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DE CRISI: A GLOBAL INVESTIGATION ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HUMANS  
AND CRISIS

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## Chapter 1: The Relationship between Humans and Crisis

### 1.0 Introduction

In writing this work, the intent of the author is to underline and deeply understand a different set of variables that are related to one of the most important aspects of periods and moments of the human life, characterised by something that we can put under the wide umbrella defined by the world “crisis”. As a matter of fact, this work is aimed at reviewing how different societies in different ages of the modern era have coped with years of turbulence and upset. To do so, it will be fundamental to process and highlight one of the aspects that more than others influence the way in which crisis are managed, that is the decision-making process. Of course, it would be reductive to review the decision-making process without providing an understanding of the context that defines the societies of which we are going to talk about. Because of this, it is possible to say that this work will be characterised by a multidimensional approach, since it will be built upon strong historiographical basis, with references to different aspects as well. At the same time, it is important to understand the elements that give importance to this work. As a matter of fact, when future scholars will try to understand the elements that contributed to make this period as a period of crisis, they will probably study a whole set of variables which most of us are perfectly aware of, as for example the climate crisis, or the migratory crisis. The COVID-19 outbreak surely worked as an accelerator, since it has highlighted the structural weakens that contributed to the crisis of our time, while increasing a certain awareness around it. In fact, the years that the society of late capitalism is about to face will be characterised by uncertainty and opportunity, which is the reason why a strong management of resources, especially human, will be absolutely pivotal. In this sense, it will be interesting to address a discussion about the necessary communion of intent between decision-makers and populations, given that the liquid society in which we live need conscious citizen in order to be “adjusted”. The hope of the author is that all these elements combined will constitute the strength of this work, which is not meant to represent a “Memento Mori”, but rather become a humble contribution on which the readers will read “*Historia Magistra Vitae*”.

So, after this brief introduction, it is now time to start with a chapter that is aimed at providing a wide literature review on the concepts of crisis and decision-making, which is a crucial step to be made before starting the real journey.

## 1.1 What is a “Crisis”?

In opening this work, it is interesting to notice that the very idea of “crisis” is so embedded within human nature, to the point that different cultures from very different areas of the world have shared since ancient times legendary fictions around the creation of mankind and earth, that show a similar *fil rouge*: the disruption of the status quo, with all the possible consequences that follow.

For example, if we think about the Semitic-Christian myths regarding all the steps that had been taken by men and women to progress in history, we can clearly identify a matrix common to different religions and cultures: a group of people, the “chosen” of course, are going through an era characterised by upsetting conditions and consolidation of an unwilling status quo, in a moment in which these people feel subducted to some kind of evil power. This evil power, which is often represented by the presence of false oracles or the domination under an authority that is considered illegitimate, is fought by a prophet, who embodies the task to lead these people on the right path. Of course, this path is the one indicated by God, regardless of how you prefer to call it. As a matter of fact, it is intention of the author to define this authority as “Supreme Decision Taker”, not in a rash of atheism, but on the contrary not to fail to consider any different religious tradition.

When men and women are wise enough to follow the instructions of this Supreme Decision Taker, they embark on a path that will lead them to improve their condition, thus finding a bright future for their civilisation. But what happens when they are not sufficiently wise? In the “hardcore” version of the sacred scriptures, the disobedience to the lead of the Supreme Decision Taker can translate in exile from an earthly heaven created by the Supreme Decision Taker itself, in sacrifices aimed at reconstructing its trust, or in the death of these unwise people. At the same time, myth, and legends from all around the world are full of references to floods, famine, pestilences, generic plagues and so on. Certainly not the most idyllic condition to help a civilisation to flourish. To broaden the spectrum of analysis to a context very different from ours, it is interesting to note that “The Chinese symbol for crisis combines two simpler symbols, the symbol for danger and the one for opportunity. Crises are times of danger, but they are also times of opportunity”<sup>1</sup>.

However, this brief reference to some of the most classic patterns of religious mythology is not casual, since it is fundamental to highlight some of the concepts that are going to help us in the understanding the dangers and the opportunities that derive from a correct or wrong management of the moments of crisis.

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<sup>1</sup> Starbuck WH, Grève A, Hedberg BLT. 1978. Responding to crisis: theory and the experience of European business. *Journal of Business Administration* 9(2): 111-137.



Figure 1 Fall and Expulsion from Garden of Eden, Michelangelo

As it is common to many different ideas, we owe the modern definition of crisis to the ancient Greeks, that, as we are going to see forward in the work, have had many opportunities to experiment such a momentum. To provide an etymological origin to the term, “Κρίση (*Crise*) has its roots in the Greek verb κρίνω (*crino*): to “separate” (part, divorce), to “choose”, to “judge”, to “decide”; as a means of “measuring oneself”, to “quarrel”, or to “fight”<sup>2</sup>. The wide nature of this term has allowed it to be applied to a whole different series of subjects, from medicine to law and theology, but most importantly to politics, where it found its more popular *raison d’être*. In the context of public administration, this term was used also to define the decision that was taken by leaders, thus also embodying the concept of evolution, or passage, from a previous stage to a following one. As evidence of this, the term was used by Thucydides when he was referring to four decisive battles as the conclusive moments of the Persian Wars: “The greatest achievement of former times was the Persian War; yet even this was speedily decided in two battles by sea and two by land”<sup>3</sup>. At the time, another interesting aspect was given by the fact that the term was also used to indicate a decision related to a judgement or a verdict, relating the term to the contemporary concept of criticism. Moreover, it is in this sense that we must highlight another fundamental aspect of the concept of crisis, which is bond to the contemporary meaning of the term as well.

Talking about the legal meaning of the term, it was used to indicate the will of the community of the πόλις (*pólis*), acquiring in this way an enhanced legal and political significance, as it began to be extended “to electoral decisions, government resolutions, decisions of war and peace, death sentences and exile, the acceptance of official reports, and, above all, to government decisions”<sup>4</sup>. At this point,

<sup>2</sup> Richter, Melvin, and Michaela W. Richter. “Introduction: Translation of Reinhart Koselleck’s ‘Krise,’ in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*.” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 67, no. 2, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006, pp. 343–56, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30141881>.

<sup>3</sup> Thucydides *History* 1,23

<sup>4</sup> Idem at 1

we already have sufficient elements to understand the link between the concept of crisis and the idea of opportunity and renewal, especially in such delicate stages for the structure of the πόλις of ancient Greece. However, this is a side of the matter that is yet to be considered, and that will have a part dedicated to it in the following paragraphs.

Moving forward, if by now we had the opportunity to analyse some of the concepts related to the idea of crisis, trying to underline more than anything the philosophical background of the ancient Greek thinkers and rulers, it is now time to highlight the juridical nuance that the term acquired over time, because it is crucial to actualize the concept. As we have already seen, the term is linked to fundamental decisions for the life of the πόλις, and for this reason it begins to represent the ακμή (*acmé* - high point) within which the form of participatory government finds its maximum form and aspiration, distorting the original meaning of the term. At the same time, the people who take part in these moments acquire the highest status available for the citizens of the time.

It is at this point, that is important to review some concepts from the Jewish Christian tradition, before moving beyond more technical references, especially related to the different models of decision-making processes. In fact, this concept was well described by Voltaire, whose “view of the Jews, however, amounts to this: there is a cultural, philosophical, and ethnic tradition of Europe which descended, through the human stock of that continent, from the intellectual values that were taught by the Greeks. Those were in turn carried to all the reaches of the European world by the Romans”<sup>5</sup>. It would be interesting to analyse the point of view of Voltaire in a contemporary key, but this experiment would risk making the author pass for an anti-clerical anti-Semite, so for now we will postpone.

From a Jewish point of view, the heritage of Greek thinkers is visible in the sense that God is considered the supreme ruler and judge of its people, while embodying the idea of a universal salvation that will finally occur in the day of Final Judgement. Again, we see the idea of judgement represented by the concept of crisis. A same concept is clearly visible in the Christian tradition, where the faithful live in expectation of the Final Judgment. It is not known to the faithful when this judgment will take place, and for some traditions it is even unsure if our conduct may in some way change its outcome, but the only sure thing is that it will happen<sup>6</sup>. The crisis will occur and will totally change the existence of the people involved.

By now, the first part of this work was mainly aimed at introducing the concept of crisis, while trying to put it in the context of the foundational philosophical and theological traditions of western world. At this point, the focus will be shifted to the second step, reporting a literature review of the different

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<sup>5</sup> Arkush, A. (1993). Voltaire on Judaism and Christianity. *AJS Review*, 18(2), 223-243. doi:10.1017/S0364009400004906

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 10:15; 12:36; 25:31f.

ways we cope with crisis, by defining different models of decision-making processes, underlining the different contexts in which they fall. This is not an exercise in style, but a key passage to understand the way in which modern and ancient societies have fought crises, with encouraging, or not, results.

### 1.2.1 What is a “Decision-Making Model”?

The concept of crisis as outlined above, acquires fuller meaning and importance when associated with another system of thinking, which stays under the big umbrella of decision-making. As a matter of fact, the opportunities that can arise from a crisis are only possible through a proper management of the decision-making resources, as we will see for different moments in the history of mankind.

Before starting, a note for the reader: this will probably be the least historiographical of the work but is necessary for two specific purposes. First, to respect the author’s multi-dimensional intent. Second, to understand the intricate dynamics that in the course of history have affected men and women put to the test by epochal crises.

To provide a first generic definition, we can say that “Collective decision making is a ubiquitous task for social animal species, including humans. Whether deciding where to forage, which nest site to choose, or when to move, individual decisions are greatly informed by observing the choices that others make”<sup>7</sup>. To put it as simple as it gets, these theories aim at understanding the reasons that lead individuals within a group to move to direction A instead than B, and vice versa. This could sound naïve, but it is pivotal to get which reasons lead governments of various forms to declare war or peace, to open or close borders during a pandemic, or just to use a communicational form rather than another one.

If it is true that most of these theories originally apply for problems of economical nature, we will considerate them in the perspective of the Aristotelian man, the so called “Political Animal”<sup>8</sup>, a man who lives in the πόλις, dealing with philosophy and human affairs. A man who is a political and an economic animal at the same time.

### 1.2.2 The Collective Models

Among the dozens decision-making models available today, I decided to take into consideration the ones that seem more suitable to the direction that the work will take: The Collective Models. The reasons appear clear, since these models are aimed at understanding the different variables to be taken

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<sup>7</sup> Collective decision making by rational individuals Richard P. Manna,<sup>1a</sup> Department of Statistics, School of Mathematics, University of Leeds, Leeds LS2 9JT, United Kingdom

<sup>8</sup> Aristotle, Politics



into consideration when groups take decisions for the collectivity<sup>9</sup>, while indicating their best possible behaviours in those situations.

As a matter of fact, the thesis decided to take into consideration several models and theories that departure from the model imagined by Coleman<sup>10</sup> in 1973, since it is strictly related to the decision-making in the public arena and have inspired other scholars in the years that followed, prompting a strong debate around these topics. In his work, Coleman “defines vectors of actors and outcomes, and matrices for each actor's control over and interest in each outcome, where actors lack full control over outcomes that interest them. Matrix multiplications represent bargaining or exchange processes that determine whose interests are achieved, the general principle being that control over events in which others are interested yields the greatest power”<sup>11</sup>. The interesting part of this model is represented by the fact that each outcome probability is influenced by the amount of power, that we could define as “interest”, moved through that direction. Moreover, it was the same Coleman that between 1988 and 1989 reviewed his own model, adding a proposition. He thought that by adding a system of sanctions and norm creation, collective societies could solve issues related to the lack of respect for collective resources, on the contrary causing an excess of these resources within the community.

Now, even if this model may seem little related to the great problems of ancient and contemporary societies for us, it is fundamental because it helps us to shed a light on the meaning of what we are reading. With a provocation, that will be less and less provocative as we move forward in this work, we could replace the concept of resource with the concept of collective health, the concept of protective tools with face masks, and with the final defensive line as the Intensive Care beds. What would happen if the regulatory and sanctioning instruments are not effectively deployed? The last two years have shown us enough. But we will analyse these aspects later.

Moving forward, many scholars have taken elements introduced by Coleman to investigate the components of collective decisions. Among them, Marsden took some of the elements produced by other scholars and imagined an evolution of the model by adding new ones. In particular, he took into consideration the influence of networks and influence processes, creating a matrix to investigate how much influence other people's interests have on our own, changing in this way what are the results at the collective level. His analysis was structured around the comparison of his results and Coleman's ones, allowing him to draw three interesting conclusions: “the effects of the influence process on collective decision making may be (1) a decline in the system level of resource mobilization; (2) an increase in the level of apparent consensus on collective decisions; and/or (3) a bias in collective

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<sup>9</sup> A Discursive Practices Approach to Collective Decision-Making. Michael J. Shapiro, G. Matthew Bonham, and Daniel Heradstveit. *International Studies Quarterly*, Dec. 1988, Vol. 32, No. 4 (Dec. 1988), pp. 397- 419

<sup>10</sup> Coleman, J. S. 1973. *The Mathematics of Collective Action*. Chicago: Aldine

<sup>11</sup> Formal Models of Collective Action Pamela E. Oliver *Annual Review of Sociology*, 1993, Vol. 19 (1993), pp. 271- 300

decisions toward the interests of the actors centrally located in the influence network”<sup>12</sup>. This is particularly interesting, since if we think modern democratic societies as a bundle of systems of influence, in the sense that different groups aim to reach the majority of consensus to take decisions for the collectivity, the long-run implications of these conclusions appear clear.

Now, the author would like to review a series of models that are useful to shed a light on the dynamics that occur between movements and regimes, especially in moments characterized by strong crisis. As evidence of this, there is a flow of theories that try to analyse the strong interconnection between the masses and the regimes, as both part of the same community that often must face harsh moments and points when the past is set aside to embrace innovations that can radically change people’s lives.

The first model is the one imagined by McAdam in 1983. In fact, he particularly focused on the phenomenon of black insurgency in the United States between 1955 and 1970, mainly in their harsh relationship with south segregationist. The conclusions of his work state that the technical innovations provide the most valuable opportunities for the parties in fight, until the opponents are not able to neutralize the others’ innovations. As in a chess match, “movement opponents can be expected, through effective tactical adaptation, to neutralize the new tactic, thereby reinstituting the power disparity between themselves and the challenger”<sup>13</sup>. Also in this case, we take the elements of McAdam to analyse some aspects of conflict within society.

Moving forward, another interesting model was modelled by Pitcher and other scholars in 1978. The model developed by Pitcher et al. is strictly related to the one developed by McAdam, since they both argue on the assumption that innovations deployed by the raging parties have a positive externality on the effectivity of their protests, giving them a temporary advantage. At the same time, this model gives some level of importance also to the cultural factors that characterize the parties in fight, since they are decisive in the definition of the reasons that lead the parties into fight and violence. The conclusions of Pitcher et al. are interesting, since they assumed that “most of the violence investigated [...] involved basic conflicts where the members of both sides were doing physical damage to one another's persons and properties in efforts to settle the issue in their favour. Much of the violence and counter-violence might have been avoided if the conflicts were somehow turned into either legal contest where the facts were considered and the issues adjudicated to effect justice, or political contests where the issues were settled via discussion, de- bate, compromise and a vote”<sup>14</sup>. This is a fundamental aspect to be considered, if we want to take into consideration the role of decision makers

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<sup>12</sup> Introducing Influence Processes into a System of Collective Decisions, Peter V. Marsden American Journal of Sociology, May 1981, Vol. 86, No. 6 (May 1981), pp. 1203- 1235

<sup>13</sup> Tactical Innovation and the Pace of Insurgency, Doug McAdam, American Sociological Review, Dec 1983, Vol. 48, No. 6 (Dec 1983), pp. 735-754

<sup>14</sup> The Diffusion of Collective Violence, Brian L. Pitcher, Robert L. Hamblin and Jerry L. L. Miller, American Sociological Review, Feb. 1978, Vol. 43, No. 1 (Feb. 1978), pp. 23-35

in the settlement of disputes, that are most likely to arise when their decisions are considered questionable at least, if not detrimental for collectivity at all.

Now, we have had the opportunity to review some models related to the concept of collective decision-making, with some references to the effects and externalities of collective violence as well. As well demonstrated by the last few years, phenomena of collective violence and protests during moments of crises are likely to arise, so it is important to understand what the decision-makers shall do, or shall not, to bring back this energy within the sphere of social harmony. It may seem naïve, but also the correct management of dissent and criticism are related to the effectiveness of public decision-making, affecting in a decisive way the effectiveness of the remedial measures.

### 1.2.3 An introduction to Game Theory

Before engaging in the historiographical review of moments of crisis from different ages of human history, there is one more system of thinking that is worth to be briefly analysed: The Game Theory. Trying to summarize a whole system of thinking in a few lines is impossible, but the intent here is simply to provide the definition of a series of concepts, that are crucial within the dynamics of collective decision-making.

First, the most important goal of Game Theory is helping us in understanding which are the factors and the reasons that lie behind the decisions of decision-makers, while providing a system that can help them in being more rational. At the same time, this is also helpful if we want to highlight the cognitive bias that may induce people in important positions to take decisions that will reveal as detrimental for them and for the collectivity. In fact, if these theories clarify the context in which we take day-to-day decisions, that affects our existence in a limited way, but they are applied also in a multitude of fields, from economics to politics. However, it is important to assess that no models are per se right or wrong, instead they are important for us because “one reason for improving our understanding of the world is to enhance our ability to mould it to our desires. Studying game theoretic models [...] may also suggest ways in which our behaviour may be modified to improve our own welfare. By analysing the incentives faced by negotiators locked in battle, for example, we may see the advantages and disadvantages of various strategies”<sup>15</sup>. To provide historic context to this system of thinking, we can cite the German academician Ernst Zermelo as the father of contemporary studies on game theory, with his *Über eine Anwendung der Mengenlehre auf die Theorie des Schachspiels*<sup>16</sup>. The goal of his work was to demonstrate that within any competition between two different actors,

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<sup>15</sup> An Introduction to Game Theory, Martin J. Osborne, Department of Economics University of Toronto

<sup>16</sup> Decision Making using Game theory, an introduction for managers, Anthony Kelly, Cambridge University Press 2003

there is a better strategy for each of them. The assumption from which it started was the presence of perfect information of each one about the objectives and preferences of the other. The theory was successful and was soon followed and developed by other scholars and mathematicians.

Moving forward, it is now time to present some of the two best known models of Game Theory, to underline their application in collective decision-making.

