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The end of Covid

Michael Briguglio

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“Hope to have a rehearsal soon...when the situation permits” is the repeated mantra between my bandmates and I in the rock band Fire, whenever we communicate with each other.

The last time we rehearsed together was over a year ago, and we look forward to the day when ‘normality’ will return. There are so many other musicians in this situation. Well actually, the same can be said of so many people involved in so many activities.

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The million dollar questions here are: When will this happen? Will it actually happen? Will there be a clear cut-off date for the end of Covid-19? Will there be such a thing as a post-Covid society?

I tend to err on the optimistic side of things, and I fuse this with stoic philosophy, which teaches us that it is up to each and every one of us to interpret the situations we are in. At the same time, the sociologist in me gives much weight to sociological evidence, 'reality', and how the latter is constructed and understood in society.

In the coming days we will be able to gauge the impact of the government's latest decisions on Covid measures - in a context of Malta having among the highest vaccination rates in the world and an R-Factor rate that has gone down to 0.52, according to the latest figures released by University of Malta colleague Vince Marmara.

Each one of us has a role to play in the interpretation and implementation of the government's measures. We are products and producers of society at the same time. Hence, a high vaccination rate coupled with appropriate social distancing can hypothetically help our society move towards 'normality'. In the meantime, these variables intersect with other social realities, including Malta's smallness, the partisan divide, the impacts of and on different economic sectors, and variables which may not even have been anticipated.

The behaviour of each and every one of us thus needs to be contextualised, resulting in possible different outcomes. For example, an ideal case scenario would be to have lower Covid-19 and R rates, an increased sense of optimism among the public, conformity to directives issued by authorities, and a sense of normality in fields such as the economy, culture, and society.

On the other hand, Covid-anxiety might still persist even if Covid-figures improve. Or conversely, Covid-figures may remain worrying, but we may get tired of restrictions with respect to our needs and wants.

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time, however, it is interesting to note that to date, Maltese society has shown quite a high level of communitarian behaviour, for example through social distancing and vaccine take-up rates. In turn, these different possibilities can be impacted in different ways, for example through the influx of tourists.

Tourism can act as a double-edged sword in this regard. On the one hand it can help fuel a rise in Covid-19 rates, and on the other it can provide a badly-needed economic injection. Let us keep in mind that assistance to businesses through national and EU funding is not unlimited. Widespread consultation with experts and stakeholders is required to ensure that we do not repeat mistakes like last year's.

Whilst I understand the government's need to plan a timeline to return to a post-covid situation, I think that it would be more realistic to interpret all this as a social process without a clear cut-off date, but with a myriad of changes and impacts which take place across time and space. It is important to take heed of lessons learned during the process, whether related to facemask-wearing and social distancing, or to opportunities and constraints of remote working and flexibility, and the intersection of medical, economic, social, political, cultural, and other factors at individual, societal, national, and transnational levels.

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