

SMOTIES: Scenario-building for creative future solutions in remote places

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Abstract

This paper introduces a scenario-building design methodology used in setting up a four-year Creative Europe Program project co-funded by the European Union. The project addresses an emerging field of action that aims to explore how small and remote places can benefit from the design of cultural and creative innovations within public spaces and in collaboration with local stakeholders. The paper describes how a common ground of scenarios has been designed for the development of project trajectories by defining future visions of action within small and remote places in Europe. This methodology is currently being applied and tested in ten pilot projects for the development of innovative creative solutions that address the specific needs of depopulated and relationally remote places considered to be depositories of material and immaterial culture that risks being undervalued, not consolidated, not handed down, and hence lost.

Keywords: Scenario-building, remote places, public spaces, culture and creativity

Introduction

Globalisation, digitisation, demographic and climate change, combined with the shocks of the global financial crisis, are all significantly influencing small and remote places, shaping their nature and future development. According to the European quantitative criteria for Remote and Rural Places (European Union Regional Policy, 2008), places can be considered remote if: their population density is below 150 inhabitants per square kilometre and if 50% of their residents cannot reach the centre of a city of at least 50.000 inhabitants within 45 minutes. Hence, by remote places, we intend those located outside of cities and poorly connected, both in terms of infrastructural and relational networks. Therefore, small and remote places include

villages and areas that: (1) are not far from big cities but are difficult to reach through physical or relational connections; (2) lack relationships and interconnections with nodes of creativity such as universities, research centres, outreach projects, innovative communities/networks; (3) have yet to be involved in networks, innovative bottom-up processes, or project-based experimentations.

Despite the aforementioned destabilising dynamics, small and remote places are currently gaining unprecedented value, especially within the European context, due to "two global macrophenomena: climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic" (Membretti et al., 2022). Even if they are often depopulated and relationally remote, these places are depositary of material and immaterial culture, contributing to human lives with many resources, and carrying unspoiled natural beauty, biodiversity, and Indigenous cultures (OECD, 2020b). This cultural patrimony risks being undervalued, neglected, poorly consolidated, unpassed down, and thus lost.

A four-year research project, named "Human Cities/SMOTIES, Creative works with small and remote places" (SMOTIES), was co-funded by the European Education and Culture Executive Agency of the European Commission within the Creative Europe Programme to foster creative thinking and innovation in European small and remote places. Started in 2020, SMOTIES belongs to the Human Cities informal network, including, since 2006, design, art, and architecture universities, centres and consultancies. Human Cities serves as an interdisciplinary exchange platform around Europe, investigating the livability of public places using participatory design to support processes of innovation. Since 2008, Human Cities has been funded by the European Commission's Creative Europe-Culture sub-program, consolidating its approach and acting as a catalyst in several European settings to implement innovative experimentations, nurturing networks and building capacity with local stakeholders, and disseminating cultural values. With SMOTIES, Human Cities applies its approach to ten European small and remote places, which benefit from the design of cultural and creative innovations within public spaces in collaboration with local stakeholders. Each place is associated with ten project partners, including public institutions, design centres, creative agencies, national associations, and research centres located in ten European cities (De Rosa & Fassi, 2023). The SMOTIES partners are:

- Department of Design, Politecnico di Milano (Milan, Italy)
- Cité du Design – Ecole Supérieure d'Art et Design (Saint-Étienne, France)
- Clear Village Trustee Limited (London, UK)
- FH JOANNEUM University of Applied Sciences (Graz, Austria)
- Urban Planning Institute of the Republic of Slovenia (Ljubljana, Slovenia)



- Estonian Association of Designers (Tallinn, Estonia)
- Department of Product and Systems Design Engineering, University of the Aegean (Ermoupoli, Greece)
- Art & Design Department, University of Madeira (Funchal, Portugal)
- Alternance SLF (Reykjavik, Iceland).
- Zamek Cieszyn (Cieszyn, Poland)

They are referred to as "nodes of creativity" (fig.1) because, within the project, they interact with small and remote places as interlocutors, activators, and supporters of creative works to be rooted in public spaces.

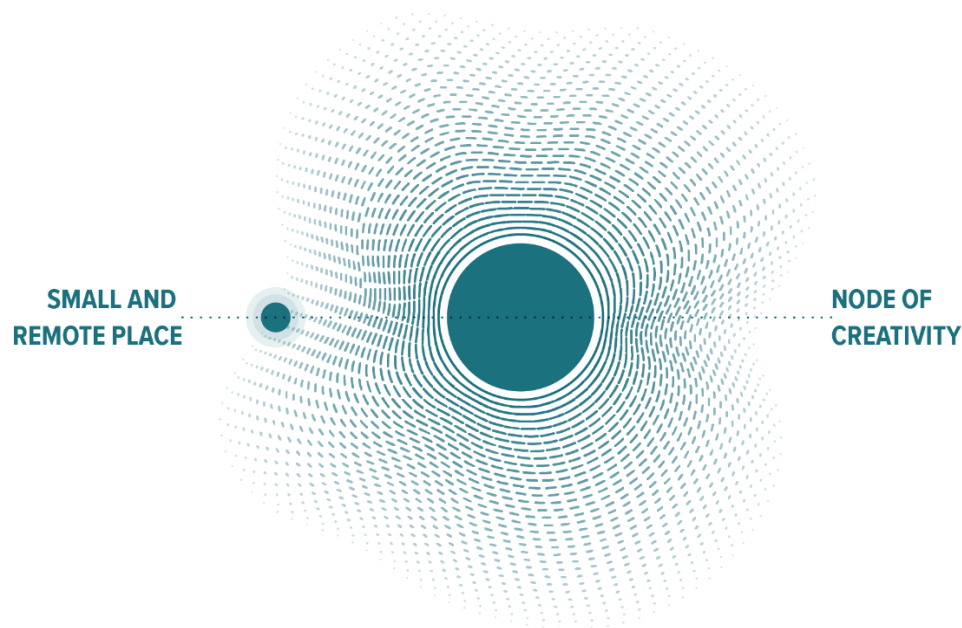


Figure 1. In SMOTIES, "nodes of creativity" interact with small and remote places: they have been chosen for the particularity of position, cultural uniqueness, and consolidated role in their cultural sector.