#### 1.2.3.1 The Theory of Rational Choice

The rational choice theory is the most important starting point of many game theories. This theory assumes that the decision-maker chooses the most coherent action compared to the possible choices available to him or her. It should be stressed that there are no qualitative restrictions with respect to the options of the one who takes the choice, while also assuming that the decision-maker is rational, in the sense that he or she rationally prefers one option over another. In this sense, it is good to specify that the model allows choices of altruistic kind, since the final aim is “to derive implications that do not depend on any qualitative characteristic of preferences”<sup>17</sup>. In this sense, it is purely ordinal. To summarize, the key points of this theory are the awareness that actors rationally weigh the potential costs and benefits to arrive to a conclusion, and that they will always choose the option that maximizes their preferences. As many theories, this model provides a series of cons and pros. It is important summarize them to better stick these concepts and assumptions in our minds. First, it is very useful to explain the reasons of choices that we could consider irrational, giving them a sense. If the basic assumption starts from the fact that all actors choose the option that best suits their preferences, this is immediately explained. At the same time, the assumption of rationality allows us to rationalize and decrease the number of actions that men and women can take, making it a predictive theory. This is certainly a fundamental feature when we are dealing with complex contexts such as international relations, for example. Finally, the very wide range of fields to which it applies, allows us to generalize human behaviour, providing us with a tool also to retroactively analyse choices made by the decision-makers, even centuries away from us. At the same time, there are some criticisms. First, even if the theory assumes the presence of a generalized perfect information, in practice we know that this is often not the case, and that not all the actors are in possession of the amount of information that would allow them to make a rational choice. Closely related to this critic, there is the discourse on cognitive limitations. In practice, even if we all had the same amount of information, we would not all be able to process them in the same way. Moreover, the time available for us to pick an option could lead us to underestimate, or overestimate, the effects of our decision, leading us to be mistaken.

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<sup>17</sup> Idem at 15

In addition, when we decide, we must take into consideration the social pressures that influence us, and that therefore lead us to cognitive distortions. In the end, it is good to consider the heuristic tendency of human mind, that will lead us to see the last outcome of a determinate event as the most probable. At this point, it is worth it to provide an example that can clarify what we have reported since now.

#### Ex 1: Walk or drive?

Every morning, John has two choices in front of him, take the car to go to work or decide to walk to the office. In the first case it would take 10 minutes, while in the second 30. Walking would take him longer, but at the same time would allow him to exercise and save on fuel money. At this point, John's decision depends solely on his own values and preferences. What is preferable to him may not be preferable to others, but this does not transform his choice the least preferable to him.

What for John is a trivial dilemma, can result in decisive decisions of foreign and domestic policy, which can cause moments of deep crisis for a country.

#### 1.2.3.2 A Strategic Game

At this point, it is time to discuss about a model of Game Theory that adds some layers of reflection to the basic model of rational choice: Strategic Game. Within this model, we define the people in action as players, and we assume that each of them has a series of different actions that they can take. In this way, the model "captures interaction between the players by allowing each player to be affected by the actions of all players, not only her own action. Specifically, each player has preferences about the action profile"<sup>18</sup>.

At this point it is good to understand how this model differs from the original. In particular, the fact that players are also influenced by what other players could do is a fundamental aspect, because it adds a variable that is better able to describe the reality of which we will talk later in the work. One of the main differences among these two models is given by the different conception of time. In fact, in this model the different decisions of the actors are taken at the same time, creating a condition totally relatable to the decisions that must be taken by governors during moments of crisis. At the same time, we must consider that we can delete all the complications that would arise if the players had the possibility to change their decision once that the other players had taken their decision. In this way, we can think it as a simultaneous-choice strategic game.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibidem at 15

So, we have reviewed some of the characteristics of this model, and now it is worth it to provide an example that can clarify what we have reported since now.

#### Ex 2: The Prisoner Dilemma

The Prisoner's Dilemma<sup>19</sup> is one of the most famous strategic games. Its popularity is given by the simplicity, but also by its effectiveness in communicating the concept.

The scenario is the following: two suspects have been charged with a crime and are kept in two separate cells. Both are facing evidence that would be sufficient to convict them on some minor charges, but insufficient to be convicted for the most serious crime, unless one of the two decides to betray the other, accusing him of having committed the crime. If they both decide to keep quiet, they will both be convicted for the less important crime and will both spend a year in prison. If one of the two decides to betray the other, he will be released and used as a witness to convict the other for the major crime, sentencing him to 4 years in prison. If they both decide to betray each other, they will both be convicted for the major crime, and will both spend three years in prison.

To conclude, this example draws a scenario in which both the players have a serious incentive to cooperate, while also have some gains in betraying each other, independently from what is decided by the other player. If we think about it, this example provides an interest insight on the dynamics that can apply to many different situations of public decision-making.

#### 1.4 Examples from the past

By now, the objective was to provide a theoretical background that could help us in better understanding the processes that affect decision-makers and masses, especially in moments of crisis. At this point, we want to make a strong step forward in the direction of the most historiographical soul of this work, with the aim to report a series of different moments of history, in which men and women have faced harsh crises caused by many different reasons. The intention is to report what happened, how people have reacted to these moments, and how decision-makers have dealt with these crises, trying to limit their devastating consequences. As we will see, also in these cases the results have had mixed fortunes.

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<sup>19</sup> Dynamic Influences of Culture on Cooperation in the Prisoner's Dilemma, Rosanna Yin-mei Wong and Ying-yi Hong, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, Hong Kong, China, and 2 University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

#### 1.4.1 The end of Athens' dominium on Greek peninsula

As a first example from ancient time, it is intention of the author to report a case that has shaped the imaginary of ancient history, both for the violence of the phenomenon and for the upsetting consequences that it had on the destiny of one of the most importance cities of human history. As a matter of fact, we are going to discuss the Plague of Athens, an event that had occurred in a very difficult moment for the πόλις, as we are about to see.

However, the historical context in which the plague occurred was already characterised by very challenging moments for Athens. At the time, around 430 B.C.E., at the head of the city there was Pericles, one of the most notable figures of the time, who held in his hands both the political and the military power. The city upon which Pericles ruled, was one of the first experiments of democracy in human history and had a series of unique features for the time, so it is worth to spend some time to review and understand them.

##### 1.4.1.2 The Democracy of Pericles

First, we must underline that the status of citizen was strictly related to a series of conditions. The citizens had to be men, at least twenty years old, and with both mother and father of Athenian origin. Because of this, at the time of Pericles, active citizenship was composed of about 30,000 people, half of whom were peasants, who due to the difficulties of the journey to reach the city in the moments of political participation were de facto excluded from it. The fact that active citizenship represented a small percentage of the approximately 200,000 inhabitants of Athens, meant that they felt strongly interested in the political affairs of the city. In the Athens of the time, everything came under politics, from religion to art, to arrive at a fundamental tool for an imperialist power like Athens: war. Due to these different reasons, active citizens often retained a feeling of care and interest in public affairs that went beyond the feelings of family, often creating situations that with the eyes of today appear at least curious. As reported, “the Athenian of that time was before all else a citizen, for whom social duties were paramount. He mainly absolved them in two places: that of the clubs or confraternity, and that of the parliament or ἐκκλησία” (*ecclesia*)<sup>20</sup>.

Regarding the clubs, they were structured around a common interest or cult, as for example the lovers of a particular wine or meat, or the worshippers of a precise god or goddess. They served two goals: knowing each other, while compacting around the same idea or aim before the discussion in the parliament. Regarding the ἐκκλησία, it met four times a month, and the participants gathered in groups

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<sup>20</sup> History of the Greeks, Montanelli I. Gervaso C., Rizzoli 1969

corresponding to the clubs of which they were members. There was no right or left, which were concepts born after the French Revolution<sup>21</sup>, even if there was a general distinction between the objectives of the richer and more educated classes, and those of the more proletarian parts. The work of the parliament was regulated by a president, elected for a year, who had the task of reading the legal provisions to be voted. In theory, everyone had the right to speak, in practice there were strong limitations to this right to streamline voting operations. The vote was by show of hands, and in case of approval the resolution became law immediately, even if sometimes an opinion of constitutionality was required by the βουλή (*bulè*). This, was a sort of constitutional court composed of 500 citizens, paid 5 oboli a day for their service. Among their duties, we can report the check of constitutionality of the laws proposed, the audit on the public money spent by the governors, together with a control on the morality of public and religious officials. To summarize, the legislative power was in the hands of the ἐκκλησία and the βουλή, while the executive power was strongly held by the nine ἄρχοντες (*arcontes*). Again, the ἄρχοντες were drawn among the active citizens, although there were many conditions that made this position inaccessible for the majority, both from an economic point of view and from the point of view of honour. Once drawn, they had to have the approval of the βουλή, in addition to requiring the confidence of the ἐκκλησία nine times a year. Of the nine ἄρχοντες, the βασιλεύς (*basileus*) was a sort of religious authority, while most of the powers were in the hands of the chief of the armed forces, the στρατηγός αὐτοκράτωρ (*strategos autocrator*). In any case, the wide spread of democracy, due to the large number of people taking part in the life of the institutions and the large turnover within them, guaranteed a completely different character to Athenian democracy compared to contemporary democracies, since it “was predicated not on the legitimacy of elected leaders but on the assumption that value is added in political decision making via the aggregation of technical and social knowledge that is widely distributed within the citizenry itself”<sup>22</sup>. By now, we can start to understand the implication related to the decision-making in a moment of crisis that have to compel to a huge number of different actors, and therefore to a huge number of different visions on the common goals of the city.

So, it is now that we can start to discuss the figure of Pericles. As a matter of fact, the wide range of power granted by the office of στρατηγός αὐτοκράτωρ led him to seek the position from 467 B.C.E. until the year of his death. During his era, he was able to extend its sphere of influence also on matters related to foreign policy and treasury administration, all this thanks to his extraordinary abilities, as witnessed by Thucydides, who reported us that he “guided it (the city) with moderation and guarded

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<sup>21</sup> Norberto Bobbio, *Destra e Sinistra*; Bienfati and van Beek, *Right and Left as Political Categories*, *Anthropos*, 96/1/2000 [https://www.jstor.org/stable/40465460?seq=1#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/40465460?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents)

<sup>22</sup> Ober, J. (2008a), ‘What the Ancient Greeks can tell us about democracy’, *Annual Review of Political Science*, 11: 67–91.



it with confidence, and (it) became very great in its time”<sup>23</sup>. Although in a context characterized by a series of chess and balances, as we would call them today, his skill was to guide his people through oratory and prudence, influencing the decision process to maintain a public policy consistent with what his aspirations were, that is consolidating Athens as the most important city in Greece. This happened, as shown by the fact that during his rule public revenue grew 35 times<sup>24</sup> over what it was before he came to power. He made it the biggest city Greece had seen until then, all thanks to his ability.

If by now this has been an history of success, it is time to discuss the reasons of the crisis that will destroy the progresses of years of enlightened public policy.

#### 1.4.1.3 The Peloponnesian War and the Plague of Athens

The reasons behind the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War were intrinsic to the characteristics and the limits of the Athens which was first imagined, and then built by Pericles.

First, it is essential to point out that Athens controlled several small towns and little city-states, which were put under the umbrella of the Athenian league. Under this league, Pericles guaranteed security and supply of grain, asking in return for total loyalty and the payment of taxes that served to preserve the immense fleet of Piraeus, pride of the city and deterrent for possible invaders. The peculiarities of the city made necessary an imperialist policy since the poor presence in Athens’ region of arable land tied the survival of thousands of inhabitants of the city to the grain supply. The grain supply was guaranteed by the control of the seas. So, it is because of this that Pericles considered pivotal in establishing the power of Athens in the region a strict rule over the cities of the league, reason that led him, in the year 432 B.C.E. to pretend from them the payment of 500 talenti. It is difficult to relate that sum to today’s money, but they should correspond to something around 1.8 billion euros<sup>25</sup>, a huge amount of money whose original aim was the conservation and the improvement of the fleet. As already mentioned, the role of the fleet was to preserve peace for all the cities of the league, although they did not all receive the same treatment. For example, in the event of a judicial problem affecting a non-Athenian citizen of the league, he would have been judged by Athenian judges, in a relationship similar to what we saw in the occupied countries of World War II. As expected, this caused growing discontent, that caused riots in the cities of Aegina, Samos, and Euboea. Pericles ordered the intervention of the fleet, that crushed those rioters that it was originally meant to defend.

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<sup>23</sup> Thucydides History 2, 65

<sup>24</sup> Democracy without political parties: the case of ancient Athens, George Tridimas, University of Ulster, Department of Accounting, Finance and Economics

<sup>25</sup> Info Data, le notizie raccontate con i numeri. [https://www.infodata.ilsole24ore.com/2016/05/17/calcola-potere-dacquisto-lire-ed-euro-dal-1860-2015/?refresh\\_ce=1](https://www.infodata.ilsole24ore.com/2016/05/17/calcola-potere-dacquisto-lire-ed-euro-dal-1860-2015/?refresh_ce=1) (Last visited 22-12-2021)

The crisis was clearly open and if all of this was not enough, we must add that the cloud thickening over the Parthenon was also caused by the rise of the arch enemy of Athens, that is Sparta. At the time, Sparta was a completely different city from Athens, smaller and built around a capillary and structured military culture. Like rival Athens, it built a network of relations with many cities in the region called Λακεδαίμων (*Lakedaimon*), which put under its wings and brought together in its own league. However, Sparta had differences in the control model it applied to cities in its league, in fact “In Attica the other communities were constituent parts of the Athenian polis, and their inhabitants were Athenian citizens, whereas in Λακεδαίμων the other communities retained their status as discrete πόλεις of Περίοικοι (*Perioikoi*), dependent poleis under Spartan control though in possession of a certain amount of self-government”<sup>26</sup>. The softer approach in foreign politics, together with the growing discontent of the Attica cities towards Athens’ handling of the situation, were some of the reasons that brought to the conflict between Athens and Sparta. At this point, Pericles put in place his strategy to avoid a war. First, he tried to create what we would now call a kind of peace conference, suffering the blow of Sparta. In fact, it refused to take part, in order not to legitimize the position of supremacy of Athens over Greece. Sparta’s example was followed by other cities, which gradually began to rebel against Athens. War drums began to play on the horizon, and Pericles had to show to the βουλή his decisions in case of war against Sparta. Pericles stated to the βουλή that in the event of a conflict, he would close within the city walls the entire population of the region and the entire army, ensuring the connection to the sea that would allow a potentially infinite resistance. All that remained was to wait for the outbreak of the conflict to see if his strategy would pay.

The occasions were provided by two dramatic military losses suffered by Athens, against Corinth and Pontidea, but the acmé of the crisis was reached when Megara decided to ally with Corinth, asking Sparta to do the same thing. Athens reacted by imposing a naval blockade against Megara, starving its population. At this point, Sparta ordered Athens to withdraw the blockade, while refusing the Athens’ request to enter in its league. This was a provocative request, drawn up by Pericles himself. On the contrary, Sparta produced a counterproposal. They would accept the request of Athens if it renounced to its control over the Greek cities. The obvious refusal of Pericles meant war. On the one hand, Athens, whose fleet infested the shores of the Peloponnese, on the other hand Sparta, whose army invaded the Attica and set it on fire.

It is at this point in the conflict that a variable intervened in the crisis, changing the fate of some of the protagonists. As a matter of fact, we can only speculate whether the Pericles’ strategy would have paid in the long run, since during the first year of war Athens was upset by a terrible epidemic of

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<sup>26</sup> Hodkinson, Stephen. “Was Sparta an Exceptional Polis? (2009).” In: S. Hodkinson (ed.), *Sparta: Comparative Approaches*, Swansea (The Classical Press of Wales) (2009): 417–472. Print.

typhoid flu, remembered in history as the Plague of Athens. The aftermaths were disastrous, the epidemic “struck the beleaguered city, which was then crowded with refugees from the country districts of Attica that had already been overrun by the Peloponnesian forces. It caused a heavy mortality among both the military forces and the civil population of Athens [...] it destroyed a quarter of her population; but its death-roll was probably the less disastrous of its effects”<sup>27</sup>. The outbreak of the epidemic brought to its knees a community already exhausted by the conflict, and deprived confidence not only in Pericles, but in the very system on which its power was founded. The extermination of families, the lack of care for the displaced and the end of respect for the burial of the dead are just some of the testimonies that came to us from Thucydides, who described with expertise the condition in which the city was poured. As evidence of the consequences of the crisis on the system that governed the public life of Athens, Thucydides reports that “the fear of the gods or the laws did not hold them (the citizens) back, as on the one hand they considered being indifferent to being religious since the disease affected everyone without distinction, and on the other hand no one thought to live long enough to pay for their misdeeds. Everyone saw the punishment as already in place, and for this they preferred to enjoy the pleasures before perishing for illness”<sup>28</sup>.



*Figure 2 Plague in an Ancient City, Michiel Sweerts*

A city on the edge of the cliff decided to depose Pericles, who shortly after that perished for the disease, in favour of Cleon. We received the testimony of a figure different from his predecessor. A certainly brave man, but who dramatically lacked the vision of Pericles. After years of exhausting

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<sup>27</sup> The Plague of Athens, J.F.D. Shrewsbury, Bulletin of the History of Medicine, JANUARY-FEBRUARY 1950, Vol. 24, No. 1 (JANUARY-FEBRUARY 1950), pp. 1-25

<sup>28</sup> Thucydides History 2, 47-53

siege, in 421 B.C.E. Athens signed the Peace of Nicias, definitely renouncing to the dream of its dominion over Greece.

The lack of proactivity towards a changing situation, along with a weakening of democratic structures in favour of the figure of the strong man, caused the destruction of Athens. Someone said that power weakens those who do not hold it, but this story teaches us something about the need for decision makers to predict change before the crisis becomes insurmountable. At the same time, it is a warning to the possibility that the worst possible case will actually come true, a case that we will unfortunately see several times within this work.

### 1.5 The Crisis of the Late Middle Ages

Within the previous paragraph, we analysed the Athens of Pericles, investigating the reasons that led one of the most important cities in ancient history to an unprecedented crisis, and finally to a spectacular fall. We stressed the coexistence of several factors, from war to the sudden appearance of an epochal plague, highlighting the lack of proactivity by the decision-makers involved in this story. Within this paragraph the intention is the same. We want to understand all the various factors that led to one of the most incredible and terrible crises in human history, which swept across Europe in the first half of the fourteenth century and reached its acmé during the terrible epidemics of the Black Plague, a disastrous event that some scholars defined as “undoubtedly the worst disaster that has ever befallen mankind”<sup>29</sup>. There is so much that should be said about the reasons and consequences of the crisis in the Late Middle Ages, but here we shall confine ourselves to summarize the different aspects of this page of history, while trying to catch the echoes of this crisis in the centuries that followed. As a matter of fact, the crisis of the Late Middle Ages erupted after centuries in which the European cities had seen an unprecedented rise, and because of the origin of the author of the work, the analysis will mainly deal with the Italian condition of the time.

