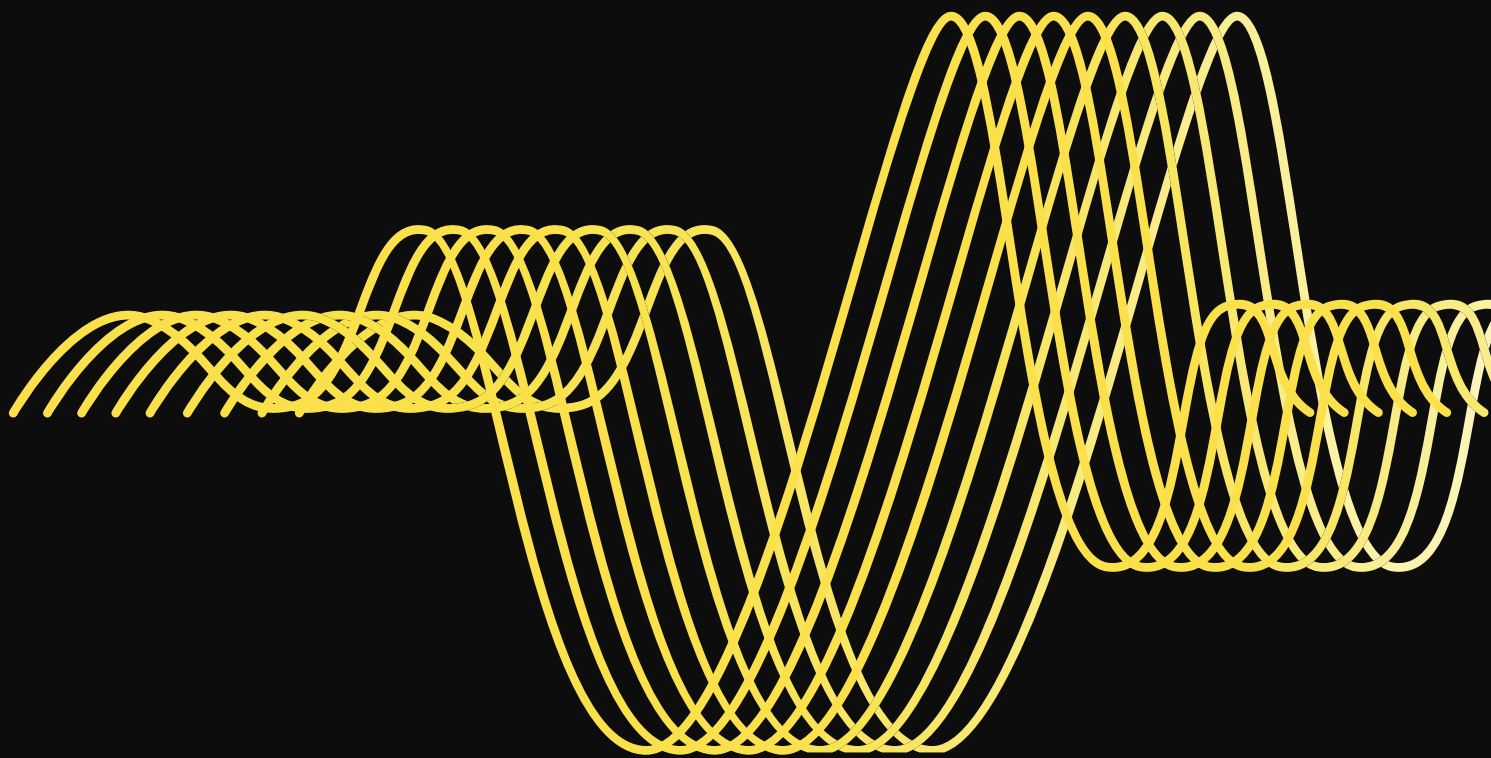
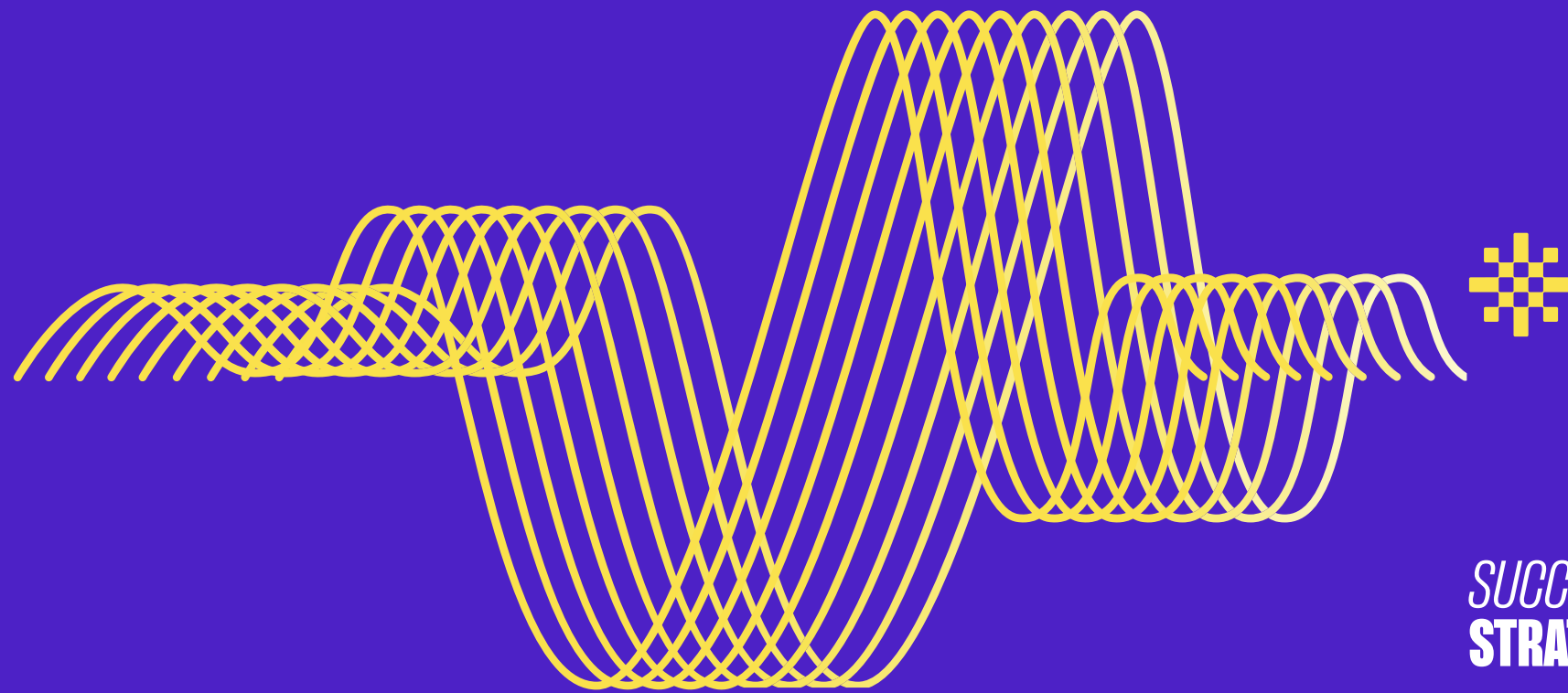


