

RI. SE

Welcome to our Elderly Futures



Domain:

Democratic Change
& Society



Place:

Gothenburg,
Sweden



Duration:

Two days: one day
workshop
and one exhibition



Target audience:

General public

Mission

Elderly care is a priority in Sweden, but it is becoming an increasingly complex issue given the ageing population, increased cultural diversity and the pressures on caregiving. Ongoing discussions are taking place on how to sustain and improve elderly care in the future, and involving the public in this conversation is essential to shaping that future. Sweden has embraced technological solutions in elderly care, but this also brings the danger of dehumanising care and exacerbating inequalities. Finding ways to engage the public, including children, in the conversation about elderly care beyond quick-fix technologies is important for creating a future elderly care system that is inclusive, humane and long-term.

Engagement activities

The interaction was organised at the Universeum Science Museum of Gothenburg, through a pop-up event on the first day, and a pop-up exhibit the second day.

Artistic activities

A performance artist (i.e. comedian) and a photographer were hired for this interaction, guiding visitors to reflect on their own elderly future and bringing them to the realisation that it will happen to them too.

IMPACT

Suggest the context of a
multi-cultural future

Raise awareness on issues
around Elderly care

Invite the younger generation to
question their future

Inspire participants and visitors to
act for their own desired future



WHAT HAPPEND?

As the aim of the interaction was to encourage citizens to reflect on their own elderly future, the activity was conducted in a public museum to directly engage visitors in an open and accessible space. Over the course of two days, a pop-up event was hosted by an artist who guided participants through a series of creative and conversational activities around a table, inviting them to imagine their own old age and to discuss what a desirable future might look like for them.

This interaction was designed to support research focusing on the theme of “Elderly Futures.” The interaction further developed the research by exploring how collaboration with artists could reach a public audience.

PARTICIPANTS ENGAGEMENT

The design research framing the interaction developed methods and props to facilitate meaningful conversations about the future of elderly care. These included proposed discussion themes and a set of creative elements that participants could combine to spark their imagination and envision possible futures for ageing. The goal was to create an embodied, sensory experience that would allow participants to momentarily feel what it might be like to grow old, to encourage deeper reflection and conversation about their own elderly futures.

On the first day, participants gathered around a table for a metaphorical dining experience. They were first invited to imagine themselves as elderly, before entering a discussion with the other participants on how ageing made them feel and exchanged thoughts and emotions. The session concluded with an open conversation about what they would prefer for their future instead, leading to the creation of personal wish cards where each participant wrote down their hopes for their own later life.

Throughout this immersive experience, the performance artist acted as the host, while two design researchers, in the role of waiters, guided the participants through each step. The flow of the session was choreographed to mirror the rhythm of a multi-course dining event.

On the second day, the interaction shifted into an open, museum-based experience. Visitors, including school groups, were either directed to the exhibit or discovered it as they explored the museum. The installation showcased the table setting from the previous day's event along with photographs capturing moments from the interaction. The performance artist continued to host the space, guiding visitors to imagine themselves as elderly and encouraging them to reflect on their feelings and preferred futures.

At the end of each visit, those who wished to delve deeper into the themes or the research could engage directly with the design researchers present, creating opportunities for more detailed conversations and feedback.



Artistic activities

A multi-lingual performance artist was recruited to host both the event and the exhibit. After preparing an initial script, he improvised throughout the event and exhibit, seamlessly blending English, Spanish, and Swedish as though they formed a single, fluid language. The balance and choice of languages were adapted depending on the audience, for example, using more Swedish when engaging with school children. The deliberate use of multiple languages was intended to evoke the idea of a multicultural future and, at times, to introduce a light sense of confusion, while ensuring clarity when necessary. Visitors' responses and engagement served as real-time feedback, allowing the artist to adjust and refine his approach throughout the day.

