

# EMBRACING (IM)BALANCE



REDEFINING QUALITY OF LIFE AND  
RESPONSIBILITY FOR OPTIMISING HEALTH  
IN THE EVERYDAY LIFE OF TOMORROW

**W.I.R.E.**

# WHY QUALITY OF LIFE REQUIRES MORE THAN HEALTH

Contrary to the common belief that medical and technological progress will eventually bring an end to diseases and lead to ever-increasing life expectancy, the analysis of the key factors influencing our health paints a different picture. Ironically, the consequences of increasing prosperity and the manifestations of progress over the last 50 years, characterised by developments such as an abundant food supply, micro-mobility, cosmetic enhancement of our appearance and digital social networking, are contributing to a rise in non-communicable diseases (NCDs). This emerging 'slow pandemic' is likely to have a profound impact on the 21st century.

The range of disease patterns is as broad as the factors influencing them, which are shaped by changes in behaviour or environmental risks. Lack of exercise leads to more heart disease. Chemical ingredients in lipsticks or food increase the risk of cancer. Microplastic particles from packaging or car tyres could be linked to the increase in male infertility. Too much screen time can promote near-sightedness or loneliness.

## New players

As a result, health is largely determined by our everyday lives. Accordingly, new structures are needed to help treat diseases where people live, but above all to change habits and environmental

risks so that they do not occur in the first place. The concept of prevention is not new. Public health systems have been advocating and promoting it for decades. However, healthy behaviour and risk reduction in everyday life cannot be achieved primarily through education campaigns or regulatory measures. Instead, health 'by design' must become part of our daily lives and consumer culture. This will open up an expanded, everyday-oriented healthcare system that will take on an increasingly important role beyond traditional medical service providers. The future players include food manufacturers and retailers, property developers, mobility providers, cosmetics producers, tech companies and the fashion industry. However, strengthening health beyond marketing promises would require a transfer of expertise and cooperation between traditional providers, from life science companies to hospitals, and the 'designers of everyday life'.

## From quantity to quality

The traditional healthcare system is geared towards the treatment of diseases – and defines the maximisation of life years as the central quality indicator. This model is reaching the limits of feasibility, affordability and viability. However, this happens because our increasing awareness of potential risk factors, present in nearly all aspects of life, can lead to heightened sensitivity, more fears and counter-reactions. After all, it is not only

## RISE OF THE SLOW PANDEMICS

Increase in disease through progress: a paradox of modernity



### MIND YOUR VANITY

Studies show that women who wear make-up are perceived by others as more attractive, competent, dominant and socially respected. At the same time, toxic PFAS 'forever chemicals,' which accumulate in the human body and are associated with cancer or

immunodeficiency disorders, have been detected in numerous cosmetic products.

<https://news.nd.edu/news/use-of-pfas-in-cosmetics-widespread-new-study-finds/>  
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8956164/>



### MAKE LOVE NOT PLASTICS

Plastics are essential for safety in vehicles, connectivity through lightweight smart-phones or better health through hygienic consumer goods. But microplastic particles released into the environment through car tyres or synthetic clothing could be a significant cause of the decline in male fertility.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9134445/>  
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2873019/>



### LOWER YOUR LIKES

Digital sharing makes life easier, from socialising to listening to music and simplifying everyday life. But frequent use of social media can lead to deep-seated mental health problems and depression.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7364393/>



### Beware of your barbecue

Many people derive pleasure from eating meat. MRI studies show that areas of the brain responsible for pleasure are stimulated by the consumption of tasty foods. At the same time, the consumption of red meat is classified by the WHO as 'probably carcinogenic.'

<https://www.ed.ac.uk/news/2022/taste-for-food-is-in-our-genes-study-shows>  
<https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/cancer-carcinogenicity-of-the-consumption-of-red-meat-and-processed-meat>

sugar, fat, alcohol or red meat that are known to be harmful to health. Poor ambient air quality or drinking hot tea can contribute to asthma or cancer risks. Thanks to increasingly powerful diagnostics and growing transparency about potential dangers, the implementation of a 'zero risk' strategy leads to wide-ranging restrictions in everyday life. In other words: the goal of maximising lifespan and equating quality of life with physical health results in missing out on experiences. In a holistic understanding of health that includes social and psychological aspects, this actually lowers quality of life. The actual objective is therefore 'adding life to years' instead of 'adding years to life'.

