NeoRural Futures

SPECULATIVE•EDU•NEORURALS

NEORURALS

SPECULATIVE

A documented case history of a speculative design learning experience in Rome
2 - 6 September 2019

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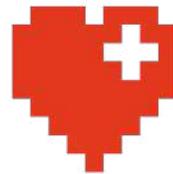Erasmus+ Programme
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FOREWORD

In this pamphlet we will describe and analyse the characteristics and the dynamics of NeoRural Futures, the summer school of SpeculativeEdu: an Erasmus+ project funded by the European Commission we are glad to be part of with our research center HER.

The summer school was held in Rome in September 2019. The objective was to test out the findings of the State of the Art through which the consortium of the SpeculativeEdu project mapped out the education programs and the practices which are involved with a variety of approaches and methods related to speculative design.

For this reason, we set out to design and implement an immersive, experiential and performative educational experience to:

- expose participants to a number of different ways in which educators and practitioners intend speculative design and related approaches;
- put speculative design and related practices in crisis, by addressing their more current objections and critiques in practice, in order to verify how different subjects react to them, and which strategies can be used to evolve the practice;
- be in itself a speculative design project, by choosing a theme, speculating on it, and producing a design and communication artifact around it that would be able to engage participants and audiences into a shared discussion about the implications of the future scenario; in this case, the speculative design was the summer school itself.

In all three items, we tried to avoid being pedagogical. Our aim was to try to obtain

sincere, direct – possibly unbiased – feedbacks from all sorts of participants and passers-by: for this reasons, we did not highlight these items explicitly, but rather chose to expose them through practice and concrete situations, and then to adopt ways in which to check for results and to ask for feedback.

The experience was intensive, from the point of view of the result, the process and the relations: the group inspiring. We decided to document what happened in a full case study, creating this short publication to create actionable knowledge for enyone interested in learing more, in particular: students, designer, teachers and professors, the speculative design community which is a rich vibrant network of thinkers and professionals around the world, constantly growing around the world.

From a certain point of view this publication is also a how-to: it is our style in art and research, to make them alive and part of the world.

Trento (Italy), 16 June 2020
Salvatore Iaconesi and Oriana Persico

INTRODUCTION

The workshop was titled "NeoRural Futures. Speculative Designs for rurality in global scenarios". We chose the theme of neo-rurality for different reasons.

First of all, for the fact that it is a theme that is tightly interconnected to many delicate areas of the changing scenarios of our times: the transformation of cities, of work, of food, of nature, of the environment, of energy, of knowledge, of communication. These all find revealing and meaningful manifestations in rurality.

Cities are changing and, thus, rurality is, too: people move back and forth from cities to rurality because cities sometimes cost too much, but they also have more dense opportunities. In the economy of the crisis, for example in Italy, many people have rural origins, maybe they have their grandmother's house in rural villages of the XV century, for free, and they go and live there, but maybe they keep on working in the city, and they just go to sleep in the village. They may even have land there, which they don't use. Or they live (or only go to sleep) in a village of 200 souls, while knowing none of them.

In different parts of the world, people move between cities and rurality for completely different reasons, that are always connected to fundamental issues of our changing planet: poverty, access to resources and opportunity, wars, health, environment, energy, education, work, and more.

Thinking about "rurality" also forces us to take into consideration the ways in which technologies have substantially reshaped territories, communities and opportunities for relation and interaction.
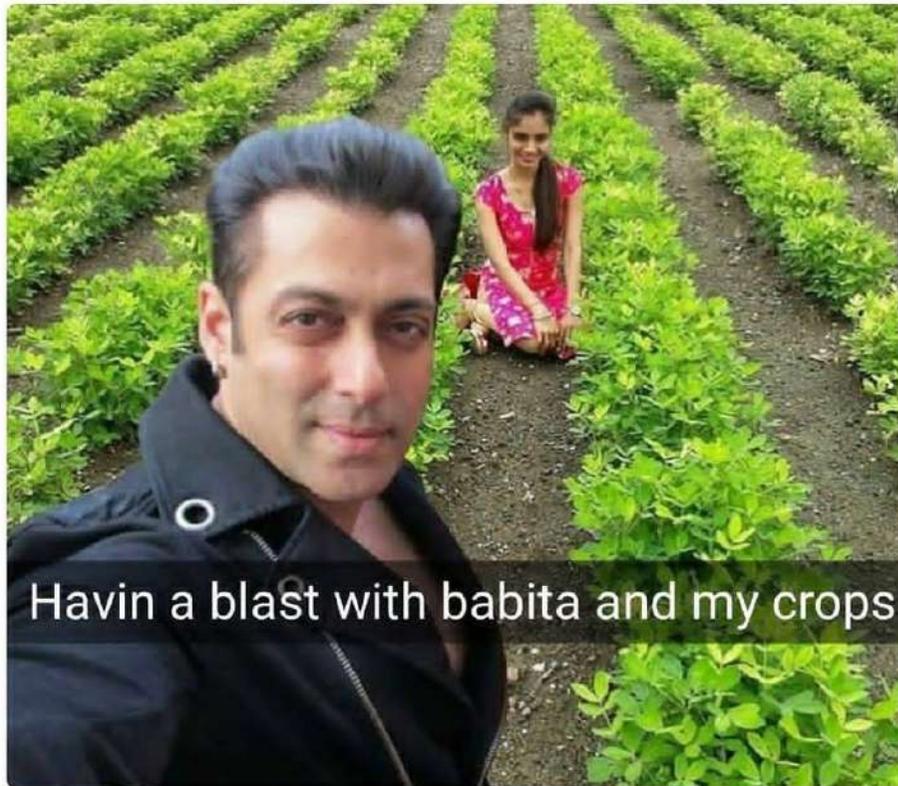
Image used for the first day presentation by Salvatore Iaconesi

These people in the image: are he and his girlfriend in a rural or urban context? They are in both at the same time. This image takes place in rurality, but is full of the city: these people are looking at themselves in rurality through the lens of the city, and representing themselves in the city through rurality. The result is that they are in both and none of the two at the same time, enabling a series of possible "third" spaces and places to emerge – that are of a totally different kind.

Or: are we in rurality when we visit an urban garden, where they grow crops for urban inhabitants? Is a drone that is remotely controlled by some startup to take care of the rural fields a thing of the city or of rurality? Or something else?

We could continue to come up with examples endlessly. The reason is embodied exactly in this radical transformation, and in all the domains that it touches. And also in all the conflicts that it creates (for example in regards to the transformation of work, in the form of modern slavery that is too many times associated to rural work, in migrations, energy, the phenomena of land-grabbing, in climate change, chemistry, and the globalization of food).

All of these factors make this theme a perfect candidate for speculative design processes.

To take into account all of these different possibilities, we chose to use a very minimalistic definition of what is Rurality, which only has two elements:

- an element of "density"
- and one of "negotiability of reality".

Rurality is less dense than urban spaces. There is less people, far apart. There is also more distanced opportunities, and of different kind: for interaction, relation, work, consumption, and more. As a complement, there is more space and time: to experiment, sleep, rest, think, eat, work, and many more things. This diminished density has implications, which characterize the contexts we wish to explore through speculation.

And then there is the element of "negotiability of reality".

The city is the land of "services", which can be defined as those encoded processes and procedures which coordinate subjects, resources, infrastructures, materials, work, energy and more, according to which multiple subjects can participate and collaborate to match a need with its fulfillment. Cities are dense with services. The technological city, tendentially becomes a composition of services, in which platforms of different kinds address consumption, health, relation, entertainment, communication, movement, expression and more.

In this scenario, everything tendentially becomes a service and, thus, a procedure of some kind.

Now: procedures are non negotiable by definition. Therefore, a reality composed solely by procedures is less negotiable than other ones.

We defined **Rurality** as those **contexts in which a minor density is also matched by a minor presence of services, standardized procedures and, thus, with a reality that is more negotiable**: determinable at relational levels more than at formal, predetermined ones.

It is important to note two things in this definition:

- first, this is not necessarily a positive characteristic; if reality is more negotiable you may be find yourself to be forced to negotiate to have your rights and freedoms respected;
- second, this is not a romantic definition alluding to some form of ideal context where "reality is more negotiable, like in the old times", but, rather, a very conscious reflection on the ways in which platforms and services, apart from being useful, sometimes also exercise power through their interfaces, procedures and through the other ways in which they encode reality.

Rurality is less dense, and reality is more negotiable, due to a diminished presence of standardized procedures and interfaces.

From this definition, we began.

THE HUMAN ELEMENT

Participants

A public call was launched using the website and the network of the Speculative Edu consortium and the partner of the event, in particular:

- HER - Human Ecosystems Relazioni, as leading organization of this specific action, and as part of the SpeculativeEdu consortium;
- RUFA - Rome University of Fine Art, Rural Hack and Societing 4.0 as local partners, external to the consortium.

We created a landing page, a visual identity and a google form to collect and manage the registration process, asking participants a series of questions about their desired roles, skills and backgrounds, but also their motivations (why they wanted to participate and how it could improve their professional life).

A series of different communication packages – to be used for different type of audience – where then assembled, to spread the call to students, professionals, researchers, PhDs, designers, or the rural world.

The main communication tools used for the campaign were:

- newsletters (of the Speculative Edu project and of the different partners);
- thematic mailing lists (selected in the field of design, speculative/critical design, making, arts, rurality);
- word of mouth/personal contacts, in particular among/with students and professors of different departments from different universities (in particular Italy, Europe, USA) who invite their students, phd, researchers;
- social networks (facebook and twitter).

The active contribution of each partner was crucial in the extraordinary success of call: both the consortium and the local partners published and diffused the information package accurately, following the directions and involving their networks.

As a result a group including an extreme diversity – in terms of background, geographies, roles and skills – was formed.

The numbers were impressive. We received 95 registrations and we were forced to close registrations before the deadline. Nonetheless, after we closed the online form, we received 6 additional requests of participation that are not in the statistics, for a total of 101 subscribers from all over the world.
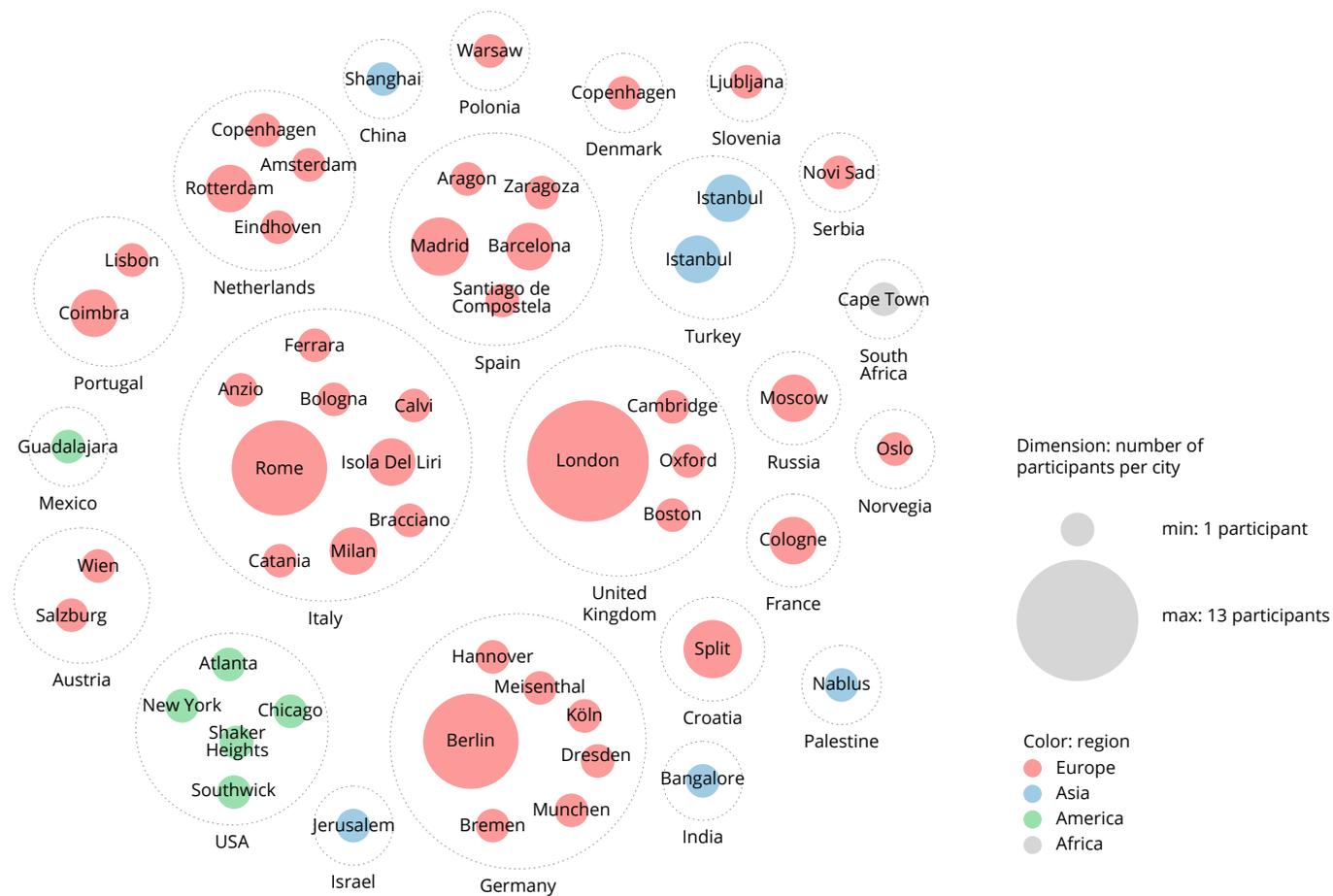
As shown in the visualization above, the call had a global impact, fully covering Europe, but also including the USA, Mexico, Cina, Russia, Israel, India, South Africa. The most represented city was London (13 applications), followed by Rome and Berlin (with 8 applications), Madrid, Split and Istanbul (3 applications). The remaining applications are an explosion of cities from all over, with 2 or 1 subscribers per each location.

