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TRANSFORMATIVE FORESIGHT FROM AN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE: WHAT & WHY?

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UNESCO CHAIR ON COMPLEX SYSTEMS AND
TRANSFORMATIVE AFRICAN FUTURES
CENTRE FOR SUSTAINABILITY TRANSITIONS

Change vs. Transformation



BUT, "...a common understanding of what should be transformed, by and for whom, and how these intended transformations come about, remains elusive."

One approach to transformation: focusing on the different uses of the prefix 'trans'

TRANS -disciplinary

- Integrating diverse perspectives and ways of knowing in a respectful way
- Enabling creative explorations, engagement, and moving across intellectual and disciplinary silos

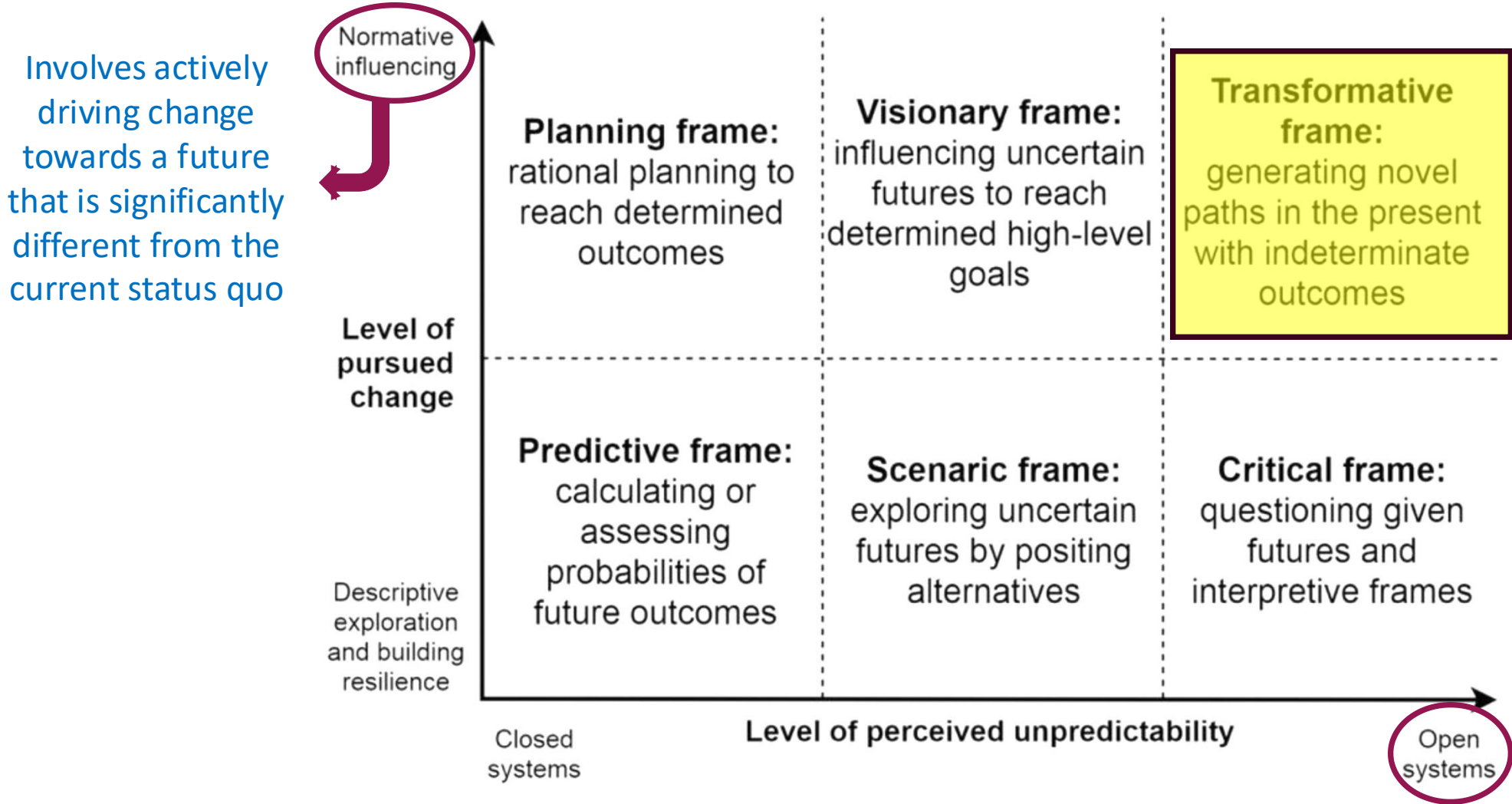
TRANS -gressive

- Calling for a fundamental change that moves beyond current constraints, normative framings, and power asymmetries
- Challenging taken-for-grantedness and delivering caring acts for socially just change

TRANS -cendence

- Opening to a variety of perspectives and beliefs
- Empowering political and collective agency that supports imagining alternatives and generates systems changes at all scales

Distinct typologies of foresight methods, each defined by varying assumptions and approaches



Minkinen, M., Auffermann, B., & Ahokas, I. (2019). Six foresight frames: Classifying policy foresight processes in foresight systems according to perceived unpredictability and pursued change. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 149, 119753. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2019.119753>

Compared to other types of futures thinking, a transformative foresight frame encompasses a view of:

- preferable futures (Amara, 1981),
- lived futures (Groves, 2017),
- is novelty oriented (Miller, 2018),
- with time as emergent and indeterminate (Selin, 2006),
- is complexity oriented, and critical (Mannermaa, 1991).

