

DESIGN CULTURE(S)

Cumulus Conference Proceedings Roma 2021

Volume #2

ARTIFICIAL ARTIFICIAL
LANGUAGES
LIFE LIFE
MAKING MAKING
NEW NORMAL
MULTIPLICITY
PROXIMITY
RESILIENCE
REVOLUTION
THINKING THINKING

**Design Culture(s)
Cumulus Conference
Proceedings Roma 2021**

Volume #2

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and Intelligence
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After
- 07/21 Rome, Design Culture(s)
Volume #1, Volume #2

DESIGN CULTURE(S)

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Volume #2

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of Art and Design Education and Research

Rome 2021

DE
SIGN
CULT
URE (S)

ROMA **2021**

JUNE 08.09.10.11
CUMULUS CONFERENCE

OVERVIEW

36 **ABOUT THE
CONFERENCE**

49 **EXHIBITIONS**
all tracks

81 DESIGN
CULTURE (OF)
ARTIFICIAL
track

629 DESIGN
CULTURE (OF)
LANGUAGES
track

1175 DESIGN
CULTURE (OF)
LIFE
track

1425 DESIGN
CULTURE (OF)
MAKING
track

1891 DESIGN
CULTURE (OF)
MULTIPLICITY
track

2095 DESIGN
CULTURE (OF)
NEW NORMAL
track

2604 DESIGN
CULTURE (OF)
PROXIMITY
track

3153 DESIGN
CULTURE (OF)
RESILIENCE
track

3929 DESIGN
CULTURE (OF)
REVOLUTION
track

4383 DESIGN
CULTURE (OF)
THINKING
track

4768 **POSTERS**
all tracks

CONTENTS

36 About the conference
Loredana Di Lucchio, Lorenzo
Imbesi

49 EXHIBITIONS

51 ARTIFICIAL | City of Experiences
George Brown College, Canada

54 LANGUAGES | Post collaboration
as a form of counter-culture: The
birth of new languages
University of Johannesburg,
South Africa

57 LIFE | Design for social problems
in Mexico: living with disabilities
Autonomous Metropolitan
University, Azcapotzalco, Mexico

60 MAKING | New Textile
Topologies: Experiments at the
intersection of surface, textile
and form
The Swedish School of Textiles,
Sweden

63 MULTIPLICITY | Self-Acceptance
to Self-Indulgence
Pearl Academy, India

66 NEW NORMAL | Expedition 2
Degrees
Zurich University of the Arts

69 PROXIMITY | Newcomers: Design
for Immigrants
Pratt Institute's School of Design,
USA

72 RESILIENCE | Designing for
Resilience: Creating new
possibilities for industrial cities
University of Monterrey, Mexico

75 REVOLUTION | UFØ Drift: In
Search of Practice
ArtEZ University of the Arts
Arnhem, Netherlands

78 THINKING | Design and
awareness: user meeting
ESDAP Catalunya, Spain

81 DESIGN CULTURE (OF) ARTIFICIAL

83 A participated parametric design
experience on humanoid robotics
Francesco Burlando, Xavier
Ferrari Tumay, Annapaola Vacanti

99 A systemic vision for the common
good : |C|A|S|E| Goods Mobility
in the fourth industrial revolution
Veneranda Carrino, Federica
Spera

CONTENTS

-
- 117 **Activist Activated: Efficacies of AR Political Poster Design**
Sarah Edmands Martin
-
- 130 **Art, Design, and Mathematics: Software programming as artifice in the creative process**
Carlos de Oliveira Junior, Eduardo Ariel de Souza Teixeira
-
- 142 **Artificial Creativity – Hybridizing the Artificial and the Human.**
Yael Eylat Van Essen
-
- 156 **Artificial Intelligence is a Character? Exploring design scenarios to build interface behaviours**
Andrea Di Salvo, Andrea Arcoraci
-
- 168 **Becoming Janus: The Subversive Potential of Face Recognition Technologies**
Romi Mikulinsky
-
- 181 **Between digital and physical. Envisioning and prototyping smart material systems and artifacts from data-informed scenarios.**
Stefano Parisi, Patrizia Bolzan, Mila Stepanovic, Laura Varisco, Ilaria Mariani
-
- 199 **Consensual (Design) Fictions: co-creating iterative use cases to define technology conceptualization**
David Hernández Falagán, Andreu Belsunces Gonçalves, Kevin Koidl
-
- 215 **Design of robotic for superhuman tasks**
Fabrizio Formatì
-
- 227 **Design, space management and work tools: enhancing human work in transition to Industry 4.0**
Luca Casarotto, Pietro Costa, Enrica Cunico
-
- 237 **Designers' skills for Social Robotics**
Maximiliano Romero, Giovanni Borga, Rohan Sashindran Vangal, Francesco Baldassarra
-
- 251 **Designing for the future by understanding evolving culture based on advancing technology and the changing behaviours that accompany it.**
Nayna Yadav
-
- 264 **Designing Somatic Play for Digital Natives through a Body-centric Design Process**
Seçil Uğur Yavuz, Kristi Kuusk, Michaela Honauer
-

CONTENTS

-
- 279 Designing unpredictable futures. An anthropological perspective on the algorithmical prediction of human behaviour
Giovanna Santanera, Roberta Raffaetà
-
- 290 Digital Creativity Tools Framework
Marita Canina, Carmen Bruno
-
- 304 Digital tools that support students to reflect on their design competency growth paths
John Fass, Job Rutgers
-
- 316 Domestic AI and Emotional Involvement. Design Perspectives
Mauro Ceconello, Martina Sciannamé, Davide Spallazzo
-
- 328 Empowered by Code, to act in real word
Alfredo Calosci
-
- 339 Exploring Digital Inequalities: How Welfare States are disappearing behind an AI
Paola Pierri
-
- 349 From Decoration to Functionality — Research on smart accessories design in the Internet era
Qingman Wu
-
- 360 From the evaluation of acceptability to design of an assistive robot for elderly
Francesca Tosi, Mattia Pistolesi, Claudia Becchimanzi
-
- 376 Future heritage and heritage futures. A design perspective on the activation of Digital cultural heritage stored in archives
Margherita Tufarelli
-
- 386 Going beyond the problem of privacy: individual and social impacts of the use of personal information in connected services
Laura Varisco
-
- 400 Human and Artificial Intelligence for the Cultural Reform of Design
Elena Laudante, Mario Buono
-
- 412 Human Sensibility, Robotic Craft: Toward Autonomous Stonework
Tom Shaked, Karen Lee Bar-Sinai, Aaron Sprecher
-
- 423 Interface takes command. Educational environments, tools and practices to face the new normal.
Alessio Caccamo
-
- 437 Intelligent Voice Assistants: A Review of User Experience Issues and Design Challenges
Lucia Rampino, Sara Colombo
-

CONTENTS

-
- 449 Research on Gender Differences of Adult Head Shape in China
Renke He, Wenxiu Yang,
Wanshan Li, Haining Wang
-
- 461 Speculative Physical Models Created Through a Robotic Process
Sara Codarin, Karl Daubmann
-
- 476 Teaching Design in the Age of Platforms: A Framework for Platform Education
Xinyi Li
-
- 488 The body as an artefact: a case of hand prosthesis
Venere Ferraro, Silvia Ferraris,
Lucia Rampino
-
- 502 The design of human machine interfaces: from data to risk prevention.
Annalisa Di Roma, Alessandra Scarcelli
-
- 516 The Designer in the AI/Machine Learning Creation Process
Frederique Krupa
-
- 526 The encounter between Design and Artificial Intelligence: how do we frame new approaches?
Marzia Mortati
-
- 537 The Perceptual and Dialogical Form of Design between Time, Space and Technologies
Camelia Chivăran, Sonia Capece
-
- 552 The role of Design in telepresence robotics experience
Claudio Germak, Lorenza Abbate
-
- 565 The Venice Backup: Case studies on the use of Virtual Preservation Techniques on Architectural Heritage sites in Venice, Italy
Kai Reaver
-
- 587 Towards a visual-based survey on explainable machine learning
Beatrice Gobbo
-
- 604 Toys and Play, Weapons and Warfare: Militarizing the Xbox Controller
Rachel Berger
-
- 619 Wearing the smart city: Supporting older adults to exercise by combining age-friendly environments and tailored digital public data
Nicole Aimers, Alen Keirnan, Ann Borda, Sonja Pedell
-

CONTENTS

629 DESIGN CULTURE (OF) LANGUAGES

631 A Sidewalk museum. Exhibiting the collective dimension of the moving image
Nicolo Giacomo Ceccarelli, Marco Sironi, Sabrina Melis

645 Abstract to figurative, and everything in between: visual design approaches and linguistic codes of a traditional form of animated product.
Vincenzo Maselli, Eleni Mouri

659 Al-Kafiye: A Symbol of Change
Hala Abdel Malak

688 Beyondstories. People Narrative makes a Territory
Aureliano Capri, Valeria Michetti, Veneranda Carrino, Mauro Palatucci

707 Brand in Product. The language of the brand to govern complexity
Mario Rullo, Massimiliano Datti

726 Creating Visual Identity as Constellation: Methodological Project for a Design Workshop
Ximena Izquierdo, Magdalena Ballacey

754 Data visualization as a qualitative driver in knowledge communication: an interpretative framework
Giulia Ciliberto

771 Design and Cultural Sites: New signage methods and languages for fruition, accessibility and storytelling
Monica Oddone, Irene Caputo, Marco Bozzola

