The Corona Effect
Four Future Scenarios
How will the pandemic change the way we live and do business?
The Zukunftsinstitut describes four possible scenarios of how the corona crisis can transform the world.

The corona virus has shaken the foundations of our social and economic coexistence – indefinitely. We experience an uncontrollable collapse of our everyday life and the world as we knew it. Now, the first thing we all need to do is to come to terms with this new exceptional situation – as the first step to overcoming this crisis. But what will happen afterwards?

As the Zukunftsinstitut, we are committed to observing the future – a future that currently seems more uncertain than ever. In this situation, it helps to approach possible developments by means of scenarios. Scenarios sketch out the scope of possibilities that open up for all of us in the context of the current crisis: What developments can we expect? How will the virus change our cultural techniques, values and consumption patterns, our collective mindset?

This is why the Zukunftsinstitut has taken the Corona crisis as an opportunity to develop four scenarios that describe what our future after the pandemic could look like in the medium to long term. In the coming weeks we will continue to monitor these scenarios for you and share the results with you. In this way, we want to bring clarity into a chaotic situation – and discover what opportunities are opening up for you, and for all of us.

The scenarios help us to formulate a new future together. Because everything we do and decide today will have an effect for years to come. Our future is being decided now.
ABOUT THE SCENARIOS

The four future scenarios are based on two central basic coordinates that describe the possible directions of development in principle:

1. Successful relationships versus unsuccessful relationships (optimistic versus pessimistic)
2. Local versus global (disconnected versus connected)

Based on the four possible developments, the scenarios describe consequences for society as a whole. As with all scenarios, the presentation is tapered to illustrate the expected change and does not claim to be "realistic". However, it is in precisely this way that it helps to create orientation and open up spaces for a new, forward-looking way of thinking.

MAPPING OF THE 4 SCENARIOS

The four future scenarios are mapped on a grid with two dimensions: successful versus unsuccessful relationships (optimistic versus pessimistic) and local versus global (disconnected versus connected). The scenarios are labeled as follows:

- Scenario 1: Optimistic successful relationships (connected)
- Scenario 2: Pessimistic unsuccessful relationships (disconnected)
- Scenario 3: Optimistic unsuccessful relationships (disconnected)
- Scenario 4: Pessimistic successful relationships (connected)
First there was the shutdown - and then the shutdown has become the norm. It is normal to scan a chip in your wrist when you enter the metro or to exchange your health data to each other before your first date. It is also normal to need a permit when leaving your country, and for countries outside the EU, even a lengthy visa procedure is required. Global trade is largely a thing of the past; the trade agreements between individual states guarantee basic services, but nothing more.

SCENARIO 1

Total isolation: Everyone against everyone

Welcome in the Super Safe Society! Society is once again clearly defining itself as a nation – because security can only be guaranteed if the boundaries of the security zone are clearly defined. Security comes first. Every man for himself. The state uses all available means to protect its citizens – even if that means stirring up deep-rooted fears or artificially scarifying food. People therefore use all possible open spaces to grow their own fruit and vegetables. The black market and bartering are also flourishing.

De-Urbanization: The countryside is gaining power. Those who can, move out of the city, to feed themselves – and earn good money by supplying impoverished city dwellers with food. The trend towards single life, ever smaller apartments and co-living, reliance on public transport and global commodity flows has made the urban population dependent. The urban hipsters have become a precarious class.

Germophobia, the longing for sterility, has steadily increased mistrust of products whose origins cannot clearly be traced. Fruit and vegetables are clinically disinfected before consumption, and research into safe packaging is being conducted at full speed. Imports have been restricted because the fear of germs being introduced via products from abroad is too high. There are fewer exotic fruits – but many of them can now be grown in countries where it was not previously possible, thanks to climate change. Agriculture and the manufacturing industry have experienced an enormous upswing, nearshoring has been put into practice.

What began with recommendations to cancel large events with more than 1000 people has developed into a ban on meetings with more than 10 people, for the benefit of the people. Public cultural life has therefore come to an almost complete standstill. Concerts or sporting events still take place, but the audience sits at home and watches the event from their couch at home – free of charge, sponsored by the state. Once popular third places such as cafés are being avoided, restaurants have become ghost kitchens, supplying customers with meals to the highest hygienic standards. For city dwellers in particular, social contacts have shifted to virtual space.
The virus has made the world tumble and it can't move on. The focus on national interests has massively shaken up the confidence in global cooperation, and a return to former routines is no longer possible. The fear of a new pandemic makes every local spread of a virus, no matter how small, the trigger for drastic measures, from border closures to the defence of resources. The loss of confidence in international cooperation based on solidarity makes long lasting stability impossible. So the world is nervously wobbling into the future.

