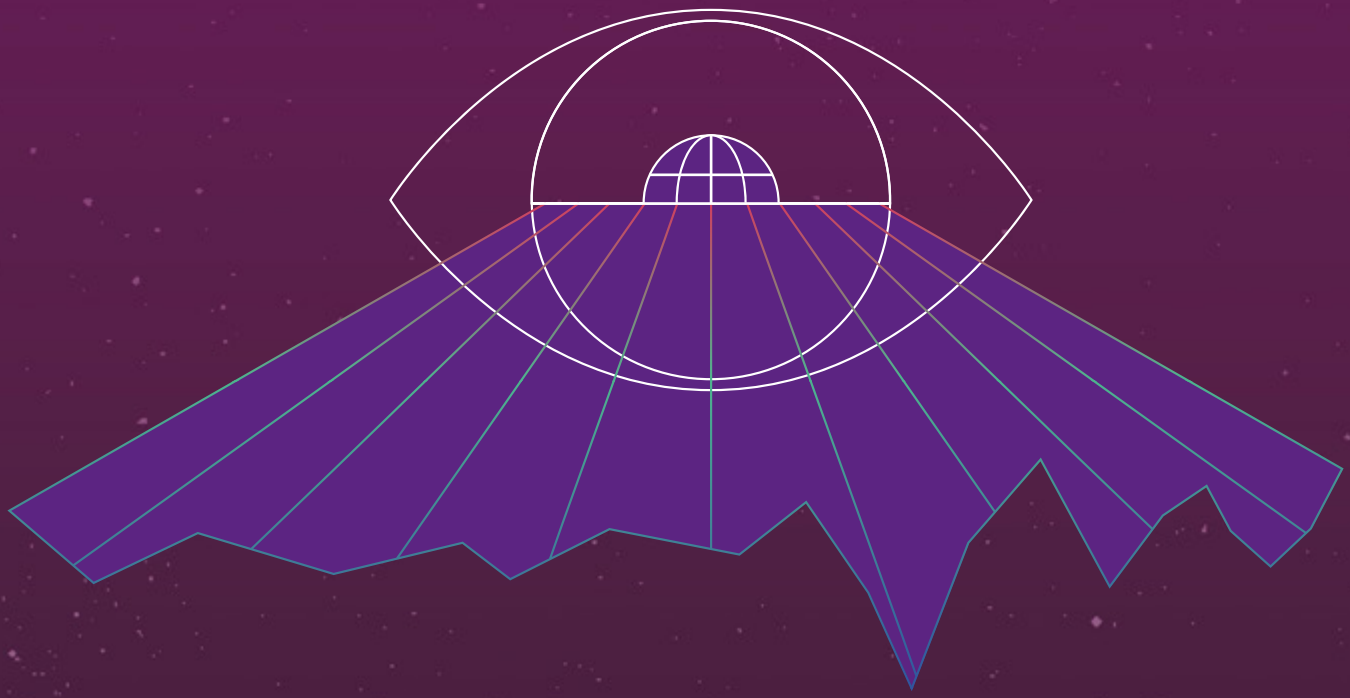
FUTURE SOCIETY ASSOCIATION



FUTURE SOCIETY OUTLOOK

NEW REALITY INSTEAD OF ROARING TWENTIES – SOCIETAL CHALLENGES AND BLIND SPOTS

The seamless transition from the covid-19 crisis to the war in Ukraine is indicative of what we will soon have to accept as the new normal. Given the highly dynamic nature of change in society, politics, and technology, we are challenged to learn to live with uncertainty and scarcity. This requires diligence, humility, creativity, and looking beyond the short term focused hot topics to the long-term challenges of our time. Below, the Future Society Association presents the Future Society Outlook with ten topics that will occupy us in the coming months. A key element is building a systematic early warning system that considers indirect consequences of change in addition to the obvious risks. This requires a shift away from a pure technology focus to a focus on society

1 NEW NORMAL: A HARSH REALITY INSTEAD OF THE „ROARING TWENTIES“ AWAITS US.

After two years of keeping our distance, staying at home, and hiding behind masks, the end of the pandemic promises a return to the good old world: easy travel, informal socializing, and extensive parties.

