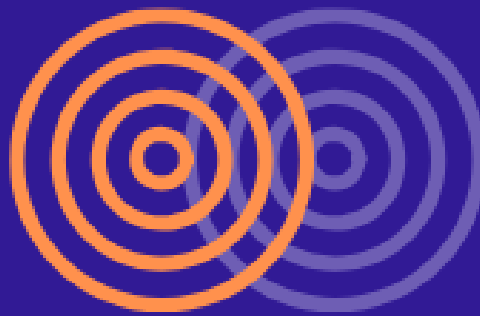


THE GREAT TRANSITION - GROUP 53

DECEMBER 2020

PROJECT REPORT




ASSEMBLEAT

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LONELINESS

At the beginning of the semester we decided to work on the topic of “Loneliness and Virtuality”. Loneliness is the At the beginning of the semester we decided to work on the topic of “Loneliness and Virtuality”. Loneliness is the hidden illness of the 21st century. Indeed, in Western countries, numerous studies have documented that in our increasingly connected society people are lonelier, especially the younger generation. A 2018 study by the Australian Red Cross, showed that one in two Australian adults feels lonely for at least one day in a week, while more than one in four feel lonely for three or more days. A 1990 meta-analysis, which included data on 25,000 people, revealed that young adults showed the highest levels of loneliness; feeling of loneliness then declined over midlife, to increase again modestly in old age. However, today the “loneliness curve” is flattening. Indeed, according to a 2019 study by YouGov, 30% of millennials said they felt lonely “often or always”, a higher percentage than those of Generation X (20%) and Baby Boomers (15%) when they were the same age.



**LONELINESS DOES NOT
COME FROM HAVING NO ONE
AROUND, BUT FROM BEING
UNABLE TO COMMUNICATE
THE THINGS THAT SEEM
IMPORTANT TO ONESELF.**

CARL JUNG

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT



A 2018 STUDY BY THE FIGARO FINDS OUT THAT 18% OF YOUNG PEOPLE ARE SOCIALLY VULNERABLE AND RARELY MEET OTHER PEOPLE IN REAL LIFE.

Loneliness is a major society issue because it is both detrimental to people's mental and physical health. Indeed, feelings of loneliness predict depressive symptoms, impaired sleep and daytime dysfunction, reductions in physical activity, and impaired mental health and cognition.

Moreover, loneliness has been found to be a major risk factor for all causes of early death: feeling lonely increases our likelihood of earlier death by 26%. This is greater than the risk related to obesity. There is evidence that chronic loneliness can turn on genes involved with inflammation, which can be a risk factor for heart disease and cancer.

LONELINESS IN NUMBERS

N°1

A 2016 study by YouGov found that loneliness is the number one fear of young people today—ranking ahead of losing a home or a job.

1/3

men and 1/4 women in Western Countries report that they do not feel that they have someone to help them out in case of need.

10%

A 2018 study by the US Office of National Statistics: 9.8% of young people (16 to 24) say that they are often lonely.

50%

Lonely people are 50% more likely to die prematurely than those with healthy social connections.

THE WORK OF ZYGMUNT BAUMAN

The development of social media has deeply transformed the way we understand and value relationships. Numerous studies have attempted to establish a causal link between the use of social media and the feeling of loneliness. However, their findings on this topic have been contradictory to this day. Some studies have highlighted the detrimental effect of social media on both self esteem and loneliness, others, pointed out that social media are a solution to the issue. Nevertheless, scientists agree that social networks play a significant role in the problem of loneliness. We firmly believe that it is the way people behave on social media also their pre-existing self esteem issues that are the main sources of the issue.

For Zygmunt Bauman in *Liquid Modernity*, the increase in loneliness levels compared to the previous generations is due to the “liquid modernity”. Indeed, today, more and more people wish to avoid social bonds that are too binding or too demanding in terms of obligations. (According to Bauman, this shift is due to the rise of individualism and the phenomenon of commodification in Western societies). Moreover, with new technologies and the rise of social media, creating as well as breaking social bonds has never been easier. However, communication on social media lacks intimacy and these new “weaker” bonds do not bring the security that is associated with the certainty of belonging, and the fear of being disposed erodes interactions. Therefore, he concludes that we all live in a state of potential loneliness.

