Press kit — Socrates at the Festival del Classico 2026

Background material for newsrooms, accompanying the press release: the project, how the avatar works, the profiles of e-REAL Labs, Centro Studi Logos, and Logosnet, and the images.



"What if you could talk with Socrates?": the Logosnet one-pager on the avatar, for schools and teachers.

The project at a glance

Item	Detail
What	A conversational avatar of Socrates, for the second year at the Festival del Classico
Where	Circolo dei lettori, Turin
When	December 9–13, 2026, during the Festival; one morning
Who builds it	Logosnet's e-REAL Labs
Who takes part	Students from a liceo classico and students of ancient Greek law from the University of Turin's School of Law
How it unfolds	Part one: the students prepare with Socrates. Part two: the trial, with the avatar playing himself
The avatar's sources	About 15 texts on ancient Greek law and the trial of Socrates, Plato's major works, and other classical texts dealing with the figure of Socrates
Precedent	December 2025, Politecnico di Torino: “A dialogue with Socrates: avatar of thought”
Cost for the Festival	None: Socrates is a contribution from Logosnet, sponsor of the Festival

How Socrates works

The avatar plays Socrates as we know him: not directly, since the philosopher left nothing in writing, but through the historical sources that have handed down his figure, starting with Plato's dialogues and the writings of Xenophon. On this basis the interprofessional team at e-REAL Labs reconstructed with particular care the traits that make him recognizable: the irony with which he declares himself ignorant in order to test other people's certainties, his taste for the short, pressing question, his habit of starting from everyday examples, and above all the maieutic method, which does not deliver answers but leads the interlocutor to find them on their own. The result is not a Socrates who repeats famous lines, but an interlocutor who reasons and questions in his own style.

Socrates uses the same infrastructure as the other e-REAL Labs avatars. What changes is the logic of the conversation, built on three principles.

- **Questions instead of answers.** The avatar gives no direct answer to what the interlocutor can work out alone: it returns a question, or a sequence of questions, that leads them to formulate their thinking more precisely.
- **Attention to the person in front of him.** It detects signs of frustration, disengagement, or premature satisfaction and adjusts the tone of its questions accordingly.
- **Reflection on the reasoning.** At intervals it invites reflection on the path taken: “Why did you ask that question?” counts as much as “What answer did you get?”

An exchange with the avatar goes through four moments.

1. **Listening.** A speech recognition system transcribes what the interlocutor says.
2. **Searching the sources.** The avatar retrieves from its knowledge base, made of selected documents, the passages relevant to the question.
3. **Formulating.** A language model composes the reply from those passages and from Socrates' rules of conversation.
4. **Voice and gesture.** Speech synthesis and the avatar's animations (listening, explaining, answering) deliver the reply in real time.

The knowledge base is updated in minutes with a proprietary e-REAL Labs editor. The avatar can be projected life-size on a wall or shown on a screen, with no headsets.

Socratic Prompting: the idea behind the avatar

Socratic Prompting is a method for questioning one's own premises before and during the use of a generative AI system. It was developed by Fernando Salvetti and Barbara Bertagni under the scientific supervision of Roberto Pieraccini, former Head of Engineering of the Google AI Assistant in Zurich and New York. It draws on the Socratic method, Karl Popper's epistemology, and research on metacognition.

The starting point: a generative system answers within the conceptual frame of whoever asks the question. The initial premises are not challenged; they are developed. The method proposes four levels of competence.

- **Clarification.** Formulating precisely the problem one is really facing.
- **Contextualization.** Giving the system the context it needs, choosing what is relevant.
- **Problematization.** Looking for counter-hypotheses and objections to the answer received: “Under what conditions would this conclusion be wrong?”
- **Reflective evaluation.** Placing the answer within a broader line of reasoning and asking whether the question posed was the one to ask.

The authors present the method as conceptual and design work. The observations gathered so far are qualitative; empirical validation is in progress.

