Emerging Media Trends
Evaluation

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EMERGING MEDIA EXPLORATION

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Introduction

Emerging Media Trends was the last workshop that was held within the Emerging Media Exploration (EMEX) project in 2021.

As the Covid-19 pandemic was still actively spreading world-wide during the winter of 2020-21 and the spring of 2021, it was decided within the EMEX consortium that the best and only possibility for holding the workshop would be to do it fully online. As this had worked reasonably well in the autumn 2020 workshop, there were no doubts that it could not be pulled off again.

However, the consortium members all agreed that some changes to the workshop would be necessary and welcome, both content-wise and in the way the workshop itself was organized and held. After all, EMEX as a project was all about exploring new ways of teaching international courses in emerging media.

As a comparison: the Autumn 2020 EMEX workshop was clearly aimed at virtual production techniques and technology, with the Volucap Studio in Babelsberg being one of the main company partners in the project. The main platform of the

autumn 2020 course was Discord, where each student team and the tutoring teachers had their own chat groups, and where it was possible to download all the various course materials. In addition to this, video conferencing platforms such as Zoom were used for team meetings, tutoring sessions and presentations. Other platforms such as Flinga were also used.

It is worthwhile to note that this was the first EMEX workshop course that was voluntary and not compulsory for the students.

In the three-week online course, international Teams, drawn from Universities in Finland, the UK and Germany in groups with different academic backgrounds, developed three innovative concepts in the field of emerging media.

In the spring 2021 iteration, which was called Emerging Media Trends, the main changes occurred in:

1) the briefings given to student teams
2) the course platforms
3) the freedom the students had to choose their team and briefing

This time, the briefings were written by the tutor teachers. In the previous workshop iterations, they were given mainly by the partnering companies, such as RBB in Germany or YLE in Finland.

The briefings were:

1) Unexpected Futures
   Addresses the possible social, political, environmental and technological factors of the year 2050. The output should be a potential future scenario in the form of an experienceable concept / prototype that makes the audience understand and feel the circumstances of the potential future.

2) Virtual Learning
   What might the future of virtual learning become in the next decade in order to accelerate learning, become ubiquitous and provide personalised co-created opportunities? The goal is to develop one or more prototypes of a virtual learning platform.

3) PIE - Personalized Interactive Experiences
   What do end users want and need from their future media consumption and content creation? Develop a showcase(s) / prototype(s) that explain future concepts for living rooms, bookstores, libraries and books, using low fidelity platforms.

4) Virtual Collective Media Spaces
   Together we aim to create an immersive visual story that builds on and reacts to the user's personality and behavior. The user is the protagonist and they will choose what information they reveal, for a reward of a story that is for and about them.

To begin with, one student team gathered around each of the topics. The group with the topic "Virtual Collective Media Spaces" was having a hard time getting organized and the roles of the students in the group were not ideal. This team

had four participants, and after one of them showed up late for the course and another decided to drop out, the group was dissolved. One member of the group joined another team.

Thus the April 2021 course implementation ended up with three finalized concepts.

There were also some changes to the course platforms compared to the previous iterations. For instance, the opening and closing events were held online at Gather.Town (https://gather.town/), which proved to be a mostly successful decision, judging by the results of the evaluation queries.

Workshop methods and implementation

During the course, the tutors of the teams wrote summaries about the course goals, methods, success and learnings.

The Unexpected Futures group had altogether seven workshops in Zoom in addition to three common course gatherings. Teacher and tutor meetings were mainly on Monday evenings and the students had their own gatherings on Fridays.

The tutors used Mural (https://www.mural.co/), a software for meetings and workshops, for two purposes. Firstly, they did common planning for tutor sessions on Mural. Secondly, Mural worked as a suitable platform for students' exercises, learning and collaboration during the workshops. The students also used Google Docs, Padlet and Discord in their co-operation.

Year 2050 Picture Storming gave an easy and interesting start for future visioning and collaboration in the Unexpected Futures team. Following the ice breaker, the Virtual Learning team, participated in the 'creativity diamond' activity to understand their areas of interest around virtual learning problems, audiences, technologies and platforms.
(Creativity diamond - see: https://www.stanwick.be/en/blog/design-thinking-creative-thinking-and-action)

Students looked for their own vision

Generally speaking, the methods used in both teams were mainly based on speculative design and Google Design Sprint (methodology for concepting). PEST (political, economic, social and technological viewpoints) and future scaping analysis were used to create a holistic picture about different perspectives of the future media. The aim was that the students find a suitable vision to communicate to the others. When that was done, the students also wrote a scenario about their vision. The students took mood boards, sketches and storyboards in use as well in their concepting projects.

