

Partnerships

RIGO Project



Funding

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Co-funded by
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Partners

The project is coordinated and communicated under the umbrella organization of Ulysseus European University.



Beneficiaries of the grant and collaborating partners of the project are:

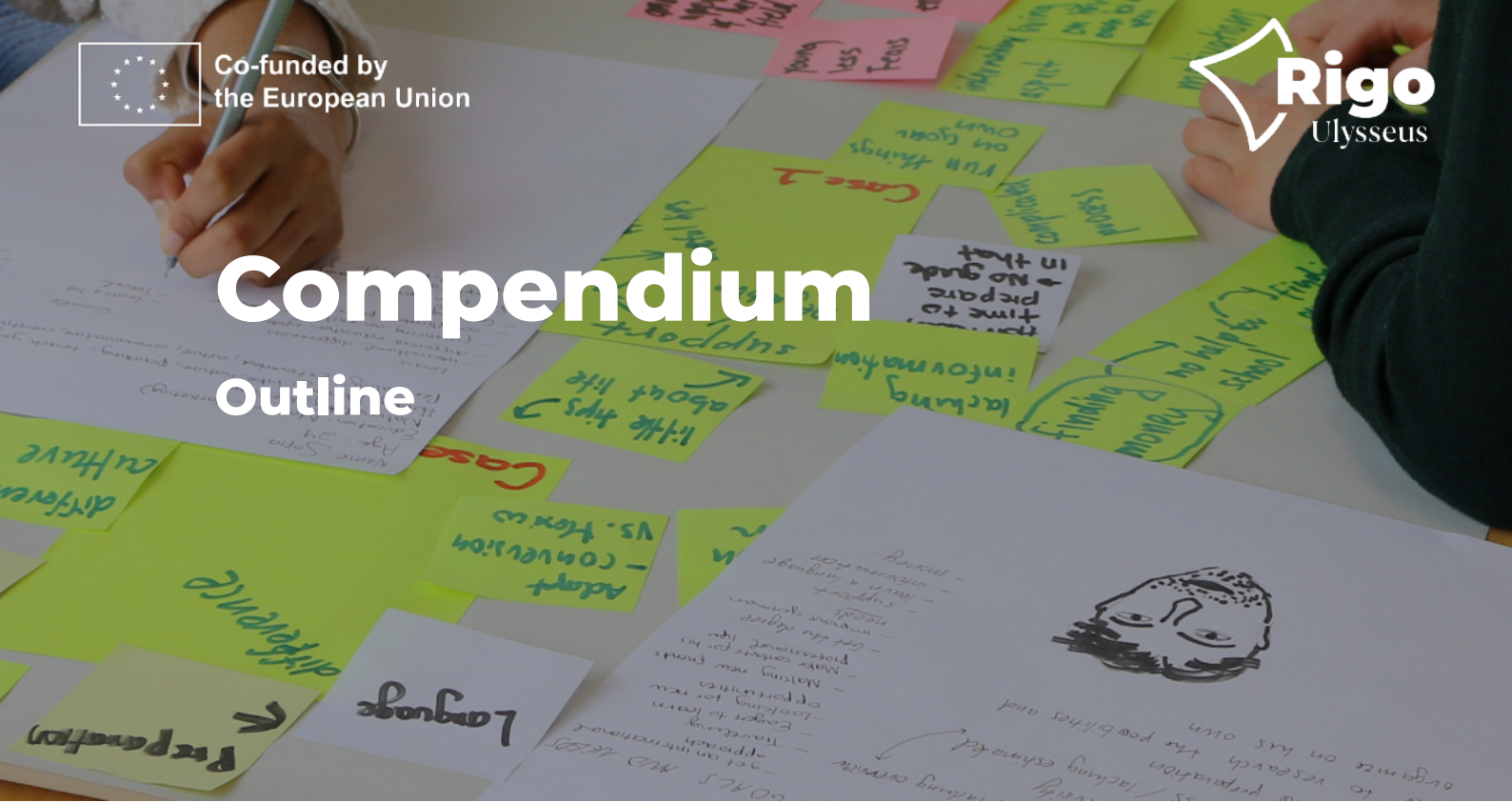
Université Côte d'Azur, France
Technical University of Košice, Slovakia
Management Center Innsbruck, Austria
Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences, Finland