Who we are

e-REAL Labs. Logosnet's technology labs, based mainly between New York and Piedmont (Caluso and Turin): they develop proprietary generative AI and extended reality technologies, software, and platforms. They build immersive environments that as a rule require no headsets or wearables, and conversational avatars installed, among other places, at the Museo Regionale di Scienze Naturali in Turin.

Centro Studi Logos. Founded in 1996 in Caluso (Turin) as an applied research center, at the time in collaboration with Olivetti, it is Logosnet's research center: it conducts studies and publishes books and scientific articles with publishers such as Springer and FrancoAngeli. In Turin it hosts about 100 interns a year from the University and the Scuola di Amministrazione Aziendale. With the Department of Architecture and Engineering of the University of Bologna and e-REAL Labs, the

Centro Studi developed the research that led to the volume *Design per spazi informativi interattivi* (FrancoAngeli, 2026, open access). It is affiliated with Fondazione Piemonte Innova and the Piedmont ICT cluster (Polo ICT), as well as the Bio-Industry Park of Colleretto Giacosa.

Logosnet. Active since 1996, with offices in Turin, Lugano, London, Houston, and New York, it operates in more than 80 countries. It works in five areas: business and organizations, healthcare, law and compliance, education, culture and tourism. e-REAL Labs and Centro Studi Logos both operate within it.

The people



Fernando Salvetti. Founder and managing partner of Logosnet and e-REAL Labs (Turin, Lugano, London, Houston, New York). A lawyer and epistemologist by training, he works on immersive learning, artificial intelligence, and extended reality, with expertise that brings together philosophy of knowledge and science, anthropology, and law. For more than thirty years he has designed and delivered learning solutions for organizations in education, healthcare, business development, and international institutions. He has developed generative AI–based avatars and extended reality platforms for training critical thinking, decision-making, and intercultural skills. He is co-author, with Barbara Bertagni, of the Socratic Prompting method.



Barbara Bertagni. Founder and managing partner of Logosnet and e-REAL Labs, where she coordinates the team that develops the avatars. A clinical psychologist, philosopher, and trainer, with a background in epistemology and anthropology. She designs and runs training programs for professionals in various sectors and uses immersive technologies, avatars, and extended reality to develop critical thinking, emotional intelligence, and intercultural skills. She has worked with organizations, universities, and international institutions in fields such as healthcare education, leadership development, and sustainability education. She is co-author, with Fernando Salvetti, of the Socratic Prompting method. Author and speaker at international conferences on human behavior, immersive learning, and artificial intelligence in education.



Roberto Pieraccini. Scientific supervisor of the e-REAL team. An electronic engineer with a degree from the University of Pisa, he has worked for more than forty years on language technologies and human–machine dialogue: CSELT in Turin, Bell Labs, AT&T Labs, and IBM Research, then Chief Technology Officer of SpeechCycle and director of the International Computer Science Institute in Berkeley. He was Head of Engineering on the Google Assistant team, in Zurich and New York, and Chief Scientist of Uniphore. He is the author of *The Voice in the Machine* (MIT Press, 2012) and *AI Assistants* (MIT Press, 2021) and is a Fellow of IEEE and ISCA.

The e-REAL Labs team working on avatars and immersive environments:

Name	Role
Danils Vanags	AI-enhanced communication, learning design, and interactive simulation
Francesco Galina	Project manager and storyteller: narrative design, scriptwriting, immersive environments
Sanzio Pedersoli	Programmer and game designer: interactive and immersive applications in Unity and Unreal
Gabriele Malpezzi	Developer and AI engineer: conversational applications and interactive avatar systems
Arjun Satheesh	Architect and urban planner, Solutions Outreach Strategist: immersive environments and spatial storytelling

Other projects

Socrates comes from the same technology that e-REAL Labs use in museums, cultural sites, schools, and simulation centers. For example:

Project	Where	What
Avatars of Michele Lessona and Alfred Wallace	Museo Regionale di Scienze Naturali, Turin	Visitors talk with the two naturalists; immersive projections and interactive video mapping recreate the ecosystems
Digital Alpine Museum (DAM)	Regions of Aosta Valley and Liguria, Departments of Savoie and Hautes-Alpes	Cross-border project funded by the European Union: digitized collections, virtual exhibition rooms, multilingual conversational agents
Mortar Mixer	Switzerland, with USI, SUPSI, and UNESCO	Interactive 3D reconstruction of a medieval mortar-making technique, available in the exhibition and online
Pompeii in 79 AD	Embassy of Italy, Washington DC	Immersive and interactive reconstruction
Visual storytelling and interactive iconography	Museo Civico di Zoologia, Rome	The avatar of ornithologist Ettore Arrigoni degli Oddi talks with visitors; interactive animals in the skeleton hall, 3D-reconstructed footprints for tactile exploration, an augmented reality mirror to compare the human and chimpanzee skeletons

Project	Where	What
Time travel toward a climate-neutral society	RSE - Ricerca sul Sistema Energetico, Milan	Portable e-REAL lab: an immersive, interactive experience on three walls takes the audience to 2020, 2030, and 2050, through energy consumption, European and Italian policies, and technologies for cutting the carbon footprint
Community Medi-Corps: mobile immersive learning center	George Washington University, School of Medicine and Health Sciences, Washington DC	A roughly 14-meter classroom-lab on wheels, with virtual reality, augmented reality, and e-REAL, bringing training for healthcare and science careers to high schools across Virginia

Similar projects have been carried out for Northwestern University in Chicago, for the Harvard Center for Medical Simulation in Boston, and, with the Università della Svizzera italiana (USI), for the MEM - Middle East Mediterranean Summer Summit in Lugano.



"Spark curiosity about science": the avatar of Michele Lessona at the Museo Regionale di Scienze Naturali in Turin.

Facts and story angles

- **An artificial intelligence that asks questions.** AI assistants are built to answer and to oblige. Socrates is built to question.
- **From dialogue to trial.** In 2025, a public dialogue at the Politecnico. In 2026, students prepare with the defendant and then put him on trial.
- **The sources before the machine.** The knowledge base is made of selected texts on ancient Greek law and the trial of Socrates. The avatar knows them and does not quote them.
- **High school and university on the same case.** Classics and law students work together: philosophy and Attic procedure.
- **"Natural Intelligence."** It is the theme of the Circolo dei lettori's 2026/2027 season. Socrates forces whoever uses him to think for themselves.
- **From museums to medical classrooms.** The same technology gives voice to Lessona and Wallace in Turin and supports clinical training in the United States.

Questions and answers

Where does what he says come from? From a knowledge base made of selected texts on ancient Greek law and the trial.

Does the avatar replace teachers? No. Accuracy, context, and guidance remain the teachers' responsibility. The avatar gives students an interlocutor to test their arguments against.

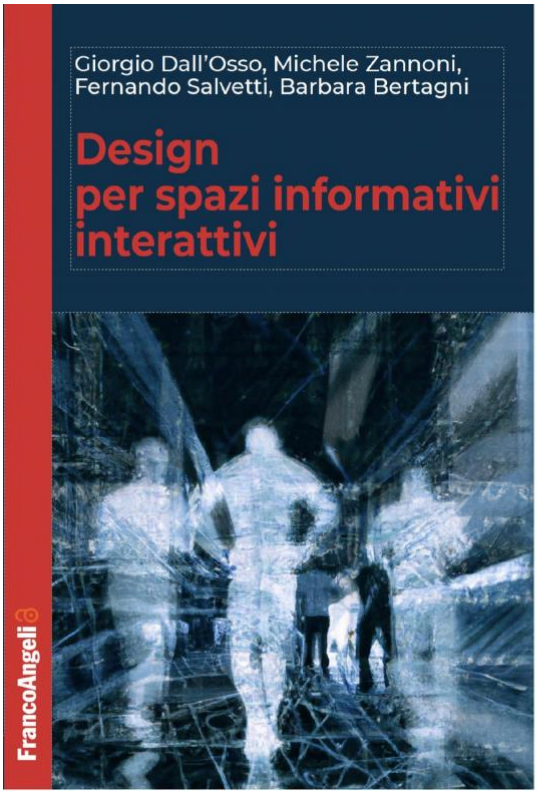
Why an avatar that asks questions? Because a system that confirms the premises of whoever questions it reinforces them. A system that questions leads its users to make them explicit.

