UX Design for the Cultural Adaptation
of Latin American students in Italy

Migra Tranqui

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Migra Tranqui:
UX Design for the Cultural Adaptation of Latin American Students in Italy

A Systemic Approach Integrating Gamification and Interaction Design

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I would like to thank God for allowing me to have this experience and for giving me the strength and perseverance to overcome daily challenges and successfully complete my thesis project.

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Abstract

This project is a continuation of a previous UX/UI project developed by the author: Migra Tranqui was originally developed as an informational mobile application designed to support international students in Italy. This thesis aims to redefine the application into a systemic, community-centered platform. The primary objective of this transformation is to enhance the cultural adaptation of Latin American students. A comprehensive literature review on cultural intelligence and adaptation, complemented by interviews with students from Politecnico di Torino, led to the identification of two key needs: access to reliable, updated information and opportunities for connection.

The redesigned Migra Tranqui employs gamification and progressive disclosure to enhance the engagement and personalization of the adaptation process. It organizes contents into five phases that reflect students' evolving needs. The resulting prototype functions as a digital companion that facilitates integration and fosters community creation. The "Prepare" phase's testing indicated the project's feasibility and its potential for short-term implementation in collaboration with universities in Colombia and Italy.

Keywords: *User Experience design; Interaction Design; Gamification; Cultural intelligence; Adaptation journey; Latin American students; Mobility to Italy.*

Abstract

Questo progetto è la continuazione di un precedente progetto UX/UI sviluppato dall' autrice: Migra Tranqui è stato originariamente sviluppato come applicazione mobile informativa progettata per supportare gli studenti internazionali in Italia. Questa tesi mira a ridefinire l'applicazione in una piattaforma sistemica e incentrata sulla comunità. L'obiettivo principale di questa trasformazione è migliorare l'adattamento culturale degli studenti latinoamericani. Una revisione completa della letteratura sull'intelligenza culturale e l'adattamento, integrata da interviste con studenti del Politecnico di Torino, ha portato all'identificazione di due esigenze chiave: l'accesso a informazioni affidabili e aggiornate e le opportunità di connessione.

Il Migra Tranqui riprogettato utilizza la gamification e la divulgazione progressiva per migliorare il coinvolgimento e la personalizzazione del processo di adattamento. Organizza i contenuti in cinque fasi che riflettono le esigenze in evoluzione degli studenti. Il prototipo risultante funziona come un compagno digitale che facilita l'integrazione e favorisce la creazione di una comunità. I test della fase "Preparazione" hanno indicato la fattibilità del progetto e il suo potenziale per l'implementazione a breve termine in collaborazione con le università in Colombia e in Italia.

Parole chiave: *Progettazione dell'esperienza utente; Progettazione dell'interazione; Gamification; Intelligenza culturale; Percorso di adattamento; Studenti latinoamericani; Mobilità verso l'Italia.*

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Introduction

Within the framework of an online UX/UI design course completed in 2024, an initial project was developed with the **goal of assisting people who study abroad**. Its main purpose was to provide the necessary **information** about **bureaucratic procedures, housing, transportation, education, healthcare**, and **cultural norms** in the country of destination, which in the context of the project was Italy.

Nevertheless, due to the scope and deadlines of the course, the final output, named Migra Tranqui, resulted in an application that functioned primarily as an **informational repository.** While it provided useful material about the mentioned categories, it resembled an encyclopedia and **lacked interactive and social features.**

Interviews conducted during that initial phase revealed a significant insight: beyond information, users expressed the **need for a trustworthy network** where they could exchange experiences, give feedback, and keep the information updated. This finding highlighted the importance of **community-based interaction** and the **social dimension of adaptation,** aspects that had been underdeveloped in the first version.

Building upon those insights, this thesis **retrieves and expands the original project**, transforming it into a systemic platform for cultural adaptation. The objective is to design a network that supports **Spanish-speaking Latin American students during their adaptation journey in Italy**, offering verified and updated information while fostering mutual support and connection among peers.

To achieve this, the project will first **analyze** the context, trajectory and actors involved in the **process of international mobility and adaptation**, with a particular focus on the Italian context and the city of Turin. Based on this analysis, the digital system will be redefined by applying **interaction design principles** and implementing **gamification as a core methodology** to encourage engagement, reflection and participation throughout the user journey.

The resulting proposal aims not only to enhance the existing ecosystem of student mobility but also to create a **more human, connected and empowering adaptation experience,** reinforcing the systemic nature of the project beyond a single digital product.

Being a foreigner in Italy

Context

Thanks to the bilateral agreements between universities around the world and the rising exchange opportunities for the youth, more people decide to study abroad. Italy is a very appealing country for international students due to its world–renowned universities, affordable education, rich culture and heritage, and wide range of social and leisure activities.
Currently, there are more than 500 study courses available in English. Every year, there are more options to study in that language while being in Italy. Compared to other European countries, Italy offers lower tuition fees and a low cost of living, especially in smaller cities.

With a welcoming academic environment, this country has become an increasingly popular destination among international students. In the academic year *2023/2024,* Italian universities enrolled *96,083 foreign students.*

However, despite these advantages, international students often face challenges, many of which were confirmed through user interviews conducted later in this research. They struggle with adapting to a new culture, understanding social norms, doing bureaucratic paperwork, speaking another language and developing daily activities on their own. These tasks can be overwhelming, and the lack of comprehension of local norms can provoke stress and anxiety.

A study conducted by Noel L. Shadowen, Ariel A. Williamson, Nancy G. Guerra, Ravichandran Ammigan and Matthew L Drexler (2019), aimed at international students in U.S. universities, discovered that they suffered from depressive symptoms (45,3% of the sample) and anxiety (24,7% of the participants). Although this research was conducted in the United States, its findings are highly relevant to Italy, as international students often face similar challenges when adapting to a new environment. The study suggests that these issues can be solved by providing culturally appropriate counselling services, when possible, in the students' native language. Another finding is that high levels of social support can prevent these depressive symptoms, pointing that international students' counselling services could also benefit from social support groups for students to help them find social support networks in the area and to connect with other students. Besides, the study highlights the importance of universities encouraging foreign students in joining extra-curricular activities, and the way in which student services could also link internationals with more formal support networks.

While Italy offers significant advantages for international students, ensuring they receive adequate support is essential for their well-being and ensuring a satisfactory international experience.

User Definition

As previously mentioned, the main user target of this project are international students from Latin American origin, currently developing an exchange or double degree in Italy.

In the EU migration context, international students are non-EU citizens who are accepted in a recognized University in the territory of the EU to pursue a full-time course of study. To study in Italy as a non-EU citizen, certain immigration procedures are required, such as the obtention of a study visa and the application for a residence permit for study upon arrival.

Other commonly used terms

During the preliminary research, other common terms used to refer to people who emigrate were identified: immigrant and expat.
An immigrant can be defined as a person who has come to a different country to live there permanently, (Cambridge Dictionary, 2024) whereas an expat (short for expatriate) refers to someone who does not live in their own country (Cambridge Dictionary, 2024).

Political and socioeconomic implications

Although the main difference in these terms is time of stay, since an immigrant is expected to stay, and an expat is expected to return to their home country, it is necessary to recognize that the usage of these terms carries significance in the locals' perception of foreign citizens. The term 'expat' carries a more positive connotation than 'immigrant.' The former is often perceived as an educated or rich professional who works abroad. There is usually more acceptance towards them. On the other hand, those in less privileged positions are 'immigrants,' a word with a more negative connotation (Nash, 2017).

Why international students?

After examining the various terms used to describe migrants, it was decided to refer to target users as international students, as they are neither immigrants, since they typically enter Italy on a temporary student visa, nor expatriates, a term more commonly associated with workers. However, the term "expat" will be used in specific cases, such as when a source or case study employs it.

With the objective of having a better understanding of the journey an international student goes through, it is crucial to mention and analyze previous literature that explains cultural adaptation, as well as key terms and concepts about settling into a new country.

Expatriate Adaptation Cycle

Each student who decides to study abroad goes through a process of preparation and adaptation to the host country. During this time, they can live with cultural shocks. Culture shock happens when an individual encounters unfamiliar events and unexpected circumstances. However, this is a very personal experience that does not affect everyone in the same way (Pedersen, 1995).
In the 1960 article "Cultural Shock: Adjustment to New Cultural Environments," the anthropologist Kalervo Oberg delineated the stages that an individual undergoes during the process of adapting to another nation. These stages are described as follows:

Honeymoon phase

This stage could last from a few days or weeks to the first six months of the stage. It is characterized by fascination with the new, association with nationals who are polite to foreigners and who often speak the individual's language. However, if a foreigner remains abroad and must cope with "real life" in the host country, this mindset does not last. At this moment, the second stage begins.

Cultural shock phase

This stage is characterized by a hostile attitude towards the host country, coming because of the difficulties faced during the process of adjust-

ment. Foreigners can find trouble in different aspects of their life, and the hostility can grow as nationals from the host country are indifferent to these issues. It is likely that if there are other compatriots, the individual will side with them to find refuge, but also to criticize the costumes and people from the host nation.

Recovery phase

In this stage, individuals start getting around by themselves, getting to know more about the language and opening a way inside the new cultural environment. Although there are still some difficulties, the individual faces them with a better attitude. There is also a bigger ability to joke about their own difficulties, even getting to help people who are in more vulnerable situations.

Adaptation phase

At this point, the individual accepts the customs of the host country as another way of living. They not only accept them but enjoy them. Moments of strain will be embraced without a feeling of anxiety. Once the person has left the foreign country, they will generally miss it and its people, as they already have been accustomed to it.

Figure 1 represents the evolution of the stages, showing the level of happiness or satisfaction vs. the time passed in the host country.
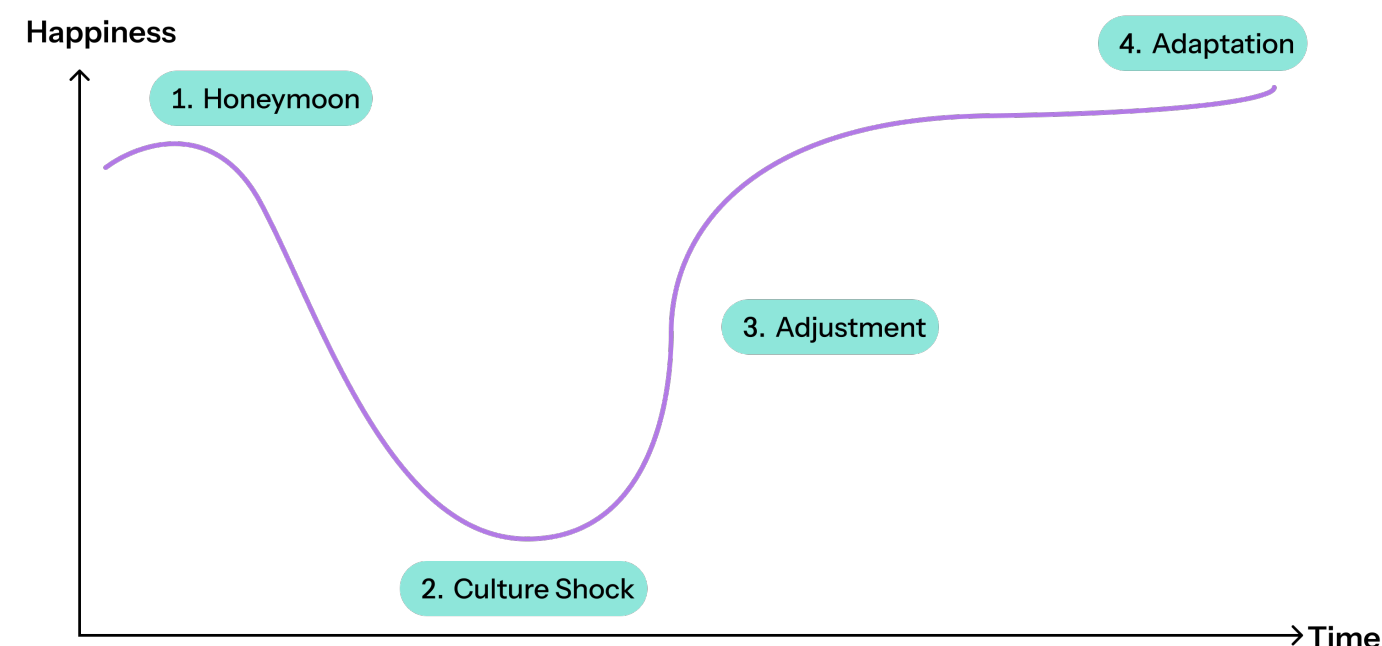

Figure 1. Adapted from "International University Students in Thailand: Shifting from Universalistic Models to an Ethnicity Matters Approach" by D. Rhein, 2018, Journal of Research in International Education, 17 (3).

Cultural Intelligence or CQ

It has been defined as the capability of functioning effectively in culturally diverse situations. This term has been studied in different aspects.

Motivational CQ focuses on enthusiasm and self-assurance in engaging with people from diverse cultural backgrounds (Ang & Van Dyne, 2015). This plays a crucial role in the learning and understanding process of different cultures, as well as navigating the challenges associated with cross-cultural interactions. Cognitive CQ refers to awareness and understanding of cultural contexts, including norms, customs, and traditions (Ang & Van Dyne, 2015). It also involves recognizing both the similarities and differences across cultures (Ng, Van Dyne, & Ang, 2012). Meanwhile, metacognitive CQ involves the continuous process of adapting one's mental frameworks to align with the demands of new cultural settings. Individuals with high metacognitive CQ are more mindful and can withhold cultural biases before and during intercultural interactions. Finally, behavioral CQ refers to the ability to express culturally appropriate verbal and non-verbal behaviors in unfamiliar cultural settings (Ang & Van Dyne, 2015). Its significance is emphasized, as it is the most visible and tangible aspect of CQ in intercultural engagements.

Figure 2 represents the different dimensions of Cultural Intelligence.
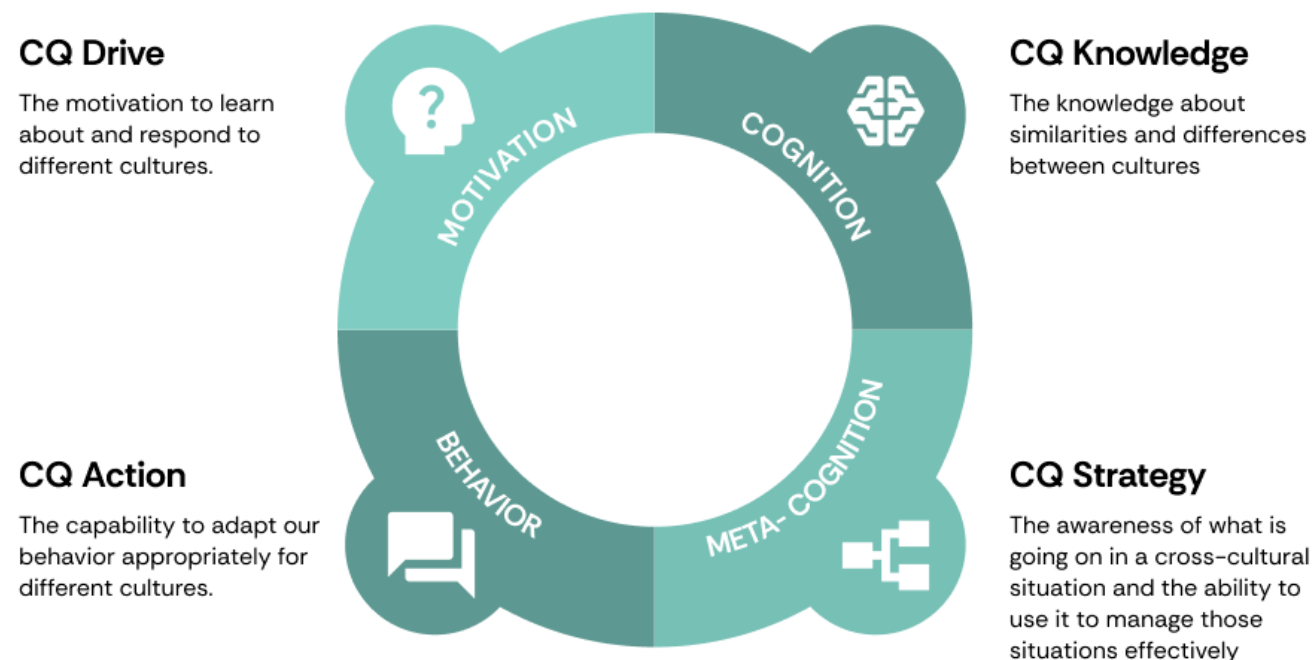
Cultural Intelligence (CQ) Framework

CQ Drive
The motivation to learn about and respond to different cultures.

CQ Knowledge
The knowledge about similarities and differences between cultures

CQ Action
The capability to adapt our behavior appropriately for different cultures.

CQ Strategy
The awareness of what is going on in a cross-cultural situation and the ability to use it to manage those situations effectively

Figure 2. Adapted from Cultural Intelligence (CQ) for Not-for-Profit Organisations, 2020. (https://betterboards.net/relationships/cultural-intelligence-for-not-for-profit-organisations/).

According to a study conducted by A. Presbitero (2016), where cultural intelligence in international students settled in Australia was measured, higher education institutions should offer suitable programs whose goal is to help new international students manage culture shock. They should be more proactive and ensure these initiatives reach those who need them the most. If severe culture shock is not addressed, it can lead to difficulties in psychological and sociocultural adjustment. The study also demonstrated that CQ acts as a moderating mechanism to mitigate the effects of culture shock and reverse culture shock.

Factors that affect cultural adaptation

A study conducted by Michał Wilczewski, Rong Wang, Juana Du, Anne Marie Søderberg, Paola Giuri, Terence Mughan, Sheila M. Puffer, and Mark J. Jacob (2022), explores the concept of cultural novelty, defined as the perceived difference between an individual's native culture and that of their host country. The study examined international students in Denmark, Germany, Italy, Poland, and the USA, aiming to identify the key factors influencing their experiences and ability to adapt to new cultural contexts.

The research revealed eight critical factors that shape cultural adaptation:

Cultural Novelty
The greater the perceived cultural difference, the more challenging the adjustment process.

Cultural Intelligence
A higher ability to understand and navigate different cultures positively impacts both adaptation and overall satisfaction.

Time in the Host Country
While prolonged exposure improves adjustment, it may reduce satisfaction as the novelty of the experience fades.

Language Proficiency
Both host-language proficiency and English facilitate adaptation.

Socialization with Domestic Students
Meaningful interactions with local students enhance cultural adjustment.

Collectivism vs. Individualism
Students from collectivist cultures may adapt better in some individualistic environments, though this effect varies across host countries.

Age and Gender
Age influences adjustment and satisfaction differently depending on the host country. However, previous research suggests that older students might experience more stress when adapting to a new culture. On the other hand, gender does not significantly impact adaptation.

Prior International Experience
Surprisingly, previous exposure to international settings does not necessarily predict better adjustment and can even lower satisfaction due to heightened expectations.

The study concluded that cultural adaptation is a very nuanced process affected by the context of origin and by the host country, emphasizing the need for mechanisms tailored to students' backgrounds and needs.

Reverse Culture Shock

On the other hand, students who have lived abroad and return home may experience reverse Culture Shock. According to Gaw (2000), this phenomenon is defined as readjusting, reacculturating, and reintegrating into one's own culture after spending a considerable amount of time in a different culture.

Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963), stated that the main difference between culture shock and reverse culture shock are expectations. When moving to a different country, individuals are expecting and are more prepared for experiencing cultural differences. However, they often expect to return to an unchanged home as unchanged people, which often is not the case.

Reentry expectations have also been thought to have a negative impact on reverse culture shock. In this situation, the returnee anticipates no problems because they are going home, that friends and family will still be there to greet them, and that the home culture will still be friendly and unaltered. Expectations for returnees who have lived overseas for the most of their life are based on what they believe home should be, as conveyed by others (parents, classmates, media) (Stelling, 1991).

According to Brislin et al. (1994), people may have a sense of irreversible loss when they return to their native culture since they are leaving behind friends, a familiar environment, and a life they will never be able to return to. This loss often adds to their stress of return, as oftentimes conditions and lifestyle abroad are perceived as better and more stimulating.

International students in Italy

Demographics

As previously mentioned, in the academic year 2023/24, 96,083 foreign students were enrolled at Italian universities. Among them, Iranian students accounted for 13,000 (13% of the total), followed by Turkish (6,400) and Chinese students (6,100). While statistics do not always explicitly detail the exact number of Latin American students in Italy, mobility trends indicate that they constitute a significant and growing portion of the international student population. According to OECD data, Latin American and Caribbean students are the most represented group among all foreign students in Italy compared to other OECD countries, highlighting Italy as a preferred destination for higher education within this demographic (OECD, 2022).

Challenges faced in Italy

Upon arriving and settling in Italy, international students might face some challenges that hinder their cultural adaptation, and that affect them in different ways depending on their context of origin, cultural intelligence, cultural novelty and other factors previously stated. A 2023 study developed in at Rome's University (La Sapienza), determined that in the Italian context the main difficulties are:

Language Barriers
This is one of the major factors that can affect the overall integration in the host country. It can be caused by characteristics of the individual, such as shyness. This issue makes international students struggle in communicating with locals, because of not having enough information about the host country's social norms and vocabulary. Furthermore, it was shown that it might be one of the main reasons why international students feel uncomfortable expressing their opinions on group projects and engaging in friendships with local students. The results of the study confirmed language anxiety to be related to academic success.

Socio-cultural adjustment and perceived discrimination
This factor is closely related to language anxiety and barriers. It is defined as the ability to fit into the new culture, and it is significantly facilitated by close contact and positive interaction with host students, as they can give cultural insights to international students, and to provide opportunities for improving language skills. However, oftentimes these interactions are restricted by barriers and perceived discrimination.
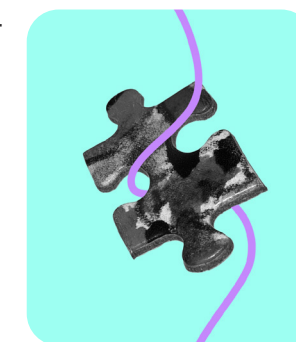
The study highlights the influence of these relationships with locals on international students' sense of belonging in the community, leading to better academic performance and sense of satisfaction. These dynamics are further explored by analyzing support provided by fellow international students, highlighting that while it is valuable, if the relationships are over-reliant, they can also affect the feeling of belonging, limiting opportunities of engagement with the rest of the community.

Other consulted sources, like blogs and online communities, mentioned additional challenges faced by international students in Italy:

Navigating bureaucratic procedures
Italian bureaucracy can be lengthy and complex. International students must deal with this for visa procedures, fiscal code and residence permit. Significant delays with these procedures have been documented. For example, in 2024, nearly 1,000 Turkish students could not begin their courses in Italian universities due to delays in the obtention of a visa in the Italian consulate, these issues led some of them to lose scholarships.
While doing a net ethnography on some Reddit communities, it was possible to find users' testimonials and opinions about Italian bureaucracy. Some of the main results mentioned inaccurate

information on official websites. Another challenge was the need for annual renewal for the residence permit, unlike other EU countries that issue this type of document for the entire duration of the study course. This renewal process can be frustrating and generate academic obstacles for internationals.

Housing
Finding convenient accommodation might be a difficult task, especially in cities like Rome and Milan. Besides, many students may have to share apartments to divide expenses, a situation that can be challenging for those who prefer privacy.

Financial Strain
The financial strain experienced by students can be attributed to various factors, including tuition fees, living expenses, and travel costs. This burden is further intensified when the Euro's exchange rate exceeds the students' local currency, leading to elevated costs of living. To address these challenges, students can apply for scholarships, seek part-time employment, and develop a budget to manage expenses effectively.

Academic Differences
Differences in teaching methods and Italy's educational system (grading, teamwork, methodology, expectations) can generate academic stress and challenges in foreign students, which require extra effort to adapt and thrive in the new academic environment.

Health and Wellness
Some health and wellness challenges might be generated while adjusting to the Italian diet and lifestyle, as well as adapting to the fluctuating temperatures and climate conditions different from the students' home country.
Other issues are related to the search for adequate healthcare and dealing with mental health issues that could emerge because of the cultural adaptation process.

Life in Turin as an International Student

A holistic analysis of the city of Turin was carried out with the goal of understanding the territory from the point of view of an International Student. The information collected seeks to detect possible risk factors or difficulties that international students might encounter when living in the city, as well as explain the appeal of Turin as a host city for internationals.

Geography
Situated at the meeting point of the Dora Riparia and the Po River, 239 meters above sea level, Turin serves both as the provincial and Piedmont region's capital. It has an approximate surface area of 130.2 km2, and an approximate of 857.865 inhabitants, making it the fourth largest city in Italy by population, and one of the productive motors of the country.

Massimiliano Morosinotto (January 3rd, 2020). Una vista di una città con le montagne sullosfondo. [Photograph]. Retrieved from Unsplash. (https://unsplash.com/it/foto/una-vista-di-una-citta-con-le-montagne-sullo-sfondo-PIRRMpAWZKU)

Climate
In Turin, the climate is moderately continental, with cold, wet winters and hot muggy summers. Throughout the year, the average temperature goes from -1°C to 29°C. Rarely it goes under -4°C or over 32°C.
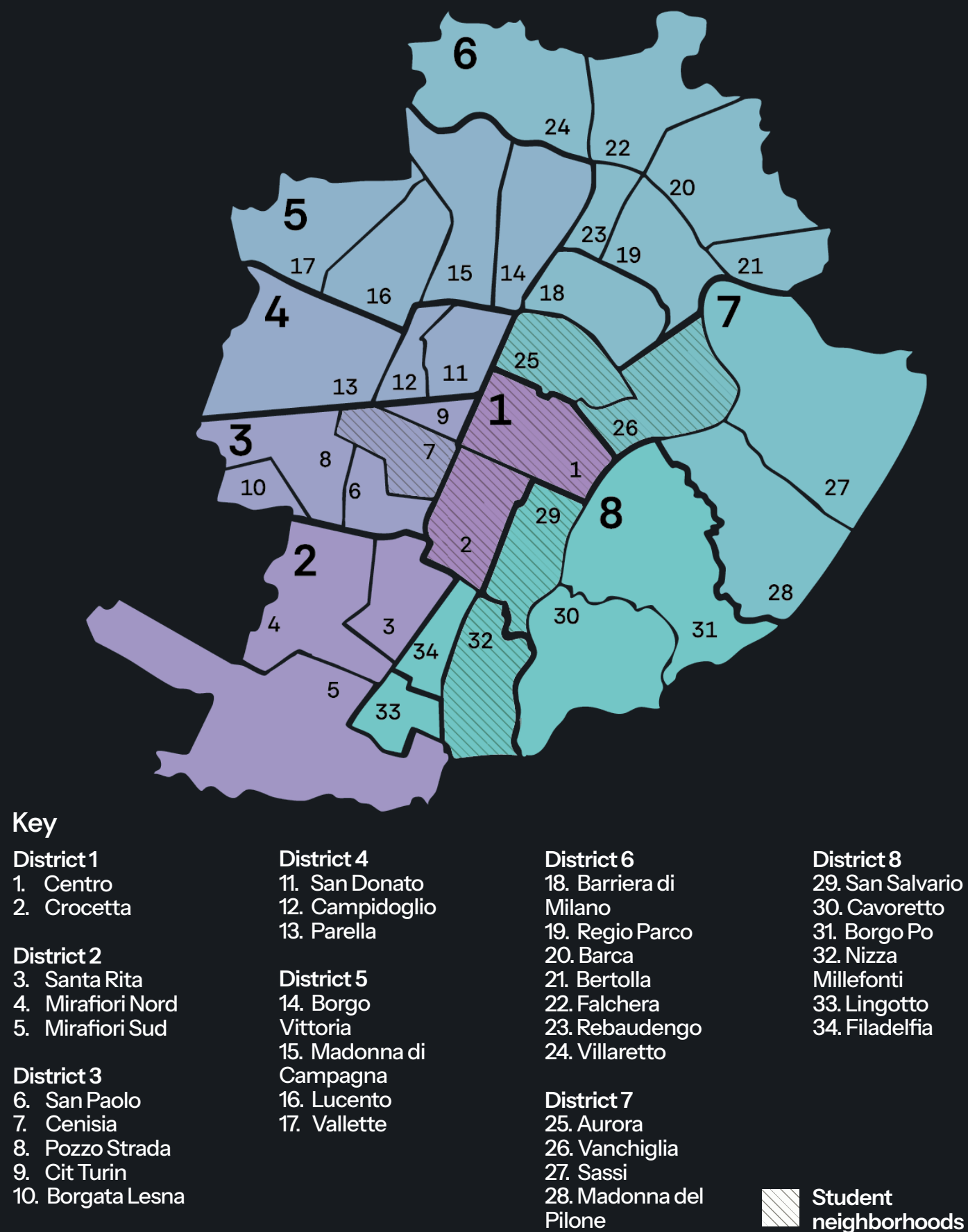
The cold season lasts 3,4 months, from mid-November to February, with an average maximum temperature inferior to 11°C. The coldest month is January, with a maximum temperature of 7°C and minimum temperature of -1°C.

The warm season lasts 3.1 months, from June to the start of September. The warmest month in Turin is July, with a maximum temperature of 28°C and minimum temperature of 19°C.

In Turin, spring is a season that is initially unstable, with mild days alternating with cold spells. However, from mid-April to the end of May, there are a lot of days with warm temperatures throughout the day, though thunderstorms can occur in the afternoon or evening. Summer, which lasts from June to August, is hot, muggy and mostly sunny. The heat is more tolerable than in the rest of the Po Valley due to the slightly lower temperatures, but also because of the thunderstorms with wind gusts. In September and occasionally in early October, autumn gives some sunny days, but then quickly turns gray and rainy. November is typically when the first cold days appear. Winter is damp and freezing, lasting from December to February. The sky is frequently cloudy, and fog can build during high pressure. In the middle of the day, the sun can emerge.

Student Neighborhoods

Turin has 34 official neighborhoods divided into 8 districts:

Key

District 1
1. Centro
2. Crocetta

District 2
3. Santa Rita
4. Mirafiori Nord
5. Mirafiori Sud

District 3
6. San Paolo
7. Cenisia
8. Pozzo Strada
9. Cit Turin
10. Borgata Lesna

District 4
11. San Donato
12. Campidoglio
13. Parella

District 5
14. Borgo Vittoria
15. Madonna di Campagna
16. Lucento
17. Vallette

District 6
18. Barriera di Milano
19. Regio Parco
20. Barca
21. Bertolla
22. Falchera
23. Rebaudengo
24. Villaretto

District 7
25. Aurora
26. Vanchiglia
27. Sassi
28. Madonna del Pilone

District 8
29. San Salvario
30. Cavoretto
31. Borgo Po
32. Nizza Millefonti
33. Lingotto
34. Filadelfia

◪ **Student neighborhoods**

Some neighborhoods stand out for their closeness with university campuses, variety of services, or presence of university students. These have been denominated student neighborhoods and are listed as follows:

Aurora
It is a neighborhood with significant historical and artistic charm. The new university campus and the Institute of Applied Art and Design (IAAD) have been the driving force behind the neighborhood, attracting numerous investments in real estate, commerce and recreation. Consequently, a wide range of services and housing solutions are available.

Cenisia
It is a residential neighborhood located in the central-western part of the Piedmontese capital, boasting a strategic location for accessing university campuses. To access other places in the city, a variety of public transportation options are available, including the M1 metro, and bus. In this neighborhood, it is possible to find rooms for rent to suit all budgets.

Centro
The city center is the most well-served and historic area in the city. It presents the highest costs, but also has a unique concentration of culture, transportation and services. It is well suited for students who attend the Palazzo Nuovo. Some landmarks include the Mole Antonelliana, being a symbol of the city and serving as the home of the National Cinema Museum; Piazza Castello, the central square of the city, characterized by its Baroque palaces; and Via Po, a historic thoroughfare, filled with bookshops, universities and cafés.

Crocetta
This neighborhood is characterized by the presence of old bourgeois houses that blend harmoniously with buildings dating back to the 1900s, resulting in a tranquil residential atmosphere. The primary motivation for students to choose Crocetta is its proximity to the Polytechnic of Turin; moreover, the area offers a variety of essential services and an efficient public transport system, with frequent services to the city center and other points of interest.

Nizza Millefonti
In this neighborhood it is possible to find the faculty of medicine and surgery. Nizza Millefonti is an ideal location for seeking affordable accommodation with a high concentration of university buildings in the vicinity. It also offers a variety of nightlife activities, including bars where live music is played and social gatherings can be enjoyed.

San Salvario
It is one of the most vivid and multicultural neighborhoods in Turin. Some of its most outstanding places are Parco del Valentino, the green lung of the city, a perfect place for gathering with friends, studying outdoors or taking a walk; the Valentino Castle, home to the Faculty of Architecture and a UNESCO World Heritage Site; and the Turin Synagogue, a historic symbol of the neighborhood.

Vanchiglia
The neighborhood is characterized by its creativity and tranquility, qualities that are highly regarded by students from the humanities and law faculties. Its proximity to the Luigi Einaudi Campus is a significant factor in its popularity. Some other landmarks are Lungo Po, a location for walking, sporting activities or studying by the river, and Via Santa Giulia, serving as the neighborhood's primary commercial hub, with a wide concentration of bars and restaurants.

Demographics of the foreign students

The Polytechnic of Turin reports 8100 foreign students enrolled for the academic year 2024/25, coming from 122 different countries. The Americas represent 6% of international students, having Colombian students representing 2% of total foreign students.

International students by continent at Politecnico di Torino (A.Y. 2024/25)

- Asia
- Europe
- America
- Africa and other countries
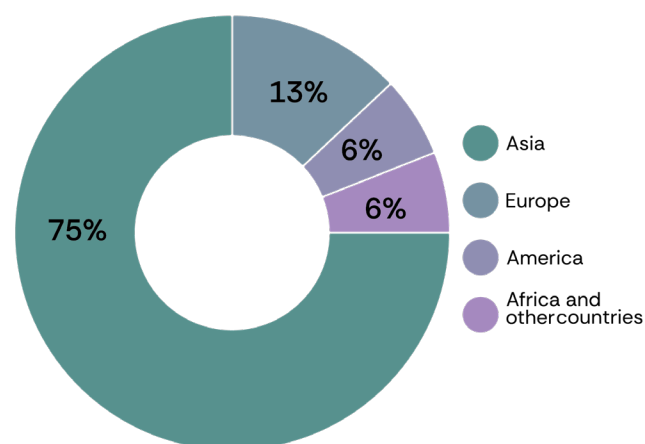
International students by country at Politecnico di Torino (A.Y. 2024/25)

- Iran
- Türkiye
- China
- Libano
- Romania
- India
- Pakistan
- Colombia
- Albania
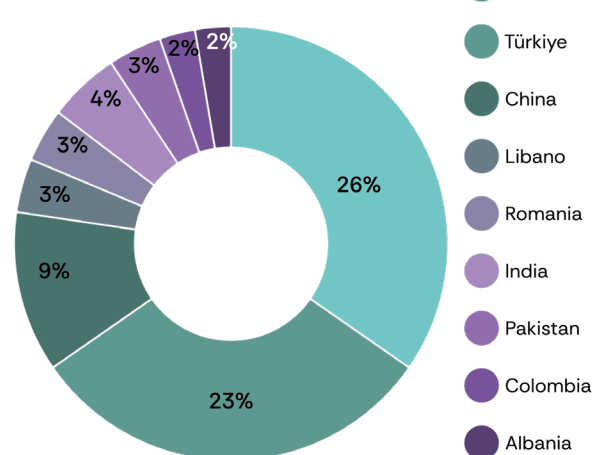
Figure 3. Representation based on data elaborated by Politecnico di Torino (2025). Ateneo Internazionale.
https://www.polito.it/ateneo/colpo-d-occhio/ateneo-internazionale

Likewise, the University of Turin reported 4500 foreign students enrolled for the academic year 2024/2025.
According to Musto (2025), the provenience of foreign students varies between internationals and second generations. The latter reflect local migrant communities, having Romania (38%), Albania (10%), and China (11%), among the most

represented countries. On the other hand, the provenience of international students is influenced by international University agreements. When choosing the university course, international students prefer courses taught in English, regardless of the subject area of the course.
Compared to Italian students, the proportion of female students is much higher among international students. Women make up more than 60% of international students at the two universities, and among second-generation students, the figure rises to 71%. Women make up 35% of international students at the Polytechnic University of Turin, which is more than the 31% of Italian students.

Economy

Housing conditions
Students in Turin can consider different solutions for their housing needs depending on specific requirements:

· University residences, and public and private campuses.
· Rental of rooms or apartments from privates through paid or free channels.

Public university residences
EDISU has a series of residences and fully equipped apartments in diverse zones of the city, satisfying student needs according to the chosen school. There are 2237 total sleeping accommodations, 68 of which are reserved for disabled students.
These structures provide a variety of internal services, such as surveillance, laundry, equipped gyms, common rooms, etc. It is possible to access public residences through a public competition, identical to that for scholarships.

Private university residences
Collegio R. Einaudi is a private institution, but it is recognized as performing functions of public interest and for this reason receives state funding. It offers five structures (Crocetta, Po, Mole Antonelliana, San Paolo, Valentino), with a total of 767 beds. The admission is done through a competitive examination and ranking based on merit.

The structures provide numerous services, such as reception, library, music room, fitness area, editing area, guest quarters, etc.
The Camplus College offers residential and formative services, with annual costs ranging from €10000 to €12000 yearly, depending on the chosen accommodation type and the income bracket. The structures are present in different city zones.
Campus Sanpaolo is a university residence located in the San Paolo neighborhood. It offers different housing solutions, with a total of 455 beds. Prices range from €4740 to €7140 yearly.

Private rental
It is possible to find rooms or apartments for rental through free channels, such as: notice boards in the faculty lobby; WhatsApp and Telegram groups; Facebook groups; Cerco Allloggio, Edisu's official service for finding and offering accommodation and housing solutions on the private market in Turin, Alessandria, Bra, Cuneo, and Novara; Sportello casa Piemonte, a free service managed by Fondazione Ceur for finding short-term housing solutions. Some paid channels include real estate agencies spread around the city.

The main channels that publish offers for rooms and apartments, whether it is from privates or from real estate agencies are websites such as: affito.it, casa.it, immobiliare.it, Idealista, mioaffitto.it, rentola, subito.it, wikicasa.it, torino.bakeca.it. The most used channels by students are: informal, such as Facebook groups or word of mouth through their own network; and formal, such as rental platforms or real estate agencies, as shown in Figure 4.
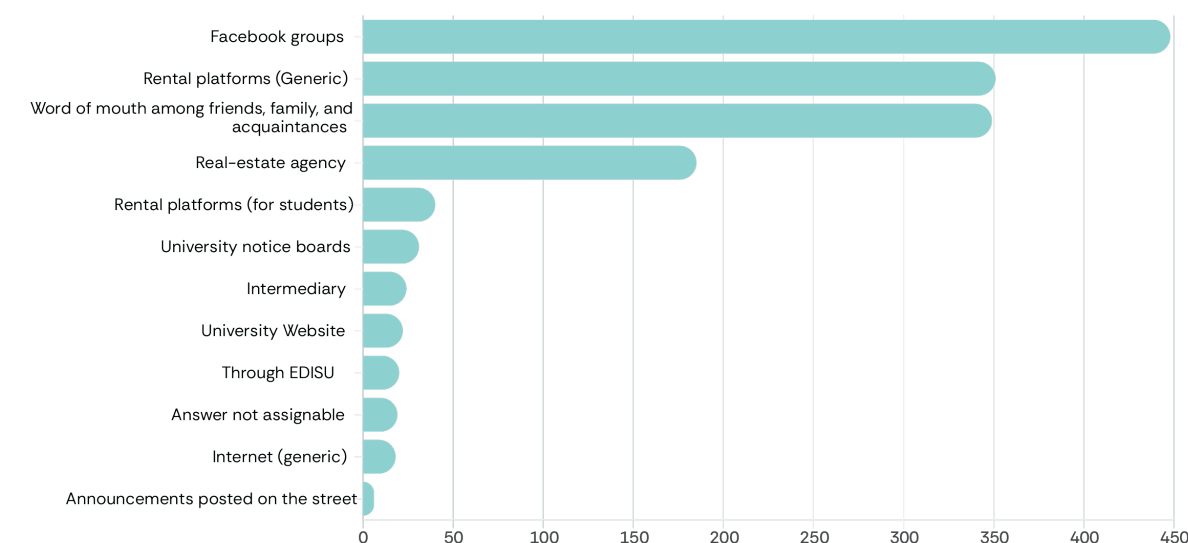

Figure 4. Adapted from Torino da fuori. Studiare, abitare e vivere la città da fuori sede (p. 31), by S. Cenere, E. Mangione and L. Servillo, 2022, Future Urban Legacy Lab

According to a report published by Polytechnic of Turin, the foreign student population lives mostly in a rental apartment, as represented in Figure 5.
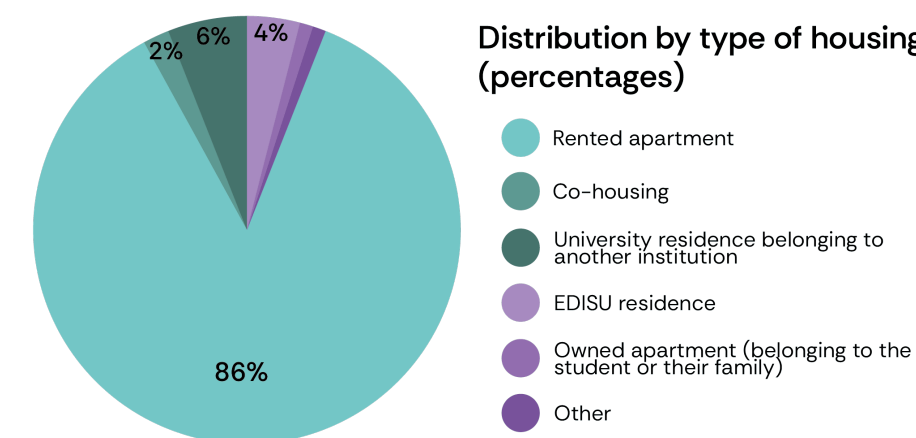

Distribution by type of housing (percentages)

- Rented apartment
- Co-housing
- University residence belonging to another institution
- EDISU residence
- Owned apartment (belonging to the student or their family)
- Other

Figure 5. Adapted from Torino da fuori. Studiare, abitare e vivere la città da fuori sede (p. 27), by S. Cenere, E. Mangione and L. Servillo, 2022, Future Urban Legacy Lab

Rental price according to the zone

The average rental costs per square meter by zone are listed below, according to a report by Immobiliare. it, having September 2025 as a referral period.

Zone	Rental cost (€/ sq. m)
Centro	16,14
Crocetta, San Secondo	12,79
Cavoretto, Gran Madre	13,93
Colle della Maddalena, Superga	11,1
Borgo San Paolo, Cenisia	11,6
Lingotto, Nizza Millefonti	10,76
Regio Parco, Vanchiglia, Vanchiglietta	12,37
Aurora, Barriera di Milano, Rebaudengo	10,85
Barriera di Lanzo, Falchera, Barca, Bertolla	8,89
Borgo Vittoria, Parco Dora	10,1
Le Vallette, Lucento, Madonna di Campagna	9,54
Pozzo Strada, Parella	10,56
Santa Rita, Mirafiori Nord	10,04
Campidoglio, San Donato, Cit Turin	11,4
Madonna del Pilone, Sassi	11,4
Mirafiori Sud	9,93
San Salvario	13.32

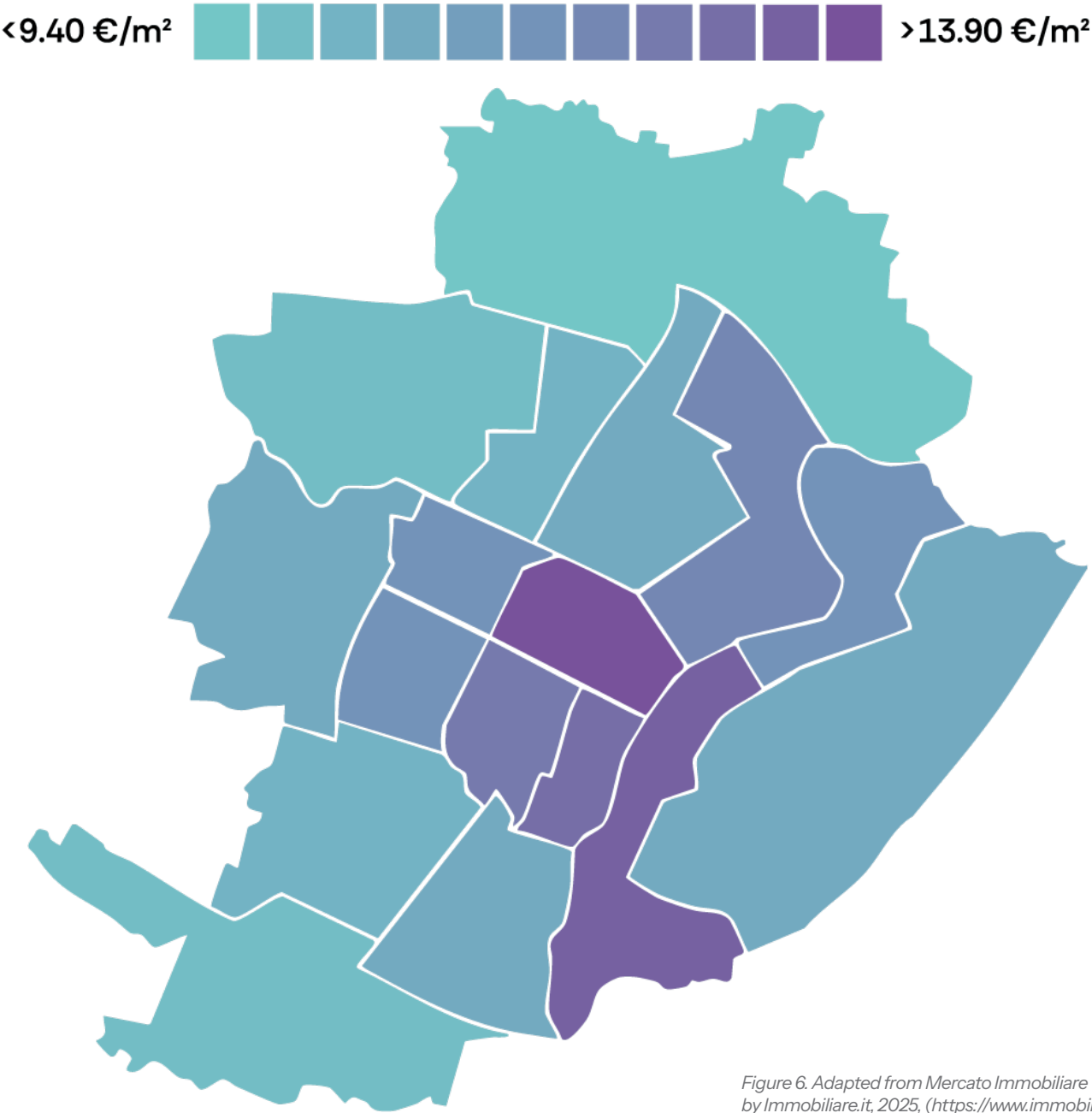Figure 6 represents the average rent prices by zone in Turin.

Figure 6. Adapted from Mercato Immobiliare Torino, by Immobiliare.it, 2025, (https://www.immobiliare.it/ mercato–immobiliare/piemonte/torino/)

Cost of living beyond rent

Besides rent, there are additional monthly costs that may vary depending on one's own lifestyle. According to data by Politecnico di Torino (2024), an average estimate is presented as follows:

Utilities

Some utilities may be included in the rental price. However, it should be considered that electricity, water and internet can amount to around €70– €100 per month, depending on consumption and rates.

Food and beverage

It can be managed by cooking at home and shopping at convenient grocery stores. The monthly price, considering some dinners out, can vary between €200 and €300.

Public Transportation

GTT offers monthly subscriptions for students

under 26-years-old. It has a cost of €25 and covers the whole transportation network. Starting from the academic year 2025/2026, the Piedmont region launched the initiative "Piemove- Piemonte Viaggia Studia", which allows to travel for free in the local public transport of the municipalities of Turin, Alessandria, Asti, Biella, Cuneo, Novara and Vercelli. It is aimed at students enrolled at the University of Turin, Polytechnic of Turin or the University of Eastern Piedmont, in 1st and 2nd level courses or a PhD, and with an ISEE up to €85,000.