To support the project partners and the communities of the small and remote places in identifying opportunities for new ideas and project development, a shared methodology was developed. The SMOTIES methodology aims at building guiding perspectives towards the future, impacting and generating long-term legacies in the involved settings. This is achieved by engaging with local communities for the *constitution of a public*, meaning a group of people coming into being while interacting with an issue (DiSalvo, 2009), promoting transnational mobility of creative professionals, and activating masterclasses and training for capacity-building purposes.



The following methodology describes how scenarios for a possible and positive future of small and remote places can be imagined and used to develop new project ideas. These scenarios are part of the SMOTIES Toolbox, which has been given to partners to engage with locals, co-design, and design situated projects. This toolbox is currently being tested, iterated, and validated to be published by the end of SMOTIES activities for other researchers to use in similar project conditions and contexts. Therefore in this paper, we intend to describe the development of the methodology for building the scenarios included in the Toolbox, while the results of the co-design sessions with local people in the different remote locations are still in elaboration and will be the subject of a final publication of the research.

Building a methodology: a pathway towards desired futures

Scenario-building and foresight methodologies have been widely explored in design with different approaches, mindsets, and methods stemming from other fields of research and application, such as Future Studies (Amara, 1981; Candy & Dunagan, 2017; Candy & Potter, 2019; Dunne & Raby, 2013; Fry, 2020; Henchey, 1978; Voros, 2001) and Strategic Planning (Hillgren et al., 2020; Jantsch, 1972; Voros, 2003). Strategic foresight has also been embedded into the European Commission planning, now aiming to mainstream it into policymaking in all fields (European Commission, 2020a). Methodologies for building scenarios are at times similar while also differing in details and adaptations to specific research contexts. Literature in this field is rich, but there is a lack of comparative research on different methodologies for a deeper and more critical understanding of the various ways in which tools and methods can be applied both in the profession and in research.

In SMOTIES, scenarios are used as means to allow actors involved in the decision-making process of a specific remote context to initiate a discussion, compare their views, and hopefully come to shared visions (Manzini & Jégou, 2006, p. 190). Over the past twenty years, in fact, the scientific community has increasingly recognised the value of incorporating participatory practices into foresight, accommodating a more extensive variety of viewpoints and, ultimately, a more comprehensive range of public preferences (Cagnin & Scapolo, 2007; Heidingsfelder et al., 2015). The main aim of the project is to develop creative solutions in remote places to trigger change as well as stimulate “new forms of community interaction that help people cope with everyday life” (Koskinen, 2016, p.23). In this context, scenarios act as lenses for project ideation and development. For these reasons, the methods chosen to develop scenarios in this specific project first refer to the theory developed around the use of Design Orienting/ed Scenarios (DOS) (Manzini & Jégou, 2000; Manzini &



Jégou, 2003; Manzini & Jégou, 2006; Maschi, 2002), the intersection of foresight and design (Candy & Dunagan, 2017; Voros, 2001), and their evolution when being applied to designing product service systems (Manzini, Jégou, & Meroni, 2009; Meroni et al., 2018). DOS are "tools designed to facilitate the design process" (Manzini & Jégou, 2006, p. 193), and their final goal is to build common visions of contexts where non-existing but possible artefacts can be put in place. In SMOTIES, the "possible artefacts" are to be considered within public spaces, indoor or outdoor, and they can combine physical or virtual products, spaces, and services.

The DOS methodology was also contaminated through other techniques that allowed for a deeper understanding of the state of the art of the topics depicted for the preliminary desk research and an assessment of the accuracy of the data gathered. The methodology was enriched thanks to the collaboration with a research project running parallel to SMOTIES. Fuel4Design—Future Education and Literacy for Designers (fuel4design.org), co-funded by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union, was working on the creation of methods, tools, and resources to support creatives in envisioning complex futures (Celi et al., 2019; Morrison et al., 2021), of which some have been used to integrate the overall methodology for SMOTIES. For example, the Polarity Mapping tool by Fuel4Design was "tweaked" by putting a greater emphasis on trends and looking into the future of current weak signals of change, as discussed in detail in the following paragraph. This exchange of experiences and knowledge between researchers also allowed Fuel4Design to use SMOTIES as a case study to prototype the application and effectiveness of their methods (research papers describing this activity will soon be published by the Fuel4Design project).

Since the research aims to work on the future of small and remote places, and since this implies the involvement of local stakeholders (local administrations and policymakers) in co-design activities, the project also intends to contribute to the more recent debate on the role of scenario-based design methods for future policy studies (Kimbell, 2019; Bason, 2020; European Commission, 2020) and on previously theorised policy-orienting scenario building (POS) (Manzini & Jégou, 2000). Although much has been said and experimented with, both in academia and practice, to demonstrate how design can be a strategic tool for policymakers (Bason, 2016; Junginger, 2013; Junginger, 2017; Villa Alvarez et al., 2022), perhaps there is still a need to reinforce the specific strategic value of scenario-building and scenarios, as a method intrinsic to the design profession, by leveraging on the design ability to act as an agent of change, allowing different local stakeholders to imagine futures and accordingly determine impact pathways to reach desired futures for the sustainable development of a place.



Considering the challenges that small and remote places face today, scenario-building and foresight methodologies have been used to find common ground for possible sustainable futures within the European context. We aim to achieve medium-term outcomes for 2024 through forecasting and backcasting processes that look further into the future toward more significant impacts in 2100. Based on long-term thinking, foresight translates future uncertainties grasped in the present into future trends and challenges, while, by looking far into the future, backcasting fathoms the challenges and opportunities of what is uncertain today in order to develop project pathways to reach desired futures (Meroni et al., 2018).