Is a headset needed? No. The avatar is projected or shown on a screen and is used by voice.

Where has it already been used? In university courses in philosophy, law, and management, in executive programs, in clinical simulation, and in legal reasoning training, mainly in Italy, Switzerland, and the United States.

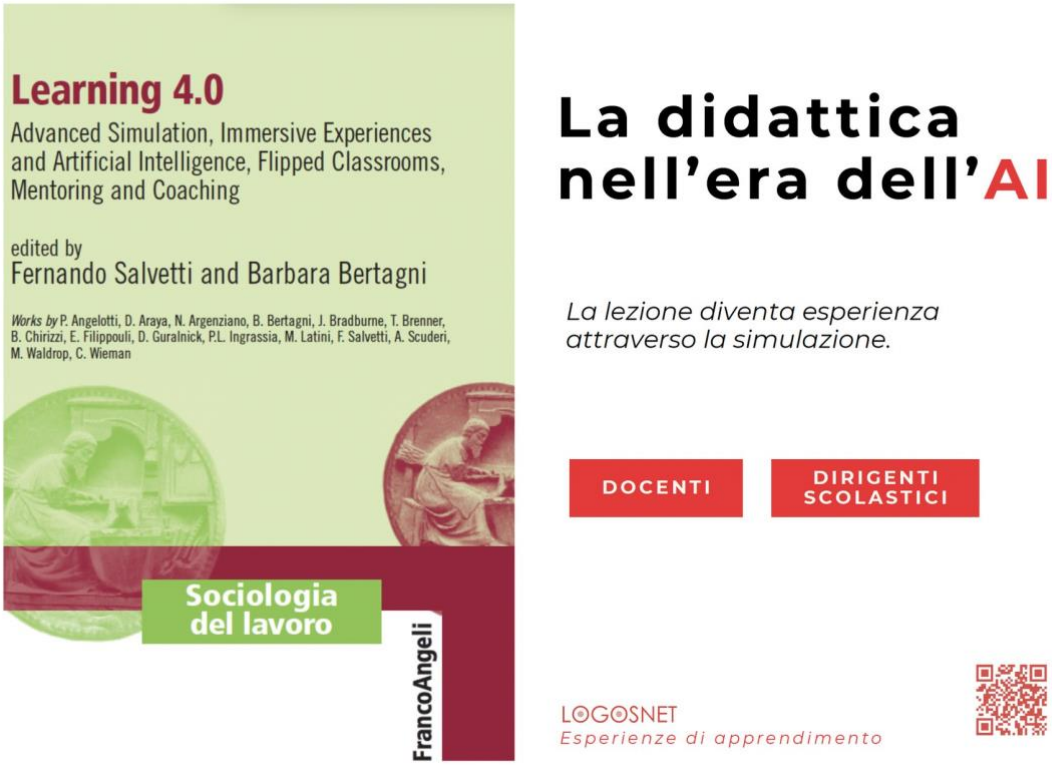
Publications, talks, and videos

- Video: Socrates at the Festival del Classico 2025 and in the lab, during multilingual test runs
- F. Salvetti, B. Bertagni, *Socratic Prompting: Critical Thinking as a Foundational Skill for the Age of Generative AI*. Presentation of the method and of the Socrates avatar at Columbia University, New York, in June 2026 (forthcoming from Springer, volume edited by David Guralnick and Antonella Poce).
- F. Salvetti, B. Bertagni, R. Pieraccini, *Talking with the Expert: An Emotionally and Socially Intelligent Avatar*, in *Creativity and New Technologies in Learning for the Workplace and Higher Education*, proceedings of The Learning Ideas Conference 2025, Springer, 2026. It describes the architecture of the e-REAL avatars.
