Trend & Sustainability

The Sami have a nice picture to describe the view on the future:
"We move backwards through live, looking at our past.
As we don't have eyes in our back of the head we can't see our future".

There is a lot of truth in it - philosophically. But this picture also says that we are moving. We have a starting point, a direction and an aim.

Practically I have never seen a Sami going backwards. They look forwards to avoid falling into swamps or getting lost in the wood. Walking backwards would also destroy the traces of the reindeer.

Of course one can't see the future, but one can estimate it.

The reason why you study design is because you have the aim to become a designer - *in the future*. You can define the date in the future when you accomplish this aim.

"But what will the world look like then?
Will you be able to make it successfully?"

Some weeks ago I saw a funny program on television: An outlook on the year 2000, made in 1972. Some of what they estimated become very precisely true; some of what we have today was not even thought about like personal computer, mobile phone or internet. Really funny was the design: An exaggeration of the design of the 70ies.

In the program they mixed trend and fashion.

In order to find answers about what the future may bring, we have to guess. This estimating process is called "*making a scenario*". A **scenario** is building on a statistical evaluation of the past and the prolongation of the development curve into the future.

This is called "a trend".

Trend [english]

1) *common:* Direction of development, general direction

2) *statistics:* Component of a timeline, that works evolutionary, lasting and sustainable and expresses the general direction of the development of a timeline.

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Trend is not another word for fashion (so many people use this word in a wrong way). Also a trend cannot be made; it can only be made usable.

It is a little like the weather forecast: You watch the development of the wind, the air pressure, the air moisture and the temperature and estimate the further development.

A **trend** is a projection of an existing direction within society into the future, basing on mathematical and statistical calculations.
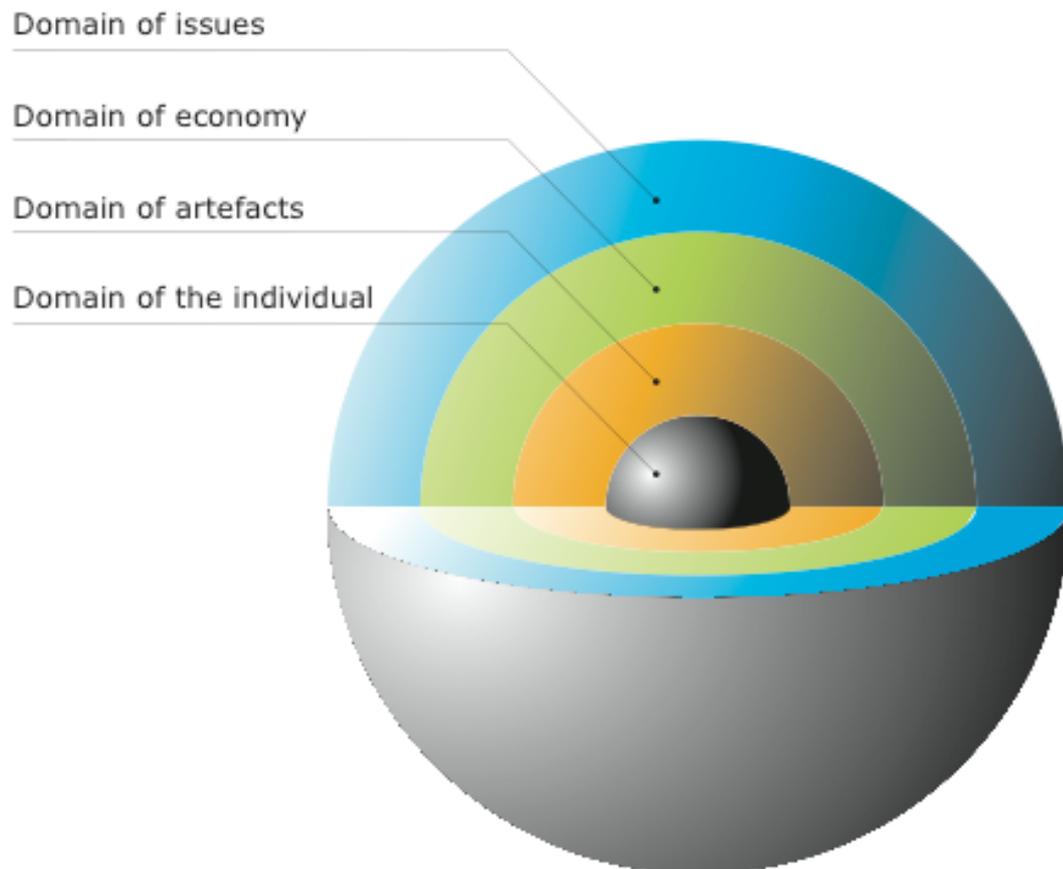
A **mega-trend** is a long-term projection of the social development.
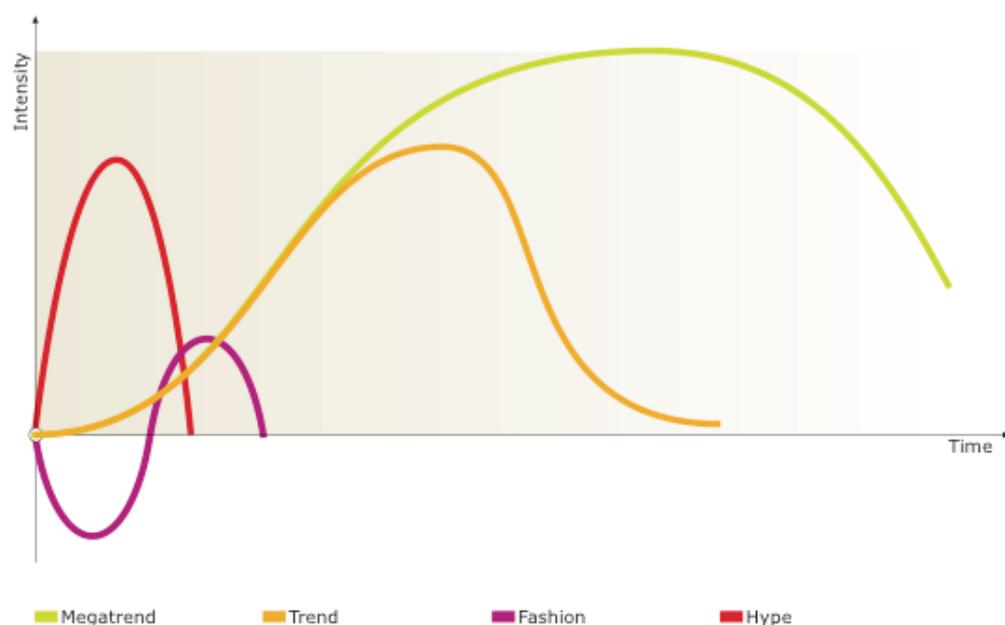
As designers we have to be aware of the trend, follow the development and translate it into visible items.