LEADING FROM THE FUTURE USING SIGNALS 🗨️



Psst. Trends show what already is.
Signals show what might be.

PLANETHON



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SUCCESSFUL COMPANIES APPLY STRATEGIC FORESIGHT AND FUTURES WORK

Studies show that futures and strategic foresight work improves decision making, supports navigating uncertain and unpredictable markets, helps anticipate change, increases the capacity to take action, improves social-ecological understanding, identifies vulnerabilities in strategies, exposes biases and assumptions, and brings long term value. The approach is increasingly used by both private companies and the public sector, for vision, strategy, innovation and policy work, while it is still underutilized given its potential. Another scientific study has shown that future ready companies reach, on average, 33% higher profitability and 200% higher growth compared to other companies. Big global companies such as Intel, Lego, IKEA, AXA and many more have worked or are working with strategic foresight and futures, and the big four global consultancies offer services in the field. Working with strategic foresight and futures is no longer a wild, weak signal, but a trend.



WHY SIGNALS *NOT* TRENDS?

In many ways the core of futures and strategic foresight work is signals – early signs of change. They can be spotted in research, technological development, policy, behaviour, and many other places, sometimes in plain view, sometimes well hidden. Signals works as tools to anticipate, explore and learn from different possible futures.

Signals are seeds of the future in the present; seeds of change that have the potential to become mainstream or disrupt the current system enough to take on a new, more or less sustainable dynamic. Signals point towards the plausibility of alternate futures that we face, as well as constitute risks and levers of change towards the kind of futures that can be considered as desirable (or undesirable) for a wide range of actors. Signals can be both weak and strong depending on how established they are in the present.

Signals are different from trends; in that they are earlier signs of development which you can impact the direction for. Often, a signal acts as double - or even triple - edged swords - with dual, as well as milder or wilder possible impacts and developments. They intend to highlight what kind of future your decision making, strategy, innovation, competence development and communication efforts might build. A trend however, can be a more superficial occurrence, that is not necessarily connected to a deeper change mechanism - or a wider pattern of signals that has entered the mainstream.

WHAT IS A SIGNAL *AND* WHAT IS A TREND?

EXAMPLE

-)

Weak signal: One lake in New Zealand gets legal rights and personhood.
-))

Strong signal: Areas of nature get legal rights and personhood in specific places, governed by different groups in different countries.
- **Trend:** If a trend is built on signals, a trend could be the established pattern of environmental personhood that is widely known.
- **Shift:** A wider societal norm where nature is treated as a stakeholder, no longer an externality, in business and policy.



Signals are used to:

- Stress test strategy
- Innovate and develop innovations
- Identify opportunities
- Anticipate risk and build resilience
- Train systems and futures thinking
- Engage and mobilise



Signals are used by:

- Management teams
- Innovation teams
- Strategy teams
- Sustainability teams
- People & Culture teams
- Communications teams



SIGNALS — BUILDING THE CAPACITY TO IDENTIFY OPPORTUNITIES AND ACT WITH CONFIDENCE IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

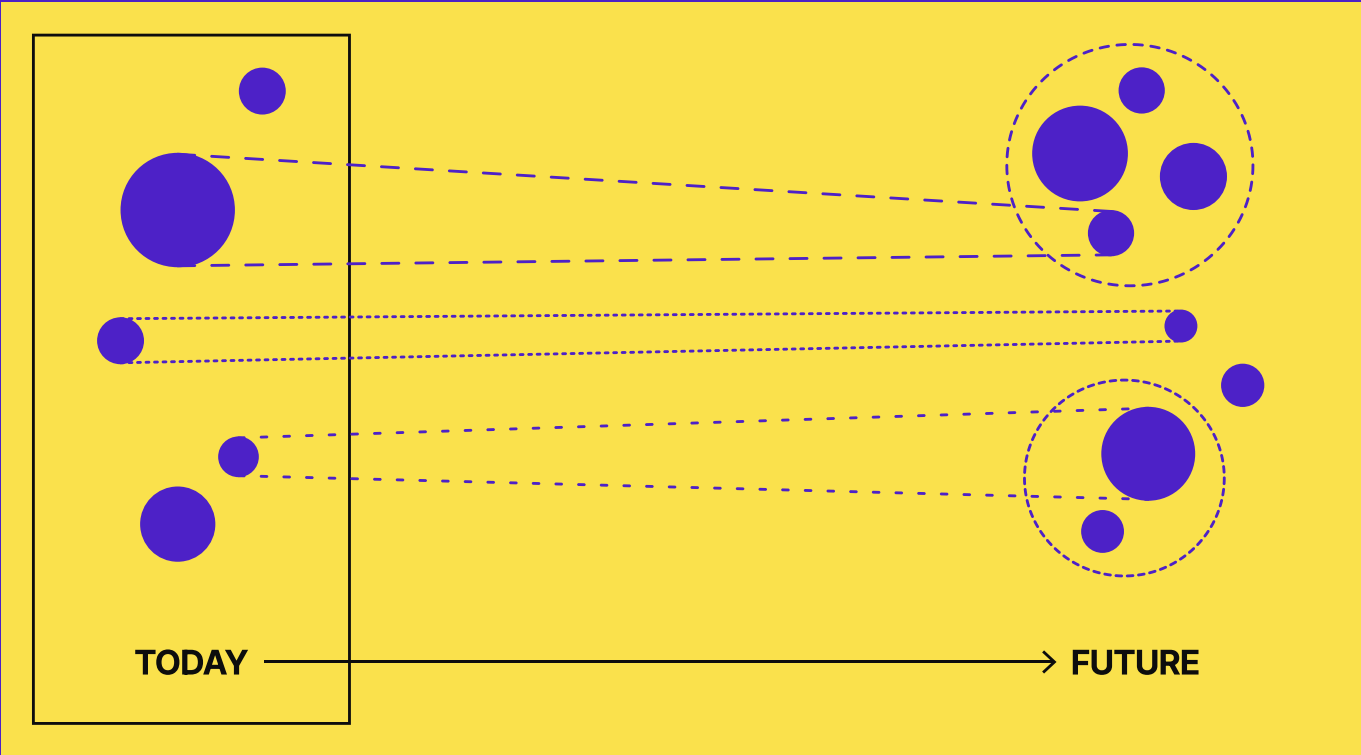
You may have been welcomed to the Anthropocene more than once by now. That unsettling word that reminds us just how much humans have become a dominant force of planetary change. *The Anthropocene*, a term popularised by Paul Crutzen and others, marks the new geological epoch in which human activity is the main driver of change on Earth. It signals a break from the Holocene, the stable climatic window that enabled human civilisation to flourish for the past 10,000 years.