Role

Professional
45,7%

Student
33,0%

Phd/Researcher
10,6%

Teacher/Professor
5,3%

Graduate/Recent Graduate
3,2%

Student/Freelance
2,1%

Background

Design
43,6%

Architecture
11,7%

Art
5,3%

Anthropology
4,3%

Engineering
4,3%

Social Science
3,2%

Urban Planning
3,2%

Economy
2,1%

Other
22,3%

Background (detailed)

- Applied physics, Mechanical engeneering, Design
- Architecture and Contemporary Art Management
- Art, UX Design
- City and Regional Planning
- Communication
- Computer Science, Design
- Design (BA), Literature, Art, Media (MA), Management (PhD)
- Economic History, Economics, Sociology
- Landscape Architecture
- Masterplanning and Urban design
- Materials Research
- Mathematics, Economy
- Philosophy
- Psychology
- Psychology, Business Innovation, Hpi design thinking basic track
- Scenography
- Service Design innovation (MA) and Psychology (BA)
- Sociology, Health Administration, Service Design
- Storytelling
- Trends researcher and Analyst
- Urban Design

The visualization in the previous page presents the roles and backgrounds of the participants.

Surprisingly enough, the majority of the applicants were composed by professionals (45,7%), and only a third by students (33%). The summer school was also able to attract phd/researchers (8,5%) and teachers/professors (5,3%). A small percentage of participants uses different definitions to describe themselves, such as "graduate students" (2,1%), freelancers, "Student & Working freelance on thev side": all of these definitions point to an uncertain social position in between work and university.

Coherently with the project and partners consortium, Design is the largest percentage of the represented background (43,6%), followed by Architecture (11,7%), Art (5,3%), Anthropology and Engineering (4,3%), Social Science (3,1%). A tremendous variety of disciplines is also represented, from Economy to Psychology, to Urban Planning or Data Science, showing that speculative design is able to attract a transdisciplinary audience.

The most difficult part of the whole process was perhaps in having to make a selection among this incredible group of people, skilled and deeply motivated to come.

Here below, we present a few of their motivations, as they had inserted them into the registration form:

"*"As a social designer focused on urban areas I experience different understanding of rural areas. In current times we try to develop cities as most economic and ecologic way of leaving for our overloaded society at the same time forgetting about deserted countryside. We all can also observe rising movement of people traveling, dreaming and finally moving out in opposite direction. Personally I am interested what means for my generation this alternative way of living which for our grandparents was most natural and right way to choose. What is rural appears also very romantic but is it really? How to deal with utopian romanticisation of rural areas and lack of understanding or even appreciation of its values but also impediments. I would like to focus on future of rurality in context of climate change and its influence on our future live scenarios."*

"I work primarily in public engagement and social design projects working with institutions and government bodies with very little room for speculative practice. I would like to attend the workshop to see if there is any place for speculative design in the public sector."

"First of all, I've participated several design workshops before, and through my experiences, I think it is a wonderful way to challenge critical issues, and to find effective and meaningful solutions, through gathering talented people from all kinds of backgrounds, communicating and sharing ideas, which is extremely important in a design process. Personally, I come from rural area of China, with my own culture in my blood, went abroad to meet new cultures at a young age. I've studied philosophy for 3 years in Beijing, China, then 5 years of architecture study in Ferrara, Italy, and now working in an architecture studio in Italy for more than 1 year. So, I know how important it is to communicate interculturally and to work within an interdisciplinary context. And then about NeoRural Futures, this is always a topic that I'm most interested in, not only because it is related to my own grow-up experience, my own immigrate experience, but also it is an important issue that normally isn't given enough attention, and the design-hood really can offer a lot to it. I've done house-crisis projects (not built, but honorable mentioned) in rural areas of China and of Africa, looking for the new possibilities of NeoRural Futures in this globalization world today. And for my architecture thesis, I've done a city-refurbishment-through-museum project in a rural area in Italy (Alife, Campania, a roman historic town, but currently almost abandoned). Architecture is just one aspect of the whole NeoRural Futures network, and it needs the understanding of the whole context, and the collaboration of other design fields, in order to function better. So, I'd love to participate in this work   shop, to contribute, to share, and most importantly to learn."

"I work as a research associate at the Interaction Design Lab of the University of Applied Sciences Potsdam. Currently I am working on a research project named "PROTOTYP. De-

signing the future materially. Prototypes as communication medium of the new" which reflects on the prototyping process of speculative artifacts. My two fields of study are, first, the prototyping of critical design artifacts for speculative futures in the field of mobility, and second, human-centered visualization for communicating the impact of climate change-related hazards to the population in rural areas (e.g. elderly people, farmers, children...). While the topic (impact of climate change in rural areas) is of high relevance, it is also complex and abstract. And the worst, it is hardly approached in the research (rich cities seem to be more interesting) and if it is approached, it is done in a very institutional (boring, uncommunicative, unpersonal) way: long discussions between policy makers, politicians, etc., where everybody talk too much, everybody has different opinions, "knows" different solutions and where everybody ends up nervous and angry. When I saw the topic of this SpeculativeEdu Workshop I thought it was the perfect synergy between my two fields of study. I believe that speculative objects and scenarios would be great mediators in that discussions, and that speculating about rural futures in a tangible way has a huge potential as communication tool (for creating awareness and engaging discussion), as well as for motivating action. The NeoRural Futures workshop is a good opportunity for me to combine my both areas of study, but also to meet people that are also working at that intersection between speculative design and rural futures."

"The neorural question resonates with me on a deeply personal level. Coming of age in Cambodia in the early 1990s, I witnessed the rapid development of a country in recovery from genocide, civil war and colonial occupation. Within the last decade, a speculative real estate and construction boom consumes natural resources, forcing Phnom Penh's skyline vertically upwards while people at the margins of development remain trapped

in cycles of poverty. Having recently completed a Master's in Urban Planning at Harvard University Graduate School of Design, and seeing the narrow conceptualization of our collective future defined by a class of built environment experts who privilege the urban form as existentially inevitable, I seek the inherently human element of play in Speculative Design practice that is increasingly necessary to challenge the nihilism of this contemporary cultural and political milieu. I want to participate in this workshop because I want to be in partnership with a global network of radical practitioners refusing to accept inherited modes of doing and thinking."

"I am an Urban Design and City Planning Graduate from the Bartlett School of Planning at UCL, and I am currently working at the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) Office in Amman, Jordan. I am extremely passionate and interested in urban design and planning discourses and find this specific theme extremely relevant and topical. I am especially drawn to the possibility of working in a multi-disciplinary team and working with different mediums and tools of design to learn more about speculative design."

"Having a longstanding interest in speculative design, I have worked on projects exploring diverse affordances of emerging technologies such as machine learning, blockchain, and synthetic biology, and probing into social, cultural, and ethical implications of them. Using critical, philosophical, and poetic lenses, I work cross disciplines to search for latent space between technology and humanity, and try to look beyond human-centric view and explore new design materials. The topic of future rurality is very intriguing to me. As designers we tend to focus more on urban environment when speculating about

future scenarios. Yet in the era of social and ecological crisis, how rural environment will be transformed and help transform our ways of living is a topic worth researching and speculating about. I look forward to challenging and being challenged, creating alternative scenarios, and building experiential futures of rurality. In April, I was fortunate to participate in the 'Future Friends' workshop in Maribor, Slovenia, working with people from different backgrounds and being inspired by the great mentors. The workshop and conference were very enjoyable and inspiring and I felt very lucky to be part of the community. I hope very much to have the chance to again participate in the SpeculativeEdu workshop in Rome to continue my engagement with the community."

This are only a few of the 95 motivations we received. All the participants wrote long, passionate answers describing in detail why they wanted to participate: only very few of them wrote more generic text (like "I'm curious, I want to meet new people and enrich my skills"...).

Nonetheless we had only 35 open positions.

Confronted with this richness, the first thing we did was to allocate more space. Our classroom at RUFA could contain 5 more people, so the 35 positions immediately turned 40.

We then tried to welcome as much backgrounds as possible, and to fully benefit from the variety of the different cultures and countries involved in the process: we also

decided to confirm firstly people from abroad (like China or US), so they could organize their intercontinental trips.

Another essential information was for us how the workshop could help their carriers or in general improve their work/research/skills/professional interest:

"

"For the last three years I have shifted my art practice from contemporary painting to performative gestures, social interventions and the creation of curated environments where certain types of engagements can occur, breaching into the philosophies of social art practice. I have understood that my involvement into the community that supports me and of which I am a part of is a vital part of my work, especially in terms of research and field-work and hopefully more hands-on collaboration too. It would be a privilege to be able to take part in professionally diverse conversations so I can expand my field of curiosity with non-contemporary art audiences and voices. My slow move towards a social kind of interdisciplinarity means that as I break with the insularity of the artist as removed cultural-producer, it is important to ground my research and projects in actualities and to be exposed to people who have technical trainings such as anthropologists, designers, architects, programmers, engineers and cultural studies. I look forward to discussing neo-ruralism in Rome specifically, as so peripherally considered 'Ciociaro' discourses seem to always return to the historic relational lines between the capital and its countryside areas."

"In the field of Strategic Design, where short-term thinking and outcomes are blind and where the consequences are not taken into account we need a deep reflection through conversation to imagine and regenerate the systems that have brought us here."
"As said, it would form part of my PhD research and hence would greatly help in getting deeper knowledge on how speculative design is applied in the context of the workshop. In addition, I am curious seeing how others run workshops and create outputs to learn how to improve the workshop formats I am giving. A third point is the exchange with other like minded people - Lisbon's speculative design scene is very small and I would like to get more contacts with people involved in this kind of thinking and doing."

"My first objective is to keep learning and to meet new people involved in this field. I really like the focus on neoruralism cause several studies say that in 2050 the 75% of people will live in big cities but I think that we will come back to the rural areas, and we will have the responsibility to not forget this zones, to protect them and to co-create a better environment that allow us to live better in the future. As I mentioned before, this year I participated in the first design futures workshop inside my company. It was a 5 months workshop and now we are exploring other topics to do a second exercise, but I have the purpose or at least I would like to create a design futures department in my company and work continuously in this field."

[...]

These are, again, only a few of very coherent explanations we received, but reading how this experience would help these people: matching this information with motivations, backgrounds and skills helped us a little bit in creating a hierarchy of priorities among them.

Our greatest wish was to accept them all, but it was just impossible because of the limited spaces and resources we had. It also motivated us to create a meaningful experience for such a great group, organizing the school with the feeling to already know them a little bit.

All the 40 selected participants landed in Rome and took part in the intense 5 days Neorural Futures experience.

The Team and the Network

The staff for the workshop was selected in order to support both the domains that were involved: speculative design and innovation and transformation in rurality.

Workshop coordinators were Salvatore Iaconesi, Oriana Persico and Alex Giordano. Salvatore and Oriana coming from arts and design, with Nefula (the first italian studio dedicated entirely to Near Future Design) and with the HER - Human Ecosystems Relazioni research center, which uses near future design in its research methodology, and is the Italian partner in the SpeculativeEdu project. Alex Giordano works with RuralHack, probably the most innovative initiative in neo-rurality and in Industry 4.0 concepts applied to rurality from a community/glocal perspective: they focus on innovative social uses of technology in rurality, DIY, social impacts and on the transformations of culture, with a history of collaboration with Italian and European institutions.

The tutors were chosen with a multidisciplinary approach in mind, and connected to the groups in which their point of view could be best expressed: Arianna Forte, with a background in art curation and feminism, to support a group whose focus falls in the

domains of possible dystopias or utopias, with strong visual and cultural references; Alessandra Del Nero, visual and information designer, to handle the potentially colonialistic aspects of design; Daniele Bucci and Valeria Loreti, designers and facilitators at CivicWise, to enable the dynamics which can emerge from communities in rurality; Federico Biggio, researcher and semiologist dedicated to the study of the possible futures, to confront with a scenario for the evolution of human values; Herbert Natta, researcher and writer, to deal with the possible SciFi derives.

Francesca Bosio and Dana Cappiello from Societing 4.0, with a background in communication, helped in documenting the event on social networks, daily. Elisa Nitti, a master student in cultural event management, helped in the welcome and the logistics of the event.

The local partners formed a network able to support the practical needs of the workshop (such as locations, communication or food) and a cultural program to bring impacts out in the city.

The local education partner was RUFA, Rome University of Fine Arts, a private university for the arts and design which is a national excellence, and which its location in the San Lorenzo neighbourhood, where the roman popular tradition meets universities, the national research center (CNR), thousands of students from all over the world, high level of diverse cultural activation, and a wide array of urban styles. The university is set in the Pastificio Cerere, an art institution through which several of the most important avantguardes of the late 20th century have found a home.

RuralHack was our partner with a focus on rurality, as we have described before. Societing 4.0 is the partner who coordinated the focus on the social impacts that can be generated by opening reflections about the future and transforming them into actions towards change in individuals and communities.

And then there were the partners of the cultural program, according to which we have brought the participants out in the city, to come to know how different types of subjects confront with the future: NONE Collective and Ultravioletto, two arts and design studios which explore ways to work on both popular and experimental experiences for communication, culture and art; the Fondazione RomaEuropa, with its Digitalive programme for new media; and the Mercato Centrale, a large commercial organization who creates high quality food courts in major train stations across Italy and abroad, establishing bridges between local producers, artisans and the city.

THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE SCHOOL

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The Brief and the Rural locations

While designing the workshop, the entire team was strongly activated towards understanding the best brief that could be given out to participants. The theme of neo-rurality suggests issues which can go from climate change to migrations, to the transformations of cities, to the mutation of work, to AI, IoT, 5G, robotics, circular economies, and more.

To immerse participants in a credible setting, and establish some rooting on the ground through which the complexity of the lives of the people could come across, we decided to choose one location per group. This would also allow tutors to prepare themselves on that location, so that they could better support their group. To choose the actual locations that we would use for the scenarios, we tried following different logics: geographic (i.e.: "one per continent"), political ("one where there is war"), typological ("one in the Amazon Forest"), and more. But none of these strategies proved to be fully satisfactory. In the end, we chose to select locations in ways that could address some of the principal critiques to Speculative Design, through experimentation and practice, while also maintaining a degree of balance across the planet.