It searches for evolutionary pathways and invention of novelty with unpredictable consequences (Minkinen et al., 2019).

“Those seeking to change societies imagine better futures to achieve, unwanted futures to avoid, and often both. Observing or experiencing novel ways of existence or action that were previously unconsidered can, in turn, spark fresh imaginative potentials” (Vervoort et al. 2024)

In layman's terms:

- While strategic foresight focuses primarily on anticipating future developments to inform decision-making within existing frameworks, transformative foresight is fundamentally oriented toward significant change that addresses root causes of current (African) challenges.
- The key distinguishing features of transformative foresight include its focus on:
 - deep systemic changes,
 - visionary and speculative thinking that explores radical alternatives,
 - broad participatory processes engaging diverse stakeholders, and
 - its aim to empower and mobilize collective action.
- Unlike strategic foresight which operates within existing strategic frameworks, transformative foresight aims to challenge and reshape these very frameworks

WHY?



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The Anthropocene:
A new geological era where human activity is a dominant force shaping ecosystems at global scales



C



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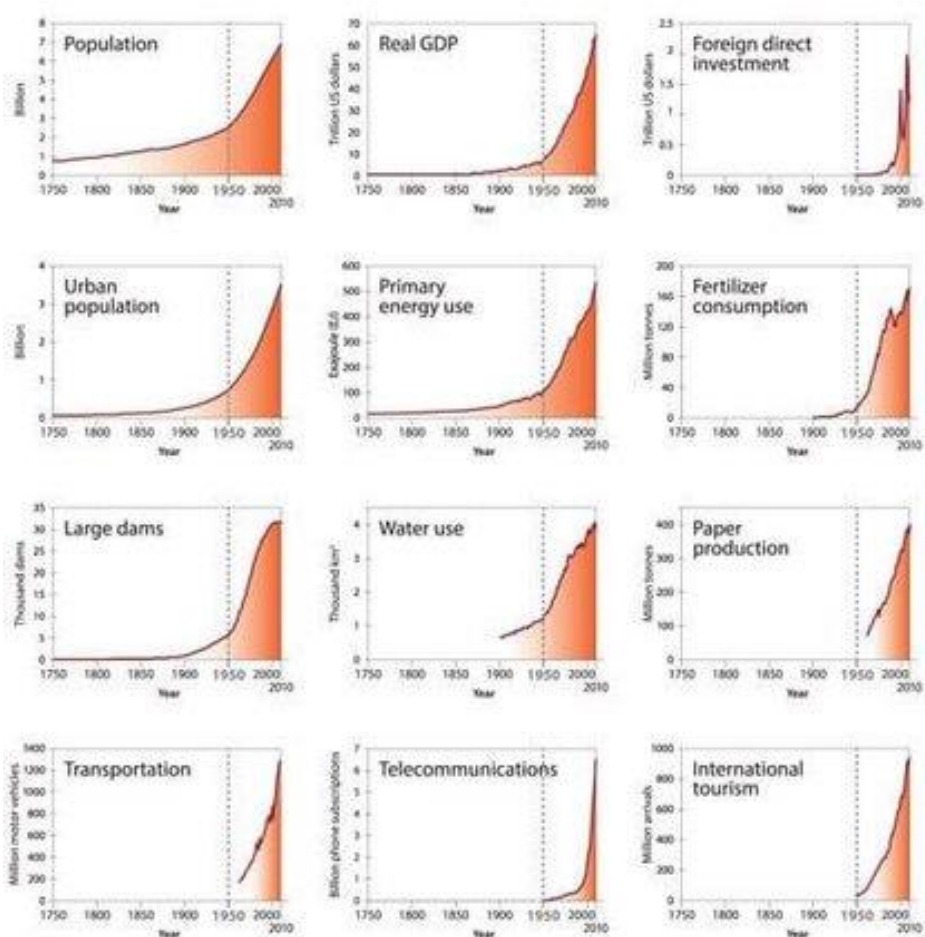
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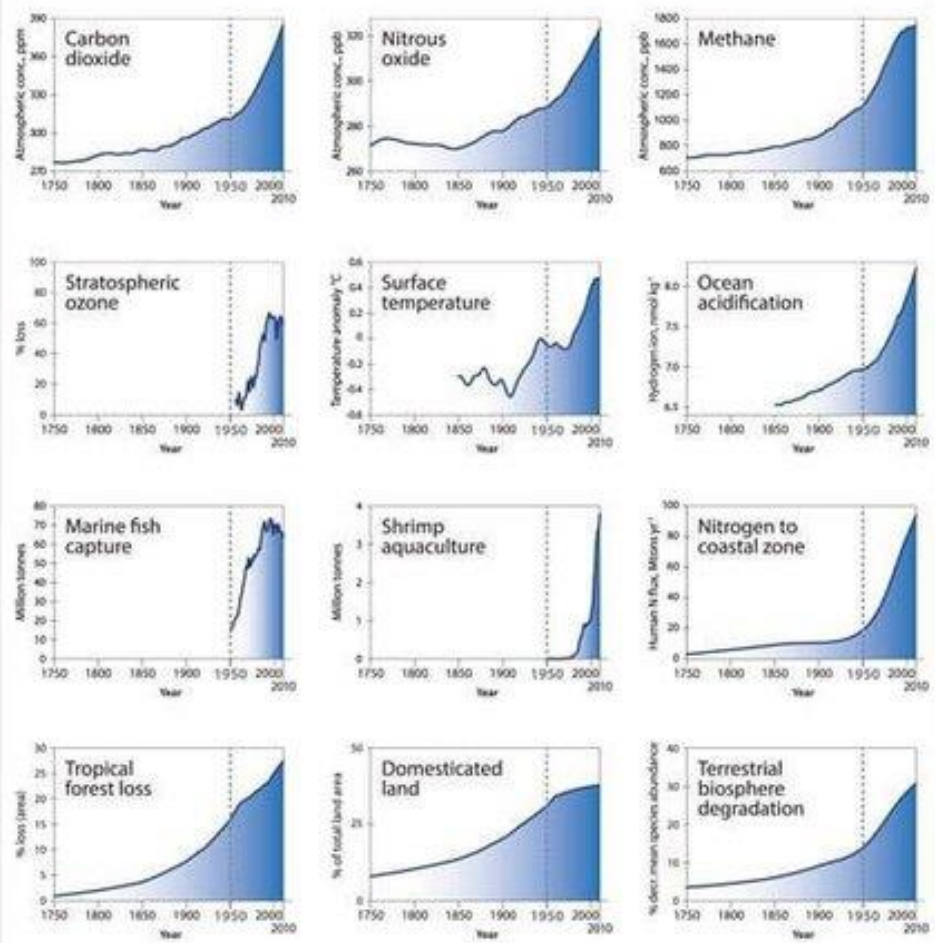
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'The great acceleration'