**System crash: Permanent crisis mode**

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**SCENARIO 2**

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- Frictions in the **multipolar world order** are the order of the day: mutual recriminations, aggressive threatening and nervous action alternate with efforts towards openness and cooperation — because there is nevertheless an awareness that we are dependent on each other. Neo-nationalism is on the rise, there is a constant state of tension.

- Looking to national sale markets, **nearshoring** is becoming a political-ideological premise. At the same time, however, dependence on international trade relations and commodity flows remains. Both tendencies abruptly and permanently stand side by side and rub against each other. **Glocalization**, too, is only an expression of the discrepancies between local and international markets, which cannot exist without each other. **Global cities** are the most nervous places in the world: this is where the tensions between the regional, national and international flows of finance, services and goods are constantly felt.

- **High times for Big Data!** The more uncertain the times, the more analysis is required. The collection and processing of large amounts of data is experiencing a continuous boom. The development of **artificial intelligence** is being intensified, especially for the simulation of crisis scenarios and the control of crises. Consequently, **cybercrime** on behalf of the state is also on the rise – with the aim of weakening international competitors. Internally, the state is using technology for monitoring: **predictive analytics**, the data-based prediction of human behavior, is becoming increasingly important in a permanently insecure society.

- **Privacy** is declining. Individual freedom of data is increasingly restricted, and laws concerning privacy and data protection have largely been abolished, both in international exchanges with other states and in dealing with one’s own population. Health data is becoming a matter for the state – and the population is joining in, as confidence in the state’s health provision and care has been waning for a long time. More and more people are relying on personal health responsibility, **digital health**, continuous **self-tracking** and the monitoring of their vital signs by **smart devices** that feed personal health data into government databases at any time.
After the Corona crisis, the globalised society has returned to more local structures. There is more emphasis than ever before on regional products. Small communities are emerging and consolidating – always in careful differentiation from the others. Sustainability and a we-culture are important values, but these are only thought of locally, not globally.

**Neo-Tribes:**
The retreat into the private sphere

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- People no longer trust state actors and supranational alliances – nor do they trust them with the power to act. The turning away from the global world community leads to a particularized we-culture and the increased formation of neo-tribes. Community is sought on a small scale, because in the wake of the corona crisis the trend towards post-individualization has become attractive to a broader mass.

- The fear of infection has spurred a retreat into the private sphere and the rediscovery of domesticity. There are practically no major events anymore, but there is a lot of streaming, because you can participate in mega-events via virtual reality without having to leave your secure and comfortable home. Neighbourhood help is a top priority, and there are fixed structures for helping each other in a crisis. Supplies are shared or exchanged, special attention is paid to the old and weak. People are also increasingly moving to the countryside or smaller towns – the Progressive Province has reached its peak.

- Instead of using public transport, people are more and more switching to bicycles or e-scooters. Long-distance travel has lost much of its appeal – in contrast to surrounding regions or neighbouring countries. Massive de-touristification has the effect that entire landscapes and former tourism hotspots are able to recover from overtourism. Travel is no longer taken for granted, but is – again - seen as something special, also because it requires a lot of precautions and planning in post-corona times. Tourism is turning even more into resonant tourism.

- The failure of global retail chains and mistrust of certain countries of origin are leading to a fundamental re-regionalisation. More than ever, people are buying locally, the sharing economy is gaining momentum in regional networks, traditional handicraft techniques are experiencing a renaissance. Urban farming and co-operatives are replacing capitalist consumption patterns, and a circular economy with autonomous ecosystems is emerging in regional communities. Concepts such as Cradle to Cradle or post-growth are naturally embedded in people's everyday lives - as practices that are as desired as they are necessary. The regional economy functions completely autonomously.

- The corona crisis has proven to be a surprising driver of new work trends towards more flexicurity: The fact that flexibility in the workplace was made possible on a broad scale out of necessity has permanently changed working cultures. Home office is now an essential part of every corporate culture, international companies arrange meetings in VR conferences, contracts are concluded via blockchain. Digital health applications calculate the potential risk of personal business meetings in advance – which are usually not recommended anyway.
Adaption: The resilient society

World society is learning from the crisis and developing resilient, adaptive systems. Deep social currents towards post-growth, we-culture, glocalization and post-individualization, which already existed before the crisis, are catapulted from the niche into the mainstream by our collective corona experience.