What followes is a despcription of the five chosen locations:

Arjeplog

It's a small town in Lapland, Sweden, of less than 2 thousand people. It's interesting for many things, but one stands out: the way in which its economy is strongly connected to its climate. In fact, many car manufacturers come to Arjeplog to perform the winter/ice/extreme conditions tests for their cars, using Arjeplog's climate, iced lake, and abundance of snow and ice. This has shaped the community, so much that in the local school there are profiles dedicated to the automotive industry. This allowed us to choose this location to study the effects of climate change, and to try to approach those critiques about the capacity of speculation to confront our planetary issues, with researcher Federico Biggio.
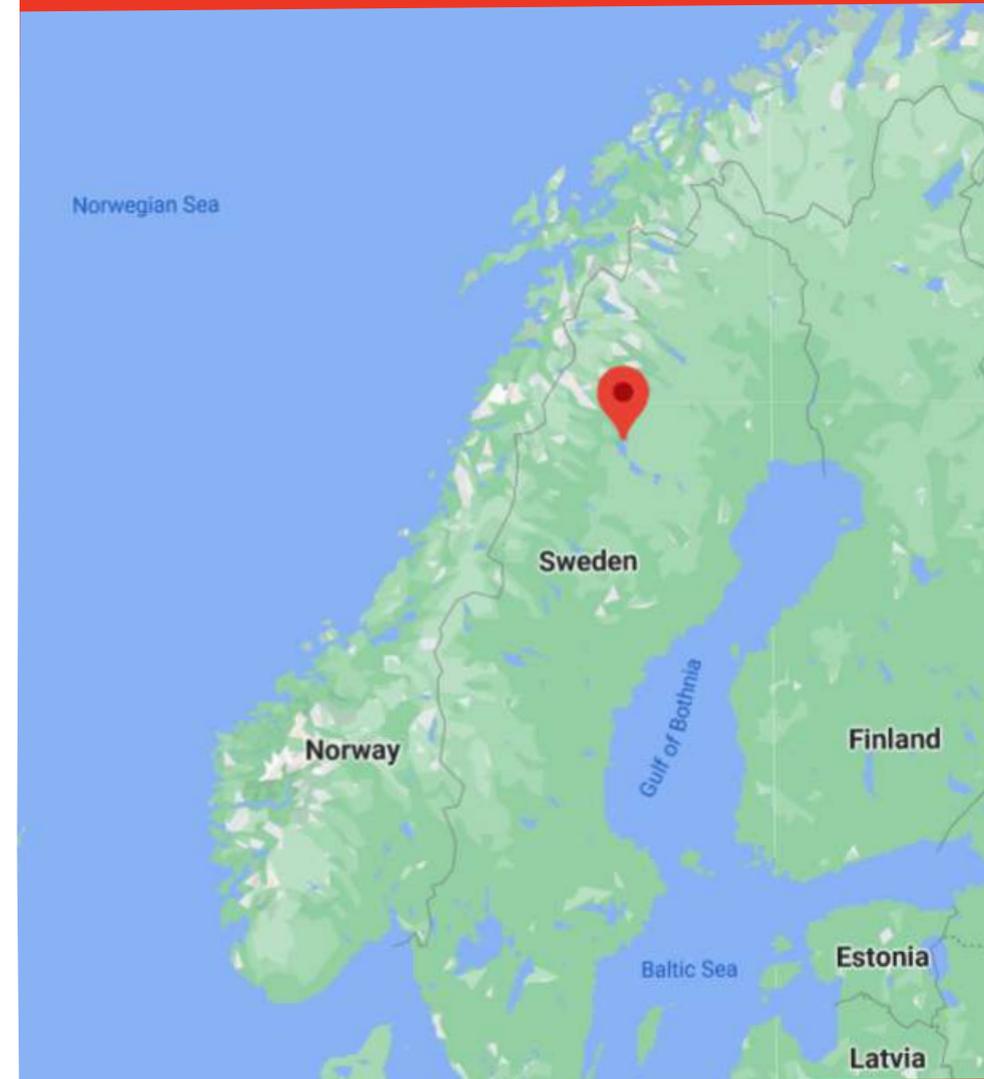
Lushoto

A small town in the Usambara mountains in Tanzania with about 30 thousand citizens. It is starting to suffer from climate change for the progressive even radical unreliability of weather and precipitation. On top of that, the area has been subjected to land grabbing phenomena (China, US, Emirates) as well as to intense land exploitation for minerals (bauxite, for example). This location has been chosen both to confront issues such as climate change, migrations and geopolitics, but also to be able to address some of the main critiques to speculative design, about its potentially colonialistic effects ("how can I design something for Africa without being colonialistic?"). The group was assigned to Alessandra Del Nero, a visual and information designer, to confront this critique.
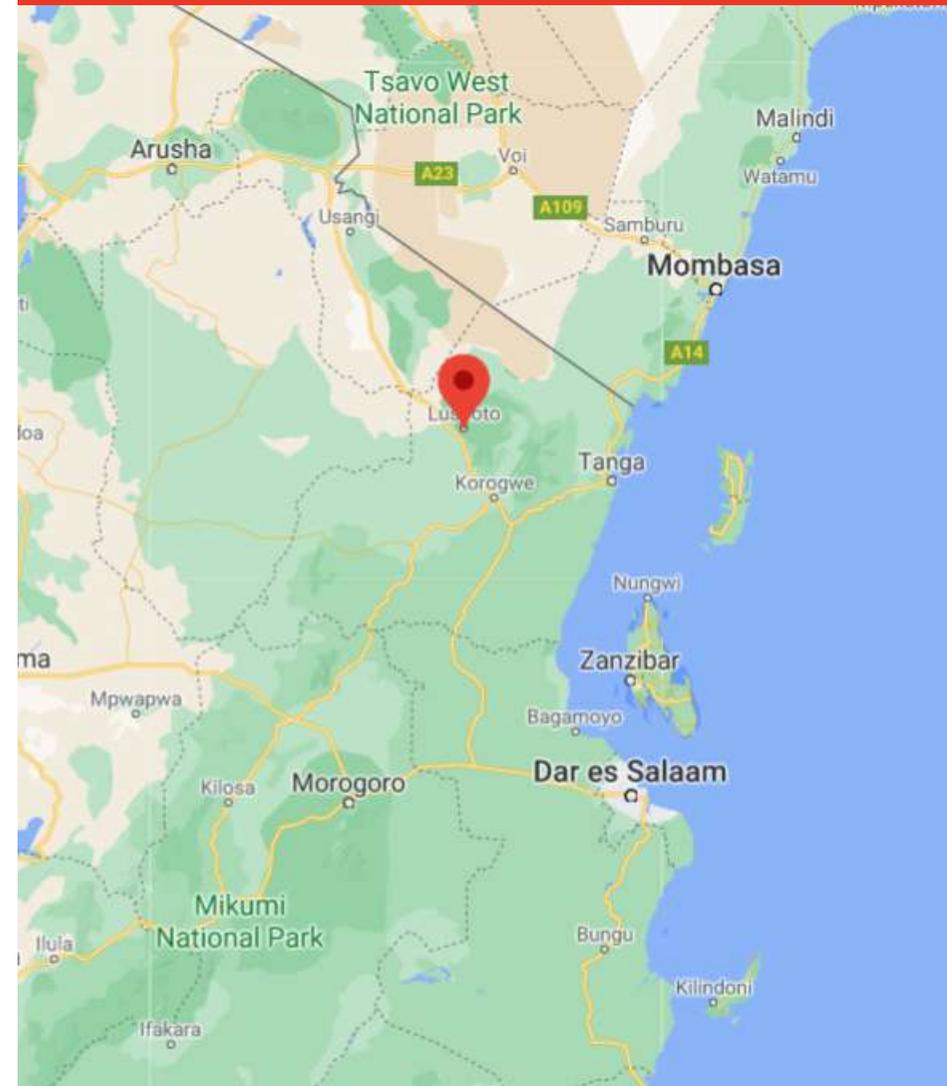
Caselle in Pittari

It's a small town of less than 2 thousand people in the province of Salerno, Italy. It is interesting for its culture, for the ways in which it welcomes migrations, and, most of all, because there have been multiple initiatives across the years that have regenerated in many ways what it means to inhabit rurality. Whether it was in how to use technologies in agriculture or ways in which to create new forms of relationships and economies, Caselle in Pittari has been many times a center in which new practices and "things" emerged, across tradition and technological innovation, even creating a number of new rituals for rurality like the Palio del Grano, the Rete di Cumparaggio and many more. The possibility to have guests that have experienced such transformation was a plus. The group was assigned to two designers and system thinkers from CivicWise, Valeria Loreti and Daniele Bucci, to try to understand ways in which speculation can bring activation to communities.

Chernobyl Exclusion Zone

It's a geographical area with special administrative status sitting across Ukraine, Belarus and Russia, around the city of Pripyat and the site of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster of 1986. Nobody should live there (apart from military, scientific and administrative personnel in charge of the area), but many scenarios exist in which people remained there because they didn't have elsewhere to go, or went there to escape wars or prejudice, or for many other reasons. There is also a lively market for extreme tourism in the area. This location has been chosen for its richness of possibilities, for its capacity to explore the "post" of disasters, for the extreme rural character of the area (nature is actually flourishing). It is also a phenomenon in communication, with strong visual and cultural references. For this, we assigned the group to the art curator of our research center, Arianna Forte, to confront possible dystopias or utopias, and their implications.
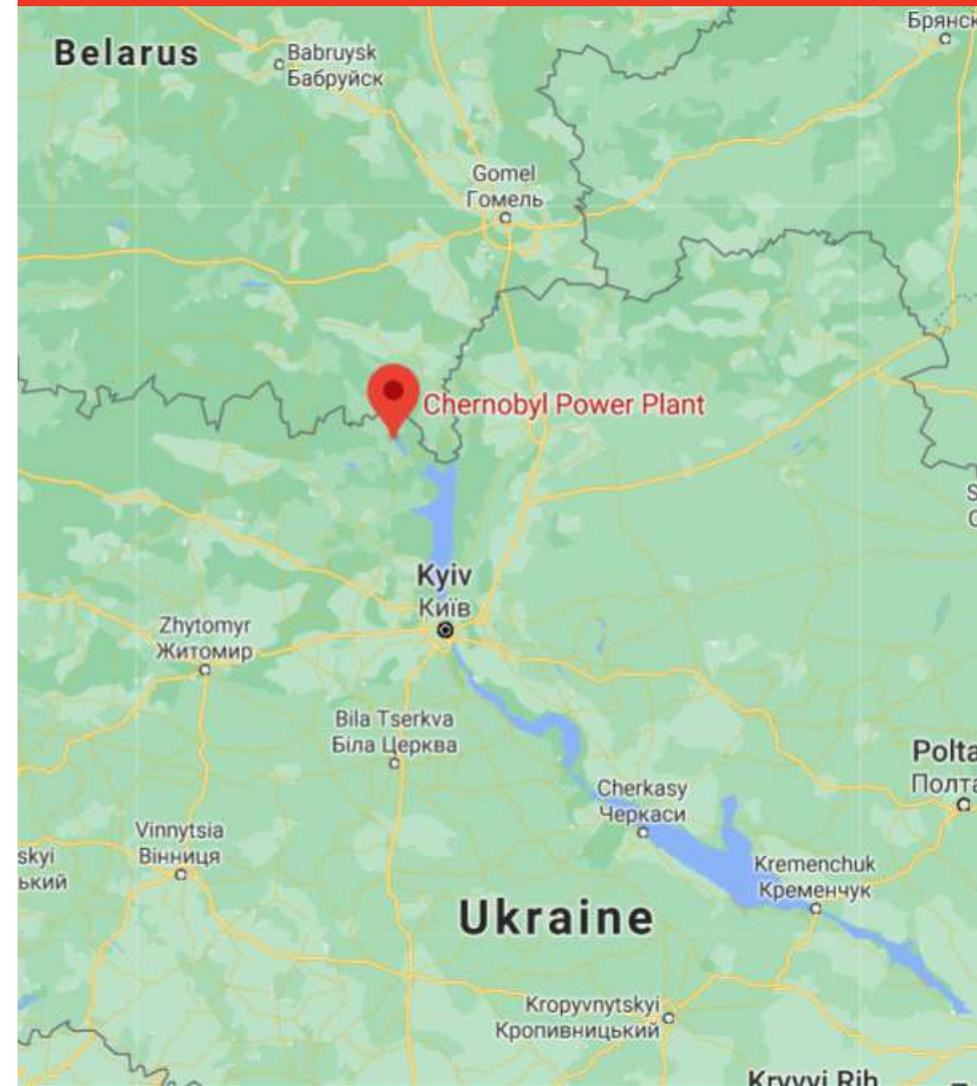
The Moon

It's Earth's only asteroid and, for us, it has represented a radical interpretation of rurality. There are many experiments which deal with how to bring, for example, agriculture to the moon. There are fewer studies about how life, culture, psychology would/could develop up there. Will there be a concept for "community"? For "family"? For "business"? "School"? "Private"? "Will the community be of robots? In which sense?" And so on. To deal with the critiques to speculative design about "too much SciFi", we have assigned this group to Herbert Natta, researcher and writer.

The Brief included also one digital map per group: a digital map of their assigned location, with some georeferenced content to provide an initial understanding of the context (where is the location's center; where is the school, hospital; do they fish, cultivate, hunt, have shops, work in an office, go to the cinema, study... ?).

The role of the map will be detailed in the next sections, when we will talk about the tools and outcomes.

The brief was the same for everyone:

"

<<Describe a scenario whose setting is in your group's assigned location, that is set 10 years from now, and that shows the characteristics of life as it will be at that time. To do it: choose a point of view, so that you can work with the things he/she uses and experiences, with the people that he/she relates with, with the knowledge / information / communication they access and express through.

While you work, look for ways in which your location:

- is affected by planetary issues (climate/environment, energy, food, poverty, health, education, migration...)

- expresses its own version of what it means to inhabit rurality
- is the place where people use and do specific, or traditional, peculiar, weird, "new" things
- expresses ways in which technologies are changing people's interactions, relations and communication

Represent the scenario in this Point of View using any media you desire: video, objects, manuals, publications, interactions, etc, as long as it respects the constraints of the exhibit that we will make at the end to showcase the outputs of the workshop.>>

"

The Architecture of the Workshop

Positioned right in the middle of the Speculative Edu project, the summer school was designed as an immersive hands on experience for a community of people active in the speculative design, as well as for students, professionals, researchers and teachers new to the field, interested to learn more and meet new connections.

