

The background features a dark blue field with white geometric lines. These lines form a complex, overlapping pattern of arcs and straight segments, resembling a stylized globe or a network diagram. The lines are of varying thickness and create a sense of depth and movement.

Future: System

TRANSFORMATION
BEYOND
MEGATRENDS

THE FUTURE:
PROJECT

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Transformation Times

TRANSFORMATIVE FUTURE RESEARCH FOR THE NEXT SOCIETY

The upheavals of the 21st century present societies with entirely new global and planetary challenges. Rapidly advancing interconnectivity and multiple crises are causing fundamental shifts in our social fabric. More urgently than ever the question arises: What will the future be like? How should companies prepare for it? And how can future research help?

In this context, the Future:Project represents a fundamental change in perspective. We question the purpose and role of the economy from a fundamental level. We move people and companies from a reactive stance to a proactive, shaping role: Companies must take a stance on the future. Because the future is not just an economic space but above all our future living space, which we actively shape through our collective actions.

WHAT FUTURE DO WE WANT?

The real starting question is: What does a future look like in which we as humans want to live? And how can individuals and organisations contribute to shaping this future? This change in perspective allows us not to treat the future as something external, something that will wash over us like a wave. Instead we should view it as an immediate space for action that we can influence and shape ourselves.

Companies can focus their energy on the proactive shaping of their sphere of influence. Instead of an aimless focus on trends, forecasts, and probabilities, a focused view, a sense of direction emerges. The focus on the desirable future shifts attention to those trends and transformations in which the future is being negotiated today. These

transformative forces can be utilized and nurtured to bring about one's own idea of the future.

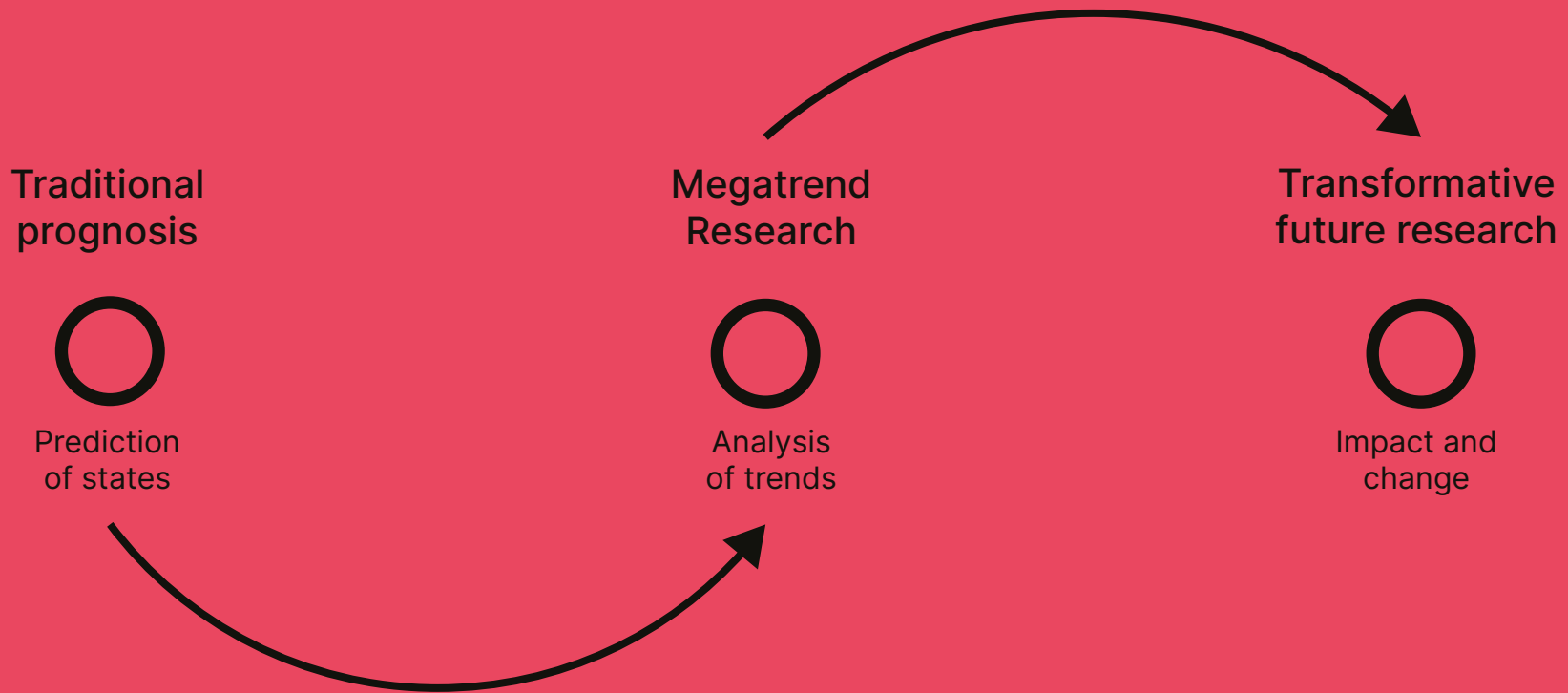
A NEW UNDERSTANDING OF TRENDS

The work of the Future:Project focuses on the transformative forces of societal change: the major forces of change in which concrete societal issues and needs are negotiated and solved. These are where the desire and search for livable futures are reflected. The idea of a livable future is at the heart of the Future:Project.

