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## Is the Society Ready for the Consequences of the Pandemic as a Natural Stage of Development

**Abstract:** The article is devoted to the analysis of changes in society during and after the coronavirus pandemic. The general features of epidemics and pandemics in the human history have been considered, the similarity of the main forms and methods of fighting against pandemics accumulated by society in different periods of history has been shown. Some trends in the development of modern society have been outlined and described, which could be seen even before the COVID-19 pandemic that has become their catalyst and intensified their manifestation. In other words, it has become the impetus for their further development. In particular, the transformation of society into an information and knowledge society; reorientation of the economy and business in the context of COVID-19; the changing role of the labor force and the labor market; character in social connections and communications; the phenomenon of social responsibility of citizens, business and the state in a pandemic; changes in the nature of education has been analyzed. The emphasis is made on the fact that society will not return to its usual pre-coronavirus lifestyle, but will gradually expand (deepen) the described trends in all areas, will make a transition to a new state.

**Key words:** COVID-19, pandemic, epidemic, society, state, economy, education, personnel

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### Introduction

**E**pidemics and pandemics are constants in the history of society. They are different, but at the same time, some patterns in their emergence, spread, fight against them, and their consequences can be traced. First of all, it is the causative agent of the disease – a virus, bacteria, etc., which provokes the emergence of the disease, its rapid spread, the unpreparedness of the health care system to fight it, the search for methods and means of treatment, and further prevention. Humanity has already fought the plague, cholera, influenza, HIV/AIDS, and other pathogens of epidemics and pandemics. Historical experience shows that overcoming epi-

demics and pandemics requires time (several centuries, decades, years), the duration of which is constantly decreasing. In the 20th – the early 21st centuries, viral infections, both present in the natural environment and grown artificially for different purposes, have become the causative agents of diseases that provoke epidemics and pandemics. Another such pandemic is COVID-19.

As the experience of the previous year of humanity's life in conditions of the coronavirus pandemic has shown, society was utterly unprepared for such a turn of events. The impression was that everything would be limited to China, and everyone hoped for that. The result is known. The protracted coronavirus crisis worldwide has exposed existing problems and provoked new difficulties and risks in many states.

However, how unpredictable has the pandemic become for society? Could it have predicted such a course of events in advance? While the epidemic's beginning was perceived with slight bewilderment, the further development of events has shown more actions to confront it. History would remember examples of the spread of epidemics and pandemics, which radically influenced the subsequent development of society. Common characteristics can also be distinguished in them, for example, quarantine restrictions (lockdowns, prohibitions to leave homes, contaminated territories, bans on entering cities, settlements, port calls, etc.), economic recession, demographic crisis, the decline in social communications, closure of cultural and sports institutions, other public places, etc.

The results and consequences of pandemics in history also indicate the presence of common components, for example, a gradual economic recovery, demographic growth, rotation in the social structure, improvement in the health care system, greater opportunities for people in building a career, etc.

Various aspects of the life of society during the coronavirus crisis, the prospects for the development of society and changes in it in the post-COVID-19 period are presented, for example, in generalized studies of a practical nature “Factors and Results of the Implementation of Anti-crisis Policy in Selected Countries. Forecast of Ukraine's Economic Development in 2021” (*Factors and Results of the Implementation of Anti-crisis Policy in Selected Countries. Forecast of Ukraine's Economic Development in 2021*, 2021), “Ukraine: the impact of COVID-19 on the economy and society (vision of post-pandemic development in 2020–2024 as viewed by experts and youth): consensus forecast” (*Ukraine: the impact of COVID-19 on the economy and society (vision of post-pan-*

*dem development in 2020–2024 as viewed by experts and youth): consensus forecast, 2020), “Impact of COVID-19 on the country’s economy and society: results of 2020 and challenges and threats of post-pandemic development: consensus forecast” (Impact of COVID-19 on the country’s economy and society: results of 2020 and challenges and threats of post-pandemic development: consensus forecast, 2021), “A comprehensive package of national anti-crisis measures to overcome the effects of the pandemic and create the conditions for sustainable socio-economic growth” (A comprehensive package of national anti-crisis measures to overcome the effects of the pandemic and create the conditions for sustainable socio-economic growth, 2020), “COVID-19 in higher education: how current and prospective students are adapting” (COVID-19 in higher education: how current and prospective students are adapting, 2020) etc. In addition, there are websites of various international organizations that provide information and statistics on the coronavirus, its spread, the course of combating it, etc. (e.g., Worldometer, *COVID-19 Coronavirus Pandemic*, <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus>; World Health Organization, *Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) Pandemic*, <https://www.who.int>; IMF, *World Economic Outlook*, <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO>).*

Therefore, the purposes of our research are the identification and characteristics of the main directions and regularities of society’s development in the post-COVID-19 period.