Therefore, we developed an approach for devising future-oriented perspectives, seeking a solid impact on the addressed contexts in the long-term. These perspectives were defined using a methodology consisting of the following methods and techniques:

- **Knowledge base development:** secondary research was conducted in two areas of interest to comprehend and interpret existing data on the state of the art and future strategic research streams. The first literature research looked into remote well-being and rural region conditions, identifying current challenges and consequent European strategic missions for the future (European Commission, Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs, 2020; European Union Regional Policy, 2008 and 2011; European Commission, 2020a; OECD, 2020a and 2020b). The second one analysed the challenges of the European cultural and creative sector and its potential to impact future transformations (Clifton et al., 2015; European Commission, 2018a and 2018b; European Commission, 2010; EY, 2021; OECD, 2009 and 2018; Rosenkranz, K., 2018; UNESCO, 2022; Van Puyenbroeck et al., 2021).

Quote example 1: "Demographic changes call for new policy objectives that provide sustainable solutions to maintain a robust labour force, quality services, and the attractiveness of rural regions. This requires forward planning that accounts for ageing, population decline, and the need to attract and retain young workers. **To adapt to demographic changes, rural regions need to support a vibrant community culture for people of all ages and mechanisms to integrate the elderly in the local economy.** Social innovations that address loneliness of elderly people or the integration of migrant communities can be an important tool to find solutions to societal challenges and enhance well-being simultaneously." (OECD, 2020b)



Quote example 2: "Remote regions produce the most electricity using renewable sources and generate 36% of the clean electricity in OECD countries." (OECD, 2020a)

Quote example 3: "It is important to emphasise that in a long-term, sustainability of regional CCI development strategy could be ensured only by active participation of local communities, but in many cases these communities lack skills and the ability to identify local CCI assets, to develop and implement regional CCI strategy." (Clifton et al., 2015)

Furthermore, the collection and analysis of case studies as good practices in the participatory and creative provision of public space in European remote places supported and provided additional knowledge to the understanding of issues and challenges in the cultural and creative sector and in rural regions.

- **Data extraction and interpretation:** the above-mentioned literature was scanned. Quotes and keywords were extrapolated to identify relationships between future trajectories of European challenges, and the key insights emerged. Through confrontation, the information gathered was mapped and clustered. Emerging areas of project opportunities were clustered as: (a) active citizen participation and new forms of governance; (b) off-grid communities and ecologies; (c) rural digitalisation; (d) rural proximity and tourism; (e) creative ageing; (f) post-COVID distributed and diffused education. Two tools developed by Fuel4Design were used: (1) *Horizon scanning*, to position the desk research findings, investigate other areas that required additional investigation, and identify potential opportunities and future developments; (2) *Future forces*, to perform a more profound examination and comprehension of external uncertainties, addressing significant possibilities, issues, emerging futures, and potential trajectories driving each specific sector. These trajectories included: government, wealth distribution, media and telecommunications, economy, education, demography, environment, infrastructure, public health, and geopolitics.
- **Scenario-building:** the emerging project areas were further deepened through long-term thinking lenses by using the following Fuel4Design tools: (3) *Trends timeline*, to identify emerging values and behaviours, detect signs of change, and reflect on how particular trends would react over time in determining futures; (4) *Polarity mapping*, to identify scenarios. The definition



of strategic objectives for each area of interest served to capture the non-linear causal relationship that links far-future changes with current challenges. These are based on a conceptual model that derives from the notion of *impact pathways* or *pathways to impact*, currently adopted by the Horizon Europe framework, where it is associated with a *Key Impact Pathway Indicators'* approach. The Impact pathway is defined as the

“Logical steps towards the achievement of the expected impacts of the project over time, in particular beyond the duration of a project. A pathway begins with the projects’ results, to their dissemination, exploitation and communication, contributing to the expected outcomes in the work programme topic, and ultimately to the wider scientific, economic and societal impacts of the work programme destination” (Horizon Europe Programme. Standard Application Form (HE RIA, IA), 2022, p. 29).

In SMOTIES, five polarity maps were identified. Each map looks into an area of opportunity identified in desk research and clustering to identify and envision possible future scenarios. These maps have been called *Windows on the Future* since they function as a project tool to identify opportunities for intervention by serving as emerging narrative lenses through which it is possible to peek into the future to transform remote places into more liveable environments whilst boosting the participation of local communities and stakeholders.

Figure 2 describes the process we have followed to define the 5 *Windows*, integrating the methods and tools of the Fuel4Design project.

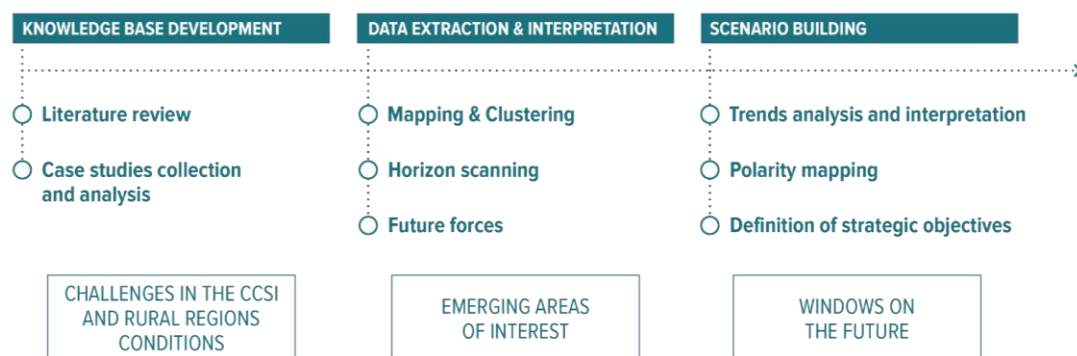


Figure 2. Graph illustrating the methodology developed for scenario-building.