786 Design and the 'Magical magic'. Disney and history, perceived heritage and shared memory
Luisa Chimenz

800 DEsign DEcide The sign
Tsvetomira Girginova

811 Designing the Gross. In search for social inclusion
Adrien Rigobello, Nadja Gaudillière-Jami

828 Finding New Representations of Old Knowledge: a design study of visualizing I-Ching
Yvette Shen

843 Form is function. Ethics and aesthetics of digital technologies in inclusive interface design.
Letizia Bollini

CONTENTS

-
- 852 'Graphicmance'. New Visual Languages between Design and Performance
Giulia Scalera
-
- 865 Inner Geographies as poetic-aesthetic knowing: the inspiration and manifestation of creative doings through an emotively-orientated sensory methodology
Mizan Rambhoros
-
- 883 Italian Pavillion at XXII Triennale di Milano
Ilaria Bollati, Luisa Collina, Laura Daglio, Laura Galluzzo
-
- 895 Language and identity in new Italian design
Stefano Follesa, Peian Yao
-
- 906 Metaphors as Knowledge Activators in Data Visualizations: the case of the Archipelago of Calvino's literary works
Tommaso Elli, Maria de los Angeles Briones Rojas, Beatrice Gobbo, Margherita Parigini, Virginia Giustetto, Valeria Cavalloro, Michele Mauri
-
- 925 Patient Autonomy Indicators: a knowledge visualization tool for patient autonomy support
Wen Zhang, Yuan Liu, Li Hou
-
- 938 Performativity as a language of sense-making for cultural service in local museum
Shu Hongming, Eleonora Lupo
-
- 950 Solid perspectives and optical corrections of spaces in graphic & architectural design
Tommaso Empler
-
- 962 Spatial construction for ideational meaning: An analysis of interior design students' multimodal projects.
Andrew Gill, Giovanna Di Monte-Milner
-
- 976 Tales of Surprise: Exploring Sense Making Processes Through User Narratives
Miray Hamarat, Ozge Merzali Celikoglu
-
- 992 The Design of Politics: Understanding the Arrest of Cesare Battisti Through the New Media Factor
Noemi Biasetton
-
- 1007 The Enlightenment of the Contemporary Transformation of Chinese Traditional Visual Space Perception on Cultural Sustainability design for all
Jixiang Jiang, Dong Tao
-

CONTENTS

1021 The Interplay between Ethics and Aesthetics in Intelligent Systems-Users Interaction
Gabriele Barzilai

1034 The pluralistic aesthetics of nowadays design
Francesca La Rocca

1049 The role of vernacular typography in the linguistic landscape of multicultural Singapore: A multimodal analysis case study of a gentrified street
Min-Yee Angeline Yam

1063 The Threshold of Language: Design and Soma
Daniela Monasterios-Tan, Susan Sentler, Ginette Chittick

1082 Towards a new design culture of scientific production – Innovating the formats of scientific publication of design
Eleonora Lupo, Beatrice Gobbo, Emilio Lonardo

1098 Translation Design for medicine leaflets. Research and innovation.
Elena Caratti, Antonella Penati, Valeria Bucchetti

1115 Visual dialects. Exploring early design sketching in various design disciplines
John Daniel Öhrling, Åsa Wikberg-Nilsson

1127 Visualizing Offshore Foreign Direct Investments: The Atlas of Offshore
Michele Mauri, María De Los Angeles Briones Rojas, Jonathan Gray, Daniel Haberly, Chris Anderson

1144 What does this symbol mean? Icons as a Language for Emergency
Rodrigo Ramirez

1159 Where methods meet form
Meret Ernst, Maya Ober

1175 DESIGN CULTURE (OF) LIFE

1177 Adopt a costumer - to design new processes and packagings
Maria Benedetta Spadolini, Chiara Olivastri

1190 Autonomy as a Design Principle: Service Design for the Technology Literacy of Older Adults
Houjiang Liu, Miso Kim, Canqun He, Tia Thomson

1208 Bio-revolutions: radical change, design cultures and non-humans
Carolina Ramirez-Figueroa, Luis Hernan

CONTENTS

-
- 1222 Cognitive Ergonomics
Components for Analysis of User
Interface in Healthcare Industry
Mariia Zolotova, Angela
Giambattista
-
- 1238 Connect art and science for a
functional biomimicry in design
Andrea Forges Davanzati
-
- 1244 Development of a test setup for
validating a cognitive assessment
platform within ICU's
Muriel De Boeck, Philippe Jorens,
Guido De Bruyne, Kristof Vaes
-
- 1256 Food design as a tool for social
development: experimental study
in the evaluation of child smell
Lígia Afreixo, Francisco
Providência, Sílvia Rocha
-
- 1272 FUTUR.DRESS. The Superskin for
the Human Body in nearspace
Maria Antonietta Sbordone, Ilaria
Giampetraglia, Alessandra De
Luca
-
- 1286 Hybrid systems of human |
technological | biological
products: a road to a greater
sustainability?
Marco Marseglia, Francesco
Cantini, Alessio Tanzini
-
- 1301 No more whining – natural smart
textile
Nuutinen Ana, Pietarine Heidi,
Kunnas Susan , Korpinen Risto,
Sipola Reeta
-
- 1308 Paving the way to post-digital
smart materials. Experiments on
human perceptions of a bio-
inspired cellulosebased
responsive interface
Stefano Parisi, Markus Holzbach,
Valentina Rognoli
-
- 1325 The flow of emotions in co-
creation
Mariluz Soto, Caoimhe Isha
Beaulé, Satu Anneli Miettinen
-
- 1337 The Food Futures Teaching
Cluster. Food Culture, Visual
Communication Design, and
Collaboration
Peter K. Chan, Ben McCorkle, Rick
Livingston
-
- 1351 The river and the revered: Tracing
the impermanence of the land,
the people and the embroidered
Indrajit De, Saumya Pande
-
- 1364 The Shape of Drugs: a matter of
Human-Centred Design
Antonella Valeria Penati, Silvia
Luisa Pizzocaro, Carlo Emilio
Standoli, Valeria Maria Iannilli
-

CONTENTS

-
- 1377 The Wicked Home: Living Space as Ecological Holobiont
Rachel Armstrong, Rolf Hughes, Nel Janssens
-
- 1392 Three Dimensional technologies: Digitising Nature
Gregor MacGregor
-
- 1405 Towards Neurodesign. The Mental Effort in packaging design
Alessio Paoletti, Lorenzo Imbesi, Angela Giambattista
-
- 1413 “WIT” as a Sustainable Engine Overcoming Mind Fixation in Ideation
Alon Weiss
-
- 1425 **DESIGN CULTURE (OF) MAKING**
-
- 1427 A designed generation: Maker's maturity and social responsibility
Luca D'Elia
-
- 1438 Accumulation of empirical investigation into joint structures in wooden furniture design
Yi Shiang Lin, Ming Huang Lin, Jen Kuan Yau
-
- 1453 Amorphous Stacks: A Low-Tech Construction Method for Jointless Cast Structures
Liqiong Huo, Jongwan Kwon
-
- 1468 An Exploratory Study about Communicating 4D Printing between Product Designers and Manufacturing Engineers
Faten Ezrin Azhar, Eujin Pei
-
- 1482 Biotextiles applied to everyday objects
Viviana Quiña, José Francisco Alvarez Barreto, Cristina Muñoz Hidalgo
-
- 1504 Claudio Alcorso and Post-war Textile Culture
Tracey Sernack-Chee Quee
-
- 1521 Collaborative Capabilities: aural encounters in digital/analogue co-creative making
George S. Jaramillo, Lynne J. Hocking-Mennie
-
- 1535 Collaborative ontology design for Open Hardware and Open Design
Massimo Menichinelli, Emilio Velis, Andre Rocha, Alessandra Schmidt
-
- 1551 Contemporary Spaces of Apparel Design: Embracing both Digital and Physical Environments
Krissi Riewe
-

CONTENTS

-
- 1562 Design Cultures of Making: Fashion thinking as creative process and pedagogy
Susan Postlethwaite
-
- 1573 Design culture of playing. The musical instrument industry: an important culture of made in Italy.
Marco Mancini
-
- 1588 Digital encounters in the culture of textile making: developing a hybrid craftsmanship for textile design by fusing additive methods of surface fabrication with knitting technology
Delia Dumitrescu
-
- 1600 Distributed design and production for distributed care. Investigation on materializing bottom-up open and indie innovation in the field of healthcare
Patrizia Bolzan, Massimo Bianchini, Laura Cipriani, Stefano Maffei
-
- 1614 Heterotopia of Space: How capitalism is alienating and controlling societies
Sarah Khayat
-
- 1625 I - D (I – Design _ Idiosyncratic Meta Design) Idiosyncratic Proceedings on Reading and Production Meta-Objects in Contemporary Industrial Design
Mantikou Angeliki-Sofia, Farangas Athanasios, Zafeiropoulos Theodoros, Psychoulis Alexandros
-
- 1640 If we can't make it together, we won't make it alone. The challenge and potential of collective making
Lena Håkansson, Stephanie Carleklev, Stephan Hruza, Anna-Karin Arvidsson
-
- 1652 Inter-Weaving Culture and Crafts in Design Education
Puja Anand, Alok Bhasin, Priyanka Khattar
-
- 1668 Learning through codesign toolkits. A case study on codesigning the cinema of the future
Simone Taffe, Sonja Pedell
-
- 1681 Letterpress: A Survey of Print Culture or an Immersive Learning Experience
Alexander Cooper, Rose Gridneff, Andrew Haslam
-
- 1695 Made by (Material) Frustration
Arielle Blonder, Shira Shoval, Eran Sharon
-

CONTENTS

-
- 1711 Material culture(s). Research paths in an evolving material design culture, and the connected future designer's attitudes
Doriana Dal Palù, Beatrice Lerma, Claudia De Giorgi
-
- 1724 Mind-mapping in design culture: A tool for ideation in graphic design education?
Philip Jones, Marion Morrison
-
- 1738 New scenarios for developing cooperative platforms for local manufacturing
Alberto Calleo, Giorgio Dall'Osso, Laura Succini, Michele Zannoni
-
- 1752 Playing for change: designing a board game for the circular economy
Thomas David Cockeram, Jessica Clare Robins, Emmanuel Tsekleves, Leon Cruickshank
-
- 1769 Progetto Glume: from milling waste to resource for new materials
Danilo Perozzi, Laura Dominici, Elena Comino
-
- 1785 Re-distributed manufacturing in makerspaces. Towards a model of sustainable production
Louis Rose
-
- 1799 Research on the Application of Lacquer Craft in Modern Accessories
Tianxiao Xie
-
- 1811 The Emerging Fashion-Tech Paradigm in the Contemporary European Landscape
Chiara Di Lodovico, Chiara Colombi
-
- 1825 The evolving role of prototypes in design research: a discussion on terms and meanings
Silvia D. Ferraris, Gabriele Barzilai
-
- 1840 The Making of a Dress: Explicating the Implicit Processes
Adrian Huang
-
- 1857 The shape of wellbeing: investigating an approach for the development of a design requirements framework for design for wellbeing projects
Sandra Dittenberger
-
- 1873 Weaving sequential changes – designing textiles with multiple embedded stages
Riikka Talman
-