In a historical comparison with the Spanish flu of the 1920s, the next „Roaring Twenties“ might even await us. In reality, however, we as a society are facing fundamental challenges that offer little room for a new general euphoria. As an example, the ongoing attack on Ukraine is causing widespread destabilization in Europe. But pre-pandemic challenges such as accelerated digitalization and the lack of cyber security strategies also continue to call for solutions. The fight against climate change, rising interest rates, and inflation risks also make it clear that the new normal will not be characterized primarily by relaxation and reward, but will demand a great deal of diligence, modesty, and resilience. The highly dynamic nature of change also ensures that we will have to adjust to crises as an integral part of our everyday lives in the future. Dealing with risks and uncertainty will become the central task of the coming years.

What needs to be done?

The „social immune system“ needs to be activated. In addition to a high level of commitment on everyone‘s part, we need systematic early detection systems and long-term visions of the future that show how quality of life is possible despite limitations. The prerequisite is an active dialogue between companies, science, the public sector, and civil society. The focus is on defining common perspectives and values, coupled with concrete initiatives and lighthouse projects that demonstrate on a small scale where the path can lead on a larger scale.

2 COMPLEXITY OF SUSTAINABILITY: CONTRADICTIONS FUEL OLD, IDEOLOGICAL DEBATES.

The digitization efforts of the last two decades have led to greater transparency in many sustainability areas and made environmental impacts measurable. These include, for example, satellite-supported deforestation data or the current particle pollution of individual industrial quarters. At the same time, it is precisely these digital, often cloud-based and computer power-intensive solutions that cause a significant amount of CO2 emissions when training artificially intelligent algorithms or streaming movies and music. Even in the transition to electric mobility with a growing demand for rare earths, it is not yet clear whether this step is sufficient to protect the environment. A similarly ambivalent picture emerges in agriculture: while organic food cultivation protects biodiversity, reduces climate-damaging gases, and promotes nutrient conservation in the soil, it requires more land than conventional cultivation methods. The increased loss rate of untreated vegetables or fruits also has a negative impact on the climate balance of organic products. The discussion about the degree of sustainability of nuclear power plants further shows the limits of the traditional definition of sustainability in natural production forms or clean, digital solutions as green drivers of progress. These contradictions foster controversial, trivializing, and often old ideological debates that do not do justice to the complexity involved in the shift toward a sustainable world.

What is to be done?

A differentiated, case-by-case approach is necessary. The goal is to anchor the idea of sustainability in business and society. Instead of relying on universal, „one size fits all“ strategies, a variety of approaches that reflect the diversity of possibilities – based on scientific knowledge and verifiable data – is needed.

Above all, it must be clear that technological solutions alone will not be enough. Climate change can only be contained through behavioral changes and public awareness.

3 HYBRID WORLD OF WORK: LOCATION-BASED WORKERS ARE DISADVANTAGED.

Zoom, Teams and Google Hangout have become an indispensable part of our everyday working lives. Virtual and hybrid working is an integral part of the new normal – but only for some of the workforce. While „knowledge workers“ and service providers benefit from the flexibility of the home office and the advantages of local independence, the value creation of many professions remains tied to a physical presence. These include production workers, nursing staff, employees in retail and logistics or in childcare. These are all professions that are already under pressure. With the impossibility of flexible working, this social divide is widening. The ever more divergent working conditions further exacerbate the shortage of skilled workers in system-relevant areas and encourage migration to other sectors.

What is to be done?

Companies that rely on a local workforce must think about how local, stationary work can be revalued. Fair and sustainable work models are needed. The working environment should be made as attractive as possible by means of furnishings, catering facilities, break activities and proximity to health, care, and leisure facilities. In addition to the „hard“ measures, it is also important to express appreciation for these occupational groups outside of times of crisis, whether in the supermarket, the nursery or the retirement home.