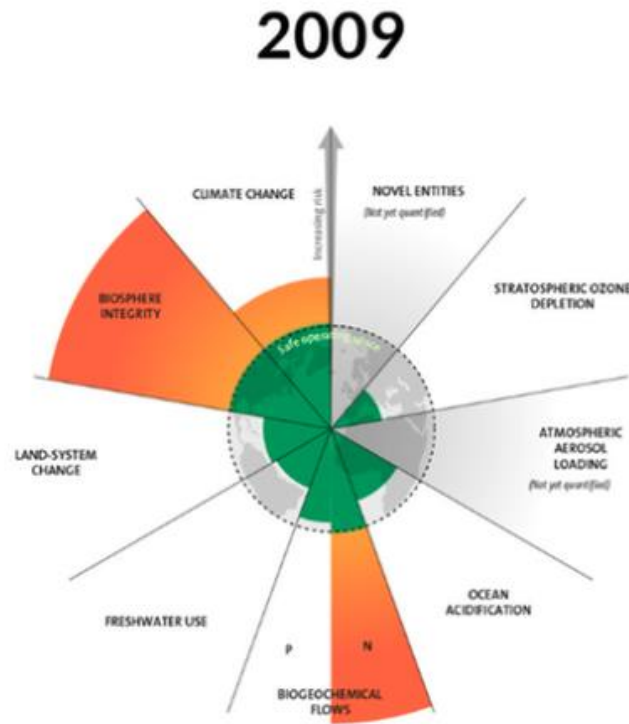
Socio-economic trends



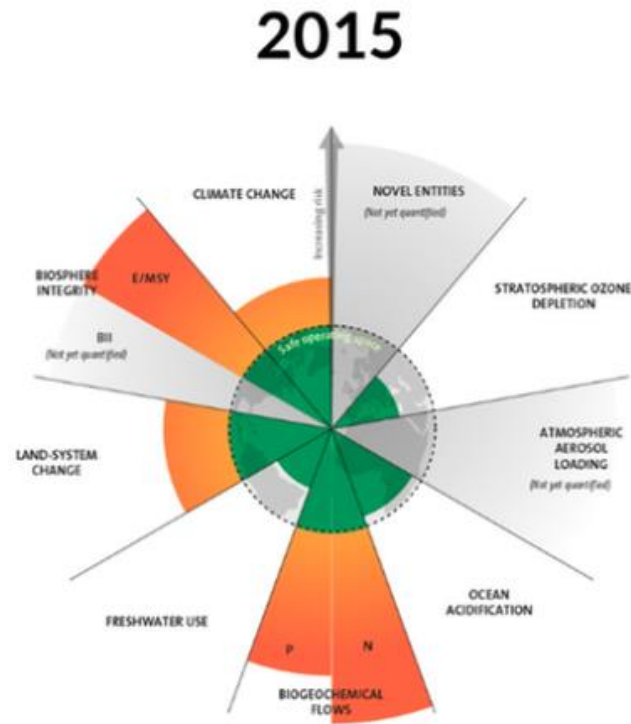
Earth system trends



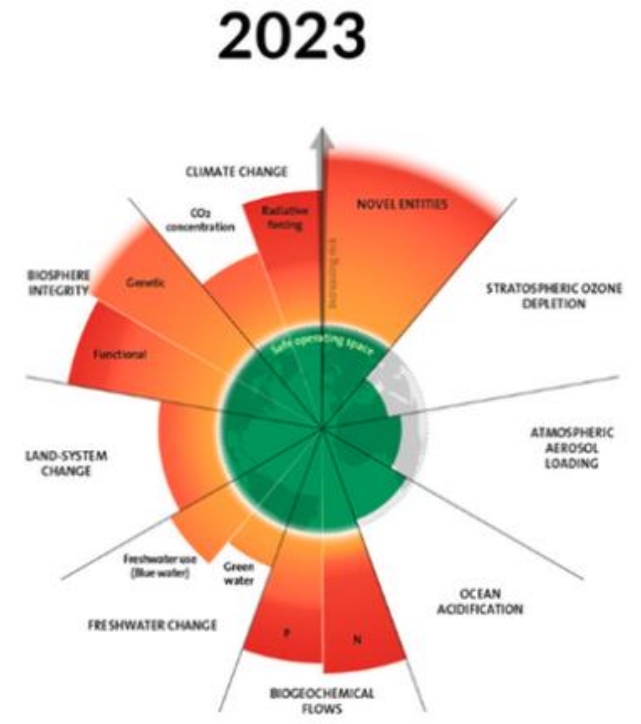
