Fakultät für Design und Künste
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Research Cluster: Make – exploring innovative approaches to the ideation of artefacts and spaces| Timespan: 2015 – 2018

TANA Tangible Narrators

Can smart objects be the new narrators?

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This research project addresses smart objects as narrators of everyday rituals, memories, tales and even future stories. It follows a research-through design methodology that continuously creates prototypes, designed and constructed within co-design workshops, in which the main theme is "narration". As an outcome, this research aims to create scenarios for future smart objects by exploring new ways and methods of designing collaboratively. Besides creative results, the research project also questions what "smart" means, and tries to explore new definitions for future's smart objects.
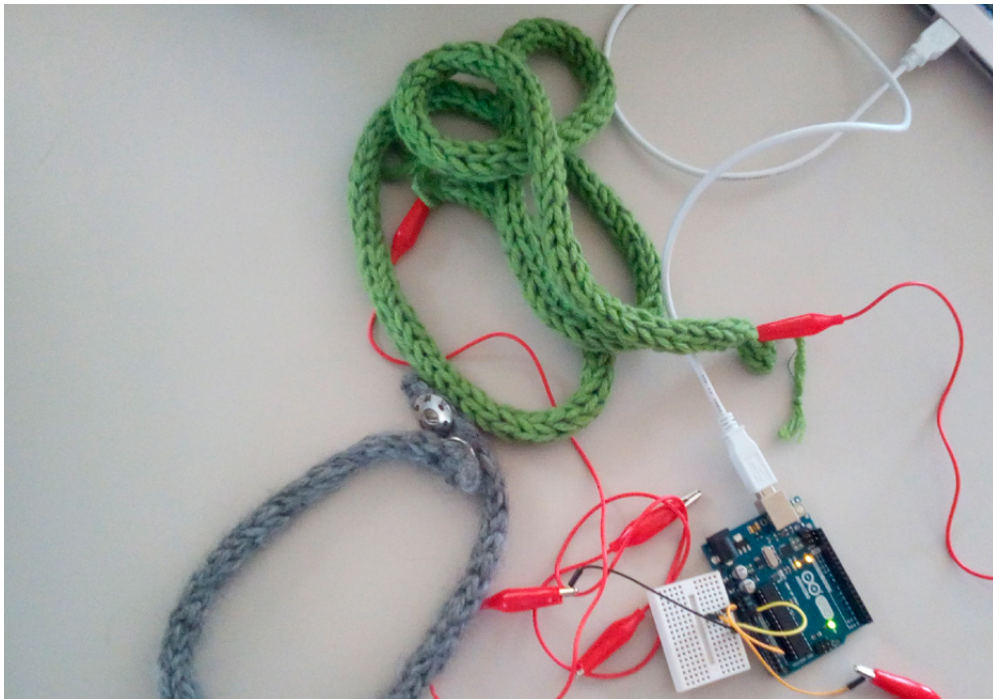
Figure 1

There are two pillar activities of this research project:

1. Storytelling smart textiles (Storytelling Smart Textile, Making Textiles Talk, Co-e-knitting workshop series): In these workshops, we focused on e-textiles, ranging from making process to creation of new concepts for smart textiles (FIG. 1,2,3,4).

Figure 2

Figure 3

2. Co-designing smart object stories together with children: In this experiment, we worked with a class of primary school children (7-8 years old) and created stories of our future smart objects. We developed an imaginary Future Smart Home with smart object ideas created by the children and five smart plate ideas and their mock-ups reflecting on our future eating habits (FIG.5,6,7,8,9).

While Storytelling smart textiles was a more hands-on activity related to e-textiles and craft skills, the second one had a conceptual level, focusing on translating children's imaginations into smart object scenarios. Both activities gave rise to valuable knowledge about making/designing smart objects and presented new methodologies on blending storytelling technique into design process to create smart objects.

Figure 4

TANA

TANGIBLE NARRATORS

SMART CHAIR
The chair can measure how long the person sits on it, and starts shaking in order to make her/ him to stand up and do some exercises after a long sitting.

EMPATHY GLASSES
The virtual reality glasses help the user experience somebody else's life and through it can enhance and generate empathy.

MAGIC DOOR
The door is not an ordinary door that opens up to a new room, but a new reality. Through opening the door, the user can enter to a virtual reality in which she/he can experience a new place.