Windows on the Future: a tool for envisioning future states

Polarity mapping is a tool that is often used in scenario-building. However, as described previously, it is essential to specify that in SMOTIES the method used slightly differs from the original matrix identified in the DOS theory (Manzini & Jegou, 2000). While in DOS the values of the axes are defined by User Culture Expectations (vertical axis) and Function Technological Options (horizontal axis), in the method proposed by SMOTIES each axis represents a trend and its evolution in time (from a closer future to a far one): the vertical axis represents a trend related to the level of engagement of inhabitants (users) in the process of change, while the horizontal axis looks at trends related to specific areas of interest (socio-economic systems) identified in the desk research. The definition of the values of these axes was guided by the main aim of the project, which was to investigate the livability of public places using participatory design and creative works as a way to support processes of innovation in small and remote places. The values of the axes were defined as follows:

- **Vertical axis:** a constant value for all *Windows* (*Engagement and leadership*). All identified scenarios place the participation of communities and active citizenship at their core. Citizens' engagement allows communities to design themselves: this is a crucial value for envisioning a world in which communities go beyond participation and become the "creative government" of remote places themselves. The declining population of small and remote regions can also be seen as a strength, an opportunity to allow the emergence of a new form of local governance and leadership based on raising awareness of local creative resources. In this context, creative citizens take the responsibility and authority for collectively giving form to the future of their living environment and actively participate in the care and governance of the neighbourhood.
- **Horizontal axis:** a variable that changes in each *Window* and refers to a specific trend identified from the desk research within the topic.

For each *Window*, two trends have been identified to give form to the Polarity map. These trends reveal behavioural change that is anchored in what is happening today and that leaps toward future opportunities fueled by significant uncertainty. To describe the evolution of the discovered behavioural changes, each trend was translated and structured into a timeline with a positive value at both ends. The trend timelines were then intersected to build a Polarity map for each *Window*.



The *Windows on the Future* identified are the following:

- "Project" Communities, related to active citizen participation and new kinds of governance;
- Co-created ecologies, regarding creative solutions for sustainable living;
- Beyond Tourism, describing ways to live an authentic life;
- Proud to be silver, supporting the wellbeing of the wise;
- Distributed education, considering the future of local cultural and creative knowledge.

The obtained Polarity map breaks each *Window* into four possible scenarios, generating a total of 20 scenarios in which Cultural and Creative Sectors and Industries (CCSI) can contribute to transforming European small and remote places. Keywords, key challenges and opportunities, and trends were identified for each *Window* in order to allow a better understanding (fig.3).

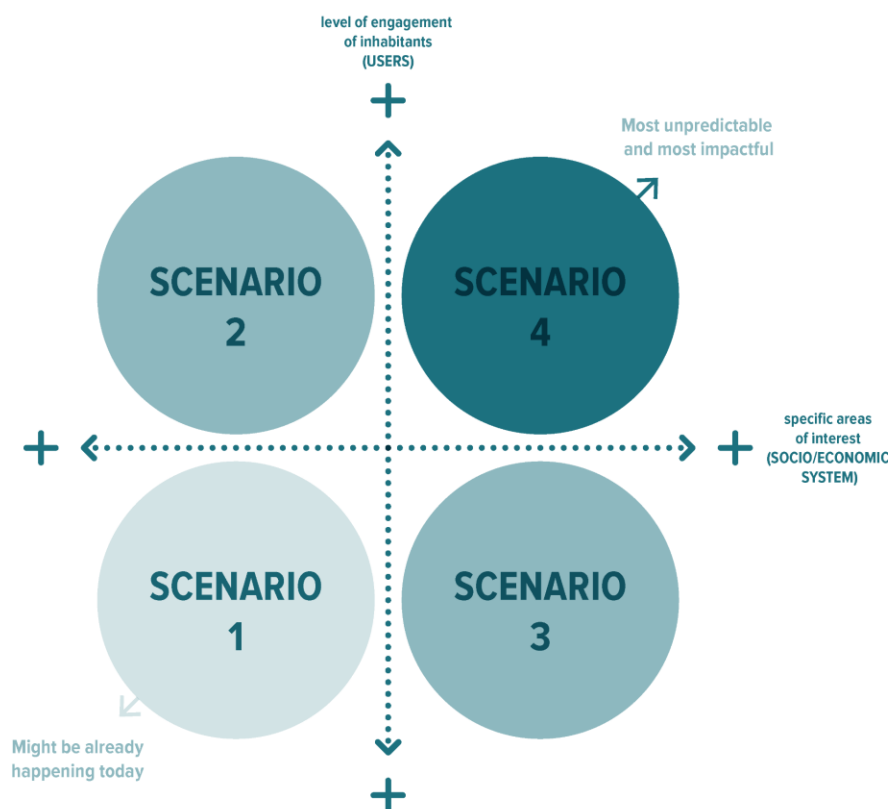


Figure 3. Elements constituting a *Window on the Future*.



The scenarios resulting from the Polarity mapping approach, positioned in the four quadrants, represent the identified pathways to explore how culture and creativity might work in the future in remote contexts (fig.4). These scenarios represent the setting in which projects on the ground may arise. The top-right quadrant, specifically, represents the most unpredictable yet most impactful scenario, whereas the bottom-left quadrant represents what may already be happening today. Scenarios are also accompanied by a selection of SMOTIES' case studies to provide a more profound idea of what CCSI can accomplish to transform remote places into more liveable regions.

Window on the Future	Vertical axis value	Horizontal axis value	Scenarios
"Project" Communities related to active citizen participation and new kinds of governance	Engagement and leadership From "This is ours" to "The (extra)ordinary anarchy"	The place to live From "Born to be there" to "The New Native place"	SCENARIO 1a. The virtuous circle SCENARIO 1b. The social village SCENARIO 1c. The 1€ house SCENARIO 1d. The effective Babel
Co-created ecologies regarding creative solutions for sustainable living		Living Off-GRID From "Don't buy, just use it" to "Autonomous station" From sharing to co-created ecology	SCENARIO 2a. Light Communities SCENARIO 2b. Stone soup SCENARIO 2c. The eco family SCENARIO 2d. Community quilts
Beyond Tourism describing ways to live an authentic life		The world is my home From "Sometime somewhere" to "Anytime anywhere"	SCENARIO 3a. Instagrammable hidden treasures SCENARIO 3b. Deep dive SCENARIO 3c. Engaged Globetrotter SCENARIO 3d. Super Tourist
Proud to be silver supporting the wellbeing of the wise		The new Gandalf From "Being cared" to "Guiding with wisdom"	SCENARIO 4a. Active memory SCENARIO 4b. The social clinique - Proximity and community welfare SCENARIO 4c. Cultural relay SCENARIO 4d. The wise anarchy
Distributed education considering the future of local cultural and creative knowledge		Extinction or Survival From "Cultural Dominance" to "Cultural Integration"	SCENARIO 5a. Bridging creative minds SCENARIO 5b. Storytelling our culture SCENARIO 5c. The village experience SCENARIO 5d. This is the place to be

Figure 4. Summary of all the *Windows* and their relative trends and scenarios.