CONTENTS

1891 **DESIGN CULTURE (OF) MULTIPLICITY**

1893 Architectural Design Education as an Agent of Change: The Case of the Ultra-Orthodox Branch, Jerusalem
Elissa Rosenberg

1904 “But I’m a lecturer not a therapist”: Educational Coaching – a proposed alternative approach to supporting students through their creative education
Gary Pritchard

1918 Decoding the birth of transcultural fashion
Shipra Kukreja

1934 Design as a medium for an informal learning. INDICOLearning from the interface to the activity
Marina Puyuelo, Mónica Val, Hugo Barros da Rochas

1946 De-stereotype UX Design – Discussing and managing issues related to the clustering of users in the design of innovative solutions
Margherita Pillan, Alessandra Mazzola

1958 Framing diversity: designing hearing aids from a deaf culture perspective
Patrizia Marti

1979 Gazes and Gatekeeping: Reconceptualising the entrance portfolio in the post-colony
Diane Steyn

1994 Hybridity as a culture of making
Maya Ober, Nicole Schneider

2011 Hyper-Contextual Futures in Mexico City
Paolo Cardini, Karla Paniagua

2025 Learning and Differences reciprocally shared and validated: A decade long Participatory Design collaboration between KG Elementary School and AD University
Raymond Patrick Zachary Camozzi, Helene Day Fraser, Caylee Raber

2040 On (un)becoming in Design Academia: A Coloured female’s autoethnography
Cheri Hugo

2058 The Ethics of Knowing a Shared Language and Intention in Design
Lisa Elzey Mercer, Terresa Moses

CONTENTS

-
- 2066 The Neighbourhood Home. System of environments for plural inclusion
Ilaria Longo, Sonia Massari, Alessandro Spalletta
-
- 2081 Universal Visual Languages in a Male-oriented Society
Valeria Bucchetti, Francesca Casnati
-
- 2095 **DESIGN CULTURE (OF) NEW NORMAL**
-
- 2097 A Comparative Study of Online Teaching Modes of Sino-Italian School of Design: A Politecnico di Milano, Tsinghua University, and Tongji University perspective
Fan Chen, Lin Li
-
- 2107 A COVID-19 Horizon Scan Looking for Post-Pandemic Implications for Design
Marcus Foth, Glenda Amayo Caldwell, Joel Fredericks
-
- 2126 A new way of perceiving the locality: economic growth, social inclusion, environmental protection
Fabio Mongelli
-
- 2141 A Sustainable Jewellery Design Practice for Psychological Health after Covid-19
Huiyi Qu
-
- 2153 Autopoietic design; seven components for a sustainable future design model
Gonzalo Raineri Bernain
-
- 2165 Community-led design capabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond
Mariana Fonseca Braga, Eduardo Romeiro Filho, Haddon G. Guimarães Pereira, Emmanuel Tsekleves, Rosângela Míriam L. O. Mendonça
-
- 2182 Cross-Team Brainstorming and a Comparison of Online to Physical Version
Heng-Yi Mie, Hsi-Jen Chen
-
- 2198 Design Education in a Pandemic Context
Harald Skulberg
-
- 2210 Design for Sustainable Healthcare. Cutting the impact of medical products through disposable packaging
Gabriele Maria Cito, Angela Giambattista
-

CONTENTS

-
- 2227 Designing new learning experiences in pandemic time: how digital can support a new didactic in Service Design
Andrea Taverna
-
- 2239 Ecosystem Framework for Community Life Circles based on Life Projects in the Post-COVID-19 Era
Tao Chen, Yong-Ki Lee, Juyoung Chang
-
- 2253 Expansive Video Capture – Up close, personal & specific tutoring “performances”
Brendon Clark
-
- 2265 Gamified e-Learning approached through Emotional Design in the Post-Covid-19 era
Na Wei, Yong-Ki Lee, Juyoung Chang
-
- 2275 Healthcare innovation during the pandemic time: digital technologies to enhance clinic 4.0
Stefania Palmieri, Mario Bisson, Alessandro Ianniello
-
- 2289 Hospitals’ decision-making regarding infrastructural adaptations in response to Covid-19
Pleuntje Jellema, Margo Annemans, Ann Heylighen
-
- 2302 Identifying Factors for Designing a Successful Telemedical Training System for Remote Pediatric Physical Exams
Elham Morshedzadeh, Ph.D., Andre Muelenaer, MD, Jr, MD, MS., Michelle Morris, Dana Werlich, Margaret Nelson, MD.
-
- 2316 Inter-University Design Workshop: plurality in design education
Inés Alvarez-Icaza Longoria, Diego Alatorre Guzmán, René Harari Masri, Lucero Donaji De la Huerta Santaella, Ana Elena Hernández Palomino
-
- 2332 Kids-centered Pocket Park design. Well-being for children in the urban post-covid context.
Benedetta Terenzi, Anna Laura Pisello
-
- 2347 Nanomedicine and Tourism in the post-pandemic era: smart “mobility & health” through wearable design for lab-on-chips
Claudio Gambardella, Pietro Ferraro, Assia D'Alesio
-
- 2358 Post-pandemic medicines: towards a new normality
Antonella Valeria Penati, Carlo Emilio Standoli, Patrizia Bolzan
-
- 2372 Reaching Audiences in 2020
Sharon Hooper
-

CONTENTS

-
- 2387 (Re)envisioning the contribution of design to the sustainable transition of healthcare systems
Amina Pereno
-
- 2404 Reinforcing Networks of Place-Based Care and Resilience
Julie Van Oyen, Jacquie Shaw, Laura Kozak, Jean Chisholm
-
- 2419 Research on rapid mass production of emergency products based on FDM 3d printing
Xueyan Wang, Dongmei Peng
-
- 2433 Semi-immersive Virtual Habitat to Enhance Relaxation in People with Dementia during COVID-19 Emergency
Silvia Maria Gramegna
-
- 2446 Shifting paradigms in Sustainable Fashion Design education: Studying implications & effectiveness of pedagogical methods adopted in a pandemic setting
Pragya Sharma
-
- 2471 Strengthening city resilience through the re-orientation of a social innovation incubation programme in Covid-19 time. The case of 'The School of the Neighbourhoods'
Marta Corubolo, Anna Meroni, Daniela Selloni
-
- 2487 Telemedicine, today more than ever. The ABBRACCI design concept for COVID-19 patient monitoring
Alessia Buffagni, Martina Frausin
-
- 2500 The Challenges and Benefits of online Education and the possible impacts of the entry of IT firms in the education ecosystem
Nayna Yadav
-
- 2512 The design culture and the challenges of the new normal
Nicola Morelli
-
- 2524 The effects of eye expression on emotion perception
Yi-Hsun Liu, Hsi-Jen Chen
-
- 2537 The value of design in the emergency-driven scenarios. Crafting Ecosystems with data
Francesco Dell'Aglio, Enza Migliore, Chiara Scarpitti
-
- 2551 Thinking With Card: Curriculum-Led Making Activities Integrated with Distance Learning
Benjamin Hughes
-

CONTENTS

2569 Understanding public health communication design globally during the Covid-19 pandemic: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly
Emmanuel Tsekleves, Mariana Fonseca Braga, Alejandro Moreno-Rangel, Linli Zhang, Mafe Salazar, Hannah Field, Hayley Alter

2594 "United in isolation. An online letterpress festival". A community response to the Covid-19 pandemic
Andrea Vendetti, Elettra Scotucci

2604 **DESIGN CULTURE (OF) PROXIMITY**

2606 A Design Experience for Interactive Narrative Based on The User Behavior
Yuan Yao, Haipeng Mi

2619 An answer to the complex representation of territory. The fertile ground of mnemotopes and design of communication.
Clorinda Sissi Galasso, Giovanni Baule

2630 Attractive Factors in the Experience of an Online User-supported Learning Platform
Min-Yuan Ma, Hsin-Yi Huang, Eric Chen-F Hsieh

2650 City Branding and Fictional Layers: Reading Istanbul through Filming Locations
Zeynep Arda, Onur Mengi, Deniz Deniz

2667 Co-Design processes for the inclusiveness of Rome's temporary communities
Gianni Denaro, Luca D'Elia, Safouan Azouzi

2679 Co-designing the future of a public space and its related services. The case of the Reggio Emilia Ducal Palace and its park
Marta Corubolo, Anna Meroni, Daniela Selloni

2694 Collaborative Futures: a pedagogical model for delivering future-focused and citizen-centred design education
Marianne McAra, Kirsty Ross

2710 Communicating social values to children using design solutions
Laura Girdali, Marta Maini, Francesca Morelli

CONTENTS

-
- 2720 Creating an inclusive learning environment to support transformative learning and encourage upward educational mobility opportunities for economically or academically under-resourced design students
Michal Rotberg
-
- 2736 Cultural Differences as Challenges and Design Drivers in the Development of Smart Assistive Technology for an Ageing Society
Danying Yang, Louise Moody
-
- 2752 Data visualization and knowledge sharing in participatory design to improve people liveability in urban places
Giovanni Borga, Massimiliano Condotta, Chiara Scanagatta
-
- 2768 Democratizing design: lessons from a case study in the Alpine area
Daniele Busciantella Ricci, Ilaria Argenziano, Marta Gandolfi, Michela Ventin
-
- 2786 Design for Promoting Pro-environmental Behaviours of the Georgian Domestic Workers in Ankara
Ayşe Kaplan, Lilyana Yazirlioğlu
-
- 2800 Design projects as drivers for organisational change in the public sector
Felicitas Smittinger Schmittinger, Alessandro Deserti, Francesca Rizzo
-
- 2813 Design when you are the other 90%, a student's perspective
Kyle Graham Brand
-
- 2826 Design with Social Justice in Mind. The Case Study of Furniture Design in Elementary Schools
Caroline Gagnon, Claudie Rousseau, Thomas Coulombe-Morency, Sonia Cadoret, Colin Côté
-
- 2846 Evolving future city-based retailing via design thinking: A Chinese hybrid model approach
Yujia Huang, David Hands, Rachel Cooper, Nick Dunn
-
- 2862 Feeling Endem. How travel enhances applied-autonomy in spatial design
Hans Venhuizen
-
- 2878 Global Proximity: case studies of international and interdisciplinary collaboration between the USA, Italy, Guyana and Japan
Valeria Albani, Paolo Cardini
-