The corona virus has triggered a self-purification of the markets: a collective reflection on the origin of our goods, which has stimulated new patterns of consumption. The breakdown of global chains of production and action has led to a rediscovery of domestic alternatives. Stationary trade, regional products and supply chains have experienced an upswing. Not only has a sensible balance between online and offline been achieved, but above all a wise approach to globalised retail chains, a balance between local and global trade and a flourishing of direct trade platforms. Since then, weekly markets, regional producers and local online shops have been booming. The monopoly position of online retailers such as Amazon and Alibaba has dissolved in favour of several smaller players that are less dependent on global production chains and more readily available locally. Society is moving away from mass consumption and a throwaway mentality towards a healthier economic system.

Corona has made the vision of a new holistic understanding of health come true: Health is no longer seen as something that concerns only the individual body and behavior. Rather, health is now viewed more holistically: Environment, city, politics, global community – all these factors are important for human health. World health and individual health are being looked at as a whole. This new mindset is turning the entire healthcare system upside down: Governments, city planners and businesses are working together to create healthy environments for all people. In this context, the use of digital health apps has become a matter of course to share health data anonymously in real time. Thanks to predictive health, accurate predictions can be made, for example about the likelihood of an epidemic. It is clear to everyone that individual health can no longer be viewed in isolation from environment and society.

Global risks require supranational players who can act in a globally networked manner. The Corona crisis, for example, has given political power to act a new weighting. While nation states have lost relevance, cities and supranational bodies are becoming increasingly important – a re-organisation in the sense of glocalisation: the local level (cities, municipalities, mayors etc.) is directly linked to global organisations. In this way, local problems can be solved quickly and creatively, and global risks can be identified more quickly and tackled cooperatively. Overall, since the pandemic, humanity has perceived itself more strongly as a global community that must solve challenges together. For neither an epidemic nor the climate crisis stops at national borders. A global identity has emerged, supported by a fundamental change in values: solidarity and we-culture not only with our neighbours, but also at international and global level.

The Corona crisis has led to concrete lessons in supranational handling of big data, predictive analytics and early warning systems. Artificial intelligence is now being used more constructively: not only to contain epidemics at an early stage, but also to minimize all possible global risks that do not respect national borders. Everyone is equipped with health tracking devices, because the global exchange of up-to-date health data allows risks to be detected early on. The continuous learning from each other in a multitude of functioning networks creates global resilience. This new spirit also shapes the media landscape: Constructive journalism focuses on solutions instead of spreading alarmism and fake news. This also helps to maintain a resilient and adaptive society that knows how to deal productively with crises.
About the Zukunftsinstitut

The Zukunftsinstitut was founded in 1998 and has significantly influenced trend and future research from the very beginning. Today, the company is regarded as a leading international contact for questions concerning the development of business and society.

**OUR MISSION**

Our mission is to identify and describe the patterns of social and economic change. We share our analyses and findings in publications, keynotes and events. We accompany strategic decision makers with our consulting formats.

**OUR GOAL**

The aim of our work is to sharpen the orientation and business intelligence of our customers. This creates space for new, forward-looking strategies, economic transformation and innovation. We see ourselves as a sparring partner who brings a differentiated view of the questions of the future to enable new thinking.

**OUR PRINCIPLES**

As a network of experts and researchers from various disciplines, we work with established methods and have comprehensive strategic insights. In doing all this, we are especially committed to the following: We are critical optimists of the future and are convinced that the future is a space for opportunity.

**OUR PRODUCT PORTFOLIO**

**Consulting**
- Future Room – the strategic consulting approach of the Zukunftsinstitut
- Trend and innovation consulting – contents, tools and methods for the best development processes

**Publications**
- Trend studies, industry reports, practice guides, workbooks, „Lebensstile“ and „Megatrend“ documentation
- Individually commissioned studies, trend dossiers, trend guides

**Expert Publishing**
- Tailor-made publications with maximum effectiveness – for entrepreneurs and companies

**Events, trainings and keynotes**
- Future Day – Future congresses for decision makers, trainings, managed events
- Future Day speakers – the network of leading future speakers

**Membership**
- Future Circle – be at the forefront with all exclusive access to publications, multimedia and interactive content, specific know-how and unique events

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1. We perceive, name and describe the future.

2. We think holistically and systemically.

3. Our work opens up new spaces in thinking.

4. Our findings increase the future competence for decision makers.

5. Our goal is effectiveness.

6. We are effective by recognizing early.

7. We stand for critical optimism.

And:
You may also rethink the future.