Window n.1: "Project" Communities (fig.5). The pandemic has influenced the way we look at small and remote places. For many, they have become a new place to work and live thanks to the evolution of digital technologies and enforced smart working. In the creative community, this trend is not new (Rosenkranz, 2018), but as a result of the pandemic, there has been an acceleration. Due to this, some remote



places have been transformed into real hubs of creativity, able to welcome back those who had to leave because of a lack of possibilities (OECD, 2020a; OECD, 2020b) and attract newcomers. Who will be the new natives of our small and remote places?

The scenarios in this *Window* concern the future of people's participation and their ability to give form to shared future projects. Their common aim is to build resilient, creative ecosystems for future development, allowing the creation of an inclusive governance structure that can secure the full commitment of the local rural community to their long-term goals. These scenarios build on the emerging trend of civic participation in governing local development, stretching this concept from sporadic projects and civic listening to a new form of governance led by creative citizens.

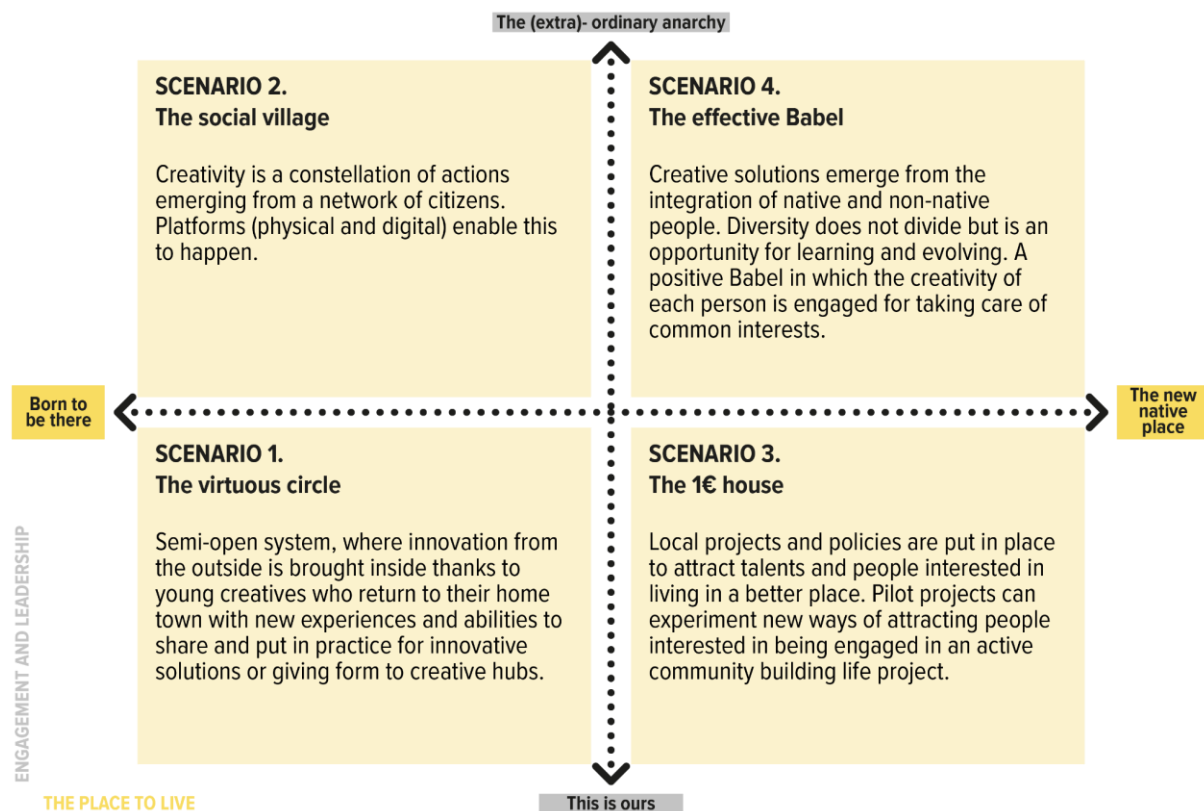


Figure 5. *Window* n.1: "Project" Communities.

Window n.2: Co-created ecologies (fig.6). The concept of Living Off-Grid was born with the scope of building dwellings not dependent on one or more public utilities, typically the supply of electricity, water, gas, and sewer systems. Its meaning has eventually expanded to include the idea of new self-sufficient lifestyles. Therefore,



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this trend is looking at this phenomenon starting from emerging sharing economy products and services to a more ambitious system of co-created ecology. This trend can be even more interesting in small and remote places that cannot be reached by utilities and can be a driver for reducing environmental impact and cost of living (OECD, 2020b).

The scenarios in this *Window* involve emerging models of alternative economic ecosystems and business models. Their common aim is to prepare a fertile ground for local economic transitions which build on sustainability and bio-economy. Research shows that small and remote places are also "by nature" more environmentally sustainable than cities, not only due to demographics but also to lifestyles, rituals, and traditions (OECD, 2020a). Preserving biodiversity, producing and depending on renewable energy, and using sustainable transport systems are only some of the main assets needed to build self-resilient neighbourhoods. Under this lens, small and remote places can be seen as the ideal setting for experimenting with alternative ways of future social and environmentally sustainable living.