The Italian situation is pretty exemplary, given that departing from the XI century, the Italian municipalities had seen an unprecedented development, thanks to the economic fortunes created by trade and shipyards, which allowed a large circulation of money, although with a strong concentration of the same. Economic growth, of course, did not eliminate the question of poverty, which was widespread at the time. The impossibility of a consistent and strong economic growth was primarily imputable to the small-scale nature of cultivations, with a little development of new technologies. As a matter of fact, the two issues were related, since “technological stagnation or slow evolution is directly linked to small production. Conversely, technological innovation implies in this system a

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<sup>29</sup> The Black Death, William L. Langer, *Scientific American*, Vol. 210, No. 2 (February 1964), pp. 114-121

kind of tearing apart of the social fabric and consequently remains marginal or geographically limited”<sup>30</sup>. However, in what dimension the fourteenth century has been defined as one of crisis? First of all, the crisis that hit Europe was preceded by a long period of slow but steady growth, accompanied by a sustained population growth. Population growth required increased food production, in particular wheat, which was at the basis of the diet of the vast majority of the population. In any case, with population growth, the supply of labour in the fields and in the yards increased as well. The cities were full of bankers and merchants, thanks to whose taxes cathedrals were erected, symbol of both Christianity and power. In fact, at the time Christianity is universal, it is totally embedded in a world of believers who interpreted natural phenomena with the eyes of faith, inspiring some of the strongest pages of Italian literature of the time, from Dante to Boccaccio. However, providing more structured economic data to understand what kind of growth we are talking about is really difficult. Yet, the perception of the population was that of an expanding and growing world. This perception of a growing economy was influenced by the aware of price growth, the first key indicator for measuring the growth of an economy. The rise in the price of wheat was such that in some particularly unfortunate years “the municipality (Florence) takes charge of 40% of ordinary urban consumption [...] trying again in this case to deal with the different needs [...] keeping the selling price lower than that of the free market but with a difference never exceeding 24-42 soldi to keep the privates on the market”<sup>31</sup>. Of course, this measure was meant to make wheat more accessible for all the different parts of the population.



*Figure 3 The Triumph of Death, Unknown*

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<sup>30</sup> On the Crisis of the Late Middle Ages, Guy Bois, *The Medieval History Journal*. 1998;1(2):311-321

<sup>31</sup> Una città nella crisi: Firenze (1280-1380): A proposito del recente volume di Charles Marie de La Roncière, Duccio Balestracci, *Archivio Storico Italiano*, aprile-giugno 1985, Vol. 143, No. 2 (524) (aprile-giugno 1985), pp. 163-195

In any case, these measures were not sufficient to try to limit the destructive effects of such a serious phenomenon. In fact, at the dawn of the fourteenth century a new serious issue erupted, that will challenge the survival capacity of the population, while changing forever the history of Europe. In this century, the world climate enters a meteorological cycle characterized by a colder and wetter climate than the previous centuries. What comes to us from the chronicles of the time, is the story of a sudden change in the climate, which cause very serious difficulties to an economic system based on agricultural self-production. We have many chronicles from the beginning of the fourteenth century, that reports terrible downpours and destroyed crops, seriously impacting the survival chances of the less fortunate people. In fact, between the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries, the Old Continent falls into what will be called the “Little Ice Age”<sup>32</sup>. We cannot fully understand the extent of the phenomenon, but it is sufficient to know that “the climate knows a cooling between 1150 and 1200 which then gives way to a period of accentuated rainfall which, for its part, reaches the maximum between 1310 and 1320, years within the which is inscribed the first disastrous famine of '300, that of 1317”<sup>33</sup>. At this point, a population that had grown over the centuries without producing revolutionary technological developments, finds itself in serious difficulty. The difficulties in cultivating enough wheat for a population that had grown steadily caused a series of terrible famines, of which we have received testimonies from chroniclers of the time. As reported, “In the years 1346 and 1347 there was a terrible famine for all food, to the point that many people starved and ate wild grass as if it were bread. For this reason, no king or lord made war since there was no food to raid in any city”<sup>34</sup>. Until this moment, we had the opportunity to report some of the elements of crisis that characterized the beginning of the century. Now, it is time to introduce the most relevant variable, in a similar fashion to what was done in the paragraph concerning the Athens of Pericles. In fact, it is precisely at the end of the second terrible famine of 1347 that Europe is overwhelmed by a mysterious disease that will be remembered in history as the Black Death. Probably, the disease was born and began to expand around the borders between India China and the Himalayan Mountains during the 1330s. As a demonstration of how that was already a global world, the disease took a very short time to reach Europe, as it “reached the Crimea in 1346. From the Crimea, *Pasteurella pestis* and the plague took ship and travelled to Constantinople and Sicily in the year 1347, Egypt and Syria in 1348, and spread to the rest of Europe in the following years”<sup>35</sup>. In the following years, the plague recurred several times in the life of Europeans, with waves of variable violence. If a contemporary estimate

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<sup>32</sup> How Little Ice Agee changed History, The New Yorker, April 1, 2019. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/04/01/how-the-little-ice-age-changed-history> (Last visited 29-12-2021)

<sup>33</sup> Idem at 31

<sup>34</sup> Storie Pistoiesi, a cura di S. A. Barbi, in «Rerum Italicarum Scriptores», 2ª edizione, tomo XI, parte V

<sup>35</sup> The Black Death and the origins of the ‘Great Divergence’ across Europe, 1300–1600, SEVKET PAMUK, *Ataturk Institute of Modern Turkish History and Department of Economics, Bogazici University, Istanbul, Turkey*

claims that the first wave of 1348 wiped out a third of the European population, the waves of 1361, 1371-1374 and 1381 did not allow a substantial demographic recovery, since any recovery in the number of the population was cancelled by the new onset of the disease. Finally, the wave of 1399 closed the century with violence second only to that of the first wave, concluding a century of unprecedented violence and suffering for the people of Europe. As reported, “it is now generally accepted that at least a quarter of the European population was wiped out in the first epidemic of 1348 through 1350, and that in the next 50 years the total mortality rose to more than a third of the population”<sup>36</sup>. Clearly, we must try to take the estimates of the time with a certain degree of scepticism, while trying to reconstruct an estimate as plausible as possible based on a long series of comparisons between sources. However, if we look at the case of Florence alone, the numbers of the pandemic sound terrifying, since we are told that “from the examination of the texts available so far, we can approach the truth admitting present in Florence, before the plague, little more than ninety thousand inhabitants and, immediately after the plague, little less than fifty thousand inhabitants”<sup>37</sup>. The consequences of the plague were devastating from many different points of view, in economic and psychological terms particularly. In a universally Christian Europe, the arrival of the plague was seen as a divine punishment. The inexorable descend of the disease on the communities and the impossibility of the doctors to treat properly the sick people, were interpreted hysterically by the frightened population, who gathered in churches to praise for liberation from the disease, or in cults like the flagellants, who saw physical suffering as a method of liberation from the plague. Certainly, the economic consequences were even more destructive, but also curious. Paradoxically, at first such a drastic decline in population had positive effects on the economy, as resources remained almost unchanged, while competition and the number of people that shared wealth fell dramatically. This follows one of the assumptions of economic theory, since “with the decline in population, total output also fell but the decline was not as large as the decline in population; output per capita increased after 1350”<sup>38</sup>. At the same time, the arrival of the plague often meant the abandonment of economic activities, especially the crops, with a gradual shift of masses from rural communities towards the urban centres, which became even more the epicentre of the contagion. The coexistence of disease and conflicts between cities had destructive effects on the economic strength of the communities, even if we must emphasize some curious aspects, since the smaller number of people to feed had interesting consequences on the prices of goods. If on the one hand, products with poor income elasticity such as wheat became cheaper, on the other hand, goods with higher income elasticity such

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<sup>36</sup> Idem at 29

<sup>37</sup> Firenze dopo il 1348. Le conseguenze della peste nera, Aliberto Benigno Falsini, Archivio Storico Italiano, 1971, Vol. 129, No. 4 (472) (1971), pp. 425-503

<sup>38</sup> Idem at 35



as meat and milk kept a higher price, showing increasing public interest in these goods. However, once considered all these aspects, it is worth to highlight that Europe did not reach a new period of flourishing economy before the eighteenth century, driven by crucial technological developments and a strong recovery of the population. The authorities of the time tried to limit the spread of the contagion, by “attempt(ing) to limit the movement of men and goods with quarantine and improv(ing) urban hygiene conditions, with the removal of waste and all that caused bad smells, in addition to the introduction of new regulations regarding burials”<sup>39</sup>.

To sum up, the crisis of the Late Middle Ages has assumed an unprecedented severity due to the coexistence of several crises that unleashed at the same time. First, the crisis of the feudal and self-sustaining system, inadequate for a world that was moving towards a proto-capitalist system, with the birth and flourishing of many credit institutions, in addition to the fundamental role of trade, which assumed an increasing importance in the international arena of the time. Second, the absence of decisive technological developments, which would have made possible to deal with the climate crisis in a different way, by limiting at least in part its destructive effects on crops. Third, the plague totally changed the life and society of peoples who for centuries had not seen the birth of such a terrible and incurable disease. The impossibility for the decision-makers to face this crisis seems at least understandable, given the limited scientific knowledge of the time, which decided the fate of this century of history.

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<sup>39</sup> La Peste Nera del 300, Enciclopedia Treccani



## Chapter 2: The Crises of our Time

### 2.0 Introduction

Within the goals of the first chapter of this work were many and differentiated, even if they all responded to the necessity of providing a series of different sets of theoretical backgrounds. First, the previous chapter provided a starting definition of the concept of crisis, while shedding a light on the very mankind-related nature of the concept by reporting different myths and traditions of different cultures, all somehow linked to the nature of the crisis. In this way, we had the occasion to understand the dual nature of the concept of crisis. If, on the one hand, it represents a dramatic moment that upsets the lives of those involved, on the other hand it embraces the idea of opportunity, but only in the scenario in which the people follow the indications of the so-called “Supreme Decision-Taker”. Moving forward, we made a step in the direction of the more philosophical and juridical character of the concept, introducing the nature that this term had within the context of ancient Greece. In this way, we had the opportunity to highlight the shift of the concept from a purely philosophical character, linked as well to the myths of creation of different religious backgrounds, to its more institutional aspect. Indeed, it is right within ancient Greece that the term started to cover the idea of opportunity and evolution, that interest those involved allowing them to move forward in the history of their culture. However, this is only possible if the crisis is well managed by those who are appointed to do so. Because of the importance of the decision-makers during the moments of crisis, the following paragraphs were built upon the idea of providing a brief literature review of the decision-making processes. Again, the goals of these paragraphs were two. First, the author wanted to provide an explanation of some basic concepts in the behavioural analysis of public decision-makers, while also investigating the relationship between people and decision-makers especially in moments of crisis. Second, the explanation of these concepts was pivotal to better understand the phenomena that have interested different societies in different moments of time.

As a matter of fact, in the previous paragraphs the author decided to report two different examples from different moments of time, yet with some common characteristics. In fact, both the decay of the Athens of Pericles and the crisis of the late Middle Ages shared some elements, as for example the presence of a mysterious and terrible plague, that certainly contributed to sharpen the crisis. The reporting of these two examples was pivotal, since without those elements the work of this second chapter would not be as effective as the author hope it will be. Here, we will review the elements that characterize some of the harshest crises of our time which, if combined as it is happening, risk to plunge us into a situation like the ones that we saw in the first chapter.

### 2.1.1 The COVID-19 Crisis

The reasons that led the author to choose the COVID-19 Pandemic as the opening act of this second chapter are many and different. I have decided to open the second chapter with an analysis of the pandemic, since I think that it has worked as an accelerator of previous crises whose effects were already on going, but whose importance was not fully understood. However, it is impossible not to recognise the extraordinary nature of this phenomenon, both from a political and economic point of view, and because of the symbolic importance that it has gained through the moments, while shaping the imaginary of the contemporary people that will always remember these years as the years of the Coronavirus Pandemic. At the same time, the Pandemic has contributed to strengthen a certain awareness around the crisis that we are living, interesting a wide spectrum of matters, from politics to economics, to arrive to mental health, presenting some characteristics that this moment in history share with other moments that have been reported as moments of crisis.

So, here we will start a journey in the years of the Pandemic, by tracing back its steps while highlighting how decision-makers and people from all around the world reacted to this crisis, that we are not going to define as unprecedented because it would sound at least contradictory with what reported until now.

The first reports of a mysterious and severe form of respiratory disease arrived in the last days of 2019, when “Wuhan Municipal Health Commission of China reported a cluster of cases of pneumonia in Wuhan, Hubei Province”<sup>40</sup>. Before the world’s attention dramatically shifted on the Chinese city, it was almost unknown to western people, far from the shimmering skyline of Hong Kong and the dazzling futurism of Shenzhen. However, it is important to understand the strategic relevance that Wuhan has within the Chinese chess table, as it is the most populous city of central China with around 11 million inhabitants, and hosts within its borders a series of development sites that make it one of the most important cities of the world in the field of technological and scientific research. During the second half of the twentieth century, it was one of the capitals of Chinese industrialization, as well exemplified by the fact that in 2020 the city produced more nominal GDP than the whole Greece<sup>41</sup>. These data may seem cold, but they tell something crucial about the eruption of the virus, since it flourished thanks to a set of different conditions, strictly related to a skyrocketing economic growth.

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<sup>40</sup> The COVID-19 Pandemic and Its Impact on the Global Economy: What Does It Take to Turn Crisis into Opportunity? Ligang Song, Yixiao Zhou, *China & World Economy* / 1–25, Vol. 28, No. 4, 2020

<sup>41</sup> GDP: Hubei: Wuhan, 2021, <https://www.ceicdata.com/en/china/gross-domestic-product-prefecture-level-city/cn-gdp-hubei-wuhan> (Last visited 13-01-2022)

The conditions we are talking about are linked to the relationship between humans, animals, and uncultivated lands, in a scenario that seems to get us back in centuries, but that is related to the zoonotic nature of the virus. As a matter of fact, many scientists and researchers have presented doubts regarding the identification of Wuhan as the “point zero” of the Pandemic, while little or no doubts exist regarding the identification within the city of the perfect conditions for the virus to explode. These conditions, “are essentially related to the loss of ecosystem biodiversity caused by the conversion of natural habitats to agricultural and/or urban ecosystems, that have increased the contacts between humans and wildlife, and among it, reservoirs of potential zoonoses”. In this sense, the conservation of an ecosystem as varied as possible is essential, given that the large number of different species in a system constitute a sort of barrier, or wall since we are in China, against pathogens, in a phenomenon defined dilution effect. Unfortunately, human activities from hunting to uncontrolled urbanization “have disturbed the ecosystems, interfering with the dilution effect, decreasing it, and increasing risks of pathogens of all types, including viruses to spill over to humans”<sup>42</sup>. In the case into consideration, the number 1 suspect seems to be the bat, which for several features has become particularly insensitive even to the most severe forms of coronavirus, unlike other animal species with which it often comes into contact due to the lack of wild lands to live in, as this habitat is gradually disappearing all around the world. Among the animal species with which bats get in touch, human makes no exception. Moreover, the conditions that facilitated the explosion of the virus in the Chinese city were many and different and are particularly related to the conditions of the wet market, which are part of Eastern culture, and that represent the perfect environment in which viruses can spread and attack different species. In this environment, the above reported dilution effect had no occasion to operate, instead the hygienic conditions worked as a “detonator”, dramatically increasing the chances of outbreaks.

The *cocktail* of all these different conditions produced the virus that put the world on its knees during the last two years: Coronavirus SARS CoV-2. The symptoms of the disease<sup>43</sup> are many and cover a spectrum that goes from fever and chills, to sever pneumonia that is likely to kill the most fragile people, which are the elderly and the ones interested by other diseases. In the moment in which this paragraph is written, the virus has contributed to the death of around 5.550.000 people all around the world<sup>44</sup>.

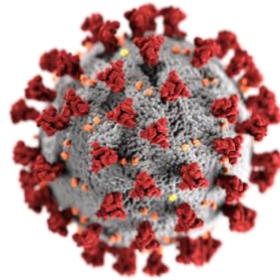
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<sup>42</sup> History of the COVID-19 pandemic: Origin, explosion, worldwide spreading, Sara Platto, Yanqing Wang, Jinfeng Zhou, Ernesto Carafoli, Biochemical and Biophysical Research Communications 538 (2021) 14-23

<sup>43</sup> Symptoms of COVID-19. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html> (Last visited 14-01-2022)

<sup>44</sup> Coronavirus World Map: Tracking the Global Outbreak. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/world/covid-cases.html> (Last visited 14-01-2022)

However, until now the author has limited himself to providing some basic scientific concepts, which would allow the reader to understand the nature of a complicate relation, that is the one between humans and their surrounding environment. In this sense, it is pivotal to highlight how a mismanagement of the natural resources can produce dramatic results in the history of our specie. In any case, this is a topic that will be present in many of the following sections of this work, so it is not the case to anticipate too much.



*Figure 4 Coronavirus SARS-CoV-2*

### 2.1.2 A History of the Disaster

At this point, it is time to report a brief history of COVID-19, and how it spread with impressive speed around the world. Here, it will be intriguing to observe with hindsight the excessive trust of a large part of the world rulers, while providing some specific examples that we'll talk about the misconception that characterized the beginning of the crisis, but not only.<sup>45</sup>

So, on the 31<sup>st</sup> of December 2019, the Chinese authorities reported an abnormal number of cases of pneumonia, concentrated in the capital of Hubei Province, Wuhan. From the very first days, fear and upset start to spread and the news regarding the new virus bounced in newsrooms all around the world, as it happened in Italy where the news from China reported the latest updates on the latest famous son of the family of coronaviruses. After a few weeks, Thailand is the first area of the world out of Mainland China interested by COVID-19 infections, followed soon by Japan, South Korea, and other Asian countries. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of January, Wuhan is the first city affected by something that was about to become familiar for all of us, as it enters in a generalized lockdown to stop the diffusion of the virus. As we know, it was too late. On the 31<sup>st</sup> of January, Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte reports the first two cases of COVID-19 on Italian soil, two Chinese tourists from Wuhan. At the beginning of February, the effects of the new virus start to become clearer, as the Hubei Province is interested by a shortage of intensive care beds, while the death toll starts to grow. It is at this moment

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<sup>45</sup> Cose che noi umani. <https://lab24.ilsole24ore.com/storia-coronavirus/>. (Last visited 15-01-2022)

that we can start to highlight the differences in the approach of decision-makers in handling the crisis. In fact, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February the Chinese government inaugurates a new hospital opened to tackle the crisis, built in just 10 days.

The 11<sup>th</sup> of February is a date that represents a milestone, as the new virus is officially denominated COVID-19. In the first half of February, the effects of the virus start to affect the economy, as fair and event start to be cancelled worldwide and the numbers of the epidemic grow outside China, particularly hitting Italy before other western countries. At this point, Lombardia and Emilia-Romagna see a dramatic increase in the numbers of the contagion, that led the public decision-makers to institute eleven red zones in the provinces interested by the first cases, and sadly the first victims. From this moment on, the crisis seems to strike a weakened democratic system like the Italian one. Controversy around the decisions of the authorities start to grow, slowing the decision-making process while splitting the country and beginning to break the social pact. Of course, Italy is not the only country which will assist to this kind of phenomenon. On the 4<sup>th</sup> of March, schools throughout Italy are declared closed for two weeks, and a few days later Lombardia enters red zone, while the infections begin to get out of hand. Following this dramatic rise, on the 9<sup>th</sup> of March the Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte announces a national lockdown, which is considered the only measure that can effectively flatten the curve of contagion, in a country already weakened by decades of economic stagnation, and cuts in public care expenses.