But today, the forces reshaping our world reach far beyond climate change alone. We’re living in an era of geopolitical instability, where conflicts, shifting alliances, and resource tensions challenge the very idea of predictable global order. Meanwhile, **AI is advancing at unprecedented speed**, transforming how we work, govern and create, while raising profound questions about bias, agency, and control. Add to this the **growing concentration of power**, not only through wealth and corporate ownership but also through political structures that increasingly test the resilience of our democratic institutions.

In this turbulent landscape, our ability to **imagine and shape better futures** is not a luxury, it’s a necessity. If the Anthropocene has taught us anything, it’s that the systems we build; technological, economic, political, reflect our choices and values. How we choose to lead, invest and collaborate now will determine whether we deepen the divides and vulnerabilities, or whether we strengthen resilience, inclusion and regeneration for generations to come.

Signals are identifiable, trackable, signs and tools to work with uncertainty and your vision for the future - and simultaneously, build a unique capacity to better deal with the absurdities of the present. This unique capacity is often referred, within futures thinking, as Futures Literacy.

Futures literacy is the ability to understand and engage with the future as something open—not predetermined. As defined by UNESCO, it’s the skill that helps us recognize how our ideas about the future shape our decisions today. It invites us to become more aware, more intentional, and more imaginative in how we move through the present.



Signals can be weak or strong today, depending on the number of real life occurrences of the signal or the strength of effect from one occurrence. Some signals can grow stronger in the future, some weaker, and some signals can generate strong implications in combination with each other.

Without this awareness, we risk being trapped in short-term thinking or the belief that the future is something that happens to us - not something that comes from us. We may continue with business as usual, even as the world around us shifts. But with **futures thinking**, we can begin to ask and answer deeper questions: What futures are possible? What futures are desirable? And what stories, systems, or assumptions might we need to let go of to get there?

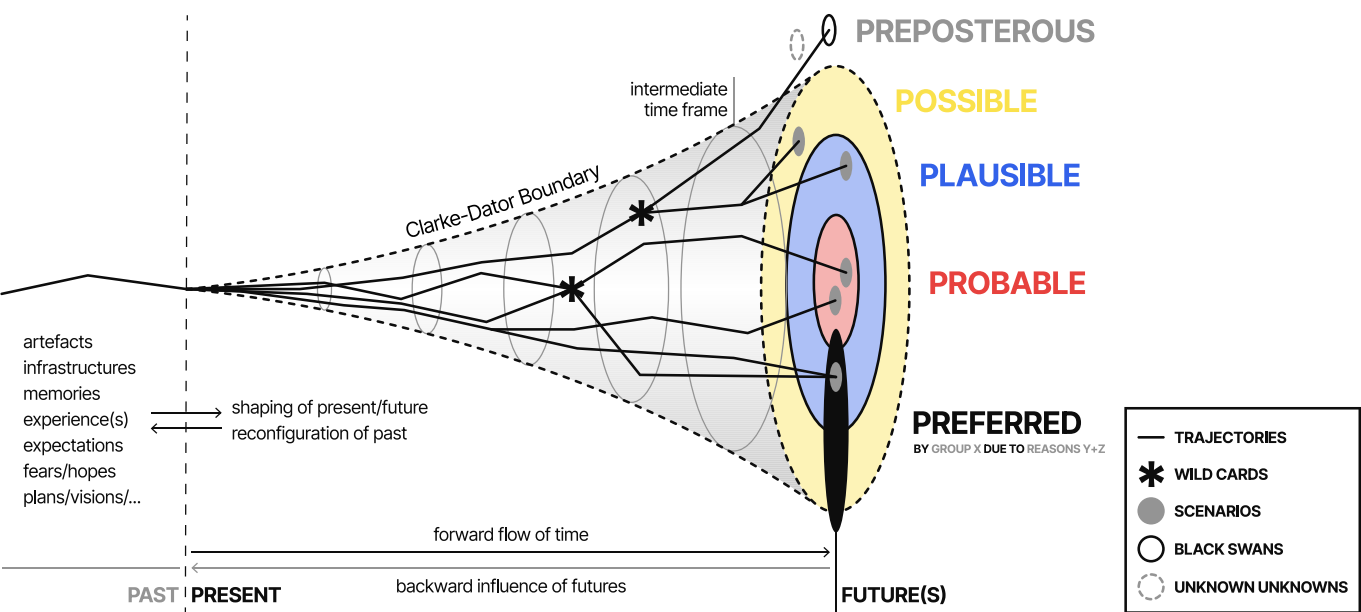
This is a skill for everyone, not just experts or policymakers. In fact, the more people who are empowered to imagine and influence the future, the more inclusive, resilient, and hopeful our shared path can be.