Planetary boundaries



7 boundaries assessed,
3 crossed



7 boundaries assessed,
4 crossed

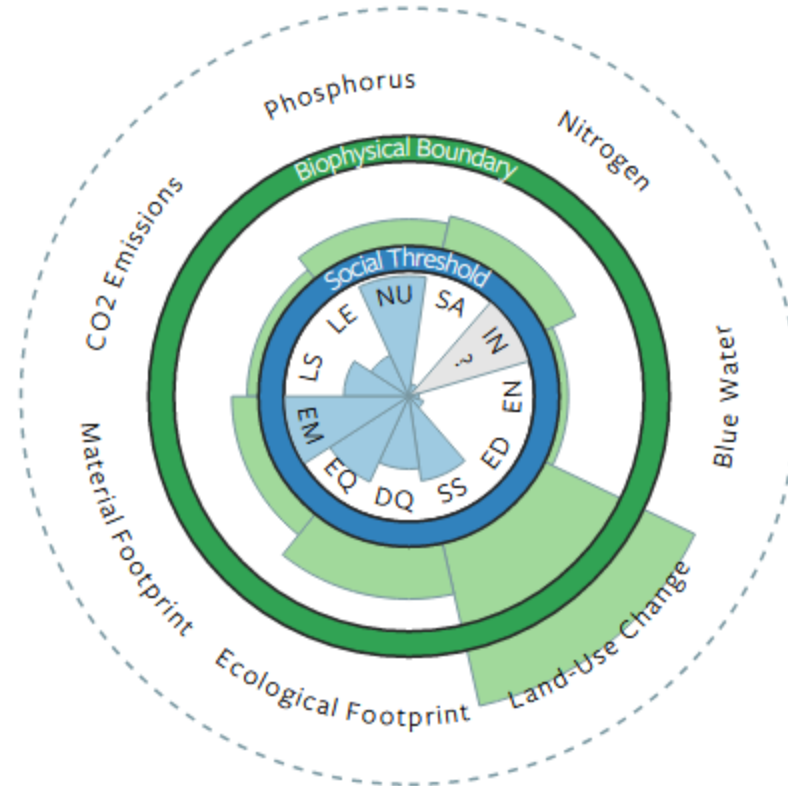
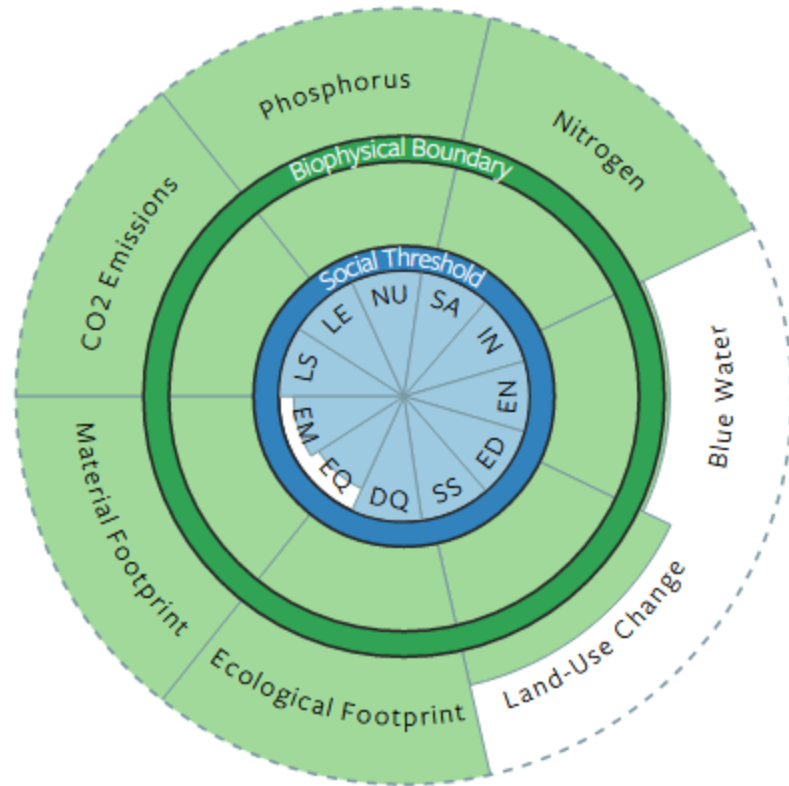