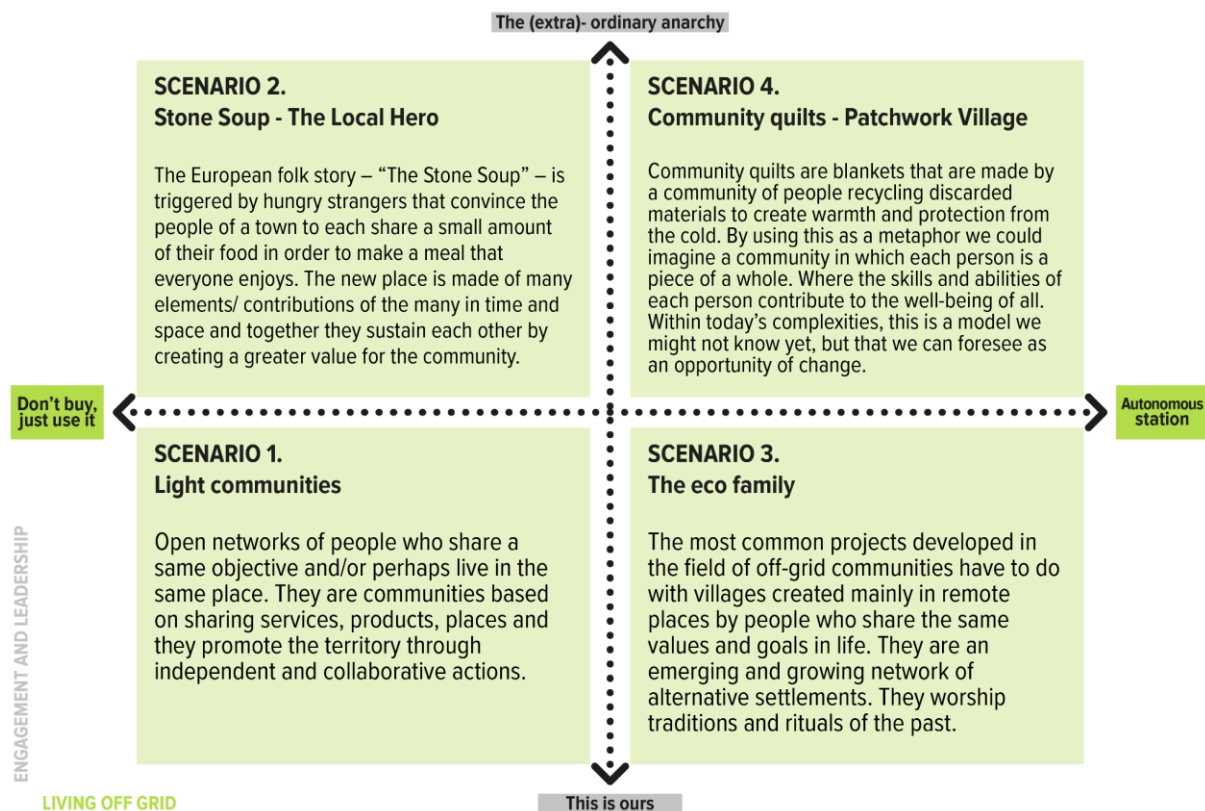


Figure 6. *Window n.2: Co-created ecologies.*



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Window n.3: Beyond Tourism (fig.7). The concepts of tourism and of "going on a holiday" are evolving. The recent COVID-19 crisis has changed our perception of distance and time. Many transformations are occurring, and it is not easy to imagine how it will be possible to balance work and leisure in the near future. There are places worldwide where massive tourism has completely transformed local realities. These places have started to protect themselves by restricting the number of visitors to reduce massive access. At the same time, the recent crisis has reduced the income of many and has highly impacted the tourism sector (European Commission, 2020b). Nevertheless, these events have also allowed people to work wherever and merge their private leisure time with work time, breaking the "industrial" structure of time. So what if, in the future, technology could be a means to visit places (through immersive experiences), breaking the alternation between work/holiday and starting to explore the world at any moment and time?

The scenarios in this *Window* imagine a world in which people will shift their daily rhythm, where time for work and leisure will merge into a continuous timeline, and where new technologies will allow us to visit exotic places while staying local. Climate change is also influencing these trends (European Commission, 2020). Perhaps by creating more significant experiences, we can imagine a shift from the mere concept of tourism (going to a place as a visitor) to a deeper understanding and exploring the world (going to a place to merge with the local culture and leave a mark).



