PARTICIPATION -

SPECULATIVE DESIGN

A Critical Toolkit

Overview

In the following pages is a critical toolkit to explore the space of participation in speculative design.

It has been created to support designers in combining participation and speculative design by providing a set of questions for reflection about the process.

The toolkit is composed by 3 overarching challenge cards and 36 issue cards with questions used to descontruct the challenges and navigate the space.

This toolkit is the result of a 6 month research project about Participation in Speculative Design.

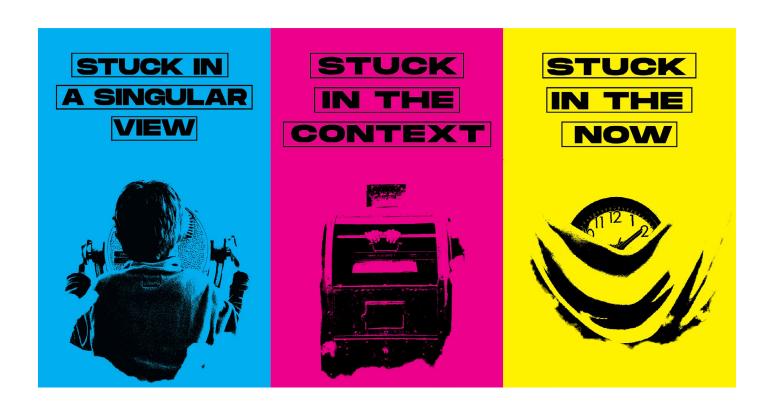
Challenges

The starting point for exploring space of participation in speculative design are **three overarching challenges**. These are the three coloured cards:

Stuck in the Singular View relates to the challenge of dealing with plurality and nuance when creating or discussing alternative futures/scenarios and engaging a diverse set of views.

Stuck in the Context refers to the process of engaging participants in reflexive behaviour and facilitate self- critical perspectives beyond their own biases.

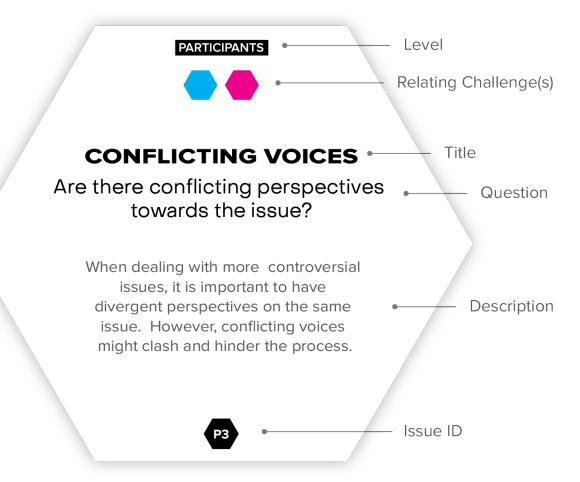
Stuck in the Now describes the challenge of distancing oneself from how the world looks today and imagine how things could be different.



Issues

The Issue cards represent specific issues in the space of participation in speculative design. They can be used to reflect on particular moments of the process and help deconstruct the overarching challenges.

Each of the **Issue cards** has a short title, a provocative question and a short description to help give more context. Each Issue card is colour coded by the challenge it relates to. One issue can be related to more than one challenge.



Issues

Additionally, the overall set of questions is divided in four levels relating to different aspects of the process of participation in speculative design:

Context level relates to the project's preconditions that might influence the participatory efforts. This includes the initial intentions, the framing of the project and the issues it deals with.

Participants concerns itself with who is included in the participatory moments and how that might influence the critical aspects of the project.

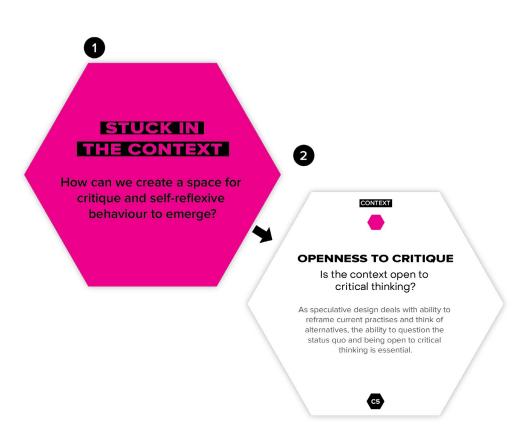
Engagement refers to the participatory moments themselves and how the process of engagement is curated and the discussion moderated.