Leisure, free time and study material
Turin offers a variety of opportunities at accessible prices. There are museums, movie theaters, parks and cultural events that offer student discounts. Textbooks and study materials can be acquired online, in university libraries or by buying used books.
According to online blogs, there is a monthly expense between €150 and €200 for these activities.

Employment opportunities for students

Each year, Universities in Turin offer students the possibility of working part-time inside their campuses, by opening a contest where students can participate and be selected for these opportunities.

On the other hand, they offer career services for all their students. Polytechnic's Career Hub is a collaborative environment where connections with companies are fostered. They provide support with orientation, networking and placement services. Furthermore, they assist organizations in their talent acquisition process. Likewise, University of Turin has a Job Placement service, facilitating student's entry into the workforce. This solution fosters first contacts with companies, and also aids the latter in staff research and selection.

Additionally, the city of Turin provides a series of advice and resources for job search inside their portal TorinoGiovani. These include: guides for writing a curriculum, advice for job interviews, contacts for job agencies in Turin and free support services for job search. Besides, there is a series of job listings and open positions in companies in the Piedmont region.

In the case of non-EU students, the Italian government has stated that, by possessing a study residence permit, it is possible to work for no more than 20 hours per week, which can be accumulated for 52 weeks. The reason for this is that studying must always be the primary activity. Whenever a student wants to develop a job activity that overpasses this limit, they must convert their document into a work permit.

After finishing the course of study that was developed in Italy and obtaining their diploma, students can request a permit for job search. This permit has a duration from 9 to 12 months. To solicit this permit, it is necessary to fill the form, demonstrate a minimum annual income and possess health insurance, which can be a private policy valid in the territory, or a registration in the National Health Service.

Education

Higher education institutions

The city's two main universities are the University of Turin, one of the oldest and most prestigious in Italy, and the Polytechnic of Turin, which has created a blend of research, innovation, and education. Furthermore, the city offers a variety of educational opportunities, including enrollment at the Albertina Academy of Fine Arts, the Giuseppe Verdi State Conservatory, the European, Institute of Design, and the Italian campus of the ESCP Business school. In summary, a wide range of options is available to cater to diverse student needs.

The Polytechnic of Turin has 338 Erasmus+ Program Countries agreements, 74 Erasmus+ Partner Countries agreements, 138 Double Degree and student mobility agreements, and 11 joint programs.

Particularly speaking of Latin America, the Polytechnic has double degree agreements with universities in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, and Mexico

Country	Universities with a double degree agreement with PoliTo
Argentina	• Instituto Tecnológico Buenos Aires • Universidad de Belgrano • Universidad Nacional de Córdoba
Brazil	• Pontifícia Universidade Católica de Minas Gerais • Universidade de Pernambuco- Estadual • Universidade de São Paulo • Universidade Estadual de Campinas • Universidade Federal de Pernambuco
Chile	• Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile • Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso • Universidad Adolfo Ibáñez
Colombia	• Pontificia Universidad Javeriana Bogotá • Pontificia Universidad Javeriana Cali • Universidad de Antioquia • Universidad de Los Andes • Universidad Jorge Tadeo Lozano • Universidad Tecnológica de Bolívar
Mexico	• Universidad de las Américas en Puebla • Universidad de Monterrey

On the other hand, the University of Turin has more than 500 active agreements with universities in 91 countries, and over 1500 agreements for Erasmus+ mobility. It also offers 27 programs taught entirely in English

Specifically speaking of Latin America, it does not have active double degree agreements. However, the University of Turin developed specific partnerships with universities in the following countries:

Country	Universities with an ongoing agreement with UniTo
Argentina	• Universidad de Buenos Aires • Universidad Nacional de la Plata • Universidad Nacional de Córdoba • Universidad de Hurlingham • Universidad Austral de Buenos Aires • Universidad Nacional de Rosario • Universidad Abierta Interamericana • Universidad Nacional de Cuyo • Instituto Universitario Italiano de Rosario • Universidad Nacional de Tres de Febrero • Universidad Nacional de Villa María • Universidad de San Andrés • Universidad de Belgrano

Bolivia	• UMSA
Brazil	• Universidade de São Paulo • Instituto Federal Catarinense • Universidade Federal de Lavras • Universidade Estadual de Montes Claros • Universidade Federal de Viçosa • Centro Universitário Barão de Mauá • Universidade Federal Ouro Preto • Universidade de Marilia • Universidade Federal do Amazonas • Faculdade de Direito de Sorocaba • Universidade Federal da Fronteira Sul • Universidade Federal De Pernambuco • CEUB • Universidade de Caxias do Sul • Universidade Federal Fluminense • Universidade Federal Do Estado Do Rio de Janeiro
Chile	• Universidad de Chile • Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile • Universidad del Desarrollo • Universidad de Playa Ancha
Colombia	• Universidad de La Salle • Universidad Nacional de Colombia • Universidad ICESI • Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia • Universidad Externado de Colombia
Cuba	• Universidad Agraria de La Habana
Ecuador	• Universidad Internacional del Ecuador
Mexico	• Universidad Iberoamericana • Universidad Autónoma de Baja California • Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México • Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla • Tecnológico Nacional de México Campus Ciudad Valles • Universidad Panamericana • Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez • Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México • Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana de Los Estados Unidos Mexicanos • Universidad Nacional de Tlaxcala

Paraguay	• Universidad del Cono Sur de las Américas
Peru	• Universidad San Ignacio de Loyola • Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú
Venezuela	• Universidad Católica Andrés Bello

Student services and spaces

EDISU (in Italian Ente Regionale per il diritto allo Studio Universitario del Piemonte), is an entity that provides a variety of services for university students in the Piedmont region. Some of the most important include student residences, canteens, and study rooms spread in different zones of the city.

The Polytechnic offers different services and opportunities to satisfy a wide range of student needs, some of the most important include: language center, international mobility, student teams, sports and cultural associations, career orientation services, scholarships, and wellbeing activities.

Likewise, the University of Turin provides students with services and opportunities like scholarships, wellbeing and personal support, and sports and health.

Language and Communication
Italian Courses
In Turin, it is possible to enroll in Italian language and culture courses, whether it is at the University or in specialized schools.

The Polytechnic of Turin offers Italian courses for its students, in a partnership with Società Dante Alighieri. There are four available levels, according to the students' knowledge of the language.

The University of Turin offers different opportunities to learn the Italian language. Some of them are: UNITO Italian Programs Abroad, Italiano per stranieri, Centro Linguistico di Ateneo, and ICoN- Italian Culture on the Net.
Additionally, it is possible to find other options to learn Italian in the city. Firstly, there are diverse schools like: L'Italiano Porticando, Società Dante Alighieri, Scuola Penny Wirton, and Ciaoitaly-Scuola Leonardo Torino. On the other hand, entities and associations, such as CPIA, Fondazione Università Popolare di Torino, Centro Interculturale della città di Torino, ASAI, Magazzino sul Po, among many others, offer courses for foreigners. Furthermore, there are available online courses and mobile applications that allow non-native speakers to improve their skills.

Presence of English and Spanish in daily life
English is a language spread and spoken throughout the world. For international students with no or very basic knowledge of the Italian language, English is a bridge that facilitates communication with locals and other internationals.

The two main universities have available versions of their websites in English, as well as courses and programs taught entirely in the language.

The Polito Language Center (CLA) offers English Learning activities and exams sessions for students. It is possible to take the IELTS Academic test on paper inside the Polytechnic of Turin campus. University of Turin's language center provides courses and workshops for learning general and academic English as well.

On the other hand, Spanish is less present in official communications and services, as well as in everyday life. However, some foreign language courses that include Spanish are offered by the University of Turin.
Spanish-speaking spaces are fostered by specific communities in extracurricular or cultural contexts. Some places of encounter for Latin Americans in Turin are listed in detail in chapter 3.

Culture

Art

Turin has a wide offer of art exhibitions and museums. Some of them include: Galleria d'arte Moderna e Contemporanea (GAM), Museo d'arte Orientale (MAO), Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Museo Ettore Fico (MEF). It is also possible to find a variety of paintings, sculptures, and art installations located in public spaces. According to Arte per Strada Torino, the highest concentrations of public artworks are found in the Campidoglio district, thanks to the MAU Museum of Urban Art, and in Parco Dora. Overall, Arte per strada Torino has catalogued the works of 91 different artistic collectives and 395 individual artists (20% of whom are women).

Galleria d'arte Moderna (n.d.). Outside view of the gallery [Photograph]. Retrieved from Dove Siamo | Galleria d'arte Moderna Torino. (https://www.gamtorino.it/it/welcome/dove-siamo/)

Bruno Montaldo (2018). Cultus, Obiettivo 2: Fame Zero by Truly Design [Photograph]. Retrieved from Arte per strada Torino. (https://www.arteperstradatorino.it/schede/scheda_250.html)

Music

The Sistema Musica Association is a classical music portal in Turin, supported by the city. It organizes projects especially aimed at young people. Furthermore, the Department of Culture, Education and Youth organizes music education courses.

Libraries

Turin hosts some important libraries. It hosts a network of libraries spread across the city. Some of its most important locations include: Central Library, Andrea della Corte, Rita Atria, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Italo Calvino, Luigi Carluccio, Cascina Marchesa, Biblioteca del Centro Interculturale, among others. There are also 2 Bibliobus available.

The library network organizes a variety of events and projects, like reading groups, study support, activities aimed at children and families, and digital education.

Points of interest

Turin has a highly important urban heritage, from a historic and artistic point of view. With places that range from royal residences to tree-lined avenues, according to Turismo Torino (2025), the city has a vast amount of places of interest, as listed below:

Royal Residences

Between the 16th and 18th centuries, the Savoy dynasty surrounded themselves with a system of sumptuous residences designed by the most important architects at the time and located in the city of Turin and the nearby municipalities. This scene of court life, unique in Europe, was recognized by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site in 1997.

Some of the Royal Residences inside the city of Turin are: Palazzo Carignano, Musei Reali (Royal Palace of Turin), Palazzo Madama, Palazzo Chiablese, Castello del Valentino, and Villa della Regina.
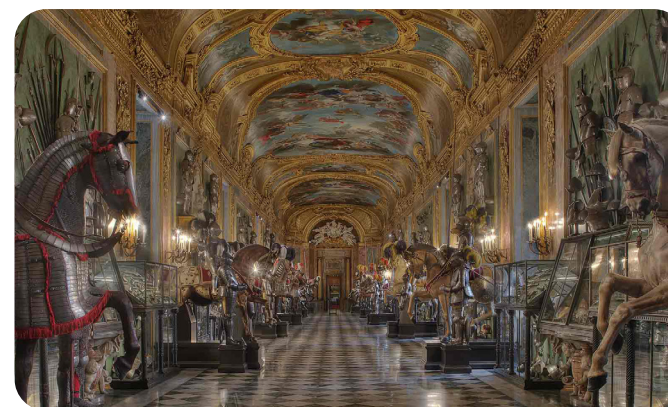
Ernani Orcorte. (n.d.). Armeria Reale [Photograph]. Retrieved from Musei Reali Torino. (https://museireali.beniculturali.it/esplora/)

Museums

Turin possesses a wide range of museums that highlight the history, knowledge and versatility of the city. Some of the most visited museums of the city are listed as follows: Royal Museums, Egyptian Museum, National Museum of Cinema (Mole Antonelliana), Civic Museum of Ancient Art, National Automobile Museum, National Risorgimento Museum, and Lavazza Museum.

Museo Egizio. (n.d.). [Photograph]. Retrieved from Museo Egizio. (https://www.museoegizio.it/)

Politecnico di Torino. (n.d.). Castello del Valentino [Photograph]. Retrieved from Castello del Valentino. (https://castellodelvalentino.polito.it/?page_id=1279)

Evgheni Liuft. (December 1st, 2022). Mole Antonelliana, home of the National Cinema Museum. [Photograph]. Retrieved from Unsplash. (https://unsplash.com/it/foto/una-torre-alta-in-una-citta-bmK6jaGR0Lk)

Sports and Outdoors

Turin is the Italian city with the most public green spaces, with 320 km of tree-lined avenues and approximately 50 parks. Each neighborhood has at least one "green lung" with grass, areas for children, and spaces for running and relaxing. The most famous park in the city is Parco del Valentino. Other outstanding green areas are: Parco della Pellerina, Parco Colonnetti, Parco Cavalieri di Vittorio Veneto (Piazza d'Armi), Parco Ruffini, and Giardini Reali, behind Turin's Royal Palace.

Lorenzo Taccioli. (March 4th, 2025). Parco del Valentino in Autunno. [Photograph]. Retrieved from Parco del Valentino- Cosa vedere, dove si trova e breve storia. (https://www.lorenzotaccioli.it/parco-del-valentino-cosa-vedere/)

Francesco. (May 12th, 2012). Torino, Piazza d'Armi. [Photograph]. Retrieved from Flickr. (https://flic.kr/p/bWE2sd)

Religious Places

Turin has numerous places of worship, that allow visitors to experience the union between art, landscapes and spirituality. Some of the most important are: Duomo di San Giovanni Battista (Turin Cathedral), Basilica di Maria Ausiliatrice, Santuario della Consolata, Real Chiesa di San Lorenzo, Chiesa del Santo Volto, Basilica di Superga, Chiesa di San Tommaso, Chiesa della Gran Madre di Dio, Chiesa di San Domenico, and Chiesa di santa Maria del Monte dei Cappuccini.

Paris Orlando. (October 3th, 2018). Basilica di Superga. [Photograph]. Retrieved from Wikipedia. (https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Basilica_di_Superga)

Eccekevin. (September 27th, 2019). Duomo di Torino. [Photograph]. Retrieved from Wikipedia. (https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duomo_di_Torino)

Food and beverages

Turin's gastronomy is rooted in popular and courtly tradition. Some of its most characteristic typical dishes are:

- Vitello Tonnato: Veal slices with tuna sauce, egg, caper and anchovy sauce.
- Bagna Cauda: Hot sauce prepared with garlic, anchovies, olive oil and served with vegetables.
- Grissini: An elongated, crunchy, stick of bread.
- Gianduiotti: Cacao and hazelnut-based chocolates.
- Bicerìn: A traditional hot drink made with chocolate, milk cream and coffee.

Paneangeli. (n.d.). Grissini Torinesi. [Photograph]. Retrieved from Paneangeli. (https://paneangeli.it/ricetta/grissini-torinesi)

Clop. (July 16th, 2009). Due Gianduiotti Torinesi. [Photograph]. Retrieved from Wikipedia. (https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gianduiotto)

La Cucina Italiana. (June 4th, 2025). Vitello Tonnato. [Photograph]. Retrieved from La Cucina Italiana. (https://www.lacucinaitaliana.it/ricetta/secondi/vitello-tonnato-ricetta-originale-piemonte/)

Mobility and accessibility

Public transport

The city's public transport is managed by the GTT (Gruppo Torinese Trasporti). It offers urban and suburban lines, as well as extra-urban lines.

Ten lines currently make up the tram network, including two that form a circle route (16CS and 16CD, left and right circular), and one that is used only on public holidays using vintage trams (line 7).

The Turin Metro was inaugurated in 2006, at the 20th Winter Olympic Games. It currently consists of line 1, which is 15.1 km long (23 stations), with extensions to the west currently under construction. The plan for line 2 is to connect the northeast with the south-west, interchanging with line 1 at Porta Nuova.

The urban and suburban bus network consists of approximately 110 lines, which also reach surrounding municipalities.

Gruppo Torinese Trasporti. (n.d.). Tram Hitachi Rail. [Photograph]. Retrieved from GTT. (https://www.gtt.to.it/cms/en/12-avvisi-e-informazioni-di-servizio/10616-nuovi-tram)

Cycling

A total of 190 kilometers of cycle paths and routes have been constructed in Turin, extending along roads and within urban parks.

Turin offers a bike sharing service, representing a particularly salient solution for short trips due to their convenience, cost-effectiveness, and environmental benefits.

Bike Sharing TOBike. (January 24th, 2017). Bicicletta gialla TOBike in piazza a Torino con fontana. [Photograph]. Retrieved from GW. (https://www.gw-360.com/it-it/blog/bike-sharing-tobike-torino)

Train Connections

Turin is an important railway hub for lines to Biella, Genoa, Savona, Aosta, Asti, Cuneo, Novara, Alessandria and Vercelli. The stations currently in use are listed as follows:

- Torino Porta Nuova
- Torino Porta Susa
- Torino Lingotto
- Torino Rebaudengo Fossata
- Torino Stura
- Torino Grosseto

Paolo Carlini. (n.d.). Porta Nuova Station. [Photograph]. Retrieved from Filière3e. (https://www.filiere-3e.fr/2019/01/16/dossier-eclairage-des-gares/)

Airports

Turin's Caselle airport is the international gateway of the city. It was founded in 1953 and is located on the territory of the municipalities of Caselle Torinese, San Francesco al Campo and San Maurizio Canavese, 16 km north of Turin. In 2024, Assaeroporti reported a total traffic of 4.693.977 passengers through the airport.

Additionally, there is Turin's Airport- Aeritalia, which serves as a general aviation structure, along with a flight school.

Quotidiano Piemontese. (January 28th, 2022). Aeroporto Torino Caselle. [Photograph]. Retrieved from Quotidiano Piemontese. (https://www.quotidianopiemontese.it/2022/01/28/aeroporto-torino-oltre-2-milioni-di-passeggeri-nel-2021/)

Healthcare and Wellbeing

Access to healthcare system

For international students coming from outside the European Union, health insurance is mandatory for obtaining the residence permit.

The Italian health system provides health coverage to citizens and residents. Its services are mostly free, while some of them require the payment of a fee for tests, treatments and assistance from specialists. It is possible to make a voluntary enrollment in the National Health Service (SSN, by its acronym in Italian). This includes access to full health coverage, upon payment of a fee per calendar year. Coverage costs a minimum of €700 for students, and expires on December 31st, regardless of the activation date.

On the other hand, there are private insurances that must be acquired directly from providing companies, these must cover emergency treatments, accidents and illnesses for the full period of stay.

Mental health and counseling services

The city of Turin, in particular its local health authority (ASL, by its acronym in Italian), has a Mental Health Department, a territorial entity serving mental health patients and common psychiatric disorders like anxiety, panic attacks, depression and complex life events. The department has beds inside hospitals and 15 local clinics spread across the different districts.

On the other hand, the Polytechnic of Turin offers listening spaces for students and collaborators who are experiencing psychological distress. The service is developed in a partnership with University of Turin's Psychology Department.

Likewise, the University of Turin offers free assistance for students and collaborators. The service is provided in an independent place from the university campus, with a path developed in two phases. Firstly, the Listening Space, and then, if necessary, the Counseling service.

Legal Aspects

Bureaucratic processes

Latin American students must comply with a series of procedures to enter and stay for a long period in the European Union. Some of them include:

Visa

For stays longer than 90 days in the European Union, students are required to apply for a study visa at the Italian Embassy of their home country. The necessary documents for the application may vary depending on the type of study to be developed, but generally students must provide their passport, certification of enrollment to a course, demonstration of economic means and health insurance coverage.

Universitaly pre-enrollment

In order to give Italian and foreign students a trustworthy resource for obtaining higher education in Italy, the Ministry of Universities and Research in Italy established the Universitaly webpage.
As a part of the Visa application process and to complete their enrollment to an Italian university, students must fill in the form in the Universitaly platform and present it at the Italian Embassy.

Apostille and legalization of documents

The apostille is an international certification that makes a document from one country valid in another. When applying for a double degree or post-graduate degree, students are required to validate their diploma and legalize other study related documentation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of their home country.

Tax code

The tax code is the identification tool for natural persons and entities other than natural persons in all relationships with public bodies and administrations. Upon arrival in Italy, international students must request a tax code, since it is a necessary document for various daily procedures, like renting an apartment or obtaining an Italian phone number.

Residence Permit:

The Italian authorities require extra-EU citizens to apply for a residence permit when they plan to stay in Italy for long periods.
Students must submit the postal kit within the first week of arrival in the country, containing the following documentation: a copy of the passport, a copy of the study documentation presented at the Embassy, and a copy of the health insurance certificate. After some months, they must go to the immigration office of Turin's Questura (police precinct) for photo and fingerprint identification. Then, in a period of one or two months, their residence permit is issued.

Key Findings and Project Goals

Building upon Migra Tranqui, the previously developed app, as an input for this thesis, further research was conducted to determine key aspects of the project. A systemic approach led to the decision to focus on international students in Italy, specifically those of Latin American origin, as the primary users, this was the first shift done as the first version of the project dealt with Latin American students and expat workers willing to relocate to any country.

This focus enabled a deeper exploration of cultural adaptation and cultural intelligence (CQ), two essential concepts for the project's development. Additionally, an analysis of psychology literature on the expatriate adaptation cycle provided insights into the phases international students experience when adjusting to a new culture. Understanding these stages helped identify key moments and the types of support mechanisms needed for each of them.

Stating a specific geographic boundary: Italy, and particularly Turin, allowed a more detailed characterization of the challenges faced by international students within the local context. Analyzing Italian bureaucracy, socio-cultural adjustment, language barriers, housing and financial issues led to the identification of key opportunities to support students' adaptation journey.

Following this preliminary research, the thesis aims to expand and refine Migra Tranqui, transforming it into a systemic tool that integrates into the existing landscape of support services for international students. The goal is to provide culturally relevant resources to enhance cultural intelligence, ease adaptation barriers, and foster community connections. By doing so, the project seeks to create a more seamless adaptation experience, ensuring that Latin American students in Italy can navigate their new environment with confidence and support, and make the most of their time abroad.
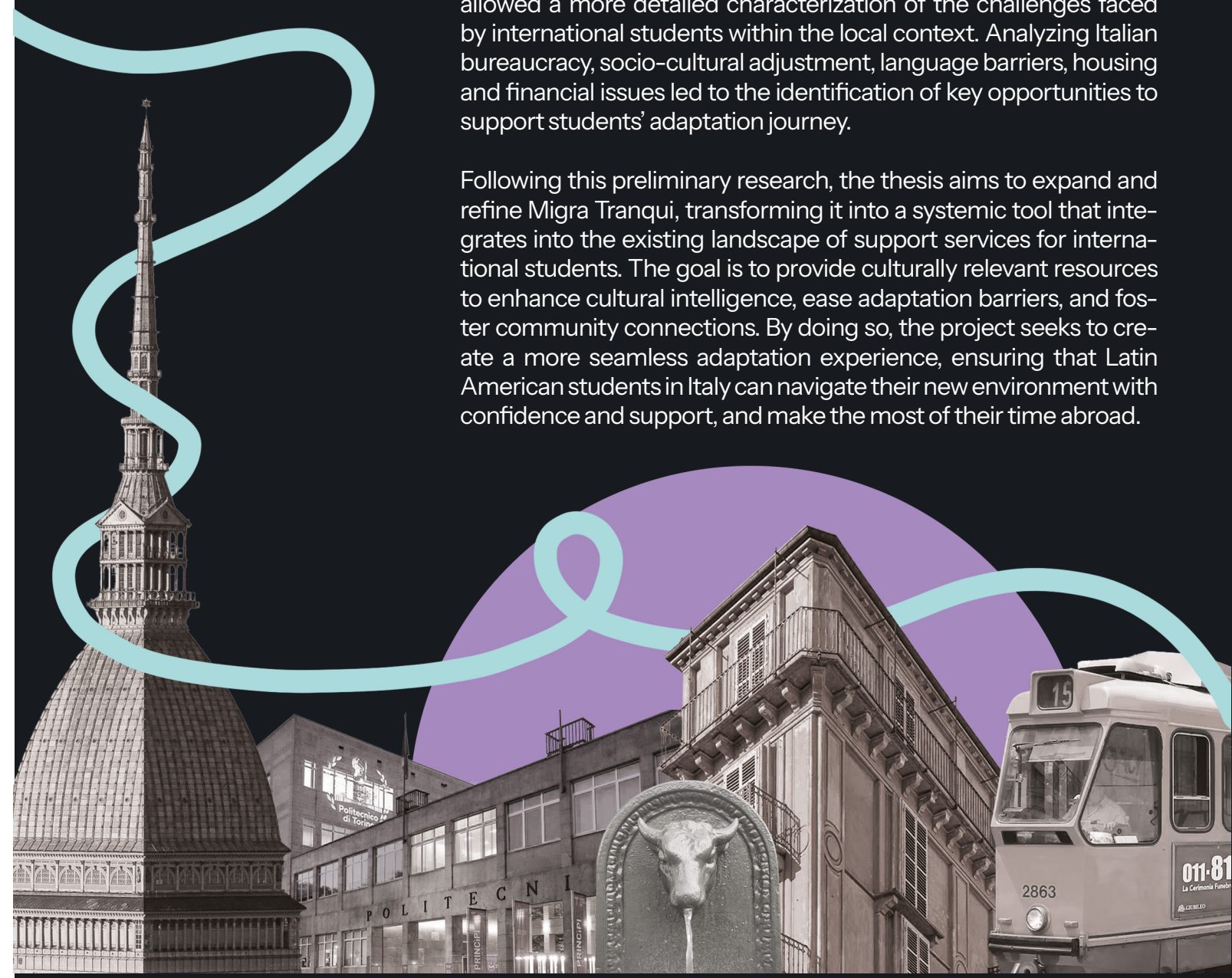
Bench marking existing solutions

After establishing a context and setting boundaries for the project, **case study research** was conducted. The goal of the analysis was to identify **businesses or projects dedicated to migrant adaptation around the world.** Some of them are aimed specifically at university students, while some others cover a broader audience including workers, families and refugees. The findings were divided into four categories: **Networks and Relocation Companies, Websites, Apps, and Therapy Services.**

Networks and Relocation Companies

InterNations

Defined as the largest global network, it was founded in 2007 by Germans Malte Zeeck and Philipp von Plato. This is a platform where people meet, connect and exchange information.

InterNations is present in over 420 cities worldwide and has over 5.4 million members. Each month, around 4,000 activities are carried out. Within this network, members can find exchange tips and information on life abroad through discussion forms and articles.

To join the network, it is required to send an application and wait for its approval. This membership mode ensures quality and trust in the community.

Guiding Principles

Diversity

Open Communication

Helpfulness

Responsibility

Personal Development

Fact-Orientation

Entrepreneurship

Business Aspects

The company has different divisions in charge of activities to keep InterNations working. These are:

Engineering and Operations
Development and testing of new features for the platform.

Product Management
Definition of roadmap and development of new ideas, identifying the needs of the target group.

Community Experience
Organization of events in the 420 InterNations Communities, providing member support.

Content and Communications
Brand promotion with engaging content in social media and international press.

Online Marketing
Growing the member base, making sure expats looking for online information can find InterNations.

Corporate Partnerships
Managing and expanding the network of advertising partners, who can offer useful services for members.

Corporate
Making sure that InterNations runs smoothly, managing recruitment processes and organizing opportunities for personal development.

Symbols and Communication

InterNations has chosen the **albatross** as their main symbol because of its **significance and similarities to expats**, as both travel long distances around the world, facing the challenges of an itinerant lifestyle, but still maintaining a special connection to their birthplace.

InterNations. (n.d.). [InterNations Logo]. Retrieved from About | InterNations. (https://www.internations.org/about)

Touchpoints

Website
Open to everyone, it allows migrants to know the network, find communities and guides.

Mobile App
Used mainly to join communities, discover events and connect with people.

Social Media
With presence in Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and YouTube.

InterNations. (n.d.). [Webpage with facts about life in Italy]. Retrieved from Living in Italy | What you need to know before you move. (https://www.internations.org/italy-expats/guide/living)

Mobile App Reviews

Google Play Store rating

3,6/5

★★★☆

Apple App Store rating

4,4/5

★★★★

Positive Reviews

"Amazing way to know friends abroad living in Italy"
- Emanuele, September 27th, 2024.

"Always met great and interesting people"
–Paolo, March 29th, 2024.

"Nice parties and beautiful public events"
- Betty, January 28th, 2023

Negative Reviews

"Asked for a refund immediately and after a month everyone denies responsibility. They just steal money from people that are not even using it"
- Sara, December 17th, 2024.

"It doesn't work. It remains a blank page that loads endlessly. The complaint management is unspeakable: more than one report is seen as a nuisance because after almost 3 weeks they have not solved the problem and do not provide information. And I am also Consul, it would be useful during events"
- Roberto, March 1st, 2024.

"They declined the offer of membership even though I gave the same answers as another person to whom they accepted it instead. And they haven't even explained why."
- Sara, November 6th, 2024.
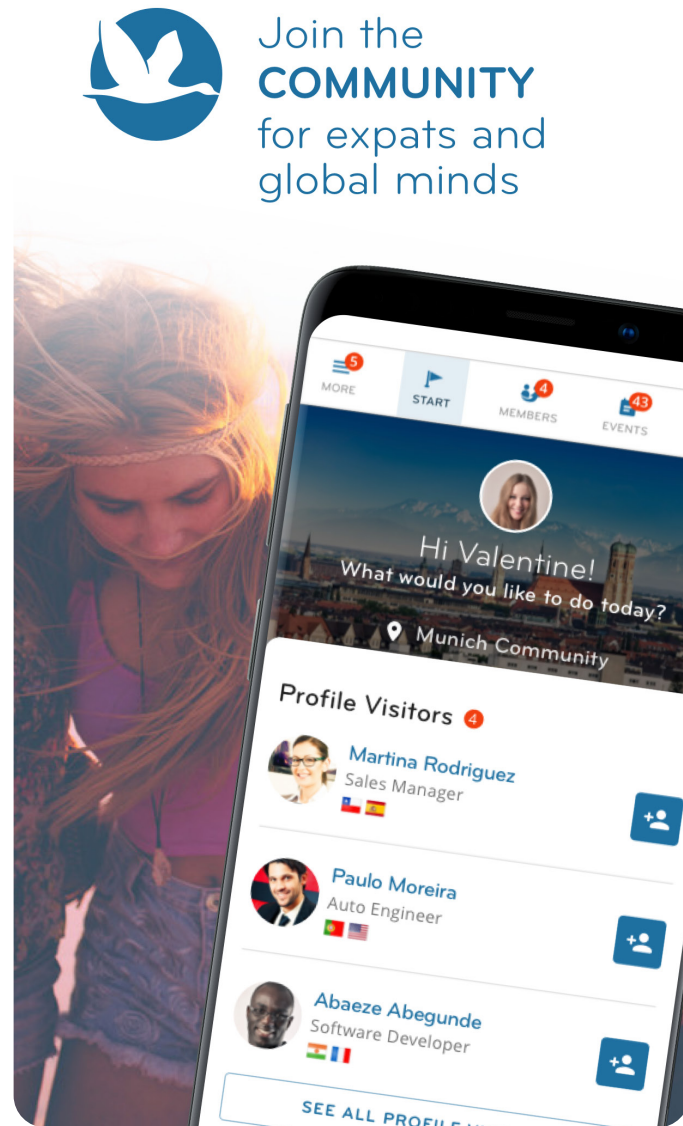
Strengths
- Communities by city.
- Networking opportunities.
- Possibility of attending events.
- Information about cities and countries with statistics available for free on the website.
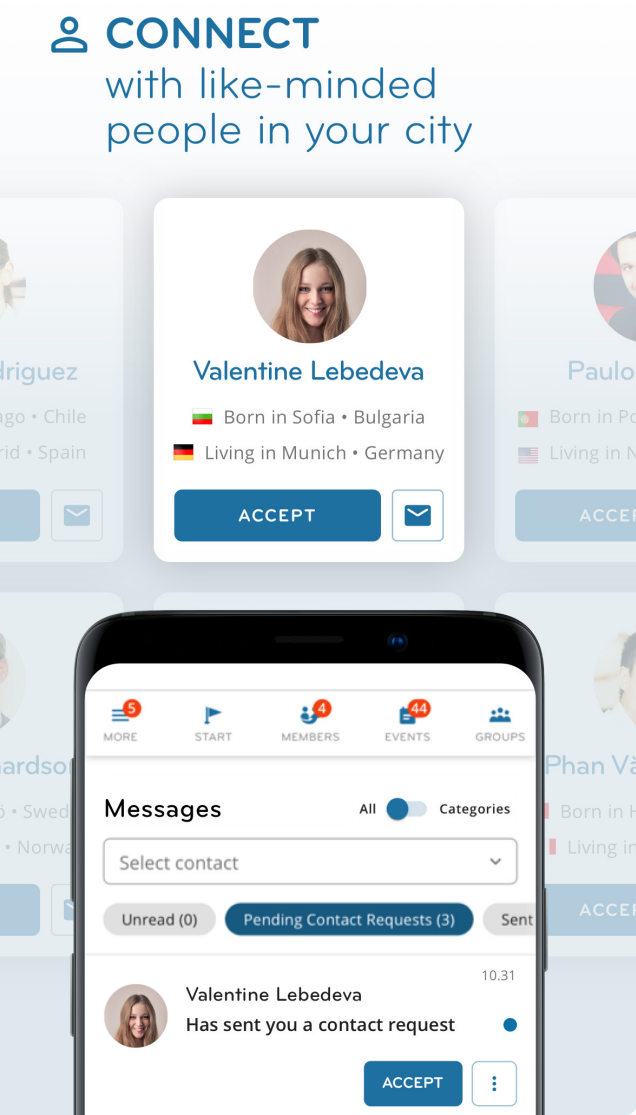
Weaknesses
- Need for approval to enter a community, with an unclear process or guidelines.
- Technical issues with the app.
- Poor refund policies and customer support.

Archer Relocation

It was founded in 2015 by Emily Archer, an Australian based in Berlin. Their main goal is to assist migrants moving to Berlin and other cities in Germany, before, during and after their move.
In consequence with this approach, their services are presented in two main categories: Moving to Germany and Settling into Life in Germany. Additional services include packages for families or custom relocation packages aimed at businesses or students.

Description of Services

Moving to Germany
This includes orientation tours and intercultural training (80 EUR per hour), assistance in home search (from 1800 EUR) and accompaniment in immigration procedures like visa and residence permit application (from 400 EUR).

Settling into Life in Germany
This includes assistance with bureaucratic services procedures such as registering home utilities or home address with the authorities (from 85 EUR).

Family and Recreational Needs
This service includes School or Kindergarten search (from 550 EUR), or search for specific services such as Babysitters, Pediatricians, Language teachers, etc. (from 85 EUR).

From the website, it is also possible to book an Online Consultation, which consists in a 45-Minute call where people who are planning their move to Germany can give advice on different topics related to life in that country. This service costs 120 EUR.

Touchpoints

Website
It works as a showcase for the relocation agency, getting to know their services and having the possibility of booking online consultations. Among its functionalities, there is a "Home Search Navigation", which helps users to determine the most beneficial kind of home search for them by answering a few questions about their visa and immigration status. There is also a section called "Berlin Blog", offering articles about life in the city.

Social Media
With presence in Facebook, X, Instagram and LinkedIn, they share testimonials and facts about life in Germany.

Mobile App- Move to Germany
Provides free information and guides, a functionality to connect with the expat community and optional expert coaching in case of needing personalized guidance. There are no ratings available on Google Play Store and Apple App Store.
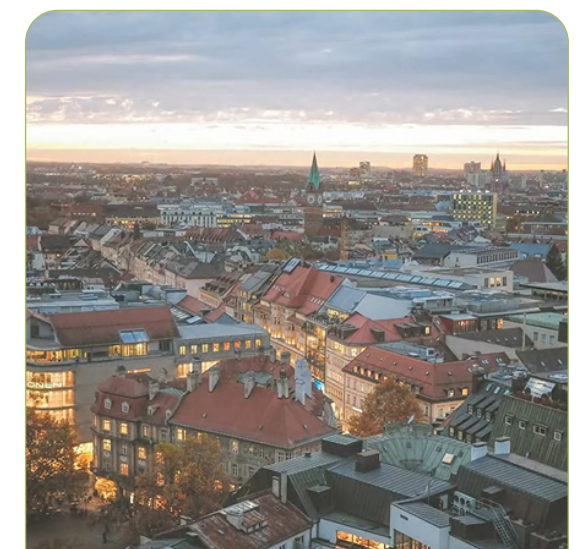
Relocating to Germany?

We will show you how.

You have come to the right place

Discover Relocate Community Checklist Profile

Strengths
- Diversity of packages and services.
- Presence on different channels, providing useful and curated information.
- Free access to the app and its contents.

Weaknesses
- Focus exclusively on information, without community or networking features, having users rely only on the relocation agency.
- Packages with low accessibility for users who are on a budget, like students.

Dwell Ghana

It is a company founded in 2009 by Angela, a woman who arrived in that country a year prior after having lived in the UK and Spain. Dwell Ghana offers relocation and home search services in the African country. According to their website, they are recognized as one of the leading relocation companies in the region. For over a decade, they have accompanied corporate and private clients who are settling in Ghana.

Values, Mission and Vision:

Dwell Ghana is guided by the promise of providing an excellent level of service, working with transparency and inside the legal framework, following the necessary procedures. Their expertise is something that their clients can rely on, delivering flexible and customizable services.
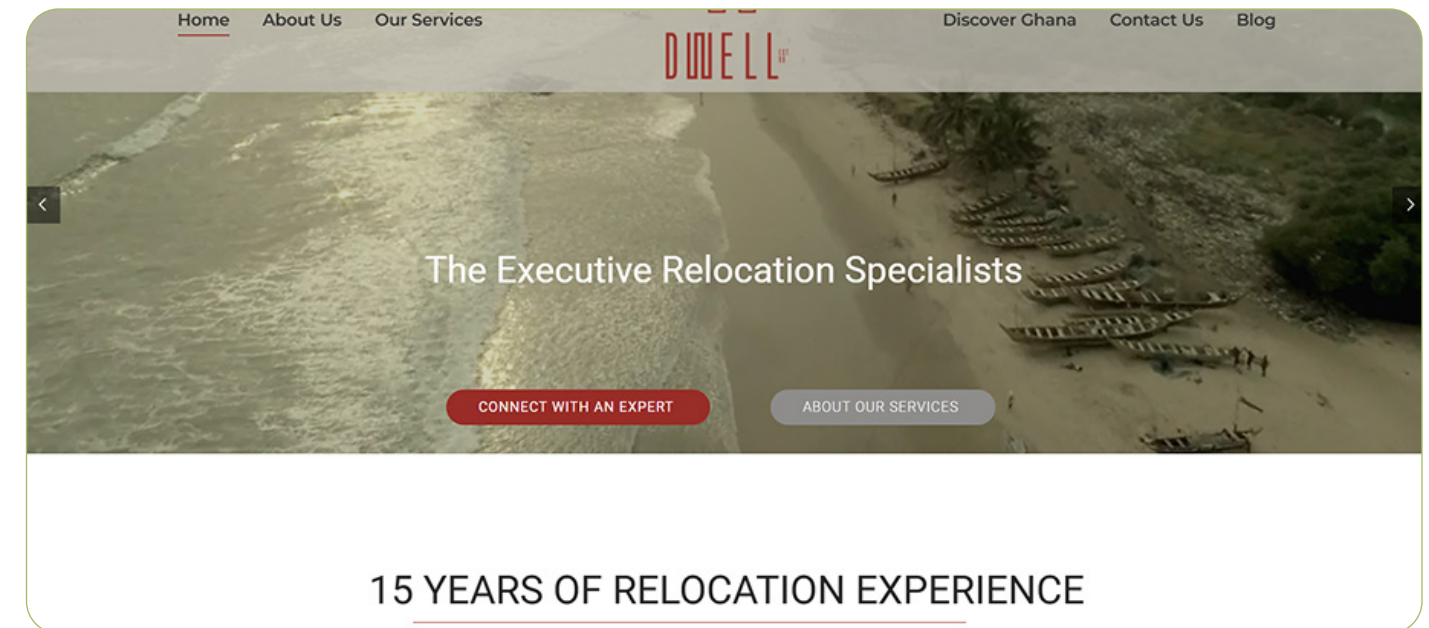
Their vision is to be the most recognized and trusted relocation company in Ghana, whereas their mission is to deliver impeccable relocation services to all clients.

Description of services

Home search
Assisting users in every aspect of this process, whether they plan to rent or buy.

Orientation program

Aimed at people who are still deciding to move to Accra, this service gives a general idea of life in Ghana's capital city.

School Search
Helping with every step involved in finding a nursery, kindergarten or school for children.

Settling in program
Aiding families to settle into the neighborhood and obtaining many of the necessary services in Ghana.

Cross- cultural training
Program designed to assist with common cultural shocks and transition challenges.

Departure Services
Helping users who are departing Ghana to ensure a smooth transition.

Immigration
Helping with immigration procedures to move and settle in Ghana.

Additional support services
Assistance in miscellaneous services to ensure a smooth and stress-free transition.

Touchpoints

Website
Its main functionality is to promote the company and attract potential clients, providing information about their services. Besides, there is a "Discover Ghana" tab, which presents basic information about the country, 360° views of some neighborhoods in Accra, as well as the possibility to download a Living in Ghana Free guide. Another page inside the website is a Blog, where information and tips about living in the country are posted.

Social Media
Dwell Ghana is present in LinkedIn, Facebook and Pinterest, where they mainly promote their services, offer available housing options, promote the country or, in the case of Pinterest, post images about décor, design, arts and crafts, fashion and culture in Ghana.

Dwell Ghana. (2023). [Website Homepage]. Retrieved from Dwell Ghana (https://www.dwellgh.com/)
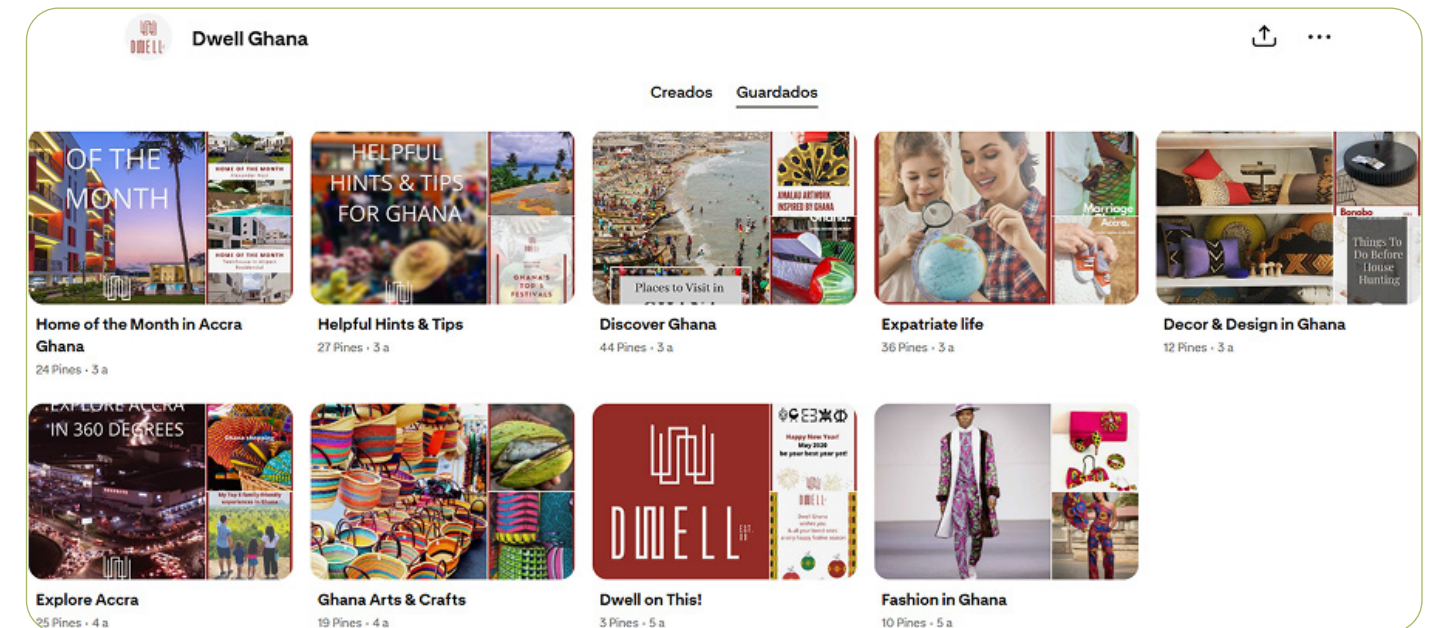
Dwell Ghana (n.d.). [Pinterest Boards on Dwell Ghana's profile]. Retrieved from Pinterest (https://uk.pinterest.com/dwellgh/)

Strengths
- Wide range of services for workers and families.
- Cross-cultural training
- Promotion of the country as an appealing place to live in
- Provision of departure services in the case of leaving the country.
- Presence on different channels with strategic information for each.

Weaknesses
- Due to the nature of their services, there is no promotion or creation of a community.
- Does not foster interaction or connections between users.

Networks and Relocation Companies

Expatica

It is an online platform founded in the Netherlands and launched in 2000 by Bram Lebo, Mark Welling and Antoine van Veldhuizen. Even though it started as a service for internationals in that country, it has quickly grown beyond that territory, expanding across eleven more countries in Europe, Asia and Africa.
It offers resources and information about settling into a new country. The website includes articles and guides covering a wide range of topics such as immigration, relocation, healthcare, education and insurance. They also offer directories to help internationals connect with services they need. Besides, housing and job offers are published there. These articles are written by a team of certified writers.
According to their website, "Expatica's mission is to provide internationals with information that helps you settle and thrive in a new country."

Website Structure

The website is divided into different sections depending on the country of interest, also counting with a global tab, from where it is possible to browse articles about global tips.
Moving to each country, the user will find quick facts about it, suggested articles as well as three tabs: guides, jobs and directory.

Guides
The website offers the possibility to search for articles in different areas, such as education, finance, healthcare, housing, lifestyle, living, moving, working and directory.
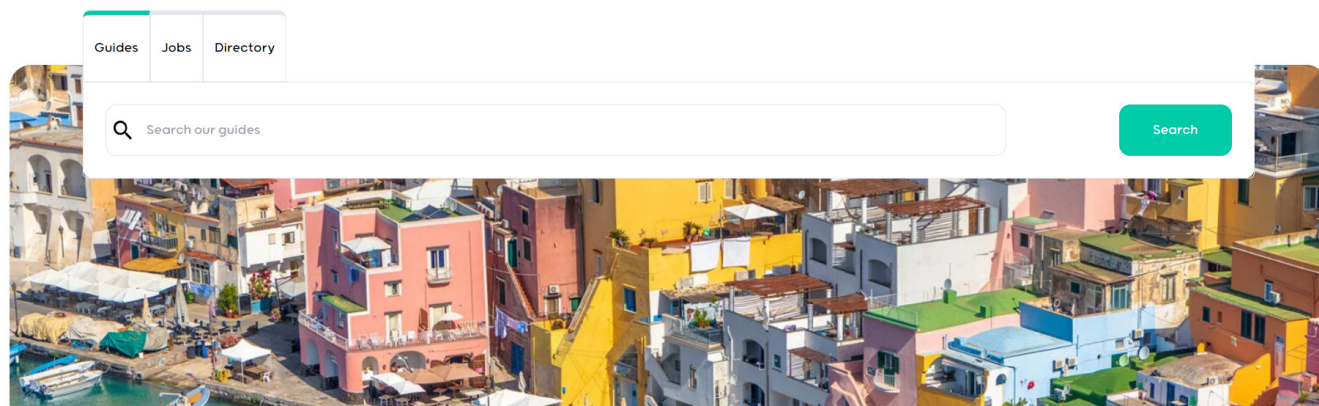
Jobs
In here it is possible to browse the available jobs in the country.

Directory
This section allows users to explore different services in the chosen country in different areas.

Expatica (n.d.). [Webpage dedicated to life in Italy]. Retrieved from Expatica Italy. (https://www.expatica.com/it/)

Touchpoints

Besides the website, Expatica is present in social media (Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn). Their content is totally focused on directing users to their website, presenting article previews with direct links.

Expatica. (n.d.). [Section dedicated to Italian culture and entertainment]. Retrieved from Lifestyle in Italy: holidays, cuisine, things to do | Expatica (https://www.expatica.com/it/lifestyle/#culture-entertainment)

Strengths
- Guides and detailed information for some countries.
- Job search support.
- Constantly updated blog and newsletter, keeping users invested on the website.
- Diversity of contributors with international backgrounds to the website.