Our goal was to create a welcoming and and rich environment where participants could:

- share, discuss and use the study on the state of the art which has just been completed by the consortium, experimenting and criticising different speculative design approaches (learning experience; valorisation and dissemination of the Speculative Edu research);
- meet new people, create meaningful connections and relations (networking; community building);
- meet the city, creating connections and bridges outside the classroom (placing the international event in the territorial context);
- immerse in the theme of the workshop in a meaningful way (using art, design and communication);

- present the result of the workshop in a public moment, involving participants as well as the city (public representation; public event).

This is how we have come to conceive a workshop architecture mixing different moments, different elements (cultural, design, communicational, performative), and different activities (some of them dedicated to participants, some of them open to the public). In particular:

- a day by day program, describing activities and goals for each day;
- the tools and research resources;
- the collaborative environment and the experience;
- a cultural program (for the participants and the city).

Structure of the days:
the program

NeoRural Futures
Rome, Sept. 2-6 2019

The Workshop Days

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri
- intro + groups - theory - research	- research	- research - production	- production	- setup - reviews - vernissage - event
By the end of the day: We did the initial research	*By the end of the day:* We have a working hypothesis of the scenario	*By the end of the day:* The designs are on their way, and some content Is being prepared	*By the end of the day:* The designs and content are complete	*By the end of the day:* We have prepared the exhibit, we did the reviews, we have done the conference, we are happy and drunk Partying :)

We first of all designed a day by day program, shared with participants just after the selection process, so that they could set their minds toward the upcoming workshop, make questions, but also let us know if they had any problems about it:

- the first day was the more frontal-lesson oriented day. The goal was to
    - form the groups, give to participants an overview about the activities and about the expected day-by-day and final output;
    - start the research, introducing the speculative design approaches and theories;

- the second day was fully dedicated to the research process:
    - we first introduced the theme of rurality
    - the group then focused the research process in order to find a working hypothesis with their tutors

- the third day was the crucial day in which to
    - refine the working hypothesis;
    - transform it into a concept

- the fourth day was left to the groups to:
    - finalize the research;
    - enter the production phase

- the fifth day participants, coordinators and tutors were fully immersed in the production phase, working to:
  - print and build the element of the exhibit;
  - conceive the layout end the presentations of the outputs toward the audience and the Speculative Edu research group;
  - be ready for the critical review (with the consortium partners and the guests invited to the review) and to the public conference and exhibit open to the city.

The Tools

We designed three main tools for the participants:

- A digital map, an element with two functions:
  - A quick interactive geo-notebook, to be used both by tutors and participants during the research process to place interesting materials (such as images, links, videos, text, but also data) directly onto the territory;
  - as an element of the exhibit, where to publish digital narrative/digital design objects realized to materialize the concepts, through a geo-narrative;

- a series of cards about different approaches in the field of speculative/critical/near future design and design fiction, with two main objectives:
  - give an easy overview of existing approaches;
  - be used as inspiration during the workshop;

- the Speculative Edu Online Repository, together with a series of recommended texts and materials, as a reading resource to document themselves before the workshop (especially for people new to the field).

Participants received the repository, the research resource and the cards before their arrival in Rome, to have time to explore it and ask us questions: the map was presented on the first day, also because we wanted to maintain the surprise effect about the locations, and to discover them together.

In the history of the SpeculativeEdu project, the summer school participants are the first users of the repository, that had just been released: we thank them for testing it and for their feedback about readability and usability.

The environment and the process

To create the environment – where people can interact, relate, learn and express – is perhaps the most exciting and difficult challenge when you design an event. You need to have an exact imagination about the space, about how things materialize in it, how people can move, the flow of time, how many activities you can place in a day or in a session, the balance between formal and informal (because you need both), and the degrees of freedom you can provide, to both make sure that participants can express themselves and that you can finish on time.

It is both about paying attenttion to the global experience and the smallest of details, especially in avoiding the cognitive dissonances that can make people confused about what they are experiencing. Being lost in a state of confusion can annihilate the trust and relaxation which is needed to enjoy the experience itself.

Here is an example: in organizing a conference about environmental sustainability, using random industrial plastic cups and food for the meals would constitute a cognitively dissonant message. These are things we often witness, and we are very critical about them – as artists, designers but also as audience and citizens.

This is why the theme of the event obliged us to pay extreme attention to ecological aspects/elements of the organization, designing the environment and the processes of

the workshop: we wanted it to be 0-km and 0-waste in a radical way.

The first and more complex issue we tackled was food: in an urban environment and without a kitchen to use, how could we create an eco-friendly, neo-rural food experience? But also one which was affordable for every participant, and capable of making people come together, to know each other in an informal way, so that they could establish relations out of the classroom/learning experience frame?

We did a lot of research in the field, starting from the neighborhood, and the answer was found in our relational and cultural network. A group of female activists from an historical squat in Rome (the Forte Prenestino), used to work on food and also make extraordinary vegan buffets. We called them and they designe with us the food experience for the summer school: the genius loci was used to create a 0-km, inclusive, affordable solution for the participants.

Working with them, the environmental issues where easily solved:

- they offered a different vegan menu every day, cooked using rigorously local, biodinamic products:
    - the menu was an example of fusion between the macrobiotic style created in Italy by Mario Pianesi, but with a mediterranean touch: in particular the basis was "il piatto misto", composed by a soup and five different elements to combine (a fresh salad, two different cooked vegetables, a carbohydrate and a protein element derived from legumes), all sourced locally from

sustainable urban gardens; the meal itself was a speculative design project;

- each day they would bring the food and explain the recipies and the origin of the products to participants, so that they could be aware of what they were eating (this was very convincing for us, to transform the eating experience into a learning performative experience, overcoming any consumerist approach);
- to avoid using paper or plastic, they brought a set of ceramic dishes and metal cutlery for the whole group (team and participants), which then was washed and recycled for the next day;
- in terms of logistics, we decided to use the terrace of the RUFA space to organize the buffet, where people could:
  - eat together;
  - wash their dishes autonomously, using the bar area with the sink, and natural detergents.

Luckily enough, we received RUFA's permission to use their magnificent terrace, and we were able to make all of it happen. With 8 euros per each, participants received a fresh, locally grown, vegan, macrobiotic/mediterranean lunch every day, enjoying washing their dishes and glasses, chit-chatting, sometimes reclaiming a carbonara or a traditional lasagna, but always smiling.

On top of that, we designed and organized the last elements of the food experience by ourselves: every day we prepared perfumed water (with ginger, lemon and mint), green tea, sweet and savory snacks, composed of fresh fruit, dried fruits and Apulian taralli. All this was freely available to the participants, and managed as a commons: we

wanted to create a welcoming environment where basic needs (such as water) were accessible for free, as well as healthy beverages (such as green tea, which is known to help depuration but also concentration), and small healthy food to eat during the intense design session.

The second issue was designing the gifts: with a very limited budget, how could you create an eco-friendly, meaningful, recyclable, sexy gift bag for our participants, to remember the experience?

Limitations are opportunitties that can make you smart. We decided for a neo-rural punk, poetic-artistic approach.

First of all, we bought about 80 tempered glasses: for the team, the participants, the guests who could have attended the event. We then transformed the two logos of Speculative Edu and NeoRural Futures in two stamps: one to be stamped in blue ink, the other in red - they were just perfect for that. Third, we bought a hundred paper bags: those you find in bakeries and in any Italian food shops – at an almost zero cost. We finally selected and collected a series of spices, found in our friends' and families' gardens.

Our gift bags were almost ready. Each participants received:
• a glass, to be used during the school and all the events. We specified that this was the only access to water and drinks we would provide during the whole summer school, so they needed to take care of it;

- 4 different edible spices (oregano, rosemary, sage, chili pepper) packed in four different little bags, branded ussing the two stamps;
- a neorural card designed for the workshop and a series of cards and information materials about HER, Rural Hack , Societing 4.0 and RUFA as the leading organisation of the event: all in recycled paper, no plastic was allowed;
- a paper bag and a handmade bookmark of cut cardboard, both branded with the two stamps;
- a personal letter – rigorously branded, too, using only the stamps and the two ecoloogic inks, on recycled paper – explaining what the gift bag was about.

Neorural futures stamp

Branding neorural edible gift: location: Salvatore Iaconesi and Oriana Persico's house.

The third issue was all about relations: how can you create a welcoming experience and a rich environment where people are free to interact and can establish connections, collaboration and participation, in only five days?

Our research and artistic practices often include workshops, and also intensive ones such as summer and winter schools. For this types of workshop the best combination is for people to work and live in the same place, but this is not always possible. In Rome we could not find a space to welcome all the 40 participants. To balance it, and to help people finding shared accommodation, we did two things:

- we created a list of hotels, b&b, hostels and affordable apartments in the neighborhood and around, at a walkable distance from the the workshop location;
- we sent a message encouraging participants to ask their colleagues if they wanted to share rooms or apartments.

This helped participants to start communicating before the workshop, and some of them actually found shared accommodation. It's a little more work for the organizers, but it's worth it.

We also wanted to facilitate socialization diring the first day, at the arrival. We did not want he activities to just start, also because getting such a multicultural bunch together is not a banal task.

We designed two main icebreakers:

- one to **address the mutual presentation phase** (to avoid the A.A. effect: people in circle saying their names, affiliation, job...), **and the formation of the groups**, which is a very delicate process as well. We dedicated a lot of time to discuss the matter, and after several sessions with the group we came up to a simple but convincing mechanism. For this we created:

  - a large billboard, positioned at the entrance of the workshop: it had space for five group with no further specification (only group 1,2,3...);
  - a series of cards in different colours describing different skills, and with an empty space to write a name, positioned beside the billboard;

  - after the registration process, participants were invited to choose a card, according to their skills, and a group, with the only two indication: we dedicated a person during the welcome phase to explain the mechanism;
    - » each group each group could consist of a maximum of eight people;
    - » ensure as much as possible a good balance of different skills per group
  - on top of that, as explained in the following section, each group would have had a rural location in the world assigned to them; a moment of suspense was created for this, in which the assignement was done randomly, by pulling group numbers out of the hat;
  - this whole process was very useful both to facilitate the formation of balanced

groups, and to have to transform difficult choices into fun challenges;

- the other to **break the barriers and help people to get in touch, going beyond formality:**

  - for this we created the Neorural Grog: a free aperitivo with Apulian taralli and a strong cocktail made up with white wine, jin, sugar, lime, mint.

Billboard at the entrance, Neorural Futures day 1st.

The Neorural Grog was served in the terrace, after several hours of frontal lessons, and offered for free to participants in large quantities, allowing all of us to release tensions and celebrate the bootstrap of the workshop in a ritual, liberating dimension.

Slide from the 1st day presentation, announcing the Neorural Grog free aperitivo

The cultural program

The cultural program was composed by three main elements, some of them dedicated to participants, some of them open to the city:

- **"The future is already here - it's just not evenly imagined - Conversations about the Future"** is a series of three events in which the group of participants met four different cultural organisations active in Rome in the field of arts, design, communication, food and rurality, by visiting their headquarters;
- the **exhibit** and the **critical review** of the projects;
- SpeculativeEdu's **international conference**.

In a convivial space, the three "Conversations" were designed to break the continuum of the classroom/workshop experience, bringing participants to explore the city not as tourists, but as temporary urban dwellers, and to make them experience what innovative design studios, cultural foundations and urban food markets can look like in our country.

We wanted them to be special moments for participants, who would have been able to interact in a rich and exclusive environment: these initiatives were not accessible or

advertised publicly.

Our goal was to create a space to share and discuss how we can come together to imagine and face the future, discovering approaches and strategies that different types of entities and organisations (such as independent artists, institutions, museums, universities, businesses or research centres) are using at present. The hosting partners described their strategies to start the conversations, involving participants and the team in lively discussions.

Here the calendar and a short description for each partners:

NeoRural Futures meets Mercato Centrale - 03/09/2019

About:

- A group of entrepreneurs created Mercato Centrale to establish new bridges between cities and rurality through food, to offer innovative urban experiences, with a clear view and imagination of possible, desirable futures. We will learnt about this vision and how it materialises in physical and digital spaces of these large artisanal food markets in various prestigious locations around the country;

Conversation with Valentina Fioravanti:

- Born in Prato, Valentina graduated in Business Economics at the University of

Florence, following her studies in Marketing Management at the Luigi Bocconi University in Milan. She studied at the University of Western Australia in Perth and has experience working in China. In 2014 she landed to Mercato Centrale in Florence and today holds the position of Marketing Director of the Mercato Centrale Holding group.

- The format of Mercato Centrale, present in the city of Florence, Rome, Turin and soon in Milan, focuses on the artisans of taste, to rediscover the historical function of market as a place of encounter and discovery, open to the city in a constant dialogue with the urban fabric.

Learn more about Mercato Centrale:

- https://www.mercatocentrale.it

NeoRural Futures meets NONE Collective and Ultravioletto - 04/09/2019

About:

- NONE Collective is an artistic collective based in Rome moving across art, design and technology, that develops cross-media projects which interpret the contemporary condition of coexisting with the digital society. Ultravioletto is a creative studio applying design to emerging interaction technology.

- Ultravioletto is a creative studio applying design to emerging interaction technology, exploring the possibilities that lie between analogue and digital domains to examine the relationship between humans and technology. A team of professionals creative directors, designers and coders guided by an emotional approach to bring new media technologies in the communication field. We learned more about their vision and how design can become a tool to speculate about the future;

Conversation with: Gregorio De Luca Comandini, Mauro Pace and Saverio Villirillo + Bruno Capezzuoli:

- NONE Collective founders prefer to present themselves through the collective identity of the group;
- Bruno Capezzuoli is the artistic director of Ultravioletto, he is an artist, interaction designer and thinker. He teaches at RUFA - Rome Universities of Fine Arts and at IED - Istituto Europeo di Design in Rome

Learn more about NONE Collective:
- http://none.business/;

Learn more about Ultravioletto:
- http://ultraviolet.to/

NeoRural Futures meets Fondazione Romaeuropa Festival - 05/092019

About:

- Fondazione Romaeuropa Festival is the most influential public/private foundation in the city dedicated to contemporary performance and art. Since its first edition in 1986, the success of the Romaeuropa Festival has grown constantly and is now recognised as the most important Italian cultural festival. It includes theatre, music and dance performances but also exhibits and a kids programme. Among the many Festival activities, we will discuss how the DIGITALIVE programme investigates expressive languages and forms of art linked to new media and sound.