4 NEW LIMITS TO GROWTH: SCARCITY INSTEAD OF ABUNDANCE WILL BE THE BASIS FOR PLANNING IN THE FUTURE.

Supply shortages, difficulties in the power supply and labor shortages: the new limits to growth demand frustration tolerance and adaptability – not only in the economy, but also in society. Digitalization and automation have massively shortened the product range and waiting times for consumer goods or food over the last two decades. Whether for food deliveries, package orders or entertainment. We have become accustomed to the immediate availability of goods and services and have taken them for granted. Now, as part of the new normal, we are confronted with limited freedom of choice, rising prices and a deteriorating supply situation. Last year, the construction sector was already struggling with a shortage of wood. The electrical engineering industry experienced a shortage of semiconductors. Due to climate change, water shortages are likely in the future. Moreover, ongoing geopolitical tensions, in particular the war in Ukraine, will further restrict access to gas, rare earths, minerals and ingredients relevant to the production of medicines.

What is to be done?

On the one hand, there is a need for a reassessment of risks in relation to global supply chains and a strengthening of local production capacities with a view to critical goods – for example, in the manufacture of pharmaceuticals or semiconductors. This is where both the state as mediator and the private sector as innovation driver come into play. Scarcity offers opportunities for creativity by substituting and, above all, recycling missing goods. Furthermore, scarcity helps to prevent fake innovation. For example, it is hardly mandatory to digitally design speedometers in vehicles.

5 TECHNOLOGY MISTRUST: FALSE AND HALF-KNOWLEDGE PREVENT PROGRESS.

For decades, technological developments have been the basis for progress, prosperity, and quality of life – in the treatment of headaches as well as in digital communication. The rapid market maturity of mRNA agents has also made a decisive contribution to combating pandemics. However, this was confronted with rejection by a broad section of the population, despite a positive assessment by the scientific community. New technologies will also play a central role in future challenges – from climate change to degenerative diseases, sustainable nutrition, or an efficient power supply.

However, they can only develop this added value if the opportunities and risks are realistically assessed and supported by the population, or if they are not undermined by false or half-knowledge or a lack of basic understanding of scientific processes. On the other hand, blind optimism about technology, as has been the case with digitalization in recent years, is also counterproductive.

What is to be done?

Fundamentals such as those of genetics or algorithms must be communicated in an understandable way. An understanding of the iterative processes of science, in which new findings are constantly questioned, is also indispensable. Educational institutions, technology transfer offices and think tanks can play a key role here. When implementing new technology, corporates must look ahead and consider the effective added value for users and society. In the bigger picture, it is also important to question the role and perception of technology as a counterpart to nature and, where appropriate, to reposition it.

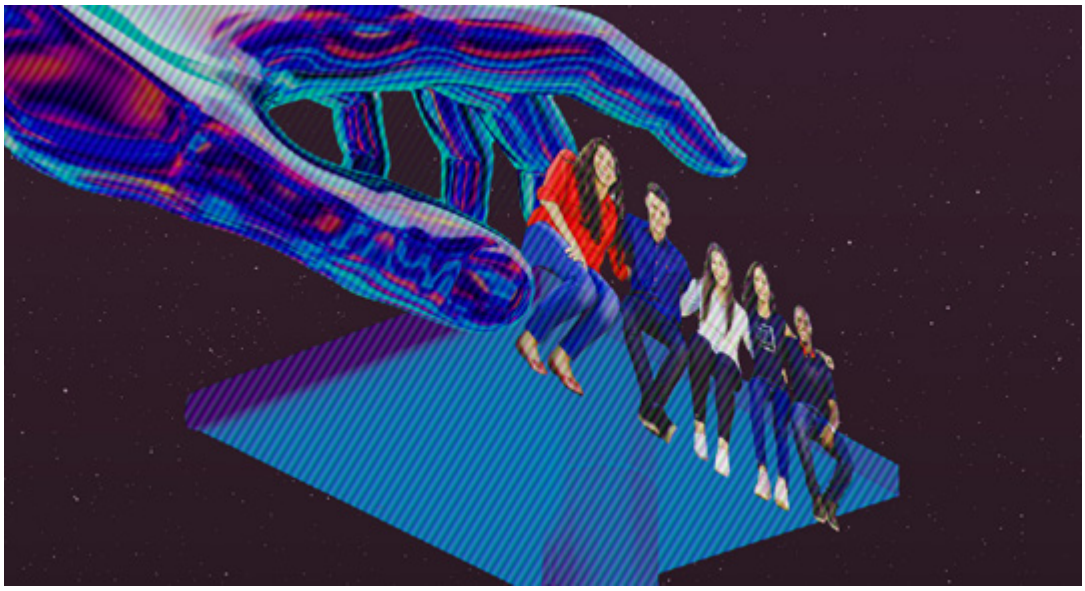
6 OVERLOAD OF THE PRIVATE SPHERE: THE HOME AND PERSONAL SPACES ARE COMING UNDER FURTHER PRESSURE.