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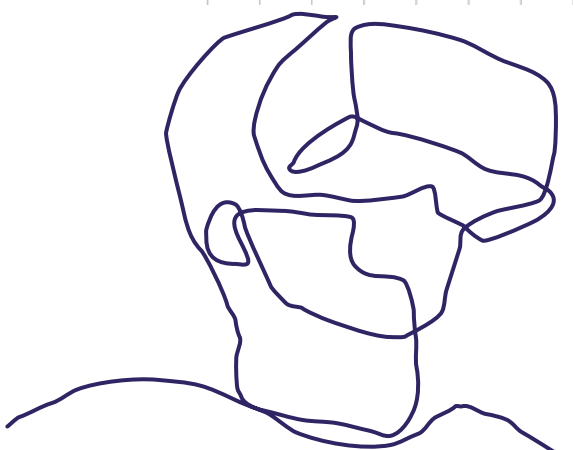
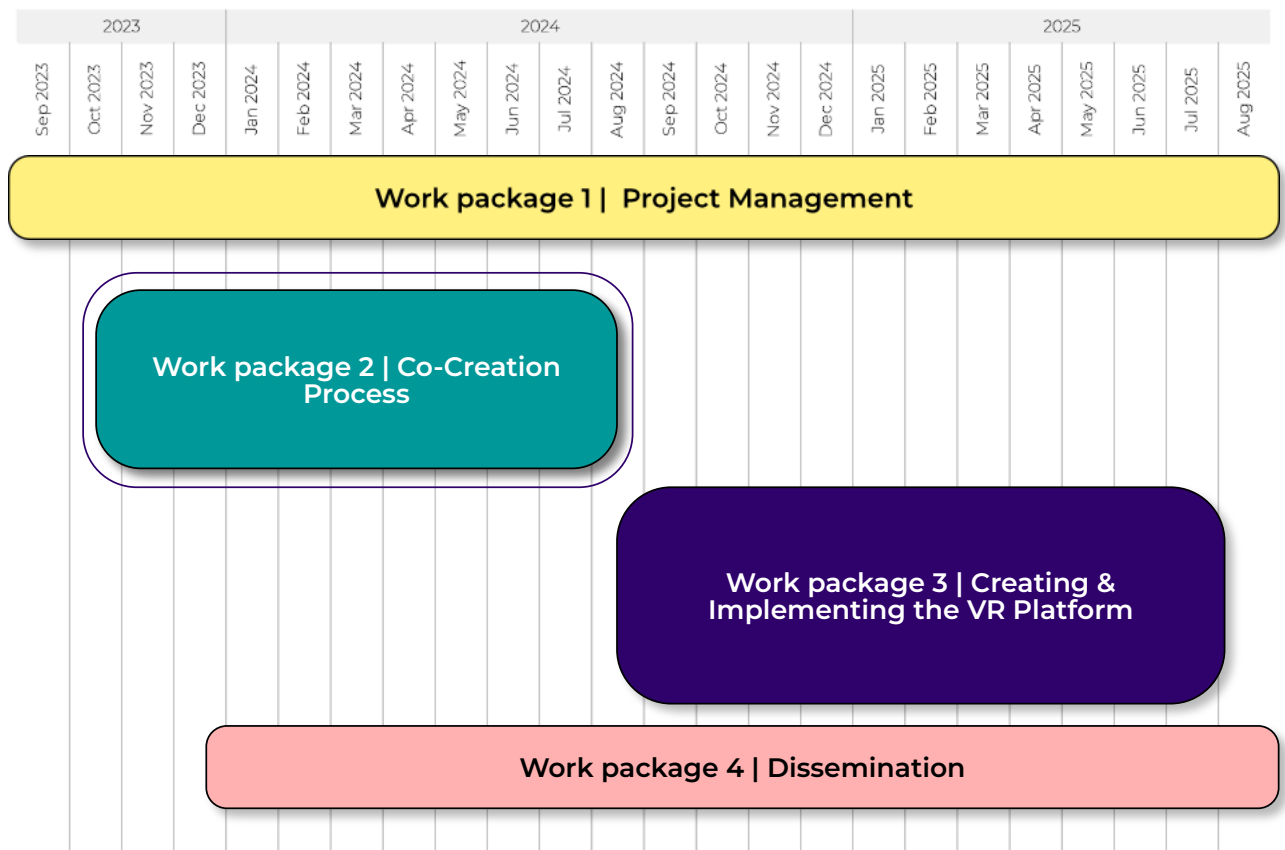
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About RIGO

Introduction

Project Timeline

Below you find a simplified illustration of the RIGO project's timeline, structured into four work packages. This compendium describes **Work package 2** - the Co-Creation Process.