Conversation with Federica Patti:

- Independent curator, lecturer and critic, her research focuses on contemporary experimental art movements, with a particular interest in multimedia, liminal practices, emerging artists and interactive and participatory projects. She actively collaborates with several institutions, galleries and festivals (Romaeuropa Festival, CUBO – Centro Unipol Bologna, among others) on the presentation and development of her research topics curating exhibitions, screenings, talks and workshops. She is part of LaRete Art Projects curatorial collective and of IKT (International Association of Curators of Contemporary

Art). Since 2013 she is a frequent contributor for Artribune magazine, Creativeapplication.net and Digicult;

Learn more about Fondazione Romaeuropa Festival:

- https://romaeuropa.net/

"The future is already here - it's just not evenly imagined" Conversations about the Future with NONE Collective and Ultravioletto; studio of the artists in the Barbatella neighborhood - Sept 4th 2019, Rome.

The closing event was the moment in which the project opened to the city, through the exhibit and the international conference.

The exhibit was hosted in the beautiful RUFA Space and entirely organized by tutors and participants: unfortunately it was accessible only for one day, due to the upcoming Openday at RUFA, scheduled just after the summer school.

Before the opening we also dedicated two hours for a critical review of the concepts emerged during the school. Participants were invited to organize short (5-7 minutes) presentations in front of their exhibit space, in which one person in the group explained the concept to SpeculativeEdu partners, a series of art/dessign curators and local guests invited to come and to create contamination between the project and the city.

The review was a really engaging and important moment. In future editions we might decide to dedcicate an entire day to it: it was perceived by the group as one of the most enriching sessions, both for the high quality critiques received from a large and well known group of professionals, but also for the possibility to learn more in depth about the work of the other groups – something which is very difficult to achieve during the research and production phases of the school.

The review was a closed event, accessible on invitation.
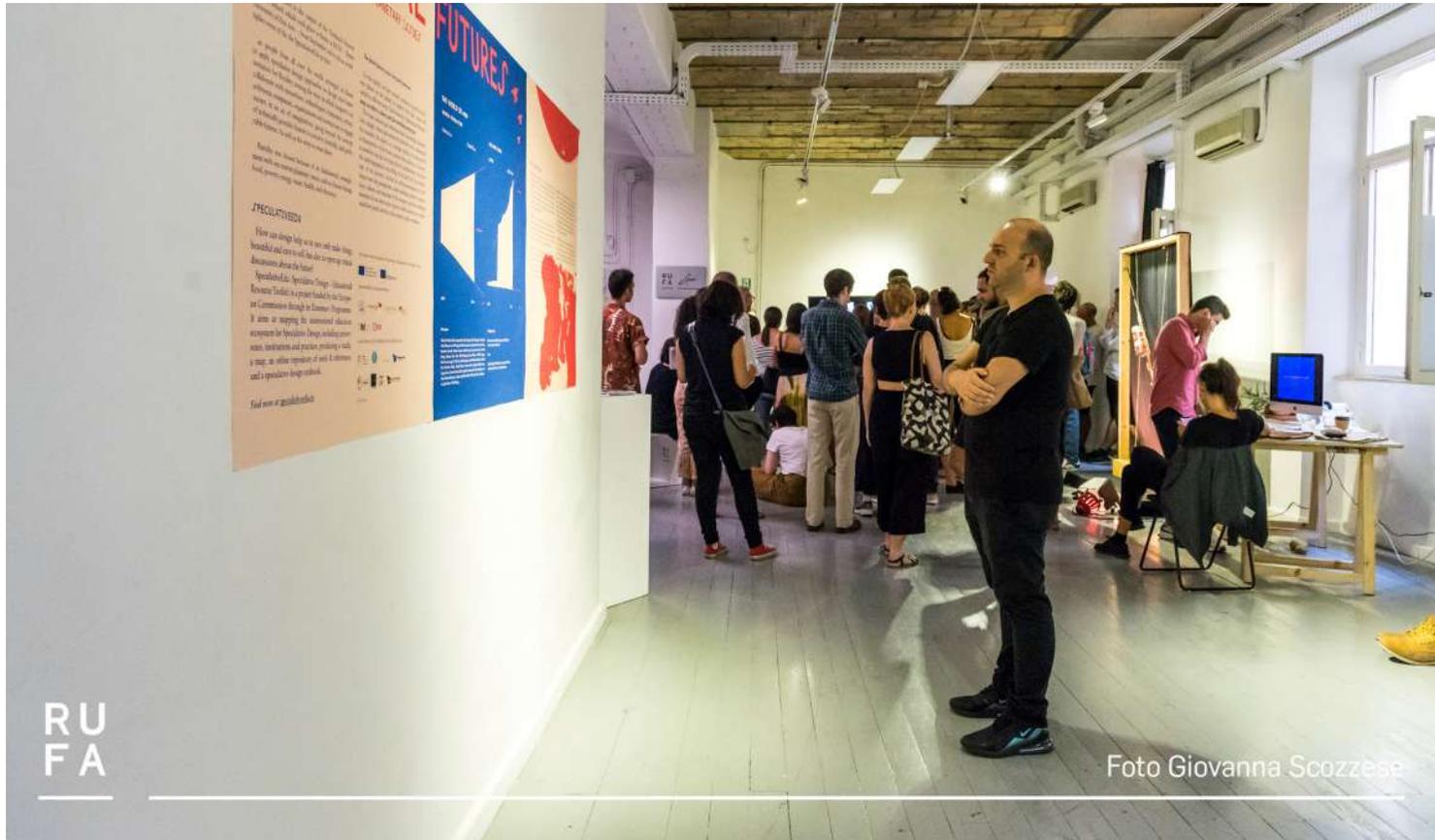
Entrance of the Neorural Futures exhibit, RUFA Space
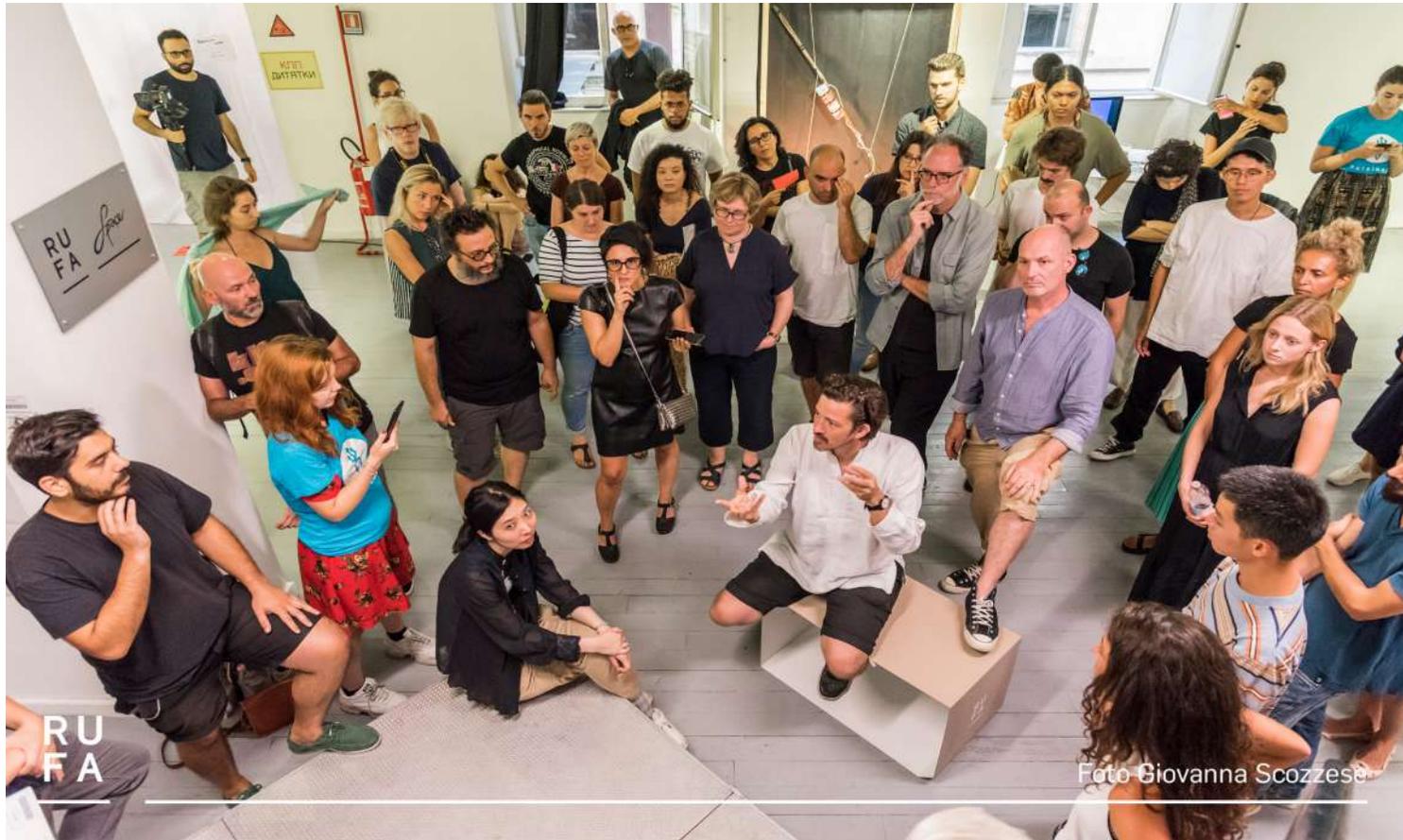
Review process with Speculative Edu, RUFA Space.

The Structure of the Outcomes

As a side note to the brief, some specifications about the desired formats for the outputs were provided, so that the results of the workshop could become an exhibit.

Therefore, we suggested the groups of participants to aim at producing the following elements as the output of their project:

- **The digital map.** Each location had a colourful digital interactive map that showed its assigned territory. Initially, the maps came filled in with a series of geo-referenced content that allowed participants to start to learn more about the location: typical activities, relevant news articles, data visualizations about some characteristics of the place, images, videos, information about culture, weather, education, demographics etc. The maps were also interactive because participants could add content to them: texts, images, videos, and entire GIS overlays. This feature of the map was used first in the research phase, to take notes about the location, and, then, in the outputs, in which we told the groups to create a spatial narrative of the scenario they were assembling, highlighting relevant places, events, actors, architectures etc., transforming the map into

an interactive digital storytelling device. In the exhibit each group had a computer and monitor through which visitors could explore the exhibit.

- **The prop.** We asked participant groups to produce an "object" for their scenario, which was able to bring it to life concretely, sensorially, and in making the implications of the scenario come more live and present. We didn't ask for a complete, or even functioning object. Of course we put no upper limit, but we asked at least some form of representation of the "object", a user manual, a readymade recontextualized to look/function like something else, a cardboard prototype, an interface of some sort, a rendering, a video, or something else which we could agree on, depending on the specifics of the scenario. The definition of "object" was initially controversial, as there were doubts about what an acceptable "object" could be, or on how to physically represent a process. For this, referring to cinema, we started speaking in terms of producing props, elements of any sort which could create the stage, give a sense of the environment and of its symbols, tools, lifestyle etc, from the point of view of the selected perspective. In the exhibit, each group had certain spaces and presentation modalities which they could use for their prop.

- **The autobiography from the future**. We asked for a point of view, showing life in the scenario, and its implications. For this, we advised participants to produce some form of autobiographical narrative from their scenario: a diary, journal, blog, video or other form of self expression and representation which

was able to convey the point of view of an actor in the scenario living an event which highlights the scenario's characteristics. Groups could produce booklets, drawings, prints, videos, podcasts and other similar materials or assemblages for this, to be shown in the exhibit.

- **The open source process.** We wanted the process to be as open as possible, so that this experience could be transformed into usable knowledge for others. For this, we asked groups to create some materials to document the genesis of their project, following the steps of the workshop. This was to be included in a folder which was included in the exhibit space of each group, so that people could also know how the group came about the idea.

Day 1st, Salvatore Iaconesi presents the structure of the outcam to the group.

THE LIFE OF THE SCHOOL

SPECULATIVE•EDU•NEORURALS

The Life of the Workshop

Who are "neorurals"? How do they live?

How are people starting to move from cities to rural areas and vice-versa? How are these phenomena related? With what effects?

How is all of this changing together with technological scenarios (such as AI, big data, IoT) and global phenomena (such as climate change, migration, and the transformation of cities)? How can design help us not only to make things sexy, beautiful and easy to sell, but also to open up critical discussions about the future?

With these questions in mind 101 people from all over the world applied to the summer school, and 40 of them converged in Rome to apply speculative/critical/near future design approaches for rurality. To test the ways in which designers can collaborate with researchers, technologists, humanists, artists, architects, companies, organizations and institutions to engage society in an act of imagination. To go beyond the concept of technically possible futures, working together to conceive desirable and preferable futures, and the ways to enact them.

We had only five days to transform an intensive learning experience into an exhibit, as planned and communicated since the beginning. It was an exciting but also dizzying state of expectation – both for tutors, coordinators and participants: would we be able to fulfill the mission?

But most of all we were overwhelmed by the number, quality and the hyper-motivated group of participants. They were students, professionals, researchers, teachers, professors from foreign, internationally recognized universities and institutions.

And they were ready to travel from everywhere to be with us for an entire week.

The selection process was hard – a real nightmare, indeed. But it also motivated us to work harder on the event. We studied and discussed all the applications – multiple times – with the result that we knew them one by one: the names, the biographies, why they were enrolled and how the workshop could help their careers, deepen the research they were carrying out or open new perspectives. Before they arrived, we already loved them all: we wanted to cuddle them and create a meaningful experience to remember.

We started from the welcoming and we used our experience as artists to set the environment.