## **Research Methodology**

The study of society’s readiness for the consequences of the pandemic as a natural stage of development sets the task of substantiating a theoretical basis and developing practical recommendations that would determine the further development of spheres of social life in the post-COVID-19 period. Such a basis can be philosophy, political management, political science, sociology, social psychology, management, including educational management, cognitive and behavioral economics, which will determine various aspects and directions of the development of society, mechanisms, forms, methods, and ways of changes in it within the framework of their research subjects.

Practical developments in combating the pandemic and the prospects for the development of the world after the pandemic that have already

been developed in the world practice also indicate the need to generalize various studies in this area.

A key role in such a study should be played by system analysis as a set of methods with the help of which it is possible to generalize all the regularities, directions of the development of society as a complex system, to generate alternatives for the further development of society in the post-COVID-19 period on this basis.

### **Results of the Research**

The COVID-19 pandemic is not an exception in the long list of pandemics and epidemics that humanity has experienced. It traditionally raised questions about the search for ways to fight the virus, the economic recession, the infringement of the rights of citizens, a compromise between the population, business, and the government regarding measures that would reduce the spread of the pandemic or even stop it. Over the past year, the experience of dealing with a pandemic in different countries of the world has already been accumulated: quarantines, lockdowns, restrictions, general ignoring it, etc., shows the similarities and differences in actions in relation to the epidemic. Therefore, in the current situation, at the very beginning, the authorities of the states were more “extinguishing the fire” than calculating further actions in this matter. However, it should be noted that the ongoing attempts to find a vaccine against coronavirus and its further use deserve special attention. The results of the fight against the first waves of the pandemic have shown that humanity is more or less able to cope with it, and the development of the first vaccines provides confidence in the ability of the health systems of states to overcome the harmful effects of the epidemic.

However, it is also necessary to think about the future, about life after the pandemic. In this matter, in our opinion, it seems that everyone, from states to ordinary citizens, hopes sooner or later (but better sooner) to return to the usual way of life that existed before the pandemic. In our opinion, there will be no such return. It is the main thing that everyone needs to realize.

The failure to return to the usual way of life is connected with various trends that were present in society even before the pandemic. The coronavirus crisis itself became a catalyst for these trends, which, having identified these trends, transferred them from a latent state to a visible

one, provoked their rapid development and spread, and made it possible to implement them. Let us outline some of them.

*Transformation of society into information and knowledge society.* From the second half of the 20th century, society began a transition to the information stage, later designated as a knowledge society. The world's countries are actively introducing information technologies, the development of which is accelerated by the competition between manufacturers of software and various kinds of gadgets, owners of social networks and virtual objects, etc. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated and increased possibilities of introducing information technologies, thereby strengthening the characteristics of the knowledge society in the political system of states, economic sphere, social environment, education, etc.

For example, one of the negative consequences of a pandemic is a long economic downturn. However, in connection with quarantine in many states, the implementation of information technologies in government (electronic government, e-state), economy (e-economy), social sphere (various information resources for servicing the population and providing services remotely), culture (virtual concerts, digitized museum pieces, virtual tours, exhibitions, etc.) has been actualized. It contributes to better management and care for the population as comfortably, safely, and efficiently as possible, and also helps reduce risks in the "manual management" of the state and brings it to a higher international level.

*Reorientation of the economy and business.* In the coronavirus crisis, serious consequences arose in the world and state economies as a result of a sharp reduction in production, a decrease in the purchasing power of the population, and the closure of many manufacturing enterprises and social institutions. Small business, which was almost closed during quarantine and restrictions, suffered the most.

In our opinion, the pandemic has contributed to the comprehension of the further development of the economy both at the state and at international levels. It refers to an economy in a consumer society, where many industries work not to produce and manufacture "essential goods" but to meet the ever-expanding needs of buyers in many unnecessary or insignificant things.