Design Sprint's Crazy 8's ideation session produced many useful and interesting concrete ideas about the prototype in the Unexpected Futures team. In the end of the course, both the students and the teachers considered that the ideation phase was an especially successful part of the project. (https://designsprintkit.withgoogle.com/methodology/phase3-sketch/crazy-8s)

In the Virtual Learning group the ideation also went smoothly. All students participated equally, the atmosphere was friendly, relaxed and even excited. There were no obvious signs of working in silos and work was highly collaborative. The students continued work with the future scaping homework. Later the students themselves decided which project ideas they would like to work on, by discussing what was possible. They ended up with three themes that they explored further.

For the mid presentation, the students in the Virtual Learning team created mood boards and sketches to concretize the ideas. Later the participants voted on which area they would like to explore further. The console classroom became the foundation for students' next ideation session and prototype building.

More effective project management

In the Unexpected Futures team, the future press release method used to fine-tune the aim of the prototype. After that, the students started to build the demo. Dividing the work, reviewing the finished tasks and planning the next tasks were done at Monday workshops. Tutors helped the students in this. However, at the end of the course, we realized that project management could have been more organised and that the teachers could have better supported the students. In the Virtual Learning team, the students shared their skills so that everyone could see how each student could be involved in the prototyping of the idea.

In both teams, the hard-working and multi-talented students from different universities made very interesting prototypes about future media. Unexpected Futures team's prototype offers users the possibility of experiencing the purchasing of implants from the web shop. The implants give the users unexpected skills and competences in the year 2050. The prototype raised a lot of discussion and debate about the future in this final event, and that was the students' work intention.

The workflow in the teams was quite similar. It started by understanding future possibilities and threats, continuing with organizing thoughts, finding common ground and voting. Ideation sessions were then organised to find concrete prototype ideas. In the end, the projects and prototypes were presented in the Gather.town app final meeting.

Student Survey

During the final session and after the presentations the students completed a survey. The student survey consisted of ten questions, including eight free-form text questions and two scale questions.

The two scale questions, with value range from one to five, evaluate the communication platforms used during the course and the predefined topics. Free-form text questions were dealing with personal feedback and preferences of the communication methods and platforms and the students' view on how the groups worked. Nine students out of 17 students answered the survey.

Question Abbr.	Question	The Answers
FT-1	What were your expectations and how were they met?	4/9 Working in multicultural team & internationally **44%** 4/9 Learning more on the on the skills already acquired and product development and designing **44%** 2/9 no expectations **22%**
FT-2	How did you find the online working and international collaboration?	7/9 Positive **78%** 1/9 Neutral **11%** 1/9 Negative **11%** "Timing was a little difficult at times but other than that the online working seemed to go smoothly" "It was a bit difficult at times, but I think we had really nice online platforms that we could use during our project and all in all online working worked really well." "It was nice but i preffer meeting in person and go to university. Online classes suck" "It was great because the teachers and students were motivated. Was quiet stressful but I achieved my learning goals."
FT-3	Did your team work well?	7/9 Positive **78%** 1/9 Neutral **11%** 1/9 Negative **11%**
FT-4	What was your role in the group and how you contributed into the team	4/9 No set roles in the group **44%** 3/9 Production role, graphics etc. **33%** 1/9 Project manager **11%** 1/9 Response off-topic.

	effort?	"We all did different things for the project, we all participated in ideation and brainstorming for example. My main role was to code and build an interactive prototype with html and css, and use graphics made by other group members."
		"There were no real "roles". I am happy that my idea was accepted by group to be realized or worked on in this frame. I inspired to team to work on this topic, I tried to moderate and structure. I worked the storyline, on educating my team members about our topic, protocolled meetings, conception. I think I took part in any possible ways."
		"i guess i slipped into a leading role / management - without ever agreeing on that in team. it just happened because otherwise the project wouldnt have come this far. I also did cconceptual / reational work."
FT-5	Your comments on the platforms used	**Positive comments:** 7/9 Discord **78%** 4/9 Googledocs **44%** 4/9 Gathertown **44%** 2/9 Mural **22%** **Negative comments:** 2/9 Mural **22%** 1/9 Gathertown **11%** 1/9 Googledocs **11%** "the only thing with discord is - as i mentioned - that it must be made sure everyone receives messages right away (by downloading the app and turning on notifs)"
FT-6	Your comments on the predefined topics and the future suggestions.	5/9 Positive **56%** 2/9 Neutral **11%** 2/9 Empty **11%** "I will prefer you stick to the topics and improve" "Maybe an overall topic/ theme would be nice or helpful?"

