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## EDITORIAL

### Social divides, open wounds

*Could it be that this modern life has more modern than life?*

**Mafalda**

When Joaquín Salvador Lavado (Quino) was asked how he imagined the coming years, he said he supposed they must be brave if, given the state of things, they still intended to come. Sadly the cartoonist did not live to see 2021, but the new year certainly needs plenty of courage to look out on such a disconcerted, sick world. On top of the specific Covid-19 symptoms, the current pandemic adds to other disorders that were already dogging us, consequences of the social disconnection and anomie brought about by chronic capitalism. While the physical effects make us even more biologically vulnerable, the social symptoms threaten the health of the common good. The concept of the common good—legacy of the utopian ideals of fraternity and equality, and essential for rebuilding our tattered social fabric—underlies recent movements for social and political change based on global awareness and social justice. However, the common good now looks like a utopia crossed by multiple risk factors arising from an unforeseen situation with an uncertain prognosis: a global epidemic that lays bare our human fragility and deepens the cultural and economic divides in our system of relationships. We have already seen the inequalities in the way the illness is detected, diagnosed and treated. Unequal access to vaccines and power games between big corporations and states will soon also force us to take a good look in the mirror. As the cracks open up beneath our feet, we must not forget that without a social fabric, whether between or within frontiers, there is no safety net to break the fall.

Fractures, cracks and all manner of distances continue to complicate already open social wounds. Since *Kultur* was first launched, we have shared reflections and proposals for transformative actions to tackle these social divides. We have always taken the link with the urban context as our starting point, an anchor from where to observe and analyse the reality that needs to change. And at each stage, we have warned of new, emerging divisions (employment, generational, cultural, digital, educational and gender divisions, among others), new violences that open up rifts and challenge the collective conscience. In this issue we turn to the rural divide, defined as the inability of non-urban areas to achieve the same standards of living, services and life opportunities as cities. One symptom of the lack of territorial cohesion and social coherence is the depopulation of rural regions. This decline is directly proportional to the decay of the large cities, since the experiences of inequity and inequality rise in rural areas as the meaninglessness of the city as an expression of developed community increases. This observation cannot, therefore, be left out of any action plan for sustainable and inclusive development, in all its facets—economic, social, cultural and environmental—as set out in the United Nations Agenda 2030. All the rural and urban areas, administrations and groups involved in this development project must keep debate, analysis and joint action alive in order to achieve its objectives.

As mentioned in the introduction to this special issue, small differences can create large distances. Not only that, but also each one of these small differences is crossed by numerous other small differences in a warp and weft of intersections that further complicate analysis and action. For example, the rural–urban divide will be experienced differently by women and men, by immigrants and locals, by property owners and employees, or by young and old. But then, if the key lies in power asymmetries, the effects of which proliferate in accordance with the classic economic, gender, age and other classifications, why refer now to divides, when what we mean is simply inequalities? The term *divide* has exercised our collective imagination ever since the doctrine of human rights was adopted as the ethical frame to define and understand development. What this perspective implies is that every expression of individual and social distance in relation to policies designed to strengthen equity and equality is an infringement of rights. Thus, social divides reflect distance, that is, the real situation of a given inequality with respect to the desired standard. And it is assumed that public policies have an ethical imperative to close these divides.

Although the concept of social divide may be somewhat elusive from the theoretical perspective, and vague from the technical point of view, it is significant that the United Nations has adopted it because it is dynamic and it gives society a decisive role. In this sense, it is saying that equality must be constructed on the basis of what sort of social justice society wants for itself; in other words, as a value, not as an adjustment to the actual conditions.



Society shifts from passive subject to actor and interpreter of the meaning of the desired changes. For this reason, social divides include a positioned relational factor that is extremely stimulating for emancipatory and transformative cultural and educational strategies. If society has to think about itself and accept co-responsibility with the State for identifying the differences in which people's lives develop, political participation acquires a significant ethical dimension.

Unless we want to water down society to nothing with the *modern* so far removed from life that Mafalda laments, we must resignify collective action to close up the divides that harm us. Whether by committing to Jürgen Habermas's unfinished project of modernity, or by trusting in the disruptive, regenerative potential of postmodernity, citizens must respond to this challenge as a community. Combating critical and political apathy and tirelessly challenging the sentences of single thought in order to shorten distances and heal social wounds is not just an intellectual exercise; it is an act of democratic coherence and civic survival.

Castelló, December, 2020.