As indicated, small businesses have suffered the most in the pandemic conditions. However, it is necessary to look at this situation based on the specifics of the industries in which small business develops. The history of the development of society after epidemics and pandemics had proven that all the masters and entrepreneurs who survived pandemics began to

live better because their number during the pandemic was reduced. They did not have strong competition as before and, accordingly, began to earn more. However, in Ukraine, small business is more concentrated in the service sector, e.g., coffee shops, small cafes, small beauty salons, hairdressers, etc. Such entrepreneurs primarily suffered during the quarantine, especially lockdowns, when the owners had to close their establishments. At the same time, the question arises about the advisability of doing this kind of business in general. In the example of Ukraine, when 2–3 small architectural forms selling coffee or beauty salons are placed nearby (several meters from each other), it seems that the entrepreneurs themselves take the path of least resistance in the search for income – which is easier, faster and where considerable financial or other efforts are not needed to start a business. Therefore, the dissatisfaction of small businesses during quarantine is in many ways the consequence of choosing the services provided with the least cost and work. Small businesses need to understand the necessity to reorient toward other types of services that require large investments and are not particularly affected by epidemiological constraints.

It may be concluded about the reorientation of the economy of the consumer society to other priorities, which is unlikely in the near future.

*Labor retention and labor market change.* In connection with the coronavirus crisis, states are faced with a dilemma: what to focus on during a pandemic – on saving the population or the economy? It means that the efforts of the state should be focused on preserving the health of the working-age and employed population capable of returning to work in the shortest possible time, or on saving the economy by forcing business and production owners to fire employees in order to save the business and have not very catastrophic consequences in the economy. As the history of previous epidemics and pandemics shows, if the size of the population and, first of all, the working population has decreased minimally, and it has been preserved, then the economy can revive faster. As practice shows, those business owners who have kept their employees as much as possible spend less money on staff restoration because there is no need to hire new workers, train them, have no high turnover, etc. When an employer looks for a new employee, the labor market after the pandemic will be full of job offers, and a potential employee, having found a job for himself, can at any time go to the place where he will be paid higher, or the working conditions will suit him more. An employer will have to look for a new employee again. The question of corporate culture also arises, since new employees do not have loyalty to the company, which makes it

possible for them to leave at any time, and old employees who have successfully been kept at work may remain, perceiving themselves as part of the company that has supported them in a difficult time.

Therefore, many companies' transfer of their employees to a remote form of work during quarantine and lockdown preserves their personnel potential. At the same time, in the HR field, over the past few years, there has already been a tendency for employees to work remotely, the effectiveness of which is being tested through various kinds of research. In the economic sphere, the direction of freelancing has increased, especially in the service sector.

Thus, each state solves the problem of saving resources and optimizing the labor market in the country in its own way.

*Changes in social connections and communications.* Our society is a consumer society characterized by an active social life, which includes going to restaurants, gyms, concerts, museums, exhibitions, etc.; getting together in communities, for example, in clubs, as guests, at parties, picnics; demonstrating status by displaying clothes, accessories, cars, houses, etc., mainly with one purpose – to parade about and to observe others. The introduction of quarantine, lockdowns, and self-isolation leads to a decrease and conservation of such communication between people; blocks the opportunity to shop, go to events, get together with the community, which reduces supply and demand in the economy: on the one hand, entrepreneurs, businesses (medium and large) reduce the release of goods and the provision of services, on the other hand, the structure of relationships changes (people are more often at home, psychological problems, such as quarrels, misunderstandings, conflicts, depression, chronic diseases, etc., appear and worsen).

From an economic point of view, this situation leads to a reduction in business, and sometimes even to its closure. The impossibility of development in conditions of quarantine restrictions does not make it possible to accumulate a “bank account.” In the future, with the resumption and restoration of business, investment in its development seems problematic due to various objective and subjective reasons. From the consumer's point of view, limiting consumption makes the further accumulation of “capital” impossible and possibly leads to its decrease. The consequences can be bankruptcy and, as a result, a change (decrease) in social status and prestige in certain circles of the former sphere of relations.

With regard to contacts and various kinds of social communications, it is natural to reduce direct contact with other people during a pandemic to

limit them. However, with the development of information technologies, various means of transmitting information, an expansion of social contacts through social networks occurs, quarantine, and restriction of movement contribute to an increase in communication through the network.

At the same time, the pandemic has brought the change in family values to one of the leading places. Quarantine restrictions showed that not all families could cope with the constant presence of all family members at home. The negative impact of the coronavirus pandemic was an increase in the number of divorces, which led to the destruction of many families. The experience gained gives hope that the next relationship of such people will be stronger and, accordingly, family values will be very important for a person.