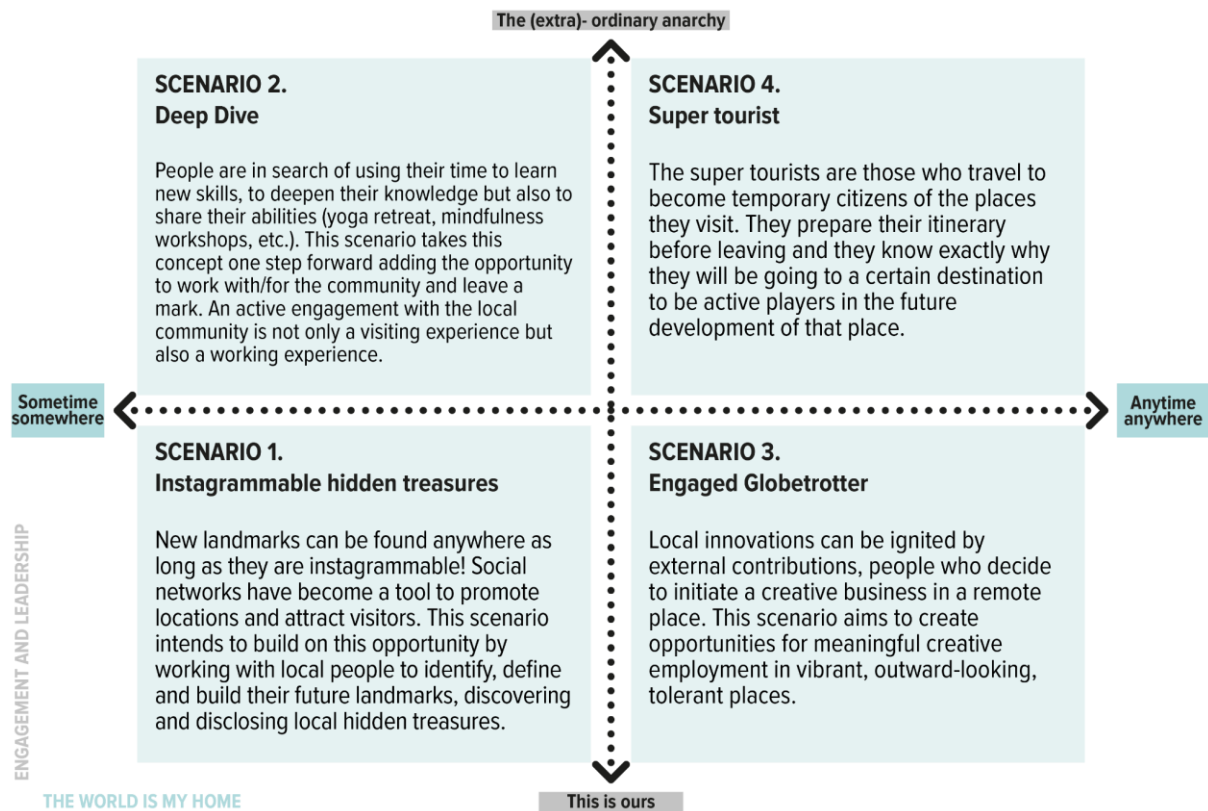


Figure 7. *Window n.3: Beyond Tourism.*

Window n.4: Proud to be silver (fig.8). Future projections show a substantial change in European demographics (OECD, 2020b). Low fertility rates and the increase in life expectancy will slowly lead us towards a society where there will be fewer than two working-age people for every person aged 65 years and over (expectation in 2070) (European Commission, Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs, 2020). There is a need for a shift in mindset, moving from considering the elderly a burden and a person to care for to valuing experience and allowing the elderly to guide us towards a more sage and mature society. The role of "the elderly" should be reconsidered, returning to the centrality once held in most societal models, but which somehow has been abandoned and neglected in our contemporary society: from being a person that needs to be assisted to being the wise guidance of a community. There is a need to move from actions being centred merely on the identification of seniority with non-self-sufficiency to a consideration of the person in old age as a valuable asset for the community. The sage archetype is the seeker of knowledge, that is, a person who values life experiences and uses them as a means of learning for the entire community.



The scenarios in this *Window* aim to work on cross-generation knowledge exchange, recognising the need for intercultural and intergenerational dialogue within a given and circumscribed nucleus of people, treasuring and building on past experiences of the wise.

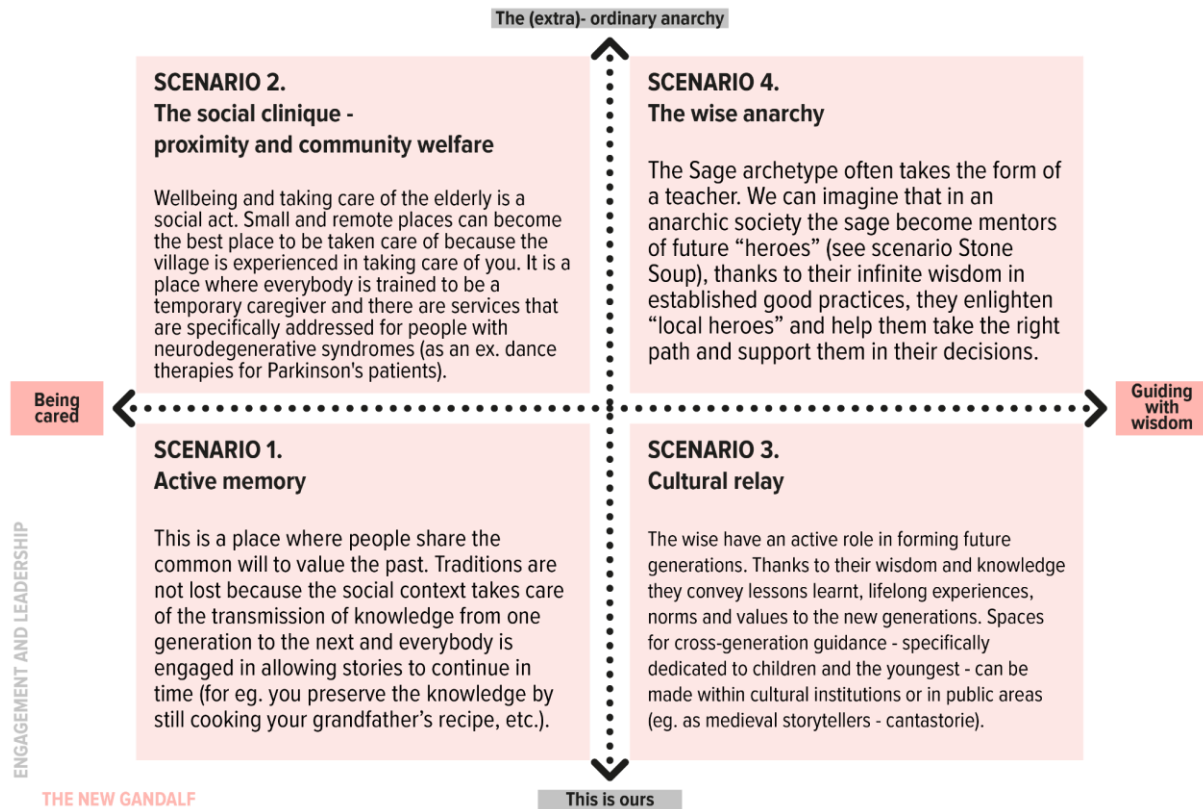


Figure 8. *Window* n.4: Proud to be silver.

Window n.5: Distributed education (fig.9). There is an international awakening around what has determined the dominance of certain cultures with respect to other marginal or sub-cultures. Today we are witnessing the emergence of what is called the "decolonisation of cultures", whose aim is to revitalise indigenous cultures worldwide. Although the word might not be suitable when working in Europe (a dominant Western culture), we could argue that there is a need to allow smaller and less popular repertoires of European culture to emerge and access a broader public. This can also be done by attracting international creatives and highly-skilled professionals to small and remote places to open up new cultural and creative production and exchange opportunities.