The performance artist not only set the tone but also actively guided participants, interacting with them directly and personally. He structured and managed the groups of visitors to ensure meaningful contact with each of them, creating a tailored experience. Through language and performance, he conveyed key elements of the design research: the suggestion of a multicultural future, a gentle disorientation, and the comforting sensation of being looked after. These dimensions were carefully integrated into the interaction as essential components of the experience.

The photographer also played a significant role in shaping the atmosphere of the pop-up environment. In preparation for the event, he conducted a pre-visit to plan the staging, determine lighting arrangements, and creatively mask the permanent exhibition elements to craft a distinct, immersive space. His photographs, captured during the first day, were edited and printed overnight to form a visual exhibition on the second day. These images not only documented the event but also became part of the narrative, influencing how subsequent visitors engaged with the topic.

Both artists were fundamental to the delivery of the interaction. Their work was not simply added to the event, but deeply embedded in the design process. The design researchers collaborated closely with them to shape the entire visitor experience, ensuring that their creative contributions directly supported the research objectives.

Finally, the design research connected to elderly care had designed graphic elements, colour and material palette, and a music soundtrack that were used for the interaction. The music playlist, in particular, was refined through several iterations to incorporate more multicultural influences, aligning with the event's themes of diversity and a shared future. This playlist was played continuously throughout the event, subtly reinforcing the atmosphere and helping to immerse participants in the intended sensory environment.

The implementation was inspired by the multi-lingual participatory performance of Jorma Heart Jorma Soul (a Swedish/Finnish musician).

As a final outcome, [a video has been done to showcase the interaction.](#)



[Find the Video
on Vimeo!](#)





...And that's very important to me, to keep the future alive.

Visitor/ Participant

Impact of the interaction

The interaction successfully invited visitors to reflect on a topic that is often viewed as something distant or only relevant to others. In this case, participants were asked to consider what they personally want and do not want for their own futures, actively engaging in conversations about the future of elderly care. The experience encouraged them to think about the actions they could take now to help shape the future they desire. For younger visitors, the interaction planted the idea that they have a choice and can influence their own ageing journeys, especially if they begin reflecting on these possibilities early in life.

Thanks to the artistic interaction, this human-centred approach was essential in shifting the focus away from the purely technological or economic narratives that frequently dominate discussions about ageing. By placing individual hopes, fears, and values at the centre, the interaction helped participants see the topic in a more personal and emotionally resonant light.

The artistic staging created by the performance artist played a pivotal role in this transformation. The surreal restaurant setting, which placed participants outside of time and space, transported them into a unique, symbolic world. This allowed them to step away from their current selves and project them into their imagined futures with greater openness and curiosity.

Participants genuinely enjoyed the conversations that emerged around ageing, autonomy, and their shared future as an ageing society. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with many describing the experience as deeply thought-provoking and emotionally impactful. Several participants expressed a desire for the installation to travel, suggesting that the format could successfully engage wider audiences and further support the ongoing research project. The event not only sparked meaningful reflection but also demonstrated a compelling, creative model for public engagement on complex societal topics.



It's very hard to grasp that you are thinking about this for yourself in the future, not for someone else.

How do you really feel about that in the future?

Visitor/ Participant



Looking to replicate this impactful experience?
RISE has identified a few key ingredients to ensure success:

- Collaborate with performance **artist** and photographer **who are flexible to improvise and take self-initiative** and trust their expertise. They very much contributed in the direction of the final outcome.
- Check the location beforehand and bring more additional tools and material for the unexpected when setting up the pop-up.
- **Allow for more time** than you think for the set-up and the pack-up. When coordinating with a venue, there is a lot of running around, trying to find people, find things out.



Resources

The event was hosted by the Universeum Science Museum of Gothenburg. The budget could therefore be allocated mostly to the performance artist and the photographer.

Some additional budget was spent for the printing of graphic materials, materials for setting the scene (eg. Fabric, clips) and snacks and beverages for participants of the event.



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