

A Pandemic Race of Unknown Distance

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Matt Galloway on the CBC's Current asked the Canadian Olympian, Clara Hughes, "Do you have any advice, as an endurance athlete, for the marathon we are in." She instantly replied, "This isn't a marathon. I think a marathon's too short ... this isn't even an ultra double trail run. This is an unknown distance."

In this pandemic race unexpected twists and turns are undoubtedly ahead, including apparent finishes that emerge from the mist, as next stages of the journey. This race will test our mettle and help us learn more about who we really are.

Some have suggested that the economy will come roaring back soon. However, it is unlikely there will be a vaccine within 18 months and even when one is developed it may not be universally effective for evolving new strains of the virus. We still don't know whether antibodies guarantee immunity and if so, for how long.

The contestants in this pandemic race are, to varying degrees, concentrated economies versus community economies. A concentrated economy extracts excessively from Earth and directs most benefits to just one of every 1,000 people. A community economy treads lightly with prudent resource use, while distributing benefits, so no one is left behind.

This race didn't even have a clean start. It began erratically as countries around the world responded with disbelief to action. The concentrated economy was in full flight on the inside track but quickly staggered, while the community economy was plodding and trying to find its legs.

Which economy do we want? There is still production, consumption, trading, buying and selling, even if challenged by the needs for physical distancing, masking, testing, contact tracing, plexiglass barriers and in some cases, complete isolation. Political engagement is more crucial than ever. We can vote for politicians who will set systemic standards for a community economy with clean energy and who recognize that we are in an even longer race of addressing the climate

crisis with societal adjustments, as we decarbonize and pace ourselves to an ecological equilibrium.

We can choose to keep sending dollars to behemoths such as Amazon, because of convenience, or choose to buy from local stores and farms still adapting to delivery and pick-up options, with physical distancing. Which businesses do we want to persist, as the race lengthens?

The hardships of the pandemic are most severe for our vulnerable citizens. Cracks are letting light in to expose broken systems of long-term care, underpaid essential workers and marginalized migrants, among others. As in the story of the Special Olympics where runners paused to help a competitor who stumbled, our human calling is to enable everyone, including non-human creatures, to continue.

Mother Earth has imposed the pandemic race of unknown distance to awaken us to the longer climate crisis and ecological restoration race. In choosing to create a community economy we may not only survive, but in the process of setting aside baggage which detracts, we could thrive, as beings attuned to our essence.

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