ENTER SCIENCE BASED SIGNALS

At Planethon, we spot and track signals with system disrupting potential. Signals that are rooted in social-ecological systems with an opportunity or risk to change the dynamics of a system. These are seeds of the futures we can build, and ingredients ensuring that the future scenarios we develop, although imaginative and speculative, are grounded in facts, science and not make-believe. From signals and imagination we build informed hope; visions and strategies anchored in what’s possible, without shying away from the major challenges we face.

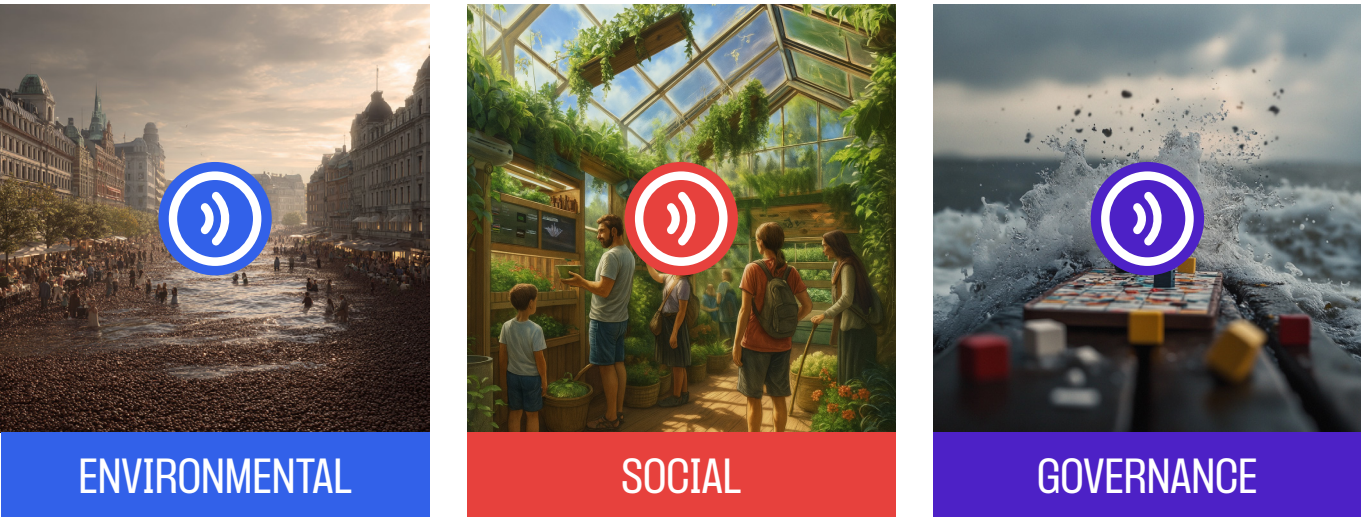
A first dose of science based signals is also a good place to start practising futures thinking. Signals can be spotted in research, technological development, policy, behaviour, and can work as tools to anticipate, explore and learn from different possible futures. The Futures Cone below is an evolving model for thinking about the future. It supports reflecting on the relationship between the past, present and possible futures - and putting signals into context. Curating a relevant overview and selection of signals for a specific business or industry requires looking at **different system interacting categories where radical change might come**. Beyond standard horizon scanning models such as STEEP-V, VERGE and PESTEL, the Strategic Worldbuilding Framework developed by Leah Zaidi, inspired by science fiction authors, suggests seven foundational categories; Social,



The Futures Cone (adapted from: Gall, T., Vallet, F., & Yannou, B. (2022)). What is possible in the future increases and widens the further ahead in time we are focusing. If you take a signal today, and explore it into the future; What could it mean 20 years from now? Which trajectories are probable, plausible, possible, which are just preposterous, and - perhaps most importantly - desirable? Ultimately - what can you do today to make the possible and desirable more probable?

Political, Economic, Philosophical, Environmental, Scientific & technological and Artistic. To translate signal scanning into corporate strategy, we can look at categories such as the ESRS standards or simply ESG: signs of change in Environment, Social, and Governance.

Environmental signals can relate to a change that impacts one or more of the planetary boundaries, from climate to land use or water. Social aspects can be changes in behaviours, preferences or demographics. Governance signals can include changes in policy, management, or law. Sometimes, technology is a separate category, but often, technology is integrated in all categories. Here is a sneak peek of what some ESG signals could look like.



Three signals in categories E-S-G. (E) Who's That Stepping on My Beans?, (S) Is the Citizen the New Consumer?, and (G) Are the Rules Tripping or Am I? (Images: AI generated)

SIGNAL! WHO'S THAT STEPPING ON MY BEANS?

STARTED TRACKING:

LATE 2021/EARLY 2022

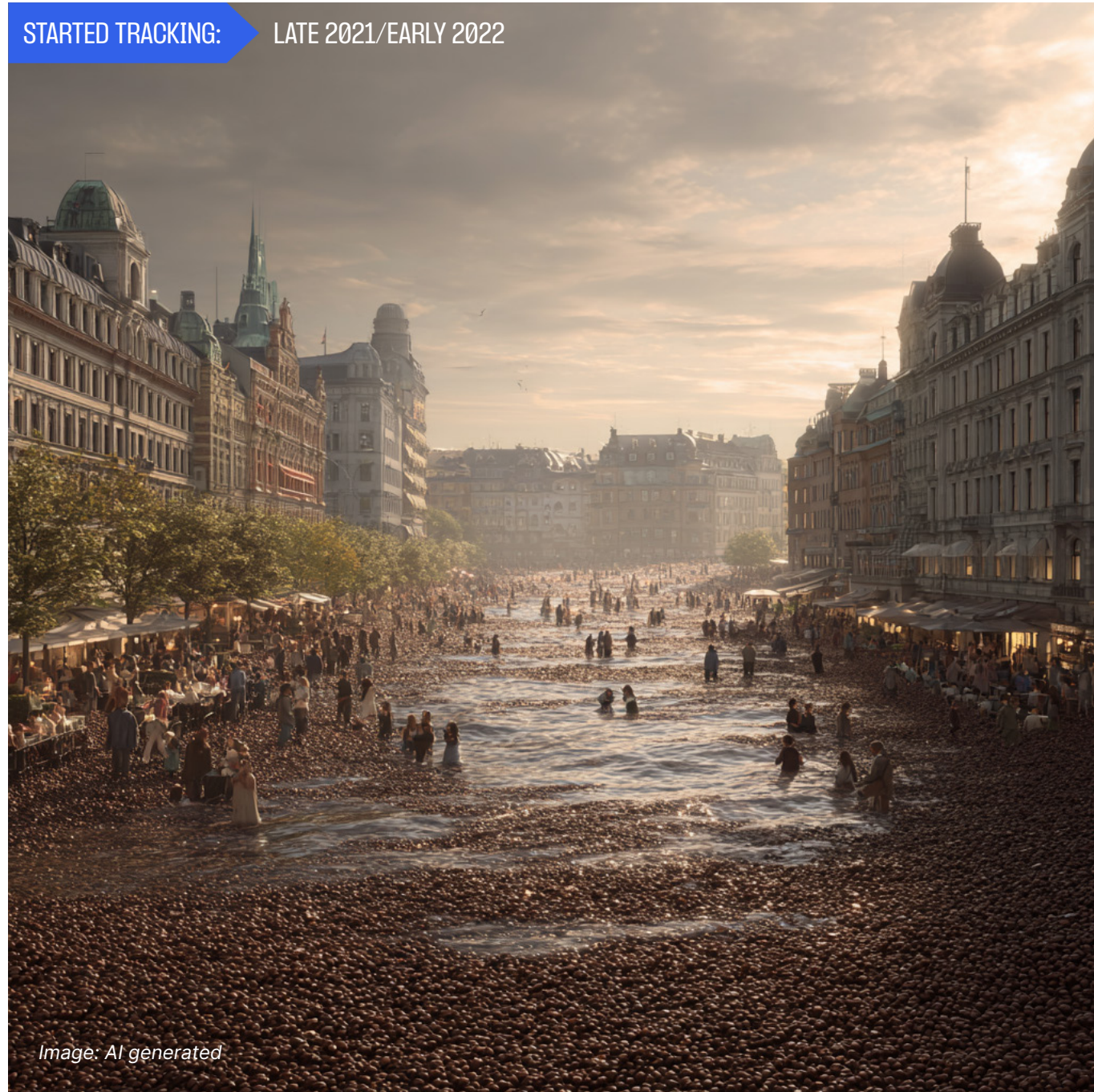


Image: AI generated

The average Swede consumes about 3,2 cups of coffee per day. Yes. Swedish cups. Not those tiny espresso cups. No, cups that can hold at least 300 ml. That's 12,3 billion cups per year. To provoke you even further with this calculation, 1,1 trillion coffee beans are required to fill our cups. And if we took that big bag of beans, poured it all over Stockholm, it would cover the city and reach people up to the knees. One would be wading through a shallow sea of coffee beans. Where does all of this coffee come from and why might the Swedish fika culture be under threat?

Many will be aware of the dominating bean species Arabica and Robusta and have probably seen these varieties being touted for their rich aromas and complex flavour profiles in your favourite local cafe. However, there are 124 species known to science which can be found across Africa, Indian Ocean Islands, Asia and Australia. Critically, to our story, many of these species possess useful and indeed essential genetic traits for the potential future survival of the global coffee trade from tolerance, to drought, to pest and disease resistance.

However, recent work has shown that over 60% of all of these species face a medium to high risk of extinction. Nature has a deep bench and is incredibly resilient but climate change and associated human pressures like habitat loss and deforestation threaten many of these species and thus, the sacred ritual of Fika. Coffee is unlikely to be wiped out but, as has been seen recently, the price could rise exponentially as species are wiped out and more and more farmers around the world fail to adapt to the ravages of climate change. Although there are experiments being done with artificial replacements for coffee and cocoa, these are in their early stages and are a very long way from being able to replace even a miniscule fraction of those 12,3 billion cups (for Sweden alone). Both the star species themselves also have major vulnerabilities. For example; Robusta is susceptible to virulent fungal diseases and large areas of coffee crop can be destroyed very fast, as recently happened at coffee plantations in Brazil.

The impact of climate change on coffee is not an issue for a far flung future. The evidence of the impact can be seen in unprecedented price increases and volatile market dynamics. For example, The International Coffee Organization's (ICO) February 2025 market report revealed the ICO Composite Indicator Price (I-CIP) breached the highest monthly prices on record.

In a recent report by the Stockholm Environment Institute on the global coffee supply chain, the authors note that by 2050 the global area well-suited for coffee production may be reduced by 50%. This can be especially devastating given that this sector provides income to ca 25 million households. Due to the globalized nature of the industry, climate change will also have spillover effects across the entire supply chain. Coffee is the second-most traded commodity in the world after oil, and as such; "climate-induced price and yield shocks will affect coffee cooperatives, traders, roasters, retailers and, ultimately, consumers"¹.

Imagine a future where coffee has a price equal to precious metals. Where the Swedish fika with real coffee is a luxury. How might our cultures be different?



PSST. LISTEN TO RAGNA – A STORY SET IN 2072, A FUTURE WHERE COFFEE IS NOWHERE IN SIGHT.

Written by **Henrik Björn**

Performed by **Gizem Kling Erdogan**

Underlying scientific scenario: **'A Hothouse Without Coffee' by Planethon**

SIGNAL! IS THE CITIZEN THE NEW CONSUMER?

STARTED TRACKING: 2023

Image: AI generated



What we call ourselves and each other impacts how we view our role in society - and how we behave. How could a shift from seeing and calling ourselves and others as *consumers* - to *citizens* - impact our behaviour?

The term consumer is defined as “a person who buys goods or services *for their own use*”². Often, people are referred to as consumers to describe private persons’ roles in society, and evidence

suggests that referring to people as consumers brings a materialistic and self-interest bias. For example; one study by a team of psychologists found differences in water-saving behaviour and willingness to trust others. Two versions of the survey were sent out. The only difference was in the priming, one started the questionnaire with “You are one of four consumers...”, and the other “You are one of four individuals...”. The respondents on the consumer version were **significantly less likely to both save water and trust others**.