9 boundaries assessed,
6 crossed

A 'decent' life within planetary boundaries

United States ▼

Burkina Faso ▼



- | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| LS - Life Satisfaction | ED - Education |
| LE - Healthy Life Expect. | SS - Social Support |
| NU - Nutrition | DQ - Democratic Quality |
| SA - Sanitation | EQ - Equality |
| IN - Income | EM - Employment |
| EN - Access to Energy | |

*“The **convergence of crises**, from climate change to economic instability, inequality, poverty and the energy crunch, makes it necessary to **call into question the conventional development paradigm** based on exploitation of nature, continuous production and consumption and privatization of common resources.*

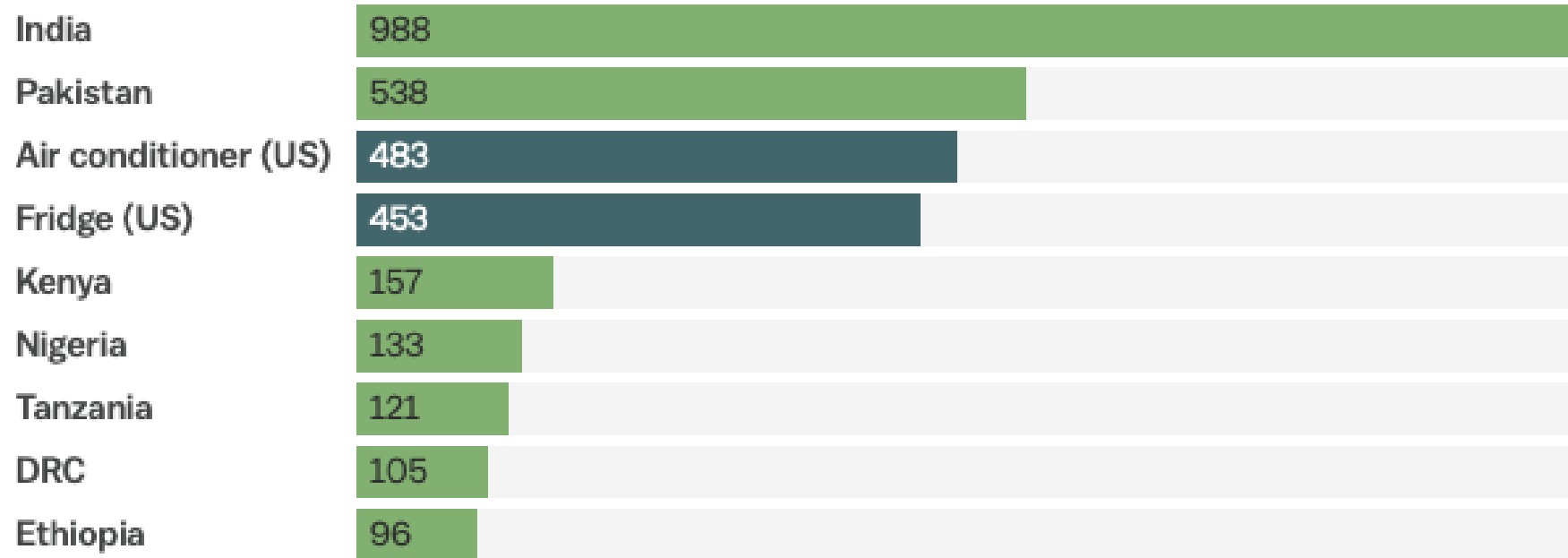
While this is imperative in ‘developed’ societies and in fast-growing economies, it is critical for nations ‘on their way’ to development.”



The average fridge in the US consumes more electricity in a year than an average person in dozens of countries.

Annual electricity consumption in kilowatt-hours

■ A person (of the country) ■ Fridge (US) ■ Air conditioner (US)