CO-FRIDGE
The fridge can understand what is missing in it, and directly order food or can 3D print the food.

FOOD MAKER
The food maker contains fundamental ingredients and creates food in different forms and different smells. It works like a 3D printer.

NAVI-SPOOL
The spool is used as a navigation tool. It rolls itself to the indicated address by living the yarn behind. The user picks the yarn and follows the spool to find her/his way to a new place.

SMART TAP
The smart tap can measure how much water the person consumed and warns him/her incase the consumption exceeds the average consumption.

FLYING BAG
The bag can contain stuff and fly next to its user. It can be used as a navigator following the adress to be reached.

MINI SERA
The biodegradable waste goes directly to the mini sera, which has daily fresh fruits and vegetables.
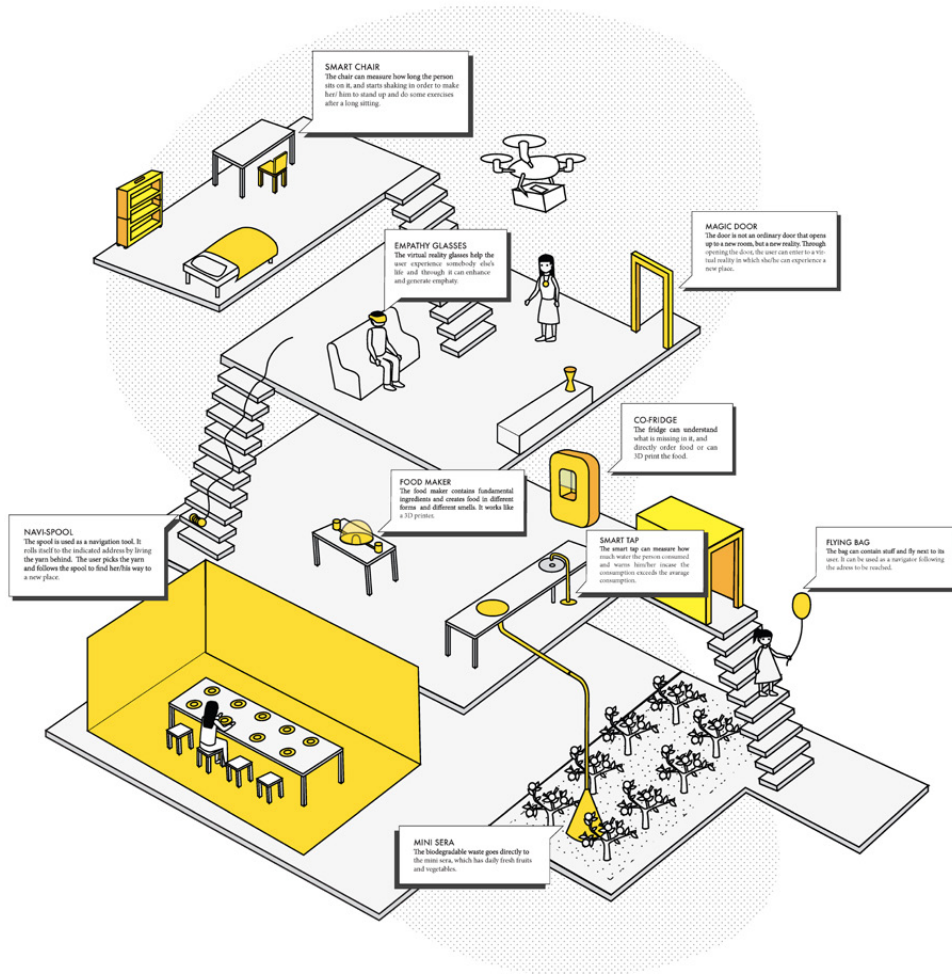
Figure 5

Figure 6

Figures 7, 8

Due to the fact that the project involves different actors, such as children, craftsmen, designers, makers, etc. in design process, it has a certain impact in empowering non-designers to be in the creative sphere. One of the outcome of the research project is tools and methods for co-design workshops, besides new smart object ideas and scenarios.

The research project collaborated with different actors, institutions, universities (UBI - Portugal, BITZ Fablab, Primaria De Gasperi - Trento, Studio Comune, Wool Museum Covilha) and created important impact in bringing design knowledge derived from the research project to a wider public.