

# Design in / for Transformations

26.11.2026–27.11.2026

How is design involved with transformations? This might seem an obvious question, since design is traditionally understood as a profession of making and **transforming**, as well as a discipline of questioning, facilitating, and sustaining change. Since the emergence of industrial mass production in the 19th century, design has been discursively intertwined with social transformation. In the 2000s, this connection became explicit through labels such as “design for social change” and “transformation design”, articulating new roles for design in reshaping organisations, public services, and everyday routines. Today, amid multiple crises – climate change, social inequality, digital disruption – this discourse gains renewed urgency as transformation design establishes itself as a transdisciplinary practice that positions design not merely as a response to change, but as a conscious co-creation of profound societal transitions.

The Swiss Design Network (SDN) Symposium 2026 invites design researchers, educators, practitioners, and students to collectively explore and redefine the role of design **in** and **for** transformations, as well as to reassess this relationship in light of the profound and accelerating transformations we live in—social, ecological, technological, and economic ones:

1. How do current transformations differ in nature and scale from those of the past, and how does design extend or challenge earlier ambitions of “design for social change” in this entangled context?
2. In what ways can design’s dual role—as a profession of making and transforming, and as a discipline of questioning, facilitating, and sustaining change—enable or constrain profound societal transitions? Reflections on the limit of design and instances when design has a role to maintain the status-quo and avoid more radical transformations will be welcomed.
3. Which transformations are we looking forward to, and which might we want to avoid—by design, and for whom? How might this reconfigure design’s responsibilities, actors, and sites of intervention in organisations, public services, infrastructures, and everyday life?
4. How can transformations be regarded as disputed, open-ended processes—globally intersected yet locally situated—that create space for marginalised perspectives beyond dominant narratives of innovation and progress?

We invite you to consider **transformations** as a plural, generative and non-neutral perspective for contemporary design practices and discourses, as certain transformations might be more or less visible, inclusive or problematic depending on points of view. We welcome “transformative” ways to address the question of transformation in and for design.

We are committed to making this symposium an inclusive, accessible, and diverse forum.

## Submission Guidelines and important dates

- Submit via [ConfTool](#)
- Possible formats and what to submit:
  - **Research papers and case studies (for Tracks 1–3):**  
Track number + abstract (max. 1000 words excluding references)  
+ Bio (max. 300 words).
  - **Workshop concepts (for Tracks 1–3):**  
Track number + abstract (max. 800 words, excluding references)  
+ Bio (max 300 words).
  - **Panel proposals (for Tracks 1–3):**  
Track number + panel description (max. 2.000 words excluding references), including
    - 1) the key concept / topic of the panel
    - 2) a short description of each contribution (title + short abstract).
    - 3) Bio for each suggested contributor (max 300 words each).We suggest panels to have not more than 3 contributors.  
Please curate your panel to ensure diversity of voices and institutional affiliations.
  - **Experimental contributions (for Track 4):**  
**Abstract** (max 1.500 words) + Bio (max 300 words).  
We welcome a wide range of submission formats (see Track 4 below).  
However, please specify the format and purpose clearly.

### Key Dates:

- Submission deadline: 30<sup>th</sup> April 2026
- Feedback on accepted papers: May 2026
- Confirmations sent & registration opens: 15 June 2026
- Papers accepted / first draft program available: July 2026
- Registration closes: October 2026
- Symposium dates: 26 + 27 November 2026

All abstracts will be published in the conference proceedings.  
We will be inviting a selection of contributions to a publication planned for 2027.

## Track 1

### **DESIGN *IN* TRANSFORMATIONS**

This track examines how the design discipline itself is undergoing fundamental change – evolving in its purposes, methods, self-image, professional identity and disciplinary boundaries in response to wider societal, ecological, and technological shifts. We invite critical reflections and case studies on how designers and design researchers are rethinking their roles, ethics, and practices in a rapidly transforming world.

Possible themes and questions include:

- The evolving identity and responsibilities of designers, including fostering personal growth, resilience, and critical reflection. How are our methodologies, tools, and approaches transforming in light of digital, ecological, and social transitions?
- Critical analysis of design's historical role in transformation: What can we learn from past successes and failures? What might be worth saving—or resisting—in current transformations? What is the impact of new technologies (AI, biodesign, platform economies) on design practice and thinking?
- Design research is undergoing transformations as decolonial and intersectional-feminist perspectives challenge established norms and practices pushing for more engagement with systemic power embedded in design. How does this affect current and future design practice and theory?

## Track 2

### **DESIGN *FOR* TRANSFORMATIONS**

This track focuses on design as an active agent and catalyst for transformations in societal, ecological, economic, and organizational contexts. We invite contributions that showcase how design and its collaborative approaches are applied to initiate, guide, and sustain meaningful transformations toward more sustainable, just, and resilient futures. We also invite critical reflections on what counts as transformation beyond dominant narratives of progress and innovation: How can we re-design these narratives?

Possible themes and questions include:

- How can design prototype and implement alternative systems for living, working, consuming, or governing?
- What roles can participatory and inclusive future-oriented, speculative and critical design approaches play in fostering our capacity to imagine and steer transformations in new ways and directions?
- Questions of ethics, power, and responsibility in design for transformations are sometimes overlooked. What open questions remain – regarding accountability and limits- particularly given design's entanglement with the status-quo?
- Inclusive and creative methods for measuring the impact of design in transformational processes are needed: what exists and what do we need to experiment with?

## Track 3

### **PEDAGOGIES OF TRANSFORMATIONS**

This track explores how design education must transform to prepare future designers for their roles in and for transformations. Here, institutional landscapes—particularly within academia and the public sector in Switzerland and internationally—are increasingly shaped by austerity measures. These are not merely background conditions but trigger specific dynamic of transformation, often prioritising economic efficiency over long-term intellectual, social, or ecological value.

For this track, we are particularly interested in submissions developed in collaboration with MA students, and we encourage joint proposals between educators, students, and practitioners that reconsider curricula, teaching formats, and learning environments.

Possible themes and questions include:

- How do financial and political constraints reshape the very purpose and possibility of design education?
- What new pedagogical models can teach design **in/for** transformation? How can personal development, wellbeing, and critical reflection be integrated into design education, student-led initiatives and experimental learning formats?
- Transformative learning through real-world projects, community engagement, and transdisciplinary collaboration.
- Learning for resilience, adaptability, and ethical responsibility.
- Tools and methods for assessing transformational competencies.

## Track 4

### **TRANSFORMATIONS EVERYWHERE (OPEN TRACK)**

This experimental and inclusive track welcomes contributions that explore transformations in, through, and around design in bodies, materials, ideas or processes in open-ended, emergent, or unconventional ways. We invite works-in-progress, provocations, manifestos, artistic interventions, visual essays, short films, performances, interactive installations, documentary formats, and hybrid presentations that do not fit neatly into traditional academic categories but expand our understanding of design's role in a changing world.

We welcome:

- Early-stage research, incomplete projects, and exploratory reflections.
- Provocations and manifestos about design in and for transformations.
- Visual essays, short films, performances, or interactive installations.
- Critical, personal, cross-disciplinary, non-disciplinary, and undisciplined perspectives on transformation as lived experience.