*Social responsibility of citizens, business, and the state.* From a social point of view, quarantine in consumer society is not a reason to abandon the usual way of life, get out of the comfort zone. It is easier to go the simplest way – to preserve one’s way of life as far as possible, and to spread information about the “encroachment” of the authorities on the rights and freedoms of citizens, etc. The question arises, on the one hand, of finding parity between the forced need to infringe on the rights and freedoms of citizens by the state to preserve the life and safety of people, even against their wishes, and on the other hand, of the readiness of the state to restore the citizens’ rights and freedoms immediately after the abolition of quarantine and stabilization of the epidemiological situation. The question is as follows: are citizens ready to “sacrifice” their rights and freedoms for a while, and is the state ready to immediately return them to citizens and not hide behind the next far-fetched reasons for their non-return? As the situation in various European countries shows, citizens do not want the state to infringe on their rights and freedoms, but at the same time, they do not want to take responsibility for their lives and health. Thus, the problem of rethinking human values arises, both for one person and society as a whole. The question arises about social harmony, or the state closest to it – about the social responsibility of both an individual citizen and business and the state in a pandemic. What measures and actions are each ready to take to ensure the safety and preservation of the life of the population? And are citizens ready to be socially responsible for their safety and life?

Historical experience shows that pandemics form objective public opinion, which is not always objective, contribute to the emergence and intensification of mass hysteria, “witch-hunting,” the search for various



kinds of conspiracies, mainly state ones. Even after several waves of COVID-19 in mid-2021, some people still argue that the pandemic is a conspiracy of states, that coronavirus infection does not exist, and that all this does not concern them and will not affect them. It seems that such people generally have no sense of security, a self-preservation instinct. On the other hand, even people with a high sense of “responsible behavior” have already been tired of the constant intense rhythm of life in conditions of quarantines and lockdowns, they also “let the guards down” and return to their usual life, ignoring another “portion” of restrictions.

The coronavirus pandemic has become a catalyst for forming a society for social responsibility, the understanding of which must be expanded not only in relation to business but also to society as a whole, from individual citizens to the state as a whole.

*Changes in education.* Another area for which the pandemic has been the catalyst for the development is education. The shift to distance learning, or blended learning using distance learning, became widespread during the pandemic. This situation has its pros and cons, as well as risks. In the cons, first of all, it is necessary to name the partial readiness or complete unavailability of the technical support of distance education. Not all educational institutions could move to the network quickly and efficiently. Technical and software problems accompanied this process during the initial quarantine period. It is necessary to add to this the reluctance of teachers to switch to the remote form of work. Among the reasons for this situation are the lack of teachers' experience with software, the need to quickly transfer a large amount of information to various educational platforms, etc. One of the main problems remains to identify students who attend online classes with their cameras turned off, arguing that there is no technical possibility; complete tasks on educational platforms, but it is difficult to check whether students did these tasks by themselves, etc. However, the problem of student identification is not new; it existed even before the pandemic and was connected with the introduction of distance learning in universities.

As for the positive aspects of distance learning, this is an increase in the number of students of national universities at the expense of those students who planned to study abroad and could not do this due to the pandemic; expanding the opportunities for academic mobility of students, especially those who, for various reasons, are physically unable to travel to another country to study; opportunities for teachers to improve their professional suitability not only with the help of various online courses,

programs (including ones in foreign universities) but also by expanding the technical skills of mastering various educational tools based on information technologies.

The opportunities to advertise universities for recruiting students, demonstrating the advantages of their universities, etc., through virtual tours, online consultations, virtual conferences, festivals, meetings, etc., have also expanded.

The coronavirus pandemic has become a catalyst for changes in education in terms of its transition to distance learning and knowledge society. It refers to a change in the understanding of the very term “knowledge,” which all students interpret in their own way today, and this aggravates the loss of objectivity by knowledge. If earlier “knowledge” was understood as verified information, systematized in the process of cognition, and realized as truth, now knowledge becomes pragmatic, and education turns into training. Instead of receiving education through obtaining certain knowledge, students receive training by acquiring skills, competences, abilities, etc. Knowledge is transformed into informational, communicative, social practices that can be used together. Such practices contribute to the constant “forgetting” of knowledge since the information does not have time to be rethought and memorized. Thus, in a knowledge society, education turns into practice. The use of knowledge as information, social communication practices during pandemics contributes to the formation of public opinion, which can be tilted in any direction depending on the goals set. Therefore, during quarantines and lockdowns, much untrue, unverified information is spread, which is presented as knowledge and is perceived as knowledge.