Lockdowns, home schooling, and limited childcare services have shifted more and more tasks to the home during the pandemic. Despite the end of the Corona measures, the added burden of the private will remain. Not only working and learning, but also healthy living, medical diagnoses, treatments as well as rehabilitation and care will mostly take place at home. As a result, core families will increasingly be left on their own, making it even more difficult to reconcile work and family life. In addition to inter-family conflicts, the pandemic also encouraged outdated gender norms. The persistent overload of the home will continue to hinder progress toward equality in the future, lead to new excessive demands and exacerbate the chronic lack of exercise. The concept of leisure is further undermined by the dwindling separation of work and home. The focus on the immediate private living environment and the accompanying decline in social exchange leads to more mistrust among the population and results in more depression. The growing dominance of digital communication media, the lure of virtual worlds and the „always on“ culture are further restricting human space. The result is new dependencies that increase the pressure on individuals, families, and society.

What is to be done?

In addition to the discourse about desirable role and family models, we should be concerned with the sensible use of private living spaces for work, education, or care. This applies in particular to real estate developers, city and community planners and the social services sector. New housing concepts that enable flexible use of space, promote exchange in neighborhoods or settlements, encourage physical activity in everyday life, and focus on health-promoting architecture provide a remedy. At the same time, there is a need to upgrade offices and workspaces, which are becoming more important for social exchange and the development of ideas as well as to relieve the private home.

7 GENERATION-WASHING: SERIOUS INTEREST IN THE NEEDS OF THE NEXT GENERATION IS LACKING.

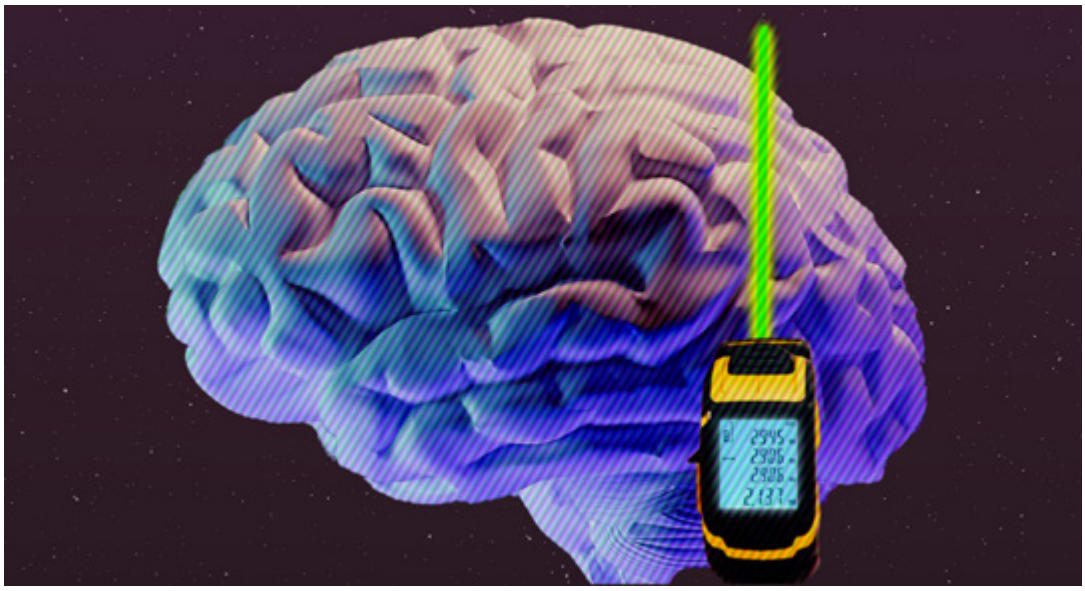


A focus on young people, on the „millenials“ or „Gen Z,“ is at the center of many marketing and social media activities. At the same time, it became clear during the pandemic, that the generational contracts were designed to the disadvantage of young people. For adolescents and young adults, who suffered disproportionately from the Corona measures – with a high burden of mental illnesses ranging from eating disorders to depression – there was no lobby to advocate for their interests. This tension between youth culture and simultaneous neglect turns out to be „generation washing.“ With the return to normality, this tendency threatens to intensify: Young customers will be targeted even more by the digital economy – without their real needs being taken into account.