As a matter of fact, in the decade that preceded COVID-19 public expenditure in national sanitary service stagnated but not decreased, at least in nominal terms. In fact, economic studies show that public expenditures in national sanitary service did not decrease in nominal terms, as it did indeed in relative terms. In short, even if the public expenditure did not decrease, it was not sufficient to face the rises in prices, which is a variable often mis considered, especially by the governments who took those decisions. At the same time, the second variable to be considered in the Italian case is the ageing rate of the population, given that “between the beginning of the 2000s and today, the over-65s have increased by almost a third, rising from 10.6 to 13.7 million. It is estimated that each of them costs to the national sanitary service on average almost twice as much as a young person”, and so that “if we want to maintain the current quality of health services, then spending in the future will increase”<sup>46</sup>. However, this is just an anticipation of the considerations that will be made in the following paragraphs but are necessary to provide a first perspective on the origins of the crisis.

Of course, Italy was not the only country to adopt such measures, as they will be gradually taken throughout Europe, precisely on the 16<sup>th</sup> of March in Spain, on the 17<sup>th</sup> in France, on the 22<sup>nd</sup> in Germany and on the 24<sup>th</sup> in the United Kingdom. Still in March, we report another fundamental

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<sup>46</sup> La spesa sanitaria italiana è stata tagliata? <https://www.ilpost.it/2020/03/15/tagli-sanita/> (Last visited 15-01-2022)

milestone, as on the 11<sup>th</sup> of the month, World Health Organization's Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus stated that Covid-19 was in effect a pandemic<sup>47</sup>, as the virus spread all over the world.

The statement by the WHO is followed by a series of decisions that highlight the different approaches adopted in different countries of the world. On the same day, the British Prime Minister Boris Johnson announces that the nation will face the crisis by seeking the herd immunity, which is a condition that is reached when at least the 60% of the population is affected by the virus. This decision is endorsed by the scientific community of the kingdom, underlining a different approach with respect to the European Union. It would be naïve not to recognize the political nature of the decision, combined with a system meant to not disrupt the British economic system, already tested by the aftermaths of Brexit. At the same time, the United States of America are hit hard, as the contagion starts to spread in the main urban centres, underlining the paradoxes of the once-richest nation of the world, making it one of the most interesting cases to be investigated, also thanks to the extravagance of the Trump Doctrine. Meanwhile, in April it seems that the measures put in place in Italy started to pay, as the numbers of the pandemic started to decrease, while the United Kingdom abandoned the light approach that characterized the first weeks of the pandemic. To represent the dramatic moment, Queen Elizabeth II addressed the nation sending a message of unity. At this point, there are other important dates that are worth to be highlighted. On the 8<sup>th</sup> of April, Wuhan lifted the city lockdown, while on the 4<sup>th</sup> of May Italy started to gradually lift the lockdown measures, concluding the first dramatic phase of the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

Until this moment, the objective of the author was to report a timeline of the early months of the pandemic. At this stage, it is possible to highlight some similarities in the approach and measures that have been put into action by almost every western democracy, if not by all of them. As a matter of fact, in the first moments the arrival of the virus was seen with scepticism, at least until the evidence of the facts has led the rulers and the populations to unite to fight the disease, in moments characterized by dismay and emotion. Of course, the level of unity of a country depends on several factors and cannot simply be based on the perception of scholars, but it is interesting to underline an interesting perspective, that allows us to stress the global responses to the pandemic with a global perspective, especially in such an interconnected world. In fact, since the first few months it has been possible to identify the division of the world into three main blocks.

First, we can identify a model well exemplified by the authoritarian Chinese Government, which has shown an overwhelming availability of resources with respect to Western democracies, especially in

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<sup>47</sup> WHO Director-General's opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19 - 11 March 2020 <https://www.who.int/director-general/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19---11-march-2020>

terms of the speed of response and the power to impose government decisions on the population. Second, it is interesting to consider how the United States of America faced the crisis, especially if we look at the situation from the perspective of President Donald Trump. Traditional American liberalism has not allowed coordinated decisions to be made between states, showing very different outcomes depending on the state we are considering. Of course, the President's interest was to wink at the more conservative electorate, which does not see good draconian measures that little match the ideals of the American dream. Many critics have been made against the Trump's handling of the crisis, especially in the first weeks when he "responded with false reassurances, delayed federal action, and the denigration of science. From January to mid-March, he denied that the US faced a serious epidemic risk, comparing the threat to a seasonal influenza. He repeatedly reassured Americans that they had nothing to worry about"<sup>48</sup>. The aftermaths of President's disillusion are clear, as 850.750<sup>49</sup> Americans have perished due to the virus by now.

Finally, we have the European democracies, which are the countries that are the worst off out of this first phase of crisis. For obvious reasons, it is easy to analyse the Italian example. The economy of the country is destroyed by two months of very hard lockdown, show the structural weaknesses of a country that has no perspective on its positioning in post-manufacturing Europe. After the very first phase of the pandemic, which we can trace from February to May 2020, the trend of the contagion has followed a path that is jagged according to the areas of the world in which it spreads. The European countries, which were the first to approve and implement extraordinary measures to fight the virus, are coming out relatively well from this first phase, going through a moment of relative calm that coincided with the summer, with a fall in the number of cases and the number of deaths. The same cannot be said of the United States and South America, which, on the contrary, went through a particularly delicate moment both from an epidemiological and from a social point of view. In the summer of 2020, the hope of a sudden overcoming of the COVID-19 is disregarded by the wave that overwhelms the United States, that in the summer months saw a dramatic rise in the number of cases and deaths, also due to a laxer attitude, especially regarding the imposition of lockdowns and strict rules on social distancing and the use of protective masks.

In that moment, the epicentre of the pandemic seemed to shift from Europe to the United States, even if it represented only a temporary situation. In the autumn of 2020, a second devastating wave hits much of the globe, especially Europe where "nearly 105,000 people died of Covid-19 in November in 31 countries monitored by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control", forcing European governments to step back on the progresses made, as in Italy where in occasion of

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<sup>48</sup> Gavin Yamey. Donald Trump: a political determinant of covid-19. BMJ 2020;369:m1643 doi: 10.1136/bmj.m1643

<sup>49</sup> COVID Data Tracker. [https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#cases\\_casesper100klast7days](https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#cases_casesper100klast7days) (Last visited 15-01-2022)



Christmas holidays “movement between Italian regions will be all but barred [...] with people allowed to travel only for work, health reasons or emergencies. New Year’s Eve dinners in hotels are also banned and limited to room service. And ski slopes will be closed from the Alps to the Apennines, a coordinated decision by Italy, France and Germany”<sup>50</sup>.

The arrival of the new year brought with it new hopes and new challenges. The arrival of vaccines ensured a certain serenity for part of the year, but the lack of coordination at a global level for the vaccination of the populations of developing countries has produced the effects that were expected, that is the arrival of more infectious variants. This new spectrum, first Delta and then Omicron, has weakened and tired populations that have begun to doubt the validity of vaccines, also fed by a divisive and toxic political debate in great part of the planet. This brings us where we are now, amid another wave of a crisis that seemed almost behind us but that is in fact far from being resolved.

However, until now the work has focused on reporting a timeline of the events, to shed a light on the chaos that the crisis has sparked since the eruption of the virus, with many implications that are yet to emerge. Now, we will proceed by focusing on different fields that have been particularly affected by the virus, to better understand the global nature of the crisis that we are all living.

### 2.1.3 The Economic and Social Context of the 2010s

As the first matter that the work is going to analyse, the author chose to departure from the economic consequences of the virus. As a matter of fact, the terrible outcomes in term of human lives, must be considered together with a reflection on how the economic crisis will affect the life of men and women for the years to come, worsening the life condition of millions, if not billions of people.

However, it is pivotal to dedicate some time on the global economic conditions that characterised the decade that anticipated the crisis, also to understand the context that certainly affected both its short-term and long-term implications. To summarize, it is possible to point out that during the 2010s, global economy was affected by five main trends, that implicate a series of consequences on all fields<sup>51</sup>. First, it is crucial to highlight that the 2010s were sons of the terrible 2008 financial crisis, whose long-term consequences have surely changed the face of global economy, by disrupting some weak countries while creating new giants on the global scene. As global growth suffered during the first years of the decade, one of the ways to face the crisis was a strong growth in public debts, that eventually produced the explosion of global sovereign debt crisis, that has particularly invested Italian

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<sup>50</sup> Europe’s deadliest Second Wave. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/05/us/europe-second-wave-coronavirus-briefing.html?searchResultPosition=1> (Last visited 17-01-2022)

<sup>51</sup> The 2010s – A Decade Divided. <https://fsgjournal.nl/article/2019-12-17-the-2010s-a-decade-divided> (Last visited 18-01-2022)



economy, just to make an example. To provide some data, between 2010 and 2019 Italian economy faced a stagnation in the growth of its GDP, which has shown a slow and erratic growth, earning just 2.6 percentage points<sup>52</sup>, with particularly dark and difficult years, as we may recall. Despite reassurances and proclamations around decimal-points growth of the GDP, the Italian economy showed itself substantially motionless, surely not ready to face a serious and difficult moment like the one that exploded in 2020. So, due to a series of reasons, from poor investments to ageing of workforce, the 2010s have been defined the decade of the Great Stagnation<sup>53</sup>. Second, the past decade was interested by a phenomenon that is strictly related to the social consequences of the Pandemic, that is the skyrocketing growth of inequality, with the obvious protests that erupted because of that. However, if on the one hand the inequality among people grew, it is interesting to notice that inequality between countries decreased, by showing an interesting trend in the emerging of new economic superpowers, as we are about to see. As a matter of fact, the third trend is the emerging of the real new economic superpower, that is China. Just to propose some numerical data, it is worth to point out that in 2015 China overcame the United States of America, becoming world's richest country in terms of GDP, while in 2018 China contributed to the 19% of total global GDP. Moreover, the other important trend to consider is the emerging of an industry as the dominant one within world economy, which is Big Tech. Of course, the 2010s were the years that saw the emerging of new phenomena and companies that changed world economy and socialisation as never before, like Facebook and Amazon, just to cite some of the most famous. In 2010, just two tech companies were among the 10 most valued companies of the world, while in 2019 that number has increased to seven, showing an unequivocal trend that does not seem to stop anytime in the future. Instead, the unimaginable size that these companies have also acquired thanks to the digitalization trend enforced amid COVID-19, has made them politically relevant instead that just politically. Because of this, governments all over the world are still figuring out how to deal with them to govern the technological power instead that being governed by it. To conclude, the last years of the 2010s saw the rise of awareness around climate related issues. The number of catastrophic events related to climate has shifted world attention on new production models, while world investments have begun to move towards sustainable sources for the planet, as we will see further in the work.

So, until now we have been able to understand the economic and social context in which the world was just before the explosion of the COVID-19 crisis. On the one hand, the Pandemic was preceded

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<sup>52</sup> Istat. (October 4, 2021). Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Italy from 2010 to 2020 (in million euros) [Graph]. In *Statista*. Retrieved January 21, 2022, from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1201202/gdp-italy-current-prices/> (Last visited 18-01-2022)

<sup>53</sup> World economy is sleepwalking into a new financial crisis, warns Mervyn King. <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2019/oct/20/world-sleepwalking-to-another-financial-crisis-says-mervyn-king> (Last visited 18-01-2022)

by economic stagnation, and growing inequalities, on the other hand technological innovations and greater attention towards environmental issues, so now it is time to understand the extent to which the virus has influenced the global economy, and which might be the long-term consequences for the production systems.

#### 2.1.4 The Global Economy Downturn

As we had the occasion to highlight, global economy was already challenged by a series of trends, mostly influenced by political decisions that were challenging the mainstream economic doctrine, based on free trade and collaboration among states. The long-term implications of these policies were yet to show themselves, as the whole world was affected by “the lingering impact of growing trade protectionism, trade disputes among major trading partners, falling commodity and energy prices, and economic uncertainties in Europe over the impact of the UK withdrawal from the European Union”<sup>54</sup>. This is crucial to understand, as it highlights the necessary steps towards a better collaboration among sovereign states and communities, especially in a context of international relations dominated by growing distrust and friction, with a chessboard that sees the great powers of the XX century lose importance with respect to emerging and consolidated powers, especially Asian.



*Figure 5 An empty St. Marco Square during Italian national Lockdown*

For this reason, we should not be surprised if the resulting crisis has been characterised by an absolute lack of balance, as we are about to demonstrate. To analyse the economic implications, we will use some key economic indicators, since otherwise it would be difficult to reach a global and consolidated perspective of the crisis. First of all, it is easy to imagine how the forced stop to commercial and productive activities that characterised the first months of the pandemic have had devastating effects

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<sup>54</sup> Global Economic Effects of COVID-19, Congressional Research Service <https://crsreports.congress.gov> R46270

on both economic and social level. The resulting slowdown in trade, coupling with a growing shortage of raw materials, meant that prices of goods raised, while the same goods became more and more rare on the market, widening the discomfort of the populations hit by the crisis. Second, it is impossible not to stress the devastating outcomes that the crisis had on the labour market, widening the concentration of wealth as never before in contemporary human history. It would be pleonastic to note that the rise of the number of poor people occurred at a time when billionaires have expanded more than ever their assets, triggering phenomena that risk breaking the social pact on which democratic democracies are based. To help the reader to understand the extent of the phenomenon, the work will provide a set of consolidated numerical data that paint an uncertain picture for the years to come. In one of its latest works, the International Monetary Fund assessed that “the global rate of economic growth declined by 3.2% in 2020, slightly less negative than its April forecast of -3.5%, before growing by 6.0% in 2021 and 4.9% in 2022, revised upward from its previous forecast. Global trade was projected to fall in 2020 by 8.2% and oil prices were projected to fall by 32.7%. For 2021 and 2022, the IMF forecast indicated that global trade could grow by 9.7% and 6.7%, respectively, and that oil prices could rebound by 59.0% in 2021, before falling by 1.8% in 2022”<sup>55</sup>. At the same time, the report of the IMF highlighted that the eruption of COVID-19 in strategic points with respect to global supply chains have resulted in longer than expected recovery time for the supply capacity, affecting the trading flows among countries.

Another interesting aspect underlined by the report, is the fact that the recovery among countries will be unbalanced due to different opportunity in terms of access to public health, effectiveness of monetary and fiscal policies to reduce the effects of the crisis, and structural characteristics as the industrialisation level and the embeddedness within international production systems. Because of this, it is important to draw a distinction between groups of states, that can help us in understanding the new world balances that will emerge once that the first phase of the crisis will be over. As perfectly pointed out by the OECD<sup>56</sup>, “among developing and emerging countries, the economic downturn is projected to most negatively affect countries that rely on commodity exports to support annual economic growth. In addition to lower prices for commodity exports and reduced global demand for exports, developing countries are projected to be negatively affected by reduced remittances, weaker currencies and tighter financial conditions”. Always according to the OECD, the crisis will more likely hit countries that rely hard on tourism within their economic system, while nations that can rely on more mineral resources will hit less than the others. At the same time, it sounds obvious to highlight that “economic effects likely varied across countries reflecting differences in the timing and

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<sup>55</sup> World Economic Outlook, International Monetary Fund, October 2021

<sup>56</sup> OECD Economic Outlook, Interim Report March 2021, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. March 2021, p. 4. <http://www.oecd.org/economic-outlook/#resources>.

degree of containment measures”. On the other hand, the picture drawn for developed countries is different. As a matter of fact, after years characterized by “firming demand and rising inflation amid exceptional monetary policy support, including policy rates near zero and the continued accumulation by central banks of long-duration assets”, the developed countries that will more likely recover from the crisis will be the ones that will be able to “steer growth toward a green, resilient, and inclusive direction requires a menu of structural policies that facilitate digital transformation, expedite the green transition, and increase labour mobility”<sup>57</sup>.

By now, we have focused on underlining the overall economic consequences of the COVID-19 crisis, but before moving towards some considerations of different matter, there is still an economic indicator which is worth to be rapidly analysed, that is the impact of the virus on employment rates. As a matter of fact, the considerations around the impact of the virus on the employment rate are particularly interesting, as they provide an insight on the differentiated impact that it had on different parts of society. Moreover, from the early weeks of the pandemic, it was already possible to notice its short-term effects on the labour market, given that forced closures of commercial and productive activities had particularly affected members of the population in less-paid and less-skilled sectors, especially in small-scale work, that were less embedded within international production chains. Because of this, the immediate effects have been an increase in inequality and absolute poverty, especially in countries that see tourism as one of the driving industries of the national economy. In addition, it is interesting to notice a correlation between telework and lower unemployment, given that the telecommunications and technical activities sectors appear to be the least affected by the increased job loss due to the pandemic. Regarding this, it is crucial to highlight that “high-wage occupations are relatively immune from adverse supply and demand side shocks, while low-wage occupations are much more vulnerable”<sup>58</sup>. However, to understand the short-, medium- and long-term implications of the virus, it is necessary to refer to the specialization of nations and their positioning within the global production chain, while also taking some considerations regarding the use of the workforce within the public employment.

Regarding the short-term consequences, it should be noted that “countries relying more on low productive service activities and with a low share of public employment are the most hardly hit”<sup>59</sup>, as it happened for the countries of the Mediterranean area, rather than for those of Northern Europe.

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<sup>57</sup> Global Economic Prospects. World Bank Group Flagship Report. January 2022

<sup>58</sup> del Rio-Chanona, R. M., Mealy, P., Pichler, A., Lafond, F., & Farmer, J. D. (2020). Supply and demand shocks in the COVID-19 pandemic: An industry and occupation perspective. Covid Economics, Centre for Economic Policy Research., 6, 65–103.

<sup>59</sup> Marta Fana, Sergio Torrejón Pérez, Enrique Fernández-Macías. Employment impact of Covid-19 crisis: from short term effects to long terms prospects. Journal of Industrial and Business Economics (2020) 47:391–410 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40812-020-00168-5>

This is a proof of the fact that the most affected countries in Europe by the rise in unemployment were and are those in the Mediterranean zone, such as Italy, Spain, and Greece.

Regarding the medium-, long-term consequences, the structural weakness, or structural strength, of the countries' economic system assume more and more importance, since the difference in fiscal policies, and the imposition of severe lockdowns, seem to have a decreasing importance over time. Also, this aspect does not play in favour of the countries of the Mediterranean area. In addition, the degree of integration within international production chains will play a key role in the medium and long term, as more integrated countries will have the opportunity to be driven by more industrialised and economically prosperous countries of the area, as it has happened in Eastern and Southern Europe thanks to the extreme integration into the German production system. Furthermore, a tool that has demonstrated itself pivotal for job preservation is telework, as its characteristics make it possible to mitigate the effects of lockdowns and social confinements. However, also in this case the positive externalities of this instrument are not evenly divided between nations, since “the share of jobs that can be done at home exceeds 40% in Sweden and the UK, while the proportion decreases in the cases of France (38%), Italy (35%) or Spain (32%)”<sup>60</sup>. Similarly, some social considerations should be studied and understood, since the access to the tools that make telework possible is not evenly divided between all sections of the population, widening the social gap even further.