The changes in education, intensified during the coronavirus pandemic, will be aimed at finding parity between distance, virtual and classical forms of education with the need to address the question: if it will be the education or training.

These are just a few directions in the development of society and its readiness for life after a pandemic.

## Conclusion

Summing up, we can state that society has started realizing that the world is gradually changing after the pandemic, it has already changed before the eruption of the coronavirus crisis, and the crisis itself has ag-

gravated these changes, has become a catalyst for them, which makes it possible to see these changes, accept them and prepare for them.

Generalizing the analyzed directions of changes in society during the coronavirus crisis and in the post-COVID-19 period, based on various kinds of analytical reports and statistical data, we can highlight the main regularities (scenarios) of the further development of society:

- reformatting international unions, changing their composition, territory, functions and powers, requirements for members, etc.;
- further transformation of society into the information society, in which all spheres of social life are controlled and operated using informational, including digital technologies;
- active formation of the knowledge society, in the process of transition to which the foundations of the education system are being rethought, a global education system is being formed, the boundaries of national educational systems are becoming blurred, the international educational mobility of students and teachers is widening due to distance learning, virtual forms of education are emerging;
- changes in the world economy related to changes in world economic centers (USA, China); continued reorientation to innovative sectors of the economy, primarily related to information and digital technologies, means of communication, robotics, etc.; reorientation to localized and flexible production of goods and provision of services;
- changes in the world labor market related to the emergence of new professions and the disappearance of professions associated primarily with industrial production, where technology, computers, and robots replace workers; reorientation of the labor market toward the demand for workers with the ability to work remotely;
- the proliferation of organizations that have a network organizational structure based on the principle of decentralization, without hierarchical structure, clear subordination, where management decisions are made collectively, etc.;
- spreading social responsibility in business, as well as expanding the boundaries of understanding social responsibility not only as corporate responsibility (in business), but also at the level of the whole society as a whole; an increase in the share of business participation in projects at the local level, in particular in life and health protection, social and educational projects, which forms social responsibility among not only business representatives, but also local authorities and self-government, local residents;

- changes in the organizational (corporate) business culture related to a change in the thinking of employees, a lack of identification with the organization in which they work, and an increase in the number of employees who, having achieved their goal in the organization, move to another to implement their new goals, without caring about “attachment” to a particular organization;
- active development of cognitive and behavioral economics as the newest areas of the economic sphere of society, which are focused on a person and personal needs;
- changes in orientation toward the needs and interests of people, particularly focusing on gender inequality, inequality in wages of women and men, violation of citizens’ rights, access to health care, information, etc.

Thus, the next decade will become a period of cardinal world changes and transformations.

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## **Czy społeczeństwo jest gotowe na konsekwencje pandemii jako naturalnego etapu rozwoju**

### **Streszczenie**

Artykuł poświęcony jest analizie zmian społecznych podczas i po pandemii koronawirusa. Rozważono ogólne cechy epidemii i pandemii w historii ludzkości oraz zaprezentowano podobieństwa i główne metody działań przeciwko pandemiom. Zarysowano i opisano niektóre trendy w rozwoju nowoczesnych społeczeństw, które można było zaobserwować już przed pandemią, które stały się katalizatorami późniejszych zmian oraz zmanifestowały się z większą intensywnością. Innymi słowy, pandemia stała się przyczyną ich dalszych zmian. W szczególności mowa jest w tym miejscu o transformacji w formę społeczeństwa informacyjnego i wiedzy; zmianie orientacji ekonomii i biznesu w kontekście pandemii, zmianie roli siły roboczej i rynku pracy; charakterze relacji społecznych i komunikacji; fenomenie społecznej odpowiedzialności obywateli, przedsiębiorstw i państw podczas pandemii; a także zmianach w naturze edukacji. Nacisk położono na to, że społeczeństwo nie wróci już do wcześniejszego stanu sprzed pandemii, ale zacznie się stopniowo rozwijać, w tym wskazane trendy we wszystkich obszarach i dojdzie do etapu osiągnięcia nowej formy.

**Słowa kluczowe:** COVID-19, pandemia, epidemia, społeczeństwo, państwo, ekonomia, edukacja, personel