Weaknesses
- Limited amount of country pages on the website, focused on European and Asian countries, leaving out the Americas, Africa and Oceania.
- Lack of variety in the social media contents, as they are focused on creating traffic to the website.
- The website is information-focused, and lacks community features.

Expat.com

It is a platform founded in 2005 by Julien Faliu, when he decided to live abroad and realized that there was not much information available about expat life. With over 3 million members, it provides information, advice, networking opportunities and services. According to their website, it is an essential tool for a successful migration journey.

Website Structure

Guides
About the main expat concerns: visas, housing, healthcare, jobs, etc.

Magazine
Created to explore the latest news and trends of global mobility.

Forums
Allowing users to share experiences and insights with one another.

Calendar
Showcasing upcoming and past events, as well as giving the possibility of creating an event.

Practical tools
Business directory, property and jobs listings, services for specific needs.

Photo Gallery
With images about life abroad.
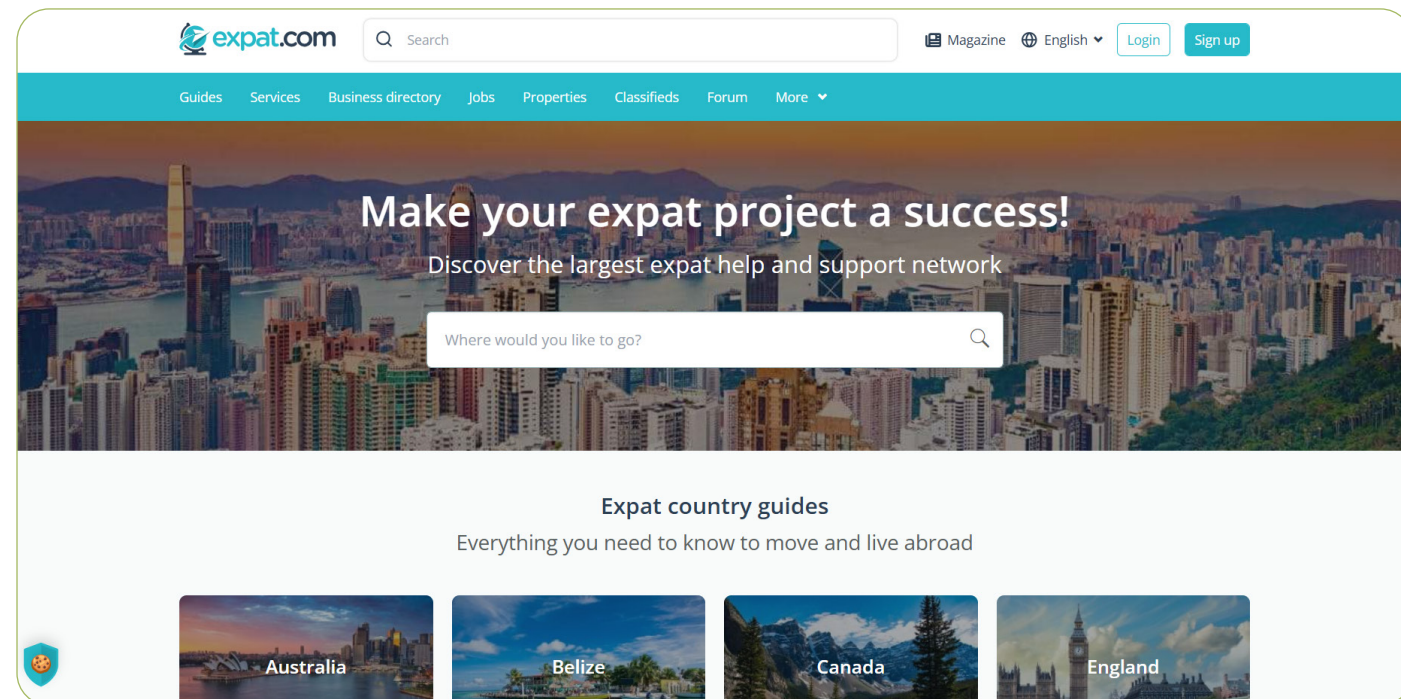
Expat.com. (n.d.). [Website Homepage]. Retrieved from Expat.com: community, country guides and services for expats (https://www.expat.com/)

Touchpoints

Apart from the website, Expat.com is present in different social media, like: Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram, where their posts are dedicated to directing users to their platform. Besides, some posts show testimonies of life abroad.
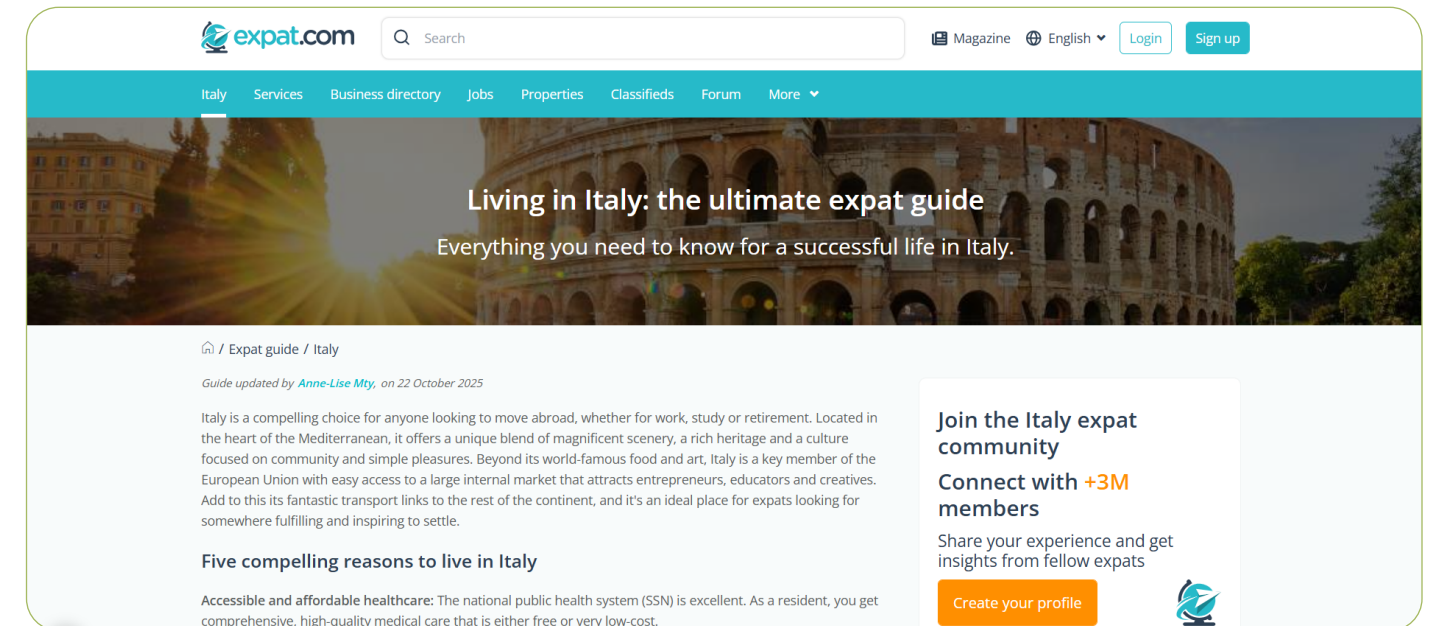
Expat.com. (n.d.). [Webpage about life in Italy]. Retrieved from Living in Italy- the ultimate expat guide- Expat.com (https://www.expat.com/en/guide/europe/italy/)
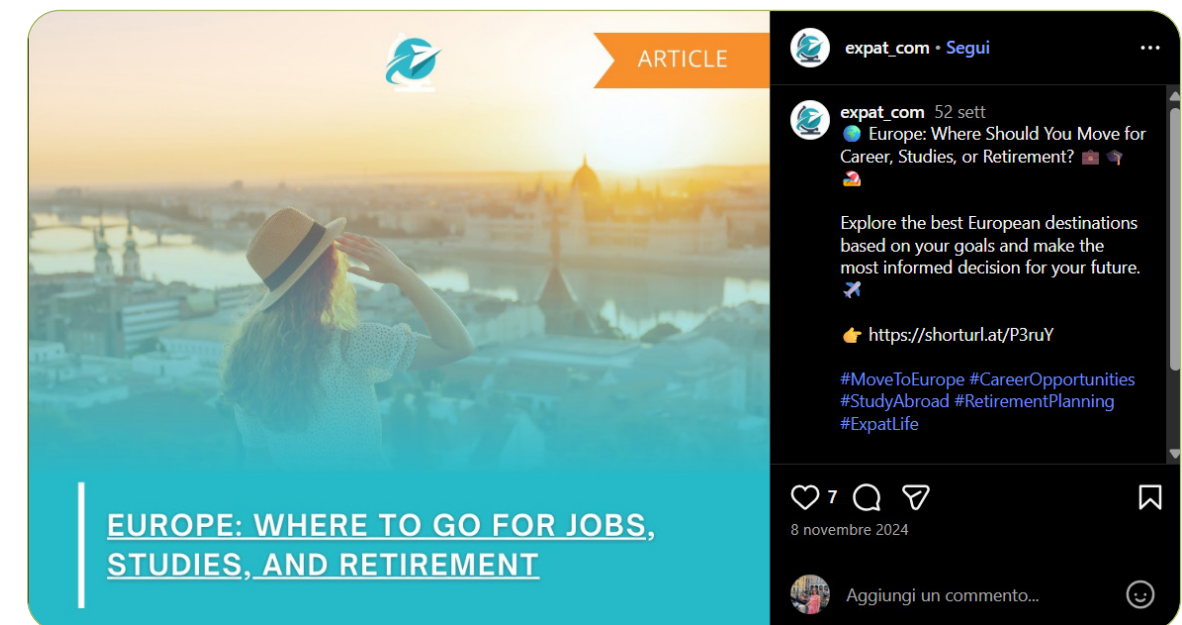
Expat.com (November 8th, 2024), [Instagram post]. Retrieved from Instagram (https://www.instagram.com/p/DCGv0xPCEdK/)

Strengths
- Guides and detailed information for a variety of countries.
- Interaction between users is encouraged through the forum functionality and the possibility to create events in a city.
- Possibility to connect with other people through the website.
- Updated news and trends about international mobility.

Weaknesses
- Although the events functionality is a strength, the page lacks filters for city or country, and it is necessary to browse on a world map to find relevant events by location.
- The user interface lacks hierarchy and might be overwhelming, as the website presents all its functionalities at once.

Mobile Apps

SettleIn

This App was designed to teach and learn about refugee resettlement to the United States during the first three months of stay. Through gamified lessons, it covers a wide range of topics regarding immigration and relocation. It is available in many languages, giving users the possibility to view content in their native language.

Gamification

This strategy keeps users engaged and motivated, giving them the chance to revisit lessons or skip around to find the most relevant lesson. Lessons are organized in an interactive way, with videos and tests to track users' knowledge, providing badges when certain milestones are achieved.
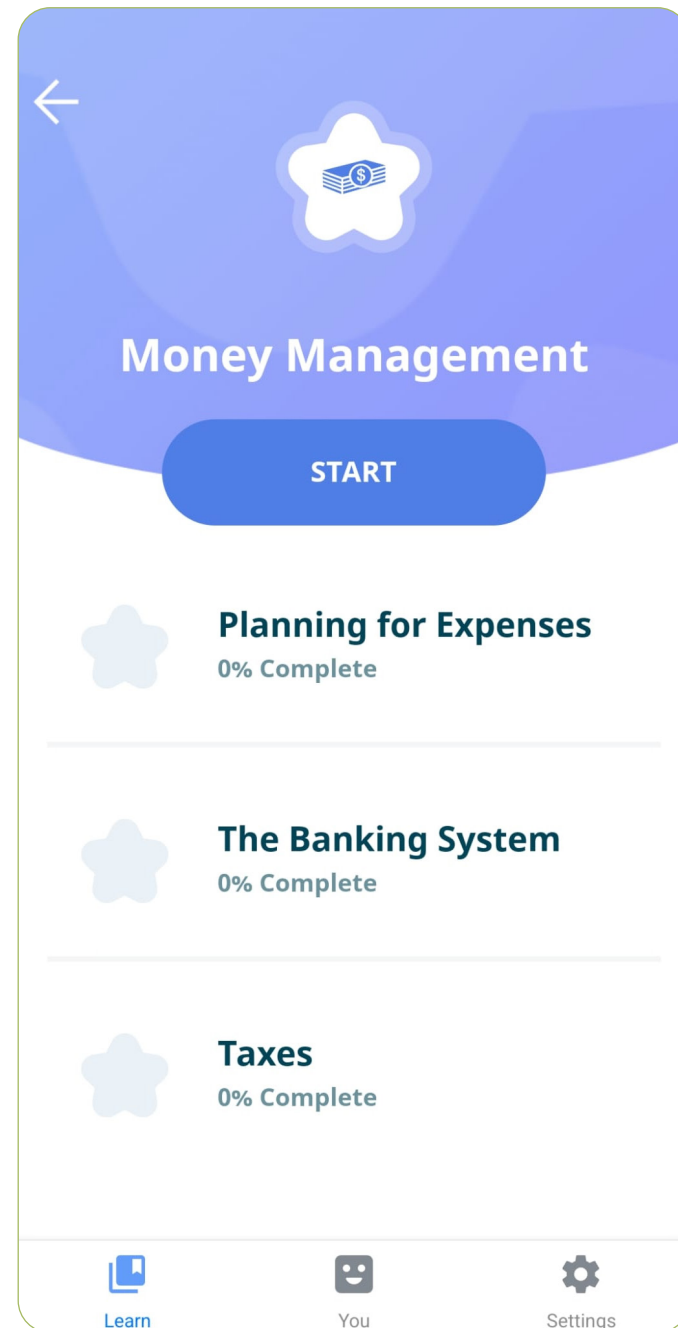
Contents

The App is divided into various sections related to relocation in the United States; the categories are:

- Resettlement Basics
- Traveling to the United States
- Your Resettlement Agency
- Working in the United States
- Housing
- Money Management
- Learning English
- Health and Hygiene
- Education
- U.S. Laws
- Cultural adjustment

Touchpoints

The app has a landing page, as well as a website from the organization responsible for creating it, providing information and resources about the resettlement process and cultural orientation.

Strengths
- Clean and consistent interface.
- Gamification to provide information in a dynamic and easy to understand way.
- Use of videos to explain aspects about life in the United States.
- Availability of the information in many different languages, not only in English.

Weaknesses
- Lack of a summary section after completing the units, as for checking the information again, it is necessary to retake the short quizzes related to each topic.
- Some section titles might be unclear when explaining each section's content.

SettleIn App. (n.d.). [Home screen and lessons about money management]. Retrieved from mobile app.
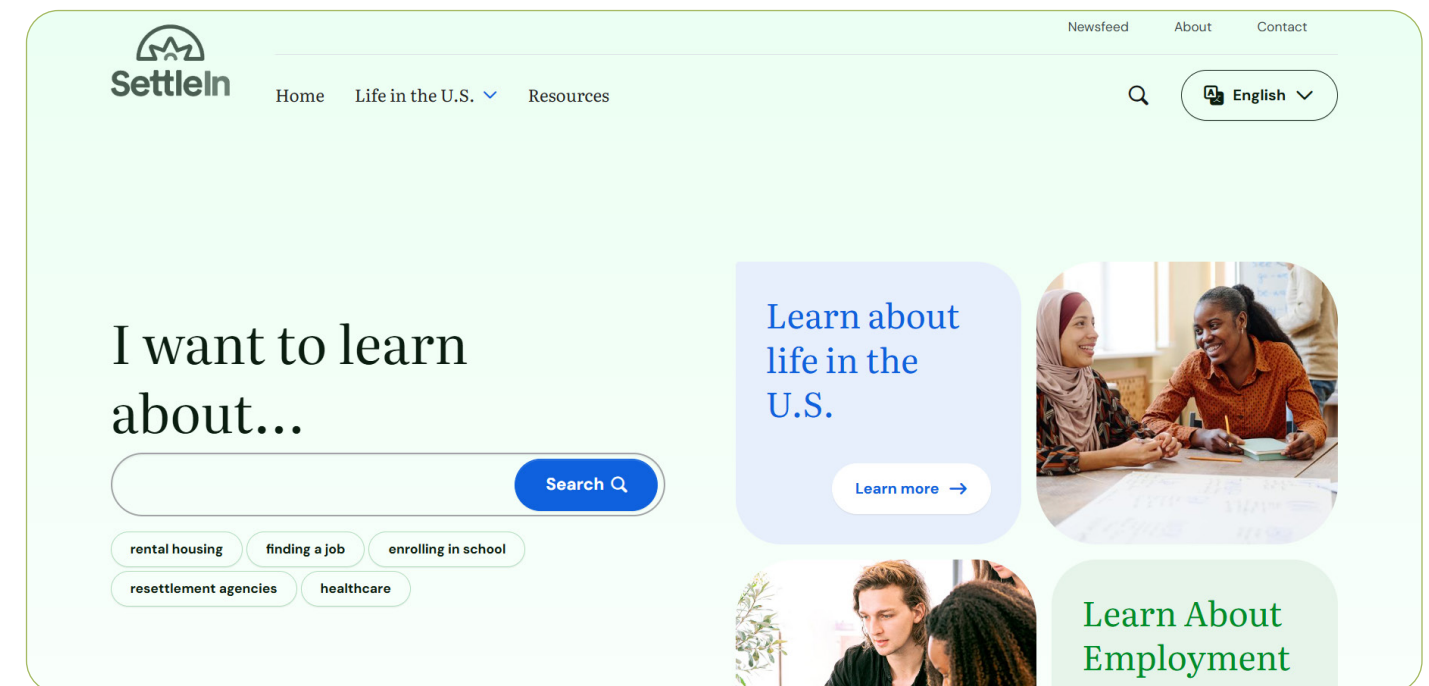
SettleIn U.S. (n.d.). [Website Homepage]. Retrieved from SettleIn US (https://www.settleinus.org/)

International Student App UK

The App was developed by Expert Self Care, in collaboration with Student Minds, the UK's student mental health charity, student support teams, and international students from the University of the West of England and the University of Lincoln. It works as a resource for anyone supporting international students in the UK, providing well-being information, tips for settling in and links to support, ensuring the best possible experience.

Well-being

The app has a focus on mental health and wellbeing for students, through the following functionalities:

- Health education, explaining to students what to do when they are concerned or in crisis.
- Promotion of safe self-care, offering practical tips on topics that might affect students' health and wellbeing.
- Signpost services and other support, providing useful resources and indicating how to get help when needed.

Customization

The App works in partnership with different universities in the United Kingdom, giving them the possibility to subscribe to their own home and content page on the app. This strategy is possible through concrete actions, such as:

- Branding: Universities can add their institutional branding, increasing visibility and students' sense of belonging.
- Student support: Providing links to student service provision.
- Alternative sources of support: Reducing service pressure, helping students navigate sources as local mental health charities.

The investment in a local customized home and signposting page is £400 per month (+VAT). Whether a university counts with 4000 students or more, the price is £1.20 a year (or less) per student per year.
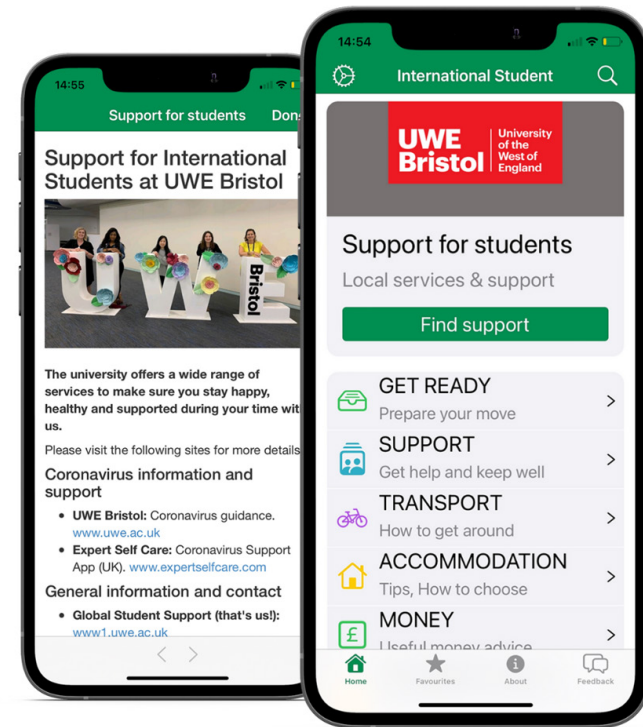
Expert Self Care. (2024). [Image of University customization inside the app]. Retrieved from University Customisation- Expert Self Care (https://www.expertselfcare.com/university-customisation/)

Contents

The app counts with 11 sections accessible from the home page, these are:

- Get ready: Necessary immigration procedures and preparation for a move to the UK.
- Support: Student support services, emergencies, disability support, and more.
- Transport: Tips and information on how to get around London and the UK.
- Accommodation: Information about the housing options and how to choose accommodation.
- Finance: Tips on how to manage money and open a bank account.
- Study skills: Information about academic culture and study tips.
- Student life: Information about student life and well-being.
- People: Focusing on friendship and relationships.
- Languages: Tips for learning English, information about accents and local languages, and language courses and resources.

- Life in the UK: Information about the country's history, values, social norms, laws, humor and places to visit.
- Work: Tips for career planning, how to work being a student and working after graduation.
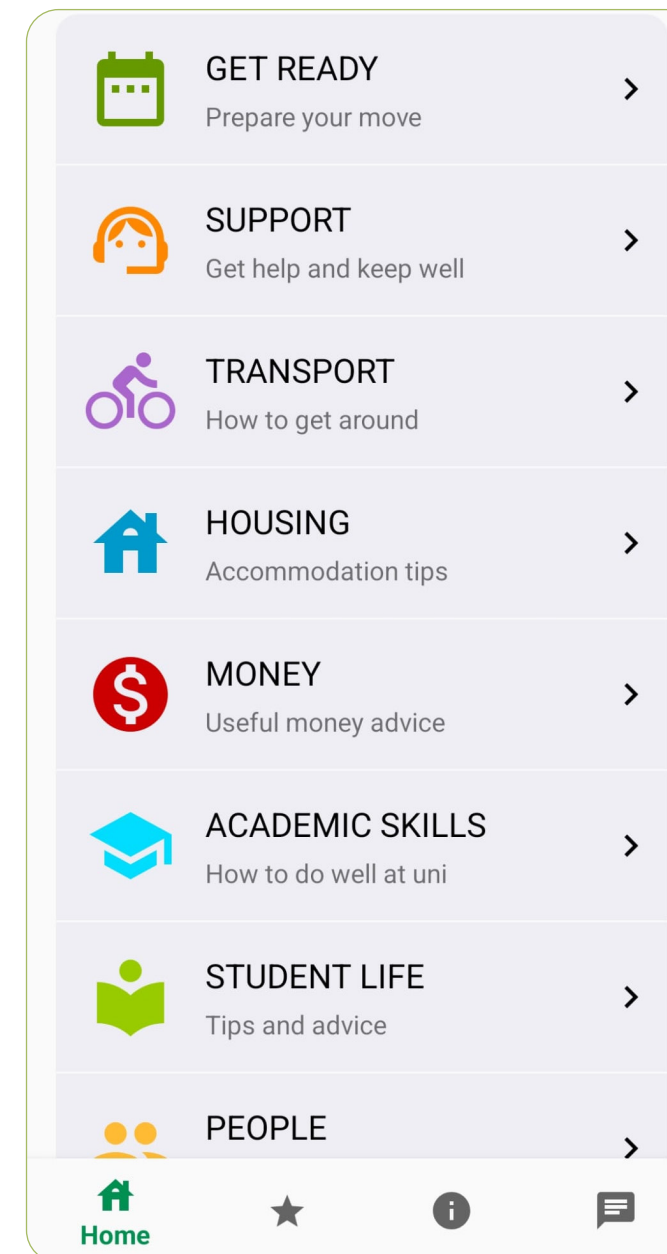
Expert Self Care. (n.d.). [Home screen and lessons about academic life]. Retrieved from International Student App UK.
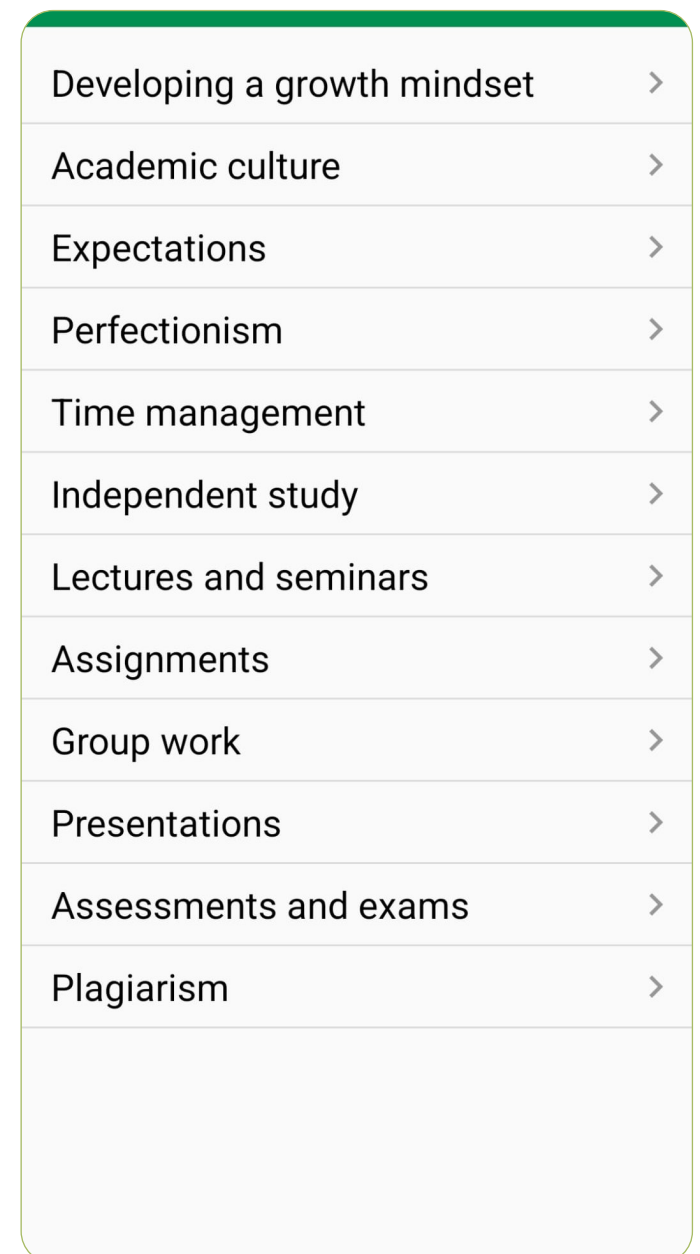
Strengths
- App rich in contents.
- The information is organized in logic categories and hierarchies.

Weaknesses
- Heavy and unappealing interface.
- Excessive use of long lists to order contents.

2- BENCHMARKING EXISTING SOLUTIONS

Welcome to Canada

It is a free mobile app that helps immigrants and refugees to Canada. It provides information and services to plan their settlement journey. It not only helps those who are already in the country, but also those considering and planning to move there. It is possible to browse different provinces and cities to get the basic information and compare cities, based on priorities and needs. Once users are settling in Canada, they can find resources, information and services in the local area.

It was designed in collaboration with key stakeholders, like immigrants, refugees, community organizations, local government, technologists and settlement service providers.

Functionalities

The app's focus is to present Canada's cities and compare them, to help users make a better decision for the place they are going to live in. For each city, there is a tab named "Things to do right away", containing tasks for settling into a new community, and another named "Welcome to [City Name]", explaining social customs for getting around.

The city comparison section allows users to choose two cities in Canada, providing information about climate, demographics, getting around, housing, childcare cost, jobs, and special aids for Ukrainian citizens. There is also an explore tab, informing users about crucial aspects of daily life, such as: education, healthcare, money and banking, housing, employment, legal system and immigration, driving, family and specialized support, and information for Ukrainians.

Strengths
- Clean and consistent interface
- Polished use of photos and graphic elements

Weaknesses
- Complex and confusing use, as it is organized by city and not by category contents (accommodation, transportation, procedures, etc)
- The use of a quiz to recommend contents affects negatively the experience, as some contents become harder to find
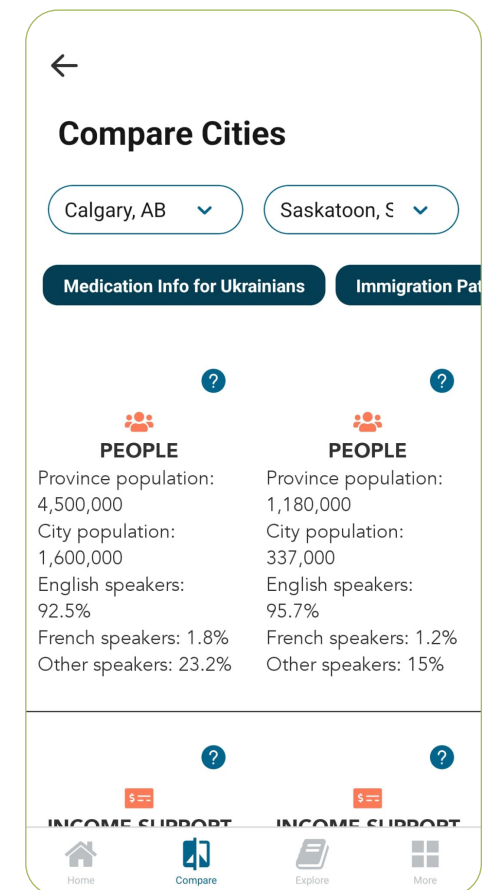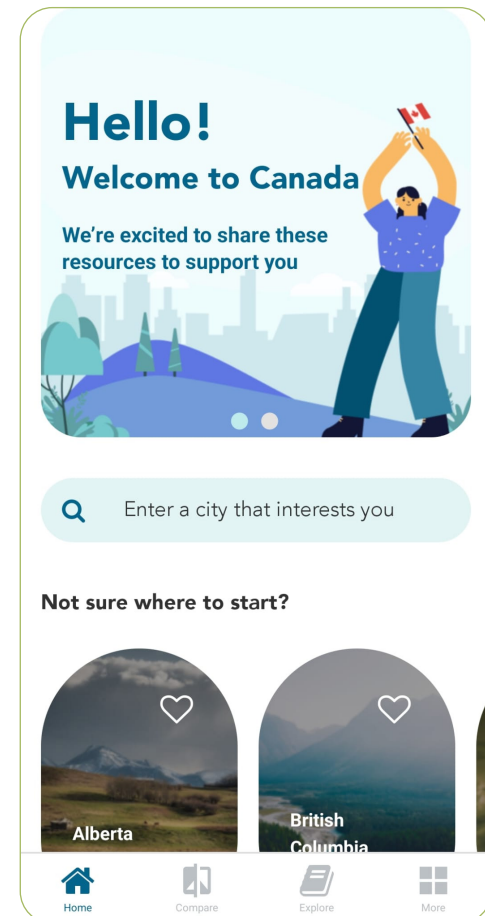
PeaceGeeks Society (n.d.). [Home screen and city comparison features]. Retrieved from Welcome to Canada App

Friends International

It is an app aimed mainly at international students living in the UK. It was created by Friends International, a Christian charity seeking to grow friendship and faith with students in the UK and Ireland. They provide spaces to meet people and create community, giving international people the opportunity to experience local culture, whether they are Christian or not.

Functionalities

The app offers the possibility to find local events and activities, access a guide to the UK, read international student blogs, watch free wellbeing videos, register for courses and create an account to meet local people.

LifeUK

The app also includes a free guide for international students living in the UK, containing guides for topics such as culture shock, British food, health service, public transport, common expressions in English, etc.

Touchpoints

Website
Its main functionality is to show the charity's work, through their mission, latest news and contact section. It also offers information about services for international students, promoting the app and other projects aimed at them. The volunteer Section invites people to join the charity as a host, volunteer or fundraiser. Finally, the Church Resources Section involves information and materials more linked to religion.

Social Media
They are present on different social media platforms, like Facebook, X (Twitter), Instagram and YouTube. Their posts show testimonials and events organized by the charity, going beyond the app itself.
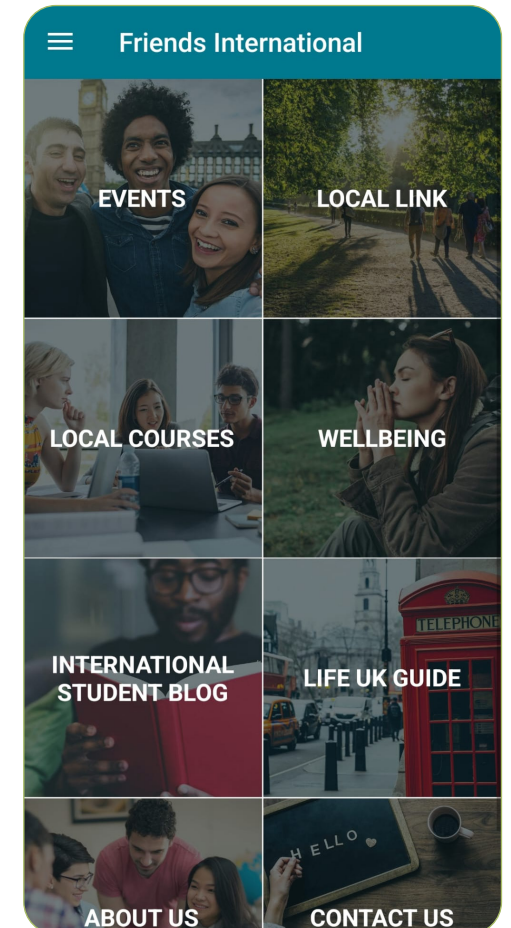
Friends International (n.d.). [Home screen]. Retrieved from Friends International App.

Strengths
- Contains a booklet full of information about life and culture in the United Kingdom.
- Provides events and networks to connect with locals.

Weaknesses
- Poor hierarchy of contents in the booklet.
- The index might result to be too extensive.
- Some consistency errors with graphic elements.

Goin' Connect

It is the leading social community platform for universities, used to engage and support students on their university journey. It was founded by Lars Molenaar, Cornelis den Hartog and Jan Thij Bakker.

Its main goal is making sure students have friendships prior to getting to the university, feeling already emotionally attached to it. According to their website, they are the largest student community platform, with over 1 million messages exchanged. In this platform, international students can create connections with people from their home university and other universities.

Functionalities

Community 1 to 1 connection
Whether it is to seek advice, collaborate on a project, or chat, this module enables collaboration and networking through 1-1 interactions.

World Connect Map
Showcases members' locations. This allows students to browse the map and connect with colleagues from specific regions.

Group Chats
Offers the possibility to join, create or manage group chat rooms. Like this, there is an engagement in topic-specific conversations and more collaborative interactions between students.

Gamification Experience
The onboarding experience is enhanced through a series of engaging activities that motivate connection and profile customization.

Goin' Abroad Network Journey

Goin' Connect's main group of clients are universities worldwide, whose international team has the possibility join the platform, following these steps explained on the website:

1. **Kickstart the Journey:** The process starts by scheduling a meeting with the Goin' Team, which will provide insights and the opportunity to become part of the network.

2. **University Listing:** The Goin' team ensures that the institution is listed, allowing students to identify it as a departing university.

3. **Launch Phase:** The university is equipped with materials to invite their outgoing students to the network.

Touchpoints

Website
It serves as a showcase for the project and a way to promote the network with different universities that might be interested in joining it, providing testimonials and information about the main functions of the app.

Social Media
Goin' is present in LinkedIn, a platform used to promote the company, its advantages and products, and feature notorious clients.

Reviews

Goin' Connect is available to download in Google Play Store and App Store. It has been downloaded over 50,000 times.

Google Play Store rating

4/5

★★★★☆

Apple App Store rating

4,2/5

★★★★☆

Positive Reviews

Great way to connect.
"This app is very cool! I had some technical issues, but they have a great team to help you figure out the problem and fix it."

– Slwebb, January 19th, 2022

Nice app
"Great concept, should reach a bigger audience soon."

– A_S_, December 3rd, 2024

Negative Reviews

Can't select a city.
"I can't select any city in the profile."

– Timmy, December 26th, 2024

Too Much Lag
"When I start conversation with others this is just stuck and not so smooth"

– Amlan, May 12th, 2023.
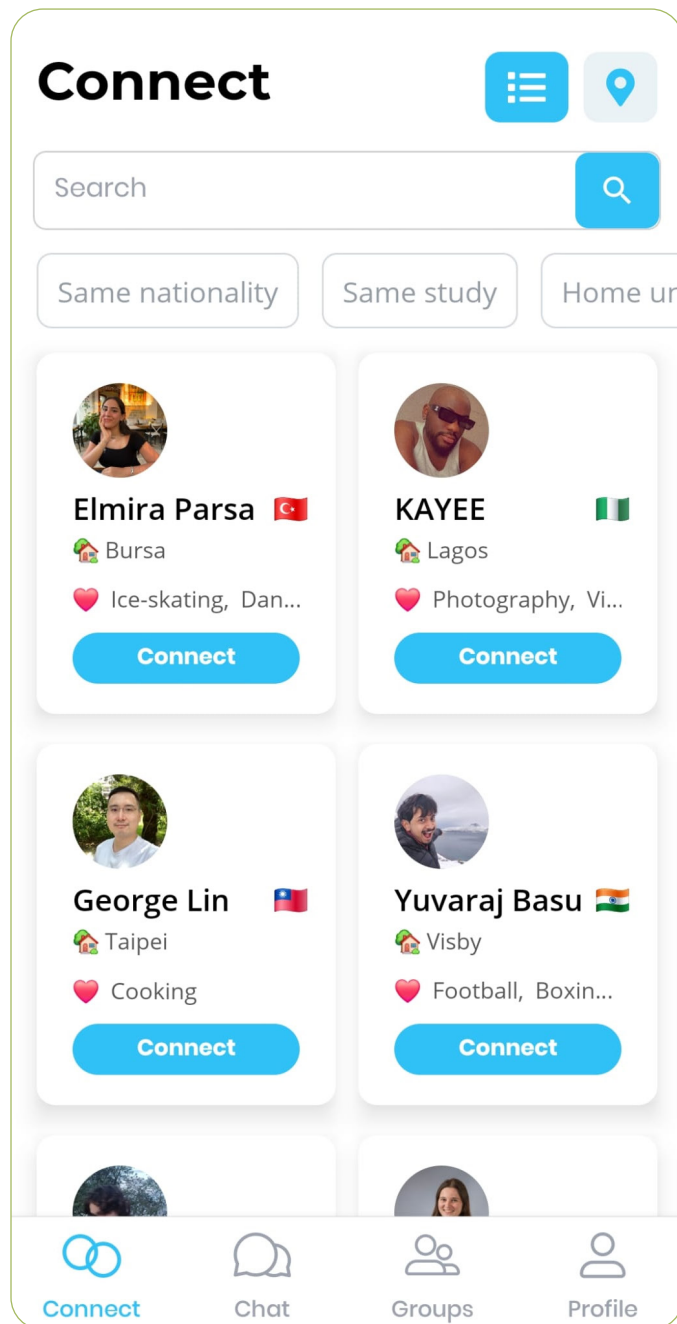
Goin' Connect (n.d.). [Connect and group tabs]. Retrieved from Goin' Connect App
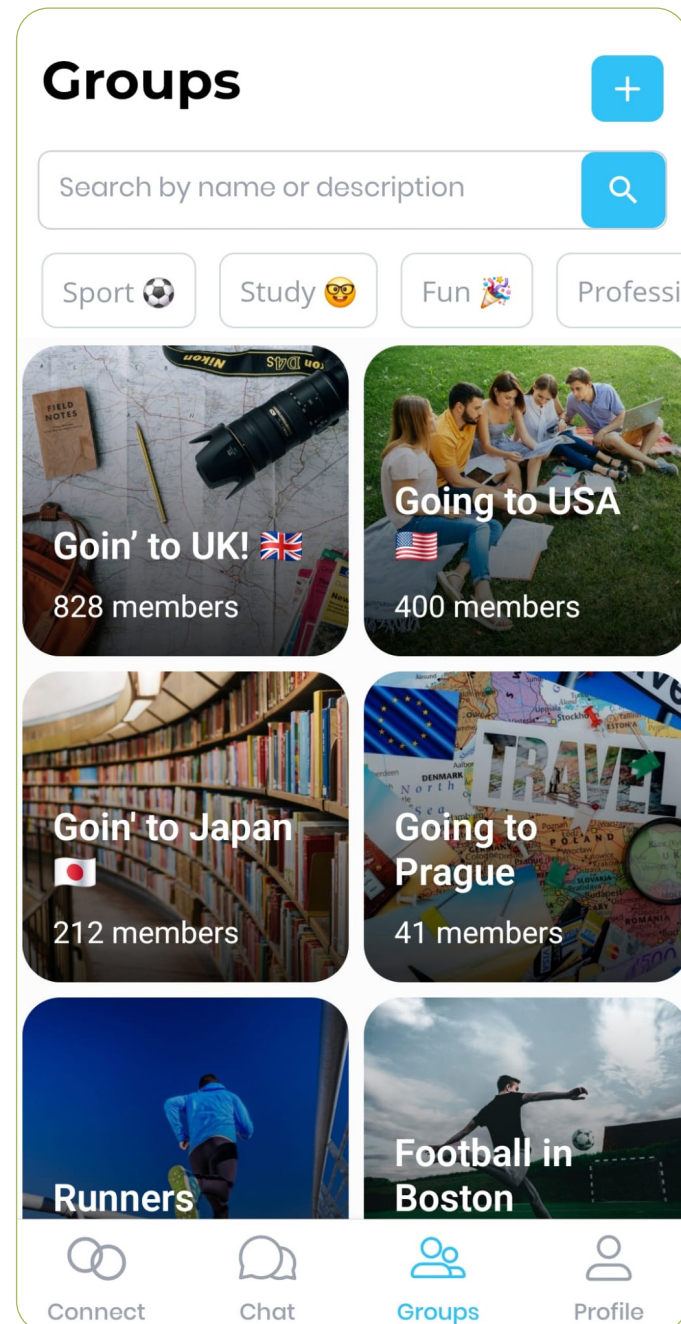
Strengths
- Community features, encouraging users to join groups and connect with other students.
- Useful tool for knowing people who are going to the country or already settled there before travelling.
- Use of badges and levels to encourage users to keep using the app and completing their profile.

Weaknesses
- Lack of information about the country and city of destination, as its focus is community and networking.
- It is only known by some students (usually the ones who are not part of a mobility agreement and go to study abroad by themselves).

Therapy Services

Transiti.net

Transiti offers psychological support and online therapy for Italian citizens living in international mobility and who find difficult situations linked to their new context or being far from home. Since 2017, a research and therapists group work in the development of strategies to support Italian expats who are struggling. Their business uses technology as a tool to respond to their needs.

Services

They offer a Therapeutic Reception service, through a first, free and customized interview. This way, users can understand how an online psychological path works. With the support of a psychologist, specific needs are established, as well as the most suitable Transiti Psychotherapist for each person. These services are offered to people and companies.

Prevention Services
Through free self-help instruments and routes like career counseling, cultural adaptation, and stress management, their goal is to keep expats' psychological well-being in the most stressful moments.

Orientation Services
Life Design
It is an innovative model for career counseling, emphasizing the evolution of people, society and economy.
Career Counseling
It is a brief consulting service. Its goal is to provide people with effective instruments to face autonomy, and future professional changes.

Transiti Groups
Sage spaces, guided by highly qualified professionals, responding to the needs of Italian expats and people who are on an expatriation trajectory.

Care Services
Helping patients take care of their mental health and find balance, serenity and consciousness.

Recognizing discomfort and its symptoms due to difficult situations related to homesickness is the first step to asking for help. Their personalized psychotherapy routes help expats find the most effective path to recover balance and a healthy lifestyle.

Touchpoints

Website
It serves as a platform for showcasing the service, the team and its values, as well as booking a first free interview and subscribing to a newsletter. There is also an Expat Blog, dealing with current immigration and psychology topics.

Social Media
Transiti.net is present in different social media platforms, like Instagram, Facebook and Twitter (X). There, they post articles about being an expat and immigration, as well as news and updates from the organization.

D-Stanza
It is the platform developed by Transiti to guarantee safety and privacy in the consulting and therapy services. This space was crafted around the idea of a deep and real relationship between patients and therapists, making it like an in-person encounter.

Transiti.net (2025). [Website Homepage]. Retrieved from Transiti- Psicoterapia online e comunità italiane all'estero (https://transiti.net/)

Transiti.net (September 17th, 2025). [Instagram Post]. Retrieved from Instagram (https://www.instagram.com/p/DOtZjcPDllx/?img_index=1)

Transiti.net (January 7th, 2025). [Instagram Post]. Retrieved from Instagram (https://www.instagram.com/p/DEh8HmFTddO/)

Strengths
- Therapy is offered in Italian, which can make users feel more understood and comfortable as they speak their mother tongue.
- They offer different, focused services depending on user needs.

Weaknesses
- Vague information about the cost of service or price ranges according to the type of therapy.
- Lack of information about how the service can be provided to patients who are in different time zones.

Expat Therapy 4U

It is a service, founded more than five years ago by Dr. Martina Paglia, whose mission is to help expats book therapy online with counsellors and therapists across Europe easily and quickly. Their therapists are proficient in English and have high experiences in working with people from different backgrounds.

How it works

1. Users search the directory to find the most suitable therapist.
2. After finding a therapist, it is possible to pick a timeslot and pay for the session.
3. Subsequently, they can encounter the therapist and start working on their goals.

Services

Besides giving expat and culture shock therapy, they help with other issues people might be coping with, such as addictions, anxiety, depression, self-esteem, personality disorders, relationships, sleep disorders, stress and trauma.
These services are aimed at different targets. For example: children, couples, families, groups, etc.
It is possible to find therapists by location and language in different European countries and cities, as well as some places in Asia like Hong Kong, Singapore, United Arab Emirates and Dubai.

Booking and Payment

All appointments are made online, by searching the therapist directory on the website and filtering by type of therapy, issues, client type and location. Depending on the therapist's availability, the meeting can be booked in-person, on video call or by telephone. Subsequently, patients are asked to fill in a form with billing details and additional information about their concerns. Therapists set their rates independently, so the platform itself does not charge fees to clients.

Touchpoints

Website
It is the main contact point between the platform, its associated therapists and clients. It offers information about the services provided, a blog, a contact form, a support center, recruitment for therapists who want to join the platform and a personal area for both psychologists and patients.