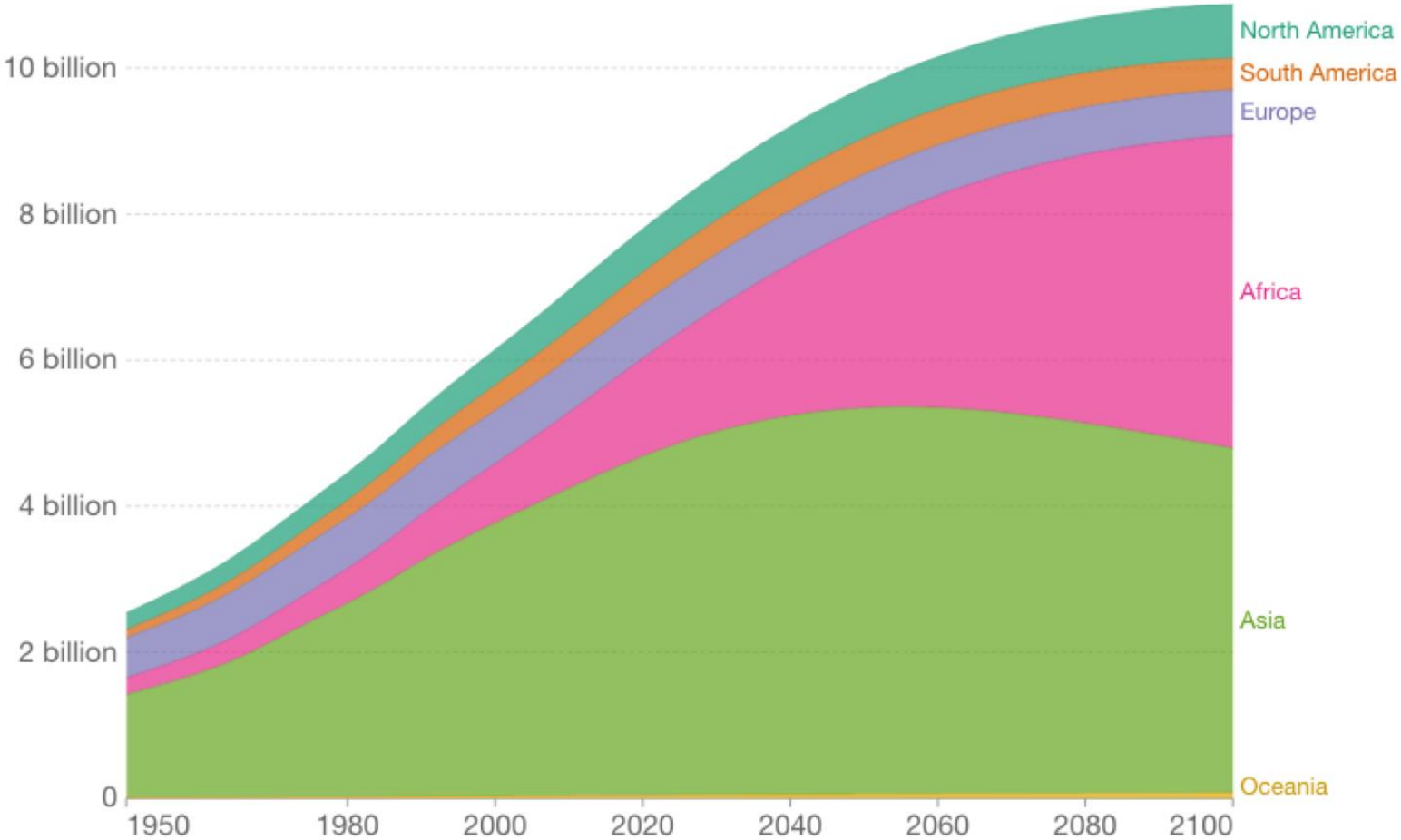
Source: IEA, Energy Star

Vex

By 2050, a quarter of the world's people will be African – this will shape our future

World population by region

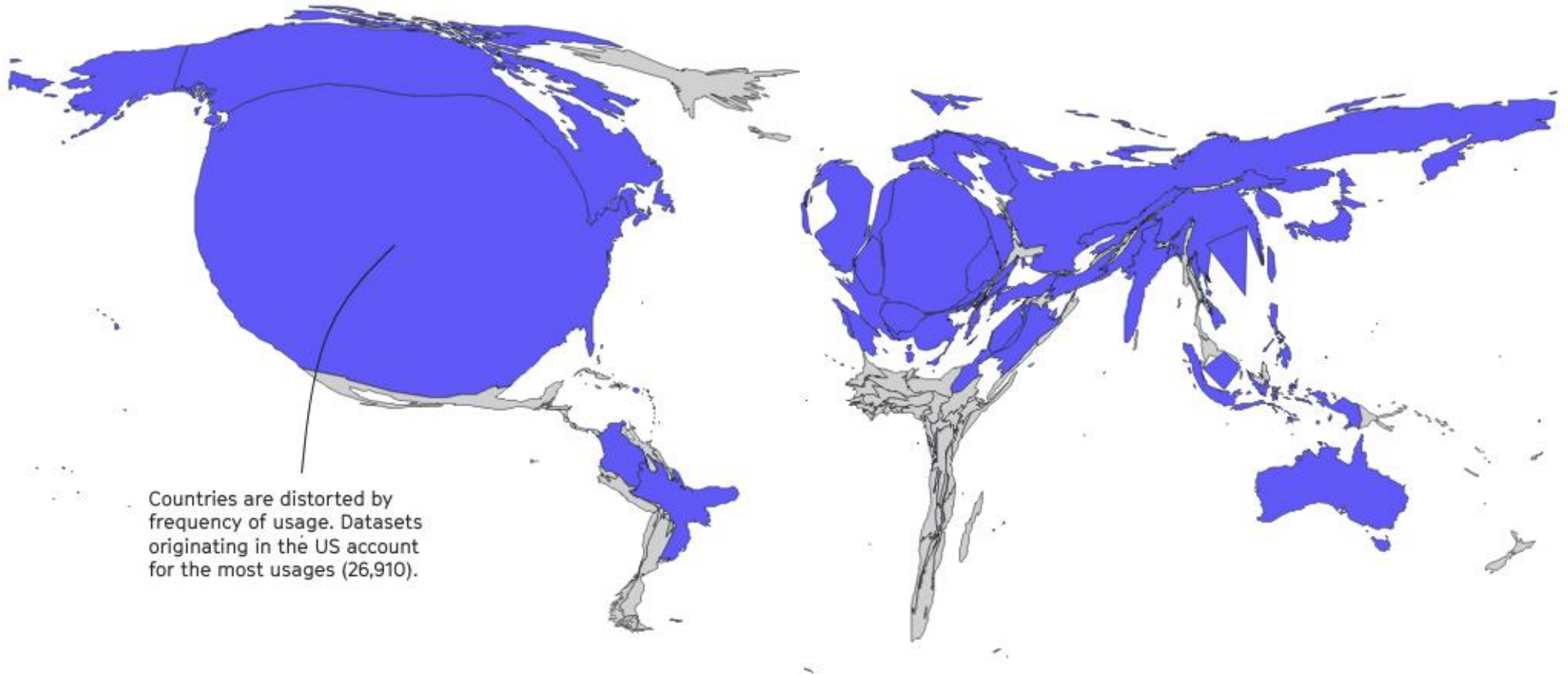
Projected population to 2100 is based on the UN's medium population scenario.