FT-7	Guidance and support. Do you feel you and your team got appropriate amount of it and did you find it valuable?	8/9 Positive **89%** 2/9 Neutral **11%** "There could have been more support at some points. we sometimes felt like swimming in an ocean of possibilities without any direction given. some concepted workshops every now and then to support our vision and get the project on a next level would va been helpful"
FT-8	Your suggestions for future Emerging Media collaborative efforts? And the other thoughts you feel are worth noting.	"I really enjoyed the project" "i really enjoyed this, having this in my third year of uni (GB) is challenging, although i would do it again, i would suggest offering it to younger uni students in either first or second years, that would be very rewarding and i know i would have loved it back then too." "I loved the idea of working crosscultural / transnational together! please more of that!" "It was a really interesting and challenging project. It gave me the selfesteem to work more on my ideas and to realize them or go public." "With this theme i think the World is getting smaller and smaller which brings about opportunities along with challenges."

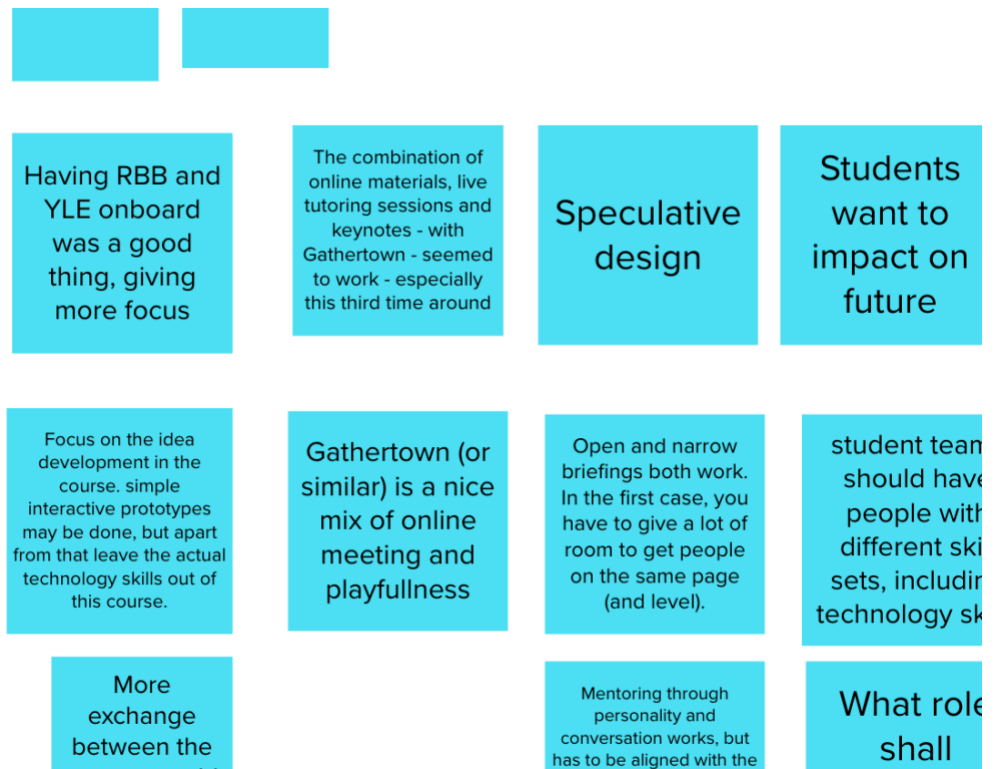| Question Abbr.	Labels	Question	Median	ø
SC-1	Very good= 5	How did you find the predefined topics for the projects?	5	4.8
SC-2	Very good = 5	How did you find the general communication platforms used in Emex?	equal amount of 4 and 5	4.5