CONTENTS

-
- 2887 Heritage and cultural accessibility: the role of design in the creation of an intercultural dialogue
Marco Bozzola, Irene Caputo, Claudia De Giorgi
-
- 2903 Immigrant Cultural Acculturation - A study of Tibetan Clothing in India
Anahita Suri
-
- 2920 Making in Proximity: Design Policies for collaborative making cultures
Lina Monaco, Luca D'Elia, Viktor Malakuczi
-
- 2931 Making practice as narrator of changing social worlds-Textiles and the Scottish Borders, in the 21st century, but based firmly on the past?
Britta Kalkreuter
-
- 2942 Multiple narratives for multiple visions: engaging citizens in building future scenarios for their city through participatory design and storytelling.
Davide Fassi, Annalinda De Rosa, Francesco Vergani
-
- 2955 New Technological Space for Tourists. Design as a Trigger of Experience, Osmotic-Membrane Interface, Know-How Provider and Social Engager
Luisa Collina, Ilaria Bollati, Claudia Mastrantoni, Umberto Tolino
-
- 2968 Placemaking through Creative Practice: Enabling Change and Empowering Future Change-makers
Cheryl Giraudy, Saskia van Kampen
-
- 2984 Proximity as space of opportunity: connecting people, productions and territories
Valentina Gianfrate, Elena Formia, Flaviano Celaschi, Elena Vai
-
- 2998 Radius 100 model – Working multidisciplinary theories, methodologies and design practice: An approach to social design beyond academia
Dr. Yona Weitz, Arch. Sharon Koniak
-
- 3014 Rethinking User Experience of Parking Garage. Exploring Innovative Suicide Prevention Strategies Through Motivational Design
Sébastien Proulx, Adam Fromme, Leila Akberdin, Maria Basile, Olivia Forsyth, Maya Jenkins, Abby Nelson, Claire Spicer
-

CONTENTS

3031 Signs of the Artisan City
Eleonora Trivellin, Susanna Cerri

3046 Social networks as enablers of design cultures: An analysis of multiplex relationships among members of a creative hub
Sine Celik, Tua A. Björklund

3059 Subversive Design. Designer Agency Through Acts of Insurgence
Seth Parker

3072 The City of Care
Anna Anzani, Elena Elgani, Maria Renata Guarneri, Francesco Scullica

3084 The power of designing choices
Raffaella Fagnoni

3101 The systemic approach and the use of new technologies to communicate cultural heritage and develop a culture of proximity
Marco Faccini, Alessandro Spalletta

3121 Towards a Design Observatory: crafting a distributed approach
Nina Costa, Vasco Branco, Rui Costa, Afonso Borges, Raul Cunha, Ana Catarina Silva, António Modesto

3137 When a designer encounters an artisan: a parameter analysis investigation
Carla Paoliello

3153 **DESIGN CULTURE (OF) RESILIENCE**

3155 0 Textile. A Design Research applying Circular Economy in textile field
Maria Antonietta Sbordone, Viviana Vollono, Carmela Ilenia Amato, Barbara Pizzicato

3173 A Research on the Sustainability in Traditional Cave-Dwelling Construction Skills in Northern Shanxi Province (Jinbei Area)
Runze Liu, Haoming Zhou

3182 A Study of Zero Waste Fashion Design and its Possibilities within a Design for Circularity Process.
Debbie Moorhouse, Tracy Cassidy, Parikshit Goswami, Andrew Hewitt

3198 Awareness, compatibility and equality as drivers to resilience in sustainable design research
Giuseppe Mincoelli, Gian Andrea Giacobone, Silvia Imbesi, Michele Marchi, Filippo Petrocchi

CONTENTS

-
- 3212 Circle Sector: exploring the role of designers in a circular economy
Ben Hagenaars, Niels Hendriks
-
- 3222 Cooperatives enterprise, incubators for the co-design of a new organizational and management model for sustainable development.
Caterina Rosini, Silvia Barbero
-
- 3235 Craft Your Future: Building a circular space through the European digital craft
Chele Esteve Sendra, Manuel Martínez Torán, Eileen Blackmore, Hendrik Jan Hoekstra
-
- 3249 Creativity as a Driver in Social Innovation Processes
Debora Giorgi, Irene Fiesoli
-
- 3264 Design culture (of) resilience. Space & Service design taxonomy, overcoming undefined space & service design contexts
Nansi Van Geetsom, Andrea Wilkinson
-
- 3282 Design education and forest environments – learning from and with living systems
Caroline McCaw
-
- 3297 Design educators in the 21st century: Applying The Compass methodology to prepare future designers as changemakers in a culture of resilience
Catalina Cortés, Alejandra Amenábar
-
- 3311 Design for Social Impact and Crafts Communities in Turkey
Hazal Gumus Ciftci, Stuart Walker
-
- 3324 Design Plugin: Using Design Thinking Approach in Smart Sustainable Cities Education
Tarmo Jaakko Karhu, Martijn Gerhard Rietbergen
-
- 3337 Design projects as drivers for organisational change in the public sector
Felicitas Schmittinger, Alessandro Deserti, Francesca Rizzo
-
- 3350 Designing community: creating resilience through collaboration
Jessica Clare Robins, Emmanuel Tseklevs, Leon Cruickshank
-
- 3365 Designing resilience. Design dealing with communities
Carlo Branzaglia
-
- 3371 Designing Resilience. Mapping Singapore's Sustainable Fashion Movements
Harah Chon, Lim Jiayi Natasha, Elisa Lim
-

CONTENTS

-
- 3382 Designing Sustainable Product-Service Systems applied to Distributed Economies in Water-Energy-Food Nexus approach
Renke He, Meng Gao, Carlo Vezzoli, Ke Ma
-
- 3401 Discovering Design Values in the Chinese Pre-Qin Classics
Miaosen Gong
-
- 3412 Eco-lab-orating. Insights from an ongoing intervention with design school faculty
Rakefet Kenaan
-
- 3424 Educating Designers for the Circular Economy: Innovative Digital Resources, Collaborative Learning and Synergic Actions
Lucinda Morrissey, Roberta Barban Franceschi, Ana Margarida Ferreira
-
- 3436 Evolving the conventional curriculum: innovative learning interventions in a classroom to enhance design students' learning competencies
Joselyn Sim, Harah Chon
-
- 3448 Fashion Futuring. Rethinking sustainable fashion design
Alessandra Vaccari, Ilaria Vanni
-
- 3458 FASHIONABLE FAÇADE: textile waste innovations for the built environment
Hilde Heim
-
- 3476 Food Cycles. Redesigning processes and products
Silvia Pericu
-
- 3487 From Objects and Products to Things and Stuff
Clare Green
-
- 3501 Green infrastructures and satellite images: the case study of Munich
Giovanni Borga, Filippo Iodice, Federica D'Acunto
-
- 3516 I Don't Want to Feel Outdated. The dissonance between product attachment and contemporary relevance
Malene Pilgaard Harsaae
-
- 3527 Innovation through circular economy: Tool development for multidisciplinary approach to product-service-system Design
João Sampaio, Ana Afonso
-
- 3544 Lost in transition; Methodologies and tools of Product-Service Systems Design for major life transition
Maria Paola Trapani, Nadejda Cervinscaia, Nadejda Cervinscaia
-
- 3560 Materials Designers. Boosting Talent towards Circular Economies
Laura Clèries, Valentina Rognoli, Pere Llorach-Massana
-

CONTENTS

-
- 3572 Preparedness and infrastructure design for disaster and emergency situations; the key to a resilient community
Noemi Bitterman, Medardo Chiapponi, Alessia Buffagni, Andrea Cotti
-
- 3585 Replicating the Unpredictable: Board Games as Prototypes for Wildfire Evacuations
Thomas Maiorana
-
- 3597 Revised Function Analysis of Sustainability - understanding the complexity of sustainability
Paul Topf Aguiar de Medeiros, Charlotte Sjödel
-
- 3616 Role of Social Ecologies within Social Design and Social Innovation
Neeta Verma
-
- 3626 Slow Engagement & Widening the Frame – Emerging Models of Social Innovation and Design Culture
Diana Nicholas
-
- 3641 Smart, Safe and Green System. A Resilient-Based Strategy for Sustainable Buildings and DIY Design
Cecilia Cecchini, Miriam Mariani, Paolo Mondini
-
- 3655 Strengthen Ties of Social Bonding Through Design from and Emotional Perspective
Deyanira Bedolla Pereda
-
- 3672 Study on the Sustainable Design of the Young Elderly Oriented Smart Wearable Products
Chen Han, Shen Lei
-
- 3686 Surviving in the wild: Sustaining design and social innovation initiatives in Asia-Pacific
Cyril Tjahja
-
- 3699 Sustainable Deliberation; an Empathetic ‘Mantra’
Amita Deshpande, Ranjana Dani
-
- 3715 Teaching and Practicing Service Design and Social Innovation: Experiences with Communities at the Margins in São Paulo, Brazil
Rosana Vasques, Mari Suoheimo, Maria Cecilia Loschiavo dos Santos
-
- 3727 The cot, the pot and other stories
Lena Gupta
-
- 3755 The Materiality of Resilience
Emile De Visscher, Lorenzo Guiducci, Iva Rešetar
-

CONTENTS

3774 The poetics of waste in contexts of satisfactory use and social action

Desamparados Pardo Cuenca,
Patrik Baldan

3795 The potential of Theory of Change to visually model the underlying logic behind service design projects

Luca Simeone, David Drabble,
Kerstin Junge, Nicola Morelli

3810 The SDGs framework as strategic lever for design education.

Simona Maccagnani, Marco Ricchetti

3823 The Tree and The Room: Co-Designing DIY WiFi Networks with Emergent Local Metaphors

Michael Smyth, Ingi Helgason,
Lauren Lapidge, Katalin Hausel

3838 Towards 'regenerative interior design': exploring a student project

Giovanna Di Monte-Milner

3853 Trace: design and responsibility in the Prato textile district

Elisabetta Cianfanelli, Renato Stasi, Matilde De Gennaro, Maria Grazia Soreca, Margherita Tufarelli