PERCEIVED SOCIAL LONELINESS

When we started working on loneliness we chose to focus on one of the most vulnerable population to loneliness: people under 25. We then discovered that there are two different types of loneliness: social loneliness, the factual absence of close social bonds, and perceived social loneliness, a feeling that a person experiences when he/she does not feel understood or supported and also the person does not feel “useful” as she/he has the feeling that no one is relying on her/him.

We chose to focus on the concept of perceived social loneliness (PSL), because younger generations are especially victims of this type of loneliness. The loneliness plaguing younger generations is mainly about having difficulties to connect with other people, rather than purely being alone. Some young adults living with others are just as lonely as others living alone. Therefore, today people are not lacking social relationships per se, they are lacking the feeling that they belong, they matter and that they are cared for by their existing social circle.



FORMULATING THE PROBLEM

Later, we discovered the destructive power of loneliness, illustrated by the image of a vicious circle. Indeed, experiencing loneliness significantly lowers self confidence and involvement in social activities or events. Therefore lonely people subconsciously decrease their interactions with others. As a consequence, they are seen as less approachable which reduces their prospects of future interactions. Indeed, shyness and fear of rejection are often brought up as the reason why young people find it difficult to create new social bonds.

The presentation of Claire Boulanger, Chargée de la Solidarité Nationale et l'Éducation, at Fondation de France, during the lecture on Loneliness and Virtuality, helped us to narrow down our problem. As she highlighted the importance of self confidence, empowerment and a sense of purpose (feeling of belonging to a collective bigger than us) to activate and foster meaningful social bonds. Moreover, we chose to target young people, transitioning from their “teenage years” and entering adulthood: from 18 to 25 years old.



OUR PROBLEM

AssemblEAT

HOW TO HELP YOUNG ADULTS SUFFERING FROM PERCEIVED SOCIAL LONELINESS, GAIN IN CONFIDENCE AND FIND WITHIN THEMSELVES THE COURAGE TO CREATE AND FOSTER MEANINGFUL SOCIAL BONDS ?

We chose to focus on this specific problem as it combines four elements we were especially interested in as a team. These elements are:

- The “vicious circle of loneliness”: Low confidence and self esteem.
- The absence of a social “purpose”: Absence of a feeling of belonging to a “greater” community.
- One of the most vulnerable population: the people between 18 and 25 years old.
- The concept of “meaningful relationships” : people who rely on you and on whom you can rely on.

THE PROJECT'S ELABORATION

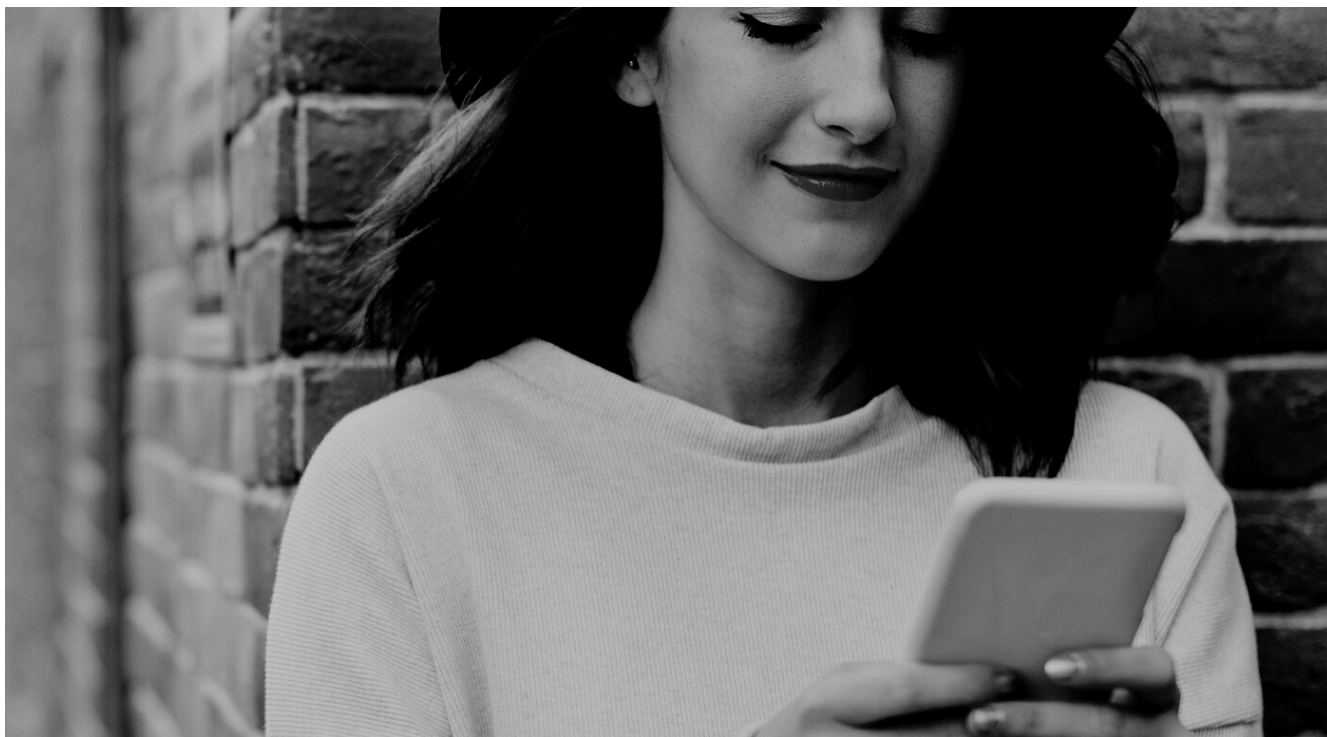
After formulating our problem we found two scientific studies which showed a negative correlation between the feeling of gratitude and perceived social loneliness. Gratitude is a positive, socially oriented emotion which plays an impressive role in building and maintaining social relationships, improving physical health and thus decreasing loneliness.