Practices that can prime us to view ourselves and behave like citizens invites conversation and reciprocal relationships. One example is citizen assemblies. A citizen assembly is a group of people from the public, randomly selected to represent a population, that meets, discusses and puts together proposals on how to tackle societal issues. The first one for climate in Sweden was established in early 2024, and in 2025 a new - and permanent - global citizens assembly is established for COP30. Another example is timebanking. Timebanking UK is an organization and platform for peer-to-peer services, where time is currency. As a member of timebanking, you can offer a service, say grocery shopping, and receive a service from the community, for example hanging something on a wall. Currently (July-25) nearly 6,8 million hours of service have been exchanged. Members have reported improvements in mental health, and 80% of time bank members felt more part of the community.

So, if you, as a consumer, are self-centered, don’t trust others, don’t save resources, but as a citizen, you feel more part of the community, you trust others, and are more likely to save resources, then, what if... What if we become more like citizens than consumers in our private lives? What would be different in such a future? Can the citizen be the new consumer?

SIGNAL! ARE THE RULES TRIPPING OR AM I?

STARTED TRACKING: 2024

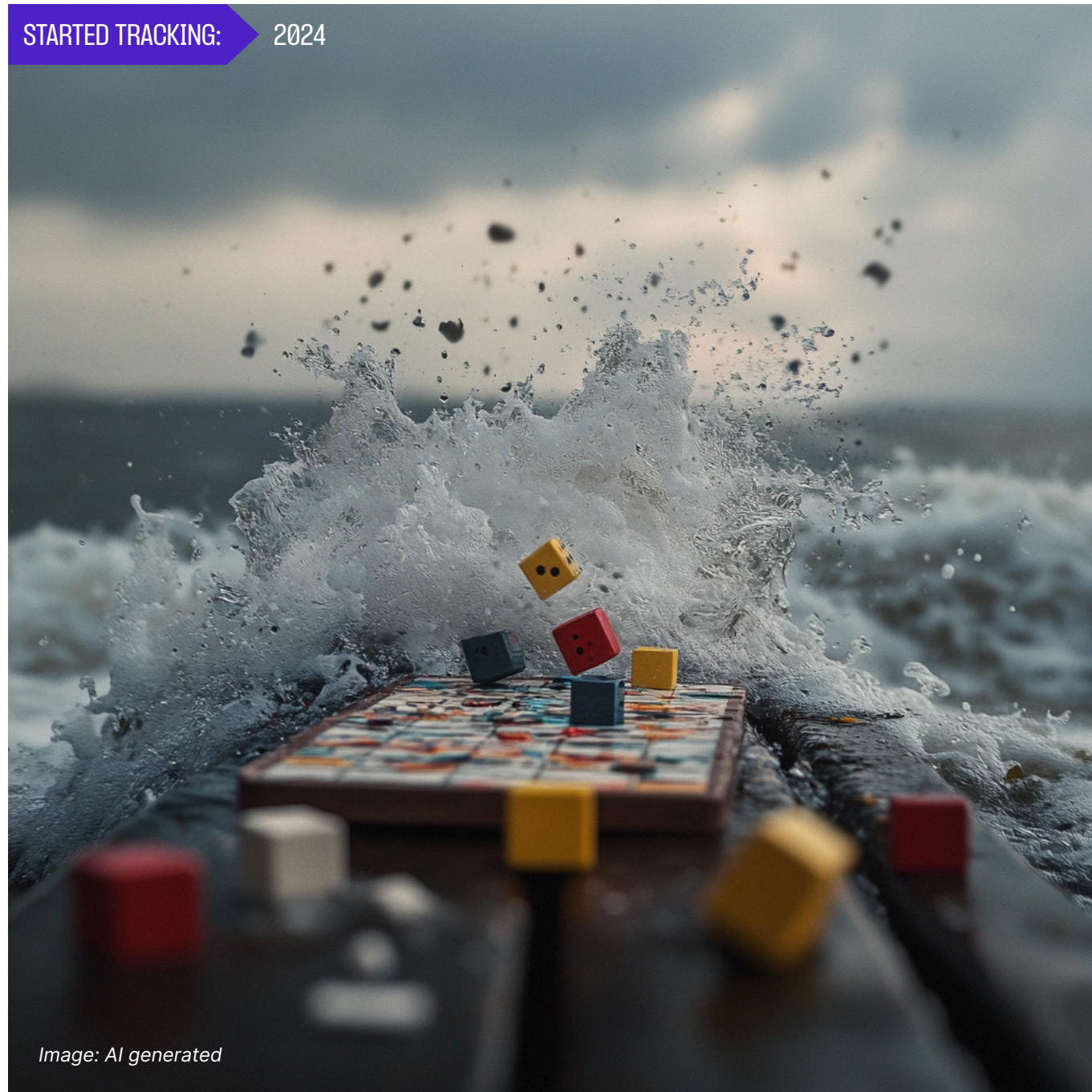


Image: AI generated

Have you tried to play a board game on a bridge when the waves hit? Then you might empathise with the many corporate leaders when CSRD was accepted - and then Omnibus. CSRD: the updated Corporate Social Responsibility Directive with clearer standards on sustainability accounting, and the Omnibus proposals aiming to simplify and remove a number of the key provisions. Some scientists and experts however put forth arguments that the simplified demands also mean reduced pressure and momentum for transitioning towards sustainable corporate practices – and a risk that

companies with heavy environmental burden are rid of any demands for transition.

Omnibus is not the only example of the recent rollback of key CSRD provisions. There is more that suggests that the wind might be blowing in the other direction: a shift from stricter rules and higher demands to accelerate sustainable development, to both governments and some world leading corporations taking a few steps back in their sustainability ambitions and transition work. Perhaps the most evident example of this signal is the changes made by the Trump administration in the USA, including withdrawal from the Paris Agreement. The result? You, me, companies and organisations don't know how to act anymore. Are the rules tripping or are we?