You get important indications out of 4 different domains:

Domain of issues

Domain of economy

Domain of artefacts

Domain of the individual

The domain of issues

As a designer you have to watch the news, read newspapers and analyse the issues. What are the topics discussed in the media, the agendas of politics?

Example:

> *The public discussion is dealing with the new media. Politicians discuss legal action against data pirates, downloading music illegally.*

The domain of economy

How is the economy developing? Which shares rise, which decline?

As a designer you have to follow what happens in the economy.

> *The big record companies have a dramatic loss of sales due to the pirates. Copyright laws break down worldwide.*

The domain of artefacts

What are the concepts and is the visual language of new products?

As a designer you have to inform yourself about new products and analyse why the society is asking for these products. You also have to try to find out if there is a gap between needs and offer.

> *Innovative and successful products today are small high-tech devices that ensure permanent access to the individual and social information network.*

The domain of the individual

What are the individual concepts and values?

As a designer you have to analyse lifestyle concepts and be able to identify target groups.

> *Today it is more important to be able to use the music than to own a record. You don't want to buy a cd with 25 songs just because you like one. You like to sample your own individual music program. And you want to listen to your own music wherever and whenever you want.*

> *Individual,*
> *convenient,*
> *immediately and always available.*

While the music industry called for legal action and politicians began to prepare steps to reduce freedom, Apple assumed that the intention of people is not to do something illegal, but to use the possibilities of the new technologies. So their answer was to make downloading legal, easy and affordable.

iTunes and iPod are product developments basing on a trend research and decisions following changing consumer behaviour.

Apple shares went up 25% in July 2004; Apple became the biggest music distributor worldwide within just 6 months.

iTunes had 100 Mio legal downloads within 3 months.

Out of a sudden the future of the music industry looks bright again, even brighter than before. They have made the step from material product to immaterial product.

What do you think will happen with the cd-store in the future? And what do you think will happen with a designer, specialised in designing cd-covers?

We as designers played a major role in heating up mass consumption and if we complain about this capitalistic world – we helped to make it. We can also play a role in shaping a new and hopefully better world.

It is not a secret that if we continue our mass consumption and throw-away mentality we will have used up most of the world resources within less than 50 years.

What the society has to learn is to save as much resources as possible. If we would manage to use half of what we use today, we would gain time to find new technologies and materials. Maybe.

In the future we will have to earn our money with something else than producing material products.