### **Embracing imbalances**

A future-oriented understanding of quality of life must therefore focus on a balance that does not maximise but rather optimises the different aspects of health and promotes a balance between physical, mental and social health. However, this balance involves temporary imbalances: for example, savouring a dessert can put a strain on the body but at the same time promote mental health. Intensive work can increase the psychological pressure on individuals, yet it can also enhance social cohesion among teams. Isolating oneself with computer games can promote loneliness, but at the same time, it can help with mental regeneration. The aim of a future-oriented quality of life is therefore not to maximise years of life, but quality of life in a holistic sense.

### **Personalisation through personal responsibility**

Defining such a balance, while simultaneously accepting temporary imbalances, can only be implemented to a limited extent through universally applicable rules or absolute behavioral guidelines. Balancing health and enjoyment should be tailored to the individual, taking into account their unique predispositions, life circumstances and personal preferences to form the foundation of this equilibrium. Even with the use of personalised data or AI-based recommendation systems, it is unlikely that they can fully accommodate the complexity of various influencing factors and individual preferences.

One thing is clear: scientific principles form the foundation on which decisions must be made. However, this also requires an overarching understanding of short-term and long-term risks. For instance, eating too much chocolate occasionally is generally not an issue, but doing so on a regular basis is. Activities or products that pose significant health risks, like addictive or intoxicating substances, must be clearly identified as such. This also

establishes the groundwork for necessary regulatory restrictions, for instance, with regard to general or age-specific bans.

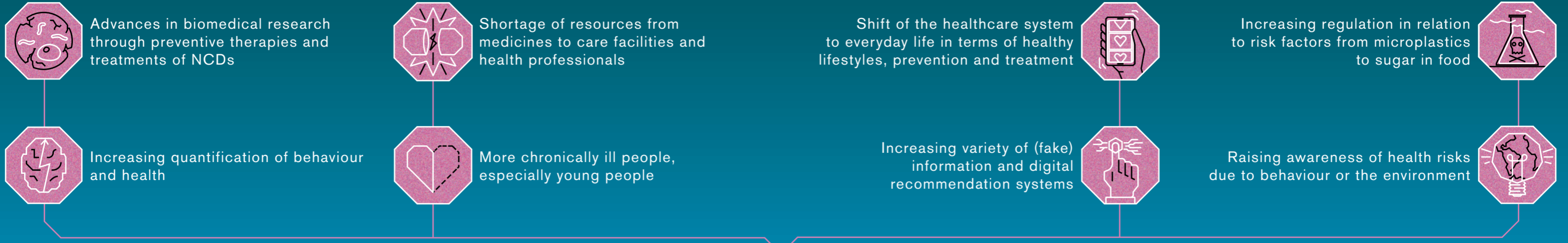
### **Sustainability through decentralised structures**

The basis for optimising quality of life in everyday life is a broad range of solutions that include products and services, but above all also incorporate pragmatic decision-making principles that help to optimise the balance between health and enjoyment. A central basis is the integration of health into the infrastructure of homes, offices or cities, where exercise and social contacts are promoted through incentive systems or architecture. Progress in biomedical research is also opening up a wide range of solutions for the next generation of functionalised foods or food supplements. Using predictive medicines via everyday products such as chewing gum may also be an option to prevent slow pandemics. However, it is also important to integrate stimulants or stressors into everyday life in moderation. Rituals such as celebrations in the spirit of Mardi Gras can play a central role here, where loss of control or intoxicants can help to optimise the mental health of a society. In this context, there are opportunities to consciously position stimulants for this purpose and to point out threshold values or dosages for everything from meat to cosmetics. This would help strengthen people's personal responsibility and have them take responsibility for balancing risks themselves.