Outcomes relates to the different outputs and ways a participatory speculative design project can develop.

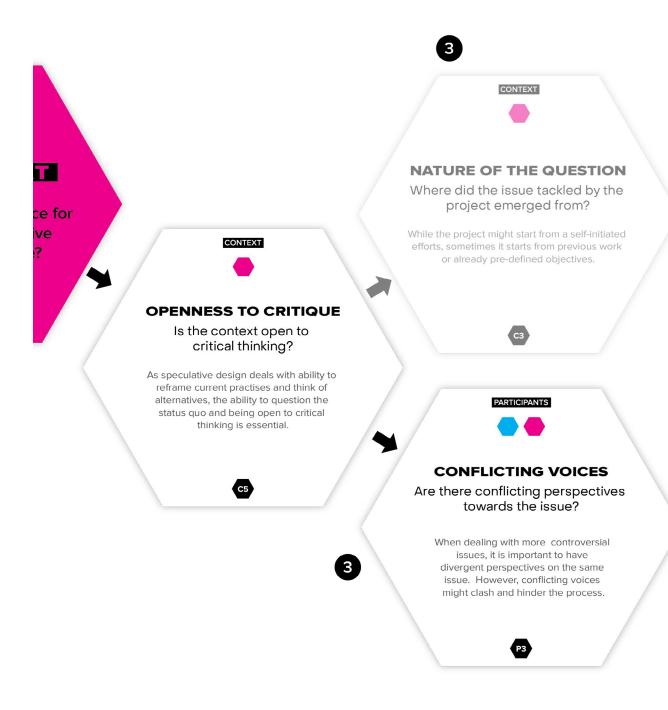
HOW: Navigating the Space

While each issue can be approached individually, they can be used in a structured way to navigate the space:

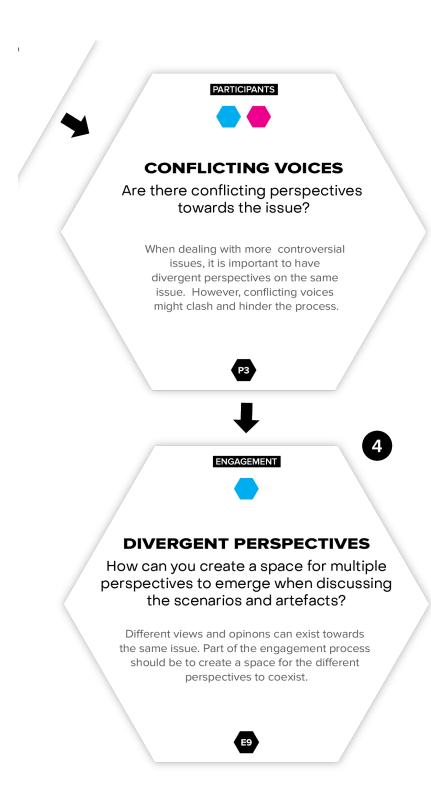
- 1. Select one of the three challenge and place it on the table/wall
- 2. Start with the **context** level, which issue might be interesting to explore? Select a context issue corresponding with the challenge you're exploring.



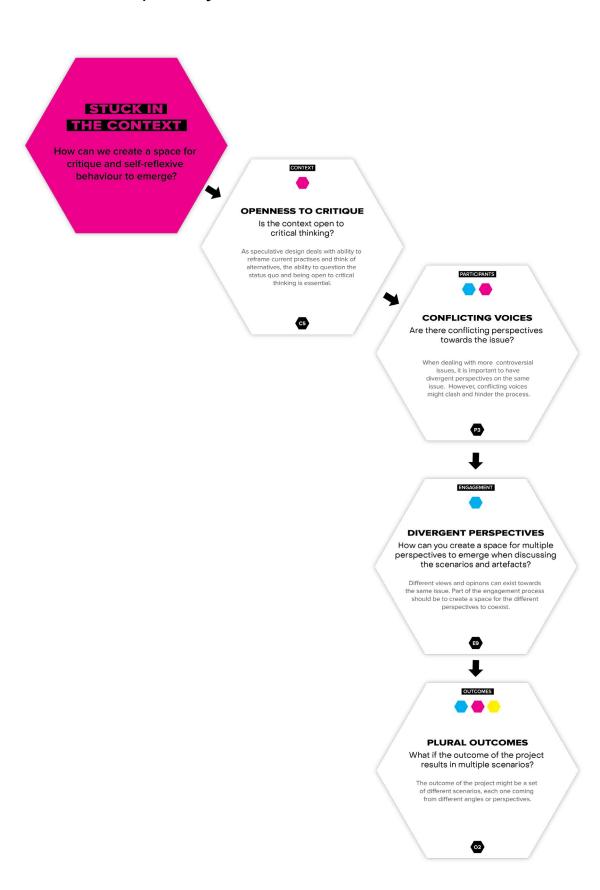
3. You can then continue to the next level, **participants**, or keep exploring the **context** level.