What is to be done?

The young generation must be appropriately involved in decisions that affect them and their future – not just for marketing purposes. Despite their demographic minority, their voice must be given weight, both in political decisions and in the world of work, for example through youth committees. This opens opportunities for companies, by involving young people not only as apprentices or marketing target groups, but also as input providers.

8 ONE-SIDED PERFORMANCE SOCIETY: QUANTIFICATION OF EVERYDAY LIFE SUPPRESSES THE VALUE OF THE NON-MEASURABLE.

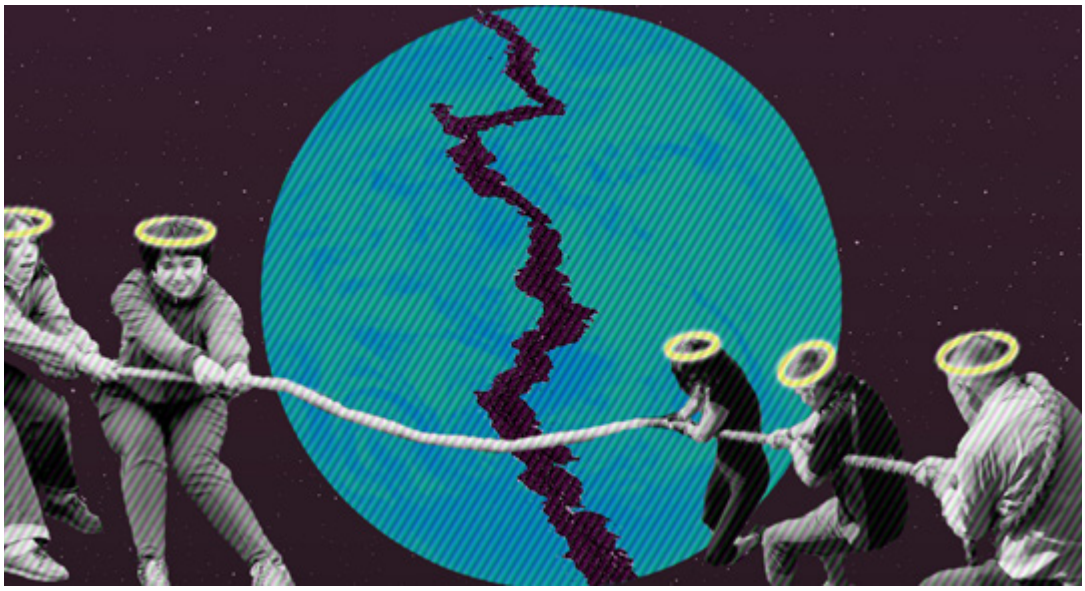


In the digital and virtual world, the individual assessment of the performance of employees or of one's own health is giving way to a comprehensive measurement of productivity, infection numbers or the behavior of individuals and populations. Especially through the increased use of artificial intelligence, corresponding data is becoming a prerequisite. However, not all parameters that allow such assessments can be quantified: Either suitable measurement methods are lacking, the effects can only be observed over a long period of time, or the complexity is too high due to the multitude of influencing factors. The pressure of the performance society leads to the fact that primarily those behaviors or activities are recorded which can also be measured. This leads to a one-sided assessment and overvaluation of the measurable, which sets false incentives in education, at the workplace or in the health care system. At the same time, the pressure on individuals to align their behavior with quantifiable parameters increases. Algorithms used in application processes only assess the criteria listed in the corresponding forms. Thereby, the risk grows that our own assessment criteria are limited to the ascertainable facts and that human intuition is increasingly lost. This development also unconsciously shapes our decision-making processes. For example, other people or our own strengths and weaknesses are increasingly judged on the basis of individual characteristics instead of as a whole.