RUFA is a wonderful location: the building, Pastificio Cerere, was a cultural space famous for having hosted the cultural and artistic movements of the 60-70s, then transformed

into an exhibition space and finally purchased by RUFA to host the university of fine arts. For the summer school we had the possibility to use the last floor, the terrace and RUFA Space: a space designed to host events, installations and exhibitions.

RUFA Space, exhibition space

For the welcome, we designed a temporary exhibit using the architecture of building and the elements of our gift bag:

- in the first room, the registration process – formal duty first;
- after the registration, people could access the second room containing the billboard: they could interact alone, with their colleague and with the two tutors dedicated to this phase, in order to choose a group;
- once completed this process, participants could access the third room: the one where the workshop would take place and where they finally received their gifts.

Day first: participants get their gifts after the registration process

This is where we settled the temporary exhibit displaying the gifts. The first table contained 40 envelopes with a personal letter, branded with the two SpeculativeEdu and NeoRural Futures stamped logos, 40 paper bags (branded as well), a neorural card and some information materials about the different partners. Two tutors, taking care of the final phase of the welcome, invited participants to find their letter (each envelope showed the participant's name and surname, written by hand) and follow the indications. Here what the letter said:

"

"Dear Participant,
If you are reading this mail, it means that you just arrived at NeoRural Futures.

Welcome! We have prepared some gifts for you: you can take only one of them, which means that your gift bag will contain five objects.

Four of them are edible and you can bring it with you and cook them:
- **Rosemary (Origin: Ostia, Rome, Italy).** *This Rosemary grows in the garden of Nino, Salvatore's father. Nino is 84 years old, he is a former admiral of the Italian Navy and he loves growing plants.*
- **Sage (Origin: Coldiretti weekly market, Fonte Egeria, Rome, Italy)**. *This sage comes from the Coldiretti Market in Rome, located in the Appia Antica Park. Salvatore and Oriana go shopping every Sunday in this unique market to buy zero kilometer food and replenish water at the Fonte Egeria,*

with their 12 glass bottles.
- **Dry chilli (Origin: GASS, Gruppo di Acquisto Solidale Selvaggio - Torpignattara Rome, Italy).***This dried chilli was ordered through the GASS of the Torpignattara district in Rome, where Salvatore and Oriana live. In Italy, GAS (which means "Solidarity Purchase Group") are self-organized groups of people who come together to buy organic, locally produced food, get better prices and support farmers that treat their workers fairly.*
- **Oregano (Origin: San Sperato, Reggio di Calabria, Italy)**. *This oregano grows in Aunt Elena's garden. She is Oriana's aunt, she is 81 years old and she always gives something from her garden to Salvatore and Oriana when they visit her. She is very proud of her vegetables.*

The last object is non-edible, and it is your access to water, wine, alcohol for the following five days:
- **Tempered glass cup (Origin: Marny Non solo monouso, via Casilina 17, Rome Italy)**. *This is your glass. You will use it throughout the summer school to drink the scented water and the green tea that we have prepared for you. But also the wine and cocktails we will offer. It is a gift but also a constraint, to remind us that resources on the planet are limited and we must take care of them. Carrying your glass with you can be a nuisance, but a necessary one.*

Enjoy your gifts and thank you for being part of this wonderful project :)
Salvatore, Oriana, Alex, Speculative Edu + the whole team of NeoRural Futures"

Neorural Futures: personal stamped letters for participants

The concept of the temporary exhibit was to recreate an Italian local market experience. The five elements were displayed on top of five different tables, so that participants could take only one item each to compose their personal bag: each edible item was packed and branded and had a neo-rural history behind, connected with our daily life.

This is how we set the mood to start classroom time, and the intense design activities to follow.

After the welcome, a conceptual, happy massacre started. The first day was all about clarifying the structure of the five days workshop, communicating the basis of speculative design approaches, form the group and start the research.

For the conceptual introduction, we used two different languages.

Salvatore created a poetical and emotional presentation, using the language of art to introduce the conceptual elements of the workshop.

Federico Biggio described the different approach to speculative, critical design and design fiction, showing a series of projects as examples.

The second day Alex Giordano introduced the theme of neo-rurality, mixing theoretical elements with practical examples, derived from projects on the field, and the first phase of the research conducted by the groups was discussed in assembly to highlight from

the rural perspective with our main expert.

The following days the group worked collaboratively with the tutors, in order to conceive, design and finalise the concept, and to produce the exhibit.

Coordinators followed the evolution of the projects, while the tutors made sure that the objectives of the day were respected, informing us of any problems to be solved.

Another interesting ritual we used was the assembly, in which each group would quickly update the others about their project, discussing good and bad things, problems and solutions: we did our best to maintain this moment of sharing, but we also had a tough schedule to follow.

Presentation and people at work, researching and designing

From the methodological point of view, we wanted to leave participants as much as freedom possible to explore and experiment different approaches (using the cards or their own experience). Speculative design is more a series of emerging approaches than a set of methodology to be applied: one of the goals was, indeed, to understand which approaches people would use or like more, and use it as an element of the research. This freedom was welcomed but also problematic according to some feedback we received, that we report here integrally:

"

"The group was left to self-regulate the way in which opinions were voiced which in itself was an interesting exercise. Our group interlaced moments of research with moments of discussion. Every time we arrived at a point of consent we would become more specialised in the research that followed. This is how we decided the scenario. I like the framing of using speculative design as an approach to probe the future. Our group dealt with it fine, we approached it as how one would put together a play/movie."

"I found it gave us the opportunity to experiment with our own imagination and creativity. And although there was not systematised methodology, the required outcomes gave us kinds of goals so that we could find ways to archive that."

"An approach rather than a methodology gave the motivational sprint to collaboratively engage in discussions within the group, share a great amount of personal insights and the opportunity to actively listen and share opinions. It indeed created rooms for imagination and feasible speculations."

"I think it made it a big challenge to not have some guidance with the method we had to follow because we were working in big groups with people from all over the world, each one of us with a different mind and way of working; but it was interesting and everything got easier once we started to know each other. In my group I think we had people with very strong points of view which made it a little bit complex especially in the research and conceptualization part but once we caught a working pace everything got better, I think some methodology would have been helpful though."

"Since I am a speculative designer I think I followed some of the methods I know and shared them with the group and we also focused more on the storytelling aspects then the probing ones"

"Most of us knew different tools to carry out the work so at the beginning it was difficult to agree on how to approach it but later we all got carried away because we were enjoying it and we trusted each other."

There is another thing here that it is worthwhile noticing, and it is the fact that the whole workshop was designed as an act of speculation around the themes of Neo Rurality.

What could we learn, for example, from the closely knit rural communities, to bring and recontextualize it to an urban context to try to achieve a way of doing something toghether, in society, minimizing separation, maintaining a level of freedom, of

negotiability of reality and of sustainability? And, thus, not necessarily adopting any strict methodology or procedure, but, rather, sharing approaches and values?

It was clear that a relational architecture was needed, so that a lack of method could be compensated through an aboundance of relationships, solidarity and mutual support.

Everything in the workshop was designed in this way, disseminating the experience with rituals that had this objective in mind and that also showed practical implementations of the concept.

For example: food, and the urban and neo-rural communities that came with it.

From the relational point of view, food was key in creating a strong convivial experience, and it also had a coherent frame with the theme of the workshop. Each day the group of female activists would arrive with food, prepare the buffet and performatively inform participants about what they were going to eat, where it came from, and why it was important, because by eating it we were part of a human netwoork of mutual support and of the ways in which rurality had become closer to the city and its inhabitants.

The menu was read out loud, written and attached ontto the wall, so that people could read it, becoming integrally part of the research process:

Day 1

Summer flavoured barley with rocket salad, carrots and radish
Peas cream garnished with turmeric and lemon
Lettuce and fennel salad
Zucchini

Day2

Autumn flavoured spelt garnished with broccoli, pumpkin and onion
Purgatory beans with shitake mushroom grown in Lazio
Chard seasoned with vinegar
Endive and lettuce salad

Day 3

Mashed red lentils, lemon, carrots, onion, celery and rosemary serverd with whole wheat basmati rice
Detox salad with raw carrots and cabbage seasoned with a vinaigrette of rice vinegar, lemon, moustard, turmeric and olive oil
Funghetti Eggplants with garlic and thyme

Day 4

Rice with daikons and red beets garnished with chives
Mashed broad beans and chicory
Mixed salad and tomatoes
Sesame and linen seeds

Day 5

Tabbouleh garnished with lemon, cucumber, tomatoes, parsley and basil
Layered Caponata with fried eggplants, potatoes and peppers
Chickpeas with Savoy cabbage, spinach and rocket salad

Food was also extremely inclusive: one participant in particular – both vegan and celiac – hugged and thanked the organization for the feeling of "being part of the group" and avoid the usual situation of "eating alone" / "bringing my special food".

This details are also what can make the difference in the life of an event.

People eating together, RUFA Space terrace.

Sharing food: the organic lunch.

The Outputs

The theme of Rurality was chosen because of its fundamental entanglement with our current planetary issues, such as climate change, poverty, energy, water, health, education.

All the scenarios dealt with the fact that probably the most fundamental difference with the city is that in rurality we are forced to face complexity. The intricacy of wilderness, the lack of services and infrastructure, the necessity for ecosystemic ways of doing things, the complex – often informal, negotiable, tribal… – relations/communication/ interactions, force us to act with the consciousness and understanding that complex (not complicated) issues are irreducible. Perhaps sometimes tragic.

The future we chose for all locations was 2030, eleven years from now.

For the exhibit all the groups produced:

a map:
containing geo-referenced data, knowledge, information, images, videos and narratives that allow us to understand the scenario;

a typical object of the scenario:
a design artifact of a thing which is characteristic of the future, and which allows us to immerse ourselves into the everyday life of its inhabitants;

a diary:
the autobiographical storytelling of the daily life of an inhabitant of the scenario, his/her/its self-representation, to dive deeper into the perceptions, understandings, desires, expectations, cultures and relations;

the workshop materials:
for the audience to understand how participants conceived the scenario, to make the research accessible and expandible in the future by others.

Arjeplog

The speculative path moved starting from the imagination of what could be the nearest consequences of the scenarios of climate change, pollution and energy, under the form of possible governative strategies in Sweden that could have been developed as responses to emergency scenario.

The scenario: Sweden had decided to stop, to give a break to the environment. People would move underground and stop consuming all possble materials and energy.

It was chosen to tell the story through a character who didn't see the historical transformations. For this reason, the main narrative object of the Arjeplog's scenario is a hand-made diary produced by a child, who assembled it with refuse objects and trash materials collected from the self-sustaining community of 2030. It contains drawings made with scraps of paper which tells her daily life, photos of Greta Thunberg and pieces of the brochure for emergency crisis, distributed to Sweden citizens since 2018.

In the scenario, the subtraction of paper from its recycling loop was forbidden and, thus, this first object was proposed as a chidren's litte secret: something which you can't and shouldn't do.

The second one is a digital object: a set of diegetic propaganda manifestos describing fundamental values of the community and omnipresent on personal devices: age

equality, welcoming, community care, respect of the wild, *lagom* (a Swedish and Norwegian word meaning "just the right amount") and memory of the reasons for the current situation.

Finally, an interactive map showing the most important features of the territory in those years, an infographic representation of the scenarios, and the whole drafts of the creative process, exposed in order to clarify the context of both narrative world and speculative performance of the group.

Tutor: Federico Biggio
Authors: Rita Trombin, Jennifer Gasser, Su Wu, Giulia Mangoni, Ladipo Famodu, Leonardo Gerritse, Marija Polović, Alejandra Robles Sosa

Foto Giovanna Scozzese

RU
FA

Caselle in Pittari

The Caselle in Pittari group focused on the future of rurality in the geographical and cultural context of the Mediterranean area.

The research phase brought out the peculiarities of the territory, characterized by hybridization processes involving traditional and innovative practices, from romantic visions to digital fabrication, from rural imaginaries to seed bombs, from community work to open source precision measurement tools.

Several scenarios of possible futures have emerged, the contexts chosen have been mainly two of them:

- Permanent and temporary communities, able to create new rituals related to collective work and entertainment through the design of wearable objects which are digitally connected and, thus, can coordinate anything from work, sharing tools and infrastructure, accessing services, and participating to the cultural life;
- Hybridization between technology and tradition in agricultural practices, bringing up possibilities such as decentralized seed banks, DIY cultivation manuals and holograms of the elderly, immortal pruners of territorial information.

Tutor: Daniele Bucci & Valeria Loreti
Authors: Afi Soedarsono, Ana María Urbieta Maisterra, Andrea Gaspar, Brandon Polack, Elliott Wortham, Gabriel Peris, Silvia Sgualdini, Yuxi Liu.

CASELLE
IN PITTARI

TRADITION IS INNOVATION

TRADITION IS INNOVATION

TRADITION IS INNOVATION

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TRADITION IS INNOVATION

Foto Giovanna Scozzese

Lushoto

Placed in a rural area of Tanziana, the future scenario immediately confronted the group with ethical question, as designers, researchers, but also as human beings. Early on in the process, some concerns over globalization and colonialism emerged. Aware of the critiques speculative design has received in the past, mainly for reinforcing colonialist and imperialist ways of thinking, the group came to the conclusion that they should not even try to speculate about the future of Lushoto; even imagining another person's' reality is indeed a colonialist practice.

The project speaks through the voices of two fictional characters, Alex Staire, a designer who follows through with creating a future scenario for Lushoto, and Victoria Turner, an anthropologist, who does not hesitate to point out the moral questionability underlying Alex's project. Through the use of parody and a fictional project the group aims at revealing and expanding the critique of speculative design.