Lead partners of the work packages:

- WP 1** Université Côte d'Azur, France
- WP 2** Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences, Finland
- WP 3** Technical University of Košice, Slovakia
- WP 4** Management Center Innsbruck, Austria

Co-Creation

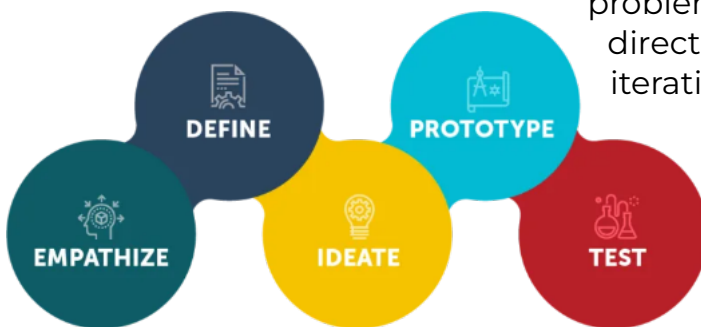
Purpose and Structure of Co-creation Workshops



Design Thinking Workshops

The co-creation workshops were designed to extract valuable insights **directly from international students and their experiences**, ensuring that the VR platform would reflect authentic challenges and solutions. The purpose of these workshops was twofold: first, to gather information about the key problems students face during their international mobility periods, and second, to identify the skills and strategies they need to overcome these challenges.

The workshops were organized based on the principles of **Design Thinking**, a problem-solving method that emphasizes directly understanding users' needs and iterating solutions accordingly. The method is generally divided into five stages: Empathize, Define, Ideate, Prototype, and Test. We focused on the first three stages only. Through this structure, the workshops aimed to collect relevant data, create **personas** to represent various student archetypes, and **ideate scenarios** that could later be transformed into VR experiences.



Each partner institution involved in the project was tasked with recruiting participants who had experienced an international exchange or traineeship. For reasons of feasibility, primarily incoming international students at all four locations were brought together, incentivized in various ways to engage fully in the workshops. Participants were divided into groups to explore different themes in face-to-face and in online settings, aimed at ensuring a diverse and rich collection of insights.

In-Person Workshops

Process and Results - Personas and Themes



Creating Personas from Real Experiences

The in-person workshops marked the first stage of the co-creation process. Held at all partner institutions, these workshops focused on understanding the participants' experiences and deriving personas and key themes from their stories in personal discussion. The workshops followed a **structured agenda**, beginning with an open discussion about the surprises and challenges participants encountered during their international experiences. This initial conversation was crucial for drawing out the personal experiences that would later shape the scenarios.

Participants worked in pairs, interviewing each other about their exchange experiences, including the challenges they faced and the enjoyable aspects. This stage allowed for a broad exploration of issues, ranging from language barriers and cultural differences to administrative difficulties and housing challenges.

After the interviews, participants collaboratively created **personas**, fictitious but realistic profiles representing different types of exchange students. These personas were based on the actual experiences discussed during the interviews, providing a concrete foundation for developing VR scenarios.





A Good Persona

<p>Inspiring and insightful</p> <p>Visual, lively</p> <p>Has a descriptive title</p> <p>Based on real data</p> <p>Has a realistic photo</p> <p>"Tells a story"</p>	<p>Contains (example)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Basic demographics · Short biography · Motivations · Frustrations · Interests
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Maria - The accent-restricted aspiring influencer



"I cannot understand half of what they're saying!"

Short bio
 Maria is from Paramaribo and started an exchange in Helsinki three weeks ago. She chose Helsinki because she follows some Colombian experts on social media and they have been posting interesting videos about Finland, their new home country. She studies international business and figured that an international experience in a business university would boost her career prospects. She likes to post TikTok videos about her experiences to her followers – mostly her friends and family for now.