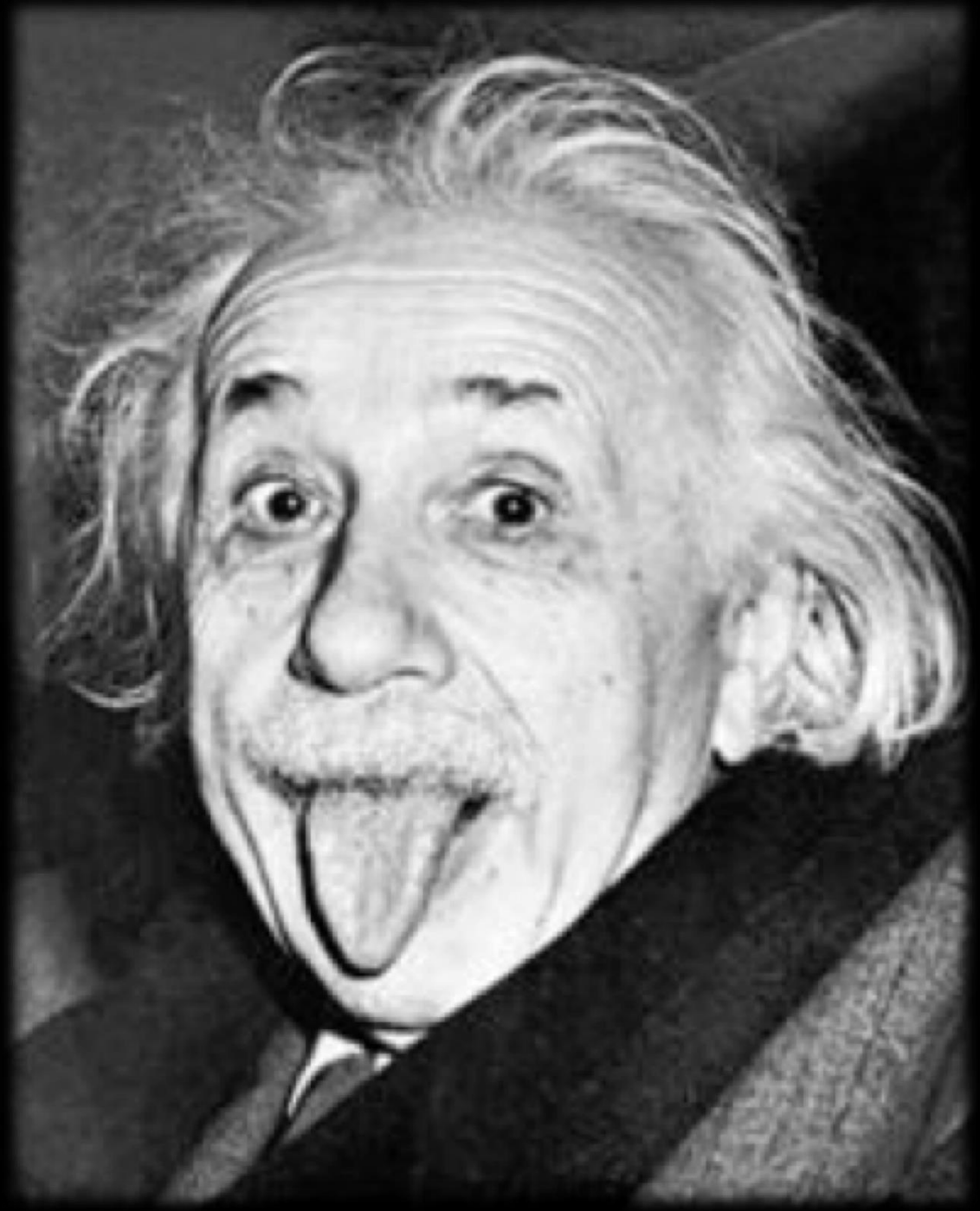
Source: Gapminder (v6), HYDE (v3.2), UN (2019)