Trend researchers see the example of the latest development in the music distribution as an indication of a new mega-trend:

Ideological mass production · Material mass consumption · Immaterial mass use
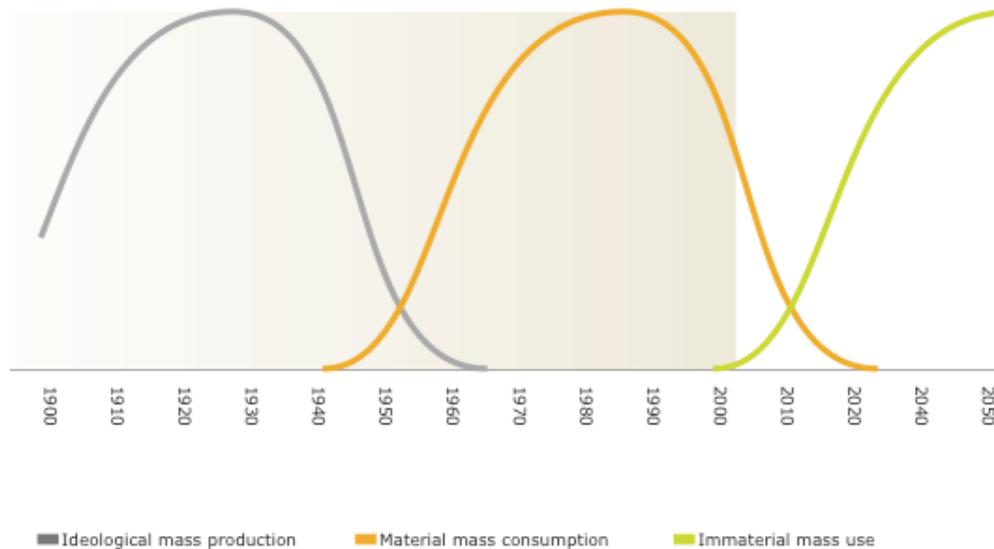
The trend of immaterial mass use.

The market structures and routines are not fully developed yet. But as you can see in the example of iTunes, it is under rapid development.

This trend has begun to change the design profession as well. The key-word is:

Sustainable Design

Until today, a designer is paid to produce the prototypes for the industrial production of communication products. The vast majority of our jobs is connected to marketing and aims at selling more products.

Even if you illustrate a children book: The interest of the publisher is to produce a material product that has to attract clients to buy it to get a return of the investment of the production costs of this book.

I agree that you can look at design from a more idealistic and ethical point of view, to see the cultural importance, the artistic aspect.

You might not like to hear this but designers often overestimate the importance of this cultural aspect. The majority of our clients see us as executive staff in the preproduction stage of a project.

In most of the cases today the designer is not asked to communicate a message. We are commissioned to design a CD-cover, a catalogue, a brochure, a corporate identity, an illustration for a book, a packaging.

Let's imagine 2 possible scenarios of your future as a designer.

Scenario 1

IKEA comes up to you and asks you to design their catalogue 2010. Before you get the contract, there has to be an agreement about the price. They offer you the following:

320 pages, format 210x250, CMYK, 100 million issues, split in 20 regional issues and languages, including Chinese.

Fee for the design
per page   1.200 Euro
320 x 1.200   = 384.000 Euro

Design of the regional versions
per page   500 Euro
20 x 320 x 500   = 3.2 Mio Euro

Total   3.584 Mio Euro

Would you accept the job?

There is a lot you have to know about organising such a project, about preprint and print.

Imagine you would find out during the project, that the project needs 40 pages more? You have this idea of introducing every new topic with a nice double spread, big headline, a lot of space around, an illustration as background instead of a photo of a happy couple sitting an a sofa.

What would you do?

Ask for 448.000 Mio Euro more!
More pages, more work, more money.

Scenario 2

IKEA comes up to you and asks you to design their product communication 2010.

So far they had a catalogue with 320 pages, format 210x250, CMYK, 100 million issues, split in 20 regional issues and languages.

As total design-fee they offer 3.5 Mio Euro.

For every page you need less without loosing communicational impact you get an extra fee of 10.000 Euro! For every page more your fee will be reduced for 10.000 Euro.

Would you propose the additional pages of scenario 1 because the design would look better? 40 additional pages would be 400.000 Euro less.

Just imagine you could do with 100 pages. You would earn 2.2 Mio Euro more.

Imagine you would save 320 pages because you would find a new way of getting the message to the reader.

Why would IKEA be interested in offering such a project where you get more for doing less or less for doing more?

The answer is simple:

They would save such a lot of money because of your intelligent proposal. Less paper, less printing costs, less weight to transport, less petrol for trucks. The savings would much higher than the money they give you for doing less.

Forests would not be cut and petrol would not be spoiled. Time, energy, resources and money would be saved.

You would be responsible for the fact that printers loose their work, paper mills close, truck-drivers would be unemployed.

Always think about that if you tear at one corner of the table cloth, something falls down at the opposite corner.

How could you solve the task?

You need to know a lot about the function of a communication process, what is important and relevant, what part of the message can be taken out without loosing information.