Social Media
Expat Therapy 4U is present in social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook and LinkedIn, where it posts self-care and mental health tips and motivational quotes.
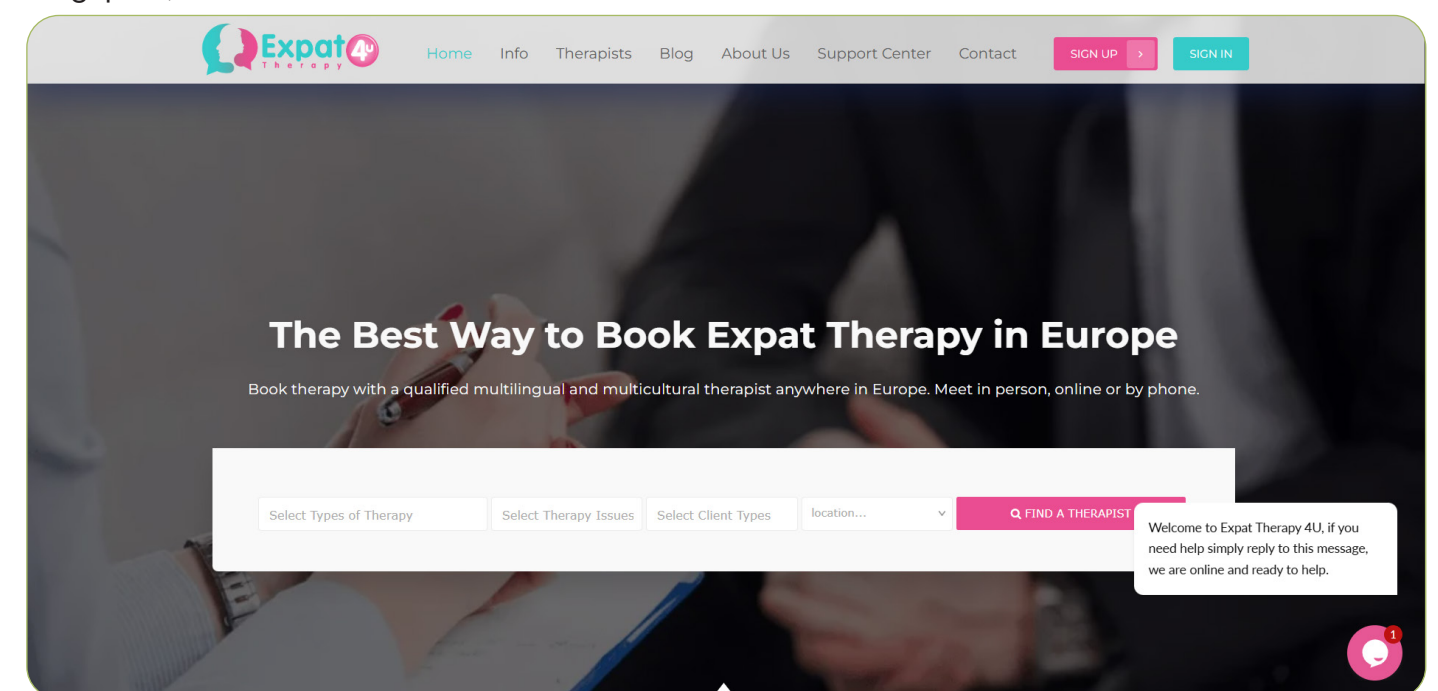
Expat Therapy 4U (2025). [Website Homepage]. Retrieved from English-speaking therapists for expats- Expat Therapy 4U (https://www.expatherapy4u.com/)

Comparison Matrix

After analyzing the different case studies, a comparison matrix was developed according to a set of criteria that the project to be developed should comply with:

1. **Community creation:** Are there concrete actions or functionalities that foster integration among people in the city/country or destination?
2. **Connections between users:** Does the service encourage users to interact with each other?
3. **Reliable information about destination:** Does the service provide enough information from trusted sources about life in the destination? Is the information categorized and easy to understand and navigate?
4. **Open and Accessible service:** Is there any free information available? Do users need paid membership to access services?
5. **Innovative interaction patterns and use of technology:** Is the content dynamic? Does the service use innovative technologies?
6. **Engagement and motivation for users:** Are there different and curated contents across channels? Are there any strategies to keep users motivated and invested?

	Community creation	Connections between users	Reliable information	Open and Accessible	Innovative patterns	Engagement and motivation	Total
InterNations	4	5	5	1	2	2	19/30
Archer Relocation	1	1	5	3	3	4	17/30
Dwell Ghana	2	1	5	4	2	3	17/30
Expatica	2	1	4	5	2	1	15/30
Expat.com	4	4	5	5	2	2	22/30
SettleIn	1	1	5	5	4	5	21/30
International student app UK	2	1	5	5	2	2	17/30
Welcome to Canada	1	1	4	4	2	1	13/30
Friends International	4	3	5	5	3	2	22/30
Goin' Connect	5	5	2	5	4	4	25/30
Transiti.net	4	1		4	4	3	16/30
Expat Therapy 4U	1	1		3	3	2	10/30

CHAPTER 3

Knowing the Latin American students

Interviews

A series of semi structured interviews aimed at Latin American students were conducted with the goal to collect qualitative data on the experiences of Latin American people who had recently moved to Italy to do a mobility program at Polytechnic of Turin.
An additional goal of this research was to better know the target audience and their needs, as well as to begin a characterization of the key places of the City of Turin where encounters between foreigners, especially from Latin America are facilitated.

Interviewees Profile

Mexico
2 students

8 Total interviews

Colombia
5 students

Ecuador
1 student

Female
50%

Male
50%
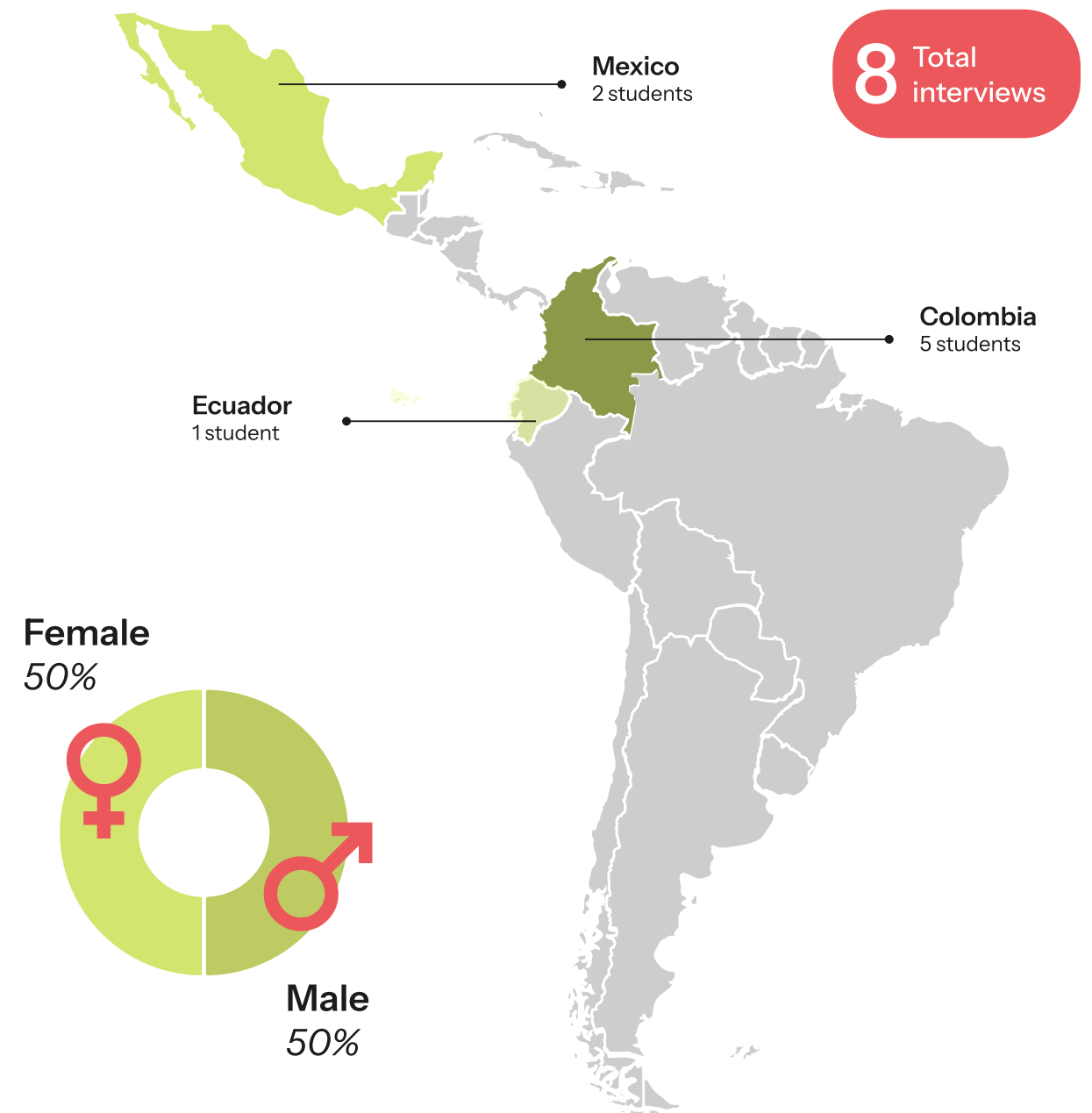
Some of the interviews were conducted online, and some others were done in presence. Their average duration was 30 minutes, and the structure was divided into thematic sections.

The first part included broad questions where personal data was collected: name, age, country of origin and occupation, as well as broad information about their lives in Italy: how long they had been living in the country and their motivations to study there.

Subsequently, issues related with the pre-travel process were discussed, asking the interviewees about their main sources of information about life in Italy, as well as the emotions linked to the preparation of the trip.

Following the typical journey of these students, the next questions dealt with their first moments in the country (expectations, faced difficulties, main cultural shocks, adaptative activities).
Lastly, the interview ended with a series of questions regarding personal relations, both with people from their countries- or from Latin American roots- and with Italians.

Valeria Jiménez   Mexico | 23 years old

Home University   UNAM (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México)

Occupation   Industrial Design student, doing an exchange year at Polytechnic of Turin

Time in Italy   Less than three months

Why did you decide to study in Italy?
I wanted to get out of Latin America. Of the countries with which my university has an agreement, the destinations that most caught my attention were Germany, Spain, and Italy. I was looking at the study plans, and the one in Germany seemed interesting, but it was quite expensive. In the end I settled between Spain and Italy. I had already been studying Italian for about 4 or 5 months, I do not have a prominent level, but I had already invested some time in it. So, I thought: "Do I want to stay in my comfort zone?" What really made me decide between Spain and Italy was that, if I went to Spain, everyone would speak Spanish; although some classes would be in English, it would not require the same amount of me as learning another language. On the other hand, in Italy I could challenge myself to learn a new language and, at the same time, improve my English. So, I said: Italy is the option. In addition, the study plan at Polito is vastly different from what we see there, and so far, I have a good foundation to face the classes. I

also like the geographical position of Turin, which is well connected and will allow me to visit other countries. Italy has always been a place I wanted to visit, and that is why I ended up choosing it.
*Apart from its geographical location, the Polytechnic of Turin was the only Italian university where students could take classes in English.

How did you find out about the process to come and live in Italy?
My university has an agreement with the Polytechnic of Turin, so I started looking at the curriculum, rents, and the cost of living here. I first learned about the call for applications from the university, because at the beginning and in the middle of the year, UNAM puts out a call for applications from all the available countries where you can go on an exchange to study, whether for 6 months or a year. Then, they give you three options to choose from, and you must do the task of researching everything: where it is located, the curriculum, quality of life, economy, and health,

everything was done through Google. You have no idea how many times I saw the Polito page, it became one of the tabs I looked at most every day for 3 months. There I saw the requirements, the papers I needed, how to register on the educational portal, and obviously also the entire visa process. The school did help us a lot with this information, but the ones who helped us the most were the students who were here in previous years. A lot of the information I have was given to me by them, for example, the subjects I was going to take, things they recommended I do, cheap supermarkets, areas to avoid. A lot of it was from them, the only thing that the school may have helped us with was the whole visa process.

Did you get all that information verbally from the other students? Or do they have a more structured system for giving you information?
Everything was spoken from start to finish. The university said, "Do you want to go? You will have to figure out how to do it." They only function as a link between universities, school services, and the mobility program. But everything that has to do with your life abroad is managed by you. I was in contact with people who were already here while I was still in Mexico, and with some who had already been here and returned. The university organized some "meet and greet" sessions with students who had already done the exchange; there was a conference where they shared their experience and answered our questions, as well as giving us various tips. But beyond that, I never received a document with specific steps to follow; everything else was up to us.

Tell me more about your visa experience with the Italian embassy in Mexico.
It was a 2–3-month process, where I was uncertain whether they were going to grant me the visa or not. The university did help us, but it was more in the way that if for a certain date you did not have your visa yet, and you were about to start your classes, they pressed the embassy. But it was a process full of distress, because they did not answer e-mails and this year the system changed: all the study visas were done with an intermediary instead of going directly to the embassy, which made the process longer. First, you

had to wait for an answer from the intermediary, indicating a date to go with all your documents. If everything was OK, they passed them to the embassy, but if there was a mistake, you had to make a new appointment. It was stressful because you do not know whether you can buy a plane ticket or not, since the university advised us to not buy it until you have the visa. But we thought that if they gave us the visa 3 days prior to the flight, the ticket would be extremely expensive. So, you had to make a flexible booking for a certain day and hope to have your visa for that moment. There was not a single person who got granted their visa the first time they went. Many of us had to return because they told us we had an issue with one of our documents.

What emotion(s) do you associate with the process you had to prepare for your trip?
If I could sum it up in 3-5 words it would be: uncertainty, excitement, anxiety, freedom, independence. I had never done so many processes on my own. It is not the same going to buy chocolate at the supermarket as having to go without your parents there holding your hand. So, it is freedom, but in the sense of independence, I am already starting to plan my life. Also, like ecstasy in the sense of I am going to go, and I just had this idea that this whole unpleasant experience with the visa was going to pass, and, in the end, I was going to leave. So, there is an explosion of many emotions at the same time, but it works out and here we are.

What were your expectations when you arrived in Italy? (lifestyle, personal and professional achievements, personal relationships)
I was told that Italians – at least in the South – are warmer people, and that people in the North are quite reserved. So, I was hoping it was not so true, but in the beginning, I did feel that way. I would not call it a rejection, but it was a barrier. I was on my own and I could not go crying to my mother, to tell her that people did not talk to me. But overall, I came with zero expectations. There were ten people from my university, from different degrees. Since we came together, we could do different activities together such as welcome weeks, walking across the city and getting to know the

style of the lessons. I believe that, if I came by myself, the adapting process would have been more complicated. I am not saying I already adapted, but I believe that surrounding myself with other people helped me to not feel lonely.

Regarding economic expectations, I knew it was going to be expensive, so I became more aware of my expenses. I even did an Excel file with all of them. I also believe that something surprising was the life path, at least in Mexico City everything is very agitated; instead here, I could not find anything open, because they close from 2 to 4 p.m. Something really shocking to me was also the public transportation system. I am not bothered if I must spend 1 to 2 hours getting from one place to another. My city is enormous- I think three times the size of Turin- as so many people live there, it is necessary to have the means to move 8 million people. Here instead, there are so few people that sometimes the transportation arrives and sometimes it does not. So, I have this love-hate for the transport here.

The city is beautiful, everything is clean, and as for the people, some do not interact with you, and others might help you and give you advice.

What difficulties have you had in adapting to life in Italy?
Socializing, learning a new language, finding a place to live in, spending euros.

How have you overcome these difficulties?
Regarding socializing, I think that when I arrived here, I thought I was not as extroverted as I thought. However, I learned to cope with it, I have a proficient level of English, at least so that everyone understands me. The first 2 weeks where everyone spoke in English it was easier to communicate, and many doors opened for me to socialize with Erasmus people. In classes, I try to go with the flow: I approach little by little, ask how they are or try to speak in Italian, even if it is just saying: "good morning, good afternoon, hello, goodbye." It is precisely the desire to get out of the comfort zone because I could close myself off to meeting people. But one of the reasons why I wanted to come was to meet people outside of my city and country and make friends. I may never see them again, or maybe I will. I want to make this connec-

tion with people who might visit me in Mexico.
Regarding the new language, I took Italian classes at Polito. I have not been very consistent, but the fact that most of the class is Italian has helped me learn, listen, and try to speak it. Also, my landlords, who live next to my apartment, are Italian. So, I must throw myself into speaking, even if I say something that might have nothing to do with it. I think that surrounding myself with people who speak the language is something that has helped me a lot.

Rent has been one of the most complicated things, not just for me. I think for everyone. It is also linked to the fact of spending in euros, because there is the phrase that says, "If you convert, you do not have fun." I see that things cost 1 EUR, 3 EUR, 5 EUR and it is nothing. So, the issue of rent is something super important, because at the end of the day it is the place where you are going to be living. I first came here with Airbnb with another friend, but as soon as she had to leave, I had to pay for both of us, and the budget went up a lot. I had to start looking for a rental, just when there was absolutely nothing and everything was already rented. It is incredible to see the number of people who are looking for a home at the same time as you. As soon as places are published, they are rented, so I had to look in different media: on Idealista, Facebook, Telegram, University pamphlets. But everything has its good and bad side. In the end, I am staying at the Airbnb where I started, because my landlords told me that if I stayed for the whole year, they would lower the rent, but all this learning of 3 weeks where I was looking helped me to know how to ask in Italian if a place is already rented or not. I was very embarrassed to ask if I could visit, so this helped me grow in the sense of realizing that I can do things, it is just a matter of daring to do it. Obviously, I cried about four times, it was a stressful situation where I was alone, without my parents there to help me. But it was worth it, it was the most enriching experience I have had so far.

What have been your main cultural shocks?
Food, in the sense that what is expensive in Mexico is cheap here, and what is cheap there in Mexico is expensive here. Yes, I miss my country a little, my food, and its gastronomy. But I also do not un-

derstand people who are so eager to get imported products from their region. It is better to take advantage of being here and eat and enjoy the local gastronomy. Also, transportation, even students who were here before me told me that it was better to get a bicycle, because it is quite easy to get everywhere with this means. It is within my possibilities to get one, but I also think about where to leave it or tie it up. Another issue is that Mexico is a huge country, so to get from one state to another it takes at least 5 hours, and it is not cheap. If you want to do it, it is at least five hundred Mexican pesos, which is 10 EUR. Here I am surprised how easy it is to move from one region to another, or even to another country. In Mexico, it takes at least 14 hours to get to the border, and here you have this ease and accessibility that fascinates me.

Have you found common ground with your country and Italy?
I considered us a bit rude, in the sense of having a large vocabulary of inappropriate words, but I think that here in Italy they are even more so, they curse a lot.

What activities do you do, or have you done to adapt?
Going to Erasmus events to meet people, hanging out with local friends, staying informed about active events in the city.

How do you find out about activities?
There is this WhatsApp group where they announce events that are going on. I was going at the beginning of the semester, but right now I am going a little less because of university. They also post activities on Instagram accounts. As for local friends, I think I have not yet gone out with anyone from Polito, but with my friends from Mexico we do go out a lot. We see each other at least once a week, at least on the weekends. We go to the market together, to eat out or to prepare food at someone's residence. I feel like we have become a genuinely nice family, we even went on trips to Milan and Genoa. Having this group is like a safe space, I have done most of the activities with them. Obviously, I am excited to do something with those from the Polytechnic, so that we all get to know each other or to go out with other Eras-

mus friends.

Do you know more people from your country here?
Aside from those from my university, I think so. Only at parties, but I do not think we clicked, I have made more Colombian or Venezuelan friends. It is great to see that you are not the only Latino here.

What activities do you usually do with them?
Trips, markets, bazaars, clubs, bars. We have also gone to museums or exhibitions, and school welcome events. When it is someone's birthday in the group we go to eat at a restaurant, obviously on a budget that everyone can fit into. We usually visit unfamiliar places, whether it is food, entertainment, travel, or culture.

Have you done any traditions from your country in Italy?
Not yet unfortunately. We did want to celebrate September 15, which is Independence Day. But since we all arrived at the beginning of September and were getting settled, that day nobody did anything. We did not even go to any Mexican restaurants. Or for example, on Día de Muertos, which is on November 1 and 2, we did not do anything either, I do not know why. Maybe no one wanted to do anything. We also do not feel like there are many Latin events, the only things are salsa, bachata classes or Latin parties where they play reggaeton. But something to do on our own regarding our traditions has not happened yet. We only went to a Mexican store called Tlaloc once. There they sell imported products from Latin America; it was like the most Mexican thing we have done.

How do you communicate with them?
Everything is through a WhatsApp group, even with friends from other countries. We are not the only ones who came on an exchange, at least in Europe. We have friends in Spain, Germany, Türkiye, England, Switzerland, and Japan. I have even made video calls with friends who are in other countries. So yes, a WhatsApp group and Google Meet.

Do you think that connecting with people from your country helps facilitate your adaptation

process? Or do you think it isolates you from your surroundings?

I think both. I only consider my group of friends to be the group with the Mexicans. Now when none of us can agree, I am going to be like "what do I do now?" It is good when we all agree, but if you stay only with that small group, you are isolating yourself from getting to know more. It is good to know that you have someone you can trust who is like your little family here. At least I really like to focus on having more friends apart from those who already came with me, to have the experience of what it is like with other people, whether they are Italian or of other nationalities. I think it can be beneficial in the sense that, for example, when many of us were looking for rent, we all started to look for and support each other. That support is from the Mexican group, you know that, if you need to talk to someone, in that group there is the person who will help you and who is like your family here. The other group is for getting to know, experiencing. So, it is important to be between the two worlds.

How would you define your relationship with the natives of Italy?

I have felt incredibly good, I have not felt that they welcomed me in the sense of we are going to help you, and you are our new foreign friend, but in the sense that I have not felt that rejection. And if there is that rejection, I do not take it personally either, because I know that I am a stranger whom they have known for only two months. In a certain way, I also put myself in their shoes, when at one time I was in Mexico and suddenly someone foreigner arrived, they did not become your best friend right away. I have had a better time than I expected, I feel good and satisfied. I do not feel forced to fit in and that is something that is especially important to me. I have been able to be myself with people who do not know me at all.

For me, anything that happens is a new experience and whatever happens will happen because it is the best for me. In a certain way, I have started to develop a certain affection for them. We Latinos are very warm. I do not feel like I am going to start telling you my most intimate things, I have not gotten to that point. But I do feel like I have someone I can trust who is not from my Mexican social group.

Have you met native people who have helped you in your process of adapting to Italy? How have they done it?

Well, for example, when I was looking for a place to stay, they helped me with Telegram groups. They did not help in the sense of accompanying me, but rather in the sense of: I know these two places, they will help you. Also, in terms of recommendations of places to go out, where to get the best pizza, the best pasta. It is more support in the sense of getting to know the city, cheap places, where to get things, or places to avoid, those.

Manuela Medina
Colombia | 22 years old

Home University — Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, section Bogotá

Occupation — Industrial Design student, doing a double degree in Systemic Design

Time in Italy — Less than three months

Why did you decide to study in Italy?

For the opportunity to graduate with a master's degree and because the program caught my attention.

How did you find out about the process to come and live in Italy?

A friend told me about it and persuaded me to continue investigating. Basically, I kept asking Ricardo and Claudia Estrada*, who are supposed to be the ones who know the most about the subject, especially Ricardo because of his experience here. Also, once Ricardo's wife was there, she is a graduate of Javeriana and had the experience, so she told me the same thing. Additionally, another teacher named Veronica Vergara, who had also done her master's degree here.

* Director of the design department and academic coordinator of the industrial design program at Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, at the moment of the interview.

Were there any entities that helped you in this process besides the university?

No, it was all Javeriana University. In fact, I was at a university fair held at the Embassy of Italy (Aula Italia), the truth is that I found it complicated and that only prestigious universities were there.

What were your expectations when you arrived in Italy? (lifestyle, personal and professional achievements, personal relationships)

When I arrived, it was perhaps like that fantasy of a new beginning, that you think "Wonderful, to start from scratch, to reinvent yourself". But now that you are faced with living alone, you realize that it's not.

What difficulties have you had in adapting to life in Italy?

Loneliness, getting sick often with my respiratory tract (in Colombia it was not like that), some things of the culture like not finding anything open on a Sunday. Yes, loneliness has hit me very hard. I am a person who at first glance seems serious, so I don't know if I scare people. It has been difficult for me to socialize. I see my other classmates, the ones who came with me, and they literally talk to half the class, I only talk to the people in my project. It's not because I'm apathetic or rude, or anything like that... It's like... it's hard for me. So, getting that network of friends or support has been more difficult.

How have you overcome these difficulties?

I have made up my mind to keep the purpose of what I came for and that I have just arrived, so at the first problem I can't give up. My family and friends in Colombia have been very attentive to me. Here it's not like I have a friend or something like that that I can have the confidence to say "Let's meet right now, I feel bad" or throw a tantrum because I feel like today is not my day ... no.

What have been your main cultural shocks?

Not finding anything open on Sunday seems bad to me. Or also that there is no nightlife here, not in the sense of discotheques, but in the sense of finding open clubs or people in the street, like everyone goes to bed early... I don't know. Maybe in terms of the classes, they look at us foreigners funny, like "You don't know", but they don't know if I really know because they don't listen to my ideas. The issue of prejudice, I have never encountered discrimination for being Latina, but there is that

concept of "You come from a jungle, and you don't even know what Dr. Martens is".

What activities do you do, or have you done to adapt?
Going for walks, going to crowded places and interacting (even if it's just to say hello and buy something).

How do you find out about activities?
Initially, by recommendations. But lately it's been more about discovering it on my own. One thing I've done is to go downtown to Via Roma. I don't buy anything, but I see the crowds of people walking around.

Do you know more people from your country here?
Yes, the guys I arrived with. Besides that, I met a "paisa"* girl the day I got my visa and here we have seen each other. She also studies at the Polytechnic, but she studies engineering. Through this girl, who is super friendly, she is from the University of Antioquia, and they have a similar model to the "Capitulo Javeriano" **, although they are closer. That's how I met another guy, and we became friends.
* A word to refer to a person coming from the Colombian department of Antioquia.
**" Capítulo Javeriano en Italia", is an association of students and graduates from Javeriana University who currently live in Italy. They organize events for the Colombian community in the country. In early 2025, they changed their name to "Enlace Colombia Italia", to represent the openness of the community to all Colombians in Italy, no matter the home university.

What do you mean when you say the people from the group from the University of Antioquia are closer?
At least in my case, my godmother* was never aware of me. She didn't answer my messages, and when she did it was always a week later, and I wrote to her for immediate procedures or questions. The girl was never interested in me, like by calendar it was clear that I would arrive in Italy at the beginning of September. We moved forward to October and until then she asked me if I

had already arrived. I never told her anyway, but it was also because of my discomfort of "she never answers me", so I felt it more on that side. So, if at this moment you ask me if Capitulo Javeriano was transcendental to me or if it helped me, my answer is no. I would say no.
*A godmother/godfather is a volunteer student or graduate from Javeriana University already settled in Italy, who gives support to a student who is preparing their move, answering questions about immigration procedures, housing, and life in the country.

Do you meet with people from your country often?
Very little, it also depends on how much we coincide and that. For example, the paisa spends her time traveling and I can't travel, or we don't coincide. We don't meet a lot with the other guy either. I mean, I would say that we do see each other, but not very often.

What places do you usually go to?
Since they are from the Polytechnic, that will always be the meeting point (the main campus). Thinking back, we always meet there. With the boy, who is a strong believer, we frequent a Latino church. In fact, the mass is given in Spanish by a priest who is Colombian. Most of them are Peruvians, but there is a little bit of everything.

How do you communicate with them?
WhatsApp

Do you think that connecting with people from your country helps facilitate your adaptation process? Or do you think it isolates you from your surroundings?
I think it is necessary to keep in touch with someone from the country, but it also depends on what you do. I mean, we are two Colombians, but it goes without saying that we are in Italy, so we have been adapting to local customs. For example, coffee after lunch, typical desserts (beyond gelato). I don't think we are a closed community or that it slows down the process. In fact, on those outings, you learn from each other's process and cultural clashes (like "have you ordered cappuccino after noon?", or "I recommend this dessert"), as

well as giving each other advice.

How would you define your relationship with the natives of Italy?
So far so good, not perfect. So far, they have been patient with the language. I consider that I have a good level, but when it comes to speaking, I go back to level A1. I have also met generous people, which I did not expect them to be. Northern Italy was usually described to me as a cold place, with cold, uncouth people. The truth is that I haven't met people like that. Suddenly I had some discomfort with my roomie, who I discovered that she speaks to me in dialect. Being a foreigner, I don't have to understand the dialect, and she gets angry when I don't understand it.

Have you met native people who have helped you in your process of adapting to Italy? How have they done it?
In my first weeks I got sick, I had to go to a hospital, and I had no idea how that worked. I was very surprised that it was the Italians I am working with, 2 of them accompanied me and spoke for me when it hurt to speak. I was also surprised by the contrast with the people from my country that I arrived with, who were not even interested in whether I was still alive or not.

Isabela Caicedo   Colombia | 21 years old

Home University   Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, section Cali

Occupation   Architecture Student, doing a double degree in Architecture for Sustainability

Time in Italy   Three months

Why did you decide to study in Italy?
I have always liked the country, the culture, and the food. It has always caught my attention, but more than anything because of the bilateral agreement. Once I started my studies in Cali, I projected myself to this.

How did you find out about the process to come and live in Italy?
My university, the international relations office. They had told me about the people who were already here and were doing good, but I really did not know them at all.

What emotion(s) do you associate with the process you had to prepare for your trip?
I believe a lot of doubt, because I feel like the university did help us get to know the program. But by the time they had already nominated me [to enroll at Polito], I was left with everything to myself. Everything about the visa, all that. So, I had a lot of confusion, I did not have anyone to answer me. Besides, I was worried, and I could not believe that I was here. After everything, I got it.

How was your experience with bureaucracy and finding a place to rent?
It was hard. First, language is like a barrier. I came with my parents, and I felt how they got frustrated as they were not the ones solving everything for me. Instead, I had to take care of myself. They were like: "tell them this, tell them that," but I had just arrived and did not know how to speak. So, I had a lot of crashes because of that. Also, it takes a long time, like needing five days to do a rental contract, or encountering problems bringing money in cash, which is a barrier. Then there was the residence permit as well, I had to do that procedure by myself, because at the university there were available appointments after two months, so that was complicated as well. As for the bank, it is a mistake that we can only open an account at the Polito, and it is really crowded all the time. I know of friends who just have an appointment this week. Fortunately, since I arrived earlier in Turin, I had it before, but it is still difficult.

What were your expectations when you arrived in Italy? (lifestyle, personal and professional achievements, personal relationships)
Well, I was expecting to find warmer people, at least I had that image in my head. But since I arrived here in August, there was nobody in Turin, the city was empty. I was lucky to have my parents with me, so I was not completely alone. I also hoped that it would be easier to make friends and get to know people, but there are few spaces for that. So, your friends end up being your classmates, but when you go out of school you go home, and I feel like there is not a lot of time to socialize as I expected. I feel like the academic load is heavy, so I had a different idea. When I was enrolling, my professors in Cali told me that it was easy to travel here, but I do not think so. I mean, on the weekends I just sleep because I feel exhausted.

What difficulties have you had in adapting to life in Italy?
I feel very lonely, people are kind, but I do not interact a lot, also the weather is quite different*. The cold has hit me hard, and I live extremely far away. All the times I spend time together with friends are in the city center, but I must think twice before going anywhere. And I also do not think that I interact a lot with people... I mean, you do collaborate with them, but they do not become your best friends. Instead, everybody is inside their own environment, and the clothes I brought are very summery, so that is different.
*Cali is a city in Colombia with temperatures between 19℃ and 30℃ the entire year. Meanwhile, Turin is a city that during winter (date of the interview) can reach average temperatures between 1℃ and 9℃.

How have you overcome these difficulties?
I try to go out with friends. I have become close friends with a boy from my university, so I go out with him and other friends. Sometimes he offers his place for me to stay in as he lives closer to the city center, so I do not have to worry about transportation, because I am afraid of going out alone late at night, it is quite dangerous. And as for the weather, buying clothes... I do not have a choice.

What have been your main cultural shocks?
As I told you, I thought people were warmer. I do not think they are rude, but they are quieter. Maybe if you speak or exclaim, they look at you badly. I also feel like they eat a lot, having a first, second and side dish is a lot. And the food is the same, there is no variety, or at least not what they give us at the Mensas, it is always the same.

What activities do you do, or have you done to adapt?
I eat like a local, go out with friends and create a routine, which makes me focus on my tasks and I do not feel so lonely when I have things to do, so that has helped me a lot.

How do you find out about activities?
To get to eat like a local, I go to a Mensa that is like a small restaurant. I do not know how that one is considered a Mensa, but it is. The cook is an old lady, so the food is very traditional for me. She prepares something different every day, and I really liked that.

Do you know more people from your country here?
I have met some in my Italian lessons, but it is a basic interaction, and in some of my other classes. There is also my godmother, I met her...we do not speak often, but she is there. And as for the rest, there are 10 Colombians in my master's degree, so I spend a lot of time with them.

What activities do you usually do with them?
We walk across the city center, near Porta Nuova station, or we also go to Valentino Park, sometimes we also go on a walk in the Lingotto Mall.

How do you communicate with them?
WhatsApp to speak and Instagram to watch their posts.

Do you think that connecting with people from your country helps facilitate your adaptation process? Or do you think it isolates you from your surroundings?
I am always with 10 or 15 Colombians every time, so I think that it does isolate you, not only from locals but also from other international students. There is the Colombian group and that is it. Besides, the master's degree is in English, so one rarely interacts with locals. That is a little sad, because they truly are the ones who teach you how to live here, the expressions, etc. I almost do not practice my Italian because I do not have the chance to speak it.

How would you define your relationship with the natives of Italy?
I would say it is friendly, the Italian girls I have met seem kind, and they are very patient, especially with language, because I do not speak it a lot. I have an idea, but it is completely different when I speak, so they are truly kind and patient, but there is little interaction, everything is very formal. My roommates are Colombian and came with me, so I spend more time with them. In my master's degree, the Italians are a minority, and I have noticed that there are subgroups depending on nationality.

Have you met native people who have helped you in your process of adapting to Italy? How have they done it?
No, I have had almost no interaction with Italians.

Eduardo Torices   Mexico | 23 years old

Home University   UNAM (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México)

Occupation   Industrial Design student, doing an exchange year at Polytechnic of Turin

Time in Italy   Less than three months

Why did you decide to study in Italy?
I wanted a challenge that had a language barrier, but that was not a huge cultural shock. I wanted a western country and culturally like Mexico. Japan was another of my options, but the culture and language were significantly different. Besides, I wish to specialize in the fashion and shoe making industry, and Italy is the home of fashion and design.

How did you find out about the process to come and live in Italy?
 In my university, international mobility is mandatory, so there were people who had already been here. The school contacted us with those students, and they gave us some advice on how to move from one place to another, where to live, what to eat, how to spend less money. I contacted students from my degree who came to Turin. They guided me with zones to rent an apartment, because many rent from Mexico, and some others arrive here to rent, so they advised me about the zones and websites.

How did your university share the information?
At first, we had general conferences for everybody in the mobility process, after that they posted announcements on [Google] Classroom, opening tabs by country. There, they told us a date and time in which students that had done their exchange in Italy would be giving the talks. Subsequently, they made a WhatsApp group to share tips, or also the guys who were currently in Italy contacted us there. We helped each other to know about the procedures for a document or the visa.

What emotion(s) do you associate with the pro-cess you had to prepare for your trip?
It was stressful, it took an extra month to do the visa procedure. I thought that during that time I was going to enjoy Mexico one last time, but I did not get the chance. It was stressful, frustrating, and demotivating.

Regarding the visa, how did you experience that process?
It was extremely stressful. I sent an email in June and got an answer in August, so it was the month of Ferragosto. The Italian embassy in Mexico did not work the whole week, only three days and four hours. They gave me an appointment for a specific hour, and it took up to three or four hours for them to help me. They sent me back because of trivial details in my documents, and I had to come back a week later. So, anything wrong meant an extra week of delay in the procedure. Then, I had a problem verifying my father's bank account status, and as these indicators are sent each month, I had to wait another two weeks to turn it in. I would like to highlight that I told my mother that, if the chance to leave did not come up, I would no longer travel. The situation was that depressing.

What were your expectations when you arrived in Italy? (lifestyle, personal and professional achievements, personal relationships)
I knew it was going to be another culture, and that people were going to be more reserved and not as warm as in Mexico, and I was not anxious to meet people either, I was not creating expectations. At the beginning, people seemed quite cold and distant, with little interest in getting to know me. I also believe that the neighborhood where I was staying (Barriera di Milano) was not a good first impression of Italy. It did not turn out to be how I thought, because I thought that they were going to be a bit more open with their culture, but they are still closed and conservative in many ways, which can be perceived even in the streets.

What difficulties have you had in adapting to life in Italy?
The main barrier is language. I arrived here thinking I had a B1 or B2 level in Italian, but I think I have an A2. I guess it is something that happens to every international student. The academic Italian is different from the one spoken in the streets, because the latter is faster and sometimes the pronunciation is difficult to comprehend. It was a broad sensation of confusion, being in an unknown place I had to understand stores, supermarkets, transportation. During my first two weeks I walked everywhere, because I did not know how to activate the GTT card, and I was afraid of being fined.

How have you overcome these difficulties?
Asking and forgetting shame. For example, in the supermarkets, when I did not know something, I approached the staff or older people, because I considered them more empathetic. For instance, when I did not know how to weigh fruit and vegetables. Even today I do not want to buy because of this issue.
As for the transportation, I waited for one of my friends to do it and help me, but in the end, I had to do it myself. I went to the GTT offices to ask how to use the card, and after that it was easier to move between places.

What have been your main cultural shocks?
At the beginning, it was when I started my lessons, because it stopped feeling like a vacation. There was a lot of pressure about not failing. Also having to eat daily and grocery shopping. Balancing that basic stuff for a human being with your mandatory tasks. I also feel a huge problem was renting or finding accommodation. The first two months were quite stressful because I occupied a lot of my time and energy searching for a place to live in. I ended up tired and demotivated every day because I could not find a place.
I realized that, despite being in a more developed country, there were many things that I had idealized and that are not as projected in the rest of the world. Realizing everyone had problems was the first cultural shock. Also, the fact that things happen very slowly and there are a lot of time outs (waiting for the bus, grocery shopping or going to bureaucratic appointments). People are not open, you do not see different people in the streets, everybody wants to seem the same.
I shared a room with various people in my first accommodation, and a boy explained to me that here everybody wants to seem normal and hide their weirdness; they only show it on the weekends or when they go to bars or clubs. Everyone is weird, but they mask it.
Unlike in Mexico, where you can see a variety of people and styles, and nobody cares. Here everybody follows some sort of untold rule, they are agreements no one admits that exist, but there they are.

What activities do you do, or have you done to adapt?
I have not done many activities, I still feel a little isolated and I feel scared to do things, just because despite having arrived with many classmates in Mexico, many of them do not want to go to the events I like, and I prefer to stay at home. The times I have gone out were only with the Mexican students. I recently moved to a male residence, and they do small dynamics. For example, this weekend they are making dinner. Some boys are friendlier than others, so they approach me, and we spend time together.

Do you know more people from your country here?
No, just people from my school. My classmates do, because they have gone to parties and have met a few Mexicans, but we have realized there are few of us. I had met many Latinos, especially Argentinians and Brazilians.

Do you see them often?
I used to, but not lately. We used to go out on the weekends.

What places do you visit?
On Saturdays, we went grocery shopping and thrifting at the Porta Palazzo Market.

How do you communicate with them?
We have a WhatsApp group created by the school during the conference of students who have been to Turin. In that group, there is the coordinator from my university, she knows about everything that happens and our whole conversation. Sometimes we forget it and write nonsense, but she does not mind, she is more interested in knowing that we are still alive. If we need her help, we mention her, but she is usually like a ghost inside the group.

Do you think that connecting with people from your country helps facilitate your adaptation process? Or do you think it isolates you from your surroundings?
I consider it isolates me; it is a comfort zone and not taking risks to explore everything else. I believe it is something I need to do; my goal is to go out by myself and get to know people without being with other Mexicans. I have been able to do it somehow with some of my classmates when we ask things about each other's country. We have an exchange dynamic between people from three different countries, where we teach each other things about our culture and talk about local memes, explaining how they are used and then we use them during classes. We show references to later use and mix them. We also realized that because of globalization, many things have expanded to other countries.

How would you define your relationship with the natives of Italy?
I still feel a bit excluded. I do not think I am integrating properly, but I do not mind. I do not take it personally; I know they are classmates, and I do not have many things in common with some of them. However, I want to know everyone else, they seem interesting.

Have you met native people who have helped you in your process of adapting to Italy? How have they done it?
Partially, I have gone out with people who have helped me or offered their help, but I have not stayed in touch. They offer me tips about places to visit, food to try, etc.

Simón Peña   Colombia | 22 years old

Home University   Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, section Bogotá

Occupation   Architecture Student, doing a double degree in Architecture for Sustainability

Time in Italy   Less than three months

Why did you decide to study in Italy?
First, because it was one of the bilateral agreement options that my university offered. Second, because I think Italy is a very interesting country that has always caught my attention, you always hear about food, music, films. I think it is a very notorious culture, and the possibility of living outside my comfort zone and the ability to be uncomfortable is very useful to me. And obviously you get to learn with a master's degree, and the university is very prominent. But there is also a new lifestyle and new dynamics.

How did you find out about the process to come and live in Italy?
I had three main sources of information. First, the university, as they oversee all the academic issues. The second were my friends who were already there, who I wrote to, so that I could know about the procedures, especially because there is a very precise order in which you need to do things, at the university they know a lot about the academic requirements, but they do not know how to help you adapt to a lifestyle, or find an accommodation, or where to go grocery shopping, so that is when you talk to people. And the third source of information was, I think, the internet. I searched for things that neither the university nor my friends knew. I browsed social media and Google.

Were there people or entities that helped you get information?
I sometimes consulted Polytechnic's page, but mostly to do required procedures. They said, fill in this form, so I did it. But it was not the case for me to search for information there. Maybe an Italian entity that helped me more was the embassy, providing information about visa procedures. I think those would be other entities that supported me.

What emotion(s) do you associate with the process you had to prepare for your trip?
I think one of the emotions could be uncertainty because I had to start from scratch, and one can always make mistakes, whether they are legal, or that you booked a flight too late or too early, or too expensive. I think one also feels expectant of the things that are going to happen: how am I going to leave, when am I going to leave, am I going to enjoy it? Is it going to be good or bad? It is not anxiety, because it does not hurry you, instead it makes you dream. Anxiety is not able to make you dream, it worries you. That is why I said I was expectant, because when you feel like that, you dream.

What were your expectations when you arrived in Italy? (lifestyle, personal and professional achievements, personal relationships)
Actually, I tried to come to Italy with the least amount of expectations possible. I feel that if you come with expectations, you may be disappointed, or you can say things like "Oh, this is not what I thought", I believe I did arrive with some thoughts or stereotypes that people had told me, like: the food is really good, but the weather and the seasons are not so good, winter is really hard, and summer is this other thing... I was trying not to condemn anything. There is a sentence in English I really like, sorry if I bring this to the interview. It goes: "Be curious, not judgmental". So, I arrived here with full curiosity about what could happen, without sentencing something. Because if in Colombia I said something like: "Oh, winter is going to hit me hard", it surely is going to do so. Or if I think: "I am going to be with people I dislike", then

I am not going to like anyone. I decided to arrive with curiosity, free of those thoughts and let myself be surprised by everything. Let's say I did not like local food and instead I preferred Arab food, which abounds here... that is curiosity in action. That is why I came here with no expectations.

What difficulties have you had in adapting to life in Italy?
I feel like I had more support on certain activities or facilities when I was in Colombia. For example, I lived with my family, so I did not have to worry about what I would have for dinner, or I do not know how to get to the university, I can use my car. Those were facilities that I no longer have here, so I must self-organize. On one hand that is good, but sometimes there is a behavioral shock in the sense of: I am doing things that I am not used to doing, which is fine because I am learning, but that adaptation process has been harder. And for example, living with people with whom I had never lived is new, but you learn. Those are shocks, I would not call them negative aspects, but one adapts and tries to see the bright side of things. We are in winter right now and it is cold, but it snowed recently and those are new things that are never seen in Colombia, so you learn to appreciate those changes that we usually fear.

How have you overcome these difficulties?
It is more like appreciating them and saying things like "I have to overcome them". There are some people who say, "I never learned how to cook, so I am always going to eat outside", and you can do it, but that is not the idea. The idea is to be able to grow outside those boundaries one might have. Or for example, "I always got to the university by car, and I cannot do it here" ... well, then let's learn how to use the public transportation, walk, bike, skate, whatever it is. But one must learn to get uncomfortable and get over those difficulties.

What have been your main cultural shocks?
There are not so many cultural differences, because I think that an Italian can be similar to a Latin American in aspects like fraternity, making noise, being outside the house. I think a cultural shock could be that here people do not like help. I mean, in Colombia if you see a woman struggling to

move the stroller or the shopping cart, people will help. Here, they say a lot like: "No, no, I can do it on my own", and it has happened to me quite a few times. They do not like to receive help and maybe another shock is how people behave based on the few daylight hours on the December equinoxes. I mean, in December there are fewer hours of sunlight, so dynamics change: people go out later and return home earlier, everything ends earlier. So, there are some shocks, not only in the environment but also in the mood, and everything changes.

What activities do you do, or have you done to adapt?
I think something I do is to spend time with people who are not from Colombia. They are not necessarily Italians, they can be Turkish, from Africa or from anywhere. But by spending time with them, one can learn about new lifestyles that you would have never thought of, and you can get the hold of things. They can tell you stuff like: "Remember, supermarkets close an hour earlier", or "This fruit costs less because it is harvest season". So, I think I get to adapt progressively, and I think that happens because by interacting with your environment, you learn about it, people who surround you and nature itself indicates to you, its changes.

How do you find out about the activities that are developed in the city? How do you communicate with these people?
I think there are two types of communication: the first one is verbal in different languages. There are some people who speak a little Spanish, so I try to understand them and communicate with them. Some others I can communicate perfectly in English, with some others I speak in Italian, I practice it as well. And the second type is non-verbal. So, some people have certain behaviors. For example: at a certain hour they always go get a drink, or do something specific, or wear gloves before. So, if I follow those gestures that people do, I can get to do stuff without having to ask. For example, the first time I saw people drinking water from "Torets", bending over to drink or refilling their bottles, even bringing jars from home, I learned about those new dynamics without having to ask or interact.

Do you know more people from your country here?
I know a lot of Colombian people in Turin, from before coming here who were already in the city. I know people who arrived with me, and I have met people in different ways. For example, there are many WhatsApp groups with Latinos and Colombians in them, so you get to know people. Especially when you speak Spanish and people approach you, asking you where you are from, what do you study, etc. and I have known more Colombians from many universities, from many parts of the country, people who graduated from their bachelor's degree a while ago, people who are doing the double degree. Every week I get to know new people from Colombia. I think there are many of us here and communication channels are very frequent.

Have you been able to meet other Latin Americans?
Yes, also. At the Polytechnic, in the metro. You speak Spanish and they ask you where you are from, or in parks, activities, like Latino parties, or meetings for people who have just arrived in Turin. And one gets to know many people from Latin America. However, I would say that the ones I know the most, perhaps because I am from Colombia, are Colombians. But there are many Latinos, especially from Venezuela, Mexico. You will always find one, you listen to them speak in Spanish and we help each other a lot. Once there was someone who had a language barrier for asking something, so I helped them out, there is that sense of fraternity.

Do you see them often?
Yes, I do. For starters, I live with other Colombian people, in my building and neighborhood there are plenty of Colombians and Latin Americans. In the university and classes I get to see and spend time with them. There are always those who make groups to go out and do something, like drinking coffee, going to eat something or cooking together. There is always something to do. Sometimes it is more focused on certain spaces, sometimes there is a person who is responsible for an activity or proposes it.

What places do you visit with them?
Before we went out, now we don't do it that much because of the weather, but at the time we went to a park or a square to talk and drink coffee, earlier we did picnics. We go to people's places or popular places in the city to take a spritz or a coffee, near the Mole or Imbarchino, which is also really popular among students.

How do you communicate with them? Besides WhatsApp
When you run into them in the street, they invite you to a meeting. But besides that, and social media, I would say there are no other forms of communication.

Do you think that connecting with people from your country helps facilitate your adaptation process? Or do you think it isolates you from your surroundings?
I think it is a little bit of both. If you know who to hang out with and they encourage you to communicate in other languages, to know people outside your usual social circle, that could work out. For example, they can suggest things to do to hang out with locals, or tell you habits to leave if you want to fit in, like words to order in a restaurant. Those kinds of Colombian or Latin American people can function. On the other hand, there are people who do not want to leave the bubble and force you to stay in it. So, both things could happen, and I think it is mutual: it depends on yourself and everyone else.

How would you define your relationship with the natives of Italy?
I feel like it is a good relationship, because Italians are friendly and know how to welcome you, especially professors, as they know that most of us come from outside of Italy. I feel like Italian professors have a will to learn from other cultures. Their welcome is really cool, interesting and open. Some of them try to speak Spanish with you, speak English or try to make you speak Italian. So, I think the relationship with them is pretty cool. I think the hardest part is to settle a first conversation with them, but it is really good.

Have you met native people who have helped you in your process of adapting to Italy? How have they done it?

They have done it because they pulled me out of my house. So, they know there are many new things like food, places or sports, or in general activities that maybe I did not do in Colombia. They tell me to go and do it, recommending places to me. Mostly, they do it by pulling me out of my house, but you need to have the will to do it. And the other way is through social media, sending each other memes or funny videos in Italian, or an instructive video about things to do in Turin, so that is how they help.

Juan Felipe Rubiano
Colombia | 23 years old

Home University   Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, section Bogotá

Occupation   Industrial Design student, doing a double degree in Systemic Design

Time in Italy   Less than three months

Why did you decide to study in Italy?

More than anything else, it was a project I had had since I entered university. Both because of my studies and the experience of living in another country, I set out to achieve this. Regarding the syllabus, it was something that caught my attention, as did the culture and design background in Italy. So, for all those reasons, I applied, and here I am.