Thus, to conclude, it is possible to say that the countries that are likely to suffer the most from the consequences of the virus are those whose leading economic sectors are most exposed to the consequences of lockdowns and social confinement, particularly if conditions of poor digitalisation and digital education persist within the population. In this sense, it is possible to say that the crisis will end up exacerbating the differences and asymmetries that have already existed for some time, also compared to the new trends related to robotics that in the coming years could increasingly replace the workforce in the production plants.

However, before moving on to considerations of different kind, I think it is necessary to make some reflections on the difficult moment that the economy is experiencing, also in relation to extraordinary moments of crisis from the past. Indeed, during historical junctures as the Great Recession, economic doctrine changed its dominant ideology, changing the assumption that it was able to regulate itself, to move on to a more interventionist approach theorized by Keynes. What seemed purely theoretical innovations had very important repercussions, as they “helped to drive a new post-war social-democratic model of economic growth and governance, and a new social contract, within the advanced economies, founded on an interventionist state and social welfare programs at home, and a

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<sup>60</sup> Dingel, J. I., & Neiman, B. (2020). How many jobs can be done at home? White Paper: Becker Friedman Institute.

regulated financial and trading system internationally”<sup>61</sup>, allowing the world economy to enter a period marked by less inequality and poverty. At the same time, the dismantlement of this model during the 1970s made the world economy more liberalized and open to trade, while producing undesirable effects such as financial speculation, which has had devastating repercussions on the economies most exposed to this phenomenon. The process which began in the 1970s, and which was expected to reach its peak following the 2008 financial crisis, has accentuated the negative effects and externalities caused by the pandemic, to the point that we could say that the pandemic itself is a product of the uncontrolled capitalism that regulates the market. In this sense, it is essential to say that “our strained interactions with the environment helped introduce the coronavirus to humans, our hyperconnected global economy allowed it to spread like wildfire, and its especially deadly effects on the most vulnerable populations have highlighted the consequences of deep-seated social and economic inequalities within and between countries. Instead of aiming to restore that pre-2020 way of life, our leaders should set their sights on creating a different, better world”<sup>62</sup>.

To conclude, a new historical reflection on the effects of capitalism is essential to ensure that the crisis of inequality does not turn into a fire capable of destroying the social advances of our democracy. Here again, a reflection on the relationship between decision-makers and populations seems fundamental, given that at least now it does not seem that the dogmas that dominate the world economy are changing direction.

#### 2.1.5 The Mental Health Crisis

Before we move on to analyse the two other major crises of our time, I think it is worth it to devote some space to a subject closely linked to the COVID-19 Pandemic, which is the ongoing Mental Health Crisis. As a matter of fact, this is an issue that has become more and more important over the last two years, and that allows us to analyse the virus from another point of view as well. Within the work, we have already had the opportunity to mention the impact that the Plague of Athens and the Black Plague had on the populations involved, and it is because of this that it seems important to look at the issue with an approach as global as possible. Of course, comparing the populations of that time with the populations of today may seem naïve, but I think it is not, given that issues such as fear and isolation can be considered universally rooted in the human soul, affecting the minds of people who lives moments of crisis which have some elements of correspondence with the contemporary one.

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<sup>61</sup> Ron Martin (2021) Rebuilding the economy from the Covid crisis: time to rethink regional studies? *Regional Studies, Regional Science*, 8:1, 143-161, DOI: 10.1080/21681376.2021.1919191

<sup>62</sup> Khan, Z., & McArthur, J. (2021). Let the transition begin. Op-Ed. Brookings Institution. <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/let-the-great-transition-begin>

If we do the experiment of looking back at the crisis of the Spanish Flu of 1918, there are some interesting data that emerge. On that occasion, one third of the world's population contracted the disease, with an estimated death toll of between 50 and 100 million people<sup>63</sup>. Also, at that time, a worrying increase in the number of suicides emerged, due to limited sociality and fear of contracting the disease. Similar data were recorded during the explosion SARS hotspot in Hong Kong, especially in the most vulnerable parts of the population.

Going back to present days, there have been a lot of studies that have shown a considerable increase of depressive syndromes in very large parts of the population since the very first weeks of the epidemic in China, when in occasion of a study that involved 1210 people from 194 Chinese cities “53.8% of respondents rated the psychological impact of the outbreak as moderate or severe; 16.5% reported moderate to severe depressive symptoms; 28.8% reported moderate to severe anxiety symptoms; and 8.1% reported moderate to severe stress levels”<sup>64</sup>. Considered this, it is pivotal to highlight how a general increase in social anxiety due to uncertainty about the future have had devastating impacts on the overall mental health of the world population. In particular, the category most affected by this parallel epidemic was that of health workers, who were overwhelmed by a wave of infections and unmanageable deaths, encouraging the growth of a sense of desperation towards the crisis. This all has contributed to the explosion of general social anxiety, which has been combined with a general increase in the rate of alcohol consumption<sup>65</sup>, which has seen its sales taking off in both physical and online stores. In general, dozens of studies have confirmed “that the COVID-19 pandemic is associated with distress, anxiety, fear of contagion, depression and insomnia in the general population. Health care professionals are especially distressed”<sup>66</sup>.

As it is clear, the elements that contribute to the disruption of the mental health of the general population come from different sides, and they all seem to have particularly impacted the suicide rate. On the one hand, social isolation and the absence of relationships have caused a state of stress and anxiety even in those who did not suffer particular mental conditions previously. On the other hand, they have worsened the conditions of those who were already affected by psychiatric diseases. Moreover, the economic uncertainty resulting from the crisis has added a cause for concern and anxiety, along with the increase in anger and social resentment, especially in the less wealthy parts of the population.

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<sup>63</sup> Flecknoe, Daniel. Plagues & wars: the 'Spanish Flu' pandemic as a lesson from history. *Med Confl Surviv.* 2018 May 15:1-8. doi: 10.1080/13623699.2018.1472892

<sup>64</sup> Wang C, Pan R, Wan X, Tan Y, Xu L, Ho CS, et al. Immediate psychological responses, and associated factors during the initial stage of the 2019 Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) epidemic among the general population in China. *Int J Environ Res Public Health* 2020; 17:1729.

<sup>65</sup> Alcol e COVID: cosa sta cambiando con la pandemia? <https://www.epicentro.iss.it/passi/focus/apd-2021> (Last visited 18-01-2022)

<sup>66</sup> Leo Sher. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on suicide rates. doi: 10.1093/qjmed/hcaa202

To conclude this short section, it seems impossible not to notice that the state of uncertainty in which we all find ourselves has had a very heavy impact on the mental health of many people. Although, it is difficult to have structured data linking to COVID-19 the increase in suicides, it is more obvious to point out that “psychiatric conditions including mood, anxiety, sleep and substance use disorders are associated with suicidal behaviour” as studies in the USA suggest that >90% of suicide victims have a psychiatric disorder<sup>67</sup>. Also, in this case, the disconnection<sup>68</sup> between decision-makers and the population seems to be growing. The lack of an emergency structure to manage this epidemic will certainly have very serious repercussions, which will surely be felt in the coming years.

### 2.2.1 Not only COVID-19, the other Crises of our Time

Within the previous paragraphs, we had the opportunity to analyse the impact of the COVID-19 crisis from different points of view. To begin, the work provided a timeline of the events, to understand how quickly the virus was able to change the life and prospects of the entire world population. We started from the very first few weeks, and we have arrived to present days, with the challenges related to the vaccination of the world population. To understand the issue in a more global perspective, the work has provided an analysis of the economic impact of the crisis, both from the point of view of the contraction of GDP, and from the point of view of the effects on unemployment. In this way, we were able to understand that the crisis was amplified by pre-existing conditions that created a vulnerable social and economic environment, without resilience and with obvious contradictions underlying the dominant capitalist doctrine. At the same time, the work analysed another issue that has been neglected for some time, that is the Mental Health Crisis. By providing the results of some studies, the work was able to highlight the correlation between Pandemic and an increase in mental illnesses, especially related to stress disorders, with heavy repercussions also on suicide rate.

All that we have considered, has had the objective of stressing three main aspects. First, the necessity for decision-makers to implement strategies that make the country-systems less exposed to the inevitable fluctuations in the market that will occur in the coming years. Second, the imperative importance of imagining a new economic and productive system, which can overcome the dogmas of extreme capitalism, putting in the first place the protection of the men and women who inhabit the nations. Third, the sad, if the author is justified to use the term, awareness that the steps taken so far have not been enough. On the contrary, the context we live in is that of a growing distrust of

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<sup>67</sup> Idem at 66

<sup>68</sup> C'è un bonus per tutto, ma non per la salute mentale. <https://www.linkiesta.it/2021/12/psicologi-terapia-salute-mentale-bonus-manovra-bilancio-economia/> (Last visited 18-01-2022)



governments, while populations become increasingly polarized, as it is happening with the current debate on vaccines.

It is precisely this theme that connects us to what the work will be dealing with within this section. In fact, here the work will reflect on some of the most important crises of our time. First, the climate crisis, whose effects are already beginning to be seen. Second, the migratory crisis that affects many areas of the world.

### 2.2.2 The Climate Crisis and the Migratory Crisis

As a matter of fact, the author decided to dedicate the same section to two different crises, since it is possible to say that even if they are independent, the outcomes are strictly related, as well the managing policies meant to fight them.

To begin, it is important to provide the reader with some key information about the causes of the climate crisis, which are closely related to human activity. In fact, we have already had the opportunity to discuss the characteristics of another moment of crisis, which shared some elements with the current one. During the Late Middle Ages, the world was hit by a sudden change in climate, which gradually became colder and wetter, hitting hard an economic world based mainly on subsistence, with serious repercussions on very large parts of the population. If, on the one hand, it is impossible to attribute to the people of the time some responsibility for climate change, on the other hand the same cannot be said about the moment we are living today. As already consolidated by the scientific debate, although the world is characterized by climate cycles with very different features, nowadays it is possible to say that “since the 1800s, human activities have been the main driver of climate change, primarily due to burning fossil fuels like coal, oil and gas”<sup>69</sup>.

Therefore, it is amid the two great industrial revolutions between the XVIII and the XIX centuries that humans begin to influence the climate in a very concrete way. The burning of fossil fuels produces the famous greenhouse effect, since the presence of some gases within the Earth’s atmosphere produces an effect like that of a glass, trapping the sun’s heat in the atmosphere and not allowing it to go back into space. It should be noted that most of these gases are naturally produced, but “human activity is increasing the concentrations of some of them in the atmosphere, in particular: carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), methane, nitrous oxide, and fluorinated gases”. Proof that it was the human hand that intervened decisively, by 2020 the CO<sub>2</sub> “concentration in the atmosphere had risen to 48% above its pre-industrial level (before 1750)”. In addition, it is estimated that “natural causes, such as

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<sup>69</sup> What Is Climate Change?

<file:///Users/mac/Desktop/What%20Is%20Climate%20Change%3F%20%7C%20United%20Nations.webarchive> (Last visited 20-01-2022)

changes in solar radiation or volcanic activity are estimated to have contributed less than plus or minus 0.1°C to total warming between 1890 and 2010”<sup>70</sup>. To make matters worse, it must be stressed that while some of these gases remain in the atmosphere for less time, such as methane for example, others have a much longer life cycle and can accumulate for centuries, such as CO<sub>2</sub>.

So, which are the human activities that have the greatest impact on greenhouse gas emissions? First, we have the burning of Fossil Fuels, such as coal, oil and gas that contribute to the creation of carbon dioxide and Nitrous oxide. Second, we have the phenomenon of deforestation, as trees contribute to the absorption of CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere. This effect has been well known for a long time, even though the lungs of the world are continually endangered and destroyed, like the Amazon Forest which in 2021 has seen the worst levels of deforestation in the last 15 years<sup>71</sup>. At the same time, other activities that make a decisive contribution are the intensive farms, since the huge number of animals produces naturally methane as a result of the digestion of food. Linked to agricultural activities, it stands out the use of fertilizers that release Nitrous oxide. Finally, the use of equipment and products that emit fluorinated gases, which have a warming effect 23,000 larger than that of CO<sub>2</sub>.



*Figure 6 Fire in the Amazon Forest*

All these considered, there are several reflections that need to be made. The climate change that is taking place will have a number of devastating consequences at all levels of society. In fact, already now the earth is 1.1° C warmer than at the end of the XIX century, and if emissions do not decrease substantially in the next 30 years, the earth’s temperature will become 2.7° C warmer, as stated by UN estimates. This rise in temperatures does not simply mean that the climate will become warmer.

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<sup>70</sup> Causes of Climate Change. [https://ec.europa.eu/clima/climate-change/causes-climate-change\\_en#close](https://ec.europa.eu/clima/climate-change/causes-climate-change_en#close) (Last visited 20-01-2022)

<sup>71</sup> Brazil: Amazon sees worst deforestation levels in 15 years. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-59341770> (Last visited 20-01-2022)

As a matter of fact, this will be followed by an increase in extreme droughts, water scarcity, uncontrolled fires, rising sea level, flooding, melting of the ices, and in general will make the world more exposed to extreme weather phenomena, together with a gradual disappearance of biodiversity. We have already discussed the importance of biodiversity also as a tool in the fight against viruses, so it is important to keep this aspect firmly in mind. At this point, it is obvious to understand what the effects on the economic and social context would be. Climate desertification would be followed by a gradual social desertification, with the gradual abandonment of lands and areas of the world become impossible to live in due to the presence of increasingly extreme weather events.

In any case, not all countries have the same degree of responsibility, as the top 10 emissaries emit 60% of the total gas. Some steps have been taken by the world's leading countries to tackle the crisis before it becomes unbearable. These include measures to cut emissions and convert to clean energy, which aim to limit the rise in temperatures before climate change becomes radical, with all that this entails.

In any case, until now we have only discussed the causes and effects of the climate crisis. Now, the time has come to discuss a crisis that has been going on for decades, but which risks becoming even more serious because of climate change. In fact, the Migration Crisis, is a phenomenon that has been amplified over the last decades. Anyway, if historically men have always migrated for very different issues, what we see is a clear trend, as demonstrated by the gradual increase of people who migrate every year. To provide some data, "the current global estimate is that there were around 272 million international migrants in the world in 2019, which equates to 3.5 per cent of the global population", while beyond this "the great majority of people do not migrate across borders; much larger numbers migrate within countries (an estimated 740 million internal migrants in 2009)"<sup>72</sup>. Moreover, one of the reasons why it is difficult to take important political decisions to try to govern the issue is linked to the difficulty of collecting structured numerical data that can paint a precise picture of the situation. Similarly, it is difficult to understand what we mean by the term migrant. In general, "the United Nations Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration defines an international migrant as any person who has changed his or her country of usual residence, distinguishing between short-term migrants and long-term migrants"<sup>73</sup>. In general, estimates of the last decades tell us that migrants have increased both in absolute numbers and as a percentage of the total population. If in 1970 world migrants were estimated at 84,460,125 people, in 2019 migrants were estimated at 271,642,105 people<sup>74</sup>.

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<sup>72</sup> UN DESA, 2019a.

<sup>73</sup> UN DESA, 1998.

<sup>74</sup> UN DESA, 2019a, 2019b

Certainly, the reasons that lead people to leave their nation of origin are often linked to domestic situations characterized by poverty or conflict. These conditions do not allow us to see a future for the next generations, and it is precisely for this reason that migration takes place mainly with flows from less rich and industrialized countries towards wealthier countries. This is demonstrated by several reports, such as that of the OECD which reports as "permanent migration inflows to OECD countries increased from 3.85 million in 2000 to 7.06 million in 2016, with a temporary lull occurring around the time of the global financial crisis. Germany remained the main OECD destination country in 2016, with over 1.7 million new international migrants, followed by the United States (nearly 1.2 million) and the United Kingdom (about 450,000 new migrants)"<sup>75</sup>.



*Figure 7 Migrants crossing the Mediterranean Sea*

In addition to the economic reasons, we must add a new category that is born because of the climate crisis we talked about earlier. This new category takes the name of Climate Migrants, with which we indicate people who leave their country of origin due to climatic reasons, such as "changing rainfall, heavy flooding, and sea level rise, [...] that make their homes uninhabitable"<sup>76</sup>. However, on the one hand we must consider that if we have consolidated data that allow us to understand the future effects of climate warming on temperatures, on the other hand the same cannot be said about the number of migrants that such a change will bring. Often, in different areas of the world there is the compresence of conditions linked to poor economic infrastructure, ongoing war conflicts and changing climate, thus not allowing to access to reliable data on the explosion that migration could have in the future. However, the lack of capacity of governments to manage the current migratory flows in a humanitarian way leaves little hope for future management. On the contrary, it seems possible to say that in future this issue will represent yet another crisis for decision-makers and for the people who will be directly and indirectly affected by this phenomenon.

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<sup>75</sup> OECD data available in 2017

<sup>76</sup> 5 facts on climate migrants. <https://ehs.unu.edu/news/news/5-facts-on-climate-migrants.html> (Last visited 20-01-2022)

## Chapter 3: The Perception of the Crisis

### 3.0 Introduction

Within the previous chapters of this work, we had the occasion to analyse a series of different topics. In the first chapter, we shed a light on a series of concepts that are of crucial importance, since they allowed us to understand the universal nature that the concept of crisis has had within human history. At the same time, we reported some of the most famous decision-making models, as in this way we could underline a pivotal relationship, that is the one between people and decision-makers, especially in moments characterised by crisis. Moving forward within the first chapter, the thesis reported an analysis of two dramatic moments in the history of mankind. First, the rise and fall of Athens of Pericles, that occurred due to the explosion of different issues at the same time, from war to the diffusion of a terrible Plague that decimated the population of the Greek city. Second, the thesis provided an insight on one of the most dramatic moments in human history, that is the Crisis of the Late Middle Ages. In this case as well, it was possible to highlight the presence of different elements that all contributed to the crisis, as the terrible Black Plague exploded within a society already put under pressure by many issues. At that time, the world climate became increasingly colder and wetter, putting in difficulty a society with an economy mainly based on agriculture for self-consumption. To make things worse, the century was characterised by the eruption of the Black Plague, a mysterious and terrible infectious disease that during its numerous waves ended up decimating the population of the areas of the world hit.

Moving forward, within the second chapter the thesis shifted its attention on the contemporary elements that define our century as one of crisis. In the first section of the second chapter, we had the occasion to review a timeline of the eruption of COVID-19, while providing an analysis of the effects of the Pandemic on different matters. From economy to mental health, we shed a light on the global implications of the crisis, with the goal of understanding the long-term effects that the Pandemic will have in the years to come. Moreover, the thesis provided an analysis of two different crucial issues of our time, the Climate, and the Migratory Crisis. By underlining the interconnection of the elements that make up these crises, we were also able to understand that their real effects are yet to fully explode, as the international decision-makers lack the prompt adoption of measures that can effectively face them.