The first step is to analyse the communication process, identify weaknesses and to look for possibilities improve the process and reduce costs. This part of the project must be visualised, documented and presented to the client.

Visualising processes will be an important and growing field of activity within our profession, we call this information design.

You can visualise that the weak point of the process is the dissemination of the catalogue including waste of material due to the fact that a consumer who wants to buy new furniture for the sleeping room because he wants to move together with his girlfriend gets all information about children furniture as well.

It takes time to transport the product to the consumer and the catalogue as such has a given lifespan of actuality, including the need to fix prices over this

period. It is difficult to identify the target-group; many printed catalogues will not reach the right clients. If the transport of the information could happen online, many problems could be solved.
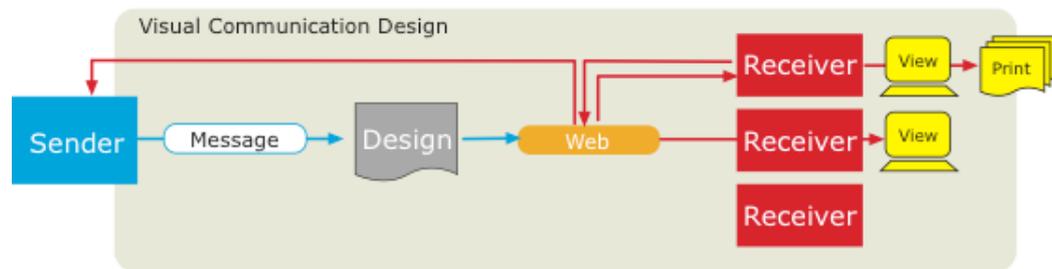
But some clients simply want the good old catalogue.

Why not? But it will surely be much less than 100 million people. Why not making this printed catalogue a beautiful book of inspirations, sold via Amazon or available in the IKEA-stores, with a link to a pricelist with technical data online?

Instead of costs you could generate new income. I guess that an issue of 1 million would be considered as bestseller. And it can be organised to be printed just-in-time, printing on demand.

The problem is to assure that the consumer can print out the additional facts he wants with his own facilities. This means that the format must be A4 related and not 210x250.

If you come up with such a proposal you must be well prepared and have good arguments. Some people at IKEA will loose their job; others have to change their professional attitude. To change good old habits takes an effort. You will have more enemies than friends.

But visual communication designers in general are not seen yet as competent to design the communication process. The emphasis of the design education has so far been more product- than process-oriented.

If we want to contribute to the new trend and make design sustainable we have to leave the product orientation and become process oriented. Sustainability means to avoid production.

Other professions like business consultants are filling the gap we leave between offer and need and help our clients in process improvement and cost reduction. They have no idea about design but finally dictate the briefing for the designer, which than only has to execute what others say.

Unfortunately some designers play this role they are expected to play. But exactly those designers always complain that they don't get the big jobs and that they are only left with peanuts at the end.

They accept to be treated with disrespect, some even accept to be paid only if the client likes the design he is offered. In this way their existence depends on the subjective taste of laymen who often even have the cheekiness to offer this deal to other colleagues at the same time. The design aims at pleasing a clients taste instead of communicating the client's message.

After delivering his work the designer is often sent home with the words "*we decide about it within the next days and let you know*". The final decision about the design is taken behind doors that a designer has no right to enter.

I know it is not very popular at art academies to talk about such things. But a worldwide research, undertaken by the International Council of Graphic-Designers Associations (ICOGRADA) in 2004 shows that 81% of young design graduates complain about the fact that the colleges did not talk enough about money, marketing and real life.

Let me come back to the Sami:

We hope that in 50 years from now you can sit in your armchair and look back at a satisfied and successful professional career. But until than you have to turn around and look at what lays behind you: The future.

To design is an activity with impact on the future.

We have to understand trends to do our job well and to avoid designing the past.

The era of industrialised mass consumption is on decline. A new mega-trend is coming up but the trend lines have not crossed yet. Experts expect this within the next 10 years to happen. A change of a mega-trend happens every 50 years, we have the privilege to experience such a change and be at the beginning of a new trend.

If we concentrate our efforts on designing this new trend, we have this unique chance of being really creative and not just reproductive.

We are forced to change our thinking to more sustainability. The world simply runs out of resources. This means to become more process than product focused. It is not the media that counts but the communication. We design visually perceived communication. Communication is a process, not a product.

Globalisation has an increasing influence on national and regional developments. To believe that this will not affect each one of us is ostrich-politics: Putting the head in the sand and hoping not to be seen.

Let's use our eyes.

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The article:

Introduction lecture of the study year 2004-05 at the Bergen National Academy of the Arts, also published in a shorter version on icograda.org, features, September 2004 and held as lecture at the

University of Lapland, Rovaniemi, Finland in November 2004 and GDUT Guangdong University of Technology in March 2005.