How did you find out about the process to come and live in Italy?

The first step was the university's call for applications, which required meeting all the prerequisites. I was always looking at what was needed, and in my mind the hardest part was the exams, because the rest was just normal paperwork. Once I passed the exams, I started gathering the papers for the visa, which were too many. I was constantly checking the website and asking people who were already in Italy, because sometimes the embassy website asks for a document, but there are things that are not clear. The apostille and legalization of diplomas is also a whole process that one sometimes doesn't know how to do, because there are many things that change: I had a friend who was also going through the legalization process, and because he had studied in a municipality near Bogotá and not in Bogotá, he had to go through a different process than mine. After getting the papers and the visa, I had to finish arranging everything for the trip. Both before and after getting the visa, I was in contact with people who were already here to find out about finding housing, understanding transportation, grocery shopping... all the basic things to understand what life was like here.

What emotion(s) do you associate with the process you had to prepare for your trip?

I think the first one would be like... I would like to say that the first one was a good emotion, like happiness. But I feel like it was more of a feeling of pressure, of having to do things within the established time frame, and if something went wrong, then everything else was useless. So, I would say that: a little bit of pressure. Another thing I felt was the desire to achieve it, the perseverance. Sometimes also a little fear of having invested so much in this and it not working out. Otherwise, I would say happiness when things were going well.

What were your expectations when you arrived in Italy? (lifestyle, personal and professional achievements, personal relationships)

Above all, it was coming to a different culture in a good way. Something that surprised me was that I had heard that people from northern Italy tended to be very cold, but 95% of the people I have interacted with have been very friendly, so it has gone well for me. I also expected Turin to be a quieter and safer city. So far, that has been the case. I also feel that in some ways it is more organized. In terms of studying, I feel that things have worked out, but it is also a different methodology that one must adapt to a little. I'm not saying that it is 100% different from what we are used to, but it does have some differences. I feel that my expectation of being able to interact with people daily has been fulfilled, and I think I have done very well. Obviously, there are moments at the beginning when you arrive and must face speaking Italian to open a bank account, and then three days later go talk to the owner of an apartment to rent and then talk to someone about health insurance... There are many very specific topics where the language can be complicated. Similarly, at the university, I

feel that I can express myself well, but not 100% of all the ideas I would like to communicate.

What difficulties have you had in adapting to life in Italy?
Not many come to mind. Becoming a little more independent brings with it many more responsibilities. Perhaps one thing is decision-making, from what cereal to buy to what house to rent. These are things you must face. Something that may not be a difficulty but has been strange is the weather. I feel that winter greatly changes people's behavior, their mood, and that sense of integration among people. However, I wouldn't define it as a difficulty.

How have you overcome these difficulties?
With language, I feel like it's something I've been lacking a bit, but I need to keep studying the basics of grammar, because I feel like I practice it every day by listening and speaking. But maybe I need to keep reinforcing it grammatically. As for decisions, I try to weigh things up and make a list of pros and cons. I try to compare and not settle on the first thing that comes along.

What have been your main cultural shocks?
I feel like very simple things come to mind right now. I am very detail-oriented in some things, and I notice the differences. But I can't tell you anything more profound than that. At university, I thought that international students would not be taken into account, but that didn't happen to me because my group welcomed me very well. But I don't know if it's because of the experiences of other international students who have come in previous years and don't have "the level" or the knowledge... I'm referring to people who perhaps come without knowing Italian. So, it becomes a stereotype that all international students who come here don't know how to speak the language. So, when I interacted with people, one of the first things they would say to me was, "Oh, but you speak Italian well," and I would say, "Well... yes, it was one of the requirements to come here." So yes, I could say that's a kind of culture shock. Feeling that difference, it's not that they give us dirty looks, but sometimes there is a noticeable difference.

What else could I say? Well, I feel like this is kind of funny, but there are things that seem outdated to me, for example, with the Permesso di Soggiorno, having to go to a Posta Italiana and ask for a folder full of papers, and then only having to fill out two sheets and throw the rest away, then having to buy something at a tobacco shop, then going back to the Posta and sending the papers. So, there are procedures that I find funny that must be done this way, when it could be solved with a form on a website and that's it. I don't have to waste paper; I don't have to send anything. At first, that made me laugh and annoyed me.

What activities do you do, or have you done to adapt?
To adapt, something I have been missing is sports. In Colombia, I always tried to do it. I feel that this would help me adapt, keep me more active, and clear my mind. I think that here, and anywhere else in the world, being immersed only in studying and not having any leisure activities—speaking of sports—is lacking. Otherwise, I try to make time for myself and go out with people I know. In this process, when you're not with your family, it's important to have company. If you're used to being with people and then going to another country to be completely alone, it would be much more difficult.

Do you know more people from your country here?
Yes. I know many Colombians here. Counting them up, this year I arrived with seven other people I already knew. There were four or five other people I knew who had arrived in previous years. So, there are always quite a few, approximately 13 from my university.

Have you been able to meet other Latin Americans?
Yes, I've met a couple, not many. Once I went to play soccer and there were other Latin Americans there. That's all.

Do you see them often?
Yes, I feel that I have a good relationship with my work group, who are all Italian. But even so, I still see more of the people from my country.

What places do you visit with them?
Above all, the city center, some restaurants, tourist attractions, or parks. I would also say that we often meet at people's homes. The fact that everyone has their own space makes it very easy to meet at people's places.

How do you communicate with them?
With Colombians, WhatsApp is a sure thing. Almost always in messages or calls.

Do you think that connecting with people from your country helps facilitate your adaptation process? Or do you think it isolates you from your surroundings?
I like to maintain the roots of where I come from. However, I feel that, by spending so much time with people from my country, I might lose touch with the local culture. For example, I didn't watch much television in Colombia, but when I was at home, the TV was almost always on. And even though there is a TV in the house where I live here, there is no cable service, so I feel that there are many things you miss out on by not watching a country's local television. For example, when you sit down to watch the news, there are many things you learn about a country. I mean, in my mind, Turin is a safe city in general, but perhaps that's just a perception I have because I've put it in my mind, but if there were news reports that it wasn't so safe, I would be better informed. By not watching the news or reading the newspapers here, you don't end up knowing some things.

How would you define your relationship with the natives of Italy?
I would say that 95% of people have been nice to me because they are very friendly and open. From the beginning, I tell some of them that I am learning Italian, and they have tried to understand me and help me. I would say that they are open and helpful. There are others who, while not necessarily rude or doing anything wrong, are simply cold. Simple things like change, which here they don't hand to you, but put in a place... I don't think that's wrong, but it's very cultural. But in some cases, they are colder. In those momentary encounters, they are very cold, but when you inter-

act more, they are open.

Have you met native people who have helped you in your process of adapting to Italy? How have they done it?
Yes, especially at university. Two, three, four people who knew I had recently arrived in Italy offered to help me with anything I needed. They were very open. Or sometimes, if I don't understand something, they are always willing to explain it to us.

Angela Gallego
<div align="right">Colombia | 23 years old</div>

Home University — University of Antioquia (UdeA, for its acronym in Spanish)

Occupation — Electric Engineering student, doing a master's degree in Nuclear and Energetic Engineering

Time in Italy — Less than three months

Why did you decide to study in Italy?
Because my university only had that agreement for electrical engineering. It was my only option.

How did you find out about the process to come and live in Italy?
During the induction talks in the first semester, they mentioned that possibility, and from then on, I began to map out the route.

Were there people or entities that helped you get information?
The truth is, I did it all on my own. We have a wellness unit, but I never went there. So, I found out everything from friends and acquaintances.

What emotion(s) do you associate with the process you had to prepare for your trip?
Hope, anxiety, sadness, joy, nervousness, nostalgia.

What were your expectations when you arrived in Italy? (lifestyle, personal and professional achievements, personal relationships)
To be honest, I arrived in the country without any expectations, because I didn't want to be confronted with a reality I didn't want to see. I arrived in the country knowing that I would encounter xenophobic people, rude people, people who would not like me being in their country. But I wasn't going to close myself off to meeting people just because some of them treated me badly. In other words, I came prepared for bad comments, but I also came prepared to meet nice people.

What difficulties have you had in adapting to life in Italy?
Obviously, the language—at least I thought I knew a little bit, but it's one thing to learn Italian from a teacher in Colombia and another thing entirely to hear it spoken by a native speaker. There are also cultural clashes. I would say those two things were the most important.

What have been your main cultural shocks?
For example, the people here weren't as friendly or happy. I noticed that they were very cold and didn't want to meet new people, but obviously it's the environment and the culture. As I got to know them better, they opened, but I did notice that they were very closed off.

How have you overcome these difficulties?
I am simply myself, presenting myself as I am without changing who I am. If they like me, great, and if not, that's fine too. Thankfully, most people liked me. This is also because I enjoy proudly showcasing my country, and they appreciate that.

What activities do you do, or have you done to adapt?
At the Polytechnic, talking to the person next to me. Making new friends. Among the Spanish-speaking people, I have a godmother, so she introduced me to people, and by introducing me to her friends, I became friends with her friends.

At Javeriana University, we have the same system of godparents and godchildren. I wanted to know how it worked at your university.
They send an email to those who have been there for a year asking who wants to sponsor someone. Then they send us an email saying, "Look, this is your sponsor, this is their phone number, and you can get in touch with each other."

Is there a type of association of people who make that connection between those who are coming and those who are already here?
Exactly, so we can get to know those who came before us and form a community. The group is called UdeA in Turin, and we have a WhatsApp group. It's a good group because you can ask questions and build a community.

Do you know more people from your country here?
Yes, it was through friends of friends. I met a friend at the embassy, and she has been the only person I have met outside of the UdeA.

Do you see them often?
Not very often, but I do see them sometimes.

What places do you visit with them?
Le Panche, Parco del Valentino, Santa Giulia, friends' places

How do you communicate with them? Besides the WhatsApp Group from your university
I have no other communication channels.

Do you think that connecting with people from your country helps facilitate your adaptation process? Or do you think it isolates you from your surroundings?
I think it does isolate me from the local environment because I would be closing myself off in a bubble, and for me part of the experience is getting to know people from other countries, their reality, and their way of life. I feel that if I only hang out with Colombians, I would be closing myself off to new experiences and meeting new people. It may help in the sense that they may be going through the same thing as me, like immigration depression and stuff; but people from other countries may also feel the same way as me, and we can connect very well. For me, there is no distinction between Colombians and people from other countries.

How would you define your relationship with the natives of Italy?
70% were kind and wonderful people. The rest have been very rude, but I also feel that it's just their personality, they have strong personalities. That's why I haven't taken it so personally.

Have you met native people who have helped you in your process of adapting to Italy? How have they done it?
I have met people from other countries who have helped me. If I have had problems going to the Questura, I have friends who have accompanied me, spoken to me, and advocated on my behalf. If I have a serious personal problem, I know I can call them, and they will listen to me.

Juan José Miranda   Ecuador | 29 years old

Occupation   Architect, doing a master's degree on Architecture for Sustainability

Time in Italy   Six months

Why did you decide to study in Italy?

First, as an architect, when I was studying for my undergraduate degree, Italy was always a point of reference in architecture. Especially in terms of history. So, it was always a country I wanted to visit, and when I found a master's program that I liked, I applied, and here I am.

How did you find out about the process to come and live in Italy?

I was looking for master's degrees and, above all, scholarship opportunities related to the subject I liked. And then I found a website called, I think, scholarships from organizations... I don't remember the name very well, but it was something like that. There I found a scholarship specifically for Italy that was offered by the Italian government. I applied, read the rules, saw everything they were asking for, and saw that they would allow me to study the master's degree I wanted here at the Polytechnic. I had to send a letter of motivation, my undergraduate grades, and explain why I decided to study in Italy. Then I received a message from them saying something like: we reviewed your letter of motivation, now we're moving on to the next step: an interview with the people who will award you the scholarship. And well, in the end everything went very well and here we are. I think the most important information I got was through the internet.

Were there people or entities that helped you get information?

I have two friends who study in Milan, and they helped me a little with information about the process when you arrive here. Regarding scholarships and finding a master's degree, I had a friend who had applied through this website I mentioned. So, she explained a little about what was required, and that's how I got advice. Through this website, I was able to find the master's degree

and the scholarship, because, as you know, coming from Latin America to Europe is not financially feasible or easy to achieve.

What emotion(s) do you associate with the process you had to prepare for your trip?

It was complicated. The thing is, when you leave your professional life behind to go back to school, you're left with this feeling of not knowing whether you're taking a step backward or doing something to further your professional training, even though you were already working in your field. It was a moment of mixed feelings; I won't lie to you. My dream was always to come here to Europe to do a master's degree. Then there was a moment when I was already working and I felt stuck, I didn't feel like I was growing in that sense. So, I said to myself: it's now or never, I can't keep putting it off, and if I keep doing so, it will never happen. So it was that feeling of: "I don't think I'm growing professionally anymore, what should I do? Maybe I should get more training." So that was the moment I decided, OK, I'm going to quit, I'm going to look into this master's degree thing. I'll try to support myself with my savings, but I'll also try to look for other alternatives. So yes, there were a lot of mixed feelings at that moment.

What were your expectations when you arrived in Italy? (lifestyle, personal and professional achievements, personal relationships)

Well, this is my first time in Europe. So, I came here with this idea of the first world that everyone talks about and that you always see in pictures on the internet and everything. So, when I arrived in Italy, the lifestyle is better than in Ecuador, but culturally I feel it's similar, in the sense that it's organized chaos, if you know what I mean. So my first impression was: I still feel like I'm in Latin America when I go to certain places, but at the same time I say, "Wow, those buildings, the architecture," and

you say, "No, I am somewhere else." But my first impression wasn't so much what I imagined in terms of 'first worldism'. I mean, I arrived in September when it was still a bit hot, my first time experiencing summer... a bit of summer. So I arrived at a student residence, and as soon as I arrived I went in and said, "It's too hot, do you have a fan or air conditioning?" and they said, "No, here you have to open the window," so I realized that they are much more responsible and conscious about the climate and the environment.

That was a shock to me that opened my mind. I mean, I came to study architecture for sustainability. In Ecuador, we are not like that at all. I think that in Latin America in general, especially on the coast, you bring your air conditioner, your fan, and whatever else you need. We don't care how much we pollute; we don't care about anything. So it was that culture shock that made me say, "This is the first world." I mean, having that ecological mindset, that we have to take care of what we have. Maybe in Latin America we're a little more disinterested in this issue. It wasn't what I expected when I arrived here either. I think you expect something very technological and modern, and then you end up living in the historic center, in these houses that are so old, that have been remodeled, but still have a history behind them, and it was a nice culture shock. I didn't feel bad at all. This is also part of experiencing the world and life.

What difficulties have you had in adapting to life in Italy?

I think what was most difficult for me at the beginning was the language. Even though Italian is like Spanish, and when I hear it, I understand it, after six months I can tell you this. But at the beginning, when you hear it and they speak quickly, I was lost. I just got around to doing all these kinds of procedures, thinking that maybe everyone here spoke English too, but no. So, it was also a little complicated, but you can do it. It's not something you can't do, but I do think it was a little difficult for me. Shopping at the supermarket or how do I say this, how do I pay, how can I do this? Also, connecting my bank in Ecuador with the one here in Italy, bank transfers, how to pay for things using my cell phone, which I had never used in Ecuador, only physical cards, and the fact that they hardly

use cash here, almost all money is through the phone. So, yes, it was a bit of an adjustment at first because of the language, but then you get used to it.

How have you overcome these difficulties?

I spoke slowly in Spanish and hoped that they would speak slowly to me in Italian so that I could communicate, or else I used the translator on my cell phone, or I showed them a picture of what I wanted or tried to explain myself somehow. Because you've just arrived here and you don't have anyone, so if you don't help yourself, you won't achieve anything, so you must come with the mindset that you have to lose your fear of facing things because otherwise, you won't succeed.

What have been your main cultural shocks?

Well, the truth is that I haven't really had that many culture shocks here in Italy. Maybe one is that you really meet people from all over the world, so it's also incredible, honestly, to have classmates at university from places you never thought you'd meet anyone from and to learn about their culture and how they do things. That was also interesting. In Ecuador, I had never met anyone from China or Japan or Iran, for example. So, it's interesting, but I wouldn't see it as a culture shock because it wasn't a shock. Rather, it was something I really enjoyed. Honestly, I couldn't tell you anything that really shocked me. As I said, I feel that culturally we are very similar to the Italian lifestyle, compared to when you go a little further north in Europe, where people are a little colder. Here, they're a bit more familiar, and just like in Latin America, nothing has ever happened to me, they've always been nice to me. Maybe it's a bit that when you approach a group of Italians who are among themselves, sometimes they close themselves off a bit and don't allow other people, maybe from other parts of the world, to join their social group. Let me give you an example from the polytechnic. My master's degree is taught in English and Italian, so in English there are people from all over the world and there are 1, 2, 3 Italians. On the other hand, in Italian, everyone is Italian. So, I say that sometimes they throw away this opportunity to meet people from other parts of the world. I would say that's what shocked me a little, that I know Italian people

who don't open their circle.

What activities do you do, or have you done to adapt?

When I first arrived at the residence hall, I met several students who were in the same situation as me. We had come from different parts of the world to study at the polytechnic. So, during my first week there, we formed a small group. We would go out for language exchanges, and we would also go out with other people who were on Erasmus but who knew other friends, and so on: friends and friends and friends. At first, you want to meet people, so you don't feel so alone, so you do these activities. That's all. The truth is that the master's degree has taken up a lot of my time, I mean, it consumes my time. So, most of my friends, or my outings, or my social life are very much confined to my circle of architecture.

How do you find out about the activities that are developed in the city? How do you communicate with these people?

Sometimes people see an event themselves, like the chocolate event that took place recently in Turin. They saw it on Instagram and told us about it through our group of friends, so we went. I think we find out about events more when they are shared by us and other friends.

Do you know more people from your country here? Or other Latin Americans?

When I arrived in Turin, the polytechnic gave us an app to meet other people who had come from other countries to study at the university. So, I downloaded this app and met other people from Ecuador. One of them was from my city and university, but we didn't know that we were both coming to study at the polytechnic until we were here. So, we talked and everything, and now he's my roommate. I have two roommates here, one is from Ecuador, and the other is from Brazil. And well, at the university there are also people from Colombia and Mexico. There's a large Latin American group, so it does feel like home. Even though we all speak Spanish, we do have our differences, but there's a bit more of a connection when it comes to food, music, tastes, and experiences. That helps when you arrive in a new country. Having a time when you can share with people who

speak your language is a relief, because you don't have to think and translate in your head. Many Latinos who travel to other places need other Latinos to share and talk with.

I wanted to ask you the name of the app you used? The one the university gave you

It is called Goin' Connect. You can filter by country and degree. That is how I found other people from Ecuador.

Do you see them often?

Yes, indeed. With the Latin American group, we tend to go beyond academic topics. It has become a social gathering, and I do spend a lot of time with them. However, within our Latin American group, there are also some Italians and people from other countries. Something very interesting that I want to tell you is that I have a very close friend here who is French. He is part of my university group, and we discuss projects. But he traveled around Latin America for six months, and when he saw that there were Latin Americans in the course, he joined us and shared his experiences in Latin America with us. He shares our culture and ideas a lot, and he is also very friendly and sociable, like us. We get along very well with the Europeans, mostly because they had already traveled to Latin America or had Latin American friends.

What places do you visit with them?

We've been going to Po River a lot now that it's spring. We go on picnics and enjoy the view. We've been to chocolate events, and we've gone to the automobile museum with some friends. We've also been to bars and restaurants, especially in the city center. At first, before classes started, we tried to see as much as possible because we knew that later, with university, it would be a little complicated. So we went to Superga, walking around the city and trying to get to know it. Now that we're in class, it's a little harder to do tourist stuff, meaning you don't have much time to sightsee around the city. So, we go to a bar or restaurant near the river, work in EDISU student spaces, and try to get to know the different areas of the city, which is very interesting.

How do you communicate with them?

WhatsApp or talking at the university.

Do you think that connecting with people from your country helps facilitate your adaptation process? Or do you think it isolates you from your surroundings?

I'm going to tell you a story, I don't know if it will be very long. Before coming here, when I was in college, I did an exchange program and went to study for a semester in Mexico. At that time, the last thing I wanted was to meet more Ecuadorians, so I wanted to meet Mexican people who could show me their culture, and that's what happened. I hardly met anyone from Ecuador; most of my friends were Mexican, and I was able to experience Mexican culture.

When I was going through the process of coming to Italy, I had the same idea: why have Latin American or Ecuadorian friends? I want to meet Italian people, I want to learn about the culture, get to know it, and adapt. When you arrive in a country where you don't speak the language, it's difficult to adapt and be able to share with them in the same way. I compared it to my experience in Mexico, where I thought I adapted very well because I spoke the same language. So, I didn't feel the need to find someone who spoke my language or understood the process I was going through. Here, day after day, you realize that speaking English all the time is mentally exhausting. You get tired. Here, I work with my colleagues in English all the time. When we're working for hours, making models until dawn, I reach a point where I can no longer think in another language. When I get home and am with my partner from Ecuador, we don't study the same thing, but we see each other at home. And getting there and being able to talk in Spanish—the Spanish of your city—without having to think about anything, translate, or even speak generic Spanish so that other people from other countries can understand, is something I really needed. It's something that has helped me continue with this adaptation process.

I think that if you close yourself off to the idea that you only must get along with Latinos, you won't be able to integrate into Italian culture. I do agree that we can become closed off on that issue. For example, I think that the group of Colombians

can be a bit closed off to meeting Italians. Even though they have Italian friends, I think they could have many more friends because some of them speak Italian well, but they close themselves off in their group. I'm not saying it's wrong, but maybe it doesn't allow you to have more friends beyond your comfort zone.}

How would you define your relationship with the natives of Italy?

So far, I've been treated very well. When I meet people on the street and try to speak to them in Italian, they get excited and, knowing that I'm not Italian, they speak slowly to me. I haven't had any bad experiences with people who don't like foreigners coming here. Everyone has been nice to me. I live in a three-story house; each floor is an apartment. A family from Turin lives on the other floor. They are the only people from Turin that I know, because the other Italians I know come from other parts of the country. The family has been very understanding and has treated us very well. I haven't had any problems.

Have you met native people who have helped you in your process of adapting to Italy? How have they done it?

Perhaps the greatest help in the adaptation process came from my friend from Brazil, who spoke Italian and helped me with all the paperwork because I didn't know anyone here. From there, the family we lived with helped me when I had to set up the internet in the house, they helped me when I had to talk to the technician. Or when I had to pay for gas, they helped me by acting as intermediaries. Because even with these technical matters, not speaking the language was very complicated. But they helped me a lot and acted as my intermediaries. The same goes for my Italian friend, who is not from Turin, but still helps me when I need to go to the post office.

Interview Insights

The eight interviewees provided key details and information about their trip preparation and adaptation process in Turin. The insights were classified in the next categories:

Pre-trip preparation gaps

- Limited availability of clear, Spanish-language information before arriving.
- Many students relied on word-of-mouth or informal Facebook or WhatsApp groups for housing.
- Several people underestimated cultural and academic differences, focusing on logistics only

Arrival and adaptation difficulties

- Bureaucracy in Italy was described as confusing, slow and stressful. Adapting to it often required peer support, as official guidance was insufficient.
- Housing search was difficult due to high demand, scams, and language barriers.
- Everyday challenges included grocery shopping and navigating transport systems

Integration with locals

- Initial interactions with Italians were described as cordial but not very close.
- Cultural differences (e.g., communication style, socializing habits, formality) made it harder to form deeper friendships.
- University classes did not always facilitate integration, as Italian students often stuck with their own groups.
- Those with higher Italian proficiency integrated more easily.

Emotional challenges

- Feelings of loneliness, homesickness, and anxiety were common in the first months.
- Food, music, and Latin American cultural activities helped cope with nostalgia.
- Having a support network (friends, associations) was critical to emotional adaptation.

Social connections and community

- WhatsApp groups and Latin American associations in Turin played a key role in adaptation.
- Many felt it was easier to connect with other Latin Americans than Italians.
- Some admitted that spending most of the time with people from their country, might be isolating them from the local culture, and that a balance is necessary.

Language barriers

- Most students had basic Italian but struggled with administrative and academic vocabulary.
- Difficulty communicating with landlords, banks and public offices.
- English helped in some contexts, but reliance on Italian was necessary for bureaucracy and daily life

Coping strategies

- Relying on social media (WhatsApp, Facebook groups, Instagram) for information exchange.
- Creating informal "how-to" guides shared among newcomers.
- Building mixed routines (Latin American cooking but adopting Italian schedules and habits).

Unmet needs

- Centralized, reliable, Spanish-friendly information on bureaucracy and everyday life in Italy.
- Tools for finding trusted housing and avoiding scams.
- Features to connect with both fellow Latin Americans and Italians for social and cultural exchange.
- Emotional support/community spaces to reduce isolation.

Personas

After carrying out the interviews and doing an in-depth analysis of the insights and opportunities, two user personas based on the most defining features of the users were developed. Core needs, frustrations and goals, as well as personality features are described.

The first persona is "The Social Explorer", a student who wants to live new experiences and sees studying abroad as an opportunity for multicultural exchange.

The second persona is "The Introvert Adaptor", a student who wants to feel comfortable and informed in a new environment, and that values close friendships over a wide network.

Despite their different personality traits, both users have shared needs, such as:

- Clear and reliable information about bureaucracy and daily life in Italy, in Spanish-friendly formats.
- Tools to find safe and affordable housing options
- Language support for Italian in different contexts.
- Opportunities to connect with peers for emotional support and shared experiences.
- Spaces to preserve and celebrate their own cultural identity, while also blending into Italian culture.
- Emotional support to cope with loneliness, stress and cultural adaptation.

The Social Explorer

Abdrahim Oulfakir. (June 20th, 2021). Man in black crew neck t-shirt smiling. [Photograph]. Retrieved from Unsplash. (https://unsplash.com/it/foto/uomo-in-camicia-girocollo-nera-sorridente-Xw6wFgA2ytE)

Juan Andrés Gómez

AGE	22
OCCUPATION	Design Student
BIRTHPLACE	Bogota, Colombia
LOCATION	Turin, Italy

Bio

He currently studies in Turin thanks to a bilateral agreement between his home university and Politecnico di Torino. He's been living there for less than six months and although he misses some traditions from Colombia, he wants to enjoy his stay in Italy in the best possible way.

`Extrovert`   `Curious`   `Independent`   `Open`

Core needs

- To live exciting experiences that make his time in Italy feel meaningful
- To easily discover events, activities, and communities
- To connect with people from different countries, not just Latin Americans
- To manage everyday life independently (budgeting, cooking, routines)

Frustrations

- Cultural shocks due to different lifestyles (weather, food, routines)
- Finds Italian bureaucracy slow and demotivating
- Feeling a barrier in his social interactions due to language or reserved approach by native people

Goals

- Adapting to the culture and connecting with people from many countries
- Developing more autonomy and self-confidence
- Discover events, parties, and local hidden spots

> " I want to exit my comfort zone and live new and thrilling experiences in Italy

The Introvert Adaptor

Malak. (March 7th, 2025). Smiling woman with glasses [Photograph]. Retrieved from Unsplash. (https://unsplash sorridente-con-occhiali-e-camicia-a-righe-XrF98ON2upU)

Valentina Torres

AGE	21
OCCUPATION	Engineering Student
BIRTHPLACE	Mexico City, Mexico
LOCATION	Turin, Italy

Bio

She currently studies in Turin due to a bilateral agreement between her home university and Politecnico di Torino. She's been living there for less than six months and has faced some difficulties adapting to the country and finding new friends

`Introvert` `Curious` `Disciplined` `Reserved`

Core needs

- To feel comfortable, safe, and supported while adapting to life in Italy
- To have clear, step-by-step guidance (bureaucracy, housing, daily life)
- To find trusted social circles that reduce loneliness
- To build confidence in her independence without feeling overwhelmed

Frustrations

- Overwhelmed by Italian bureaucracy (visa, permesso, banks)
- Feels isolated and hesitant to approach new people, especially Italians
- Misses food, traditions, and cultural warmth of her country

Goals

- Access to clear, step-by-step Spanish-friendly information about bureaucracy and daily life.
- Building confidence to reach out socially and having a circle for support
- Successfully completing studies without feeling constantly anxious

" I'd like to find people to connect with, but sometimes it can be quite hard

Places of encounter for Latin American students in Turin

To further know about the ways in which international students connect with each other and create networks in Italy, specifically in the city of Turin, the most important places of encounter or gathering for people were mapped and described. The main scope of this research stage was to identify existing modes of connection in the physical environment, and to understand how they might be connected or replicated in the digital environment.

First, desk research through net ethnography was conducted to trace places that are well-known online or that have presence in social media. Subsequently, some students from Latin America were asked about places that were known by word of mouth and perhaps without as much online presence. Places mentioned in user interviews were also included in this part of the analysis.
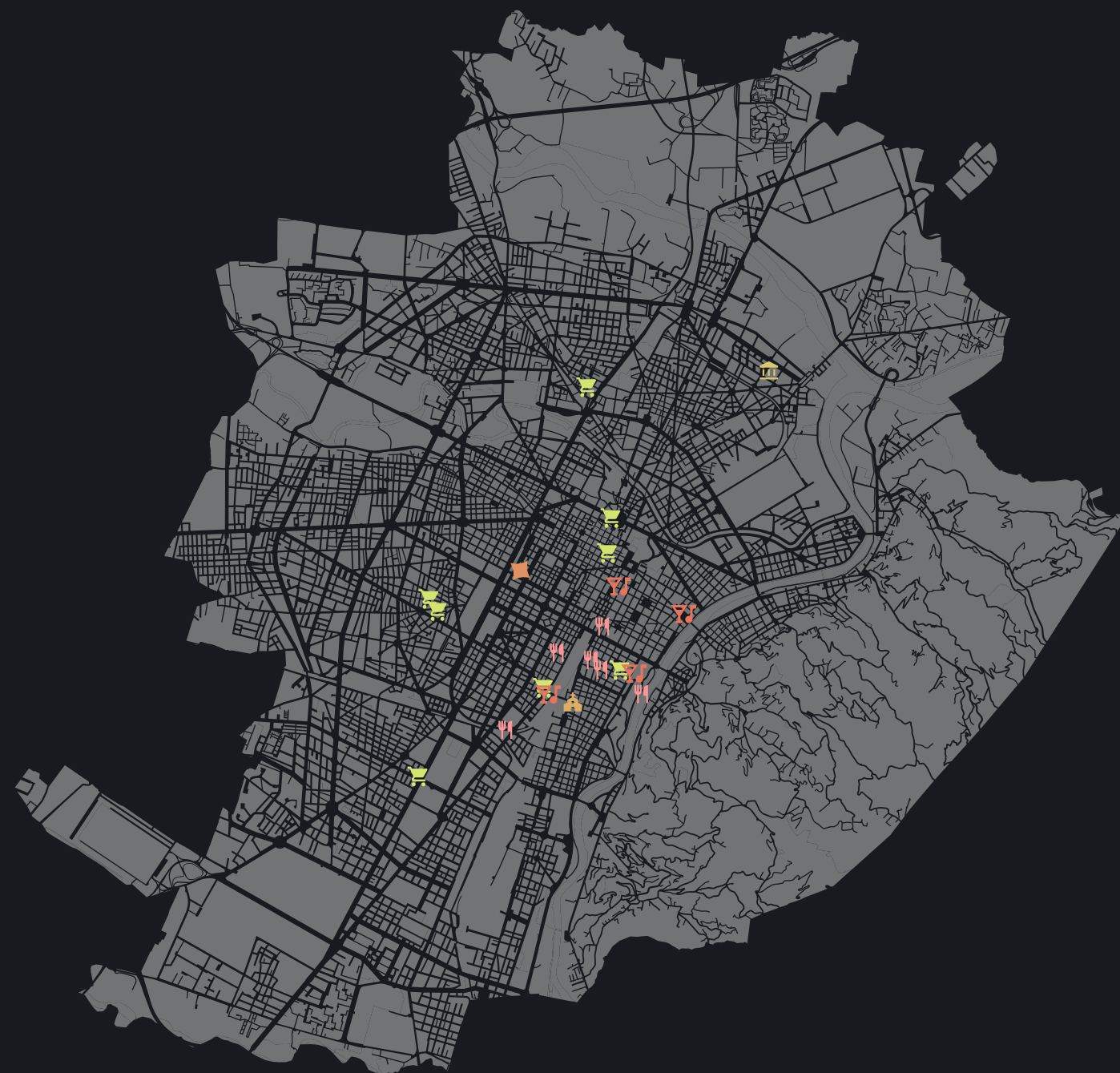
KEY

🏛 Governance

⛪ Religious places

🛒 Markets

🍴 Restaurants and bars

🎵 Parties

🔶 Others

🏛 Governance

These are local entities with a physical location in the city, providing services to foreigners or somehow promoting multiculturality.

Centro Interculturale Torino

Location: Corso Taranto, 160

It is a place for cultural exchange and discussion and caters to all native and immigrant citizens.

Provides opportunities for intercultural education as well as opportunities for meetings, dialogue and discussion on themes and issues of common interest.
It deals with:
· Organizing intercultural training
· Producing intercultural materials
· Enhancing realities present in Turin through meetings
· Hosting Italian language exams

Touchpoints:
· Website: http://www.interculturatorino.it/
· Instagram: @centrointerculturale_torino

**CENTRO
INTERCULTURALE
TORINO**

Centro Interculturale Torino (n.d.). [Logo of the intercultural center]. Retrieved from Facebook (https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=891207809704915&set=a.312999124192456)

🍴 Restaurants and Bars

In Turin, there are various restaurants specializing in international foods. It is possible to find some dedicated to Latin American gastronomy and developing as a place of gathering for internationals.

Ristorante La Finca

Location: Via Rodolfo Montevecchio, 9/a

It is a Colombian restaurant in Turin. It has become a meeting place for the Colombian community and a cultural bridge for anyone eager to experience Latin American traditions. It has hosted traditional festivities, such as "Día de las Velitas" on December 7th, a holiday that marks the beginning of the Christmas season. The restaurant creates a sense of home away from home, making it a welcoming space for Colombians and locals alike.

Touchpoints:
· Website: https://ristorantelafinca.it/
· Facebook: lafincatorino
· Instagram: lafincatorino

La Finca. (n.d.). [Typical Colombian dish served at the restaurant]. Retrieved from Home- La finca (https://ristorantelafinca.it/)

La cabaña del sabor

Location: Via Claudio Luigi Berthollet, 6c

It is a lively San Salvario restaurant in Turin that celebrates the culinary traditions of Colombia and Ecuador. More than just a place to dine, it offers an immersive cultural atmosphere: from daytime lunches featuring ceviche, bandeja paisa and Ecuadorian specialties, to vibrant evenings in its cocktail bar and lounge with live Latin American music.

Touchpoints:
- Website: https://cabanadelsabor.it/
- Facebook: La Cabaña del Sabor
- WhatsApp

*Quandoo. (n.d.).[Inside spaces of the restaurant].
Retrieved from Quandoo (https://www.quandoo.it/place/la-cabana-del-sabor-ecuador-colombia-102724/menu)*

Jumping Jester

Location: Via Giuseppe Mazzini, 2

It is an Irish-style pub and gathering spot in central Turin, located near Porta Nuova station. It serves as a multicultural meeting point, drawing university students, tourists and locals into its vibrant atmosphere.

Touchpoints:
- Website: https://jumpingjester.it/it
- Facebook: JUMPING JESTER PUB
- Instagram: jumpingjesterpub

*Jumping Jester. (n.d.). [Inside photo of the pub].
Retrieved from Jumping Jester- Pub a Torino (https://jumpingjester.it/it)*

Imbarchino

Location: Viale Umberto Cagni, 37.

It is a historic meeting point in the heart of Turin's Parco del Valentino. Located beside the Po River, it is a place to study, grab a drink or gather with friends. Imbarchino blends social connections, creativity and nature.

Touchpoints:
- Website: https://www.imbarchino.space/
- Facebook: Imbarchino del Valentino
- Instagram: imbarchinovalentino
- Newsletter

Imbarchino (n.d.) [Space by the Po River]. Retrieved from Spazi- Imbarchino (https://www.imbarchino.space/spazi)

Mamasita

Location: Corso Carlo e Nello Rosselli, 1

It is a restaurant located in the Crocetta neighborhood. A culturally rich meeting place for lovers of Latin-American and Iberian gastronomy. While food is an essential piece of experience, Mamasita is also a place that fosters connection.

Touchpoints:
- Website: https://www.mamasitatorino.it/
- Facebook: Mamasita Torino
- Instagram: mamasitatorino

Nicola, Tripadvisor user. (2019). [Inside space of the restaurant]. Retrieved from (https://www.tripadvisor.it/Restaurant_Review-g187855-d2015947-Reviews-Mamasita-Turin_Province_of_Turin_Piedmont.html)

Pasion Ristorante Argentino

Location: Via Silvio Pellico, 2/bis

It is a restaurant in the heart of Turin that offers an immersive Argentinian experience, serving typical and unique dishes from the country. Its warm atmosphere and hospitality make people feel like they are in the city of Buenos Aires.

Touchpoints:
- Website: https://pasiontorino.it/
- Facebook: ristorantepasion
- Instagram
- Tik Tok

Pasion Ristorante Argentino. (n.d.) [Inside space of the restaurant]. Retrieved from Pasion Ristorante Argentino (https://pasiontorino.it/)

🏛️ Religious centers

Capellanía Latinoamericana

Location: Via Nizza, 47

The Church of the Immaculate Conception hosts a big Latin American Community in Turin. Every Sunday, the Mass is celebrated in Spanish. It has become a point of reference for all Spanish-speaking Catholics in Turin.

Some important moments for the chaplaincy are the celebrations on the Independence Day of each country represented in the community, as they are occasions of celebration and color.

Touchpoints:
- WhatsApp channel with news.

Paola Boccalatte. (2014). [Chiesa dell'Immacolata Concezione]. Retrieved from Museo Torino (https://www.museotorino.it/view/s/f50f92a8e269474abd5df48250458813)

🍽️ Parties

Parties with Latin American music are also a relevant place for international students in Turin. Some interviewees mentioned this activity as something they did with friends or that allowed them to meet more people from other countries.

Fiesta Latina

Location: It is usually held in different places, some of them are:
- TAM - Via Principe Amedeo, 2/D
- Lab- Piazza Vittorio Veneto, 13/E

- Milk- Via Paolo Sacchi, 65

These parties are usually held on Fridays, playing rhythms most of the time like reggaeton or dance.

Touchpoints:
- Instagram: latinnightstorino
- WhatsApp group.

🛒 Markets

In Turin, there are various markets that sell imported products from Latin America, some of which are focused on a specific country, while others are more global. These places are frequently visited by Latin Americans. Some of them are:
- La Bodeguita Latina- Corso piero Maroncelli, 36
- Cahuachi Market- Via Claudio Luigi Berthollet, 37
- Puerto Latino -Via Michele Antonio Vibò, 17/D
- La Straniera- Via Germanasca 29
- Tlaloc (Mexican Store) - Via Palazzo di Città, 24/E
- La Preferita- Via Giuseppe Vernazza, 3
- La Peruanita (Peruvian Store)- Via Dante di Nanni, 64/H
- El Almacén de la nonna (Argentine Store)- Via Paolo Sacchi, 64
- Porta Palazzo, Turin's central market, was also mentioned as a place of encounter for international students as it offers affordable prices.

Touchpoints:
- Word to mouth.
- Google Maps (reviews).
- Instagram.
- Facebook.

🚩 Others

Other places in Turin mentioned by some students where it is possible to find fellow Latin Americans were dance schools, especially those focusing on Latin American rhythms.

Turin's Questura was also mentioned, as it is the place where many foreigners go to make their residence permit procedures.

Tlaloc. (n.d.). [Altar set up for the Day of the Dead in honor of Tina Modotti]. Retrieved from Me gusta Mi piace (https://www.megustamipiace.com/it/tlaloc-negozio-di-prodotti-messicani/)

Corriere Torino. (2025). [Window of El Almacén de la nonna]. Retrieved from Corriere Torino (https://torino.corriere.it/food/cards/dove-mangiare-argentino-a-torino-i-migliori-ristoranti-e-una-bottega-aperti-dai-migranti-piemontesi-di-ritorno/b-el-almacen-de-la-nonna-la-bottega-dei-sapori-argentini-b.shtml)

Market Latino Cahuachi. (July 8th, 2022). [Photo of the market's front entrance]. Retrieved from Facebook (https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=454204553377979&set=pb.100063653134631-2207520000)

Project Back ground
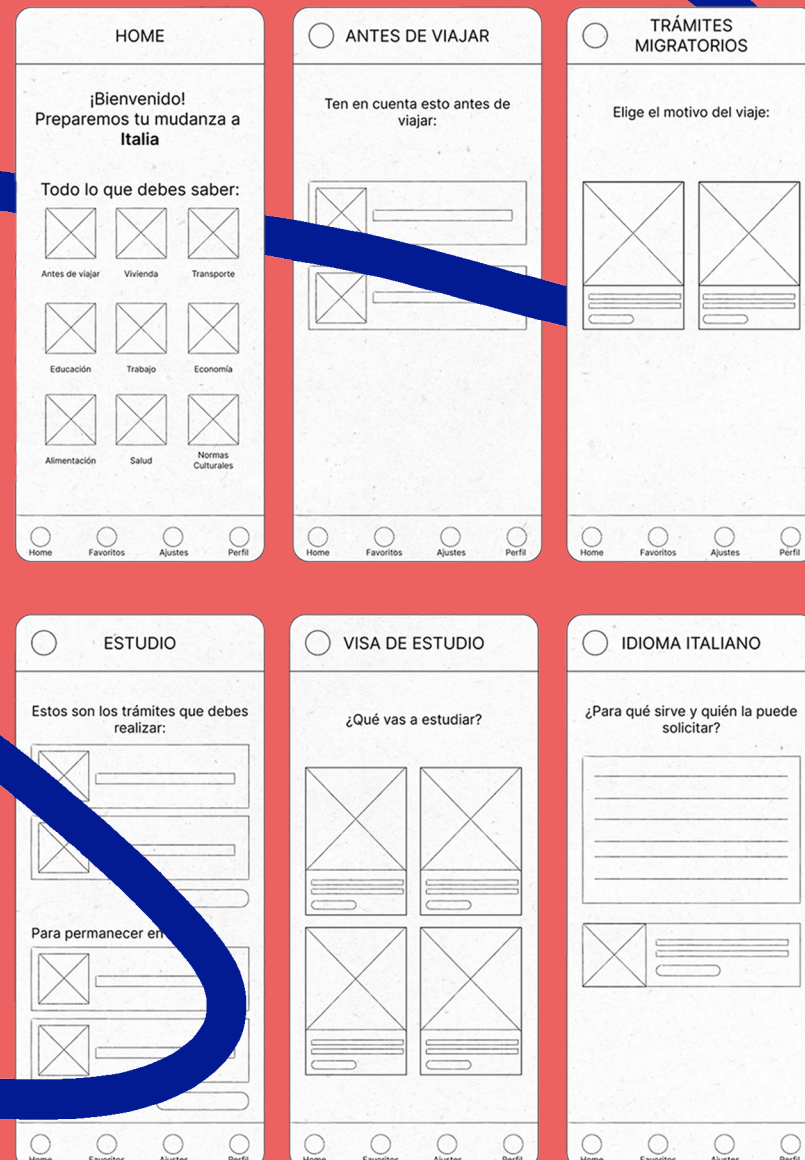
First Version: Goals & Features

In 2024, within the framework of an online UX/UI design course provided by the Argentinian company Coderhouse, the first version of the app "Migra Tranqui" was developed as a digital guide, aimed at Latin American students and workers moving abroad. The main goal was to provide reliable information on key topics depending on the country of destination, such as:

Bureaucratic procedures

Housing

Local mobility

Academic and job-related information

Cultural norms

The initial design focused on accessibility and clarity, structuring contents in logical sections, with an information architecture defined thanks to tree testing with users.

Key Features of first version

- Information categorized into clear sections.
- Simple, text-based UI with minimal interactive elements
- Links to official sources, like universities or government organizations.

While the format provided valuable information, it lacked integration and networking inside of a specific context, as in the beginning a country was not specified for the project. However, on further prototyping stages, Italy was defined as the country of reference for information.

User Feedback & Limitations

Upon the completion of the course, user testing and heuristic evaluation were conducted to determine strengths and weaknesses of the digital product.

Screen 1 — Logo (placeholder)

Logo

Screen 2 — Visa de Estudio

← Visa de Estudio ♡

¿Qué vas a estudiar?

Idioma Italiano

Intercambio y Doble Titulación

Posgrados

Laurea Triennale y Magistrale

Home · Favoritos · Ajustes · Perfil

Screen 3 — Idioma Italiano

← Idioma Italiano ♡

¿Para qué sirve y quién la puede solicitar?

Esta visa permite ingresar a Italia a los ciudadanos extranjeros que desean perfeccionar el conocimiento del idioma italiano.

Permite además ingresar a quienes desean perfeccionar el conocimiento de otro tipo de estudios/cursos siempre y cuando dicho curso represente una prosecución de los estudios previos ya obtenidos en el país de origen

🔗 Sitio y Requisitos Oficiales

Home · Favoritos · Ajustes · Perfil

Screen 4 — Migra Tranqui (logo)

Migra Tranqui

Screen 5 — Visa de Estudio (color)

← Visa de Estudio ♡

¿Qué vas a estudiar?

Idioma Italiano

Intercambio y Doble Titulación

Posgrados

Laurea Triennale y Magistrale

Home · Favoritos · Ajustes · Perfil

Screen 6 — Idioma Italiano (color)

← Idioma Italiano ♡

¿Para qué sirve y quién la puede solicitar?

Esta visa permite ingresar a Italia a los ciudadanos extranjeros que desean perfeccionar el conocimiento del idioma italiano.

Permite además ingresar a quienes desean perfeccionar el conocimiento de otro tipo de estudios/cursos siempre y cuando dicho curso represente una prosecución de los estudios previos ya obtenidos en el país de origen

🔗 Sitio y Requisitos Oficiales

Home · Favoritos · Ajustes · Perfil

Screen 7 — Antes de viajar

← Antes de viajar ♡

Ten en cuenta esto antes de viajar:

📄 Trámites migratorios

🧳 Preparación del equipaje

Home · Favoritos · Ajustes · Perfil

Screen 8 — Login (placeholder)

Logo

Usuario

Contraseña

Recuperar usuario y/o contraseña

Ingresar con
● ● ●

Ingresar

Crear cuenta

Screen 9 — Tipo de acomodación

← Tipo de acomodación ♡

Elige el tipo de acomodación para saber más:

Apartamentos

Casas

Habitaciones

Residencias

Home · Favoritos · Ajustes · Perfil

Screen 10 — Vivienda (color)

← Vivienda ♡

Ten en cuenta esto para encontrar vivienda:

🏠 Tipos de acomodación

🔍 Tips para encontrar casa

Home · Favoritos · Ajustes · Perfil

Screen 11 — Login (color)

Migra Tranqui

mariana@correo.com

****

Recuperar usuario y/o contraseña

Ingresar con
● ● ●

Ingresar

Crear cuenta

Home · Favoritos · Ajustes · Perfil

Screen 12 — Tipo de acomodación (color)

← Tipo de acomodación ♡

Elige el tipo de acomodación para saber más:

Apartamentos

Casas

Habitaciones

Residencias

Home · Favoritos · Ajustes · Perfil

Heuristic Analysis

This evaluation was carried out to validate compliance with the 10 heuristic principles, using the medium fidelity wireframes of the previous app.

For the assessment, a rating from 0 to 4 was given to each criterium based on severity, having 0 indicate that the interface fully complies with the principles established by heuristics, and 4 mean a critical issue: problems that completely prevent users from completing their tasks or pose a security risk.