Now, it is time to introduce the content of this third and final chapter of the work. As a matter of fact, the thesis is built around the global understanding of the relationship between men, women, and the

moments of crisis. In order to do so, I decided to produce a survey that investigated on a series of pivotal issues of our time. The goals were many and different, as we are about to see.

### 3.1 The Sample

As already announced within the previous paragraph, I decided to build the final chapter of the thesis upon a questionnaire on the platform Qualtrics. In order to have a perspective as global as possible, the questions were aimed at providing an understanding a series of topics very different from one another. In the first part, the survey wanted to investigate the extent to which the perception of the population has changed, both for what regards the moment of crisis and the trust towards the decision-makers that have faced it. In the following questions, the questionnaire wanted to analyse the importance given by the population to different topics that the work has pointed as crucial in shaping the international context for the years to come. Finally, the last section asked the interviewees to rate seven sentences, that will be useful clarify the opinion on the operate of decision-makers in facing and managing different critical issues of our time.

However, before commenting the results of the questionnaire, it is fundamental to provide a series of demographic data regarding the people interviewed, who had the possibility of answering the questionnaire between the last days of January and the first days of February 2022. To have a homogeneous number of respondents, the questionnaire did not target a precise section of population, instead it was shared through social media as Facebook, WhatsApp, and LinkedIn. However, also due to the “social bubble” in which I stand, the age of the author showed a certain degree of homogeneity, as the overwhelming majority of the 102 respondents were from 18 to 25 years old (83,33%), while the second most represented section was that of the people aged from 26 to 40 years old (7,84%). Moreover, the third most represented section was the one of the people from 41 to 60 years old (5,88%), followed by the people older than 60 years old (2,94%). Unfortunately, no respondents were younger than 18 years old (0%). The distribution of the questionnaire through social media platforms probably contributed to the homogeneity of the sample interviewed, providing an interesting insight on the opinions of a section of the population which will be mainly involved in the issues reported and in the decision-making processes.

<b>Age</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
<18	0%	0
18-25	83,33%	85
26-40	7,84%	8
41-60	5,88%	6
>60	2,94%	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>102</b>

*Figure 8 Graphical Representation of Age Distribution*

Moving forward, it is important to highlight the gender distribution of the sample interviewed. In this case, the respondents were almost equally divided between men and women, who are respectively the 52,94% and the 44,12% of the sample. At the same time, the 1,96% preferred not to indicate the gender, while only the 0,96% chose “Other” among the options provided.

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
Male	52,94%	54
Female	44,12%	45
Other	0,98%	1
Prefer not to say	1,96%	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>102</b>

*Figure 9 Graphical Representation of Gender Distribution*

Another interesting aspect that I decided to investigate is the level of education. As a matter of fact, different levels of education do not per se correspond to better or worse opinions, but it would be naïve not to highlight that a higher education provides a knowledge useful in understanding the implications of the contemporary crises. In this case, the number of respondents who declared to have achieved a Bachelor or a Master’s Degree represented the vast majority of the sample (79,21%). The second most represented section was that of who declared to have achieved a High-School Diploma (20,79%), while no respondent declared a Middle-School education (0%).

<b>Level of Education</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
Middle-School	0%	0
High-School	20,79%	21
Bachelor/Master's Degree	79,21%	80
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>101</b>

*Figure 10 Graphical Representation of Level of Education Distribution*

To conclude the presentation of the sample interviewed, I would like to provide a review of the different nationalities of the respondents. However, also in this case the overwhelming majority of the respondents were part of the same group, as the 92,82% of the interviewees declared to be of Italian nationality. The second most represented group was represented by Australian citizens, with the 4,08%, followed by Belgians (2,04%), Greeks (1,02%), and Austrian (1,02%). Moreover, the 3,06% of the respondents preferred not to declare their nationality.

<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
Italy	92,82%	91
Australia	4,08%	4
Belgium	2,04%	2
Greece	1,02%	1
Austria	1,02%	1
Prefer not to say	3,06%	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>102</b>

*Figure 11 Graphical Representation of Nationality Distribution*

To conclude, this first paragraph was aimed at providing a series of information on the sample interviewed. It is interesting to notice an equal distribution regarding the gender, while the other categories saw a more homogeneous distribution, as the vast majority of the respondents appear to be part of the so-called Gen Z, with a high-level education and mostly Italian.



### 3.2 The Results of the Questionnaire

Before starting to report the results of the questionnaire, it is worth to spend a few lines on the methodology that will be followed. In fact, within this paragraph I will dedicate a subsection for each question, followed by the report and the graphical representation of the results. Finally, I will sum up the results of the questionnaire, trying to identify a trend among the answers.

*Q1 - In the last two years, on which extent your perception regarding the moment of history which we are living has changed?*

#	Answers	%	Observations
1	Completely	11.40%	13
2	A lot	56.14%	64
3	A little	28.95%	33
4	It has not changed	3.51%	4
	Total	100%	114

As for the first question, it was my intention to understand on which extent the perception of the crisis that we are living among the general population has changed. In this case, it is interesting to notice that the second option alone collected the majority of the observations with the 56,14%, while the first just the 11,40%. At the same time, the portion of the population whose perception was little or not affected by the crisis corresponded to the 28,95% and the 3,51% of the total.

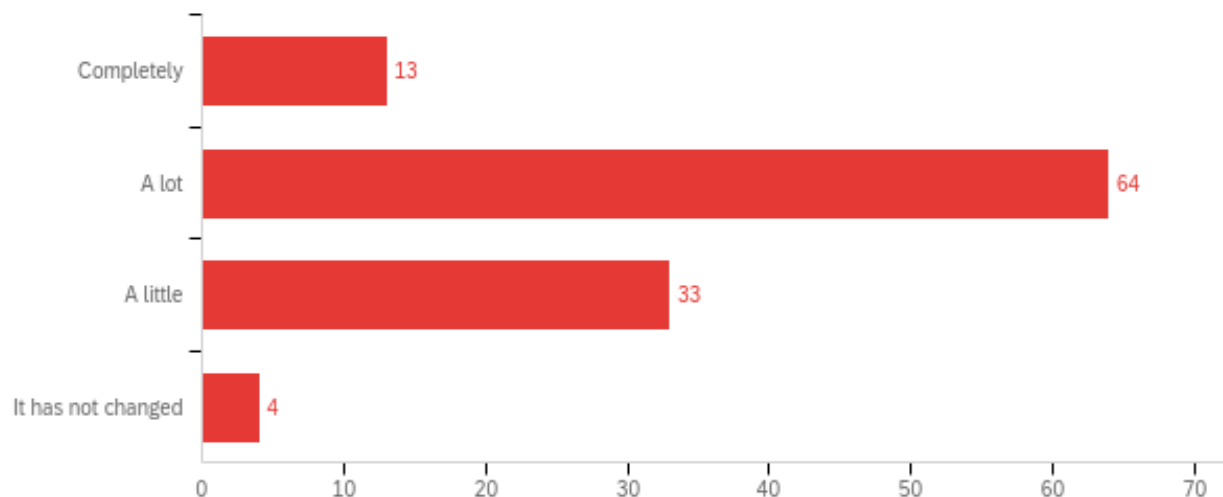


Figure 12 Graphical Representation of Q1 Answers

Q2 - *In the last two years, on which extent your trust towards decision-makers has changed?*

#	Answers	%	Observations
1	Completely	7.08%	8
2	A lot	50.44%	57
3	A little	36.28%	41
4	It has not changed	6.19%	7
	Total	100%	113

Within the second question, it was my intention to underline how has changed the relationship between population and decision-makers, by using the trust as key indicator. Here, the distribution of the answers appears less unbalanced, as the first and the second option collected respectively the 7,08% and the 50,44% of the total, while the part of the population whose trust towards the decision-makers was little or no affected collected respectively the 36,28% and the 6,19% of the total.

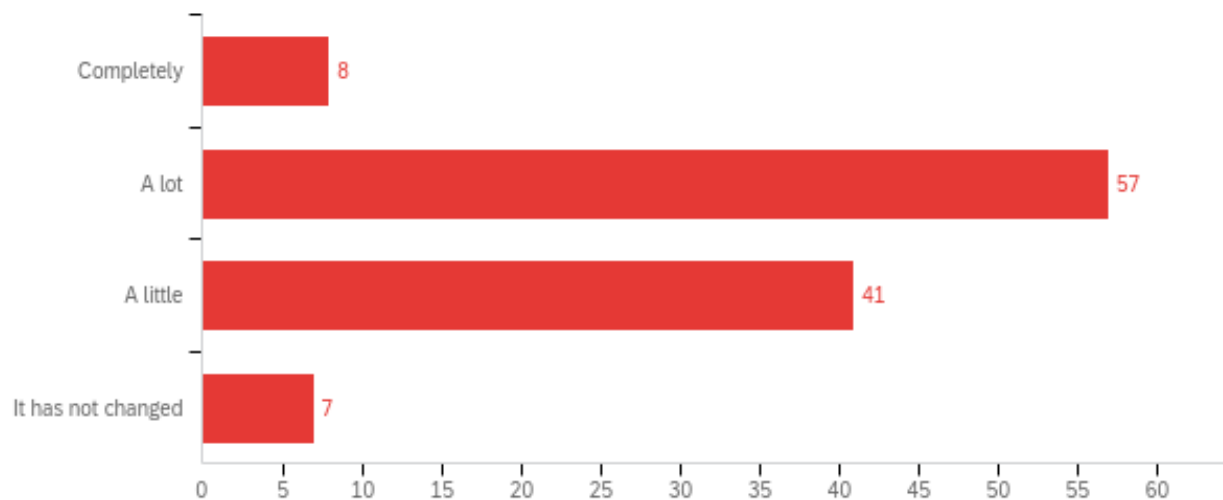


Figure 13 Graphical Representation of Q2 Answers

Q3 - *On a scale from 1 to 7 (where 7 is maximum), how relevant do you consider these critical issues in shaping the context for the years to come?*

#	Field	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation	Observations
1	COVID-19	1.00	7.00	5.53	1.34	108

2	Migratory Crisis	1.00	7.00	4.77	1.55	108
3	Global Economic Downturn	1.00	7.00	5.30	1.42	108
4	Climate Crisis	1.00	7.00	5.59	1.59	108
5	Military Escalations in International Relations	1.00	7.00	4.37	1.59	108

#	Question	1		2		3		4		5		6		7		Tot
1	COVID-19	1.85 %	2	0.93 %	1	4.63 %	5	10.19 %	1 1	29.63 %	3 2	23.15 %	2 5	29.63 %	3 2	10 8
2	Migratory Crisis	3.70 %	4	8.33 %	9	5.56 %	6	17.59 %	1 9	32.41 %	3 5	19.44 %	2 1	12.96 %	1 4	10 8
3	Global Economic Downturn	2.78 %	3	1.85 %	2	5.56 %	6	14.81 %	1 6	23.15 %	2 5	31.48 %	3 4	20.37 %	2 2	10 8
4	Climate Crisis	3.70 %	4	3.70 %	4	3.70 %	4	8.33 %	9	15.74 %	1 7	28.70 %	3 1	36.11 %	3 9	10 8
5	Military Escalations in International Relations	4.63 %	5	11.11 %	1 2	8.33 %	9	30.56 %	3 3	18.52 %	2 0	17.59 %	1 9	9.26 %	1 0	10 8

Within the third question, it was my objective to provide as “cases” some of the issues that I consider most important within the international chessboard. Once provided the cases, I asked respondents to assign each case a score in ascending order from 1 to 7, without the need to rank cases. In this way, it has been possible to understand the supposed relevance that all these issues will have in the coming years, with possibly dramatic consequences. However, for the purpose of divulgation, I think it is worth it to report the cases in order based on the average score that they have obtained. We have

Climate Crisis (5.59), COVID-19 (5.53), Global Economic Downturn (5.30), Migratory Crisis (4.77), and finally Military Escalations in International Relations (4.37).

However, it is interesting to notice the distribution of score among different cases, since they allow us to get an important point, as all these issues seem to have a high importance for the interviewed, with little or no difference in the extent to which they are going to shape the context for the years to come. Because of this, I will now report the score for all the cases.

## 1- COVID-19

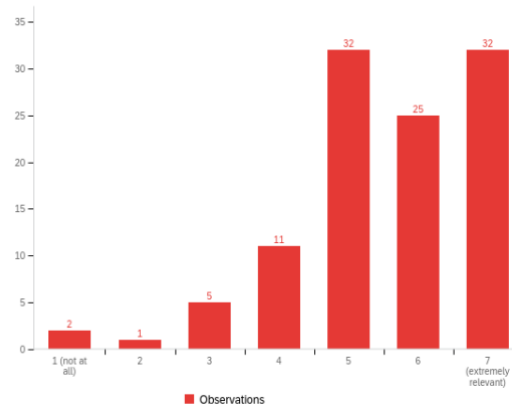


Figure 14 Graphical Representation of COVID-19 score

As evidence of the perception of the relevance of the issue, 82,41% of the overall scores were assigned to a value between 5 and 7, which we consider high values in a scale from 1 to 7. At the same time, just 17,51% of the overall scores were assigned to a value between 1 and 4, which we consider low values in a scale from 1 to 7.

## 2- Migratory Crisis

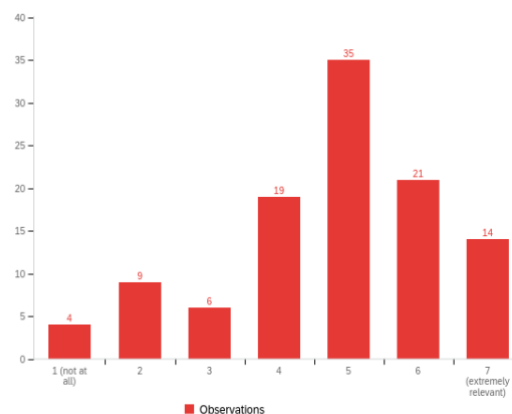


Figure 15 Graphical Representation of Migratory Crisis score

As evidence of the perception of the relevance of the issue, 64,81% of the overall scores were assigned to a value between 5 and 7, which we consider high values in a scale from 1 to 7. At the same time, 35,19% of the overall scores were assigned to a value between 1 and 4, which we consider low values in a scale from 1 to 7.

### 3- Global Economic Downturn

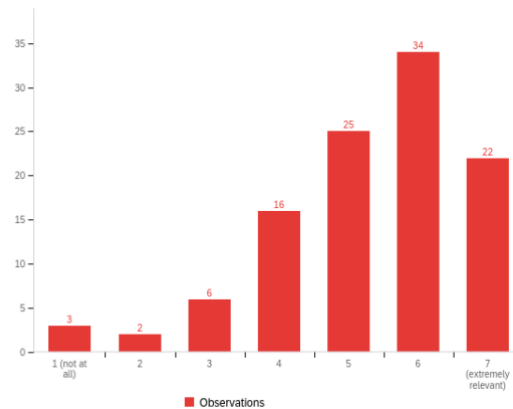


Figure 16 Graphical Representation of Global Economic Downturn score

As evidence of the perception of the relevance of the issue, 75% of the overall scores were assigned to a value between 5 and 7, which we consider high values in a scale from 1 to 7. At the same time, just 25% of the overall scores were assigned to a value between 1 and 4, which we consider low values in a scale from 1 to 7.

### 4- Climate Crisis

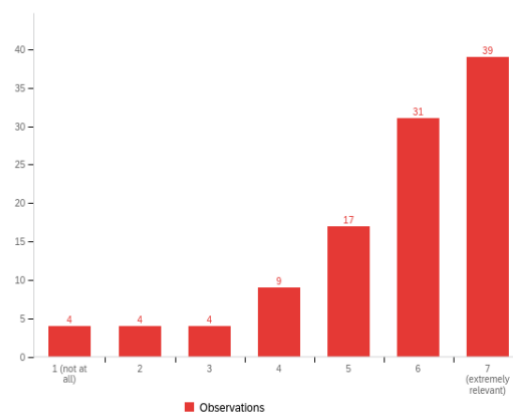


Figure 17 Graphical Representation of Climate Crisis score

As evidence of the perception of the relevance of the issue, 80,56% of the overall scores were assigned to a value between 5 and 7, which we consider high values in a scale from 1 to 7. At the same time, just 19,44% of the overall scores were assigned to a value between 1 and 4, which we consider low values in a scale from 1 to 7.

## 5- Military Escalations in International Relations

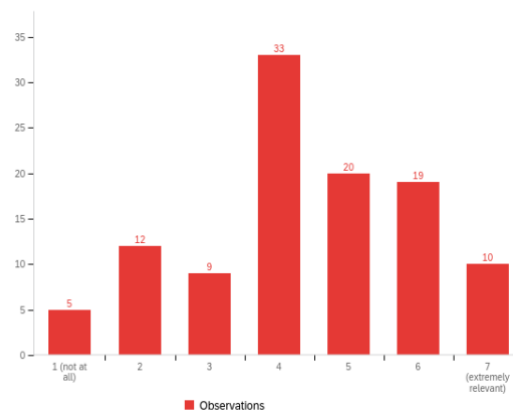


Figure 18 Graphical Representation of Military Escalations in International Relations score

As evidence of the perception of the relevance of the issue, 45,37% of the overall scores were assigned to a value between 5 and 7, which we consider high values in a scale from 1 to 7. However, we see something interesting here, as the 54,63% of the overall scores were assigned to a value between 1 and 4, which we consider low values in a scale from 1 to 7, with the 30,56% of the overall scores assigned to the value 4, perfectly in the middle between the highest and the lowest scores.

