

How Covid and 15 minutes deliveries could become opposing forces

Since the start of the pandemic billions have been poured in ultra-fast grocery and food delivery startups. But the same pandemic is driving people away from the very same areas in which this model could (dubtfully) become sustainable.

Dark kitchens, with no windows, hidden in “[edge lands: spaces that are neither one thing nor another, urban offcuts that are easily overlooked](#)”. Dark stores, where silent aisles are walked by robots or employees who take orders from a mobile app. Micro fulfilment centres where once were shops and bodegas, parking lots and basements. Delivery drivers, mostly self-employed, who run like busy ants 24/7, on bikes or mopeds.

It's a fractionated picture, that of our almost-present, fractured even.

Like reality going from macro to micro too fast. It's a change that was already underway before Covid and the pandemic seems to have accelerated it to a dangerous speed. The kind of speed at which if you lose control you crash and burn.

Take these two extracts from articles published this week. From *The Guardian*: “One important fact about Deliveroo has passed relatively unnoticed: the company that the chancellor, Rishi Sunak, calls a ‘true British tech success story’ [has never turned a profit](#) – even during the Covid lockdowns”. From the *BBC*: “Asked how Dija can make a profit, Mr West says that as with all tech firms, ‘[becoming a profitable business is not an immediate priority](#)’ as it prefers to invest in growth initially”.

The pandemic brought smart-working, smart-working is bringing people away from cities (or, at least, away from city life as we knew it), [igniting a](#)

[de-urbanization](#) that already mutates the urban connective tissue. Entire neighbourhoods have been created around the idea of accomodating offices, workers and their needs. Shops that closed on the High Street might re-open but diners and stationeries near office buildings might well not.

Here's my problem: we want grocery, hot food and other goods delivered to home in 15 minutes. This might probably not be sustainable ([as I wrote here](#)) and if it is it will only be in very dense urban areas. Are these the same areas where nobody appears to want to live anymore?

The question that matters more than any other else is: is Covid going away or will it change our way of living forever? Some startups are behaving like they believe the pandemic is here to stay. This, of course, worries me a lot. I don't want it to stay. I need to know that it will pass and leave us with the irresistible drive [to go back to shops](#) and [malls](#). Yes, even for grocery. Don't forget how the Spanish Flu was followed by the Roaring '20s.

Imagining a world where more is delivered than bought in-store is detrimental to the basic principles of humanity: I think we can agree on that even while working for the delivery sector. Logistics is about the best way to move things, not necessarily the fastest. Logistics is about understanding what needs to be moved and what needs for somebody to come to pick it up. And yet billions of dollars are invested to support a model that's thriving on the worst catastrophe hitting humankind since World War 2. This saddens me: if they are right everyone loses. If they are wrong a lot of money will be thrown away and many jobs lost.