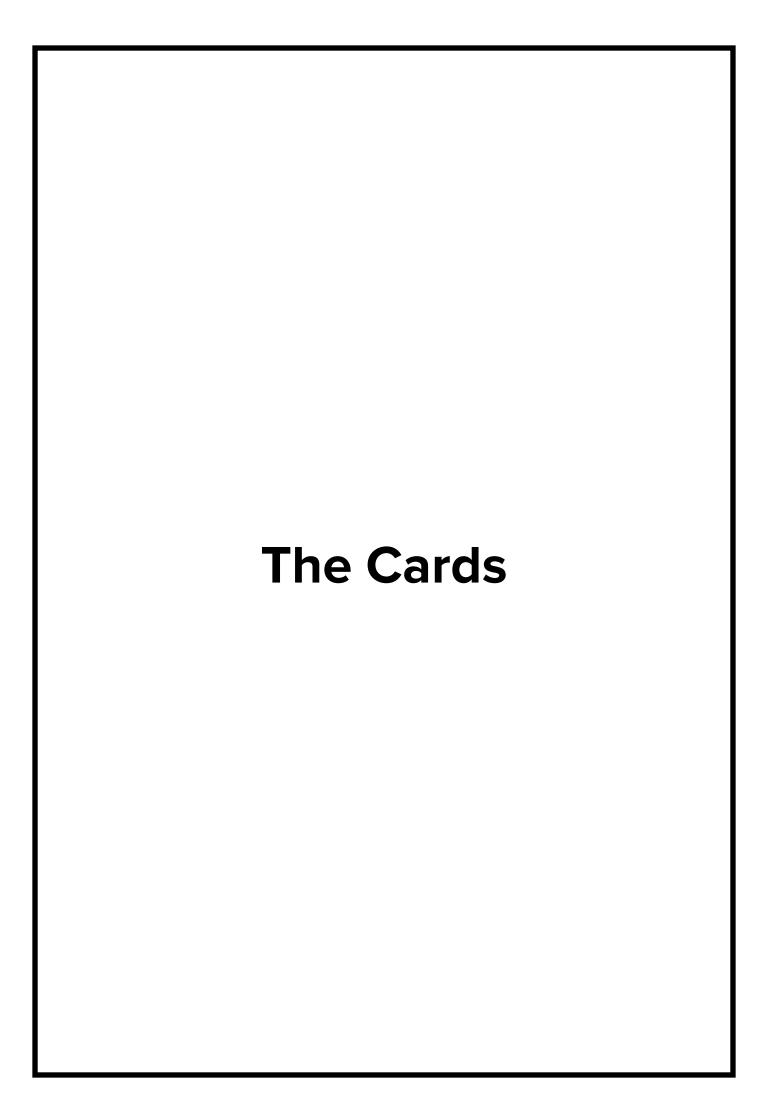


4. You can **only** explore issues that relate to the challenge selected at the start. **HOWEVER**, if the card selected is related to more than one challenge, you can start to explore the issues corresponding to these other challenges.



5. In the end, you have constructed a board representing your exploration through the participation in speculative design space and the reflection paths you've taken.





Challenge Cards

STUCK IN A SINGULAR VIEW

How can we create a space for plural and nuanced perspectives to emerge?

STUCK IN THE CONTEXT

How can we create a space for critique and self-reflexive behaviour to emerge?

STUCK IN THE NOW

How can we create a space for people to step out of how the world looks today?