Name: Maria Ortiz
Age: 23
Nationality: Colombian
Studies: International business
Hobbies: Hiking, dancing, board games, TikTok
Personality: Ambitious, organised, extrovert, outgoing

Skills
 Social media, MS Office

Frustrations and challenges

- Finds it difficult to understand the local accent
- Is worried that she misses essential information about practical stuff or social activities due to not understanding
- Feels like she has to repeat her words many times before the locals can understand her
- Thought that she had been invited to a board game night, but it turned out to be a gym event.

Goals and needs

- ✓ Wants to be able to smoothly interact with the locals
- ✓ Would like to get more followers for her TikTok, also internationally
- ✓ Wants to get the study points and have a good time
- ✓ Wishes that she had prepared herself for the accent
- ✓ Aims for an international job after her studies



In-Person Workshops

Themes

In the in-person workshops, students were previously instructed to create personas with a specific theme in mind. During an online feedback session, the workshop facilitators collaboratively reviewed the 60 personas submitted and identified 10 key themes that emerged:

1. Leisure time / socialising
2. Culture shock!
3. Feeling lonely / making friends / mental health
4. Finding a job
5. Accommodation challenges
6. Dealing with administration
7. Transportation and wayfinding
8. Security and safety
9. Course issues
10. Language problems

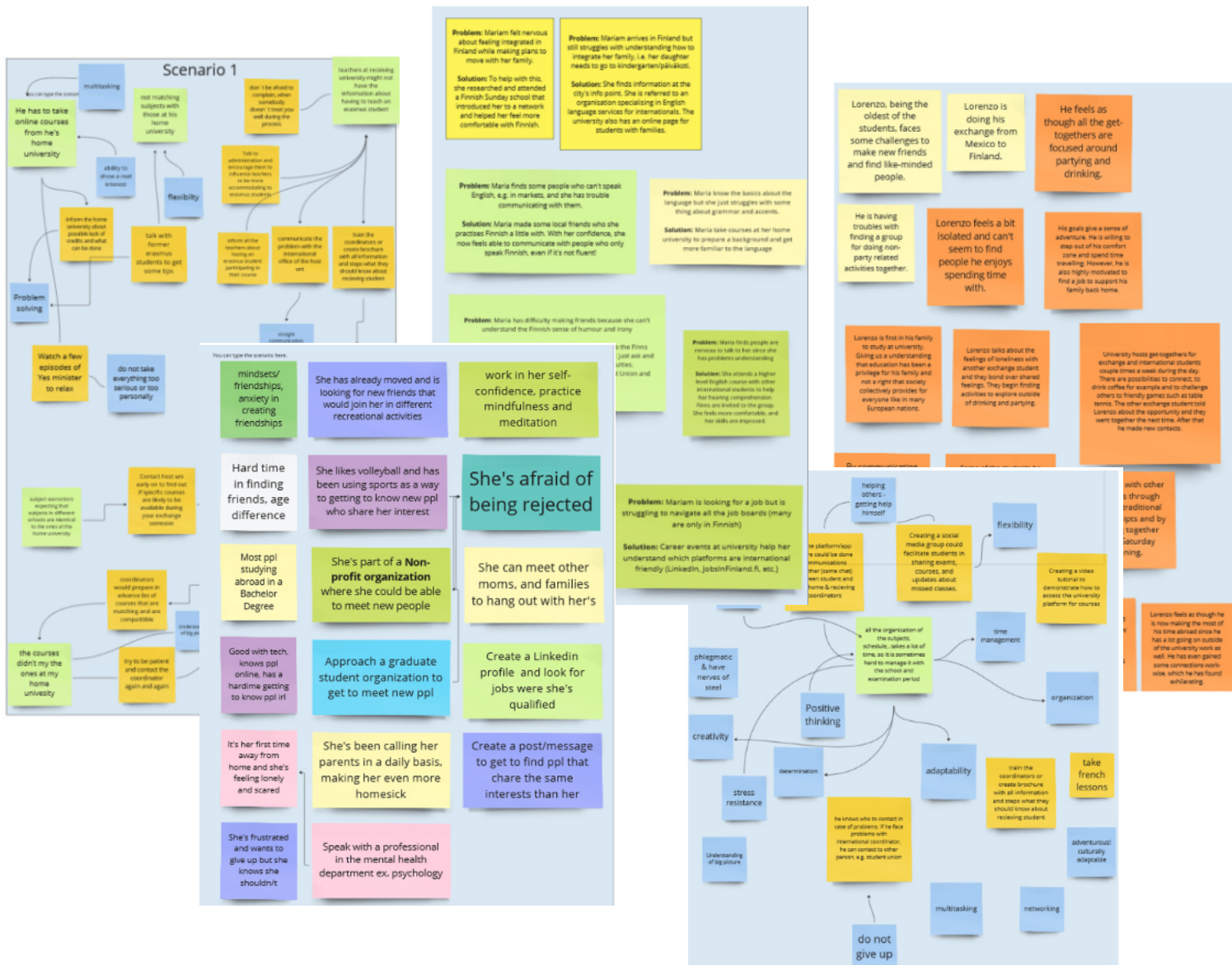
Themes	
LIVING / GETTING AROUND ABROAD	Accommodation - affordable + room mates + vicinity to uni + city
	Navigating the city / finding cool leisure places
	Getting a feeling of the safety of the new place
	Getting an idea of cost of living
	Health care in foreign countries
	Access to job market abroad
	Navigating campus
FOREIGN LANGUAGE & CULTURE	Fear of speaking foreign language
	Getting acquainted with local culture, mostly food
SOCIAL	Fear of not finding friends abroad
	Fear of being away from family & friends / home loneliness
	Connecting with locals
ADMINISTRATIVE	Administrative issues with foreign university
	Administrative issues with local authorities