The results from the analysis are described below:

Heuristic	Observations	Severity
1: Visibility of System Status	There was a loading page with the app's logo. However, the level of progress within the information hierarchy managed by the app is unclear. (It's unclear how many menus or options the user has before reaching a specific piece of information.)	1
2: Match Between the System and the Real World	The text within the app was clear and familiar. Overall, the system was easy to learn, considering that, as a guide, it didn't have very complex features, and the user experience was the same for each element of the guide.	0
3: User Control and Freedom	There were arrows to go back in navigation. Regarding flexibility, there could be alternative paths or shortcuts to reach certain pieces of information that the user may consider most important based on their needs. **Recommendations: Review alternative ways to access information. Take advantage of the Favorites button to highlight items and create shortcuts.**	2
4: Consistency and Standards	The app used consistent icons across operating systems. The design used cards and buttons to help users become familiar with the interface.	0
5: Error Prevention	At the point at which the screens were developed, there was not enough information to determine if there was a possibility of making errors in the interface and if there was clear information about these.	1
6: Recognition Rather than Recall	The information was presented clearly, the icons were accompanied by text labels, which avoided the need to memorize their meaning.	0
7: Flexibility and Efficiency of Use	The interface did not provide shortcuts and there were not many options to customize it to the user's preferences. **Recommendations: Implement shortcuts for experienced users and options to customize the interface from the configuration**	2

Heuristic	Observations	Severity
8: Aesthetic and Minimalist Design	The interface was easy to understand, with no visual clutter and clear arrangement of elements.	0
9: Help Users Recognize, Diagnose, and Recover from Errors	There were no help resources for users. At the time of the application's development, there were no error messages or technical issues. **Recommendations: Provide help resources for users and develop error messages for login and onboarding**	2
10: Help and Documentation	There were no help resources on the interface **Recommendations: Generate a help section for the interface**	2

Usability Tests

A remote test was conducted to validate the effectiveness of the user flow with a specific scenario, in which they had to find information about study visas for Italian language courses.

Users highlighted in a positive way the app's intuitiveness, information clarity and efficiency of the route. On the other hand, critical features included the login step, as it was perceived as confusing, and the lack of alternative routes to get to the information.

Due to the short scope and duration of the initial project, the developed content was static and lacked interaction between users.

Key Changes

Considering the tests and the theoretical research carried out, some key changes are to be implemented to strengthen the design solution, incorporating it inside the current system of cultural adaptation for international students in Italy.

First, the static-encyclopedia-like content is going to become more dynamic, and user-driven, enhancing participation and engagement through functions as the collaborative update of information, sharing insights about experiences and transition journeys.

Second, community-building will be fostered through features like the possibility of connecting with people also preparing their trip or already settled in Italy, as well as forums with questions and answers, providing a sense of immediacy and closeness between users.

Lastly, the navigation and personalization of one's own journey and interaction with the app will be enhanced by leveraging gamification strategies and crafting flows accordingly with users' needs.

CHAPTER 5

Developing the project

Information Architecture

Activities: International Student Journey

With the goal to create an intuitive and efficient information architecture for the platform, the first step was to define the usual educational mobility journey for international Latin American students in Italy. For this purpose, two main information sources were consulted: Colfuturo's* Website, specially the "Prepare your postgraduate studies abroad" page, and a Handbook created by Capitulo Javeriano in the year 2023, providing elemental information about life in Turin and things to consider before travelling.

Colfuturo (Foundation for the Future of Colombia) is an organization that contributes to the country's development, generating opportunities for the postgraduate training of Colombian professionals in the best programs worldwide.

After this research, and in addition to user interviews, a vertical flow was developed. Divided into three phases: Preparing, Arriving and Adapting, it intends to portray in the most accurate way the usual educational mobility journey Latin American students go through when they move to Italy.

The phases are explained as follows:

Preparing
In this phase, students are still in their home country. From there, they do preliminary research about bilateral agreements or foreign universities. This stage is characterized by many applications, requests, and bureaucratic procedures in the country of origin. Some of these include admission requests, grade certifications, embassy appointments for visa applications and apostille documentation. However, there is also a feeling of excitement and expectancy, where students inform themselves about life in the host country, start packing their luggage, booking flights, and completing other necessary procedures for travelling.

Arriving
This phase starts when students arrive in Italy and goes on for the first weeks or even months of stay in the country. The activities done in this phase include legal and bureaucratic procedures, and activities for settling in and starting to build a daily routine.

Adapting
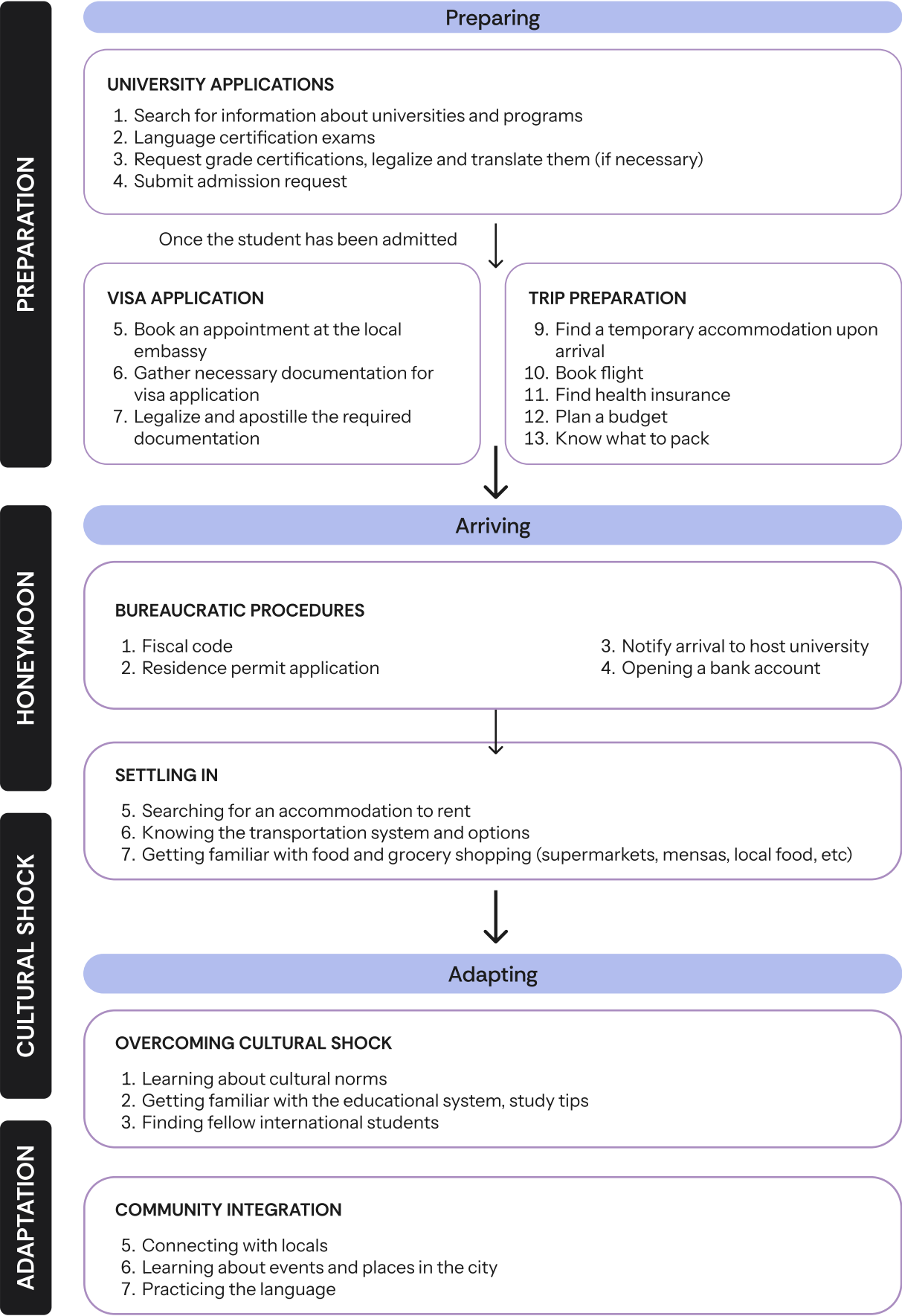In this phase, students are getting more familiar with the culture and system of the host country. Now feels like the perfect time to connect with more people, whether they are international students or locals.

Colfuturo. (n.d.). [Northern Hemisphere countries postgraduate preparation timeline]. Retrieved from Planea tu posgrado en el exterior (https://www.colfuturo.org/asesoria-planea-tu-posgrado-en-el-exterior)

Flow of activities throughout the expatriate adaptation cycle

PREPARATION

Preparing

UNIVERSITY APPLICATIONS
1. Search for information about universities and programs
2. Language certification exams
3. Request grade certifications, legalize and translate them (if necessary)
4. Submit admission request

Once the student has been admitted

VISA APPLICATION
5. Book an appointment at the local embassy
6. Gather necessary documentation for visa application
7. Legalize and apostille the required documentation

TRIP PREPARATION
9. Find a temporary accommodation upon arrival
10. Book flight
11. Find health insurance
12. Plan a budget
13. Know what to pack

HONEYMOON

Arriving

BUREAUCRATIC PROCEDURES
1. Fiscal code
2. Residence permit application
3. Notify arrival to host university
4. Opening a bank account

SETTLING IN
5. Searching for an accommodation to rent
6. Knowing the transportation system and options
7. Getting familiar with food and grocery shopping (supermarkets, mensas, local food, etc)

CULTURAL SHOCK

Adapting

OVERCOMING CULTURAL SHOCK
1. Learning about cultural norms
2. Getting familiar with the educational system, study tips
3. Finding fellow international students

ADAPTATION

COMMUNITY INTEGRATION
5. Connecting with locals
6. Learning about events and places in the city
7. Practicing the language

Full list of functionalities

Upon the definition of the phases, a list of all the possible functionalities featured in the app was generated, considering not only the stages of the transitional journey, but also the sources from which each content could be retrieved.

- **Default content:** Content native to the app, retrieved from official sources, and published and updated by the app administrators.
- **Community content:** Comments, tips and updates provided by users, reviewed by app administrators and, in the case of updates in procedures or specific information, incorporated to the default content.

Default content	Community content
Preparing	
VISA APPLICATION	
1. Visa types and requested documents 2. How to legalize and apostille	1. Tips for the visa application process
TRIP PREPARATION	
1. Types of temporary accomodations 2. Flight booking tips 3. Health insurance options 4. Tips on what to pack	1. Temporary accomodation offers 2. Flight booking tips 3. Health insurance options and tips 4. Tips on what to pack
Arriving	
BUREAUCRATIC PROCEDURES	
1. How to request a fiscal code 2. How to apply for a residence permit 3. How to open a bank account 4. How to convert from your local currency to euros	1. Tips on how to request a fiscal code 2. Tips on how to apply for a residence permit 3. Tips on how to open a bank account and converting
SETTLING IN	
1. Types of accommodation 2. Tips on how to find a home 3. Local transportation system 4. Grocery shopping options 5. University canteens	1. Announcements (looking for roommate, available accommodations) 2. Tips on how to find a home 3. Tips on how to get around 4. Tips on where to go grocery shopping or eating
Adapting	
OVERCOMING CULTURAL SHOCK	
1. About Italy's cultural norms 2. Italy's educational system 3. Study tips	1. Tips on cultural norms 2. University tips
COMMUNITY INTEGRATION	
1. Monthly calendar of events	1. Event announcements 2. Join groups (interests, activities, language, etc)

MVP (Minimum Viable Product)

Understanding the complexity of the journey of preparation and adaptation, and translating it to activities and app functions, unveiled the necessity to prioritize key functionalities to begin developing the first version of the app. To achieve this goal, an MVP was defined.

The minimum viable product, or MVP, is the simplest version of a product that can be shipped and tested with users. It helps validate the core concept of the product and review its user flows and overall UX Design. (Maze, 2025)

To ensure that prioritization led to a useful product, all phases and their activities were analyzed in terms of relevance and how critical it would be for a student to lack that type of information du-

ring each of the phases. For example: it is vital for a student to know about the visa procedures and to obtain this document before entering Italy. On the other hand, although it would be interesting for users to see tips on how to book a flight, this information is not as crucial for travelling to the country and can already be found on other sources.

The MVP included the most essential and country-specific information and excluded activities or contents that were not vital to assure a smooth adaptation process in Italy. Another consideration for the definition of the MVP was to prioritize contents related specifically to the city of Turin, as it is the location of the initial development of the project.

VISA APPLICATION
1. Visa types and requested documents
1. Tips for the visa application process

TRIP PREPARATION
1. Types of temporary accomodations
2. Tips on what to pack
1. Temporary accomodation offers
2. Tips on what to pack

BUREAUCRATIC PROCEDURES
1. How to request a fiscal code
2. How to apply for a residence permit
3. How to open a bank account
1. Tips on how to apply for a residence permit
2. Tips on how to open a bank account

SETTLING IN
1. Types of accommodation
2. Local transportation system
3. Grocery shopping options
1. Announcements (looking for roommate, available accommodations)
2. Tips on how to find a home
3. Tips on how to get around
4. Tips on where to go grocery shopping or eating

OVERCOMING CULTURAL SHOCK
1. About Italy's cultural norms
2. Italy's educational system
1. Tips on cultural norms
2. University tips

COMMUNITY INTEGRATION
1. Monthly calendar of events
1. Join groups (interests, activities, language, etc)

(Preparing / Arriving / Adapting)

Sitemap (first version)

To give a hierarchy to the app contents, a sitemap was built following the scheme and logical sequence of the different phases of the journey.

The first version of the sitemap included a homepage, followed by the 3 essential phases: Prepare, Arrive and Adapt. Inside each of them, there are macro-activities that users must have some spe-

cific content for each activity. On the other hand, the Connection section works as a community tab, where students can connect with people, create and join groups.

First wireframing approach

Following a layout grid of 8px and four columns, with a margin of 16px, low fidelity wireframes were developed for structuring the layout of the Onboarding, Home, Groups and Connect sections. Some common design patterns from other apps onboard were considered. For example, a carousel consisting of key app features before logging in or registering as a new user, or the forms where users fill in their personal data to register.

Regarding the home section, the first wireframe included access to the three main phases and a shortcut to the Connect section. After onboarding, some tooltips would appear on screen, walking users through the different functionalities.
For the Groups and Connect screens, common layouts and patterns were replicated, ensuring familiarity and ease of use.
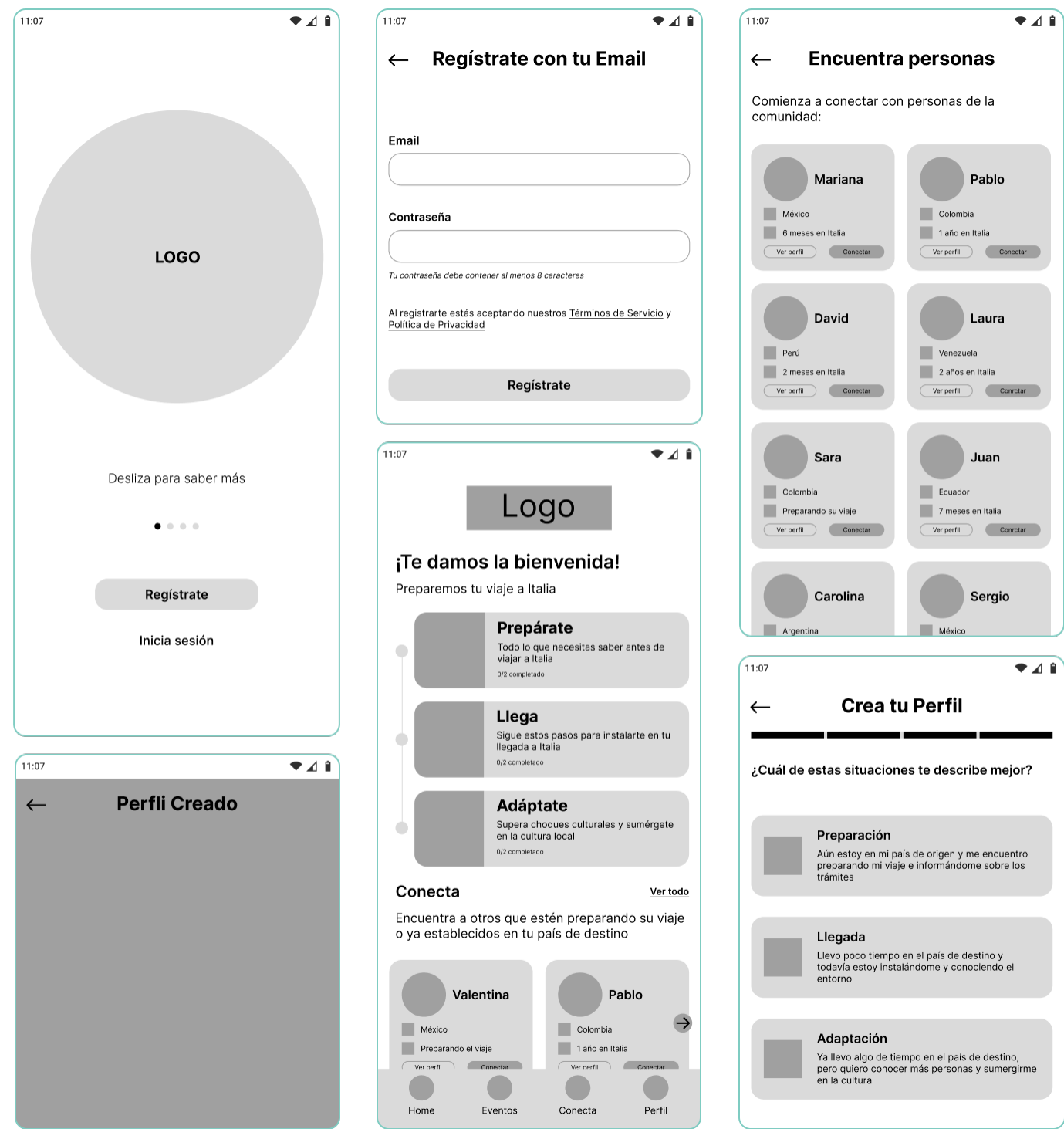
Gamification strategies and user flows

After the first wireframing exercise, the need to reduce cognitive overload in sections like Home was made evident. With the goal of making the mobile app more dynamic than the first version and other existing apps, some gamification strategies were applied to the different phases, refining user flows and defining interaction patterns.

Why gamification?

Gamification has become a major trend in UX, as it increases engagement and adoption, motivating users to achieve goals and overcome negative associations they may have. (Vinney, 2024).

To achieve a successful implementation of gamification, it is necessary to establish a main goal, in the case of the present project it is: To help international students adapt better and smoothly in Italy.

This goal can be achieved in two different ways: individually and with a community.

Individually:
Users can make progress in different parts of the process, by finding information and know-hows, and ticking off tasks in checklists.

With a community:
Users can find people who have gone or are going through the same experience. Through the forum and connect tab, they can get tips and updates about life as an international student in Italy.

Considering that some phases and activities of the international student journey, like bureaucratic procedures or finding an accommodation, might provoke negative feelings and be frustrating for users, adopting gamification can be an optimal strategy to keep students motivated and excited about the experience they are about to live in Italy.

For the app, it is applied by dividing the contents into small tasks that can be easily completed and designing the user flow in a way that is perceived

as progress in levels. Some elements to be implemented are badges, stickers, challenges or leaderboards.

Octalysis framework

Octalysis is a gamification framework created by Yu-kai Chou. Emphasizing Human-Focused Design and analyzing (The Octalysis Group, 2023) human motivation, it comprises 8 core drives represented by an octagon shape.

Figure 7. Adapted from The Octalysis Group, 2023. (https://octalysisgroup.com/framework/)

1. **Epic Meaning and calling:** Players believe that they were "chosen" to do something greater than themselves.
2. **Development and accomplishment:** Internal drive of making progress, developing skills and overcoming challenges.
3. **Empowerment of Creativity and Feedback:** Users are engaged in a creative process where they must figure things out and try different combinations.
4. **Ownership and possession:** Users feel like they own something, wanting to improve what they own and then own even more.

5. **Social influence and relatedness:** Incorporating all social elements that drive people, like mentorship, acceptance, social responses, as well as competition and envy. It also includes the drive we have to draw closer to people, places and events.

6. **Scarcity and impatience:** Drive of wanting something because they can't have it. The fact that people can't get something now motivates them to think about it all day long.

7. **Unpredictability and curiosity:** Drive of wanting to find out what will happen next. If users don't know what is going to happen, their brains will be engaged, and they think about it often.

8. **Loss and avoidance:** Based upon the avoidance of something negative happening, like losing previous work or quitting, making everything done up to that point useless.

To apply it in actual systems, all the game mechanics that are used to appeal to each core drive are identified and listed next to the core drive of the octagon. Based on how strong game mechanics are, each side of the octagon will expand or retract.
(The Octalysis Group, 2023)

Full Gamification Journey

According to Yu-kai Chou, a user's interaction and journey with a product is continuously evolving.

"The reason why a person is using a product on day one is often very different from the reason why this person is using this same product on day one hundred – the goal she is trying to fulfill is different, and even the features she sees are different!" (Chou, 2025)

Within the Octalysis Framework, it is possible to break the process into four distinct products, based on the 4 experience phases of a game:

1. **Discovery**: Initial phase when a user first comes across the product. Its key element is curiosity and interest. The design of this phase should create intrigue and demonstrate the potential value of the journey, motivating users to further explore.

2. **Onboarding**: The user learns the rules of the game or the basics of the service. They should feel motivated and capable, having a learning process as seamless and enjoyable as possible.

3. **Scaffolding**: In this phase, users repeatedly engage in the core activities of the game or product. This is the main phase of the user journey where users work toward their goals. There are ongoing challenges and rewards that match the user's growing skill level.

4. **Endgame**: Users have done just about everything there is to do. The challenge is to keep them engaged. Design should introduce new content or opportunities for social interaction to keep them engaged and invested.

The challenge was to rationalize the previously established phases of the international student journey with the four phases of the player's journey. The Prepare phase was somehow a Discovery, as students were starting to get familiar with life in Italy and preparing their trip from a comfort zone like their home country. The next phase, Arrive, was like Onboarding, as students begin to learn about their new context and settle in. Finally, the Adapt phase was in a way like Scaffolding, as at this point, they already had basic knowledge about life in the country, having already built a routine.

However, an Endgame phase was lacking. To integrate it into the international student journey, it was necessary to think about the possible paths a student could take once they finished their studies, as well as what kind of contents or functions that could motivate them towards the achievement of new goals. This led to the creation of two new phases: Belong and Evolve.

The updated international student journey, with the applied Octalysis framework principles was defined as follows:

Phase 1: Prepare

This phase happens before travelling, while students are still in their home country. It is characterized by bureaucratic procedures in the country of origin. Some of these include grade certifications, embassy appointments for visa applications and apostille documentation. They might also begin searching for long-term accommodation.

Activities	App Functionalities and contents
Applying for a student visa	• Filter by country of residence and type of study. • Document checklist according to type of study. • Information on what to expect before, during and after the visa appointment.
Finding an accommodation	• Choosing between long-term (apartments for rental and student residences) and short-term accommodation (hotels and b&b's, friends' houses). • Tips according to type of accommodation. • Lists of platforms to search for accommodation, with direct links to the website.
Packing luggage	• Checklist by category (clothing, technology, medicines, weather adaptation, personal extras, etc)

Player Name: Planner.

Corresponding phase in the player journey: Discovery, early Onboarding.

Core Drives:

• **1-Epic Meaning and Calling:** Students begin the great journey of studying in Italy, feeling like great experiences are awaiting for them.

• **2- Development and Accomplishment:** As they prepare for their trip, users need a sense of progress and of "small wins", like obtaining their visa, or finishing packing their luggage.

• **4- Ownership and Possession:** Users can customize their activities, going back to what's still in progress, as well as having a smart onboarding where they personalize their profiles and select the date of their trip.

• **5- Social Influence and Relatedness:** As sometimes official information is unavailable or outdated, word-of-mouth and experiences from fellow Latin American students, become the most reliable source for who's planning the trip. Getting to know people who have already gone through the process and obtaining answers to the most frequently asked questions is a key need for users.

• **7- Unpredictability and Curiosity:** In this phase, students are highly motivated to know more about the context they are to live in. There is also a sense of unpredictability (in a negative way) with what is going to happen with their visas or housing.

Phase 2: Arrive

This phase starts when students arrive in Italy and goes on for the first weeks or even months of stay in the country. Students begin to settle in, doing procedures such as the tax code, residence permit, getting an Italian phone number or opening a bank account. They also get familiar with daily activities, such as grocery shopping or knowing how to get around in the city they live in.

Activities	App Functionalities and contents
First week survival kit	
Arrival day	· Options to get to the city center from the airport. · Things to consider on the first day.
Applying for a residence permit	· Process step-by-step. · Document checklist according to type of study.
Obtaining an Italian phone number	· Process step-by-step. · List of mobile operators in Italy, with links to their websites.
Opening a bank account	· Process step-by-step. · List of banks in Italy where students can open a bank account, with links to their websites.
Settling in	
Finding accommodation (in case they haven't found one yet)	· Tips on how to find accommodation. · List of platforms to search for accommodation, with direct links to the website.
Getting around the city	· List of all transportation options · In-depth knowledge of the alternatives
Going grocery shopping	· List of options to go grocery shopping · In-depth knowledge of the alternatives

Player Name: Newcomer.

Corresponding phase in the player journey: Onboarding, early Scaffolding.

Core Drives:

- **2– Development and Accomplishment:** As they arrive in Italy, users need a sense of progress and of "small wins", like sending their kit for the residence permit to the post office or finding long-term accommodation.
- **3– Empowerment of Creativity and Feedback:** In between the chaos that comes with the arrival, students might find stimulating the possibility of sharing their experiences with the community in many creative ways.
- **4– Ownership and Possession:** Users can customize their activities, going back to what's still in progress. They can also start "owning" the places they start to know.
- **5– Social Influence and Relatedness:** As sometimes official information is unavailable or outdated, word-of-mouth and experiences from fellow Latin American students, become the most reliable source for the newcomers. Reaching out to the community and getting to know people in person is also a very exciting and motivating activity for who's just arrived.

Phase 3: Adapt

After having their basic needs met, students start to get familiar with Italy's cultural norms and educational system. It is very likely that they experience some cultural shocks and need to readjust routines or patterns to feel more comfortable.

Activities	App Functionalities and contents
Life in Italy	
Learning about holidays and seasons	· National holidays. · Italian traditions for international holidays. · Seasons and weather.
Learning about food culture	· Italian diet. · Mealtimes. · Local customs for eating and table etiquette.
Learning about human relations	· Useful expressions. · Time management and punctuality. · Hospitality. · Approaching strangers.
Learning about the educational system	· Academic calendar. · Grading system. · Insights about university life in the city.
Events and places	
Finding places to meet other Latin American students	· Browsing a live map with places of encounter. · Adding places to the map. · Reviewing already existing places on the map.

Player Name: Explorer.

Corresponding phase in the player journey: Scaffolding.

Core Drives:

- **2– Development and Accomplishment:** As they complete small tasks or read about the most common and challenging cultural shocks, users will get a sense of completion and progress in the activity.
- **3– Empowerment of Creativity and Feedback:** Students in this phase are encouraged to share their experiences and give feedback about places and events they have been to.
- **5– Social Influence and Relatedness:** As in the previous phases, personal experiences can enrich the information provided by the app. Encouraging people to share anecdotes and tips contributes to their sense of belonging in the community.
- **7– Unpredictability and Curiosity:** The changing events and the dynamic map feed the sense of curiosity and add a factor of surprise to the overall user experience.

Phase 4: Belong

Once they have settled in and adapted to the community, some students may want to become mentors, contributing information to newcomers in the forum, aiding them with housing search, or organizing activities to meet fellow students.

Activities	App Functionalities and contents
Helping People	• Accepting or declining friendship requests. • Accepting or skipping support requests in different tasks, like accommodation searching or accompanying in a bureaucratic procedure.
Contributing to the forum	• Answering the newest questions in the forum. • Sharing a story or piece of content about a weekly topic proposed by the app, regarding life as an international student in Italy.
Contributing to the live open map	• Adding places of encounter to the map. • Editing or adding photos of an already existing place. • Answering questions about an already existing place.
Contributing to events	• Creating and promoting events inside groups or open to the whole community

Player Name: Mentor.

Corresponding phase in the player journey: Endgame.

Core Drives:

- **1- Epic Meaning and Calling:** As they assume a new role, Mentors can find themselves motivated and inspiring for helping Planners, Newcomers and Explorers, contributing to the community.

- **5- Social Influence and Relatedness:** By obtaining badges and being in the top places of the leaderboards, mentors can become top contributors of the community, becoming a reliable and trusted voice for students of all phases

- **8- Loss and Avoidance:** To become a top voice, Mentors are encouraged to answer questions quickly and try not to miss any update.

Phase 5: Evolve

Although the primary focus of this project is on supporting students during their arrival and adaptation in Italy, this phase is conceived as an experimental extension. *Evolve* addresses the moment after students complete their studies, when they may face two different paths: remaining in Italy to pursue job opportunities or returning to their home country and readjusting to familiar contexts. In both scenarios, students could benefit from support, ranging from practical resources for job searching to guidance for managing reverse cultural shock. While this phase was not fully developed within the scope of the thesis, it highlights the systemic nature of the project and can serve as a potential entry point for future design solutions.

Activities	App Functionalities and contents
Finding a job	• Learning about useful job boards. • Browsing CV tips for job searching in Italy or Europe. • Getting interview tips. • Hearing tips and feedback from the community.
Returning to home country	• Browsing advice to manage reverse cultural shock. • Toolkit with checklists and activities to do before returning to the home country. • Finding testimonials from other users who returned to their countries.

Player Name: Walker.

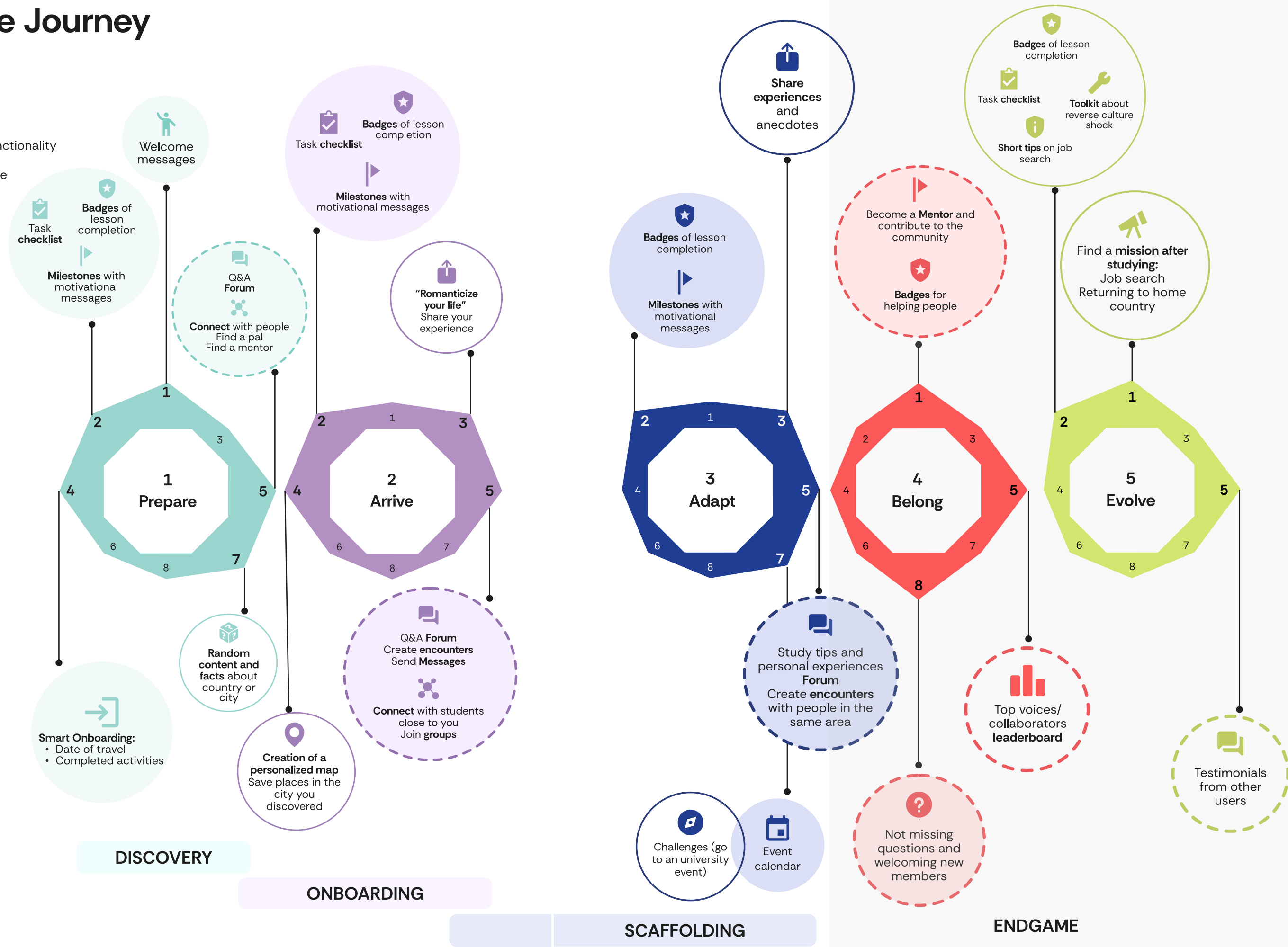**Corresponding phase in the player journey**: Endgame.

Core Drives:

- **1- Epic Meaning and Calling:** As they finish they studies, Walkers can feel motivation on the pursuit of a new mission.

- **2- Development and Accomplishment:** As they complete small tasks and get tips for both scenarios, users will get a sense of completion and progress in the activity.

- **5- Social Influence and Relatedness:** As in the previous phases, personal experiences can enrich the information provided by the app. Obtaining testimonials and advice from other users can ease the transition process.

The following map visually represents the 5 phases of the international student journey, along with their corresponding phase in the player's journey and the application of the Octalysis Framework, the core drives that guide each phase of the experience and the specific gamification strategies and functionalities.

Complete Journey

Key

- ● MVP Functionality
- ○ Future versions functionality
- ⊙ Community Feature

Welcome messages

Task **checklist**
Badges of lesson completion
Milestones with motivational messages

Q&A **Forum**
Connect with people
Find a pal
Find a mentor

Task **checklist**
Badges of lesson completion
Milestones with motivational messages

"Romanticize your life"
Share your experience

Share experiences and anecdotes

Badges of lesson completion
Milestones with motivational messages

Become a **Mentor** and contribute to the community
Badges for helping people

Badges of lesson completion
Task **checklist**
Toolkit about reverse culture shock
Short tips on job search

Find a **mission after studying:**
Job search
Returning to home country

1 Prepare
```
    1
2       3
4       5
  6   7
    8
```

2 Arrive
```
  2   1   3
4           5
  6   7
    8
```

3 Adapt
```
  2   1   3
4           5
  6   7
    8
```

4 Belong
```
    1
2       3
4       5
  6   7
    8
```

5 Evolve
```
    1
2       3
4       5
  6   7
    8
```

Smart Onboarding:
- Date of travel
- Completed activities

Random content and facts about country or city

Creation of a personalized map
Save places in the city you discovered

Q&A **Forum**
Create **encounters**
Send **Messages**
Connect with students close to you
Join **groups**

Study tips and personal experiences **Forum**
Create **encounters** with people in the same area

Challenges (go to an university event)

Event calendar

Not missing questions and welcoming new members

Top voices/ collaborators **leaderboard**

Testimonials from other users

DISCOVERY

ONBOARDING

SCAFFOLDING

ENDGAME

Adaptive player journey by entry point

Entry Point	Player Phase	Gamification strategies	
1. Prepare (before travelling)	Discovery → onboarding	**Goal-setting** · Smart onboarding · Checklists · Date organization · Milestones · Badges	**Connection** · Finding mentors · Finding pals
2. Arrive (first 2 months)	Fast discovery → scaffolding	**Goal-setting** · Smart onboarding · Checklists · Badges · Milestones	**Connection** · Finding nearby people · Groups
3. Adapt (3-6 months)	Onboarding → scaffolding	**Goal-setting** · Smart onboarding · Milestones · Badges	**Connection** · Finding people · Groups · Events
4. Belong (6-9+ months)	Scaffolding → endgame	**Goal-setting** · Smart onboarding · Badges · Leaderboards	**Connection** · Answering forum questions · Sharing experiences
4. Evolve (9+ months)	Re-onboarding → scaffolding → endgame	**Goal-setting** · Checklists · Milestones · Badges · Tips for finding a job · Tips for cultural readjustment	**Connection** · Alumni network

Considering that some users might get to know the platform in one of the subsequent phases to the trip preparation, an adaptive journey was defined to help them enroll in the app in a smooth way.

Smart onboarding is a key strategy for this adaptive player journey, as it allows users to better identify their entry point and have access to the most relevant information for them. For example, if a user discovers the app after their first six months in Italy, once they enroll in the app, they complete a short survey that guides them to the activities of the phase that is best fitting for them, placing them in the Adapt phase and omitting the first two sections of the journey.

The following scheme illustrates the adaptation of the phases of the international student journey, their corresponding player phases and the gamification strategies, sorted by goal setting (activities users do by themselves) and connection (activities to connect with the community)

Progressive Disclosure

Considering that the app's content is based on a multi-phase structure, and with the goal to avoid overwhelming users with excessive loads of information that might not be relevant to the phase of the international student journey they are currently living in, another gamification strategy known as progressive disclosure was applied to the system.

Progressive disclosure is a strategy that reveals information to users as it is needed, deferring advanced features and information to secondary components, and keeping the primary UI straightforward and inviting. Its goal is to improve usability for novice and experienced users.

Principles of progressive disclosure applied to the system

- **Smart onboarding:** Accompanying the user during the app onboarding process, helping them to choose the most fitting phase to begin their journey inside the platform, whether they are still in their home country or already in Italy.
- **Dynamic homepage:** Depending on the current phase of the users, the homepage and its contents can vary, reflecting the most relevant activities that students can do at the moment.
- **Task breakdown:** Each activity is broken down into smaller tasks to give users a sense of progress and accomplishment and avoid overwhelming them with large loads of information.

User Flows
Onboarding

The app onboarding is the starting point in the experience of all users. Following patterns identified in other apps, once the students download it, they will find a short carousel to preview the features and benefits of the app. After that, they will be asked to log in or register and create a profile. For the profile creation, they will be asked to provide basic information about themselves (name,

age, home country, home university). Subsequently, they will be asked to fill in information about the city of destination, type of study they are going to do in Italy and the estimated date of arrival in the country.

After filling in their information, they will be asked to choose a starting point depending on the situation that best describes them:

- **Prepare**: "I am still in my home country, and I am preparing my trip and informing myself about procedures".
- **Arrive**: "I arrived in Italy a short time ago, I am settling in and knowing my surroundings".
- **Adapt**: "I've been in Italy for a while, but I want to immerse myself in the culture and know more people and events".
- **Belong**: "I've been in Italy for a while, and I want to contribute with my knowledge and support newcomers".
- **Evolve**: "I am finishing or have already finished my studies, but I want to know about what I could do next!".

If they are not sure about the phase they should choose, users can complete a short set of questions about the activities they are doing or have already done, and the app suggests them the most fitting starting point. Once they completed their profile, users are directed to the correspondent homepage to the phase they chose. Aided by tooltips, they progressively discover and get familiar with the features. From the homepage, it is also possible to explore and skip to the other phases. Usually, once they finish exploring a section for the first time, users will find a Milestone screen with a motivational message.
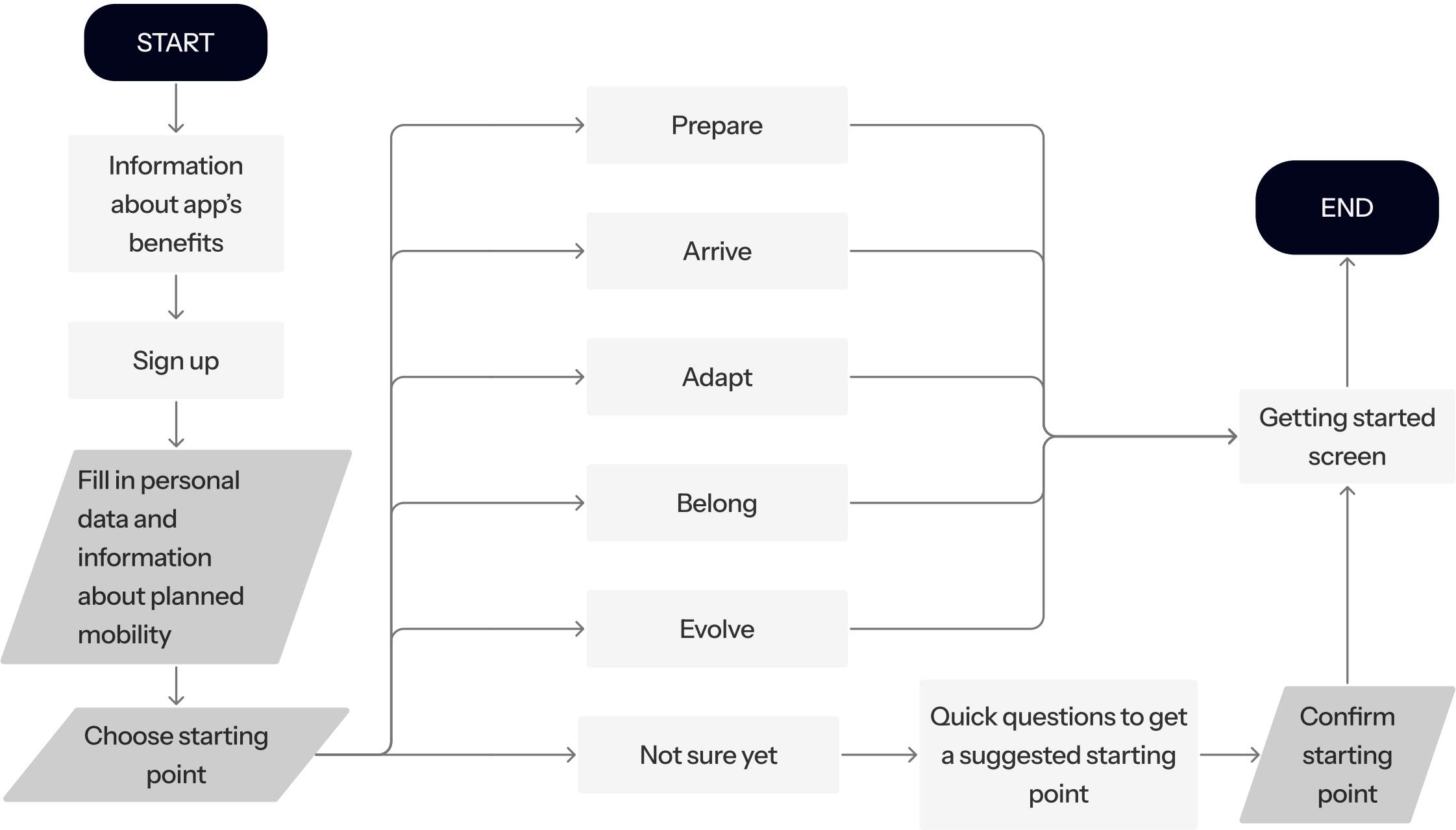
Phase 1: Prepare

The Prepare phase includes three key activities: Applying for a Visa, searching for accommodation and packing luggage. Users are free to explore them in their preferred order.

Visa Application

For the Visa Application section, users are going to start by selecting the number of days they plan to stay in Italy, as Visas are only necessary for periods longer than 90 days. In case they need to apply for a Visa, they choose the type of study they are going to do in the country. This step is necessary, as Italian embassies request different types of documentation according to the type of course or degree.

After that, they find a checklist with the necessary documents for their Visa application. There are supporting tooltips in the case of items that result unfamiliar to the users, or when further explanations about a document are needed. This checklist can be completed later.

Then, students will encounter a series of tips and information about their appointment at the Embassy. Finally, a Milestone screen appears, indicating users that they now know how to apply for a visa and that they can come back to the checklist whenever they want.

For the development of the prototype, the guidelines provided by the Italian Embassy in Bogota, Colombia were taken into consideration. The requirements may vary from country to country.

Searching for accommodation

Finding accommodation is a crucial part of the preparation journey. Some students decide they want to find long-term accommodation from their home country, while others decide they want to spend their first weeks in another place and see for themselves the apartments or rooms that are available for rental.

Regardless of their choice, they will be able to find information about types of accommodations, average prices, tips for finding a home, and a list of platforms where they can find places for rental.

Packing luggage

Knowing what to pack and not forgetting any of the essential items is a key activity inside the preparation phase. In this section, users explore the different luggage categories: Clothing, Technology, Documents, Medicines, Weather adaptation and Personal extras.

Inside each category, there is a checklist that supports users when preparing their baggage.
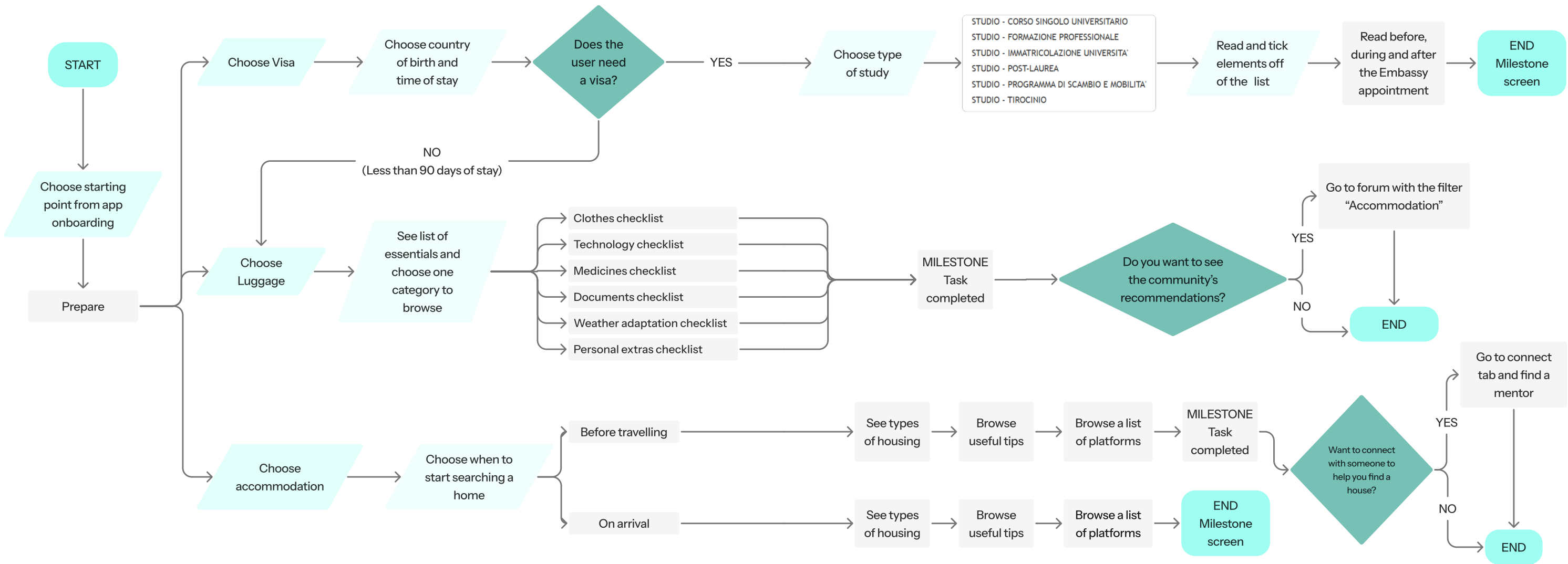
Phase 2: Arrive

Once users have completed all the activities from Phase 1, they can move forward to the Arrive phase. This includes a survival kit for the first week, consisting of activities that users should complete during the first seven days of their stay; and a set of activities for settling in, that can be completed during the first months in Italy.

First Week Starter Pack

Arrival Day

This includes a feature with options informing users how to get to the city center from the airport, presenting the different alternatives in the form of a carousel.

Then, users will find tips and things to consider during the first day, such as: jet lag, a reminder to reach out to their loved ones, and an invitation to begin exploring their surroundings.

Tax Code

Users can understand the procedure with a process step-by-step in the form of a carousel. Like the visa application, a document checklist will be available to help students prepare the procedure.

Residence Permit

The Italian authorities require non-EU students to request their residence permit within the first seven days of stay in the country. This process is a critical step in the international student journey.

Firstly, users will find a step-by-step breakdown of the whole process in the form of a carousel. This includes a detailed timeline with waiting times and concrete activities to do in each step.