3863 Walk the talk: Towards an ecological futures framework for our designed cultures

Håkan Edeholt, Jomy Joseph, Nan Xia

3878 Water infrastructure as leverage for resilient cities: a multi-scalar design perspective on urban flooding

Sophie Leemans, Erik Van Daele

3894 Weaving the New Way of Making from the Andes

Rodrigo Muñoz-Valencia

3912 Working with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals in Design Education

Silje Alberthe Kamille Friis

3929 DESIGN CULTURE (OF) REVOLUTION

3931 Alternative narratives data visualization archive

María de los Ángeles Briones Rojas, Michele Mauri

3945 Becoming Lost and Found in Translation

Mark Ingham

CONTENTS

-
- 3963 Critical Thinking in fashion design education - New learning approaches for a systemic change in the fashion industry
Carolin Ermer, Julia Schwarzkopf
-
- 3980 Design as a methodological stance in interdisciplinary research
Valérie Côté, Caroline Gagnon, Lynda Bélanger, Daphney St-Germain
-
- 3996 Design for Fast Track Democracy
Jennifer Schubert, Bastian Koch
-
- 4009 Disrupting governance by Systemic Design and co-creating the public value
Carolina Giraldo Nohra, Eliana Ferrulli, Silvia Barbero
-
- 4025 Disruptive technologies and behavioural change: Design fiction as trigger for critical thinking
Mila Stepanovic, Venere Ferraro
-
- 4043 Does design thinking matter? Empirical study and survey on the effectiveness of design thinking
Hannah Park
-
- 4057 Education formats to integrate Design with Humanities, Politics, Social Sciences & Education
Anna Lottersberger
-
- 4071 Experiments on complex systems mapping around materials.
Flavia Papile, Romina Santi, Beatrice Gobbo, Tommaso Elli, Barbara Del Curto
-
- 4088 Exploring visualizations of design processes from a design activist perspective – a scoping study
Karina Goransson, Anna-Sara Fagerholm
-
- 4105 Fashion-Tech Revolution: Future Frontiers from Products to Processes
Alba Cappellieri, Chiara Colombi, Livia Tenuta, Susanna Testa
-
- 4123 From the product to the object. The speculative design practice as instance.
Chiara Scarpitti
-
- 4135 From trustful empowerment to overwhelming guilt: pedagogy in current activism practices
Alexia Autissier
-
- 4147 Guilty Materiality: why we play down material relations
Stéphane Treilhou, Clare Green
-
- 4160 MANIFESTO! Now: Game Design for Revolutionary Thinking
Julian Hanna, Simone Ashby, Sónia Matos, Alexis Faria, Callum Nash
-

CONTENTS

-
- 4174 Ph.D. Admission System Based Comparative Study in Design Discipline under Chinese Context
Fan Chen, Jing-Yi Yang
-
- 4187 Politics by design
Elisabetta Cianfanelli, Maria Claudia Coppola, Margherita Tufarelli
-
- 4200 Projecting Change: Redefining Preservation in the Era of Sea Level Rise
Liliane Wong
-
- 4218 Realising Discourse: A Strategic Design Solution to the Problem of Addiction
Jason Hobbs
-
- 4239 Reframing development: A proposal on the role of design research in Latin America based on situated views of the world
Juan Alfonso de la Rosa
-
- 4250 Speculative Design for the Public Sector. Design Fiction as a Tool for Better Understanding Public Services
Gianni Sinni
-
- 4263 Speculative Design in Education: Mapping the Landscape
Ingi Helgason, Ivica Mitrović, Julian Hanna, James Auger, Enrique Encinas, Michael Smyth
-
- 4275 Targeting Design Intervention across Levels of Complexity
Tanner Slade, Nicola Morelli
-
- 4288 The Agency of Discursive Design Exists in the Industrial
Karma Dabaghi
-
- 4303 The Patient Revolution. New design perspectives in healthcare innovative processes.
Carla Sedini, Laura Cipriani, Massimo Bianchini, Barbara Parini, Stefano Maffei
-
- 4319 The transformation will not be televised
Peter Friedrich Stephan, Raz Godelnik
-
- 4333 Time and Design. Time as a key parameter for a survey on contemporary design
Enza Migliore
-
- 4351 Walking the Line: Creative Research as Critical Activity for Design
Brooke Chornyak, Tania Allen
-
- 4370 Why we need more somatic culture in design
Silvia Sflijiotti
-

CONTENTS

4383 **DESIGN
CULTURE (OF)
THINKING**

4385 Always ordinary, never
straightforward: Considering the
work of Lorraine Wild
David Cabianca

4403 Anticipatory Design and Futures
Literacies: A Need and a Hope
Andrew Morrison, Manuela Celi,
Laura Clèries, Palak Dudani

4420 Authorship and automation in the
digital design culture
Giuliano Galluccio

4434 Banham's 'Unhouse' as Anti-
Interiority: Towards Twenty-First-
Century Theories of Design and
Domesticity
Helen McCormack

4444 Bodies of Evidence: making
in/visible histories in South
African Design Education
Nike Romano

4459 Culture and Relationality. Moving
towards 'post-rational' modes of
design
Tom Ainsworth, Sally Sutherland

4472 Design History and the Decline of
Historical Thinking
César Peña

4482 Designers-Thinkers and the
Critical Conscience of Design
Sanna Simola

4500 De-signing Ambiguity
James Dyer, Christian S. Petersen

4514 Disruptive Thinking in Design
Education
Riccardo Balbo, Elda Scaramella,
Serena Selva

4524 Diversified Orientation and
Design Value in Safeguarding of
Intangible Cultural Heritage
Tie Ji, Yinman Guo, Xiaolei Min

4542 Domesticity and digital eugenics:
design cultures of Silicon Valley
Luis Hernan, Carolina Ramirez-
Figueroa

4551 Exploring Asian Philosophies and
Service Culture: the Notion of
Dignity
Miso Kim

4562 Fantasia and analogical thinking:
a specific reflection on teaching
the essence of the Creative Leap
Valentina Auricchio

CONTENTS

-
- 4573 How to teach design thinking to non-design students: enablers and barriers to transfer design research practices.
Gianluca Carella, Michele Melazzini, Xue Pei, Cabirio Cautela, Marzia Mortati
-
- 4595 Not just Thinkers, Makers
Hein Dubery, Kyle Brand
-
- 4605 Radical Interdependence: learning/doing with things
Jaron Rowan
-
- 4615 Rethinking & Appropriating Design Education for a VUCA World
Jan Eckert, Sabine Junginger, Guillermina Noël
-
- 4636 Rethinking Design through Literature
Susan Yelavich
-
- 4649 The chain reaction. How to design a process for transforming museums by rethinking the role of personnel
Alessandra Bosco, Silvia Gasparotto
-
- 4664 The concept of Interaction Design under review: literature review and interviews with qualified informants
Eduardo Ariel de Souza Teixeira
-
- 4674 The Emergence of Modern Design Discourse in the Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR)
Qassim Saad
-
- 4689 The engagement of visitors in faber's houses and studios. Empirical design research and experimental actions in Lombardy
Raffaella Trocchianesi, Anna Mazzanti, Alessandra Spagnoli, Davide Spallazzo
-
- 4703 Theory under suspicion: criticality and material meaning in practice based research
Marta Camps, Jaron Rowan
-
- 4720 Tokyo 2020: globalization and self-orientalism in the communication of the next Asian Olympic Games.
Claudia Tranti
-
- 4736 Towards borderless futures: How transcultural approaches changed the practice of graphic design
Juliana F. Duque
-
- 4753 Which way to go? Some complicated crossroads facing design culture in Aspen.
Elena Dellapiana, Ramon Rispoli
-

CONTENTS

4768 POSTERS

4769 A visual-analytical approach to phases of transition in people's life paths

Laura Heym, Jennifer Schubert, Irene Visentini, Sofia Sanchez, Alvise Mattozzi

4770 Aeon, in his original meaning of "life", "vital force" or "being", "generation".

Ana Maria Fessmann, Elene Bakhdatze, Vaishnavi Bala, Varshini Janakiram, Janina Hietl, Gianfranco Olivotto

4771 Co-creating prosthetics as fashion accessories for assisting people with disability. The case of hearing impairment

Andree-Anne Blacutt, Stéphane Roche

4772 Collaborative methods: design bridging academia and industry

Teresa Franqueira, Pereira Catia

4773 Craft in Makerspaces: The Potential for Social Change for Sustainability

Alessandra Fasoli

4774 Creative design process for envisioning the future of emergency medical services in smart cities

Vipul Vinzuda, Niall Deloughry, Leonard O'Sullivan

4775 Design and Neuroscience for the UX. Possible tool for Designers

Alessio Paoletti

4776 Design as a tool for participatory transformation of urban space

Jacobo Muñoz Duato, Damià Jordà Bou

4777 Digital visual tool for design project development in a multidisciplinary team

Michela Carlomagno

4778 Education in social design by means of artistic photography

Cecilia Casas-Romero

4779 Enabling Collaborative Turns: A Conversation-Based Approach for Design Workgroups

Sze-Yunn Seah

4780 Experimenting new joints for more sustainable and easier to assemble furniture

Patrizio Cipollone, Viktor Malakuczi, Felice Ragazzo, Michele Russo

CONTENTS

-
- 4781 Exploring the potential uses of ocean plastic and public engagement activities for raising awareness
Xingyu Tao
-
- 4782 Feed: design for Eating Disorders prevention in pre-adolescent age.
Carlotta Belluzzi Mus
-
- 4783 Festival Living Labs: Involving the Festival Community in Sustainable Experimentation.
Marije Boonstra, Aranka Dijkstra, Peter Joore
-
- 4784 Grey matter - Matière grise. When the 'thé dansant' is no longer an option. Imagining an inclusive and intergenerational urban future, placing seniors as productive actors of the civic life.
Jerome Picard, Elida Mosquera, Benoist Desfonds, Matthieu Boustany, Peeraya Suphasidh
-
- 4785 Guided by Voices from the Fields: A case study on earth, plants and fashion design
Piret Pupart, Julia Valle-Noronha
-
- 4786 Heirloom a device for the survival of the fittest memories
Valeria Volanti
-
- 4787 Hybrid Town, Stories in Maps: from China to Milan
Guido Tattoni, Hagit Pincovici, Germana De Michelis
-
- 4788 Identities and sustainable futures
David Serra Navarro, Carme Ortiz Valeri
-
- 4789 Interaction studies applied to Robotic Surgery
Giovanna Giugliano, Sonia Capece, Víctor Fernando Muñoz Martínez
-
- 4790 Intervention of Indian Textile Craft in Design Pedagogy for Social innovation and Economic Growth
Sakshi Babbar Paul, Saroj Bala
-
- 4791 Italia 3.0. An educational strategy to enhance food as Food Cultural Heritage
Monica Bortolussi, Martina Mitrione, Sonia Massari, Alessandro Spalletta
-
- 4792 Kairos: How Digital Culture Heritage can improve society and its development through Systemic Design
Giovanni Capoccia, Veneranda Carrino
-
- 4793 Kinetic calendar for tracking physical and emotional stress in women
Mariel Domínguez
-
- 4794 Knitted expressions. Movement as material in Textile Design
Faseeh Saleem
-