The transformative future research of the Future:Project always focuses first on the qualitative dimensions of change rather than on quantitative shifts. Trends are less relevant under this premise. The overall movement is no longer as relevant, such as it used to be with the Megatrends. Thus quality beats quantity in the mission to understand the present and reflect on the future.

The Future:Project works with a new trend systematisation – the Future:System. The Future:System provides the context for the organisation of trends. Thus, it not only enables a holistic-systemic and deep-dive perspective on the relevant, tangible factors of societal change, but also paints a comprehensive picture of the transition towards the next society (see also “Why transformative future research?”, p. 71).

From traditional prognosis to transformative future research



TRADITIONAL PROGNOSIS

The attempt to “predict” individual future states and trend trajectories.
 Issue: low complexity, emergence, contingency. Complex systems and trends can never be precisely predicted.

MEGATREND RESEARCH

The analysis of some very powerful and long-term trends such as globalisation or individualisation.
 Issue: Linear thinking, trend bias. The focus on a few major linear trends obscures the view of the disruption caused by counter-trends and the internal deconstruction triggered by them.

TRANSFORMATIVE FUTURE RESEARCH

The selection of holistic transformational trends that lead to constructive futures.
 Only trends that resolve historically derived paradoxes at a higher level are future-proof in terms of systemic self-stabilisation. Therefore, the focus is on the logic of trends, followed by counter-trends and the resulting “synthesis trends”.

Figure 1

The Future:Project

Our goal is to unlock the transformative potentials towards a livable future.

Our reference framework is the highly complex reality of the next society.

Our tool is a novel, progressive trend system that focuses on transformations: the Future:System.

Transformation beyond Megatrends

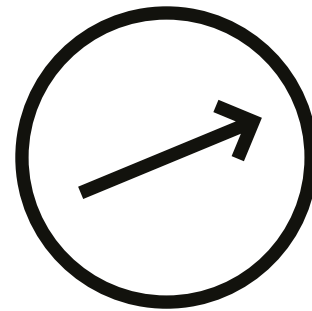
In the history of trend and future research, the year 1982 marks a milestone: It was then that John Naisbitt's influential work "Megatrends: Ten New Directions Transforming Our Lives" was published. Since then, megatrends have been used to make global transformation processes comprehensible. They are the deep currents of change that slowly but consistently upheave our world – for decades. The Future:Project is now taking a new approach: With the knowledge of the influence of megatrends in the background we focus on the major transformation processes that are reshaping society today and in the future.

FROM MEGATRENDS TO TRANSFORMATIONS

As societal transformation dynamics, megatrends impact organisations and businesses, but they also affect the living environments of individuals. We are all affected by the effects of megatrends. They have a sluggish but profound momentum that cannot be controlled in their basic direction.

The number and nature of megatrends vary depending on the research institute or trend agency. The Future:Project uses a clearly defined definition of megatrends: Only those changes that can primarily be represented as quantitative shifts over long periods of time are defined as a megatrend. From this perspective, six major movements for change emerge (see right).

These six megatrends have significantly shaped and formed the past decades. So they are "already there" and do not need to be predicted. At their core, they all describe linear changes in a certain direction: the degree of connectivity increases, the world population grows, individual needs become more differentiated, etc. At the same time, these major dynamics of change never operate in a vacuum but always encounter complex societal structures, cultural value systems, and different economic conditions. In this way, megatrends trigger various reactions, new needs, and subsequent changes in every society, developing their own, often contradictory dynamics. These transformative forces qualitatively shape the form of the next society.



The six megatrends of our time are:

Connectivity

Increasing interconnectivity and digitisation

Climate Change

Increasing impacts of climate change

Individualisation

Increasing differentiation of lifestyles

Demographic Shift

Increasing aging and population growth

Urbanisation

Increasing urbanisation

Globalisation

Increasing transnational interconnections

THE FRAMEWORK: THE NEXT SOCIETY

The 21st century marks a historic upheaval in societal evolution. Under the signs of connectivity and in the context of multiple global disruptions and crises, society is fundamentally reconfiguring itself. This “next society” is characterized by new social, political, and cultural patterns – and by a new dimension of complexity:

THE NEXT SOCIETY

The concept of the “next society” was significantly shaped by the economist Peter Drucker and the sociologist Dirk Baecker to formulate the vision of a future society. Drucker describes the “next society” as a new, computerized form of the information and knowledge society, replacing the industrial society. The principle of ambiguity is significant: Classical causalities lose their meaning, the handling of communication becomes increasingly unpredictable and less hierarchical – the future becomes open and uncertain in new ways.

Baecker describes the next society as a network society: networking unleashes new dimensions of complexity and generates hybrid interconnections that make the world “turbulent, unsettled, and over-nervous.” Fixed couplings are replaced by loose connections, fixed structures by agile processes. In the network economy, data and algorithms promote scaling effects: it is not companies that grow, but networks.

