

Presentation of the President Gabriel Ferraté Award

Saló de Cròniques, Barcelona City Hall, Barcelona

Councillor,
President,
President Ferraté,
Professor Castell,
Award winners,

The Indian-American doctor Vivek Murthy is no ordinary medical professional. He served as the Surgeon General of the United States under President Obama and has now taken up the role again under President Biden. One might call him "America's doctor". Last year, during the impasse between the two Democrat presidencies, he published a book titled *Together*.¹

In this book, drawing on his experience as a top medical advisor, he warns of **a new pandemic threatening society, potentially breeding new diseases and exacerbating existing ones, and leading individuals and groups down an alarmingly grim path towards the future**. This new pandemic is loneliness. As if to prove the accuracy of his prognosis, the recent pandemic-driven lockdowns have further stressed the harmful effects of isolation.

I don't know whether the winners of the President Gabriel Ferraté Award were aware of Dr Murthy's book, but their work is a clear manifestation of its subtitle: "The Healing Power of Human Connection in a Sometimes Lonely World".

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¹ Vivek H. Murthy. *Together. The Healing Power of Human Connection in a Sometimes Lonely World*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2020, <https://www.amazon.com/Together-Connection-Performance-Greater-Happiness/dp/0062913298>

BeChallenge – to tackle specific social challenges through digital transformation.

Having skillfully identified both the problem and the solution, the winners have come up with a platform that uses technology to harness the healing power of human connection to ward off loneliness. In this regard, the Red Maze project makes a timely appearance for two reasons. Not only is it more needed than ever, but it also exemplifies the UPC and the UOC's joint commitment – with the support of Barcelona City Council and the close involvement of our incubated company BeChallenge – to tackle specific social challenges through digital transformation.

"Ongoing transformation can only be social if it is also digital, and vice versa. This is why we need to break down disciplinary, institutional and other barriers"

In short, ongoing transformation can only be social if it is also digital, and vice versa. This is why we need to break down disciplinary, institutional and other barriers, and why it's so important to have awards, such as the one dedicated to President Ferraté, that promote the use of digital tools to bring about real change.

Today's winners demonstrate precision and, above all, show us **how necessary companionship is, both to battle loneliness and to bring good, disruptive ideas to fruition.**

Thank you and congratulations!

Josep A. Planell