Next, there is a checklist of documents that students need to put in the envelope to be sent at the post office. The use of tooltips is key to explaining unfamiliar topics or informing about the possibility of delivering some of the documents to the Questura on the appointment for the fingerprinting.

After knowing the basics of the residence permit application process, users will find a Milestone message and the possibility of returning to the checklist or the step-by-step.

Mobile Phone

Another crucial activity that students do during the first days of their stay is obtaining an Italian phone number. This activity is connected to the residence permit application, as Questura communicates through SMS with applicants.

The process on how to buy an Italian sim card is explained in a step-by-step breakdown. Then, there is a list of mobile operators in Italy, with direct links to their websites.

Bank Account

Managing money and converting it from their local currency to Euros is one of the key needs of users. There are different alternatives for this, from financial apps to accounts in Italian banks.

Users can understand the procedure step-by-step, as well as finding the list of banks where they can open an account or make cash withdrawals, with direct links to their websites.

Settling In

After concluding the essential activities for the first week, students start to learn how to do daily activities in their new city.
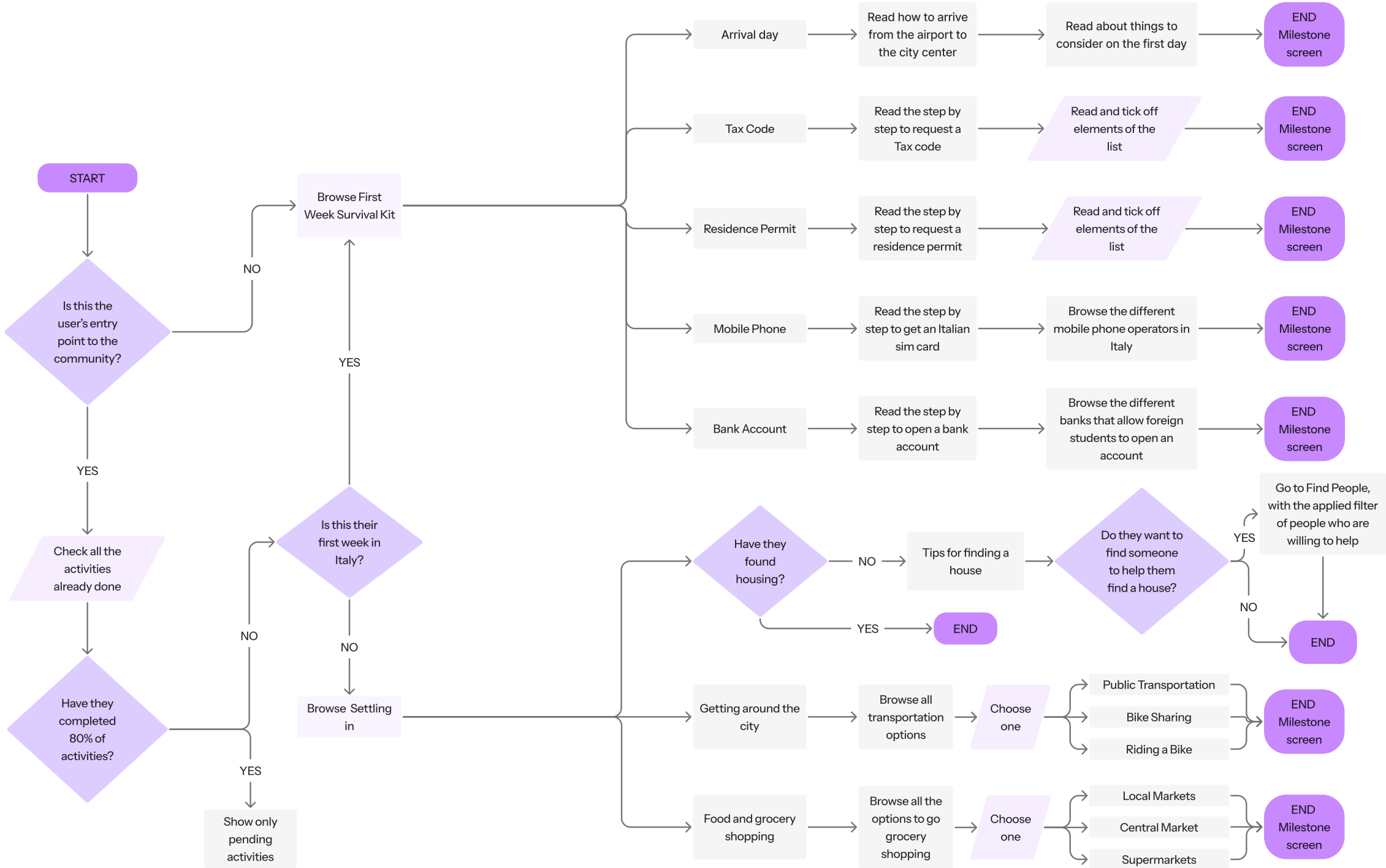
<u>Finding Accommodation</u>

In case they haven´t found accommodation yet, users will be able to browse again the accommodation section, with a special focus on apartments and rooms for rental. During this phase, community engagement is encouraged, as there are people newcomers can reach out to and ask for help.

<u>Getting around the city</u>

In this section, users get to know the transportation alternatives existing in the city of Turin, presented in the format of a carousel. After that, they can choose to know more in depth about one of the options: Public Transportation System (GTT), Bike sharing or riding a bike.

<u>Food and grocery shopping</u>

Another crucial activity to settle in is getting to know where to buy groceries. In a pattern like the transportation section, users get to know the different existing options in the format of a carousel. Then, they can know more about their preferred option: Local Markets, Central Market or Supermarkets.

Phase 3: Adapt

Once users have completed all the activities from Phase 2, they can move forward to the Adapt phase. This includes a guide for overcoming cultural shocks and adapting smoothly to the local culture and customs.

Based on user interviews, four main cultural shocks were determined. These were turned into content categories for the Adapt section inside the mobile app. The categories are described as follows:

The Calendar

This section includes the understanding of seasons and weather conditions of the host city, considering that many Latin American countries are tropical and therefore have no seasons.

Additionally, provides information about national Italian holidays, such as April 25th or Ferragosto, as well as national traditions during global holidays, like Christmas or New Year's Eve.

Food Culture

This section provides all the necessary information for students to learn about typical and regional foods, the Italian diet, mealtimes and table etiquette according to national conventions.

Human Relations

The main goal of this section is to help Latin American students better understand social dynamics to integrate with locals in a smoother way,

containing tips for different social interactions, as well as useful expressions for daily life.
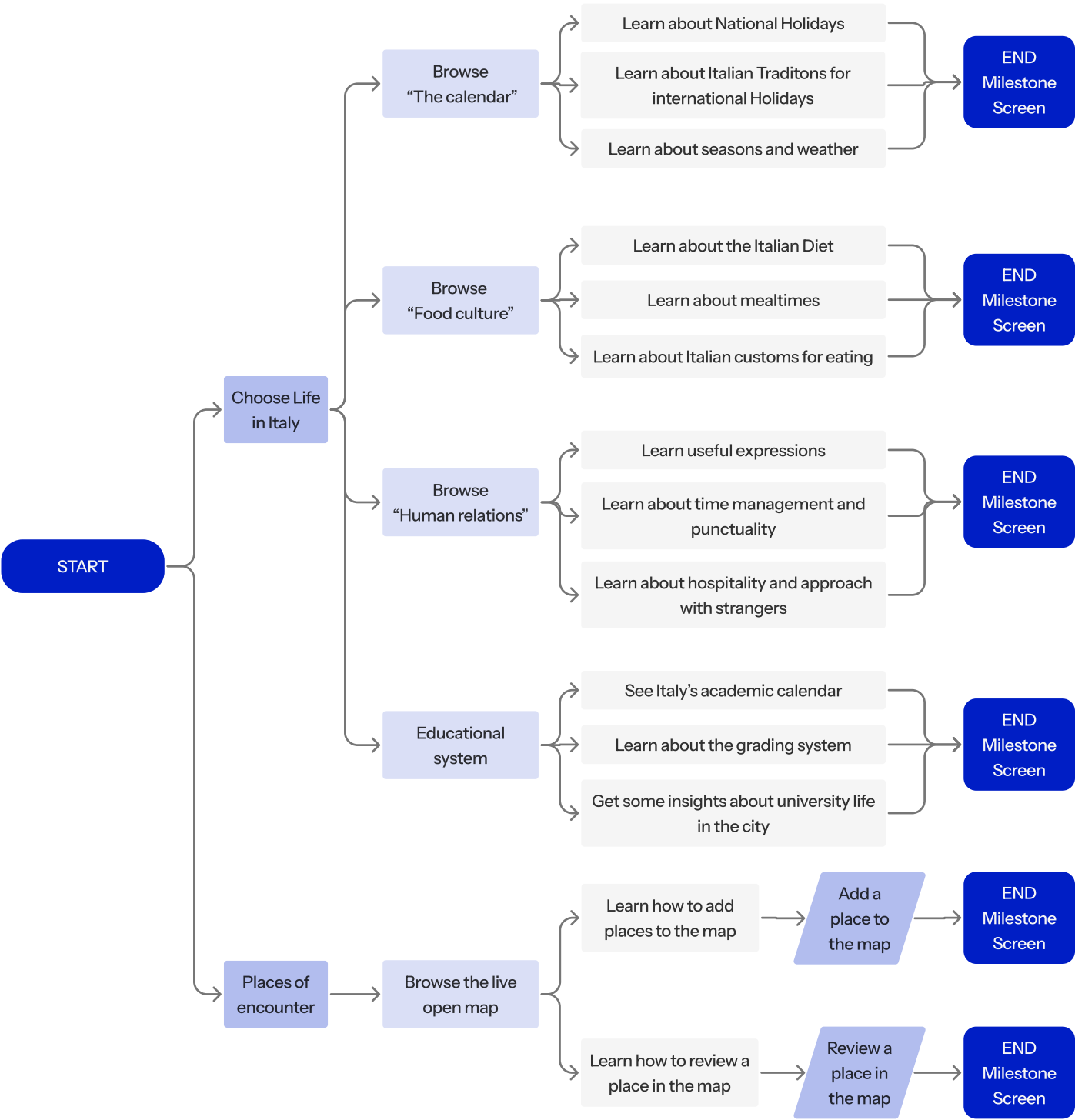
Educational System

This section aims to guide students into their journey with the Italian educational system, giving an overview of the academic calendar, the grading and evaluation system, and useful advice for university life in the country.
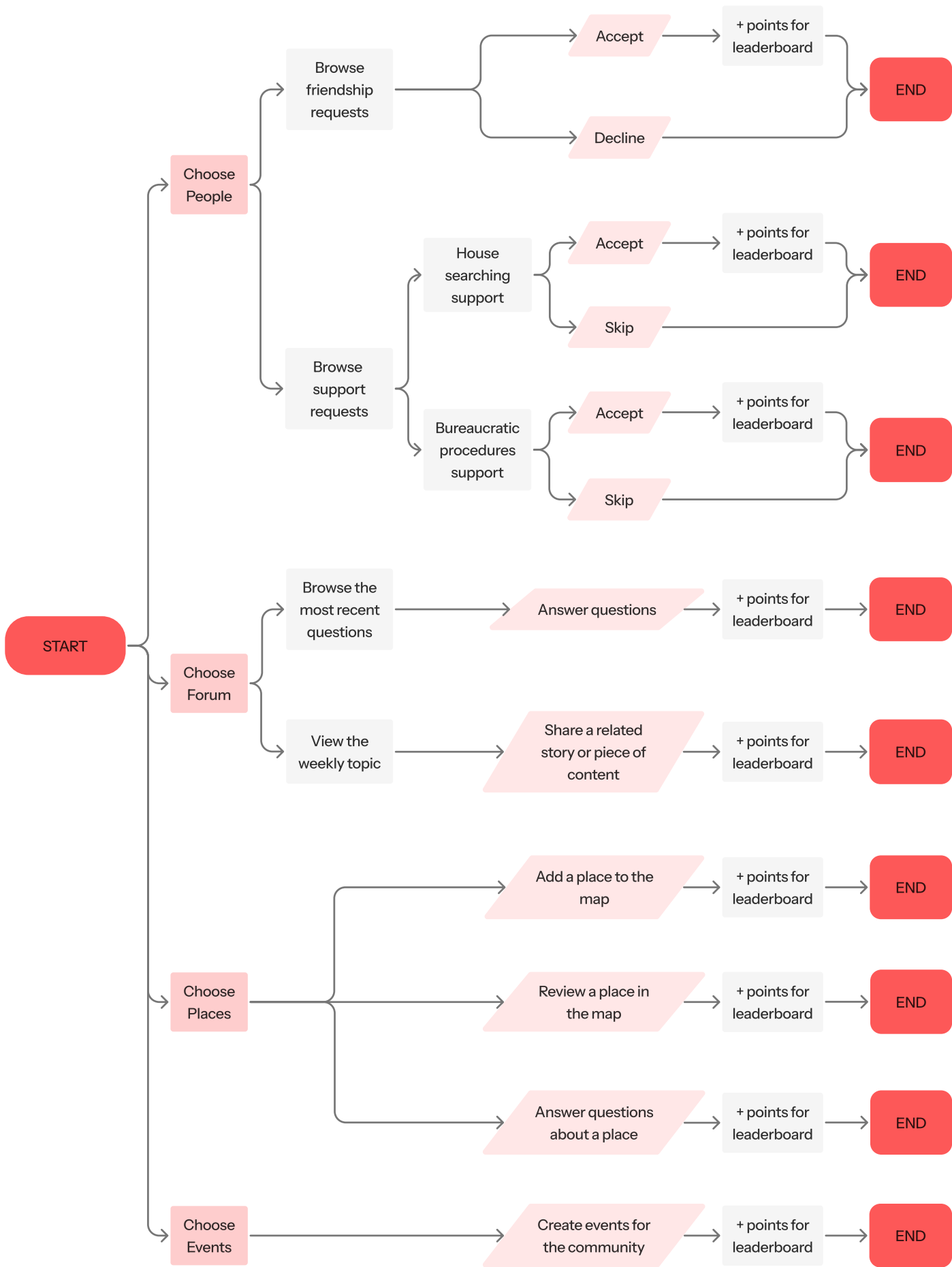
Users are encouraged to browse freely according to their preferences and needs. After finishing each category, a Milestone screen appears.

Besides overcoming cultural shocks, the Adapt phase seeks to promote greater community integration through the event tab, which includes monthly events and holidays in the city. Additionally, in this stage, users can see and modify a live open map with encounter places for Latin American communities and students.

The map consists of the places mentioned in Chapter 2 and gives the possibility to enrich the list with other small businesses, restaurants or community centers. Users can add a place by putting an image, name, description, category, address and website.

The live map will be visualized according to category and country (in the case of country-specific places). After a location is added, other users will be able to give reviews and rate places, further feeding the map.

START

Choose People
- Browse friendship requests
  - Accept → + points for leaderboard → END
  - Decline → END
- Browse support requests
  - House searching support
    - Accept → + points for leaderboard → END
    - Skip → END
  - Bureaucratic procedures support
    - Accept → + points for leaderboard → END
    - Skip → END

Choose Forum
- Browse the most recent questions → Answer questions → + points for leaderboard → END
- View the weekly topic → Share a related story or piece of content → + points for leaderboard → END

Choose Places
- Add a place to the map → + points for leaderboard → END
- Review a place in the map → + points for leaderboard → END
- Answer questions about a place → + points for leaderboard → END

Choose Events
- Create events for the community → + points for leaderboard → END

Phase 4: Belong

After completing contents from Phase 3, students can find the possibility of becoming mentors for new community members. With a dynamic homepage, they will be able to browse updates from different topics and complete tasks that add points for earning badges and becoming a top contributor of the community.

People

In this tab, Mentors will explore their friendship requests, as well as requests for support in different tasks that Planners and Newcomers must carry out, such as searching for an accommodation or bureaucratic processes like tax code, residence permit, etc.

Forum

Mentors will receive notifications of the most recent questions and have the possibility of answering them. To make the experience more stimulating and encouraging the sharing of stories, there is the opportunity to create a piece of content or a story related to the weekly suggested topic.
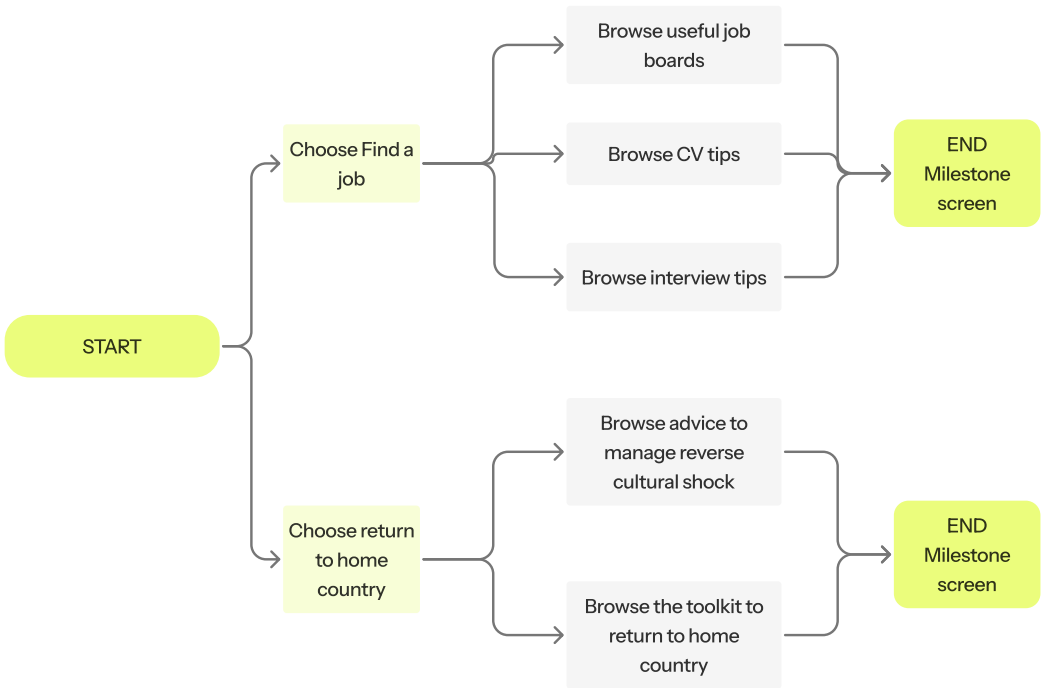
Places

There are three possible actions for mentors to perform in this tab related to the places of encounter for latin american students present in the city: they can feed the map by adding places, review a place or answer specific questions about an already existing and visited location.

Events

Mentors are encouraged to create events for the community, fostering more integration among inter-national students, or between them and locals.

Phase 5: Evolve

Users in this phase would be encouraged to browse freely between both possible routes they can take after finishing their studies. When choosing the Find a job option, they would find useful tips for landing a job in Italy. On the other hand, if they choose the return to home country option, they would find advice for reverse cultural shock and find a toolkit for returning to their home country. The forum and commu-nity tab plays a key role in this process, as members can give advice, post offers and give testimonials based on their own experience.

START

Choose Find a job
- Browse useful job boards → END Milestone screen
- Browse CV tips → END Milestone screen
- Browse interview tips → END Milestone screen

Choose return to home country
- Browse advice to manage reverse cultural shock → END Milestone screen
- Browse the toolkit to return to home country → END Milestone screen

User Interface and Voice Strategy Definition

After defining the set of app features deriving from the activities and phases of the international student journey, it was necessary to characterize the visual interface and tone of voice. To achieve this and give the platform a unique personality and storytelling strategy, able to differentiate itself from the already existing solutions, a design question was asked:

How would the app be if it were a person?

Imagining how the app would behave and talk if it were a human being, was an ideation exercise that allowed it to develop a fresh and bold UI and tone of voice. The app's personality was developed because of the initial insights of the user research, as well as the implementation of gamification strategies inside the user flows.

If the app were a person, it would be…
- …between 23 and 28 years old.
- …from a Latin American country, they already settled in Italy and want to help fellow Latin Americans.
- …encouraging students to exit their comfort zone and listen without judging.
- …a warm and outgoing person, they like to connect with people.
- …someone who knows the tricks, the groups, the places.
- …a reassuring person, telling students: "it's okay, I understand you" but also "come on, this is just the beginning!"

In summary, it can be defined as "Your Cool friend".

The 12 Brand Archetypes

To further explore the idea of the app and the brand behind it as a person, the 12 Brand Archetypes, inspired by Carl Jung's theory, were applied to the definition of the identity of the project.

Carl Jung introduced this concept, defining archetypes as universal symbols that reside with-in the collective unconscious of humans. These archetypes influence thoughts, behaviors and emotions. By appealing to them, it is possible to foster an emotional bond with users.

There are 12 brand archetypes, grouped into 4 macro categories:

- Explore spirituality:
1. The Innocent: Embodies purity, simplicity and optimism. Evokes nostalgia, hope and goodness.
2. The Explorer: Represents freedom, adventure and a desire for new experiences. Encourages the audience to explore the unknown
3. The Sage: Symbolizes wisdom, knowledge and understanding. They position themselves as experts and advisors.

- Leave a legacy:
4. The Hero: Characterized by courage, determination and the desire to become the best version of oneself.
5. The Outlaw: Rebels against the norms and advocates for change, challenging the status quo.
6. The Magician: Associated with transformation, innovation and mystery, promising to make the impossible possible.

- Pursue connection:
7. The Lover: Evokes passion and emotional connection, celebrating love and connecting with customers' desires.
8. The Jester: Represents joy and spontaneity, using humor to engage the audience.
9. The Everyman: Represents reliability, simplicity and humility, appealing to a broad audience and presenting as down-to-earth.

- Provide structure:
10. The Caregiver: Compassionate and selfless, focusing on empathy and support, and aiming to improve customers' lives.
11. The Ruler: Symbolizes authority, control and leadership. Inspires trust and reliability.

12. The Creator: Embodies innovation, imagination and self-expression, encouraging clients to embrace their individuality.

The motivation behind the definition of an archetype was the creation of a compelling narrative and the possibility to connect and communicate more effectively with users. Keeping students motivated throughout their journey needed to be done not only through UX strategies, but also through the implementation of a distinctive UI and a coherent tone of voice.

By taking a test available on the website thebrandarchetypes.com, it was possible to define that the platform fitted the archetype of The Everyman, which will be further explained below:
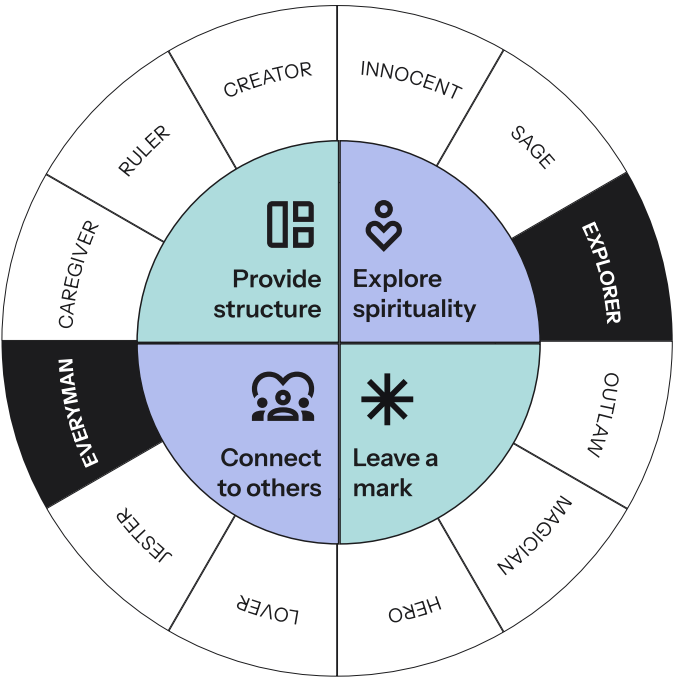

Figure 8. Adapted from Brand Archetypes, by Sensible Marketer, 2025, (https://sensiblemarketer.ca/brand-archetypes-the-secret-ingredient-for-a-knockout-brand-strategy/)

The Everyman

According to The Brand Archetypes, The Everyman represents the common person. It is relatable, approachable and down-to-earth. They are driven by affinity, fellowship, inclusion and association.

The Everyman represents students' desire to belong and integrate with others when arriving in a new country. This archetype appreciates authenticity, honesty and reliability, which connects with the need to find trustworthy, clear updated infor-mation to make a smoother adaptation process.

Inclusivity and belonging are key pillars for communication, using diverse images and messages that welcome people from different backgrounds. The Everyman's tone of voice is warm and inviting.

The alignment of the characteristics of The Everyman with international students' core needs: finding reliable information about life in Italy, while also belonging to a community of people like them.

To complement and reinforce the aspirational aspect of the app, there was a brief examination of The Explorer archetype, taking into consideration certain features that could motivate users and encourage them to exit their comfort zone.

The Explorer

The Explorer wants to step outside the comfort zone and immerse themselves in an environment where they can be creative, grow and better understand themselves. This archetype is driven by a sense of adventure and curiosity and the willingness to take risks.

Studying abroad can be an opportunity for students to grow and earn independence. It is an adventure where they can discover people, places and more about themselves. The platform can encourage users to enjoy the journey and explore the experience and possibilities that living in Italy can offer.

In summary, the main brand archetype that inspired the brand identity is The Everyman, as it appeals to a broad audience who wants to belong and integrate smoothly in their new context. Some slight touches from The Explorer in certain sections and messages make the whole experience more encouraging and aspirational, motivating users to continue their journey despite some difficulties that they may face along the way.

User Interface Design

Mood board

After characterizing the personality of the brand, a mood board was defined. It consists of a set of references from mobile interfaces, graphic designs, and photos. The pursued style is bold, fresh and appealing to gen Z students. The main emotion it wants to evoke is excitement, freedom and youth, while also relating to the interests and aesthetics of the target user.

The reference interfaces included vivid colors over dark backgrounds, with some white elements to create contrast. Collage style was considered as it combines familiar elements in unconventional ways, giving emphasis to certain elements and encouraging users to create new mental images – like themselves living new experiences abroad–. Photos of young people having spontaneous moments are in line with the style, as they represent common activities and the joy of being young and independent while living in another country.

UI Kit and Design System

After defining the app's look and feel through the mood board, a color palette and typography were chosen to begin establishing the visual guidelines of the product. UI assets derived from those guidelines were created as the prototype screens were developed.

The UI kit was developed following the principles of atomic design, as follows:

Particles

Color palette

The main color palette consists of a wide set of vivid colors, accompanied by two neutrals (black and white). Each color is associated with a phase of the international student journey, and paired with the neutrals, it is applied to its corresponding section in the mobile app and as an identification item for users who are currently going through that phase.

Colors associated with the phases of the international student journey:

- **Prepare- Light blue:** This color was chosen for the preparation phase, as it evokes the trust and stability that most students are searching for during this phase.
- **Arrive- Lilac:** Embodying the mystery and unpredictability of the first days in Italy but also provoking serenity and optimism among users.
- **Adapt- Dark blue:** Represents the confidence and success of users once they have settled in their new context, as they are now ready to tackle new challenges and embrace the purpose of immersing themselves in the culture.
- **Belong- Light red/salmon:** It conveys warmth and fellowship, offering a safe space. It is associated with the welcoming feeling the mentors should transmit to newcomers.
- **Evolve- Yellowish green:** Showing the feeling of optimism and the desire of growth and finding new perspectives after ending a cycle.
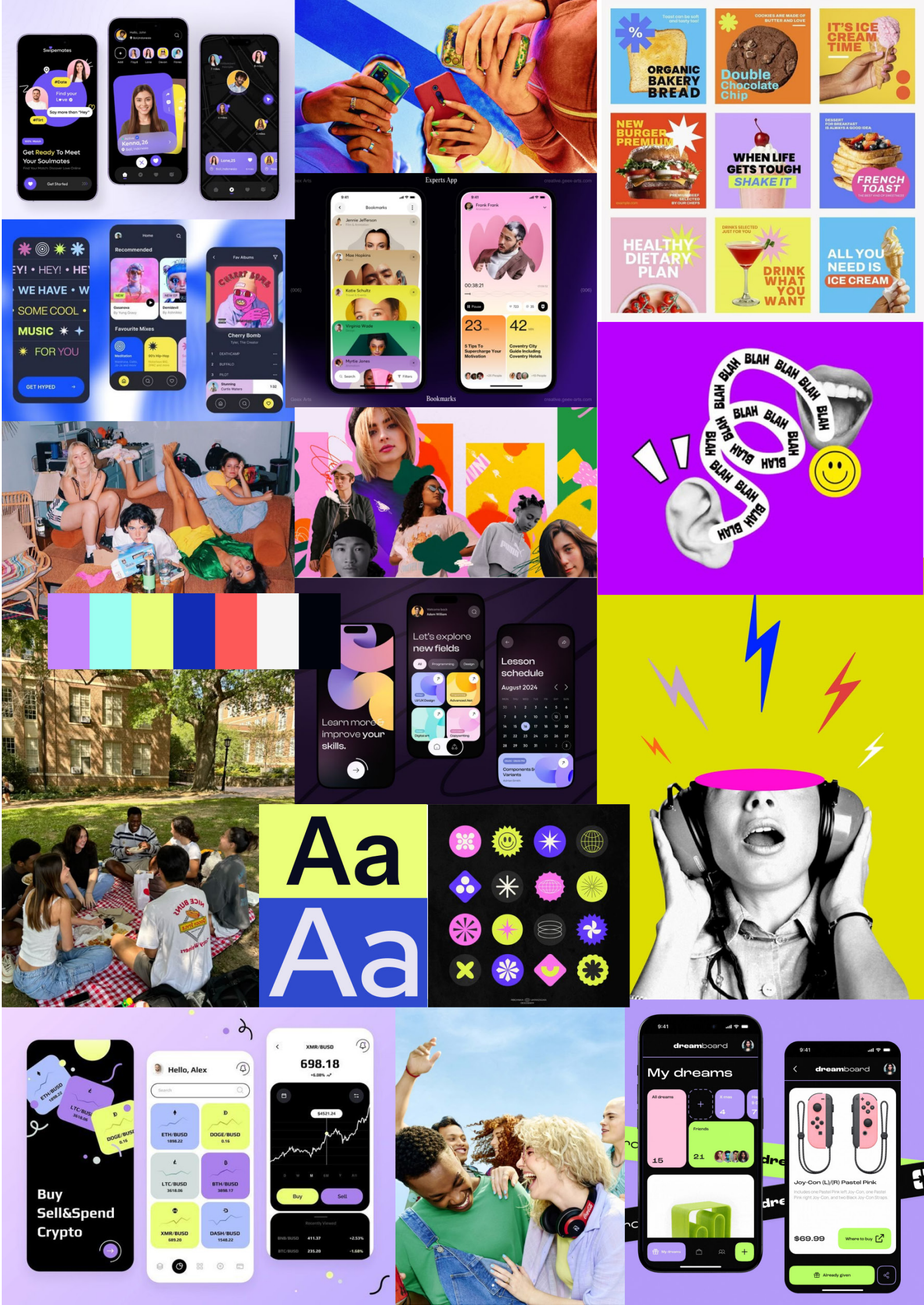
Typography

Connecting with the youthfulness that the app aims to communicate, and ensuring accessibility and legibility, two sans serif fonts were chosen: Rethink Sans for headings, and Instrument Sans for body texts.

Images

Inside each of the sections, users will find collage-style images that have two main communicational purposes:

- Firstly, they serve as a visual representation of a concept that is being explained, making information more accessible and dynamic.
- On the other hand, they can also be used in start and milestone screens for each activity of the different phases, representing some aspects of Italian culture related to the topic or the motivational message, and supporting the aspirational feeling the app wants to reflect on users.

Color Palette

F5F5F5

00020B

Prepare
9DFEF1

Arrive
C588FD

Adapt
122DB3

Belong
FD5959

Evolve
EAFD7B

Images

Typography

Rethink Sans

Title 1 - 28px Bold

Title 2 - 24px Bold

Title 3 - 16px Bold

Subtitle 1 - 16px SemiBold

Subtitle 2 - 12px SemiBold

Instrument Sans
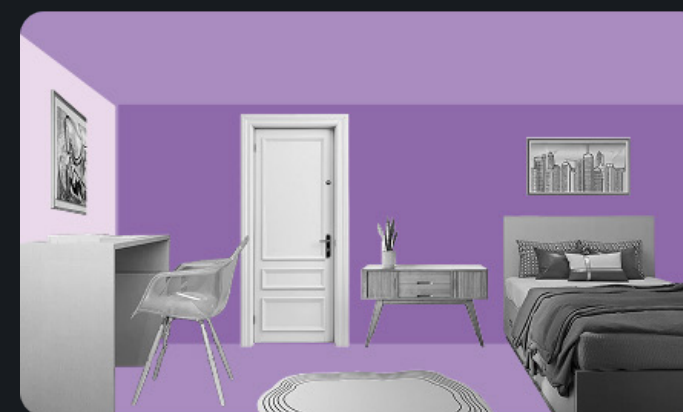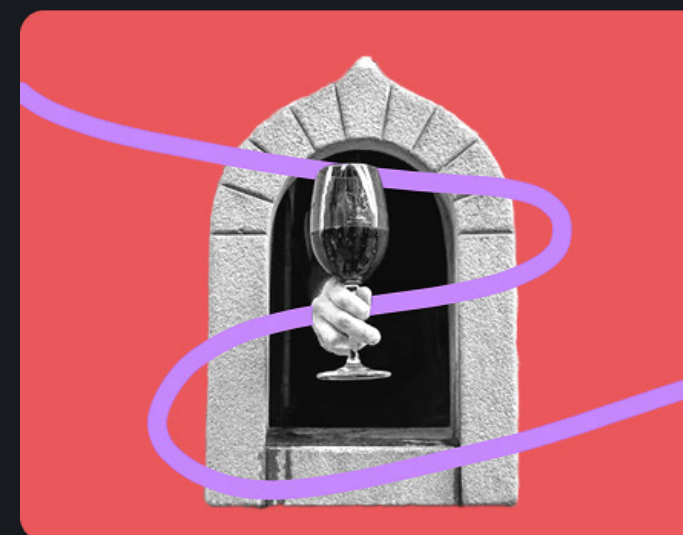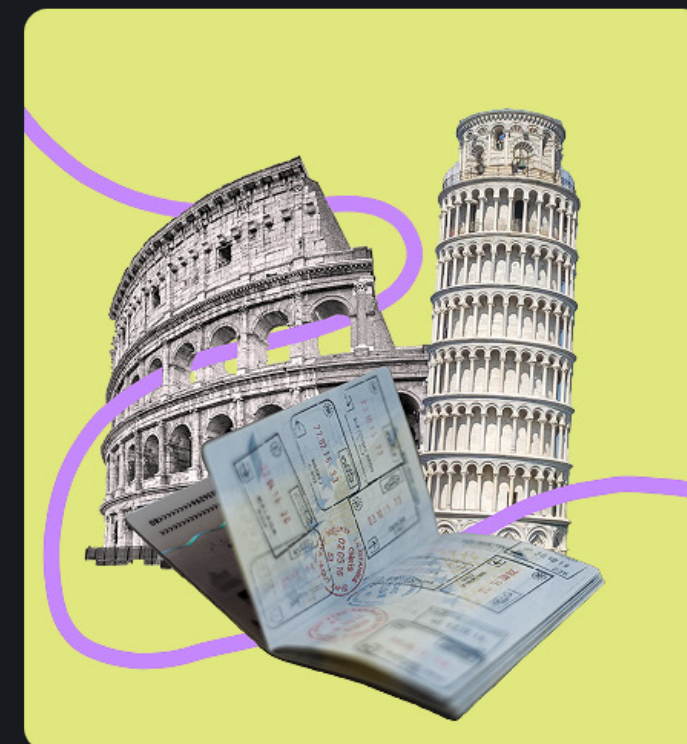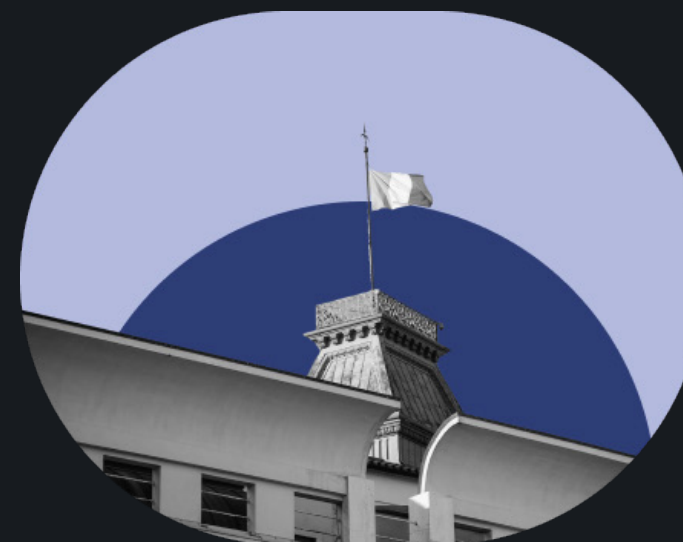
Paragraph 1 - 14px Regular

Paragraph 2 - 12px Regular

Paragraph 3 - 8 px Medium

Call-to-action 18 px Bold

Card Text 1 - 13px SemiBold

Placeholder- 8px Italic

Atoms

Call-to-action buttons

Including primary and secondary actions throughout the whole app

	Primary	Secondary
Normal	¡Empecemos!	Regístrate
Pressed	¡Empecemos!	Regístrate
Unabled	¡Empecemos!	Regístrate

Tags

For applying filters in the forum, people section, and groups.

Más interacciones — Off

Más interacciones — On

Radio Buttons

For selecting options during the enrollment process.

Normal

Selected

Checkboxes

For multiple selections and ticking off items of lists.

Unchecked

Checked

Labels

For input fields throughout the different sections of the app, especially in the onboarding and for searching topics inside the forum

Molecules

Input Field

Used for the initial onboarding and in the visa procedures

Email

Search Bar

For finding specific topics, keywords or names inside the Connect tab.

Busca por nombre de usuario o de la persona

Dropdown menu

Allowing users to choose from a range of options.

Argentina

Bolivia

Brasil

Chile

Colombia

Organisms

Cards

User

Mariana

⚐ México

🕐 6 meses en Italia
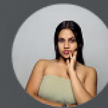
Ver perfil

Conectar

Groups

Colombianos en Italia

72 miembros

146

147

Forum

Nueva dirección para el permesso di soggiorno

Jenny

Hola a todos, ahora tienen que ir a Via Tommaso Dorè, 3, cerca de Porta Susa

hace 30 min.   Actualización   👁 20 👍 10 💬 1

Activities

Completed

Preparar el Viaje
Completado

In progress

Preparar el Viaje
En proceso

To be started

Preparar el Viaje
Por iniciar

Carousels

For explaining step-by-steps or different elements inside a category

Antes
¿Ya hiciste la preinscripción en **Universitaly** y tienes la **Luz Verde/ Declaración de Valor**?
Si no sabes qué es, tranqui: puedes **volver a la checklist** y ver ayudas que te lo explican todo.

Antes
Revisa que llevas todos los documentos **en el orden que indica la Embajada** en su sitio web, ¡puedes usar **nuestra checklist** para guiarte!

Antes
No necesitas agendar una cita, una vez que tengas **todos los documentos listos** dirígete a la sede de la Embajada en los horarios que indica su sitio web

Durante
Tendrás una entrevista en la que te harán **preguntas de rutina** sobre tu solicitud. Es algo normal y rápido: quieren confirmar que todo esté en orden.

Tab Bar

🏠 Home   📅 Eventos   👥 Conecta   👤 Perfil

Tone of Voice

Considering the brand personality, the Tone of Voice of the app can be described as conversational but accessible, with an aspirational and motivational touch. This can be summed up in sentences that the user would hear from a friend who already lived the process, such as:

"I understand, everything seems strange at the beginning... but trust me, the best is yet to come"
"We all were new once"
"I also lived that, but you will adapt"

Considering that the target users of the app are Latin American students, the language chosen for the design of the app is Spanish. Since the goal is to create an international network, the use of regional slangs or idioms is avoided, opting for a more neutral use of the language and ensuring understandability and neutrality.

The Four Dimensions of Tone of Voice

According to the Nielsen Norman Group, there are four primary tone-of-voice dimensions:

· Formal vs. casual.
· Serious vs. funny.
· Respectful vs. irreverent.
· Matter of fact vs. enthusiastic.

The tone of voice can be expressed as a point in the spectrum of each dimension, being placed on either side of the extremes, or in-between. The product's 4 dimensions of tone of voice were defined as described below:

Casual: The platform should be conversational and not too formal, to create connection with the users and feel like a close friend to them.

Slightly more funny than serious: The goal of communication is to be warm and human, with light moments of humor. Not too serious and bureaucratic as it could be perceived as overly cold, but not constantly funny or sarcastic, which could feel dismissive or mocking.

Respectful: Although there is a desire to connect with the user, the product needs to be perceived as a trustworthy and reassuring network. Students must know the platform understands their situation and journey.

Enthusiastic: It is necessary to make users excited about their journey and motivate them to prepare for this new adventure.

Tone Do's and Don'ts

After defining the four dimensions, the tone strategy was refined by creating a list of adjectives the tone must fit (Tone Do's), and another one with the words that the tone should not match (Tone Don'ts)

· Casual and welcoming, making the user experience like having a conversation with a friend, and avoiding sounding cold or bureaucratic.

· Light, approachable and slightly funny, avoiding risky humor that would make the app seem sarcastic or irreverent.

· Respectful and grounded, creating trust among users, but without making communication seem impersonal or authoritative.

· Enthusiastic and motivating, cheering users up and celebrating small wins. The messages should not be perceived as boring or flat.

Dimension	Approved tone words	Avoid tone words
Casual	Welcoming, conversational, friendly, relatable, caring	Cold, dry, bureaucratic, serious, formal
Slightly funny	Light, approachable, playful, witty	Sarcastic, snarky, irreverent, coarse
Respectful	Grounded, trustworthy, smart	Impersonal, authoritative, distant, corporate
Enthusiastic	Motivating, upbeat, cheerful	Boring, flat, conservative, unapologetic

Prototyping the experience

After having defined the main app features and established UI and tone of voice guidelines, the first medium fidelity prototype of the Prepare section was developed. It included the MVP functionalities defined for the user flow.

The homepage includes access to the three main activities a student must do before travelling to Italy, as well as a call to action to connect with the community.

Each activity includes an initial message welcoming users and giving context about the information they are about to receive. A collage-style image related to the topic accompanies the text.

The UI is predominantly black, with call-to-actions highlighted in yellow, and elements in light blue (the chosen color for phase 1). After exploring the activities for the first time, a milestone image like the initial message appears on screen.

On the other hand, the Connect section, present throughout the whole app experience regardless of the user phase, leverages the use of light red as a symbol of community and warmth.

← Scan this QR to explore the prototype for Phase 1: Prepare
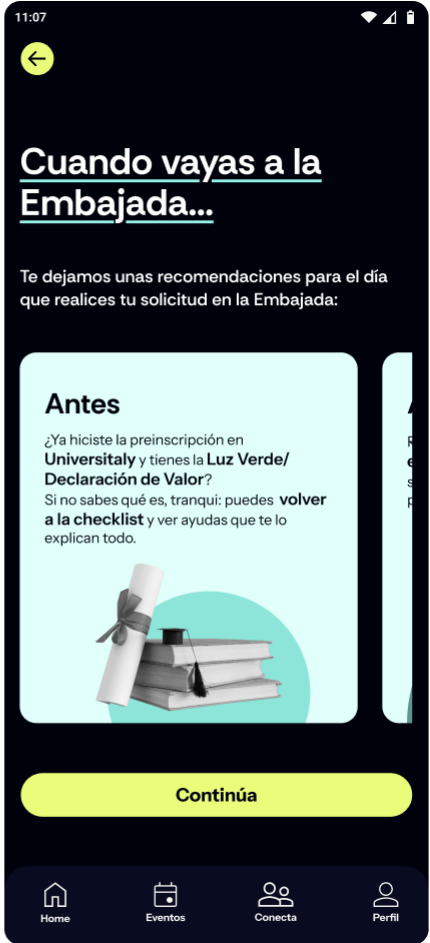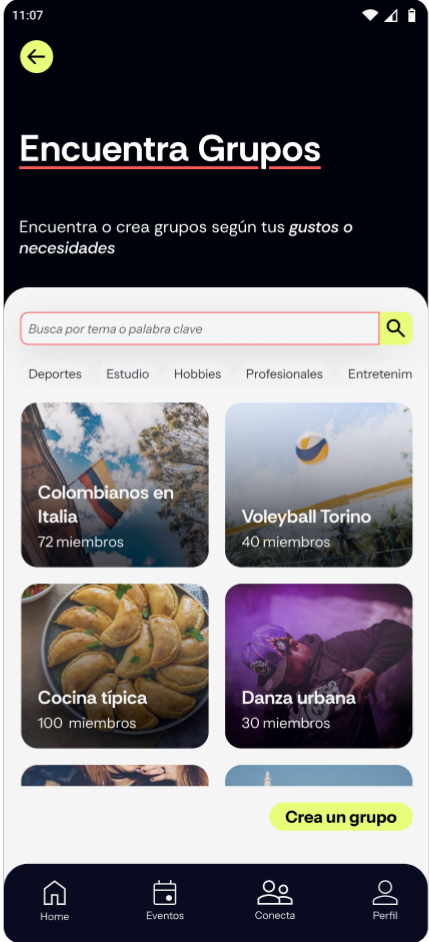
Testing the app with users

Once the first version of the MVP was ready to use, it was tested with users. The main motivation for the test was to discover if the information provided was sufficient to help students with the preparation of their trip, as well as to test the clarity of the contents. Other aspects of the app that were tested were overall usability, efficiency and user satisfaction for the phase Prepare.

Testing Goals

The main goal of the test was to validate the usability, efficiency, user satisfaction and clarity of the information in the phase Prepare.
To achieve this purpose, it was necessary to validate the effectiveness of the gamification strategies and the progressive disclosure. Other evaluated aspects of the product were the tone of voice and the aesthetic appeal of the app.

Methodology

A remote moderate test was developed. Eleven students participated throughout three short rounds of user testing.

To ensure maximum accuracy in the results, the participants were Colombian students from Javeriana University (Bogota and Cali), who at the time of the test (May 2025), had just been accepted to enroll for a double degree course at Politecnico di Torino, and needed to start preparing to start their studies in September 2025. Other participants were students about to finish their bachelor's degree, or who recently graduated, and willing to study abroad.

The online testing session was organized and recorded through Google Meet. There, participants were provided with the link to the Figma prototype and were asked to develop four tasks, interacting with the mobile prototype from their computers.

Task 1

Imagine you just obtained a place to study for a double degree. You want to understand the visa application process for Italy. Where in the app would you go to obtain this information?

Task 2

Imagine you are just weeks away from travelling to Italy, and you need to find an accommodation, whether it is temporary or long term. From this platform, can you indicate how you would start to search for accommodation?

Task 3

You are starting to organize your luggage. You would like to know what is important to pack for a flight to Italy. How would you do it with this app?

Task 4

You want to see if other students have asked questions or shared advice on how to prepare the trip to Italy. Where would you search for this information? If you find something useful, tell me how you would use it, or how you would make a question.

After developing the tasks, users were asked a series of questions about the overall experience. The goal was to unveil usability issues and to obtain qualitative insights about the app. The questions were:
- What was the easiest part to use?
- What was the hardest part to use?
- What would you improve?
- How did you feel using the app?
- What do you think about the forum and community tab? What would you improve in this section?
- On a scale from 1 to 5, how useful do you think the Prepare section is? Why?

Findings and iterations based on testing

First testing round

The first round consisted of four participants. An overview of the results per task is presented below:

Task 1: Visa Application

User	Task Completed? (yes/no)	Time (minutes)	Time (qualitative)
1	Yes	2'	The user read the contents in a fast way, and did not interact with the checklist.
2	Yes	4	The user interacted with the checklist, checking some elements.
3	Yes	6'55''	The user read the document checklist and asked questions about unfamiliar terms.
4	Yes	4'	The user interacted with the checklist, checking some elements.v

Difficulties	Think Aloud Comments	Observations
Reading contents from the computer screen.	n/a	• The user would like to see images in the cards that talk about the appointment at the Embassy. • Didn't use tooltips to expand the information on documents.
n/a	"This is interesting" (about tooltips) "Which are the green light documents?" "Do they really ask questions in Italian?"	• The user leveraged the tooltips to get in-depth information about the documents. • Overall, found the functionality to be very useful.
Finding tooltips and understanding some terms as Universitaly, green light and "Dichiarazione di valore".	"What is the Universitaly pre-enrollment?", "What does dichiarazione di valore mean?" "Do they really ask questions in Italian?"	• Some terms were not very clear and must be explained more clearly. • Suggests the application of a shortcut or reminder to complete an activity.
The user performed the test from her cellphone, making some UI elements look different. It was necessary to scroll to access the buttons to move forward.	"Oh!" (expression of surprise because of the tooltips), "I'd like for it to tell me how to get health insurance, because I don't know how to do it".	• The interface needs modifications to be correctly visualized on different devices. • The carousel with advice is an interesting element for the user.