Tutor: Alessandra Del Nero
Authors Eliza Chojnacka, Markel Cormenzana, Sabrina Haas, Elena Hess-Rheingans, James Hillman, Yang Li, Camila Monteiro Pereira
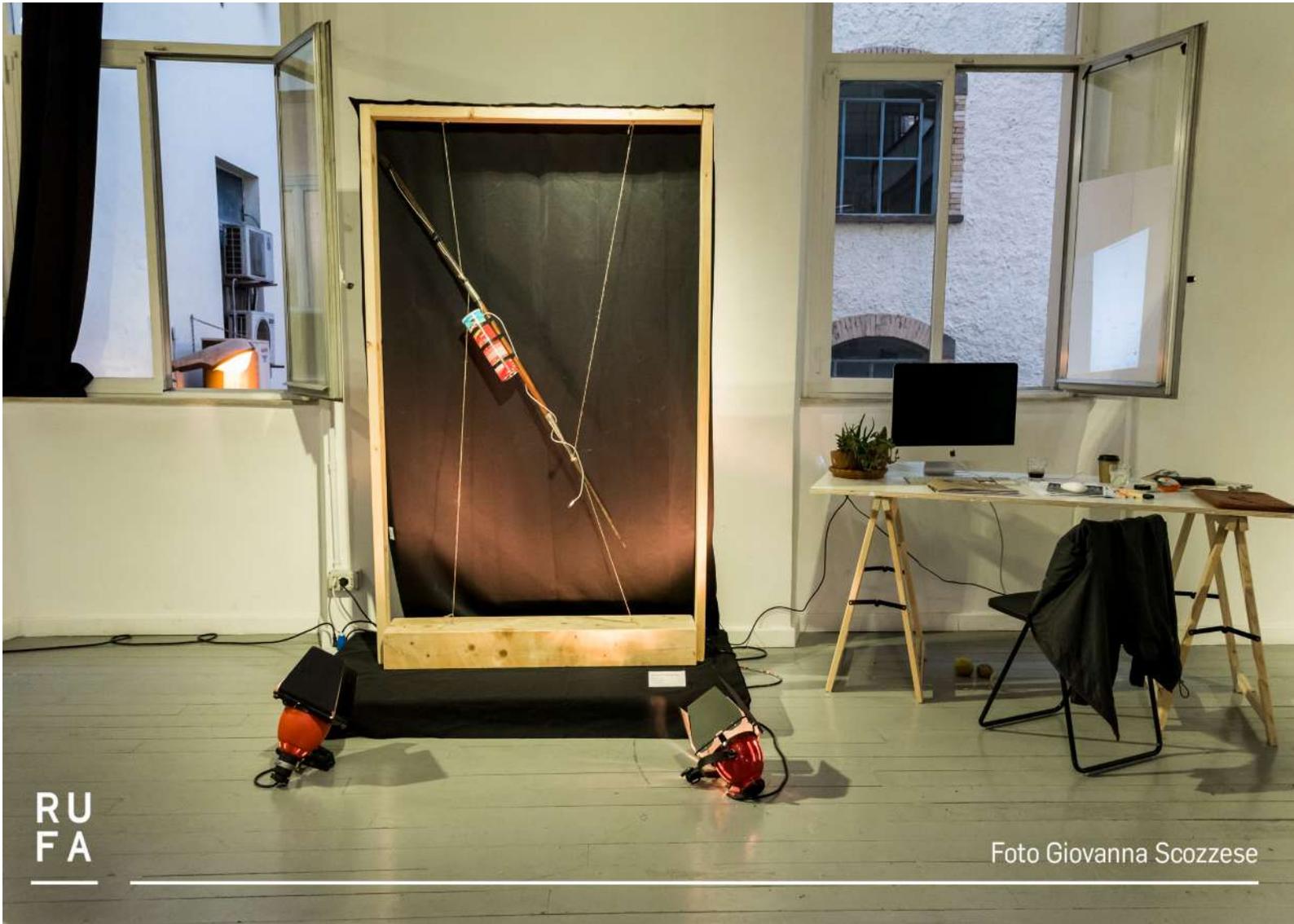
Foto Giovanna Scozzese

Chernobyl Exclusion Zone

The group pictured a scenario in which although the assurance that continued exposure to radiation is fatally dangerous, many more people began moving into the Exclusion Zone. It has become a paradise where savage animals and nature thrive and where new communities comprised of migrants from all over the world can have a high quality lifestyle, even if decreasing life expectancy.

Hope, superstition and belief are at the center of our speculation and take shape in the Swallow Symbolism (in reference to the internet legend of The Blackbird of Chernobyl). The Swallow has become a symbol of resilience in the face of extreme adversity for new waves of self-settlers to represent safety and protection from radiation. The Swallow symbol grew into a broader pseudo-mythology, complete with rituals, totems, artifacts, and even altars.

The participants didn't focus solely on one artifact, but constructed the office of main character: a gatekeeper who gathered information and took notes about the habits of the people who cross the border into the Exclusion Zone.

The elements that composed the set up were: a fictional gate, a desk, the gatekeeper diary, office furniture, the Exclusion Zone map, a russian billboard, a visitor log, 3 different paper made version of a Swallow Amulets, propaganda materials about Swallow Symbolism (flyers, posters and pins), medical poster of the Government of Ukraine.

Tutor: Arianna Forte
Authors: Taifu Zheng, Adam Zeiner, Gregory Scott, Barbara Giorgi, Andrea Cegarra, Vera Fearns, Polina Veidenbakh, Stef Silva.

Foto Giovanna Scozzese

The Moon

The lunar alternative has opened a spectrum of scenarios: from a catastrophic abandonment of the Earth, to a less urgent evaluation of extraterrestrial resources.

The storytelling starts in the middle of these polarities: the main character, Esoki, is a researcher and a farmer, sent to the Moon in 2030, to find solutions for the scarcity of food.

The exhibition shows his room: the bed is unmade; on it, a handwritten notebook.

Sketches, formulas: traces of his "Wilson project". On the walls, pages of his diary. In the center, under a sight of the Earth, his desk: his computer shows a map of the lunar exploration.

In front of the computer, some electric materials and a plant, under a glass dome, connected to a display.

It generates messages. It works: the plants communicate. Wilson speaks!

Tutor: Herbert Natta
Authors: Nicolas Attolico, Benedetta Ficarelli, , Nicola Lecca, Maryssa Cook-Obregón, Sheila Ribeiro, Andrew Seetoh, Ai YamaKa.

Reviews and Conference

The workshop experience ended with the reviews of the projects, with the conference and with networking sessions.

The reviews took place in the exhibit, and each group had some time to walk reviewers through their materials and explain the overall concept and its implications.

The reviewers were, in the first instance, partners from the SpeculativeEdu projects, for their experience in speculative design approaches and practices. On top of them, some locals were invited to act as reviewers, to provide a plurality of views across disciplines: they were curators, academics, researchers, artists, designers, anthropologists, psychologists, engineers and more.

The reviews let a multitude of issues emerge from all the works.

People listening and reflecting during the review

The first review was the one from Caselle in Pittari, who designed a scenario in which climate change, migration, data and IoT driven integrated services were the main issues characterising life in the rural area, and was communicated through the eyes of a nomadic video blogger and using different mockups of IoT devices.

First issues that emerged from the reviews regarded the data and evidence that was collected to infer this scenario, and the ways in which it was interpreted. Then came up questions about the feasibility of the technologies proposed in the narrative.

But probably the most important feedback that emerged from the reviews was that the scenario that was produced was not really able to pick up on the location's present, with its existing transformation processes, and to bring us credibly to the future scenario, through narrative construction and designed props, being able to show how the proposed transformations change the lives of the communities, economies, social organizations etc.

How can you credibly pick up from the transformations that already exist? How can you describe not only something "possible", but also something which engages the protagonists of these changes into discussing, proposing and activating themselves?

Then was what turned out to be maybe the most controversial of the projects, the one for Lushoto.

Here, the participants confronted about the possible colonialist derives of design: how

can we design something "for Africa", without ever having been there, without knowing anyone from the place, and without anyone from that place here with us?

The group chose to approach this issue by means of meta-design, reflecting on the environment and the context which bring to the possibility that "someone else" designs your future: they studied the struggles of a designer who has to design a Masai spear that is also a wi-fi hotspot for migrant and nomadic / precarious generation in Africa.

The project was implemented ironically and with a variety of media. One question came from the ways in which the images and materials of the exhibit would travel through different communication channels: the Wi-Fi Masai spear made with a box of Pringles is a controversial object, and letting its image travel alone without contextualization and explanation is not a good idea, and is prone to generate polarization and violent reactions.

Then, the hypothesis was moved to one of Communication Design, in which much focus is dedicated to both how the discussion emerges and is built within the group, and in how the concept is staged, performed and communicated with the audiences, to avoid the dangers coming from out of context satyre.

Next was the scenario for Arjeplog, which explored how climate change brought on a strong transformation to the values on which society is arranged and organized, so much that the future government established a practice using which nature could regenerate, with people moving underground.

The scenario is presented through various printed materials such as manuals, government guidelines, and through the point of view of children, who scavenge-hunt in the underground dwellings of human beings to collect documental treasures from the scenario's past which let the narrative emerge.

One very important aspect about the implementation of the project was its usage of present's real documents, to present the hypotheses of the transformation. For example, they used Swedish Government's brochure about procedures for nuclear incidents and attacks, and the great number of atomic bunkers in Sweden, to suggest the possible move underground, to let nature regenerate.

Another reviewer noted the need for the presence of the people who are actually part of the scenario, their collaboration and co-creation of future scenarios. This is of fundamental importance in aiming ad designing things that are respectful and actively promote the desires, identities, differences, expectations, rights, liberties and beliefs of all the stakeholders involved.

Then it was the turn of Chernobyl's exclusion zone, which experimented with the ways in which a radical rural scenario as this one, is able to help in designing new forms in which people can relate to each other, moving from technologies to the emergence of new rituals and traditions.

Interesting comments came arguing about the possibility of these extreme scenarios to help us reflect about our values (for example trying to understand what would

bring someone to go to the Zone, be it war, unemployment, the perception of a lack of meaning in one's life...).

The last project presented was the future scenario for the Moon. The project picked up on the many international projects which are trying to bring agriculture and architecture to the Moon, describing the incipit of human presence on the satellite, through temporary international residencies to research, study, build, experiment and, progressively, live on the Moon.

Some effort was dedicated to trying to ensure that the scenario was built progressively on top of the present one.

Other comments came from the ways in which sounds, visuals and props are able to vividly express aspects of the lifestyle which we are describing through the projects.

Then some comments came about the ways in which the designs should be able to create a discourse around the strong key values and issues which are characteristic of the scenario, and the ways in which they appear in real everyday life. For example: who goes to the moon? Billionaires? How does geopolitics work on the Moon?

After the reviews, the conference started. It was designed as a short, agile event. During the conference, right after the welcomes and institutional greetings, a presentation of the SpeculativeEdu project was given, complete with the updates on the research about the State of the Art of speculative design education programs and practices.

Then a panorama of the main issues emerging from the study of speculative design practices was given, together with a short presentation of the results of the workshop.

Then, a networking session began, where the international participants and the partners of the SpeculativeEdu project could meet the locals, our university hosts, many members of the roman arts and design communities, and other people and professionals from the city.

Everything lead up to the Cucina Titanica Partecipativa.

Cucina Titanica Partecipativa

The Cucina Titanica Partecipativa (Titanic Participatory Cooking, CTP) is a cultural practice which emerges from the mountains above Salerno, in Fisciano and Calvanico, initiated by Nino Galdieri.

It involves a "tribe" in carefully planning how to use a public square or space, or how to piggyback some existing event, in both authorised and unauthorised ways, to create a flash-mob style emergent side event in which hundreds of people gather to participate to preparing and cooking a traditional recipe (for example of Pasta e Fagioli) that will feed the hundreds of the place, for free.

The practice is relevant for many reasons, for example for the fact that it is, to all effects, a neo-rural ritual, which brings together the traditions of food and eating together of small villages and the new models of communication and the digital creative classes.

By letting participants and visitors experience CTP, we wanted them to be fully immersed in the theme of our research of the past days, experiencing how technologies, new

forms of economies (for example circular, platform) and the transformations of cities, work, free time, communication, relation and expression combine to progressively create rituals, symbols, signs, objects, processes and more, describing our lives.

CTP is also a positive contribution to speculative design because it is a performative act of speculation, regarding the models (food supply chains, circular economies, use of social media, new forms of loose and tight communities...) according to which life can reorganize itself in times of AI, 5G, IoT, BigData, etc.

Finally, CTP has also been a practical way in which to describe one of the principal characteristics of the workshop's architecture.

While CTP is happening, with people cutting onions, garlic, peppers and adding everything to the mix, many constantly have doubts: how many onions for 300 people? how much water? how many chilli peppers? and so on.

Students, professors and guest cooking on n the RUFA Space terrace

CTP's approach in caring for participants, also in their informational needs, is not based on the controlled distribution of bits of knowledge (ie: "we need 250 onions!"). Instead, it goes by carefully distributing all elements of the performance (the position of food stocks and their quantities that are present; the tools, pots, pans; the heater and fires; the cutting surfaces; the number of knives; and other, endless details), as well as a number of boundary objects, which together create a relational space which invites people to actively look at each other and look out for each other, and to collaboratively arrive to conclusions.

It's a design around the boundaries of the relational ecosystems, whose objective is to try to maximise the possibilities and opportunities that someone will do something together, or agree on a common decision, or share responsibility, while trying to avoid indoctrination, to enable diversity to actively emerge.

This is exactly what the workshop's staff tried to achieve towards the groups' participants, by way of how the spaces and tools were laid out, and through the workshop phases and how they were made, through the food and where it came from, and how it was organized, through the collaboration we requested from participants (ie: everyone cares for their glass, and for cleaning their plate), as well as from the hints disseminated across the brief and in the other materials.

This sort of ritual, performative co-presence, through behaviors, objects and processes, is, in our experience, among the most important elements for the emergence of meaningful speculative design processes which are able to both look at the possible and

to respect and build values, communities and common understandings.

This is how the NeoRural Futures summer school ended. A session of CTP took place on the terrace of RUFA Space. Nino Galdieri and his crew from Salerno come to Rome bringing food for everyone and making all of us cook together.

The ritual moment created by CTP is a tribute to a form of embodied research able to melt with people's lives to become alive: a performative act of sharing that unites bodies, cultures and differences.

We infinitely thank Rural Hack and Alex Giordano for introducing us to this cultural practice, and its initiator Nino Galdieri for generously bringing it to the summer school, giving NeoRural Futures an epic conclusion.

