

People, connect with each other!



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me Convention: It is not enough to connect devices with each other; human beings should not be forgotten, says trend researcher Oona Horx-Strathern.

The statistics speak for themselves: In 1900, 10 percent of the world's population lived in cities, in 2007 it was 50 percent – and in 2050 it is expected to reach 75 percent. "There's something going on here," trend researcher Oona Horx-Strathern begins her talk at the me Convention. "From the smart city to the mindful city: Connectivity in the age of individualization", she has called the lecture, that she is presenting at the event - organized by Mercedes-Benz and South by Southwest (SXSW) at the IAA. "Urbanisation – like globalisation, Silver Society, individualisation, or networking – is one of twelve megatrends we are

currently observing," Horx-Strathern states, pointing to the so-called Megatrend Map behind her. The map looks like a colorful subway network, with each Megatrend representing a separate line. There are several stops between the end stations and numerous points where the lines intersect.

Trends and countertrends

"Every trend triggers a countertrend", is one of Horx-Strathern's most important theses with regard to the most liveable city of the future. Globalisation is counteracted by the so-called glocalisation – caused by homesickness and a latent feeling of uprooting symptomatic of a generation that is constantly on the move.

In view of an increased and growing life expectancy, many members of the so-called Silver Society strive to stay young as long as possible. The result of this is the countertrend “down-aging” – old people, who behave like teenagers in some situations. Today, people have numerous opportunities to lead an interesting and meaningful life beyond the end of their professional life.

"While reported levels of satisfaction increase with age, the health handicaps also increase," Horx-Strathern says, pointing out that accessibility is still a foreign word for many cities. "Cities are designed for the mythical average person - super mobile, with no disabilities, and with a cast-iron bladder."

"I don't want to be part of the demographics. I want to be an individual," Oona Horx-Strathern quotes film director John Carpenter as she transitions to the next megatrend: individualisation. As households are no longer built around a core family, patchwork and single households have become more pervasive, which leads to the paradox of individualisation: the more individualistic we become, the more important the need for support from other people.

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John Carpenter, film director

Uprooting, physical limitations and social isolation – these are some of the negative consequences of today’s megatrends, resulting in what Oona Horx-Strathern refers to as the “co-culture” model: co-living, co-housing, co-working, co-mobility and co-gardening.

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Oona Horx-Strathern, Trend Researcher

Horx-Strathern cites “The Collective,” a modern building complex in London, with small, minimalist private rooms and spacious common rooms, as an example of a co-living space. “This approach fits our times,” says Horx-Strathern. “In the future, we will not choose our living space based on square metres, but on the quality of shared spaces.” The trend researcher believes in the future it will be a question of shared metres instead of square metres.

Networking - with whom or what?

Due to the increased availability of fast internet connections and mobile networks, it is easier than ever to be online at all times. But does that in itself make a city or a home smart? Oona Horx-Strathern points out: “Somewhere on the way to a networked world, we have forgotten about the importance of building connections between individuals.” If a refrigerator automatically communicates with the online grocer, that is fine, but it would hardly improve our quality of life, unless individuals are taken into account.

"Today, we have more possibilities than ever before to connect with each other, but paradoxically also more and more possibilities not to do it," the trend researcher says, referring to the constant availability of technology. Digitisation in itself is not smart. What counts is that people share knowledge with each other – and use it intelligently.

To ensure there is an exchange between individuals living in cities of the future, Horx-Strathern strives for more so-called “civic living rooms” – public places where people like to stay and talk. It is up to the mayors and architects of the world to make the vision of a mindful city a reality in as many places as possible. An interesting model could be the agora, a social meeting place for urban areas used in ancient Greece.

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Oona Horx-Strathern

"The future only works when connections – and ultimately also relationships – happen between people" is the thesis of the trend researcher. "This is not only true for public places." Innovative public transport systems using autonomous means of transportation also present new opportunities for interpersonal communication. "An electrified public transport system, which is very quiet, is a wonderful place to start a conversation."