Task 2: Find Accommodation

For this task, users had the freedom to choose if they wanted to find accommodation from their home country, or if they wanted to search for it when they were already in Italy. Some users explored both options, and the time to develop the task was registered separately depending on the path they chose.

User	Task Completed? (yes/no)	Time (minutes)	Time (qualitative)
1	Yes	1'20'' (when arriving in Italy)	The user read the contents fastly
2	Yes	2'30'' (search from home country) 1'20'' (when arriving in Italy)	The first time the user explores the activity, the task is developed in a slower way. As they explore the secondary path, they get to finish the task faster because of the repeating patterns and an already acquired familiarity with the system
3	Yes	2'26'' (search from home country)	The user read with attention all the tips for finding accommodation
4	Yes	1'30'' (search from home country)	The user read the information provided quickly and had no doubts

Difficulties	Think Aloud Comments	Observations
Reading contents from the computer screen.	"I can't read the texts", "If I click here, does it take me to the website?" (in reference to the home search platforms)	• "The user would like to see images in the cards that talk about the accommodation options. • Suggests implementing base questions to guide search.
n/a	"Can I come back and take a look at the other option?" "I would like to see a guide about the city zones in terms of price and safety".	• The user noticed the Connect tab and explored it. • The user suggested some additional information, like: knowing the average prices for each type of accommodation, detail about number of bathrooms and bedrooms (in the case of apartments).
Finding the Connect tab to ask for help in the home search, as it was present only at the beginning of the activity.	"I would like to be able to click on each suggestion to find a home and expand the information".	• The user suggests the implementation of a chatbot to answer quick questions or to include on each step the CTA "Do you need help?" that redirects to the Connect tab.
n/a	"Oh!" (expression of surprise when accessing websites to find accommodation), "Are those the actual websites?", "So, if I click, it opens the websites?"	• n/a.

Task 3: Packing Luggage

User	Task Completed? (yes/no)	Time (minutes)	Time (qualitative)
1	Yes	5'	The user read in detail all items from all categories.
2	Yes	2'30''	The user interacted with the checklist in some categories.
3	Yes	2'26''	The user interacted with the checklist in some categories.
4	Yes	4'30''	Due to technical difficulties, the process to finish the task was longer.

Difficulties	Think Aloud Comments	Observations
n/a	"I didn't see the option to add an article because there is the checklist symbol next to it".	• The user suggested extra items to add in each category, and to add an icon to each category card to make search easier and faster.
n/a	n/a	• The user marked the elements she already had.
Finding the option to add other items, because of the checklist symbol next to it.	"I'd like to have a calendar to organize my trip and the flight date".	• The user says that it would be interesting to have a feature that allows users to upload documents and another that reminds them of the necessary documents, whether they are for the visa or for travelling.
Technical aspects related to scrolling and some checklist components while visualizing in other mobile devices.	"I wish I could navigate in any order", "I didn't know about the power converter", "I'd like to have a link in the documents tab that brought you to the app section where said document is explained" (for example: health insurance → visa)	• The user selected the categories in a casual .order and emphasized the importance of being able to explore them in any order, not in a linear way. • Some technical aspects need to be reviewed.

Task 4: Exploring the forum and community section

User	Task Completed? (yes/no)	Comments about the feature	Observations
1	No	It is necessary to have an icon that identifies the forum better. The Connect tab is more visible.	• The first instinct was to go to the Connect tab. • The user suggests a visual key to indicate the level or phase of who's writing, differentiating those who are still in their home countries from users who are already in Italy.
2	Yes	The user expresses a preoccupation about response times from other users, as well as the reliability of the answers.	• n/a
3	No	The user would put the forum inside the Connect tab, so that it can be divided in forum, people, and groups.	• It is not easy to find the forum, because intuitively users go to the Connect tab.
4	No	"Are filters not working yet?" The user would search for people on the Connect tab and would ask them questions directly.	• Expresses interest in seeing functional filters.

Final questions

What was the easiest and the hardest part of use?

User	Easiest part	Hardest part
1	• Visa. • Organization of the information and the activities.	• Finding the forum.
2	• Visa.	• Reliability and response times from the community.
3	• Organization and visual layout of the app.	• Finding the forum.
4	• Visa. • Organization of the information.	• Some technical aspects, since for accessing the button to move forward it was necessary to scroll, and the content could not be visualized correctly.

What would you improve?

User	Features to improve
1	Adding images and icons to make elements more visible, providing different routes to get to the information, especially the forum.
2	More detailed information on the accommodation section.
3	Having shortcuts for the features, clearer language for some procedures and the way to find the forum.
4	Optimizing the interface for different devices, giving more user freedom in the luggage section, explaining some elements in a deeper way (health insurance).

How did you feel using this app?

User	Feelings
1	"I felt comfortable and supported. The structure is clear and guides users".
2	"Very well, I think I am going to save it as a tool to prepare my process. I like that it proceeds one step at a time and doesn't overload you with information. I also like messages for when a phase is finished".
3	"Very well, it is well organized and structured. I would have just preferred to have some information explained in a clearer way".
4	"I felt good, it is pretty, and I think it is well organized. Maybe, if I wanted to enter a section again, I'd like for it to save my progress without having to put my information again". (visa application)

What did you think about the forum? What would you improve in this section?

User	Opinion	Improvements
1	"It is useful to get answers from more people and updated information, I don't feel ashamed to write to just one person to clarify all my doubts".	The ease of finding it, and making the filters functional.
2	"It is very useful; I am just worried about the response times and the reliability of information".	n/a.
3	"It is useful to clarify doubts about information provided by the app".	The findability.
4	"I find it very useful".	Adding it to the Connect tab.

On a scale from 1 to 5, how useful do you find the Prepare section? Why?

User	Scale	Justification
1	5	"It is well structured and explains things clearly".
2	4	"It is an app that guides the process, explains everything clearly and I like the step-by-step way it proceeds".
3	5	"It has guides and useful elements to organize my trip better".
4	4	"I think it presents useful content, and it is aesthetic, there could be a functionality to save progress on all activities".

Conclusions from this round

What worked out?
- Content organization.
- Progressive disclosure.
- Additional explanations.
- The app's visual interface.
- Milestone messages.

What didn't work out?
- Forum's findability.
- Some terms were still unclear.
- Visibility in other devices .
- Lack of icons and images in some sections.
- Lack of shortcuts.

Suggestions- Next Steps
- Adding images to complement information.
- Adjusting technical aspects in the luggage checklist.
- Merging forum and connect tab.
- Adding shortcuts to resume an ongoing activity.
- Give more user freedom in the luggage section.
- Adding further explanations in elements that are still confusing:
  - Pre-enrolment visa procedures.
  - Health insurance.
  - Types of accommodation.
  - Need to speak in Italian at the Embassy.

Second testing round

The second round consisted of two participants, the prototype that was tested included the following modifications:

- Forum merged inside the Connect tab, which now appears on the home screen as a unique option, and includes Find people, find groups, find answers.
- More freedom in the navigation of the luggage section, adding a tab on the bottom part of the screen that included all the categories, instead of the linear navigation.

- Further explanations: On the carousel that explained the accommodation types, a text with the average prices was included. Likewise, in the Visa Application process, the copy was modified to clarify the need to speak in Italian at the Embassy appointment, emphasizing that it was a possibility, but not a usual situation.

An overview of the results per task is presented below:

Task 1: Visa Application

User	Task Completed? (yes/no)	Time (minutes)	Time (qualitative)
1	Yes	4'33''	Initial exploration of the feature. The user reads in detail all texts.
2	Yes	2'50''	She read in detail and checked the documents to present at the Embassy, but continues quickly on the carousel about the appointment.

Difficulties	Think Aloud Comments	Observations
Identifying the checklist and the possibility to scroll vertically in that functionality.	"I think the step-by-step was good, but I didn't understand where the checklist was".	For this user, it was very positive to know what to expect from the appointment at the Embassy and liked the conversational tone of voice.
Readability of the welcome page because of the background color and of the text size.	"I like it, although I think the background color makes it a little hard to read" (on the welcome screen). "I like the checklist; I find it very useful". "I like that it is easy to read and not boring".	

Task 2: Find Accommodation

For this task, users had the freedom to choose if they wanted to find accommodation from their home country, or if they wanted to search for it when they were already in Italy. Some users explored both options, and the time to develop the task was registered separately depending on the path they chose.

User	Task Completed? (yes/no)	Time (minutes)	Time (qualitative)
1	Yes	2'30''	Explores both options for finding accommodation, does not explore all topics and sees them in "disorder".
2	Yes	2'21'' (search from home country)	Explores just one option, follows topics in a linear order.

Difficulties	Think Aloud Comments	Observations
n/a	"Oh!" (Expression of surprise when the websites for finding a house appeared).	- Explored topics in a casual and non-linear order (as established in the navigation flow). This is an insight into the possibility of giving more user freedom in this section.
n/a	"Is there an explanation about the meaning of monolocale, bilocale, trilocale, etc? Me and some colleagues are confused about this topic".	- It is important to give further explanations on concepts that change between continents (rent contracts, types of apartments, etc).

Task 3: Packing Luggage

User	Task Completed? (yes/no)	Time (minutes)	Time (qualitative)
1	Yes	2'30''	Explores just two categories. With greater user freedom, less time is needed as it is not necessary to read all categories.
2	Yes	3'	Explores all categories freely and took some time to make some useful questions for her preparation process.

Difficulties	Think Aloud Comments	Observations
n/a	"If I am preparing my luggage, the first thing I'd do would be to add more specific objects for my particular needs".	• The user suggested to save progresses, adding the flight date and advice about arrival schedules in Italy (recommending users the best hours to arrive in the country). • She found the icons to be very positive.
n/a	"Oh, so beautiful" (emotional reaction to the personal extras category, which includes souvenirs from the home country).	• The user thinks the checklist format and the organization of the categories is positive.

Task 4: Exploring the forum and community section

User	Task Completed? (yes/no)	Comments about the feature	Observations
1	Yes	"If I don't find the answer I am searching for in a forum question, I would contact someone for more specific questions".	• The user explored the Find People feature and explained how she would use it to make questions. • Groups were also explored.
2	Yes	"It is easy to find what you are looking for".	• The user also explored the other community features (people, groups).

Final questions

What was the easiest and the hardest part of use?

User	Easiest part	Hardest part
1	• All app features.	• Sometimes texts are too small.
2	• Step-by-step guides, the separation in categories.	• There was nothing particularly difficult, but in some screens with the blue background, the small texts were hard to read.

What would you improve?

User	Features to improve
1	Some copies are too long and could be more direct (like the text for the connect tab in the home page).
2	Explaining certain concepts that are different in Italy, regarding to accommodation.

How did you feel using this app?

User	Feelings
1	"I liked the fact that it was simple, but not shallow. It is very intuitive; I felt comfortable with the step-by-step processes and the possibility to move forward and backwards".
2	"Very well, it is comfortable and practical. It is something I would use in the moment I'm in".

What did you think about the forum? What would you improve in this section?

User	Opinion	Improvements
1	"I like the fact that it is organized by answers, groups and people. It would be interesting to upload images in the forum messages".	
2	"Having that kind of human contact is helpful, I found it to be really good".	To show more in detail what each community user does, to understand affinity between users.

On a scale from 1 to 5, how useful do you find the Prepare section? Why?

User	Scale	Justification
1	5	"This is the hardest part of all, and it is explained in an easy way".
2	5	"It is very useful".

Conclusions from this round

What worked out?
- Content organization.
- Progressive disclosure.
- Tone of voice.
- Step-by-step processes.
- Checklists.
- Milestone messages.

What has improved? Compared to the previous test
- Ease of finding the forum
- More exploration of the Connect tab (not only forum, also groups and people)
- Flexibility in the luggage section

Suggestions- Next Steps
- Improving flexibility and freedom in all activities.
- Implementing checkpoints to avoid restarting all the activities from scratch.
- Making layout adjustments to ensure readability.

Third testing round

The third round consisted of 5 participants. The prototype included the following modifications:

- Improvement of flexibility and accessibility in all activities, with a special focus on the accommodation section, as some users explored it in a non-linear way. This modification implied the elimination of the call to action to move forward. Instead, users read one section and had the possibility to go back. For the milestone to appear, it was necessary to press a Call-to-Action button named "Finish Activity", located in the bottom right part of the screen. Additionally, the connection tab was added to all sections of the accommodation activity.

- Likewise, the finish activity button was repositioned in the luggage section to ensure consistency in all activities.

- In the visa application section, the copy for the checklist was replaced. The instructive text was replaced with the title "Document checklist for the visa", making it more direct and findable.

Task 1: Visa Application

User	Task Completed? (yes/no)	Time (minutes)	Time (qualitative)
1	Yes	4'20''	Re reads the whole checklist because she reads the instructions on the cards (understands later the possibility of scrolling).
2	Yes	1'40''	The user checks the documents, and reads out loud the cards in detail (information about appointments at the Embassy).
3	Yes	1'40''	Does not read the checklist in a detailed way but notes that it is an observable element. In general, the section is navigated easily.
4	Yes	1'37''	Explores the elements, checks some items from the list and reads everything fastly.
5	Yes	3'24''	Stops the navigation to read in detail all the required documents for the visa, comments about every interface detail.

Difficulties	Think Aloud Comments	Observations
Understanding that the checklist is something that can be scrolled to visualize all the elements.	"It would be nice if I could also get the link to the Embassy's website"; "Oh, I love it" (about the milestone image).	• The first time the user sees the checklist, she does not realize that it is possible to scroll down to see all items • The messages at the end of the activity make her feel reassured.
n/a	"I like the colors; I think the information is very clear"	• Uses the button to close the disclaimer. • Thinks the checklist is useful to avoid forgetting documents, believes it is important and positive to highlight the order in which documents should be submitted.
n/a	n/a	• Finds the checklist feature and the information to be very useful, because it is not necessary to go back and forth to check which documents are missing.
n/a	n/a	• Expresses a positive opinion about the checklist and believes it gives a sense of reassuring.
Identifying that the checklist was an element that could be scrolled vertically	"Oh, it looks really pretty" (comment about the UI), "I like the colors and the layout".	• The user comments that perhaps it could be communicated more clearly that the progress of the checklist can be saved and continued without problems, the instructions seem clear to her.

Task 2: Find Accommodation

For this task, users had the freedom to choose if they wanted to find accommodation from their home country, or if they wanted to search for it when they were already in Italy. Some users explored both options, and the time to develop the task was registered separately depending on the path they chose.

User	Task Completed? (yes/no)	Time (minutes)	Time (qualitative)
1	Yes	3'40'' (search from home country)	Only explores the option to search from your home country, deviates towards the Connect tab because of the call-to-action 'do you need help?' at the bottom of the screen.
2	Yes	4'10'' (search from home country)	Explores the Connect tab, explaining how to find people to help him find accommodation.
3	Yes	1'38'' (search from home country)	Explores just one of the two options.
4	Yes	2'15'' (search from home country)	Explores just one of the two options.
5	Yes	3'08'' (search from home country) 1'21'' (search in Italy)	Explores the Connect tab the first time. The second time, time is reduced because the interaction patterns are already familiar.

This was a critical task in the user testing. As users had already been used to a linear and guided flow that led to a final milestone screen on the first activity, finding different patterns and not getting to an activity conclusion was confusing in some cases. Besides, it was found that the presence of the call-to-action that led to the Connect tab generated deviations and in some cases, users did not finish exploring all the available information for the accommodation activity.

In this iteration, more freedom was given to users, and a key aspect to test was the effectiveness of this modification.

Difficulties	Think Aloud Comments	Observations
Discovering how to complete the activity, since it is a non-linear and more autonomous process than the visa application.	"I didn't get the screen like the last time" (the milestone screen); "I like the messages, I feel encouraged".	• The activity is initiated in a non-linear way since there are different options available. • The user explores the Connect tab because it is the most visible call-to-action button on screen.
Finding the relation of the groups with the functionality of finding accommodation	"It's nice to have both options and being able to explore to decide what to do"; "the fact that I don't need to be in Italy to start informing myself helps me decide better".	• The user suggests that it would be better to create a more direct connection with who can support home search if the community tab is accessed from this point
Identifying the button to finish the activity or knowing what to do after visualizing all the information	"Should I connect with someone, or go back?"	• The user finds the information about accommodation types to be useful and believes it would be optimal to explain meaning of monolocale, bilocale, trilocale.
Understanding how to proceed or if it is necessary to go back to the previous screen	"Do I choose one? Do I go back?"	• The user believes there is too much text in the recommendations section, and that this part could be more dynamic; she also states that the rental contract should be explained, in terms of services and expenses. • Does not arrive to the milestone screen.
Knowing how to continue and go back. Understanding what happens when tapping the button for finishing the activity.	"I couldn't decide on whether or not to click the finish activity button, because I didn't know where it would have taken me".	• Overall, the user finds very positive the possibility to find divisions by topic, platform, and being able to access the forum.

Due to its importance on the preparation process, it was decided to go back to a more linear and guided path for exploring the Finding an Accommodation activity, removing possible distractions and ensuring that users get all the necessary information, while also helping them better understand how to navigate across the section.

To avoid early deviations towards the Connect tab, it was decided to leave the call-to-actions after providing the information.

Task 3: Packing Luggage

User	Task Completed? (yes/no)	Time (minutes)	Time (qualitative)
1	Yes	2'40''	The user reads elements from some categories, checking what they already have (hypothetically)
2	Yes	2'35''	The user explores all categories and checks some elements
3	Yes	0'35''	Does not check the elements, just watches them
4	Yes	2'05''	Reads all categories and checks some articles, without reading much in detail
5	Tes	1'40''	Explores quickly some categories, but does not check everything out

Difficulties	Think Aloud Comments	Observations
n/a	"Having a base of what I need helps me save a lot of time"	· Explores the Connect tab from the starting section that invites to read the forum at the start of the activity, after having explored all categories
n/a	"It would be interesting to have a budget feature to prepare the trip"; "Some questions about preferences could be done to prepare the budget":	· The user suggests putting a disclaimer on the medicine section, regarding products that can be bought with or without a medical prescription. · Finds the checklists practical and fun, talks positively about the color palette
n/a	"Oh!" "Is this also like the visa checklist?" "I like this one a lot" (about the checklist feature)	· Finds the division in sections and categories to be very positive · Does not reach the milestone screen, as she does not tap the button to end the activity
n/a	"How do I know that it was correctly saved?"	· The user believes it is necessary to add a button to save progress on the checklists, the category buttons can also be used as a visual key to recognize the current category users are in
n/a	"Wow" (reaction to the personal extras category) "when I went on an exchange I didn't think about these articles, and I didn't take anything with me"	· Finds positive the possibility to have a registry and check what to pack.

Task 4: Exploring the forum and community section

User	Task Completed? (yes/no)	Comments about the feature	Observations
1	Yes	Talks about the possibility of creating alliances with student groups already established in Italy.	• Asks if people participating at the forum are just people who are preparing their trip, who are already in Italy, or both.
2	Yes	n/a	• Suggests adding more direct connections and filters based on the activity where the Connect tab call-to-action is visualized.
3	Yes	The user says that this is probably her favorite feature, as sometimes it is embarrassing to ask people directly, and it is positive to find answers.	• Finds the feature very interesting, as at the moment speaks only with a friend who is also preparing the trip and does not know many people.
4	Yes	"I like the filters to find easily specific topics".	• Regarding the community, the user believes that the challenge would be activating groups or motivating people to participate and interact.
5	Yes	"The questions are really nice" finds positive to have filters by category and the text indicating the age of the publication.	• The entire Connect tab is comprehensible and intuitive.

Final questions

What was the easiest and the hardest part of use?

User	Easiest part	Hardest part
1	• "Overall, everything was easy. But I'd highlight the step-by-step for visa application and the activity flow	• "Accommodation search, especially not knowing if the task has been completed. More than hard, it was confusing".
2	• "The luggage section, because of the filters"	• "Regarding the accommodation activity, it can be confusing to go back and explore the whole community section when clicking the call-to-action".
3	• "Everything seemed very easy"	• "I didn't know how to move back inside the accommodation section, but I think I got distracted".
4	• "The visa step-by-step and the sense of progress with the color change in the buttons".	• n/a
5	• "Being able to easily find elements and contents, subdivided into categories in the home page; it is easy to understand information".	• Navigating the categories in the accommodation search activity.

What would you improve?

User	Features to improve
1	n/a
2	Some sort of tutorial for the app's first use. The second time, navigation could be more autonomous
3	The descriptions of bilocale, trilocale (explaining the differences between apartments for rental in Italy and Colombia)
4	Making the app more motivating for participation and interaction, including notifications for new questions in the forum, and motivating people to answer
5	Adding links for the Embassy and Universitaly websites

How did you feel using this app?

User	Feelings
1	"I felt good, I found it organized, and I like the tone of voice".
2	"It is simple but very complete, it works well to plan a trip. I felt excited because I remembered my trip in Spain, and this is a tool I would have loved to have at the time".
3	"I felt good, it was simple, and I didn't feel stressed or frustrated. It was fantastic".
4	"It is a good sensation, I feel tranquil. Some buttons may be too small for touch target size (secondary call-to-actions and button to explore all phases)".
5	"Very well, it is very intuitive, and I like its design. I am very interested in this process, and I found some new information".

What did you think about the forum? What would you improve in this section?

User	Opinion	Improvements
1	"I found it very useful".	• Identifying communities, questions and answers by city. • Giving the possibility to add other question categories. • Create direct messages between users.
2	"I like the fact that it is open and anyone can ask questions. I also like the possibility of finding people and groups, it gives me a bigger sense of safety. I like the fact that I can connect from my home country, so that I don't arrive on my own".	n/a
3	"I find it to be very complete. I like finding people from my university, and to have a variety of people".	n/a
4	"It is useful to contact people and to find direct information about each topic".	"Rather than improving something, I would add languages or common interests between people".
5	"I feel it is very complete, easy to use and I wouldn't feel embarrassed to ask questions there".	n/a

On a scale from 1 to 5, how useful do you find the Prepare section? Why?

User	Scale	Justification
1	5	"It helps organize and understand in a better way all the necessary steps for the trip preparation".
2	5	"Because I believe that when organizing a trip, there is a lot of incorrect information on the internet. A well-structured platform simplifies your life, avoiding the problem of having to consult many websites, it allows you to organize your activities and prepares you in a very easy way. Overall, it makes your life easier".
3	5	"Because now I am jumping between these activities, and that's why I find it useful".
4	5	"I like that it is personalized depending on each user's data and requirements. I also like the reassuring messages to continue the process; the tone of voice is very likeable".
5	5	"It helps me organize my activities and to not leave things at the last minute. I also liked the possibility to ask the community for further information and expand the contents".

Conclusions from this round

What worked out?
• Content organization.
• Progressive disclosure.
• Checklists.
• The app's visual interface.
• Milestone messages.

What didn't work out?
• Navigation in the accommodation activity:
  ·Understanding how to continue or end the activity
  ·Deviations toward Connect tab.

What has improved? (Compared to the previous round)
• More positive comments regarding UI and layout.

Suggestions and Next Steps

In all sections, create two different user flows: one for the first time the app is used, and another for the reuse of the functionalities. The interaction patterns for each flow are based on current activities of the Prepare section, having the first flow be inspired by the Visa Application process, and the second flow be inspired by the Accommodation activity.

Flow 1: First Use

When students access activities on each phase for the first time, they are going to find a sequential flow, where each task is progressively disclosed as the app is explored. After finishing an activity, the Milestone screen appears, indicating users that they know the necessary steps to complete said activity. When necessary, tooltips are going to appear to further explain hidden or more complex functions.

Flow 2: Daily Use

When reusing the app, users are going to find an "In Process" state for the home page buttons that lead to each activity. Progress made on each activity is going to be saved in the form of checkpoints. When navigating each activity, students will find direct options and shortcuts to each task.

From this testing round, the need to prototype other crucial app functionalities that made the experience more real and complete was evident. For each activity, the suggested features and slight improvements are explained below:

Visa Application
- Giving a clearer cue for scrolling the checklist.
- Closing the disclaimer in the checklist after a certain delay.
- Adding an in-depth explanation of the Universitaly pre-enrolment and "Dichiarazione di Valore" process. To reduce information overload, this could be accessed through the carousel, specifically by adding a call to action in the card that mentions these procedures.

Accommodation
- Modify navigation for the first use.

- Adding an explanation of different apartment types in Italy, as this information is unfamiliar for Latin American students.
- For future app versions: Adding a map with city zones, indicating average rent prices and security level.

Luggage
- Modify navigation for the first use.

Connect Tab
- Prototype functional filters based on activity (Visa/ Accommodation/ Luggage)
- Forum: Filtered questions
- People: People who are available to help users with said activity (e.g. finding a house while they are still in their home country)
- Visual key to indicate phase or level of each individual user, based on the five established phases of the international student journey.
- Prototype the option to see another user's profile, as well as the connection functionality.

General app experience
- Prototyping the option to explore all phases
- Events Tab:
- For phase 1- Prepare: Adding personal activities, like the date of travel
- For the remaining phases: Events in the city.
- Prototyping the personal dashboard.

Final thoughts on the user testing

Testing the mobile app with real users was an opportunity to validate the desirability of a solution that combines information with community engagement, confirming that both reliable information and the possibility of talking to other students are appealing features among users.

The main learnings this activity brought to the design process were the validation of interaction patterns and gamification strategies, which were found very appealing and positive to users, making the process more organized and easy; likewise, some improvements were achieved in the different iterations of the product, like the findability of the forum and, in the last testing round, the decision to design two flows to better guide users.

By listening to users' expectations and suggestions, it was also possible to prioritize the development of new functionalities and to understand how students would interact with the solutions. Some testing limitations were the remote methodology, as most participants accessed the prototype from their computer, lowering the fidelity of interaction compared to the use from a mobile device. As the target participants were not in Italy yet, another challenge was to contact them and organize an online meeting for testing the prototype, which led to less tests than expected. Nevertheless, the results obtained during the three iterations helped improve and further develop the product, setting the basis for the project's next steps.

Designing a self-maintaining system
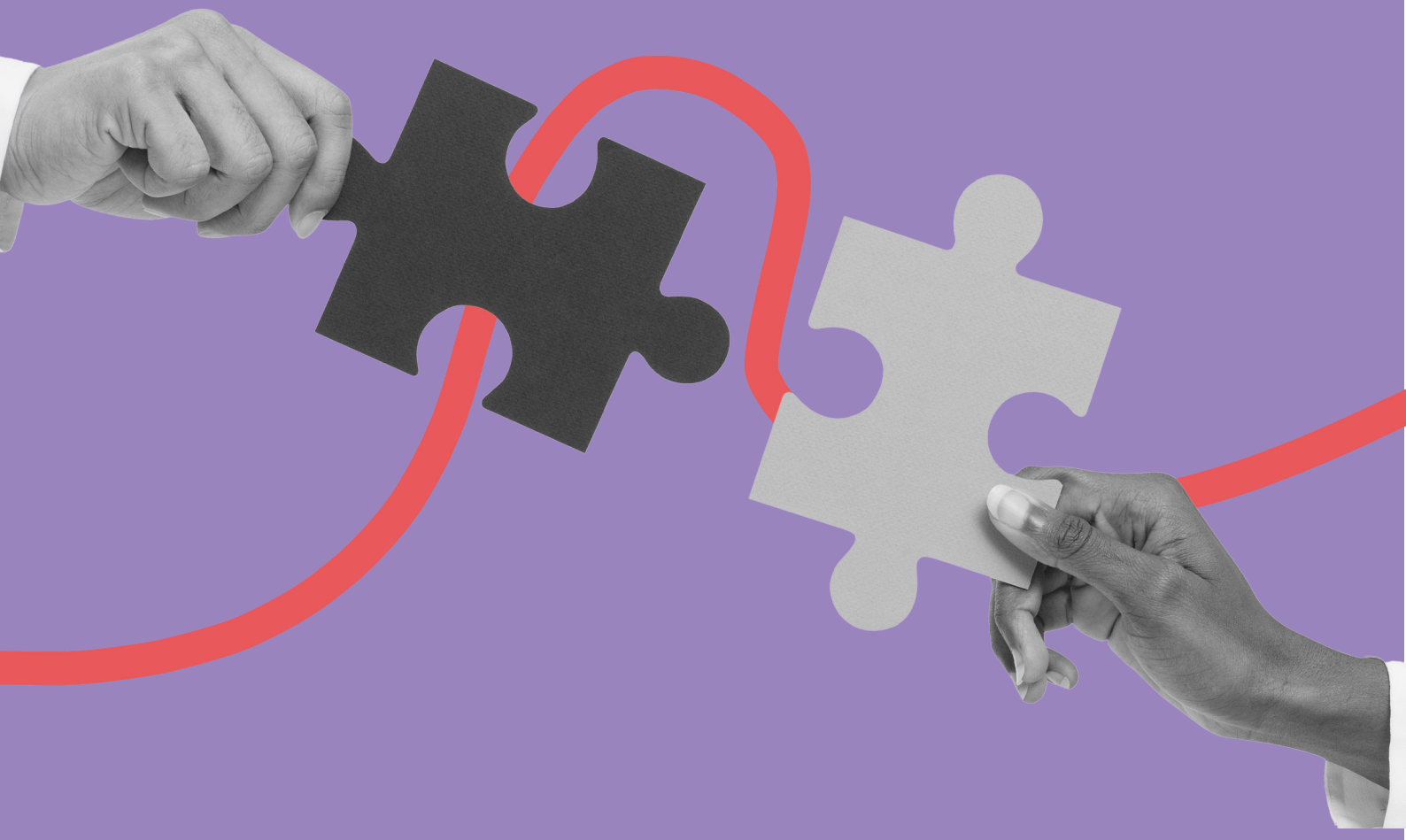
After prototyping and testing the Prepare phase with real users and outlining future app functionalities, user flows, and interaction patterns based on feedback, the next step was to determine the application's feasibility and integration into the current system.

Feasibility of the app

Firstly, a feasibility analysis was carried out to better understand the viability and development process for the mobile app. To accomplish this, the functional prototype and the MVP corresponding to Phase 1 were considered and studied under four feasibility dimensions: technical, referring to the application's development and maintenance capacity; economic, focusing on necessary resources and their sustainability; legal, relating to regulatory compliance between Latin American countries and Italy; and operational, focusing on the system's organization, adoption and scalability.

To frame the feasibility analysis, the study is situated within a possible implementation context: a pilot project between Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, at its campuses in Bogota and Cali, and the Politecnico di Torino, in Turin, Italy.

Technical Feasibility

Technologies
The app MVP and prototype for Phase 1 made it possible to validate and consider key functionalities like user login, checklists, forum, connection with other users, and data storage and task progress.
A hybrid and open-source framework like React Native can be employed for developing a mobile app compatible with both Android and iOS, reducing development times and maintenance costs. Regarding infrastructure, the use of cloud services such as AWS or Google cloud is proposed. These allow scalability and availability, with databases to manage user profiles and documentation.

Scalability
Technical development is projected through an incremental approach, starting from the already existing MVP, and evolving towards more robust versions based on user feedback. The app will be initially implemented in a context of real use that serves as a testing ground with a limited number of users, to then be gradually expanded to other scenarios, ensuring scalability and replicability as the user base grows.

Human resources
In terms of human resources, it is estimated that the initial phase of development will require a small but interdisciplinary team: a UX/UI designer to ensure usability and coherence, two developers (backend and frontend) to implement and maintain functionalities, a tester to ensure quality, and a project manager to coordinate development, tests and user feedback. The workload for the pilot phase of the project is estimated in a span of 3 to 5 months, with the possibility of short iterations according to MVP feedback.
Given that the application's content is intended to be in Spanish and directed towards Latin American students, it is plausible that the initial development team could be situated in Colombia, potentially with the assistance of Javeriana's IT office.

Technical limitations
Considering that the MVP is focused on the Prepare phase, future phases (Arrive, Adapt, Belong and Evolve) may require additional features, increasing technical complexity and necessary resources.

Economical Feasibility

Considering the academic and social nature of the project, its viability does not depend exclusively on profitability, but on its ability to create value and benefit for the university community, reducing uncertainty and administrative difficulties that Latin American students face when going through international mobility processes.

Development costs
Costs for developing a mobile app with the React Native framework may vary depending on the complexity of the project and the functionalities. However, it is possible to calculate estimations based on current prices.
The approximate cost of developing a medium-complexity application, comprising functionalities such as login, checklists, forums, groups, personal dashboards, and connect features, ranges from €17,242.00 to €38,794.50. ($20,000 to $40,000 USD)

Target market size
Referring back to the data presented in Chapter 1 on international students at the Politecnico di Torino, Colombians represent 2% of the 8110 international students enrolled in the 2024/25 academic year, equivalent to 162 students. On average, each year there are 30 to 40 students enrolled from the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana (Bogota and Cali).

Funding sources
It is proposed to implement a mixed model that combines institutional contributions. For example: from the international relations offices of Javeriana and the Politecnico di Torino, with possible grants for educational innovation projects and international cooperation.

Economic risks
Some possible risks for the economic feasibility of the project include the subestimation of technical costs, dependence on institutional funding and the possibility of a low initial user adoption rate. However, these can be mitigated with a phase-by-phase planning, prioritizing the consolidation of the prototype and its validation on controlled contexts before investing in expansion or new functionalities.
In summary, the project can be sustained with strategic institutional support and a reasonable initial investment, justifying its development due to its high social impact and its benefit for Latin American students' international experience.

Operational Feasibility

Initial operational context
As previously mentioned, the app will be initially implemented as a project between Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, and Politecnico di Torino. The starting goal would be the launch of the functional prototype corresponding to the Prepare phase, aimed at students who are enrolling in an international mobility program. Progressively, features will be expanded to include the Arrive and Adapt levels.

Context scalability
The gradual implementation model allows scalability with other Colombian and Latin American universities, in possession of ongoing agreements with Politecnico di Torino and other Italian
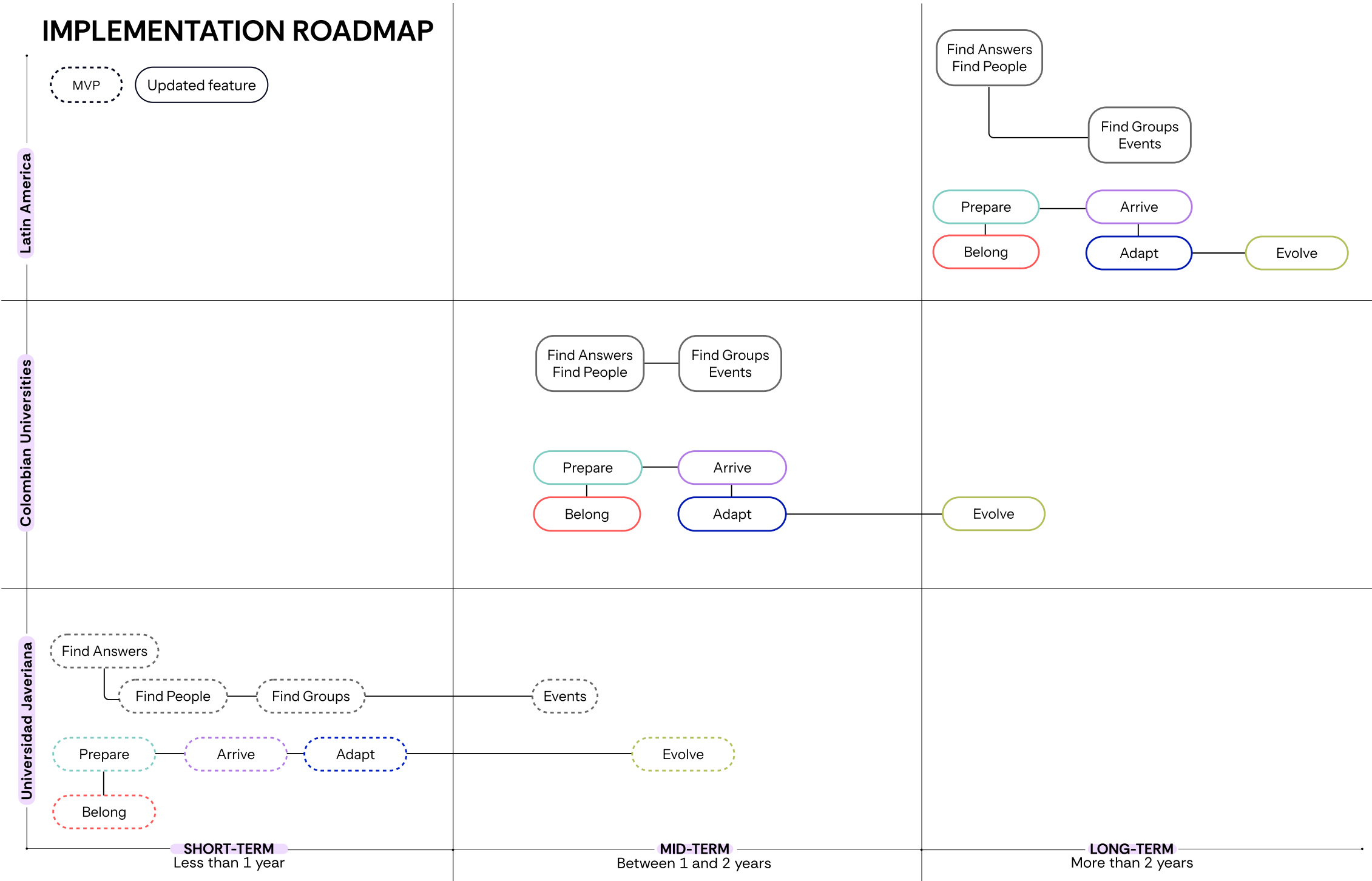

Figure 9. Implementation Roadmap

Universities.
For the drafting of content for future phases, it is projected to rely on cross-national sources like universities, students, alumni, government entities and Latin American networks in Italy. Figure 9 shows a roadmap for the gradual implementation of the app, considering short, medium and long-term, as well as the different contexts like Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, Colombia, and Latin America.

Implementation process
Prior to the implementation of the application in universities, it is planned to collaborate with students or student associations already settled in Italy to establish the first Mentor hub. This hub will assist the first students that are about to initiate their international mobility process, as well as contribute with information and insights .
On the other hand, it is necessary to partner with universities' international mobility offices, with the scope of developing app onboarding activities that serve as a support in the preparation process.

Operative human resources
It is projected that a cross-national operational team, defined as app moderators, will be established in order to ensure the smooth running of the application and to provide user support. Furthermore, the team will be responsible for drafting and updating contents for the various phases of the application.
Once the first version is implemented, it is provided to enlarge the staff to include human resources in charge of marketing and communications, and growing partnerships with other institutions.

Legal Feasibility

Considering that the mobile application collects students' sensitive personal data, it is necessary to consider existing regulations for data privacy, intellectual property and interinstitutional relationships in Italy and Colombia (initial scenario of implementation).
Compliance with the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Colombia's Law 1581 of 2012 on Personal Data Protec-

tion (Habeas Data) is an essential requirement. To ensure legal compliance, a privacy policy must be developed, explicit informed consent must be obtained, and security protocols must be implemented for data storage and transmission.

Informative content about migratory procedures, Italian culture and daily life must cite its sources and avoid the unauthorized use of protected material.

Additionally, it is important to clarify that the mobile app is conceived as an informative support tool, not a legal or immigration advisory service. Therefore, its use must be accompanied by a disclaimer that clarifies the indicative nature of the contents.

Ensuring compliance with current regulations and transparency on personal data management reinforces the legal validity of the project, increasing credibility and user trust.

System structure and map

Following the principles of systemic design, Migra Tranqui goes beyond a mobile app. It is a system of cultural adaptation that involves a variety of actors in different contexts, behaving as a unified source for diverse aspects of life abroad, fostering community creation and accompanying students throughout their journey. A scheme of the app as a system is represented in figure 10.

Students' home country

Key actors involved include government entities like the Italian Embassy, for Visa procedures, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for apostille and title recognition. Their input for the system is official information about procedures, to be filtered, posted, and constantly updated by app moderators.
Home universities are another key actor providing information about international exchange procedures, and having an active international agreement with a university in Italy. However, their most important input for the app are outgoing students, who enter the app as players for phase 1 (Planners).

Italy

As they arrive in Italy, Planners become Newcomers inside the app, and incoming students for the host University.
The main government entities involved in the international student journey are Questura, the entity to which a residence permit request is issued; and Agenzia delle entrate for the obtention of a Tax Code. Similar to how it works in the country of origin, they provide official information, which is posted by moderators and subsequently updated by community members (as it is stated that word-of-mouth is often a more reliable and updated source than official channels).
The home country's consulate or embassy in Italy is also a key actor inside the system, as it has a role

in providing services and support for its citizens. Although its interactions with students are more limited, as they are often located in a specific city and not spread throughout their territory, they are considered a stakeholder for the system as they could help promote the mobile app or financially support the project.

Inside the Italian territory, there are non-official but essential stakeholders: Latin American networks and student associations. They are key for community creation, as they can be the input for community events and interactions that go beyond the digital world, and that foster connection in the physical world. They can be involved in the system by proposing a variety of activities and events inside the app, or actively participating in groups and forums.

Mobile app

The app works as a bridge between continents, bringing closer players belonging to different phases in the international student journey. As explained in chapter 5, students experience a natural progression and level up by completing activities inside the app, reflecting real-life advances in their cultural adaptation process.

Particularly, the first three players (Planners, Newcomers and Explorers), are more information-driven players, searching information and seeking to organize and complete tasks. In parallel, they are able to create connections with fellow students and gradually discover groups, events and communities.

If Explorers want to do so, after completing all their activities and knowing more about Italian culture, they can become Mentors and help other members of the community. Contributions to the community would be rewarded through gamification strategies like badges and leaderboards, and access to special benefits or exclusive events.

Mentors, the fourth phase players, are a pillar inside the digital community. It is to be noted that any player in the app is able to contribute to the best of their ability and knowledge with information and insights. However, Mentors act as the

7- DESIGNING A SELF-MAINTAINING SYSTEM

most reliable source of information and a guide for the former three players. They are driven by contributing with content updates, helping with specific requests and fostering community creation.

A Mentor can keep their role of top voice and contributor of the app for as long as they desire. Nevertheless, they are also making real-life progresses and changes, eventually ending their cycle as students. When the moment arrives, they can decide autonomously to move to the next level and become a Walker.

This decision does not mean to stop contributing to the community or helping other players with their process. It means recognizing that they are about to assume a new role, whether it is in Italy or back in their home country, and that they might need information and support for tackling these new challenges. In a way, it is as if they became Planners all over again, but instead of preparing for a study experience abroad, they are thinking about what is next for them. Taking this into account, it is possible to hypothesize that there will be "levels of seniority" within Walkers, starting from who has just concluded their studies and is beginning a new path, and moving forward to users who have already settled into a post-study life and are willing to help fellow Walkers find their way.
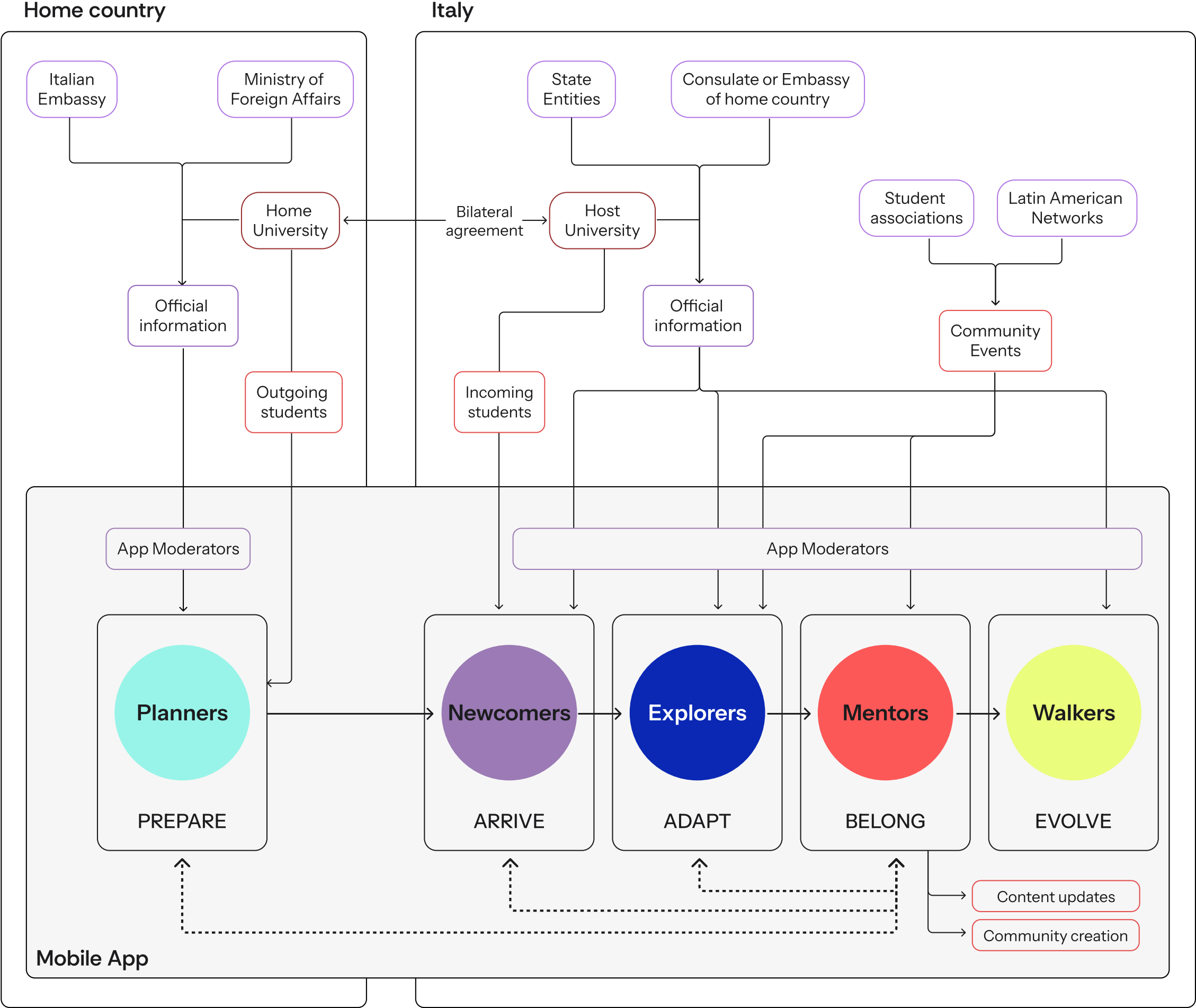

Figure 10 . System map of Migra Tranqui

Conclusion

This thesis aimed to **improve** the **cultural adaptation experience of Latin American students in Italy.** Through literature research about cultural intelligence, adaptation and culture shock, alongside a systemic analysis of the international student journey in Italy, and user interviews, the study identified key insights that informed the design of the mobile application.

By incorporating strategies such as **gamification**, **progressive disclosure**, and phased content delivery, the application provides an engaging and tailored support system that addresses the **evolving needs of students throughout their adaptation process.** Migra Tranqui enables smoother integration into the host country and fosters community-building, being perceived as a **reliable companion** in students' international experiences.

The prototype developed for the Prepare phase demonstrates the feasibility of the solution, suggesting that **short-term implementation** in collaboration with **universities in Colombia and Italy** is achievable. Future work will focus on prototyping and testing subsequent phases (Arrive, Adapt, Belong and Evolve) to refine functionalities and gather feedback from real users, ensuring the application remains responsive to students' needs.

Overall, this project offers a user-centered solution **deeply rooted in the experiences of Latin American students** and specifically designed for the Italian context. By addressing the **unique challenges** of cultural adaptation in Italy, Migra Tranqui provides a practical tool that **merges informative with community features**. Its design demonstrates how research on cultural adaptation can be translated into a focused, context-sensitive application.

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