The scenarios in this area have to do with education. Data shows that in small and remote European areas, young people move elsewhere to look for educational



opportunities, and very few return to their hometowns for working opportunities. Moreover, in remote areas, there are fewer educational opportunities for lifelong learning, which does not allow the local population to update their skills (OECD, 2020a). However, the recent shift to more flexible, informal, and digital forms of learning has opened new pathways. The scenarios consider the potential of cultural and creative education to develop local individual and collective talents by promoting the cultural diversity of expression. New generations of local creators could also be sustained by actions that attract international talents to exchange knowledge. Attention should also be given to providing access to smaller and less popular repertoires through innovative educational services.

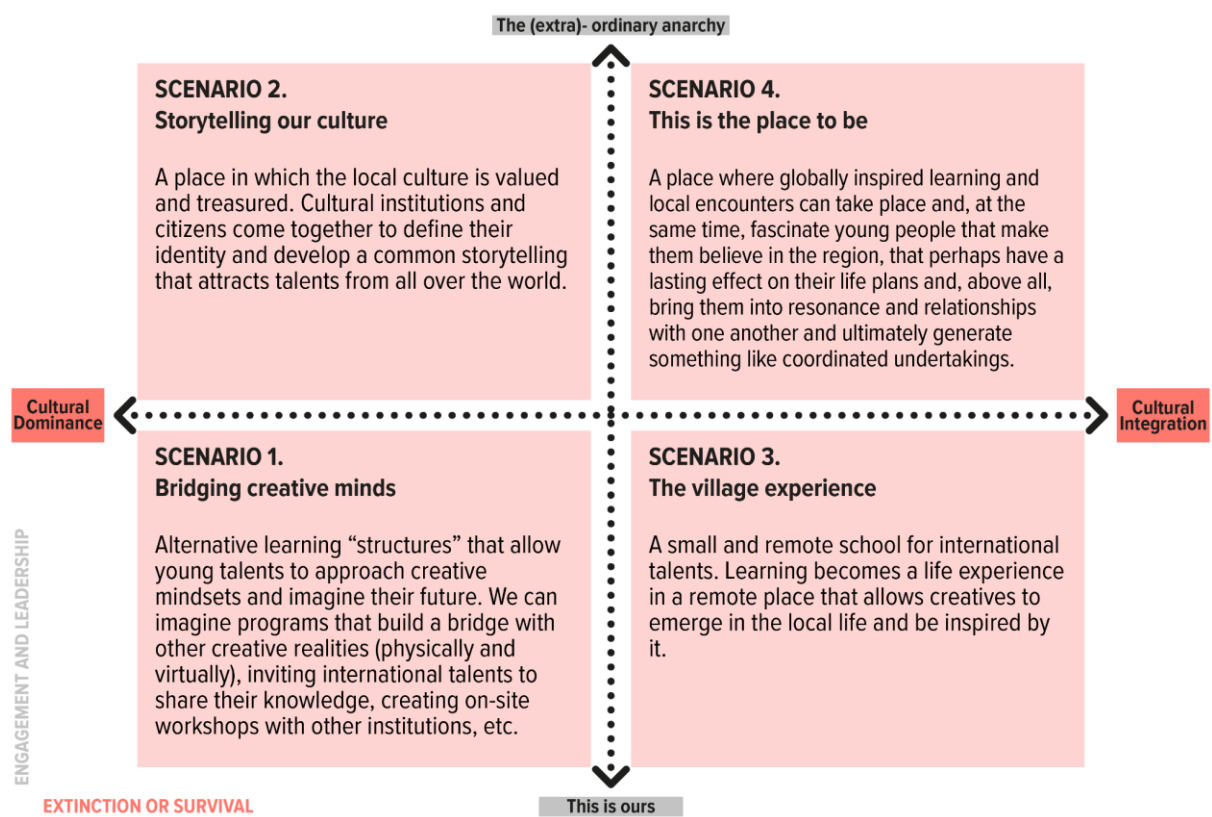


Figure 9. *Window n.5: Distributed education.*

Conclusions

SMOTIES will end in 2024. The methodology presented in this paper is currently being applied and tested in ten pilot projects set by the nodes of creativity in their respective small and remote places in different European countries. The final aim is to develop innovative creative solutions addressing specific needs of each remote



context. The scenarios developed act as a tool for envisioning, an "interaction platform" (Manzini & Jégou, 2006, p. 190), and a springboard for developing creative ideas. They are currently being used within co-design workshops with local communities to trigger discussions and map local assets. The scenario-building process described in this paper allows future designers (practitioners and researchers) to replicate it in the future while exploring how imagined futures may change over time, also according to the literature and case study research that lies at the basis of it. This paper aims to explicitly share the process and tools to allow future verification in other contexts and to encourage replication. Scenarios are not fixed truths but are situated photographs of a possible reality.

This scientific article has presented the SMOTIES methodology. As the methodology is tested, future research papers will be published to evaluate the process and to describe its application in the depopulated and relationally remote places involved in the SMOTIES project. Partners have started using the methodology in their respective small and remote places, employing it as an interaction platform to involve citizens and stakeholders in a dialogue on the future of their place and set their engagement in co-designing it. Even if the methodology has not been used for long, workshops between partners are also being held to assess how the *Windows* are being applied in facilitating the active participation of citizens. Limits and opportunities are currently being mapped, as well as an evaluation of the final project's impacts on local realities. At this point, we already realise that the scenarios developed need to be deepened from the point of view of the impact of current socio-cultural complexities that characterise Europe's remote territories, such as: social polarisation, identity and social peace, lack of infrastructural investments, international migration and integration, level of education employment, the vulnerability of agricultural and silvicultural systems with regard to climate change, to mention a few. As stated in the *Strategic Foresight Report* of the European Commission (2020a):

"In light of broader demographic trends affecting some rural areas, challenges exacerbated by regional and local inequalities, as well as a geography of discontent, a long-term vision on rural areas will also be required, taking into account social and economic development, infrastructure needs, access to basic services, and territorial cohesion; this long-term vision should cut across several policy areas and require an integrated and coordinated approach at European, national, and regional level (*Ibid.* p.15).

Therefore, a final reflection will be made on the usefulness of scenario-building techniques for guiding the definition of impact pathways in public administration.



However, this reflection will need further research and will be developed shortly as a result of the tool-testing phase with local stakeholders.

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