Q4 - On a scale from 1 to 7 (where 7 is maximum), rate the following sentences:

#	Field	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation	Observations
1	I think that International Community and local decision-makers are facing the COVID-19 Pandemic in the most science-related and coherent way possible	1.00	7.00	4.06	1.49	103
2	I think that the response to the Climate Crisis, of International Community and local decision-makers, has been as prompt and fast as possible.	1.00	7.00	2.67	1.46	103
3	I think that International Community and local decision-makers are facing	1.00	6.00	2.73	1.18	103

	the Migratory Crisis in the most efficient and humanitarian way.					
4	I think that the Economic Crisis will have drastic consequences on the economic system of the country in which I live.	1.00	7.00	4.80	1.50	103
5	I think that the current economic situation calls for a drastic change in the mainstream economic doctrine.	1.00	7.00	4.72	1.59	103
6	I think that the current handling of the Climate Crisis will result in unprecedented crisis, both social and economic.	1.00	7.00	5.09	1.57	103
7	I think that the measures and instruments to manage migratory flows must be reformed before the issue becomes overwhelming.	1.00	7.00	5.34	1.47	103

#	Statement	1		2		3		4		5		6		7		Tot
1	I think that International Community and local decision-makers are facing the COVID-19 Pandemic in the most science-related and coherent way possible	7.77 %	8	7.77 %	8	15.5 3%	1 6	29.1 3%	3 0	22.3 3%	2 3	14.5 6%	1 5	2.91 %	3	10 3
2	I think that the response to the Climate Crisis, of International Communi	24.2 7%	2 5	29.1 3%	3 0	20.3 9%	2 1	13.5 9%	1 4	8.74 %	9	1.94 %	2	1.94 %	2	10 3

	ty and local decision-makers, has been as prompt and fast as possible.															
3	I think that International Community and local decision-makers are facing the Migratory Crisis in the most efficient and humanitarian way.	16.50%	17	29.13%	30	26.21%	27	22.33%	23	4.85%	5	0.97%	1	0.00%	0	103
4	I think that the Economic Crisis will have drastic consequences on the economic system of the country in which I live.	1.94%	2	5.83%	6	12.62%	13	19.42%	20	24.27%	25	22.33%	23	13.59%	14	103
5	I think that the current economic situation calls for a drastic change in the	4.85%	5	2.91%	3	14.56%	15	20.39%	21	22.33%	23	20.39%	21	14.56%	15	103



	mainstream economic doctrine.															
6	I think that the current handling of the Climate Crisis will result in unprecedented crisis, both social and economic .	3.88 %	4	1.94 %	2	10.68 %	11	15.53 %	16	22.33 %	23	24.27 %	25	21.36 %	22	103
7	I think that the measures and instruments to manage migratory flows must be reformed before the issue becomes overwhelming.	1.94 %	2	1.94 %	2	9.71 %	10	11.65 %	12	21.36 %	22	28.16 %	29	25.24 %	26	103

Within the third question of the questionnaire, it was my intention to investigate the relevance given by the population to a series of issues that seem the most crucial in outlining the present and future international context. Instead, within the fourth question it was my intention to understand the extent to which people think that the measures taken to tackle these issues are right, as well as to measure awareness of what the consequences might be in the near future.

To achieve this, I decided to ask respondents to indicate how much they agree with a series of statements, giving a score from 1 to 7. In this case, it is not useful to rank the statements based on their score, since they have different forms and serve different purposes, as we are about to see.

S1- I think that International Community and local decision-makers are facing the COVID-19 Pandemic in the most science-related and coherent way possible.

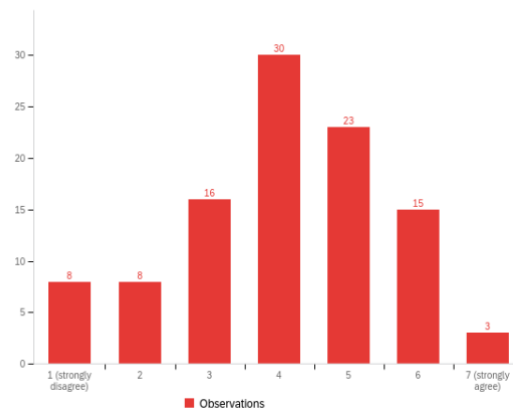


Figure 19 Graphical Representation of S1 score

For what concerns the first statement, it was my intention to investigate to what extent the population think that the measures put into force to tackle the COVID-19 Pandemic have been scientifically correct and consistent. In this case, the scores were distributed in a quite even way. On the one hand, the 31,07% of the overall scores show different degrees of disagreement with the statement (scores 1-3), not finding the measures enforced as coherent and scientifically based. On the other hand, 39,80% of the overall scores show different degrees of agreement with the statement (5-7 scores), highlighting a general appreciation for the enforced policies and measures. However, it is interesting to notice that the 29,13% of the overall scores were assigned to 4, perfectly in the middle between strong disagreement (1) and strong agreement (7).

S2- I think that the response to the Climate Crisis, of International Community and local decision-makers, has been as prompt and fast as possible.

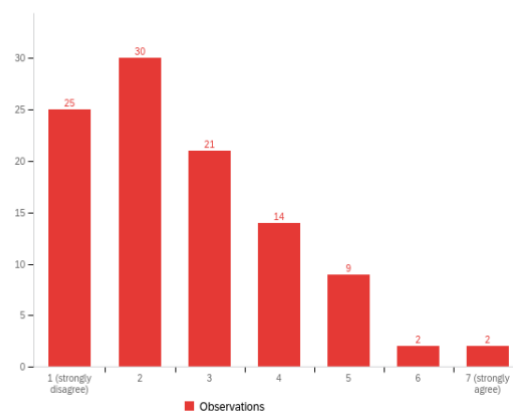


Figure 20 Graphical Representation of S2 score

For what concerns the second statement, it was my intention to investigate to what extent the population think that the measures put into force to tackle the Climate Crisis have been as prompt and fast as possible. In this case, the scores were distributed in a very heterogenous way. On the one hand, the 73,79% of the overall scores show different degrees of disagreement with the statement (scores 1-3), not finding the measures enforced as effective and quick as hoped. On the other hand, only the 12,62% of the overall scores show different degrees of agreement with the statement (5-7 scores), showing esteem towards the measures enforced. However, also in this case it is worth it to notice that the 13,59% of the overall scores were assigned to 4, perfectly in the middle between strong disagreement (1) and strong agreement (7).

S3- I think that International Community and local decision-makers are facing the Migratory Crisis in the most efficient and humanitarian way.

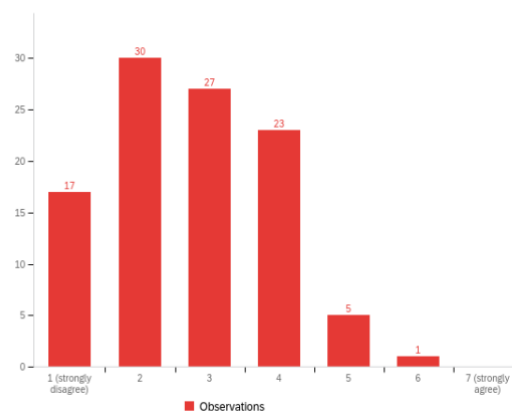


Figure 21 Graphical Representation of S3 score

For what concerns the third statement, it was my intention to investigate to what extent the population think that the policies put into force to deal with the Climate Crisis have been as efficient and humanitarian as possible. Also in this case, the scores were distributed in a very heterogenous way. On the one hand, the 71,84% of the overall scores show different degrees of disagreement with the statement (scores 1-3), thus not finding the policies nor effective and humanitarian as they should be. On the other hand, only the 5,83% of the overall scores show different degrees of agreement with the statement (5-7 scores), showing disesteem towards the policies enforced. However, in this case it is worth it to notice that the 22,33% of the overall scores were assigned to 4, perfectly in the middle between strong disagreement (1) and strong agreement (7).

S4- I think that the Economic Crisis will have drastic consequences on the economic system of the country in which I live.

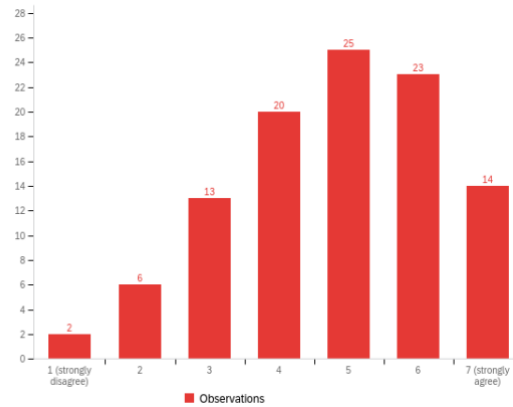


Figure 22 Graphical Representation of S4 score

For what concerns the fourth statement, it was my intention to understand to what extent the population think that the effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic will have drastic consequences on the economic system of the country in which they live. In this case, the scores were distributed in a very heterogenous way. On the one hand, only the 20,39% of the overall scores show different degrees of disagreement with the statement (scores 1-3), thus highlighting a certain level of trust towards the future economic condition of their home country. On the other hand, the 60,19% of the overall scores show different degrees of agreement with the statement (5-7 scores), showing distrust towards the future conditions of their home country. However, also in this case it is worth it to notice that the 19,42% of the overall scores were assigned to 4, perfectly in the middle between strong disagreement (1) and strong agreement (7).

S5- I think that the current economic situation calls for a drastic change in the mainstream economic doctrine.

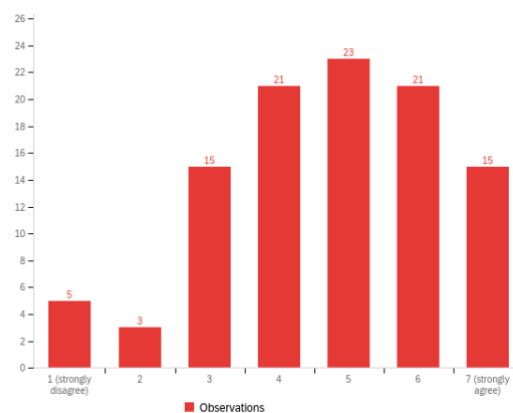


Figure 23 Graphical Representation of S5 score

For what concerns the fifth statement, it was my intention to understand to what extent the population think that current situation calls for a change in the mainstream economic doctrine. As for the fourth statement, the scores were distributed in a quite heterogenous way. On the one hand, only the 22,33% of the overall scores show different degrees of disagreement with the statement (scores 1-3), thus highlighting a certain level of distrust towards the possibility of a drastic change in economic doctrine. On the other hand, the 57,28% of the overall scores show different degrees of agreement with the statement (5-7 scores), showing a positive attitude towards a drastic change in economic doctrine. However, also in this case it is worth it to notice that the 20,39% of the overall scores were assigned to 4, perfectly in the middle between strong disagreement (1) and strong agreement (7).

S6- I think that the current handling of the Climate Crisis will result in unprecedented crisis, both social and economic.

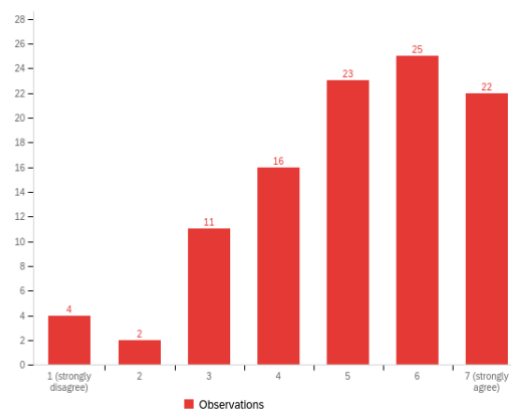


Figure 24 Graphical Representation of S6 score

For what concerns the sixth statement, it was my intention to understand to what extent the population has awareness of the economic and social consequences that the Climate Crisis will have in the following years. As for the fourth and the fifth statement, the scores were distributed in a very heterogenous way. On the one hand, only the 16,50% of the overall scores show different degrees of disagreement with the statement (scores 1-3), highlighting a certain level of optimism towards the future developments of the Climate Crisis. On the other hand, the 67,97% of the overall scores show different degrees of agreement with the statement (5-7 scores), showing a certain level of pessimism towards the future developments of the Climate Crisis. However, also in this case it is worth it to notice that the 15,53% of the overall scores were assigned to 4, perfectly in the middle between strong disagreement (1) and strong agreement (7).

S7- I think that the measures and instruments to manage migratory flows must be reformed before the issue becomes overwhelming.

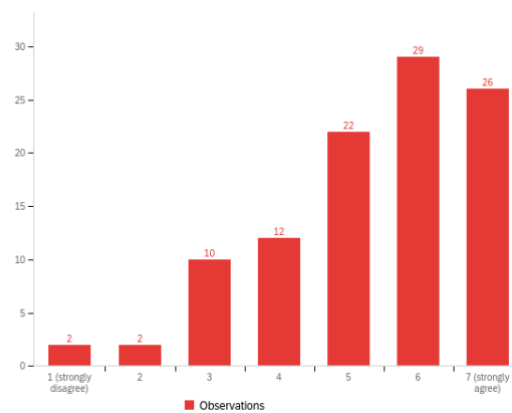


Figure 25 Graphical Representation of S7 score

For what concerns the seventh and final statement, it was my intention to understand to what extent the population think that the current handling of migratory flows needs to be reformed. Also in this case, the scores were distributed in a very heterogenous way. On the one hand, only the 13,59% of the overall scores show different degrees of disagreement with the statement (scores 1-3), thus highlighting a certain level of distrust towards a possible change in the handling of migratory flows. On the other hand, the 74,76% of the overall scores show different degrees of agreement with the statement (5-7 scores), showing a positive attitude towards a possible change in the handling of migratory flows. However, also in this case it is worth it to notice that the 11,65% of the overall scores were assigned to 4, perfectly in the middle between strong disagreement (1) and strong agreement (7).

### 3.3 A Comment of the Results of the Questionnaire

At this point, once accurately reported the results of the questionnaire, it is time to sum-up and comment the results. The questionnaire was online between the end of January and the beginning of February 2022, collecting a total of 108 answers for the third question and 103 answers for the fourth question. As for the gender distribution of the sample, it was quite equally divided between men and women, with a small percentage indicating that they did not recognize themselves in the binary system of genders, or that they did not want to indicate it. As to the age groups, the vast majority of the sample indicated that they are between 18 and 26 years old, followed by the group of people between 41 and 60 years old, and finally people over 60 years old. Finally, the vast majority of

respondents declared that they are of Italian nationality, followed by Australians, Belgians, Austrians, and Greeks.

As mentioned above, the goals of the questionnaire were different since the aim was to investigate the perception of the population on several very relevant issues at the international level. First of all, I wanted to understand if and to what extent the perception of the population about the historical moment that we are experiencing had changed. The results were in line with my expectations, with a trend that indicates a clear shift in perception about this historical moment. Moving forward, in the second question, I wanted to understand to what extent the crisis has changed the level of trust towards public decision-makers. Again, the results met my expectations, as most of the responses were geared towards a change in the level of confidence in public decision-makers.

Moving forward, I chose to select several issues that seem to me of fundamental importance in defining the international context for the years to come. Once provided the cases, I asked respondents to give a relevance score from 1 to 7 to each of them. It is worth pointing out that it was not my intention to ask respondents to create a ranking, as much as to highlight the fact that all these issues have a very great and similar importance, since they are also interconnected. However, the question was successful in its intent, as all issues garnered a high average score, ranging from 5.59 of the Climate Crisis to 4.37 of the Military Escalations in International Relations. Between these two cases we have 5.53 of COVID-19, 5.30 of the Global Economic Downturn, and 4.77 of the Migratory Crisis. Thus, what emerges from the results of the survey is a generally realistic perspective on the challenges these crises will present in the future, since all the cases provided achieved a rather high relevance index.

Moving forward, if within the third question my goal was to investigate the perception of the relevance of a series of open issues and themes of our century, the fourth question served a different objective. In fact, here I decided to present to the respondents a series of statements that provided a very clear point of view on several issues that we talked about within the thesis. Also in this case, the interviewers had to assign a score from 1 to 7 to the statements based on how much they agreed with them. By 1 we indicate a strong disagreement with the statement, and by 7 a strong agreement with it. In any case, the first 3 statements served a very precise purpose, namely, to allow respondents to give a judgment on the work of public decision-makers in the management of the great crises of our time.

With regard to the handling of the COVID-19 Pandemic, the Climate Crisis and the Migratory Crisis, a trend emerges that indicates a general lack of confidence in the work of international decision-makers, in line with my expectations. Once analysed this first block of statements, the following statements had different goals. First, to understand to what extent the population is aware of the

consequences that the great crises of our time will have in the years to come. Second, understanding the propensity of the population towards radical reform of the way we handle these open issues, both economic and social. Again, it is possible to say that the results are in line with my expectations. Most of the comments indicated that the respondents seem to be aware of the economic and social consequences of the crises we are experiencing. In the same way, the majority was in favour of a change in the mainstream economic system and the management of migration flows, as well as stressing the urgency of action to tackle climate change.

To conclude, I believe that the questionnaire served the objectives I had set. I have successfully investigated the perception of the crisis and confidence in public decision-makers. Moreover, I have successfully highlighted the public's awareness of the consequences that the crises of our time will have, as well as having given voice to an urgent need for change, which appears evident once the results of the survey have been analysed.



## Conclusions

At this point, it is the moment to summarize which were the objectives of this work, and how the analysis has enabled me to achieve them.

First of all, I think it is important to emphasise that this work has followed a multi-disciplinary and multi-systemic approach. At the basis of the thesis, there was the strong desire to investigate from the historical point of view some of the most important phenomena in the history of humanity, that are the moments of crisis. To do this, I found it interesting and necessary to investigate the concept of crisis, starting from a series of philosophical and religious considerations, understanding how it has been closely linked to human nature long before complex societies were organized by a composite system of laws and codes. Already at this point, we had the chance to highlight that when men and women are overwhelmed by a crisis, it is at this moment that they tend to rely on a decision-maker to find a solution for it. In the sacred scriptures this supreme figure is represented by God, while as societies become more structured and complex the public decision-makers take the stage. At the same time, in order to better understand the complex dynamics that arise in decision-making processes, it was fundamental to analyse from the scientific point of view some of the most famous decision-making models, since without them we would not have the tools to understand what the work proposed later.

Once reported this set of theories, it was time to enter into the most historical and important part of the first chapter, where I decided to bring back two examples of crises of the past, which could be instrumental to what awaited us later.

First, I decided to tell the story of Pericles' Athens. I chose this example for several reasons. First of all, it was an archaic form of what today we would call a democracy, with all the limitations and characteristics that one would expect to find in a Greek city of the IV Century BCE. Second, the crisis arose for different and incredibly modern reasons. Pericles' leadership was weakened by a series of unfortunate choices and unfortunate foreign policy campaigns, culminating in the war with rival Sparta, the warrior and ambitious city that decided to replace the sluggish and imperialist Athenian presence in the Hellenic peninsula. Third, the crisis found its highest point due to explosion of an incredibly contagious and deadly disease, especially for a civilization whose hygienic standards and scientific expertise were nowhere near modern standards. The combination of all these elements caused the end of an era for the Athenian city.

As for the second example from the past that I decided to take in analysis, I decided to take a decisive step in the direction of the modern era and analyse the crisis of the Late Middle Ages from different points of view. Here too, my goal was to understand the multi-dimensional nature of the crisis phenomena that disrupt societies, underlining the similarities with what we are experiencing today.

The society of the Late Middle Ages was hit by a series of phenomena of historical importance, such as the rapid and sudden climate change, which put in serious economic difficulty a society that relied on subsistence for a very large part. The explosion of the phenomenon of climate change was exacerbated by the absence of technological developments that would tackle the devastating effects of climate change. The reduced availability of fundamental goods caused an increase in prices, thus creating effects of volatility similar to those we see today. Also in this case, the century under analysis was shattered by numerous waves of the Black Death, a disease that came from Asia and that during its passage through Asia and Europe had catastrophic effects on the population, and in many senses on society as a whole.

As mentioned, the report of these examples from the past was instrumental in introducing the content of the second chapter, which focused on a multi-dimensional analysis of the crises of our time.