Issue Cards

C1: Controversial issue E1: Generative Artefact C2: Over-Framing E2: Refined Artefact C3: Nature of the Question E3: Attention Space C4: Openness of Brief E4: Coming as an outsider C5: Openness to Critique E5: Moderating the Debate C6: Predefined Goals E6: Designer as Mediator C7: Short Term Goals E6: Different Stages C8: Urgency of the issue E7: Difficult Questions E8: Divergent Perspectives E9: Level of Control P1: Different Perspectives E10: Background Knowledge P2: Conflicting Interests P3: Conflicting Voices E11: Setting the Stage P4: Background Knowledge E12: Problematise the Process P5: Imposing Views P6: Interests and Agendas O1: Considered a Prediction P7: Plurality of Voices O2: Plural Outcomes O3: Project's Afterlife P8: Reflecting Different Views P9: Reflexive Criticality O4: Reaching Consensus P10: Underrepresented O5: Part of a Larger Process

O6: Dissemination





CONTROVERSIAL ISSUE

How controversial or sensitive is the issue being tackled?

Exposing tensions is central to speculative design practise. However, more controversial or sensitive issues can influence the engagement moment and the creation of a space where different perspectives can be discussed.



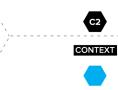
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How might the initial framing of the project close the possibility for nuance?

OVER-FRAMING

CONTEXT

When setting the scope of the project an attention space is created that might limit the possibility for more nuanced and diverse perspectives to emerge.



NATURE OF THE QUESTION

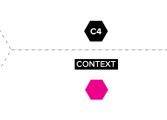
Where did the issue tackled by the project emerged from?

While the project might start from a self-initiated efforts, sometimes it starts from previous work or already pre-defined objectives.

OPENNESS OF BRIEF

How open is the initial formulation of the question?

A project can be either framed as an open exploration or a more defined research with a specific target in mind. How open is the brief will not only impacted how the project is approached but also the outcomes.



OPENNESS TO CRITIQUE

CONTEXT

Is the context open to critical thinking?

As speculative design deals with ability to reframe current practises and think of alternatives, the ability to question the status quo and being open to critical thinking is essential.



PREDEFINED GOALS

Are there any predefined goals or outcomes?

Part of understanding the context of the project, is being aware of the predefined goals or expected outcomes the different stakeholders might have and how it might influence the way criticality is approached.





SHORT TERM GOALS

What short term goals could conflict with the project's exploration of the issue?

Short term thinking might become a limitation when approaching speculative design in a participatory setting as short term goals can become an obstacle when thinking about change and alternatives.



URGENCY OF THE ISSUE

How might the urgency of the issue pose an obstacle for people to step out of today's problems?

Because speculative design deals with wicked problems, there is a sense of urgency that might lead to future myopia. The 'weight of the now' might hinder the ability to think of alternatives and step out of today.



CONFLICTING INTERESTS

Do participants' interests and agendas conflict with critically exploring alternatives?

Participants interests and agendas might not align with the speculative design efforts of imagining alternatives and being critical of current practises.



BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

Are participants familiar with the issues and controversies explored?

Participant's background knowledge and familiarity with different controversies and tensions is related to how different perpectives and opinions might be formulated.



PARTICIPANTS

PARTICIPANTS



Who can bring a different perspective in order to break through the other participants' point of view?

Thinking from a different perspective might help break through the dominant points of view and for more nuanced views on the issue to emerge.



PARTICIPANT



CONFLICTING VOICES

Are there conflicting perspectives towards the issue?

When dealing with more controversial issues, it is important to have divergent perspectives on the same issue. However, conflicting voices might clash and hinder the process.







IMPOSING VIEWS

Is there a risk that different participants impose a certain view or perspective in the project and silence other views?

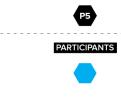
When engaging a diverse set of participants, because of power distribution or their role in the issue, some perspectives might impose over others.



INTERESTS AND AGENDAS

Why might participants be interested in discussing this issue?

It's important to consider who is interested in engaging in this conversation and why are they interested. Participants' interests and agendas might influence the participatory activities and critical discussions.



PLURALITY OF VOICES

How diverse is the group of people involved in the process?

Participants can come from different backgrounds, have different positions towards the issue or different opinions.

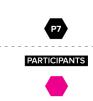
Thus, it is important that different voices are engaged during the process.



REFLECTING DIFFERENT VIEWS

Do the different participants reflect the different perspectives on the issue?

When the questions you're tackling are systemic in nature, it is important that the participants reflect the different views on the issue.



REFLEXIVE CRITICALITY

How difficult might it be for participants to critique their own practise?

When involving people that are working in the same domain, it might be difficult to create critical distance and reflect on their own practise.