What is to be done?

The value of the non-quantifiable falls short. Systems for assessing and measuring performance and health need to be rethought. Beginning with education and extending to the work environment, there is a need for assessment criteria that link quantitative and qualitative values.
The basis for this are holistic evaluation systems that take into account not only the volume of work but also the quality or usefulness of activities. In the health care system, too, it is necessary to establish qualitative evaluation grids that assess not only the physical health but also the well-being of the patient. This means that findings that are not only based on large amounts of data and statistical analyses will be enhanced.

9 DECLINING TOLERANCE: PRESSURE FOR SUSTAINABLE LIFESTYLES REINFORCES SOCIETAL DIVISIONS.



The required redefinition of climate change as a „climate catastrophe“ is intended to highlight the urgency for concrete action. With the positive momentum of countries and companies committing to climate neutrality, measures that until recently were perceived as far-reaching have become socially acceptable. There is a majority expectation that perceives air travel, SUVs, or meat consumption as harmful to society and, as a consequence, negatively evaluates behaviors that contradict these goals.
The result is an increasing pressure to demand correct behaviors and, conversely, a decreasing tolerance towards people or cultures that do not correspond to these values. However, not taking the other side into account has a counterproductive effect on the will to change and prevents progress through division.

What is to be done?
In liberal democracies, long-term solutions can only be found through compromise – without approving harmful behavior. A basis for creating mutual understanding is based on personal rather than virtual or media exchange. Without the commitment of a clear and demographically broad-based majority of the population, the breakthrough in sustainability will not succeed. The needs of the people who are potentially disadvantaged by the climate measures must be included proactively and with foresight in the development of the packages of measures.

10 OUTDATED UNDERSTANDING OF RESPONSIBILITY: TRADITIONAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE ROLES OF THE STATE, COMPANIES AND CITIZENS HAS REACHED ITS LIMITS.

In the course of the pandemic, but also in the context of digitalization, it became clear that the traditional division of roles between the public sector, companies and citizens is reaching its limits. The importance of individual responsibility in dealing with the Corona virus and the rise of social media have shown that the passive role of citizens is no longer sufficient in the context of the changing environment. Also, the state as a regulator has the task to respond to new technologies and business models not only reactively and with new technologies and business models, but to create the basis for innovation. Companies are called upon to integrate societal challenges more strongly into their business models – after all, almost all industries, from technology companies to pharmaceuticals, real estate, mobility providers and banks, have a central influence on society.

What is to be done?

We need to rethink both the public service and the social role of companies. The focus here is not on expanding the state‘s share, but rather on focusing on future societal requirements. For example, in building the urgently needed data infrastructure in the healthcare system as a kind of „backbone“ on which new services can develop. For companies, opportunities arise from linking economic growth with social responsibility by expanding traditional corporate social responsibility programmevs and linking them to business models. Citizens need a basis for decision-making that helps them realistically assess risks and opportunities and assume their own responsibility. In this context, the teaching of skills from primary school to university plays a central role. Education should no longer be limited to the recall of existing knowledge, but should also promote the independent solving of challenges and critical thinking.

FUTURE SOCIETY ASSOCIATION

Progress in the 21st century means putting society at the center of innovation. Economic growth and ecological limitations must be reconciled with societal needs – away from technology-driven growth and towards a new paradigm.

The Future Society Association (FSA) is committed to taking a systemic view, identifying societal challenges at an early stage, and developing integrative solutions. At the same time, it is committed to new visions of a desirable future. As an interdisciplinary platform, the FSA connects business, science, public institutions, and civil society at eye level.

Since its founding in 2020, the FSA has launched the „Future Society Radar“, as a working tool for partner organizations, held various virtual and physical events, and published publications in collaboration with NZZ Libro Verlag – including. Invisible Hands (2021) and Slow Pandemics (2022).

Future Society Association | c/o W.I.R.E. | Hallwylstrasse 22 | 8004 Zürich
www.futuresociety.org | www.thewire.ch | info@thewire.ch