CONTENTS

-
- 4795 Love Leftovers - Useful fictions and what if we could put our memories on sale?
Teodora Ivkov, Luca D'Elia
-
- 4796 Mass media imaginary as a symbol. How image is revealing the crises of our time through cinematic design.
Celia Cuenca García
-
- 4797 Neighborhood Cowork (Cowork del Barrio): Co-creating agents for social change
Sandra Molina, Cynthia Jaramillo, Alejandro Ramirez
-
- 4798 Pen Your Thoughts: A Visual Design Language Study on Student's Learning Progression
Jennifer Samonte Aguilar
-
- 4799 Real-time snow information for tourists - Utilizing AI for tourism - Case Snowman
Marija Griniuk, Maija-Liisa Rautiainen, Jesse Talsi, Päivi Timonen, Michelle van Wyk
-
- 4800 Recycling, refusing plastic use and choosing biodegradable materials for new products
Alexandra Anghelache
-
- 4801 Shifting Mindsets, Bridging Generations
Shiu Heng Sin
-
- 4802 TellMi Ecosystem: an example of Design Process applied to didactic methodology.
Elisa Chiodo, Michele Aquila
-
- 4803 Time Well Spent. Facilitating mindful and meaningful screen use through a 'Design for Humansic Living' methodology
Ace Chia
-
- 4804 Trans/Feminist Critical Making – Design as Open-Source Opposition
Michelle Christensen, Florian Conradi, Marie Dietze
-
- 4805 Visual Exploration Method to Engage Art History with Practice-based Mindset in Design Education
Hanny Wijaya
-



DESIGN CULTURE(S) | CUMULUS ROMA 2021
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From the evaluation of acceptability to the design of an assistive robot for elderly

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Abstract | According to a study conducted by ARS Toscana in 2014 the old people in Tuscany were 916.640 and there will be an increase of 36% in 2050. The “non-self-sufficiency” of elderly is a condition which entails their need of assistance. Often such a condition leads them to move from their home to the nursing home, radically changing their habits and everyday life. Over the past few years, robotics has represented a potential solution to improve the quality of life. This paper describes the methodology used for CloudIA research project, which concerns the development of an assistive robot to support fragile and non-self-sufficient people. An *ad hoc* questionnaire was developed to evaluate the acceptability. The questionnaire was addressed to 75 people, aged between 30 and 99 years, living in five nursing homes. The results allowed to target the design of the new robot.

KEYWORDS | DESIGN FOR THE ELDERLY, HUMAN-ROBOT INTERACTION, ACCEPTABILITY, ERGONOMICS IN DESIGN, HUMAN-CENTRED DESIGN

1. Introduction

The aging of the population is a widely known phenomenon. Europe is facing unprecedented demographic changes due to the progressive aging of the population and low birth rates (WHO, 2002), producing a significant increase of the over-80s in the total European population, even if the highest variations they are registered in Mediterranean countries such as Italy and Spain (ARS Toscana, 2014).

According to the worldwide projections, by 2050 people over 65 will be more than the double compared to the children under five. Globally, by 2050, the number of people aged 65 and over will also exceed the number of teenagers and young people between the age of 15 and 24 (United Nations, 2019).

As a result, Europe is facing the challenge of offering high quality and affordable health care to all citizens. This challenge is very tough because of the increase of the medical care need for an aging society, the costs of treating chronic diseases together with the constant demand by citizens for ever better health care.

This trend, increasingly prevalent in Europe and in Italy, is significantly marked in the Tuscany region. In fact, according to a study conducted by ARS Toscana (ARS Toscana, 2014), by 2060 almost a third of Europeans will be over 65 and the demographic trends in Tuscany are even more pronounced. In 2014 the elderly in Tuscany were 916,640 and they will increase by 36% in 2050 and there will be an increase of 36% in 2050. A typical condition of the elderly in need of assistance is the "non-self-sufficiency", defined as a functional impairment in the basic activities of daily life (dressing, personal hygiene, movements at home or away from home and nutrition).

The aging process and its related dynamics results in significant changes in the market in terms of demand of products, services and environments for the quality of life, especially in the field of diagnostics and monitoring. Luckily, the emerging technologies have the potential to help the old people to maintain their independence. They can support the users in mobility both inside and outside home and in daily activities, promoting social relationships and improving the feeling of security and therefore delaying the physical and mental decline. This is confirmed both by the rapid development of smart technologies aimed at improving services in different sectors, and by their economic accessibility among the population.

One of these technologies is robotics. For example, the assistive robots represent a fast growing business, as well as one of the most attractive sectors in the field of medical technologies. They have the potential to maintain or restore the independence of older people in the near future (Ezer, Fisk, & Rogers, 2009; Fisk, Rogers, Charness, Czaja, & Sharit, 2009; Jayawardena et al., 2010).

Bearing all this in mind, this paper describes the methodology used during the Design phase foreseen by the CloudIA research project, financed by the Tuscany Region, which entails the

development of a robot to support fragile and non-self-sufficient people (elderly and disabled) in the nursing home (for the elderly and for the disabled) and at their own home. For that purpose, an *ad hoc* questionnaire was developed to evaluate the acceptability of four commercial robots: Pepper, Sophia, RP Vita and Paro. More specifically, the following factors were assessed: appearance, humanity, facial expressions and adaptability. The results that emerged enabled the authors of this article to direct the design of the new robot.

The questionnaire was administered to 75 users, aged between 30 and 99, hosted in the 5 cooperatives involved in the research program.

2. Approach to acceptability evaluation

Over the past few years, robotics has become a potential solution to improve the quality of life of the users and the services provided to them: robotics can improve mobility, communication possibilities, promoting social inclusion and increasing the sense of security, e.g. through systems for monitoring vital signs and daily life activities (Jayawardena et al., 2010).

The scientific literature (Forlizzi, DiSalvo, & Gemperle, 2004; Goodrich & Schultz, 2007; Information Resources Management Association, 2017) provides many examples of robots developed to meet the needs of the users: health monitoring, drug assumption support, physical assistance and mediation between users and assistive technologies. Assistive robots can be classified according to the need they satisfy, including:

- robots for socialization;
- information robots;
- security robots;
- health robots;
- leisure robots;
- robots for physical support.

However, these technologies are not used yet, due to factors such as stigma, (non) adaptability or social influences (Heerink, Kroese, Evers, & Wielinga, 2009).

Robotics appear as groundbreaking but, in the coming years, it will have to find a place among human beings and humans, in turn, will have to accept this technology.

To avoid a human-robot incompatibility, it will be important to ensure the acceptability and the adoption of robots by people. On this basis, the researches in the Human-Robot Interaction (HRI) field aims at understanding, designing and evaluating robotic systems for use by or with humans (Goodrich & Schultz, 2007). The HRI therefore focuses on the two

dimensions of interaction: the physical one, which is often referred to as teleoperation or supervisory control and the social one, referred to social, emotional and cognitive aspects.

One of the key elements of the HRI is acceptability, together with safety and usability requirements (Salvini, Laschi & Dario, 2010).

In robotics, the concept of acceptability has received considerable attention, especially in the field of biomedical devices, such as surgical robots and robotic prosthesis, but it is gaining relevance also in the field of assistive devices and companion or domestic robots (Dario, Guglielmelli, Genovese, & Toro, 1996; Salvini, Laschi & Dario, 2010; Welch, Lahiri, Warren & Sarkar, 2010)

Acceptability is usually described as the “demonstrable willingness within a user group to employ information technology for the task it is designed to support”. The goal of acceptability is to measure and identify key determinants of user acceptance or resistance (Dillon, 2001).

The term “acceptability” is “user-centered”: it is exclusively based on the study of the relationship between a product and its user (Salvini, Laschi & Dario, 2010).

Robotics therefore opens new challenges for the discipline of Design and consequently for designers. The contemporary society needs products that meet people’s needs through a human-centered design (HCD).

This brings the need to develop evaluation methodologies. In particular, in the field of robotics and screen agents several methods have been used, varying from applying heuristics or other usability type tests and classifying tests to measuring physical responses (Heerink, Krose, Evers, & Wielinga, 2009).

The approach and the methods of Human-Centered Design are one of the possible strategies for innovation in the European production system and also for the small and medium-sized enterprise system (EU Commission, 2013).

Designing the acceptability (Design for acceptability) consists in applying principles and methods during the early stages of robot design in order to minimize the risk of resistance or rejection by users. According to some authors, designing acceptability means understanding the factors that can influence the adoption of technologies (Dillon, 2001) and assessing the HRI through five main methods: interviews, self-assessments, behavioral measures, psychophysiology measures and metrics of task performance (Bethel & Murphy, 2010).