Survey summary

The survey-results are shown in the table above. The extremes and most notable results are further described in the following:

- In scale questions, both the median and average values portray the fact that students valued the communication platforms and the predefined topics of the course highly.
- Communication platforms, positive notes: Discord platform gained the highest percentage of positive comments with 78% of students finding it a positive way of communicating. The downside of Discord is that if the team members do not install the application on their cell phone, there might be serious lag in the communication, this can happen when a user uses Discord in the browser only. Google Docs and Gather Town shared the same amount of positive notes with both having 44% of students giving them positive data points.
- Communication platforms, negative notes: Mural received two negative notes with the statements that it is "buggy" and initially hard to work with.
- The expectations of the students, prior to the course, indicate that international collaboration is valued by the students and they look forward to putting their skills into action and learning more.
- Quite many of the students seem to have worked in a team that had no fixed roles. This may be manageable in a small team of a maximum of half a dozen members.

Teacher Feedback

Teachers were given the chance to give feedback on the 2021 spring Emex course using Mural. 79 entries were posted on the board. Besides using the Mural board, the results were further discussed over a Whereby video conference call.

The Mural board was organized into four sections for the feedback. The board had a section for entries on what went well during the course, another one for what did not go well during the course, a third section for insights that were gathered from the course and a fourth section for ideas on a follow-up event.

Having RBB and YLE onboard was a good thing, giving more focus

The combination of online materials, live tutoring sessions and keynotes - with Gathertown - seemed to work - especially this third time around

Speculative design

Students want to impact on future

Focus on the idea development in the course. simple interactive prototypes may be done, but apart from that leave the actual technology skills out of this course.

Gathertown (or similar) is a nice mix of online meeting and playfullness

Open and narrow briefings both work. In the first case, you have to give a lot of room to get people on the same page (and level).

student team should have people with different ski sets, includir technology sk

More exchange between the

Mentoring through personality and conversation works, but has to be aligned with the

What role shall

Applications and tools

The teachers felt that Gather.town was "a good place to gather" and found the application engaging, interesting and fun. Gather.town "worked well as a communication tool". On the other hand, some teachers felt that more opportunities could have been given to edit Gather.town for both the students and the tutors. Some argued that Gather.town could have been used more for giving presentations.

Discord also gained praise as a communication tool. One feedback entry stated how Discord "worked well for group communication" and how students used the Discord voice channels actively.
Mural gained two positive feedback entries on the board, with one entry indicating that they used a single Mural board which "evolved throughout each workshop".

Topics and project management

Going over feedback concerning the project topics, ideation and project work, teachers felt that "the students seemed inspired by the briefs" and that the "students seemed motivated and engaged". The development of four different briefs were seen as a good thing, as well as the freedom for the students to select a topic. Variance in the briefs and good engagement from students gathered the most praise. Students were also seen to be taking responsibility outside of tutoring sessions, "dividing up responsibilities well and organizing their own meetings". The focus on social and critical themes were considered "great" according to one entry as well.

One team of students disbanded altogether during the course, which was seen in the feedback as a loss. The fact that two tutors did not consequently have a team to tutor was also mentioned in the feedback.

The reasons for the disbandment were discussed in the feedback, pondering how possibly the initial team communication and confusion about the brief may have had an impact on group integrity.

The end results produced by the participating students for the course gained three explicitly positive feedback entries by the tutors. One of the entries praised both the kickoff and the presentation events, another praised the variety in the briefs and a third mentioned how their team presented a concise vision at the end.

On the other hand, one entry mentioned how prototyping happened "quite late" and how more time could have been used for prototyping. Personalization did not work well according to one entry, describing how "students were not really able to envision what personalization could do for storytelling".

Regarding the final presentation event, one entry noted how it was not very apparent what should happen after the presentations had been presented. Another entry also noted how presentations were "a little fragmented" due to only two people initially being allowed on the virtual speaker podium. The writer of this entry wrote how they were "stuck at the back and could not hear some group members".

An entry pointed out how "tutors could have communicated more for better co-ordination". Continuing on tutoring, another entry said that regular tutoring was "tougher to realize than usual".