- F. Salvetti, B. Bertagni, *Interactive Museum Experiences: Natural Sciences, Cultural Heritage, Ancient Building Techniques*, in the same volume. It describes the projects for museums and cultural heritage.
- G. Dall'Osso, M. Zannoni, F. Salvetti, B. Bertagni, *Design per spazi informativi interattivi*, FrancoAngeli, 2026.
- Video: the avatar Mia Williams in a session on a healthcare topic.





Design per spazi informativi interattivi (FrancoAngeli), in collaboration with the University of Bologna.



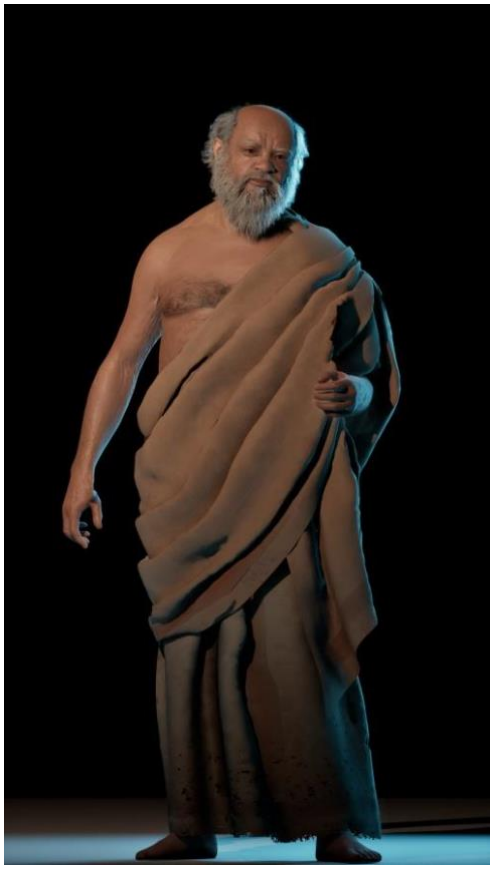
Learning 4.0. Advanced Simulation, Immersive Experiences and Artificial Intelligence, Flipped Classrooms, Mentoring and Coaching, edited by Fernando Salvetti and Barbara Bertagni (FrancoAngeli).

Images

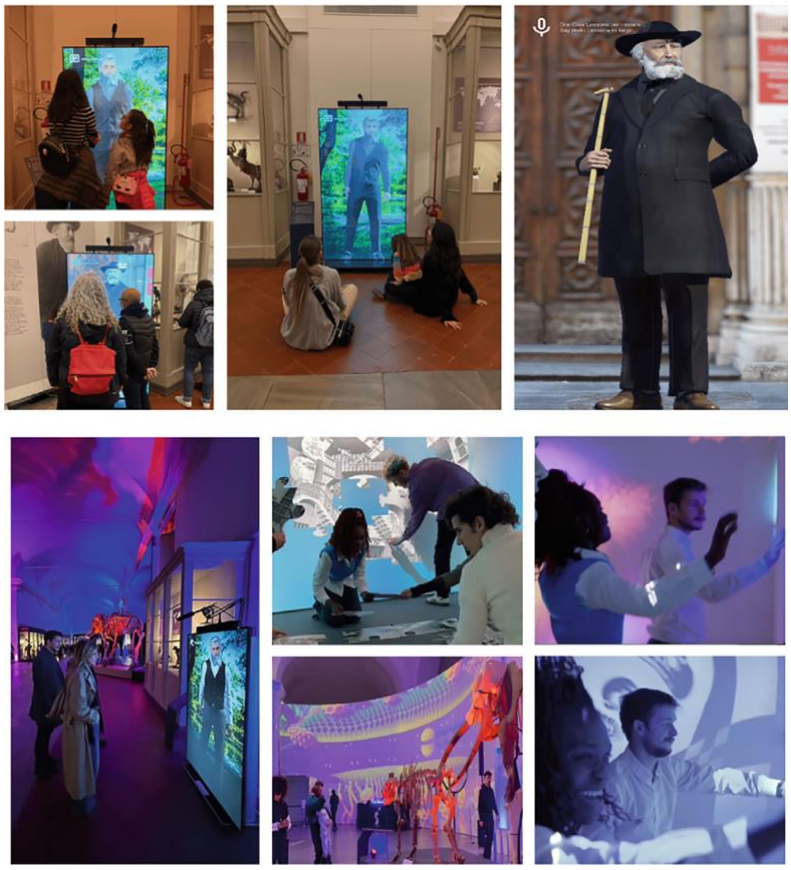
Credits for all images: e-REAL Labs / Logosnet.



