

### **NAVIGATING THE RAPIDS**

As there is no way to stop the future from coming, it is quite natural to plan, to schedule or to foresee our lives in six months, 1 year, or even 10 years, but usually our minds don't conceive unlikely or surreal futures, because that doesn't help us in our daily lives. However, guess what? The uncommon, the unexpected, is what might end up happening. As the saying goes: "reality is stronger than fiction".

The current COVID-19 pandemic provides a good chance to stop and reflect on whether the way we conceptualise "the future" is useful. Right now, people may be wondering if they have been wasting time worrying about vain scenarios, or if they have spent too much time thinking about general questions that may not have a real impact in their lives, at least not as much as the pandemic. It is okay to wonder about matters like: when will Spain have the first female president? Or, what will be Apple's next innovation? But these kinds of topics that currently seem interesting, distance us from holistic approach that could help us prepare for surprising, surreal or even "dystopian" futures. For instance, everybody knows to some extent what the effects of climate change will be in the long-term, but few people actually have taken it seriously enough to change their lifestyles, just in case the predictions turn worse than expected. Indeed, they already have. For example, the Arctic is melting twice as fast as than predicted.

So what could be a proper way to prepare for all the possible unknown scenarios? I suggest a combination of creativity and action. Creativity is as essential in predicting the future as is logic. The well-known "Simpsons predictions" (events and situations represented in The Simpsons animated series that throughout the years have become real) are a great example of creativity that seemed hilarious, satirical or absurd when it was created but eventually has proven to be more than likely to happen. They predicted Donald Trump would be president. They even predicted something similar to COVID-19 in the "Osaka flu" episode, and there are many more examples. Screenwriters aren't scientists or international relations experts; they are just people who exploit their creativity, having the courage to come up with "crazy" ideas... which may not be that crazy. That's the key: thinking outside the box, betting on fantastic scenarios, getting inspired from dystopian and science-fiction novels and films... there is a whole world full of inspiration out there to make our own predictions.

However, creativity in itself isn't enough, because once we come up with possible futures, the time to act in order to prevent worst-case scenarios or consequences is now. Institutions have been strongly criticized for not being prepared at all for a pandemic, even though various experts have been warning for years that this future was more than plausible. So, if institutions don't act now for future events, we must try to do so. Fortunately, some people are already working on that, especially regarding climate change and protecting biodiversity: the increase of vegetarian and vegan options, the invention of synthetic meat, the success of cosmetics brands that don't test on animals, the circular economy...

People are always unconsciously predicting what is going to happen next. The problem is that they are used to think inside the box, in the short-term, with familiar parameters. This is why nobody was prepared for COVID-19, we could blame the lack of organization and prevention of governments and international organizations, but we as individuals weren't mentally prepared either for such a time as this.

**Susana Matondo Muñoz**

Thinking beyond all of these, what more could we do? Getting rid of cars and planes, foreseeing that we may use non-polluting teletransport in the future? Starting to build houses with solar panels and integrated organic gardens? Who knows? Such options may seem unrealistic at the moment, but that's how thinking about the future is, like navigating the rapids: you embark on the safe, starting with something you are familiar, but the journey will be full of twists and currents that may lead you to an unexpected end. The possibilities are endless.

**Susana Matondo Muñoz**