Yet, 227 companies in Sweden stood behind an article demanding the government to stop hindering the sustainability transition back in 2022. Companies like ICA, Telia and Skanska argued that the transition accelerated by long term incentives, policy actions and stricter regulations by governments, creates opportunities and competitive advantages rather than the opposite. Other companies, such as Unilever, are supporting stricter regulations and protested when the European Round Table on industry, of which they are a part, in a letter demanded the European Commission to weaken the directive on corporate sustainability reporting. Norrskan, the Swedish impact investment hub, opens a hub in Brussels to close the gap between impact start-ups and policy makers in 2025.

Given that we might not be able to expect that politicians and government agencies will set rules that pave the way for sustainable development; how might we, as people and companies, be part of setting such rules and incentives?

PRACTICE SIGNALS

A signal is only a signal unless it's acted upon. **And someone will.**

We scan for and package signals to be practiced - not consumed - towards a future within planetary boundaries. Via our Signals Platform, you can get access to not only science and futurist verified signals, but a wide range of tools and exercises to help create more futures literate innovations, and support; capacity development, decisions, strategy and communication efforts.

Get a taste of practicing signals with the simple exercise below.



Time: 15–30 minutes

Participants: Individual or in a group (3–6 people)

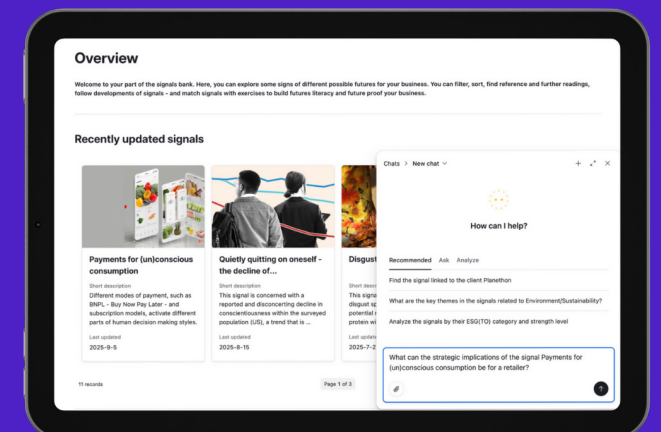
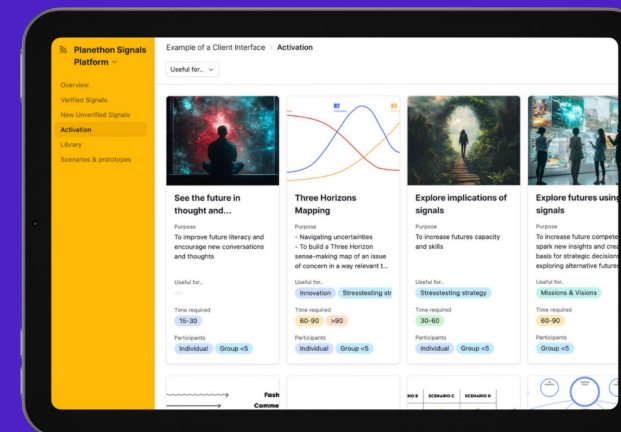
Material: One of the signals presented in this paper

1. Pick a signal.
2. Reflect on and/or discuss what this signal might mean for the future - and what you can do for the future today. Guiding questions:
 - What if one of the possible developments of the signal becomes mainstream in the future. What could it mean for...
 - ... You? Your family and friends?
 - ... Your work? Your role, your team, your business?
 - ... Society? Who would be winners, and who would be losers from this development?
 - ... What habits and behaviors could become more common, and less common, given this development?
 - How might we act today to avoid or encourage this development?

TIP SOCIAL — NOT PLANETARY — SYSTEMS WITH PLANETHON'S SIGNALS PLATFORM

With a portal set up to Planethon's signals platform, you can:

- **Explore signals.** Identify early signs of change and their possible implications
- **Sort and filter.** Filter signals in categories such as ESG, ESRS, STEEP, theme, industry or project.
- **Follow development of signals.** The contents of each signal is updated as new real life examples, statistics, and insights are spotted.
- **Add your own signals.** Register your own signals - and get them validated by our futures team.
- **Discover more signals.** New signals are updated in your portal by our futures team, in line with mutually agreed areas of interest.
- **Explore scenarios and prototypes.** Connect signals to future scenarios and possible solutions.
- **Activation templates.** Access ready-to-go exercises and reflection questions to work strategically with your signals.
- **Full library.** View or download all references, sources, and evidence material behind each signal.
- **Team access.** Share signals, comment and tag colleagues, and collaborate in teams.
- **Email notifications.** Get notifications of important updates on the platform.