This paper shows the methodology used for the design of a new robot. The presented methodology provided for the active involvement of end users (elderly and disabled), during the first Discover phase (as proposed by the Design Council’s Double Diamond). Users completed a questionnaire for the evaluation of acceptability: the questionnaire was focused on those morphological, both general and specific aspects, able to give rise to users’

likeability and influence their attitude toward the robot. The main focus of the questionnaire method was to define the guidelines for the development and design of the new robot.

Given the nature of the end users and their location on the whole regional territory, the questionnaire was found to be the most effective method among those present in the literature, because it allowed to receive quantitative data in a short time (Stanton, Young, & Harvey, 2014). Data were subsequently interpreted and used during the design phase of the new robot.

After a review of the scientific literature relating to the acceptability of robots, the questionnaire was developed, with a special focus on Mori's Uncanny Valley (Mori, 1970; Mori et al., 2012). According to Mori, there is a non-linear relationship between the likeability or familiarity and the humanoid aspect of a robot. The appearance of a robot, when it is too similar to a human being, could annoy and generate in the observer disturbing feelings such as anxiety or negative attitudes (Mori, 1970; Mori, MacDorman, & Kageki, 2012).

According to the study conducted by Dario et al., the appearance of an assistive robot should not necessarily be anthropomorphic. Consequently, the best design solution should be a balanced mix between the domestic device appearance and the machine appearance (Dario, Guglielmelli, & Laschi, 2001).

On the contrary, Breazeal claims that when designing a robot, it is essential to consider that humans, as an extremely social species, uses his socio-emotional intelligence to understand the behaviour of more complex entities, like people or other living things. Human beings interact with other non-living elements with sufficient complexity, applying social models to explain, understand and also predict their behaviours. For example, people are known to anthropomorphise all sorts of technology (e.g. cars, computers, etc.) (Breazeal, 2003).

The same author also argues that people generally apply a social model when they observe and interact with autonomous robots. Autonomous robots make decisions and perform actions independently to perform their tasks. This makes them, for human beings, similar to a creature with which they can communicate, cooperate and learn from: for this reason, it is almost impossible for anyone to not anthropomorphise them (that is, to attribute human or animal qualities to them).

As claimed by Breazeal, aesthetics is fundamental in a robot:

“when designing robots that interact socially with people, the aesthetics of the robot should be carefully considered. The robot's physical appearance, its manner of movement, and its manner of expression convey personality traits to the person who interacts with it. This fundamentally influences the manner in which people engage with the robot” (Breazeal, 2005).

2.1 The questionnaire

As stated by some scientific evidences (Johnson, Slaughter, & Carey, 1998; Scheeff, Pinto, Rahardja, Snibbe, & Tow, 2002; Minato, Shimada, Ishiguro, & Itakura, 2004; Breazel, 2005), the morphological aspect of the robot can influence its interaction with the human beings. This is more evident in relation to specific groups of users such as the elderly. Therefore, in the period from May to October 2019, an online questionnaire was sent to the 5 cooperatives partner of the CloudIA research program.

The specific objective of the questionnaire was to understand how the end users perceive the four selected commercial robots, and which aesthetic features they accept and find more likeable and acceptable. The four commercial robots were chosen after a careful review of the scientific literature as well as for their functionality and services provided.

As a result, the following robots were selected (see Figure 1):

- Pepper (Android), produced by the Softbank Robotics company. The robot is able to talk, understand, move independently, and react to emotions;
- Sophia (Humanoid), produced by Hanson Robotics. It is a platform created for advanced robotics, for AI research and for exploring the Human-Robot Interaction;
- RP Vita (Automaton), produced by AB Medica. The robot provides the remote presence service within hospital and care-intensive environments;
- Paro (Zoomorphic), produced by Paro Robots. The robot was designed to provide therapeutic assistance to various kinds of patients. It can be used both in the hospital and at home.

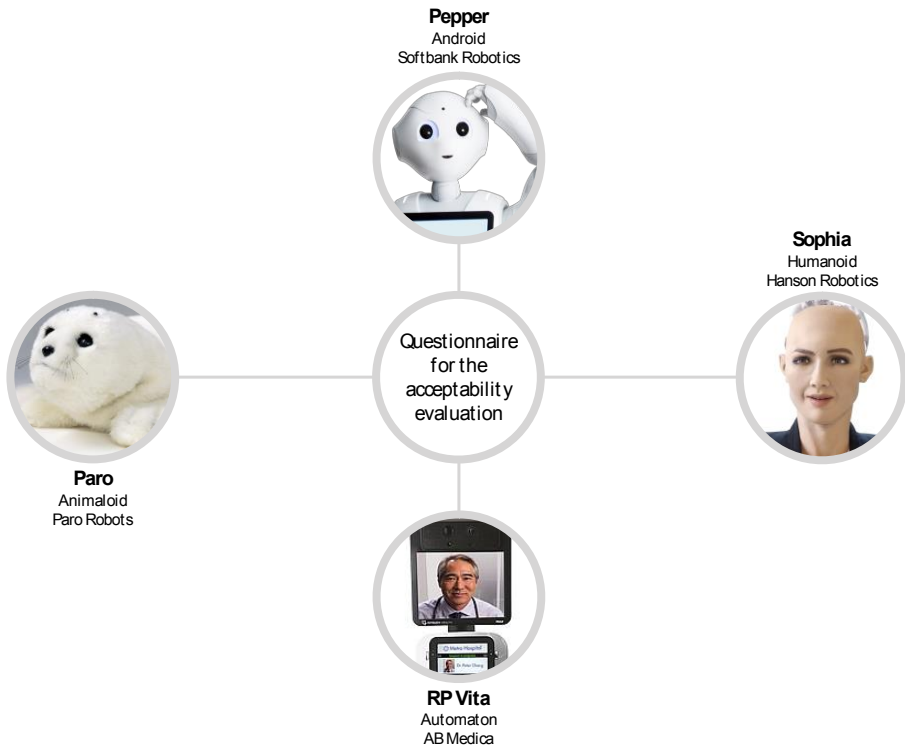


Figure 1. The four selected robots for the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was submitted to two categories of users (elderly and disabled), aged between 30 and 99, all hosted in the cooperatives partner of the research. 75 users of both genders participated in the questionnaire.

The questionnaire consists in 4 yes-or-no questions and 1 open-ended question:

1. is this robot beautiful? Y/N
2. is this robot likeable? Y/N
3. would you stay alone with it? Y/N
4. would you hug it? Y/N
5. is there anything in particular that you like?

3. Results

The data collected from the acceptability questionnaire are shown below.

17 males and 58 females replied to the questionnaire. 12 of them were under 65 (<65) while the other 63 were over 65 (> 65). Table 1 shows in detail the age of the users who took part in the survey (see Table 1).

As for the first question "is this robot beautiful?", most of the participants showed pleasantness towards the robots Pepper, Sophia and Paro. While for the RP Vita robot only 49% said that the robot is beautiful (see figure 2).

As for the question "is this robot likeable?", the data relating to the 4 robots are very similar (see figure 2).

Different results emerged from the question "Would you stay alone with it?". As shown in figure 2/question 3, the 49% of the interviewees would stay alone with the Pepper robot. While the 51% would stay alone with the Sophia robot. As for the RP Vita robot, only the 41% would stay alone with the robot and the 60% of the interviewees would stay alone with the Paro robot.

The results from the question "would you hug it?" are very different. The 65% of users would not hug the Pepper robot. The 56% would not hug the Sophia robot, and the 80% of interviewees would not hug the RP Vita robot. The 56% of interviewees said they wanted to hug the Paro robot (see figure 2).

Age	Participants	Gender	Age	Participants	Gender
30	1	Male	83	2	Female (2)
42	3	Female (3)	84	5	Female (5)
53	1	Male	85	6	Male (1) Female (5)
58	2	Male (2)	86	3	Male (1) Female (2)
59	1	Female	87	2	Female (2)
61	2	Male (1) Female (1)	88	2	Female (2)
62	1	Female	89	3	Male (1) Female (2)
63	1	Female	90	4	Male (1) Female (3)
65	1	Male	91	3	Female (3)
68	1	Male	92	3	Male (1) Female (2)
73	1	Male	93	2	Female (2)
75	1	Female	94	2	Female (1) Male (1)

77	1	Female	95	4	Female (4)
78	1	Female	96	3	Female (3)
79	2	Female (2)	97	1	Female
80	4	Male (3) Female (1)	99	3	Female (3)
81	3	Female (3)			

Table 1. The age of the users who took part in the survey.

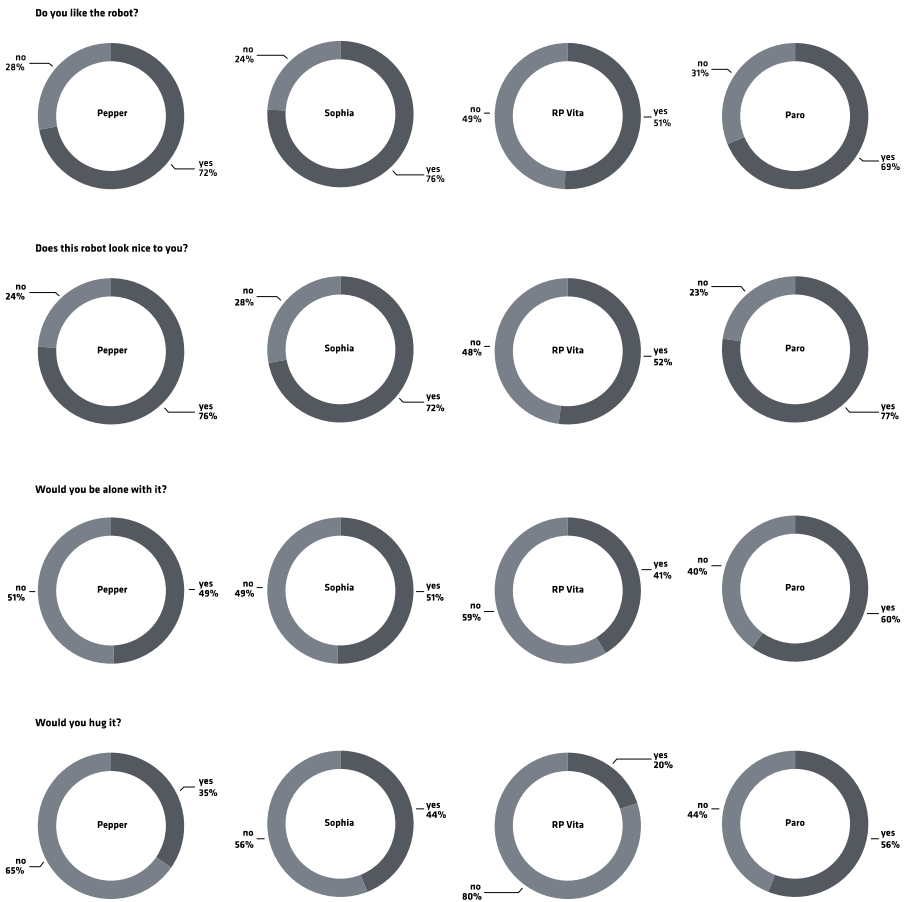


Figure 2. The data emerged from the questionnaire.