The world map according to the data AI sees

● Usage of datasets from here ● No usage of datasets from here



**“WE CANNOT
SOLVE OUR
PROBLEMS WITH
THE SAME
THINKING WE
USED WHEN WE
CREATED THEM.”**



TRANSFORMATIVE FORESIGHT IN ACTION



Seeds, a.k.a. 'bright spots', 'weak signals' or 'pockets of the future in the present', can be small-scale, experimental projects and initiatives that employ new ways of thinking or doing and exist at the margin of the current world and worldviews; or they can take the form of

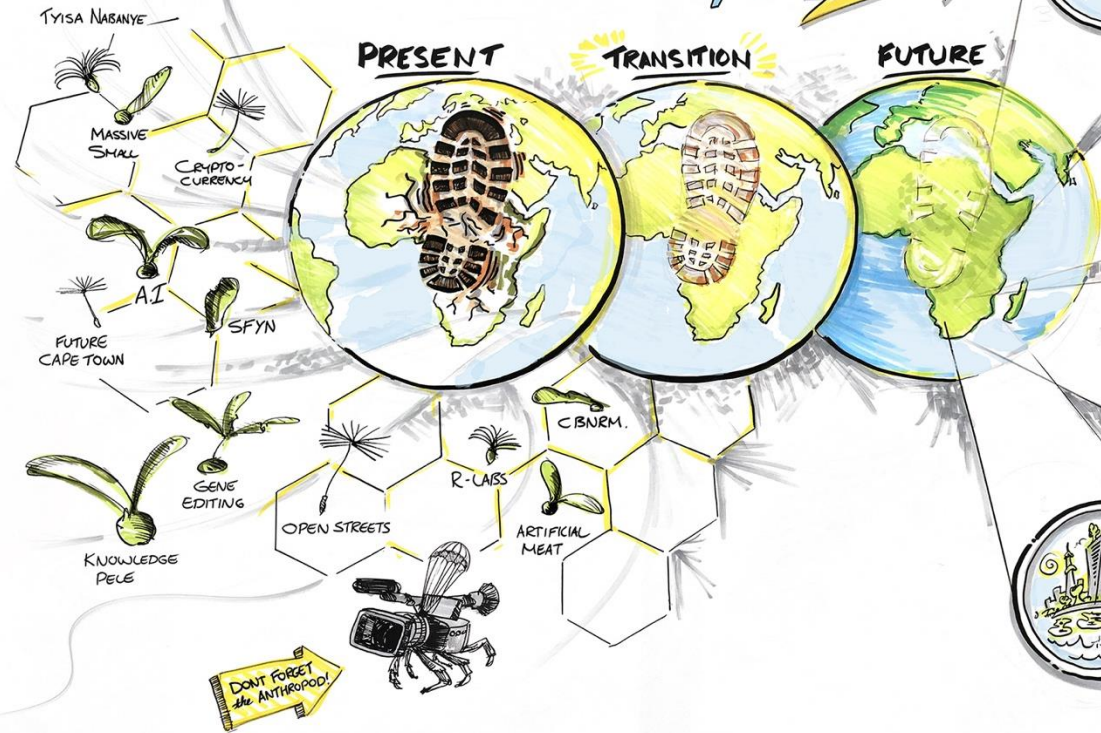
- new social institutions,
- technologies,
- or frameworks for understanding the world

that are not yet mainstream, but have the potential, or have shown at local scale to improve livelihoods and sustainability outcomes.



ANTHROPOCENE Visioning Workshop

4 Scenarios →



RHIZ(H)OME
 ★ Small, interconnected
 Diversity, Difference
 ★ Empathetic, caring & human centred



TRANSLOCAL
 ★ Community learning & Governance
 Intergenerational
 ★ Market, sharing, gift economy



POST EXODUS (2318)
 ★ Global communities
 Knowledge sharing through collective consciousness
 ★ Deep dialogues
 ★ Collectively managed immortality
 ★ Strong focus on empathy



DEMOS 42 UBUNTUNSE
 ★ Fluid infrastructure
 ★ Gastro gardening
 ★ Collective
 ★ Super intelligence

For background and more information

■ <https://goodanthropocenes.net/>



Journal article

- <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/dpr.12791>



Transformative foresight for diverse futures: the Seeds of Good Anthropocenes initiative

Rika Preiser , Tanja Hichert, ReINETTE Biggs, Julia van Velden, Nyasha Magadzire, Garry Peterson, Laura Pereira, Keziah Mayer, Karina Benessaiah

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 SECTIONS

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Abstract

Motivation

Foresight methods are increasingly recognized as essential for decision-making in complex environments, particularly within development and research settings. As foresight methods continue to gain prominence for decision-making, their application in these settings grows. Funders and policy-makers can benefit from the experience of transformative foresight practitioners and researchers who are skilled in designing novel ways to envision alternative and diverse development futures.

Purpose

The Seeds of Good Anthropocenes (SoGA) initiative has experimented with transformative foresight since its inception in 2016.

We position SoGA within the framework of Minkkinen et al. (2019); we present its transformative capacity through participatory visioning; and we explore how foresight methods can shape strategic development options.

In a nutshell: Transformative foresight...



...is a very specific form of foresight practice aimed at developing “novel paths in the present with indeterminate outcomes”, characterized by its engagement with “open systems” marked by a high degree of perceived unpredictability and emphasizes a pursuit of “normative influencing.”.