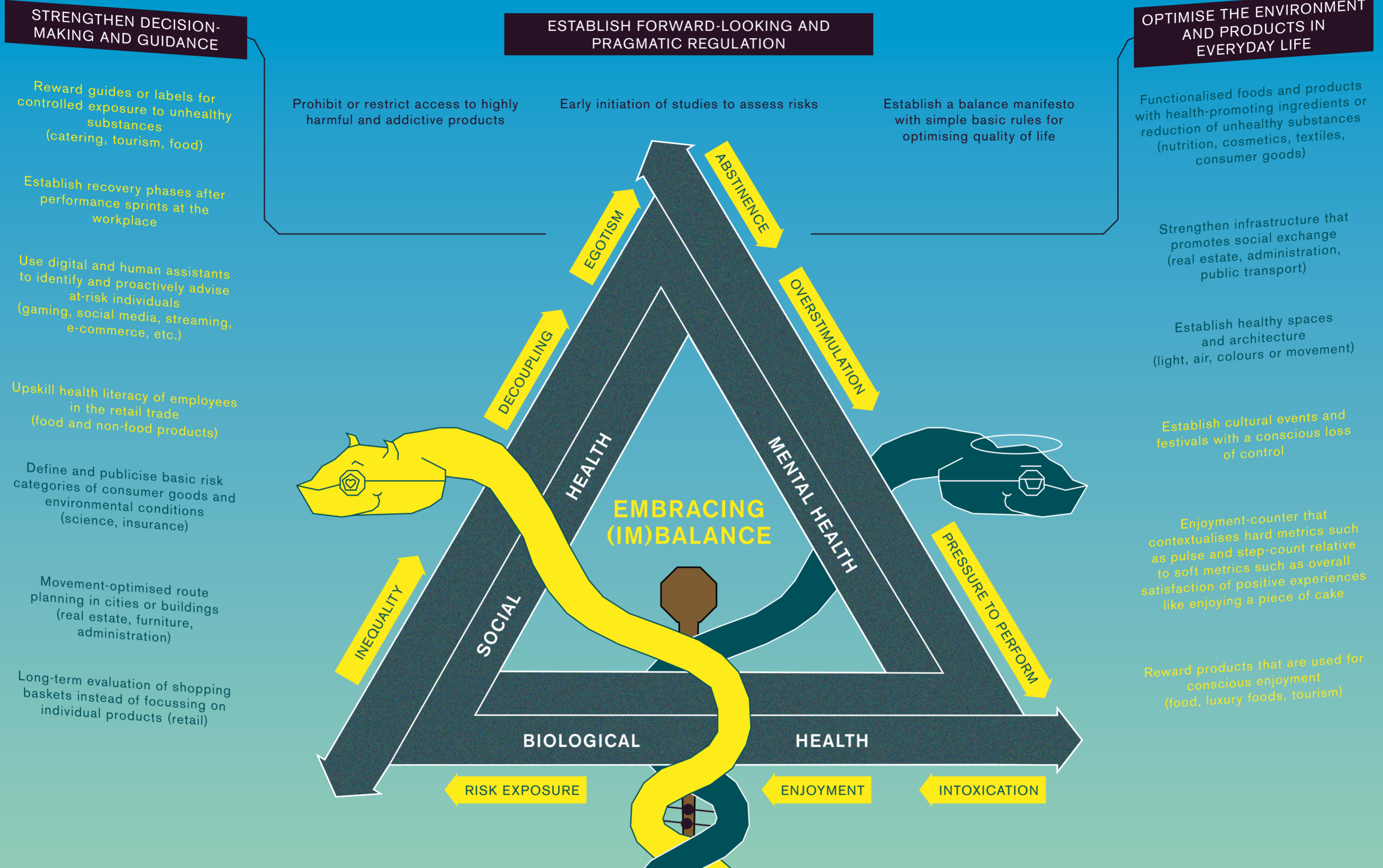
The basis for transitioning to a decentralised 'life-care-system' relies on specific services that offer opportunities for market growth and help the involved parties establish themselves as trusted organisations. In this context, the significance of health as a central part of the social aspect of ESG strategies will continue to take centre stage.



# THE FUTURE OF EVERYDAY LIFE IN THE AGE OF DISEASES AND SLOW PANDEMICS



## REDEFINING QUALITY OF LIFE



## ECOSYSTEMS FOR HEALTH IN EVERYDAY LIFE



# AS IS A TALE, SO IS LIFE: NOT HOW LONG IT IS, BUT HOW GOOD IT IS, IS WHAT MATTERS

SENECA

As part of the Future Society Initiative, the Think Tank W.I.R.E. analysed the consequences of the increase in non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in its publication *Slow Pandemics* (NZZ Libro). In further projects, the initiative delved deeper into key issues such as redefining quality of life and developing a healthcare system that focuses on everyday life. This publication is part of an in-depth study focussing on the link between health and enjoyment. It lays the foundation for developing a network of stakeholders who define quality of life in the 21st century.

W.I.R.E. is an independent think tank that has been curating the shaping of the future at the interface between business, science and society since 2007. Systematic early identification and analysis of relevant developments, trends and technologies form the basis for developing long-term strategies and differentiating positioning for private and public organisations and their decision-makers.

[www.thewire.ch](http://www.thewire.ch)



PMI SCIENCE  
PHILIP MORRIS INTERNATIONAL

W.I.R.E.

WEB FOR INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH AND EXPERTISE  
THINK TANK FOR BUSINESS, SCIENCE AND SOCIETY