Of course, a substantial part of the second chapter focused on the COVID-19 Pandemic, for several reasons. First of all, it is a historic event that shocked the world in all respects, potentially causing a shift of the centre of world balance eastward. Second, it has served as an accelerator for other open issues that have begun to reveal their consequences in recent years, although the real effects have yet to show. To carry out an analysis as correct as possible, I reported a timeline of events, explaining the different approaches in dealing with the crisis that have been implemented in different areas of the world. Besides that, it was my intention to provide a perspective as global perspective as possible, shedding a light on the multi-dimensional consequences of the Pandemic, from the economy to the effects on mental health.

As a matter of fact, I thought this all was necessary to introduce and propose an analysis of two other major issues of our time, which are the Climate Crisis and the Migratory Crisis. The reasons are obvious, but it is worth pointing out that the long-term effects of the climate crisis could be unprecedented for the modern era, and that the lack of a prompt and organized response from the international community will make our generation “partner in crime” in this disaster. At the same time, in recent decades we have had an anticipation of the historical significance that migratory flows will have in the years to come, especially if we reflect on the fact that climate change will lead more and more people to flee their country of origin, since the climate of many areas of the world will make them virtually uninhabitable.

In fact, these two crises are closely linked, as are all the open issues of our time, and that is why the third chapter was based on a Questionnaire on the platform Qualtrics, that investigated the perception of the population on these issues. As a matter of fact, it was right in the last chapter that the theoretical approach and the empirical approach of work met definitively. If within the first two chapters I focused on a more theoretical approach, it was within the third that I had the opportunity to shed a

light on the opinions of the general population about the particular historical moment we are experiencing. I did this analysis by questioning to what extent people feel there has been a change in their view of the world and their relationship with public decision makers. Similarly, it was my intention to bring out two key elements. First, the disconnection of what the population expects and the measures that decision-makers have put into force to address the many open issues that characterize our century. Second, the urgency of change. I think that the ultimate goal of this work has been precisely this, namely, to understand how men and women rethink the world around them at times when the status quo is upset by unexpected events of huge scope. Highlighting this discomfort is a valuable exercise because it allows us to look at the events of our time with the awareness of history, and with the spirit of intervening on the world to fix it.

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## APPENDIX: QUESTIONNAIRE

### Introduction

Hi everyone, my name is Fabio Caracciolo, and I am student of Global Management and Politics at Luiss Guido Carli University.

I am conducting research for my Master Thesis, and I would be grateful if you could spend some minutes to help me by answering to my questionnaire. Your opinion is crucial, so I kindly ask you to carefully read the questions and to answer to them with full sincerity.

Of course, there is no right or wrong answer, so feel free to choose what you prefer. Moreover, remember that the questionnaire is completely anonymous, so your name will not be registered and therefore will not be associated to the answers.

### Explanation

This survey is aimed at investigating the general perception of the moment of crisis that we are living during these years. With the term crisis, we refer to a series of issues that are faced by decision-makers and populations. COVID-19 Pandemic, the Global Economic Downturn, the Climate Crisis, and the Migratory Crisis are some examples that have been provided within the work. In addition to this, we also ask the interviewees the relevance that is given to other themes that make up the contemporary time. At the same time, we will ask if the measures put into action to fight the crises meet the expectations of the population.

### Questions

In the last two years, on which extent your perception regarding the moment of history which we are living has changed?

- ☐ Completely
- ☐ A lot
- ☐ A little
- ☐ It has not changed

In the last two years, on which extent your trust towards decision-makers has changed?

- Completely
- A lot
- A little
- It has not changed

On a scale from 1 to 7 (where 7 is maximum), how relevant do you consider these crises in shaping the context for the years to come?

- COVID-19
- Migratory Crisis
- Global Economy Downturn
- Climate Crisis
- Military escalations in International Relations

On a scale from 1 to 7 (where 7 is maximum), rate the following sentences:

- I think that International Community and local decision-makers are facing the COVID-19 Pandemic in the most science-related way possible.
- I think that International Community and local decision-makers are facing the Climate Crisis in the quickest and most efficient way possible.
- I think that International Community and local decision-makers are facing the Migratory Crisis in the most humanitarian way possible.
- I think that the Economic Crisis will widen the gap between rich and poor people.
- I think that the current economic situation calls for a drastic change in the dominant economic doctrine.
- I think that the management of migratory flows must change before the problem becomes overwhelming.

Demographic Information

Please select your gender:

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Other
- ☐ Prefer not to say

Please indicate your age:

- ☐ <18
- ☐ 18-25
- ☐ 26-40
- ☐ 41-60
- ☐ >60

Please indicate your level of education:

- ☐ Middle-School
- ☐ High-School
- ☐ Bachelor / Master's Degree

Please indicate your nationality:

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## Summary

In writing this work, the intent of the author is to underline and deeply understand a different set of variables that are related to one of the most important aspects of periods and moments of the human life, characterised by something that we can put under the wide umbrella defined by the world “crisis”. As a matter of fact, this work is aimed at reviewing how different societies in different ages of the modern era have coped with years of turbulence and upset. To do so, it will be fundamental to process and highlight one of the aspects that more than others influence the way in which crisis are managed, that is the decision-making process. Of course, it would be reductive to review the decision-making process without providing an understanding of the context that defines the societies of which we are going to talk about. Because of this, it is possible to say that this work will be characterised by a multidimensional approach, since it will be built upon strong historiographical basis, with references to different aspects as well. At the same time, it is important to understand the elements that give importance to this work. As a matter of fact, when future scholars will try to understand the elements that contributed to make this period as a period of crisis, they will probably study a whole set of variables which most of us are perfectly aware of, as for example the climate crisis, or the migratory crisis. The COVID-19 outbreak surely worked as an accelerator, since it has highlighted the structural weakens that contributed to the crisis of our time, while increasing a certain awareness around it. In fact, the years that the society of late capitalism is about to face will be characterised by uncertainty and opportunity, which is the reason why a strong management of resources, especially human, will be absolutely pivotal. In this sense, it will be interesting to address a discussion about the necessary communion of intent between decision-makers and populations, given that the liquid society in which we live need conscious citizen in order to be “adjusted”. The hope of the author is that all these elements combined will constitute the strength of this work, which is not meant to represent a “Memento Mori”, but rather become a humble contribution on which the readers will read “*Historia Magistra Vitae*”.

So, after this brief introduction, it is now time to start with a chapter that is aimed at providing a wide literature review on the concepts of crisis and decision-making, which is a crucial step to be made before starting the real journey. As a matter of fact, it is really interesting to notice how the very concept of crisis is so embedded in human nature, as it is at the basis of sacred scriptures of different religions and cultures. The people who pass through a period characterised by crisis rely on a supreme figure that is able to lead them through the storm, linking in this way the idea of crisis with the idea of opportunity. However, we owe the modern definition of crisis to the ancient Greeks, that applied it to a whole different series of subjects, from medicine to law and theology, but most importantly

to politics, where it found its more popular *raison d'être*. At the same time, the term is linked to fundamental decisions for the life of the πόλις, and for this reason it begins to represent the ακμή (acmé - high point) within which the form of participatory government finds its finest form and aspiration. By linking the concept of crisis with the idea of judgement, it is possible to highlight similarities with other traditions that make-up Western culture, as the Jewish Christian tradition. Furthermore, it is fundamental to understand that modern societies are more structured and complex than they were in ancient times, and that is the reason why scholars have developed different models that are meant to assist decision-makers. These models aim at understanding the reasons that lead individuals within a group to move to direction A instead than B, and vice versa, borrowing many concepts from economic theory, since the decision-maker that we are taking into consideration here is the Aristotelian man, who lives in the πόλις, dealing with philosophy and human affairs. A man who is a political animal, and an economic animal as well. The first group I analysed is the one of Collective Models, as they aim at understanding the different variables to be taken into consideration when groups take decisions for the collectivity, while indicating their best possible behaviours in those situations. By analysing and reporting the models built by Coleman, Marsden, McAdam, Pitcher and others I was able to understand the complex dynamics that occur when decisions have to be taken at a collective level, especially during moments of crisis. Once provided an analysis of these models, I think it is worth it to review a different set of theories, that is the group of Game Theory. This, because the most important goal of Game Theory is helping us in understanding which are the factors and the reasons that lie behind the decisions of decision-makers, while providing a system that can help them in being more rational. At the same time, this is also helpful if we want to highlight the cognitive bias that may induce people in important positions to take decisions that will reveal as detrimental for them and for the population. Among the theories, I decided to focus on the Theory of Rational Choice and the Strategic Game, as rationality and strategy are two of the main components of public decision-making, or at least they should be. Once reported these theories, I shifted to the most historiographical part of the chapter, where I deeply analysed the reasons and the consequences of two great crises of the past. First, the fall of Pericles' Athens. I reported the reasons that allowed the city to become the most important of the Greek peninsula, while setting the stage for its spectacular decline. The combination of unlucky military campaigns, poor foreign policy and the sudden explosion of a mysterious plague was decisive for the Greek city, which lost the dominative position it had acquired in the previous centuries. Second, I decided to focus on the crisis of the Late Middle Ages. Again, the crisis unfolded due to a combination of different issues. From climate change to the explosion of the terrible Black Plague, the society of the time had little or no chance to tackle the crisis in a different way, especially due to the lack of major technological developments.

Once reported the analysis of these two moments of crisis, the second chapter will be focused on the reporting of the harshest crises of our time, which if combined risk to plunge us into a situation like the ones that we saw in the first chapter. Furthermore, I have decided to open the second chapter with an analysis of the COVID-19 Pandemic, since I think that it has worked as an accelerator of previous crises whose effects were already on going, but whose importance was not fully understood. On the one hand, we must highlight the devastating effects of the Pandemic, both from an economic and political point of view. On the other hand, for the sake of this work I must underline that the Pandemic has contributed to increase awareness around the crises we are living. To better understand all the elements involved, I first decided to deliver a timeline of the events, from the first outbreaks of the disease to the challenges of world vaccination. By doing so, we were able to understand the human responsibility over the explosion of the virus, as we created the best conditions for viruses to flourish and spread. However, if by now the work has focused on reporting a timeline of the events, further I decided to proceed by focusing on different fields that have been particularly affected by the virus, to better understand the global nature of the crisis that we are all living. As a matter of fact, the Pandemic was preceded by a decade of economic stagnation and growing inequalities, so we should not be surprised if the devastating effects of the resulting crisis has been characterized by an absolute lack of balance. The immediate effects of the virus have had dramatic consequences on both trade and labour market, while the recovery among countries will be unbalanced due to different opportunity in terms of access to public health, effectiveness of monetary and fiscal policies to reduce the effects of the crisis, and structural characteristics, as the industrialisation level and the embeddedness within international production systems. While highlighting the negative externalities and contradictions of this system, a new historical reflection on the effects of capitalism is essential to ensure that the crisis of inequality does not turn into a fire capable of destroying the social advances of our democracy. Once again, a reflection on the relationship between decision-makers and populations seems fundamental, given that at least now it does not seem that the dogmas that dominate the world economy are changing direction. Furthermore, I dedicated a few pages to the one of the most dramatic effects of the Pandemic at a social level, that is the Mental Health Crisis, with all the terrible impact on the number of suicides in many countries of the world.

However, the last part of the second chapter was dedicated to other two major crises of our time, that are the Climate Crisis and the Migratory Crisis. First, I underlined that the current change in world climate is mainly driven by human action, by producing greenhouse gases that trap the sunlight within the atmosphere, warming the planet on unprecedented levels. The increase in world temperature will result in more frequent periods of extreme drought, water scarcity and extreme weather phenomena, together with a gradual disappearance of biodiversity. At this point, it is obvious to understand what



the effects on the economic and social context would be. Climate desertification would be followed by a gradual social desertification, with the abandonment of lands and areas of the world became impossible to live in due to the presence of increasingly extreme weather events. Together with the Climate Crisis, I decided to dedicate part of the second chapter to the Migratory Crisis, as this phenomenon has been going on for decades, even if it risks becoming even more serious because of climate change. In fact, the Migration Crisis, is a phenomenon that has been amplified over the last decades. Anyway, if historically men have always migrated for very different issues, what we see is a clear trend, as demonstrated by the gradual increase of people who migrate every year. As already mentioned, in addition to migrants for economic reasons, we must add a new category that is born because of the climate crisis we talked about earlier. This new category takes the name of Climate Migrants, with which we indicate people who leave their country of origin due to climatic reasons, that make their homes uninhabitable. However, the lack of capacity from governments to manage the current migratory flows in a humanitarian and efficient way leaves little hope for future management. On the contrary, it seems possible to say that in future this issue will represent yet another crisis for decision-makers and for the people who will be directly and indirectly affected by this phenomenon. Once analysed the open issues that characterise our society in these years, I decided to make a step in the direction of the most empirical part of the work, that was based on a questionnaire on the platform Qualtrics. The questionnaire was online between the last days of January and the first days of February 2022. To have a homogeneous number of respondents, the questionnaire did not target a precise section of population, instead it was shared through social media as Facebook, WhatsApp, and LinkedIn, even if it resulted in providing an interesting insight on the opinions of a section of the population which will be mainly involved in the issues reported and in the decision-making processes (18-25 years old). In profiling the questionnaire, I wanted to achieve a series of objectives. First, I wanted to understand if and to what extent the perception of the population about the historical moment that we are experiencing had changed. Second, I wanted to understand to what extent the crisis has changed the level of trust towards public decision-makers. Third, I chose to select several issues that seem to me of fundamental importance in defining the international context for the years to come, and I asked respondents to give a relevance score from 1 to 7 to each of them. In this way, I wanted to highlight the fact that all these issues have a very great and similar importance, since they are also interconnected. Finally, I decided to present to the respondents a series of statements that provided a very clear point of view on several issues that we talked about within the thesis. Also in this case, the interviewers had to assign a score from 1 to 7 to the statements based on how much they agreed with them. In this case, the first three statements served a very precise purpose, namely, to allow respondents to give a judgment on the work of public decision-makers in the management of

the great crises of our time. Furthermore, the other four statements wanted to understand to what extent the population is aware of the consequences that the great crises of our time will have in the years to come. At the same time, I wanted to understand the propensity of the population towards radical reform of the way we handle these open issues, both economic and social.

At this point, it is the moment to summarize which were the objectives of this work, and how the analysis has enabled me to achieve them. First of all, I think it is important to emphasise that this work has followed a multi-disciplinary and multi-systemic approach. At the basis of the thesis, there was the strong desire to investigate from the historical point of view some of the most important phenomena in the history of humanity, that are the moments of crisis. To do this, I found it interesting and necessary to investigate the concept of crisis, starting from a series of philosophical and religious considerations, understanding how it has been closely linked to human nature long before complex societies were organized by a composite system of laws and codes. Already at this point, we had the chance to highlight that when men and women are overwhelmed by a crisis, it is at this moment that they tend to rely on a decision-maker to find a solution for it. In the sacred scriptures this supreme figure is represented by God, while as societies become more structured and complex the public decision-makers take the stage. At the same time, in order to better understand the complex dynamics that arise in decision-making processes, it was fundamental to analyse from the scientific point of view some of the most famous decision-making models, since without them we would not have the tools to understand what the work proposed later.

Once reported this set of theories, it was time to enter into the most historical and important part of the first chapter, where I decided to bring back two examples of crises of the past, which could be instrumental to what awaited us later. First, I decided to tell the story of Pericles' Athens. I chose this example for several reasons. First of all, it was an archaic form of what today we would call a democracy, with all the limitations and characteristics that one would expect to find in a Greek city of the IV Century BCE. Second, the crisis arose for different and incredibly modern reasons. Pericles' leadership was weakened by a series of unfortunate choices and unlucky foreign policy campaigns, culminating in the war with rival Sparta, the warrior and ambitious city that decided to replace the sluggish and imperialist Athenian presence in the Hellenic peninsula. Third, the crisis found its highest point due to explosion of an incredibly contagious and deadly disease, especially for a civilization whose hygienic standards and scientific expertise were nowhere near modern standards. The combination of all these elements caused the end of an era for the Athenian city.

As for the second example from the past that I decided to take in analysis, I decided to take a decisive step in the direction of the modern era and analyse the crisis of the Late Middle Ages from different

points of view. Here too, my goal was to understand the multi-dimensional nature of the crisis' phenomena that disrupt societies, underlining the similarities with what we are experiencing today. The society of the Late Middle Ages was hit by a series of phenomena of historical importance, such as the rapid and sudden climate change, which put in serious economic difficulty a society that relied on subsistence for a very large part. The explosion of the phenomenon of climate change was exacerbated by the absence of technological developments that could tackle the devastating effects of climate change. The reduced availability of fundamental goods caused an increase in prices, thus creating effects of volatility similar to those we see today. Also in this case, the century under analysis was shattered by numerous waves of the Black Death, a disease that came from Asia and that during its passage through Asia and Europe had catastrophic effects on the population, and in many senses on society as a whole.

As mentioned, the report of these examples from the past was instrumental in introducing the content of the second chapter, which focused on a multi-dimensional analysis of the crises of our time. Of course, a substantial part of the second chapter focused on the COVID-19 Pandemic, for several reasons. First of all, it is a historic event that shocked the world in all respects, potentially causing a shift of the centre of world balance eastward. Second, it has served as an accelerator for other open issues that have begun to reveal their consequences in recent years, although the real effects have yet to show. To carry out an analysis as correct as possible, I reported a timeline of events, explaining the different approaches in dealing with the crisis that have been implemented in different areas of the world. Besides that, it was my intention to provide a perspective as global perspective as possible, shedding a light on the multi-dimensional consequences of the Pandemic, from the economy to the effects on mental health. As a matter of fact, I thought this all was necessary to introduce and propose an analysis of two other major issues of our time, which are the Climate Crisis and the Migratory Crisis. The reasons are obvious, but it is worth pointing out that the long-term effects of the climate crisis could be unprecedented for the modern era, and that the lack of a prompt and organized response from the international community will make our generation "partner in crime" in this disaster. At the same time, in recent decades we have had an anticipation of the historical significance that migratory flows will have in the years to come, especially if we reflect on the fact that climate change will lead more and more people to flee their country of origin, since the climate of many areas of the world will make them practically uninhabitable.

In fact, the crises I discussed are all closely linked, as all the open issues of our time are, and that is why the third chapter was based on a Questionnaire on the platform Qualtrics, that investigated the perception of the population on these issues. As a matter of fact, it was right in the last chapter that the theoretical approach and the empirical approach of work met definitively. If within the first two

chapters I focused on a more theoretical approach, it was within the third that I had the opportunity to shed a light on the opinions of the general population about the particular historical moment we are experiencing. I did this analysis by questioning to what extent people feel that there has been a change in their view of the world and their relationship with public decision makers. Similarly, it was my intention to bring out two key elements. First, the disconnection of what the population expects and the measures that decision-makers have put into force to address the many open issues that characterize our century. Second, the urgency of change. I think that the ultimate goal of this work has been precisely this, namely, to understand how men and women rethink the world around them at times when the status quo is upset by unexpected events of huge scope. Highlighting this discomfort is a valuable exercise because it allows us to look at the events of our time with the awareness of history, and with the spirit of intervening on the world to fix it.