The results that emerged from the question "is there anything in particular that you like?" are very interesting.

As shown in figure 3, although many of the interviewees stated that there is nothing particularly beautiful in these robots, the data suggest a high degree of pleasantness towards the following characteristics of the selected robots:

- face;
- eyes;
- mouth;
- hands;
- arms.

In conclusion, the results show a strong tendency to appreciate soft and smooth shapes, with non-humanoid features.

Furthermore, the display is not considered as an annoying feature of the analysed robots.

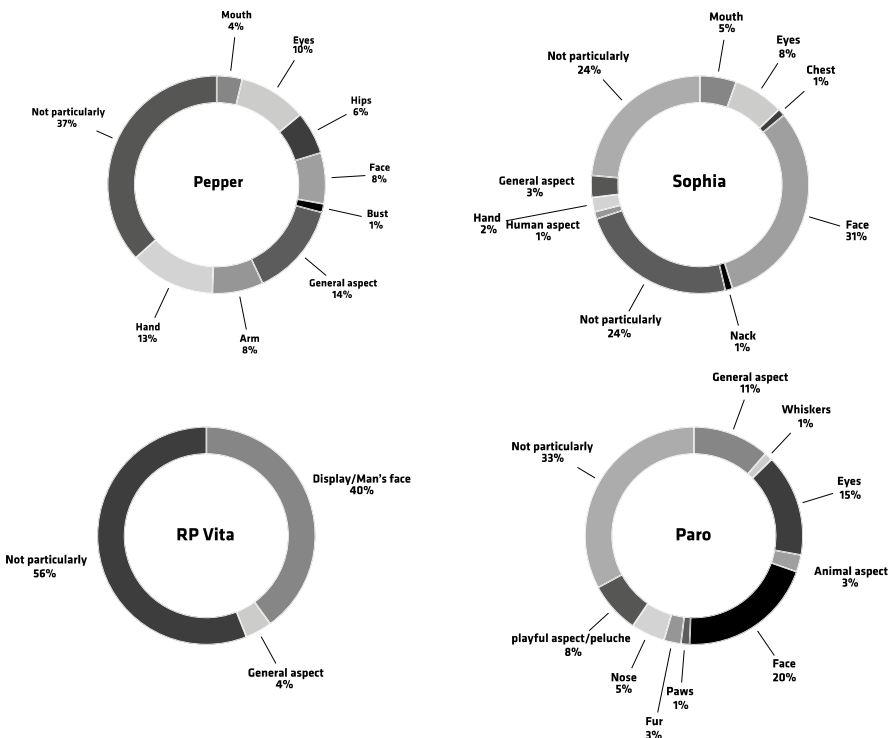


Figure 3. The results from the question: "is there anything in particular that do you like?"

4.1 The new robot: CloudIA

Before proceeding to the design of the new robot (sketch, 2d and 3d drawings and renders), simultaneously with the submission of the questionnaire, together with the cooperatives involved in the research program, the *desiderata* were defined: they were useful for defining the new robot features in relation to the real needs and expectations both of the end users and of the health care workers who provide daily service in the nursing home for the users and also at home.

The *desiderata* allowed to design a new robot for assistance, socialization, active support for hydration and for the assessment of users' cognitive and/or physical abilities, to be used both in nursing home and at home (Pistolesi & Becchimanzi, 2019).

After the definition of the design brief, the design and development of the robot was conducted on the basis of the user analysis. Specifically, the development of the robot was carried out on the basis of the results that emerged from the *desiderata* and the acceptability questionnaire. Moreover, the new robot was designed also in relation to the robotic platform designed and assembled by the Institute of BioRobotics of the Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna in Pisa, a research partner together with the authors of the CloudIA research program (see figure 4).

Although the robotic platform has constrained the shape of the new robot, its final shape is smooth and balanced, without protruding elements or edges. The chassis of the robot is made by three elements: a right part, a left part and a compact hinged door with magnetic closing. The basis is larger than the top so as to ensure the stability of the entire robot. The chassis topcoat are smooth and soft. In order to satisfy sustainable aspects, the entire body of the robot is made by plastic urban wasted 3d printed.

Furthermore, it was necessary to design a mobile arm to orient and support the tablet. It is fixed to the highest part of the robot chassis in order to allow the user to arrange and interact with the display. This feature provides a greater humanization of the robotic platform.

The height of the new robot, and consequently the customizable position of the tablet, allows all users to interact with the tablet without excessive effort.

The tablet is useful to carry out the following activities:

- hydration support through an alert;
- support to drugs intake through an alert;
- socialization activities in common areas;
- emotional/cognitive status monitoring through the submission of the Mini-Mental State test (Folstein, Folstein, & McHugh, 1975), currently used by the 5 cooperatives;
- cognitive stimulation.

These activities will be tested within the 5 cooperatives involved in the research program.

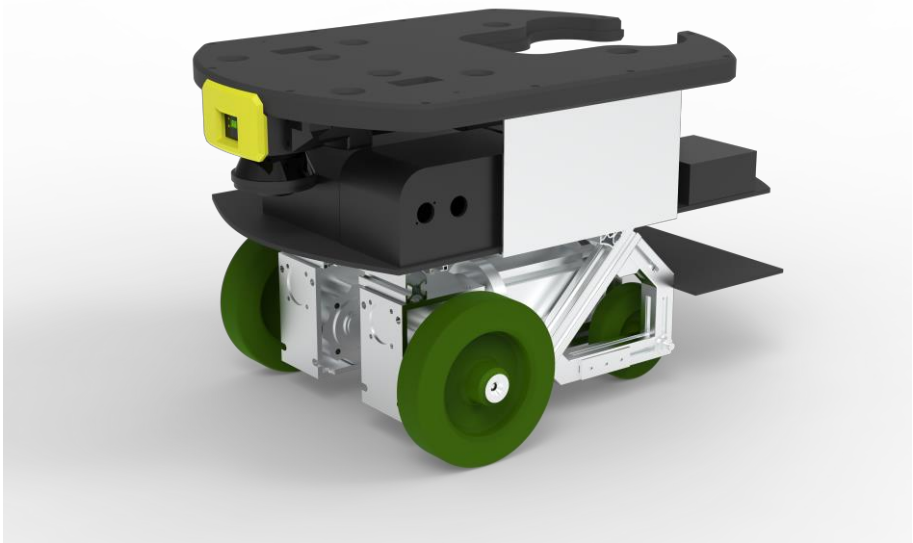


Figure 4. The robotic platform assembled by SSSA.

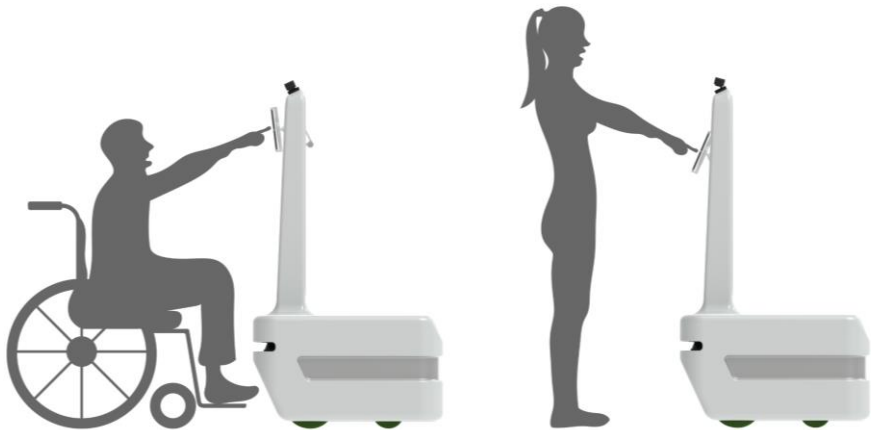


Figure 5. The new robot.



Figure 6. The new robot.

5. Conclusion

This paper presents an experimental methodology, aimed at applying the Human-Centred approach to the design of assistive robotic technologies. In fact, as stated by Forlizzi et al. (Forlizzi, DiSalvo, & Gemperle, 2004), many of the products analysed by the scientific literature on assistive robotics, have been designed with little consideration of the social, aesthetic and emotional relationships that the users will establish with the product.

The HCD (Human-Centred Design) approach, applied by the authors of this article, focuses on the analysis of users' needs, aspirations and expectations declared and/or tacit, so that they provide the basis for the design of the new robot.

The experimentation and design development presented in this paper are based not only on functionality and efficiency but also include elements such as attractiveness, likeability and the absence of stigma and non-reluctance towards technology.

The research methodology was aimed at obtaining feedback on the various personal aspects that contribute to generating the complex human-product interaction. Although this is influenced by extremely subjective factors and the personal experience of each individual user, it can be designed according to universally shared patterns and features.

The collected data contributed to the development of an accurate knowledge of the profiles of pilot users who will subsequently interact with the robot.

In addition, although the Design is often associated only with the aesthetics of products, its application is actually much wider. The Human-Centred approach therefore becomes a fundamental requirement in order to create a truly suitable, useful and acceptable product.

In conclusion, the next step of the research program concerns the definition of a new experimental protocol aimed at evaluating the overall experience of Human-Robot Interaction, through the analysis of the emotional quality of the interaction, such as acceptance, safety, intentions, perceived likeability. The experimentation will be conducted with pilot users both at home and in the nursing home for the users.

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