1. The Socrates avatar in dialogue with a philosopher on the opening day of the Festival del Classico 2025, at Politecnico di Torino.



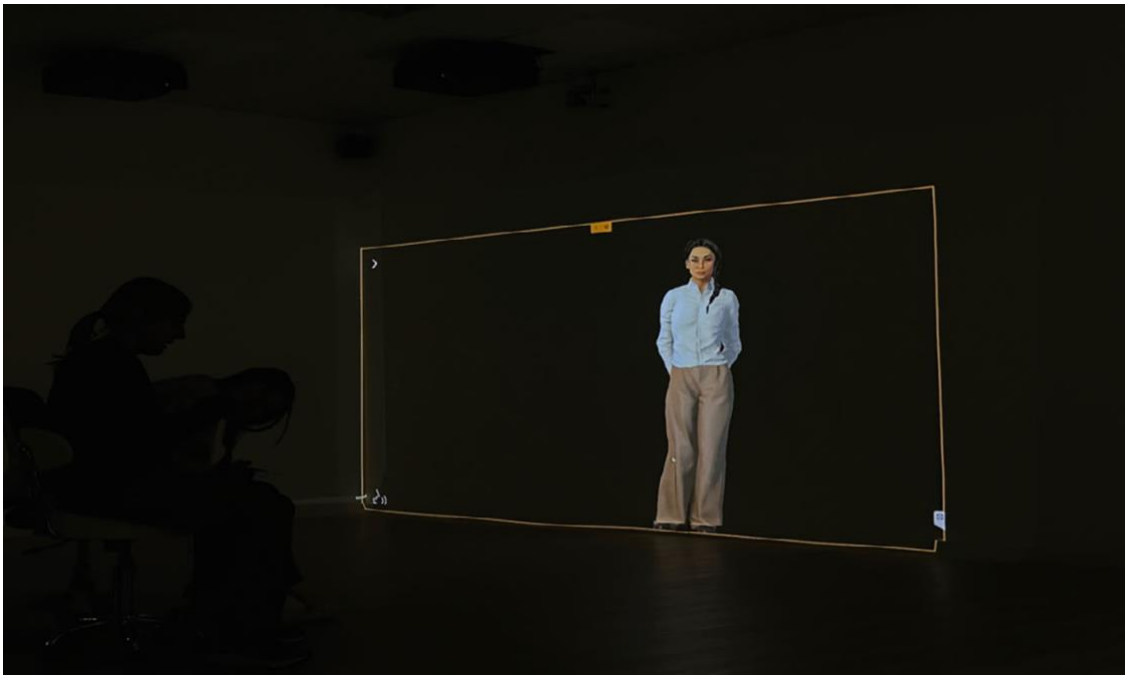
2. The e-REAL Labs digital Socrates.



3. The avatars of Michele Lessona and Alfred Wallace and the immersive projections at the Museo Regionale di Scienze Naturali in Turin.



4. Avatars built by e-REAL Labs for museums and cultural projects, including the Museo Regionale di Scienze Naturali in Turin and the cross-border project Digit Alps.



5. Mia Williams, an e-REAL Labs avatar, projected life-size on an interactive wall.