DISCUSSION

Open Issues

The workshop and the activities around it have provided an excellent vantage point to reflect on some important issues concerning speculative design approaches and practices.

From present to future

How do you get from the present to the future?

Speculative design practices have sometimes been used together with predictive actions that leverage big data and AI to try to infer "what will happen next?".

Even given this, its attitude is more inclined towards the human, cultural, psychological elements of change and social transformation.

"How do people's lives and power balances change when technological innovation plays such a big, strong role in our societies?"

This is probably the most important question which we can try answer using speculation. Not really analysing tech innovations from a technical point of view, but, rather, with the eye focused on their implications on human life and psychology.

To achieve this, a specific focus must be dedicated to understanding the progression of individual and social transformation.

Even in the most disruptive scenario, the roots of the future are always found in the present. Therefore, it is of crucial importance to dedicate attention in understanding and expressing how humanity moves from one scenario to the other.

Arbitratriety

This issue is the mirror of the previous one and concerns how to choose and layout the elements of the designed scenarios.

There will always be a dose of arbitrariety in these types of choices, from the simple to the most subtle ones. In any case, effort must be dedicated to orient these choices so that they are not completely arbitrary, and that they find their origin in the cultures, traditions, habits and, more in general, contexts (for example the geopolitical one) of the communities and spaces which the scenario is about.

Managing communication in the infosphere

The richness of channels, modalities and opportunities for communication in the current years open up both fantastic possibilities and delicate situations for speculative designers.

While, on the one hand, it is now possible to communicate transmedially in complex, coordinated ways, on the other hand, the complexity of communication gives our content a life of their own across social media sharing and algorithmic intrigues.

What may initially seem like a manageable transmedia communication strategy may easily become an unmanageable set of contents that run loose across the infosphere, de- and re- contextualized, commented and transformed, without the background information and elements that were originally intended for its comprehension.

We may find ourself reaching willing and interested audiences like never before. Just as easily as our works can be misunderstood, distorted, spectacularized, used for purposes that were not intended, even offensive, problematic, or dangerous ones.

We must make sure that the messages we diffuse have their own degree of autonomy,

so that we can minize this type of risk.

Worldbuilding

Study the implications of technologies, not technologies alone.

A world without cars would be a very different world from our own. There would be no cars in the streets, no public space dedicated to parking, no concept for "traffic", no fuel stations, no repair shops, no accidents, no selfies with Ferrari, etc. This would radically change our understanding of city space and processes, transforming how we would inhabit it, relate in it, work, entertain ourselves and more.

Speculative design processes should aspire at describing the worlds in their scenarios in immersive ways, so that people can have experience of what it could mean to live in them, what the lifestyles and the sets of mundane tasks of our lives – that constitutes our culture – could be. The things and processes in a world, and their implications.

An action of worldbuilding – that is: designing the characteristics of the world in which a certain scenario takes place – is essential to speculative design processes.

Colonialism

This is a fundamental open issue. It deals with the fact that most speculative design originates from european and american experiences, establishing a certain degree of cultural hegemony on the shape of the futures that are and can be imagined. And it deals as well with the fact that many times it involves researching scenarios without the active and present engagement of the stakeholders, like citizens, community members and, in general, the people living in the depicted scenario.

This is a very important issue, and taking it into serious consideration forces us to re-think our design practices and methods to include active presence in communities, inclusion of stakeholders across all design phases, co-creation actions and more.

Even more, it transforms design in the direction of a shift in authorship: design, in this sense, becomes not the activity through which a limited number of actors designs the objects and processes which the people will use, but, rather, the activity which governs an environment/platform/context in which people express and collaborate in cooperatively design things and processes needed to approach and satisfy the needs, desires and expectations.

CONCLUSIONS

SPECULATIVE•EDU•NEORURALS

On the second day of the workshop, we have sent out a letter to all participants, to trigger collective reflection on the participants. The central node of this letter was its indications

"

We didn't force you to use specific tools or methods. Speculative design is an approach: there's many ways in which you can do it. In the materials we provided you with examples of how other people do it. What we really wanted is to understand how you do it: with informed knowledge and understandings of the current practices, to try to understand what approaches could be better for different types of scenarios. Critiques, suggestions, evolutions, indications, proposals and evaluations are not only desirable, they're probably the most important thing you can do for speculative design practices.

While doing these activities, we should always keep in mind the objective of speculative design, which is not really to "solve problems", but, rather, to explore human culture, imagination and their implications in ways that allow people to come together in a participatory discussion about the future, in actionable ways, so that we all can learn how to imagine together, and start the change.

This is very useful: to create policies, products, services and more. Not closed in some building or institution, in the separation of a company lab, or of a hackathon, but in the middle of society.

Some advice:

- **Work like you're producing a movie or a novel**. *Speculative design, cinema and literature have many things in common: in the process, in how you do research, in how you choose and design design props to make your world credible and immersive, in how you select and shape the characters of your narrative and in how you decide to communicate what their life is like.*
- **Don't try to "solve problems":** *speculative design is not really for that. It's the design of a scenario, not of a problem --> solution thing. Probably the most important use of this scenario that comes out is to resonate in culture, to engage people in a discussion about how they want their futures to be, and to try to trigger participative action around this.*
- **Speculative design is about exploring your culture** *and, in this exploration, catching people's attention in order to try to trigger common, shared reflections on our cultures and lifestyles, and their implications, and to act on them.*
- **Choose a point of view:** *it's the only thing we have, and it is possibly the most powerful thing we can do to engage other people in a reflection and in action.*
- **Start from understanding the things that people do, how they are changing, and how technologies contribute to these changes**. *Villem Flusser, in his design lectures, gave a wonderful definition of "culture": the set of things that people do and use. Start from there.*
- **Don't give anything for granted:** *history changes through disruptions, not incrementally. If you have read books like "The Black Swan" from Nassim Taleb,*

you will have understood just how important this concept is, to be as Anti-fragile as possible in the complex scenarios of our transforming planet and society.

- **Start from psychology,** *not technology.*
- **The big issues of our planet** *(like climate change, the transformation of cities and work, energy, water, poverty, corporations ...)* **are the ambient of your scenario, not your output.**

"

On top of that, after the end of the workshop, the exhibit and event, we sent out another mail, in which we commented about the possible colonialistic derives of design.

Uniting these two elements can help us understand what sort of issues we encountered during this experience, and what they mean for design and designers.

On the one hand, is a set of technical and methodology issues, which are combined with the skill profiles possessed by people who practice speculative design: the need for worldbuilding, narrative, writing, cinematographic skills and approaches; the humanistic and psychological focus; knowledge of how innovation and transformation processes take place; the effectiveness of the autobiographical approach; the need to think and work transmedially; and more.

On the other hand, is a set of broader, even meta, considerations about the ways in which our practices – even consolidated ones – create effects that are colonialistic and hegemonic in nature.

For both, we have understood just how important it is to open wide, open and inclusive discussions and critique. Both in practice, in the ways in which we do projects, and in strategy, through our approaches, methods, teaching and research.

In this case, we have started from formulating a possible hypothesis, by listing "some of the approaches that we use in our practice to avoid colonialist (and corporate) derives in our speculative designs".

The list included in the letter to participants was "meant as a conversation starter, not as a complete reference", to open up to further reflections and different formulations.

In effect, in our practice , among others, we use two ethnographic frameworks that are of particular interest for Speculative Design processes:

1. multi sited ethnography and
2. peer-to-peer ethnography

Multi sited ethnography was first conceived by George Marcus, and it deals with the kind of issues which we talk about when we bring up questions like: "how can I design something for Tanzania?", or "how can designing for Tanzania be about us?"

Our friend anthropologist Massimo Canevacci, when working with the Bororo people in Mato Grosso, says that to understand what happens in the Bororo's aldeia (their village), he has to understand what happens in the metropolis, like Sao Paulo, or New York, just as to understand what happens in Sao Paulo he has to understand what happens in the aldeia.

This is not because of some new-age sort of global interconnection thing, but for the ways in which culture spreads, and performances of self-representations spread, and for how knowledge, information, aesthetics and fetishes resonate in different contexts, creating polyphonic, even dissonant, resonances.

Marcus says:

"

Ethnography moves from its conventional single site location, contextualized by macro constructions of a larger social order to multiple sites of observation and participation that cross dichotomies such as the "local" and the "global", the "lifeworld" and the "system". Resulting ethnographies are therefore in an out of the world system. The anxieties to which this methodological shift gives rise are considered in terms of testing the limits of ethnography, attenuating the power of fieldwork, and losing the perspective of the subaltern.

"

The other framework we use, is called Peer-to-peer ethnography, and we came up with it through our Digital Urban Acupuncture concept (which we also use in rurality, but the name came first because we have started using it in cities)

"

P2P Ethnography, as Ethnography, can be defined as a qualitative research design aimed at exploring cultural phenomena. Different from Ethnography, its aim is not to produce field studies or case reports, but to establish continuously available, accessible, participatory, performative and collaborative processes which allow gaining understandings about the knowledge and the systems of meanings in the lives of a social group, and its interactions with other ones.

P2P Ethnography represents a participatory, performative approach, in which research and understanding require gaining awareness of one's position within the relational ecosystem (from cultural, emotional, aesthetic, perceptive, cognitive points of view) of the observed social group, and to establish or modify relations and interconnections both within the group, outside of it, and in-between, in fluid, dynamic, possibilistic ways.

"

The objective of P2PE is not to create some report or similar case. Rather it is a way in which researchers can design systems in which all participants are able to gain better understanding of themselves, their relationships, their positions in the knowledge/information/communication/interaction ecosystems, in ways that are enabling and liberating for their self-representation and performance.

Going back to the workshop experience and, in the specifics, to the time of the reviews that took place in the exhibit, these concepts address those critiques according to which speculative design projects which deal with remote, distant, or, simply, not present communities, could really about designing ways to connect with these communities, to reflect and construct upon these (possible) connections. In this sense, speculative design processes would be "about you", not products and services inflicted to someone else. Ethnography is a "participant" (and participatory, and performative) observation. The concepts of "presence", "participation" and "performance" assume particular weight in this context.

For example, through the concepts of multi-sited ethnography and p2p-ethnography, it is possible to imagine how to give form to systems (technological or not) which are mutual, solidal infrastructures for communication, self-representation, interpretation, performance, sharing and interaction/relation, so that the resulting design is not "a THING you design for Africa", but an interconnective performance, through which you can relate, connect and build together.

Of course, this implies a lot of thinking about "you" (what does it mean, and in how you are different or similar from "others), and about how knowledge and information propagate in the world.

For example, from this perspective, Bruno Latour's "Laboratory Life" describes the relationship between science and society, and the revolutionary epistemological transformation which takes place when the researcher is not alone, separated, closed

in his lab, observing "us" through his micro/macro-scopes, as if we were bacteria, with data extracted in behaviours and in the environment and then used in this separation, to create intelligence that then can be used to take decisions and actions onto society, on the "bacteria" that is us.

It is a beautiful book that describes this possible epistemological change, in which the researcher is not only the one who observes, but also becomes the one who participates, helps and supports society and individuals to observe and understand themselves. In participating, the researcher enables.

Science stops being a faith, a paternalistic entity, and becomes a gentle, welcoming, solidal, participatory performance in society.

As designers, we can really learn a lot from these kinds of approaches, and in the meaning of "presence", "performance", "participation", "self-representation", and many other issues we have discussed in the previous sections.

In the case of many of the scenarios in the workshop, this, for example, would have been among the most significant kinds of output that could have been produced: an interconnective infrastructure for rurality, to start processes like the ones described by Latour.

For example, p2p Ethnography is exactly that: its intention is not to inflict you yet another report on how serious is the situation in Africa and "what can we do about it",

but, rather, how to create a participatory, solidal, gentle process for interconnection and mutual performance and representation, starting from understanding how information, knowledge, communication and interaction flow, what is the form of the human ecosystem involved, what are its nodes, hubs, missing links, over-abundant ones etc.

In our friend and colleague Penny Travlou's slides, Multi-sited ethnography and P2P Ethnography are put side by side, in search of a shift that is epistemological first of all.

As it is possible to see, in all of these practices and approaches presence is of primary importance, just as conflict is, through the concept of the dissonance that is possibly the most important characteristics of ecosystems. These concepts are very far away from new age concepts of planetary interconnections, as here is where design confronts the dimension of "tragedy" brought on by this innumerable condition of hyperconnection, in our globalised, financialized world. Tragedy, by definition, is everything which cannot be dealt with through language, rational thought and calculation. It exists, but there's no "solution": it's an existential condition and, thus, must be modeled and understood through different types of design, which are not dedicated to uncovering solutions for certain problems, but, rather, to empower people to gain better understandings about how things are and about how they could turn out to be, individually and in society.

Even when applying speculative design to its more commercial and corporate applications, these sort of reflections should remain in the radar of decision makers and designers, so that more just, inclusive strategic and operative modalities can be achieved, that are able to respect diversity and to create social activation around the needs and expectations of communities.

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2020

SPECULATIVE•EDU•NEORURALS

2020 came, and COVID came with it.

It should have been the final year of the SpeculativeEdu project, the one in which the textbook would have been published, the final event would have been performed, and maybe you would have been reading another report as nice as this one.

2020 showed us just how fragile we are. A global pandemics stopped the world. And we know that this is just the first of the many global issues that are coming next: climate change, migrations, poverty, health and all the others.

Now more than ever, thinking about the future is a fundamental thing to do.

Otherwise, the future will think about us, for sure.

It of umost importance that this "thinking about the future" is not something that someone does for us. It is of fundamental importance that it is something we all do, right in the middle of our society. It must not be something that some only lab thinks about, who knows where, how and why, or some government, or some company, just to sell us something different, however good.

This why we think that initiatives such as SpeculativeEdu are so important. How do you teach designers to not only think about future scenarios, but also to engage other people, their fellow citizens and human beings, to think together and to activate themselves? How do you move from just "possible" to "desirable", "preferable", "enjoyable", "just"

and other beautiful adjectives that we might wantt to add? How do we do it as a society?

This is possibly the most important form of politics that we can do: social imagination and desire.

Thank you to our wonderful partners at the SpeculativeEdu project and, to you all, watch out for further initiatives!

THANKS!

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