The topic on racism was found to be a difficult thing to "narrow down to a particular concept", and how students want to "save the world with a single strike". The comment also mentioned the students having very different background knowledge as a challenge. Another entry pointed out how "experiencing racism is a hard topic especially when there are so many ways to interpret it".
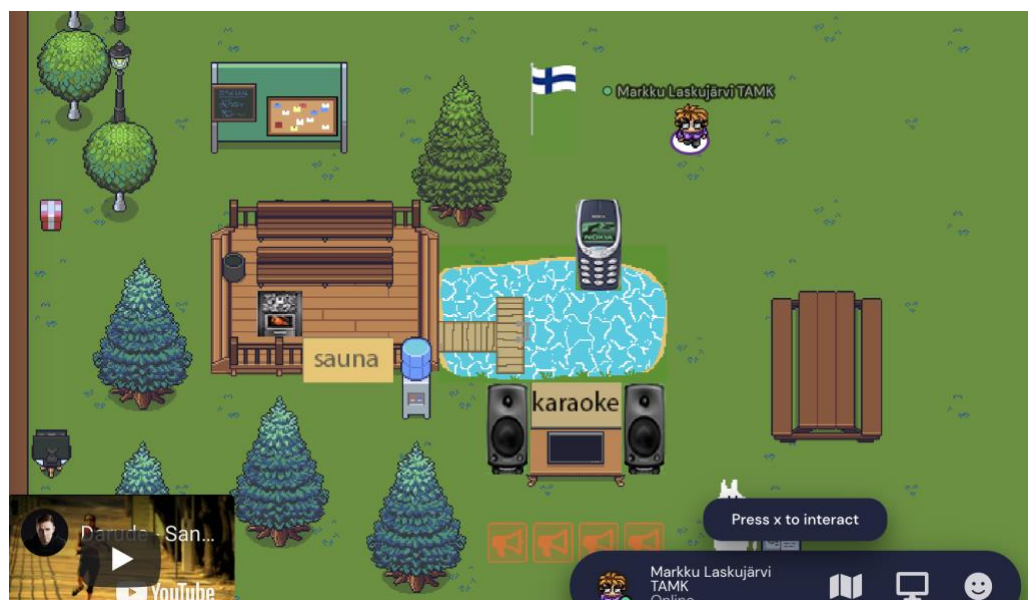
Teacher insights and ideas on follow-up events

As for insights gained from the project work and topics, one entry noted that having a clear plan for initial ideation sessions is an insight for them. Another entry suggested that "having a clearer idea of what the prototypes should or could be used for" would be useful. Better pre-planning was another point made in one comment for gained insights.

On the theme of team building, it was taken as an insight that "student teams should have people with different skill sets". Technological skills were mentioned three times in different feedback entries.

Gather.town was also mentioned in the section for gathered insights, teachers saying how they could combine online materials, live tutoring sessions and keynotes using the application, and noting that it "seemed to work". In the same section, Gather.town was discovered to be "a fun alternative for creative meetings" and "a nice mix of online meeting and playfulness" and how "thematic teaching spaces in Gather.town would be nice".

Having RBB and YLE onboard was seen as a good thing, "giving more focus". Students were seen as willing to have an impact on the future.

Ideas on a follow-up event included having a "tour of project pitches at the participating universities" and presenting an overview of the project and the student outputs in Lincoln Festival of Creativity. Another entry mentioned how the output prototypes could "evolve to help others in decision making", such as while working in creative processes.

Insights and Conclusions

The survey showed that the students overall were happy with the course and it was fitting their expectations. Secondly, the students did not seem to dislike online working.

Variance in the briefs was successful in the EMEX course this time. The various online collaboration platforms from Mural to Discord and Gather.town were also working smoothly.

As a summary, it can be said that both the students and tutors were quite ready to work and collaborate on the online contexts. Many tutors and students felt that learning and working in the international teams around important future media topics was fun and a valuable experience.

Especially in the situation of the Covid-19 pandemic, which prevented almost all international travel, including students' going abroad, both students and tutor teachers enjoyed this chance to have a truly international workshop.

It was good that all students took the course voluntarily and so had the same priorities. In future, it is advisable to not put mandatory participants and those who participate voluntarily in the same group.

As all of the EMEX workshop iterations were quite different from each other, and organized in very different ways, there was no patented "out-of-the-shelf" solution or recipe to make things work. Each course was tailor-made, giving each student a unique experience.