These themes would then serve as the foundation for the subsequent stages of creating detailed scenarios.

Online Workshops

Scenarios

The developed scenarios cover a wide range of issues, from the practical (navigating public transportation, dealing with bureaucracy) to the emotional (coping with loneliness, making friends in a new environment). The scenarios will serve as the backbone for the further development of the VR platform, offering students a simulated experience of the challenges they might face during their international exchange and equipping them with the skills needed to overcome these challenges.



Key Lessons Learned

Conclusion and Reflection

Universal and location-specific challenges

The co-creation process provided valuable insights into the challenges that international students face during their exchange periods. Several key lessons emerged from the workshops, highlighting the importance of **understanding students' emotional and practical challenges** in equal measure. One of the key takeaways was the **diversity of experiences**, with some challenges being universal (such as language barriers and loneliness) while others were more location-specific (such as finding a job or dealing with local administrative systems).

Another significant lesson was the **importance of cross-national collaboration** in the workshops. Bringing together students from different countries allowed for a richer exchange of ideas and experiences, ensuring that the VR platform would reflect a broad spectrum of challenges. However, participation in the online workshops was lower than anticipated, suggesting that while **face-to-face engagement was highly effective**, the online format posed some difficulties in maintaining momentum.

In terms of methodology, the **Design Thinking** framework proved highly effective for this co-creation process, especially in the initial stages of empathizing with students and defining their key challenges. The iterative nature of Design Thinking ensured that the workshops remained flexible and responsive to participants' input. One area for improvement identified was the need for more structured support during the scenario-writing phase of the online workshops. A third round of workshops dedicated solely to refining the scenarios could have yielded even more detailed results.

A group of approximately ten diverse young adults are standing in a line, smiling at the camera. Behind them is a large European Union flag with its characteristic blue field and twelve yellow stars. The scene is indoors, possibly at a university event or conference.

Collaboratively broadening horizons

Making the mobility experience more accessible via VR technology

Project Details

For further details on the RIGO project, please visit the website here:

<https://ulyseus.eu/rigo/>

RIGO – READY, IMMERSE, GO! Immersive VR Experience for International Mobility is a project to foster the Ulysseus Mobility Experience priority and serves as a satellite project for Ulysseus.

RIGO has received funding from European Union's Erasmus+ programme under the grant agreement No E10224899. The views and opinions expressed in this communication are the sole responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Commission.

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The project partners thank you for your interest!

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