To understand and actively address the transition to the next society and the design potentials contained within, mere engagement with the level of megatrends is insufficient. Therefore, the approach of the Future:Project shifts the focus of trend and future research onto the transformations that can shape a palpable manifestation of the next society.

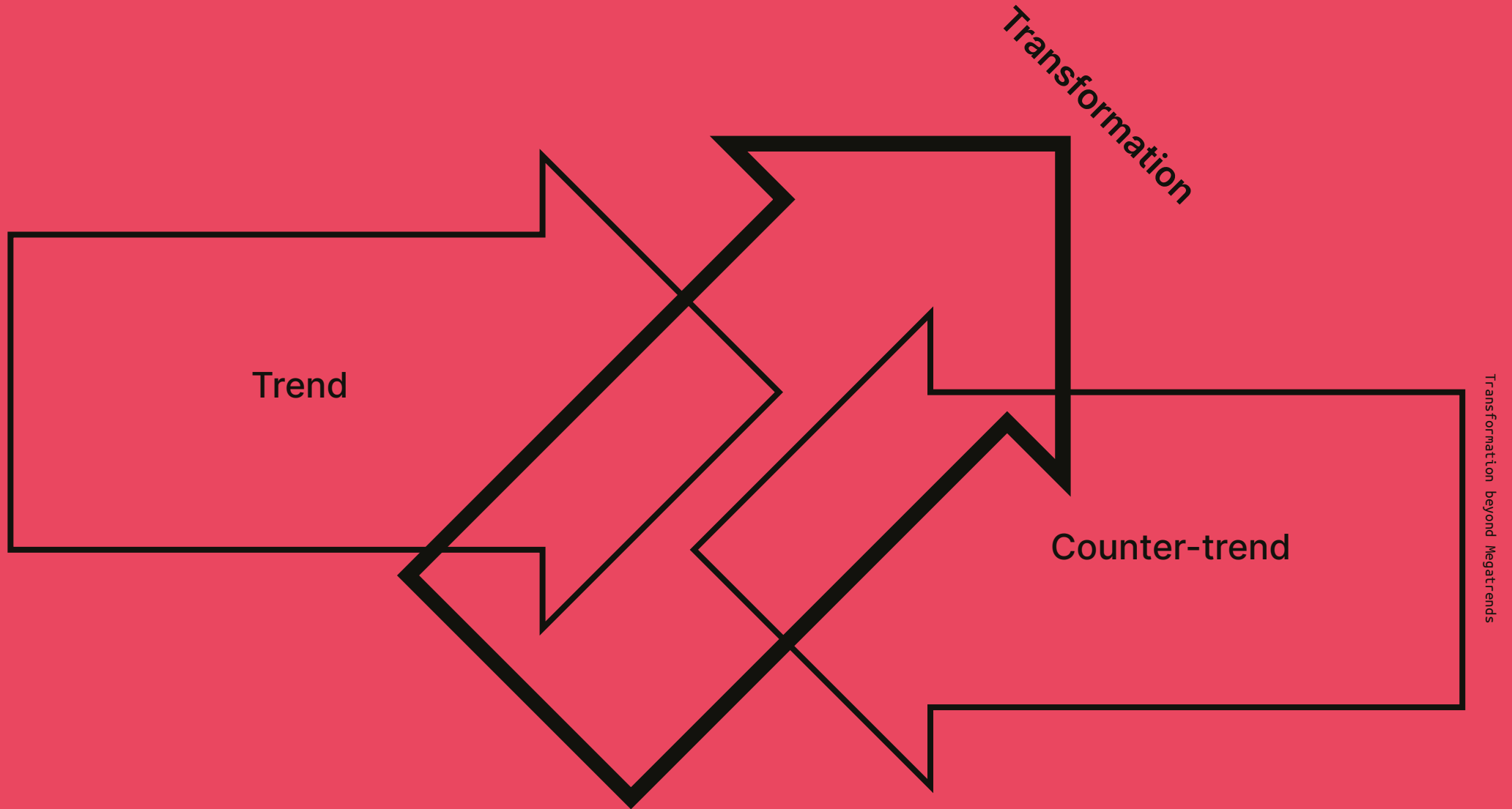
FOCUS: THE TRANSFORMATIONS

Unlike megatrends, transformations are not defined by quantitative developments. While they are connected to the decades-long impact of megatrends, they offer a different perspective on societal change. Transformations are primarily defined by qualitative developments with a specific sense of direction. This directionality stems from two sources: the concrete societal issues to be addressed and the underlying (unfulfilled) human needs.

Therefore, transformations are less linearly structured than megatrends – and in their specific implementation, much more open-ended. They contain hybrid dynamics, sometimes with seemingly paradoxical counter-trends. They open up spaces for action that are tangible, graspable, and shapeable. These potentials are already evident in the present – and can be actively shaped.

The Future:System makes these transformation processes visible and tangible. It introduces a new trend system that shifts the focus of trend and future research to the level of transformations and the interplay of design and trend potentials. It could be seen as the next level of futurology, equipped to deal with the high complexity of our current times.

Hybrid Dynamics



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Figure ②