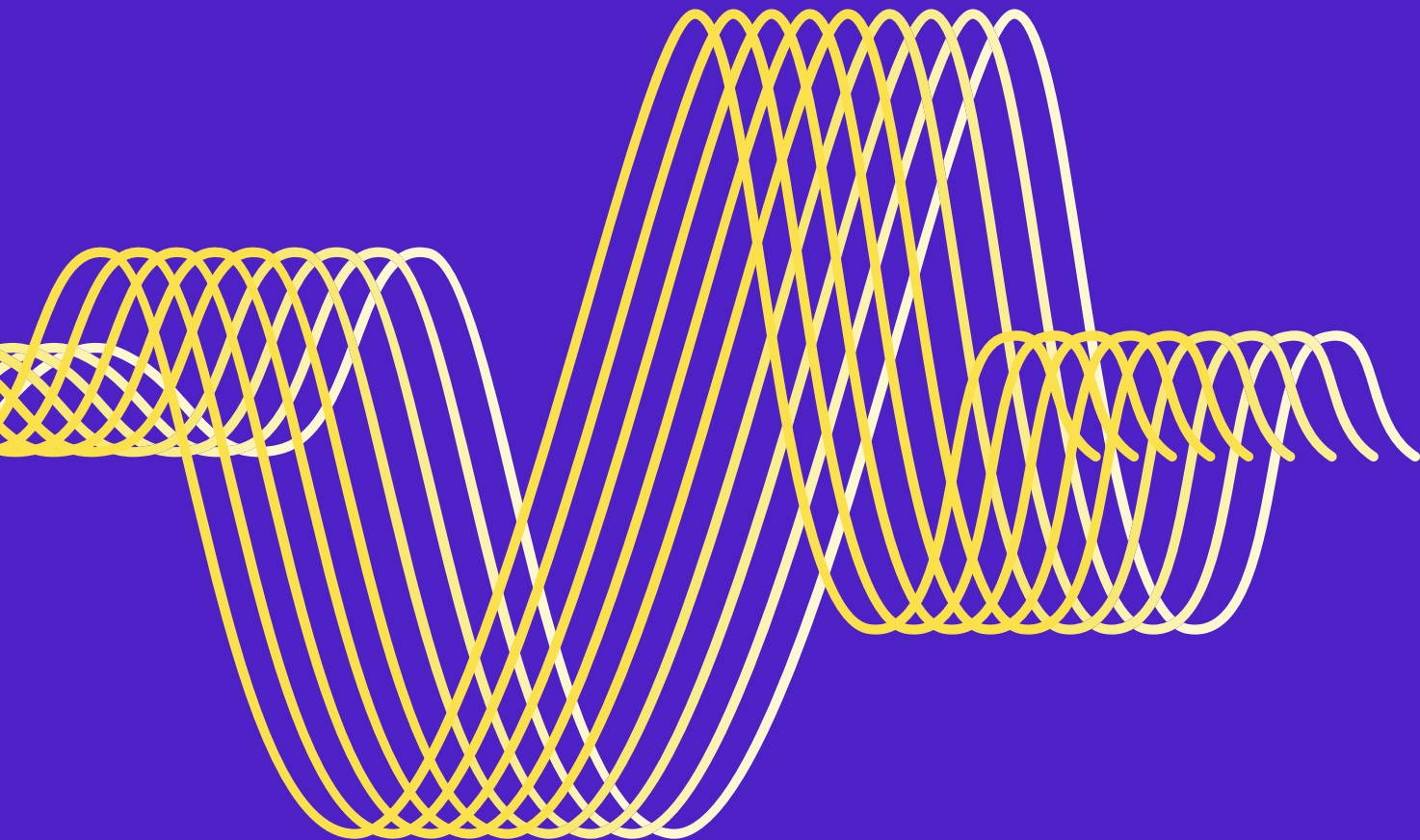
You can also order reports and presentation materials of your signals, for specific, yearly or monthly events and occasions. Examples of such reports are for the project *Proteinrevolutionen* ([access here](#)) and the report *Företagen & Framtiden* ([access here](#)).

GET STARTED

THE PERFECT FUTURE DOESN'T EXI...

That's right - **no future exists.**

And that is a great thing. Because you are part of deciding and creating it.



Do you want to get to know which signals of change are relevant for you and your business
- and how signals can be used to lead from the future?



Contact us or book a demo of the signals platform at hello@planethon.io

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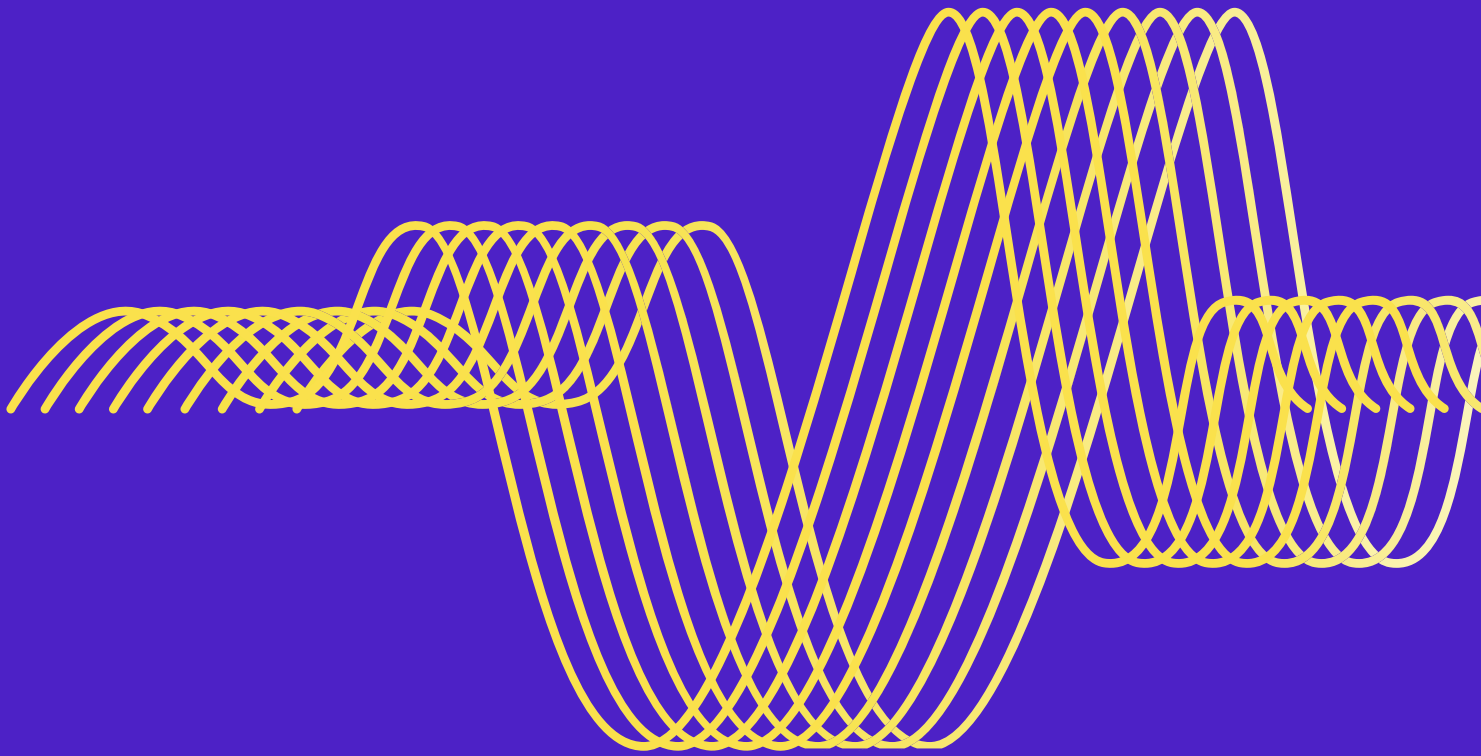
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