UNDERREPRESENTED

Who is impacted by the issue but whose voice has not yet been represented in the discourse?

Systemic issues impact different people at different levels. Nonetheless, usually not all voices are equally represented.





GENERATIVE ARTEFACT

How can the artefacts be left open so people's perspectives can feed in?

The artefact can play a more generative role by being open so people can start a conversation around it and think through making



REFINED ARTEFACT

How can the artefacts be refined enough to immerse people into the scenario?

While open, it is important also that the artefact is refined enough to transport people into the alternative scenarios so the discussions and reflections can be more nuanced.



ENGAGEMENT



COMING AS AN OUTSIDER

How can you leverage the designer's position as an outsider to push the boundaries?

When working with participants inside a specific domain or context. The designer comes as an outsider, free from existing constraints and limitations the participants and/or organisation might have. This position can be used to to problematise the process.



ENGAGEMENT



DESIGNER AS MEDIATOR

How designers work with different perspectives and combine them together?

During the process disparate groups can be involved and their perspectives combined into a joint output. Either by combining different views or translating one group output to the other, the designer can work as a mediator in the process.



ATTENTION SPACE

How can you curate the process by creating an attention space

One way to structure the discussion is to create an attention space around specific themes. This might involve pre-selecting the the signals and materials used during producing the speculations or having a predefined set of questions that guide a discussion.



MODERATING THE DEBATE

When participants are involved in discussing and debating the speculative scenarios, how is the debate moderated?

Besides designing the artefacts that work as triggers for debate, designers think about the debate moments and how the discussion is moderated.





DIFFERENT STAGES

What if different voices are brought into the process at different stages?

Different groups can be involved at different moments as a way to bring the outcome of one participatory process to another. As an example, one group can co-create the artefacts used in a discussion with a different group.

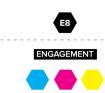


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Critical to facilitating a participatory speculative design project is in problematising the process and engaging participants in difficult questions and decisions.

ENGAGEMENT

DIFFICULT QUESTIONSWhat are key questions that can be asked to problematise the process and provoke participants?



DIVERGENT PERSPECTIVES

How can you create a space for multiple perspectives to emerge when discussing the scenarios and artefacts?

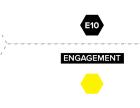
Different views and opinons can exist towards the same issue. Part of the engagement process should be to create a space for the different perspectives to coexist.



LEVEL OF CONTROL

How controlled should the process of engagement be? Why?

The way control is shared during the project is important. While some projects might require participants to explore a specific topic it may also be valuable to have an open exploration.



BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

Does participating in the process requires any previous knowledge?

When including different groups in the process, it is important to understand if the project requires previous knowledge.



SETTING THE STAGE

Are participants briefed on what is happening?

Sensitizing the participants, before the engagement moment, to be in the right mindset is a strategy that can be used. However, one might fall into the risk of framing the project too much and limit the participatory efforts.





PROBLEMATISE THE PROCESS

How can you problematise the process by creating space for dissenssus?

Sometimes facilitation is not about making life easier for the participants. Specially when you want to engage people in critical reflection, problematising the process might be a way to curate the discussion.





CONSIDERED A PREDICTION

Is there a risk that the outcome of the project is seen as a prediction and close the possibility for discussion?

When delivering a high-resolution scenario or artefact, this might be seen as a proposal or prediction for the future and not as a device for discussion.







PROJECT'S AFTERLIFE

How can the reflection engendered by the process be applied by the participants involved in the process?

When engaging people in participatory speculative design it is important to consider how can the conversations generated by the process can turn into action or decision making at the present moment.



OUTCOMES

PART OF A LARGER PROCESS

How can participant's output be involved in a larger process?

Participatory moments might be integrated in a larger process. The designer can be in charge of refining and building on top of participants output or the output of a participatory process can be brought to a different stage with different participants.



PLURAL OUTCOMES

What if the outcome of the project results in multiple scenarios?

The outcome of the project might be a set of different scenarios, each one coming from different angles or perspectives.



OUTCOME



REACHING CONSENSUS

What if the goal of the project is to reach consensus by creating a single preferable scenario?

The value of the project might be in involving different groups of people to create or discuss a preferable scenario.







DISSEMINATION

Where is the outcome of the project disseminated?

Thinking about the dissemination strategy is important if the goal is to engage different publics in discussion around project's outcomes. Who is inhabiting this spaces?

Who is not there?