We strongly believe that gratitude is a key element when trying to tackle loneliness, gratitude is tied to the recognition that others (e.g., friends, family, colleagues...) have brought benefits into one's life. Moreover, working on gratitude can help breaking the "vicious circle of loneliness" for two reasons. Firstly, feeling grateful in a social relationship helps strengthening this bond by increasing the perception of its quality and motivating both parts to take part in reciprocal prosocial behaviors. Secondly, when it comes to building new relationships, gratitude helps by drawing one's attention to the perception of anything in the world that can be appreciated, which then fosters personally and socially productive behaviours.

The last element which led us to integrate gratitude in our proposal is the ease with which the feeling of gratitude can be cultivated. Simple and rapid exercises of self reflection, such as writing 3 positive things that happened during the day in a notebook, significantly boost the feeling of gratitude. These considerations led us to develop Assembleat, a mobile application fostering everyday gratitude and long-lasting supportive relationships.



THE USER'S JOURNEY



ASSEBLEAT IS A MOBILE APPLICATION TO EMPOWER YOUNG ADULTS AND HELP THEM FEEL MORE CONFIDENT IN THEIR FUTURE SOCIAL INTERACTIONS.

The user's journey on Assembleat:

- Creation of the Profile

The user starts by creating his/her account on Assembleat. The only elements required are: the customization of an avatar (no profile pictures), a username and filling a list of 5 things the user is currently grateful for. We have deliberately chosen not to allow the user to post profile picture as we want to create interaction detached from physical prejudices.

Assembleat is separated in two virtual spaces where several different animations are proposed. The "private space" and the "public space".

THE "PRIVATE" SPACE



THIS SPACE IS THE USER'S "SAFE ZONE", WHERE HE/SHE BE CREATIVE WITHOUT JUDGEMENT. ONLY THE USER CAN ACCESS TO HIS/HER PRIVATE SPACE. WE WANTED TO CREATE A POSITIVE SPACE WHERE ONE CAN GAIN A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON MEANINGFUL LIFE EVENTS.

- The gratitude journal :

This feature will allow users to keep a digital gratitude journal where they would write down which elements they appreciated during the day. Keeping a gratitude journal has numerous benefits, such as lowering stress and anxiety levels. A digital journal allows the user to upload pictures, videos and sounds of his/her day. Moreover, this page would propose daily prompts to inspire users, Such as:

- Identify just one thing each day that you usually take for granted and that ordinarily goes unappreciated.
- Take time to focus on one ungrateful thought per day (e.g., "my sister forgot my birthday") and substitute a grateful one (e.g., "she's always been there for me")

- A list of truths : Answering simple questions: What you like about where you live/your family/ your job...?

- The Progression Tree :

This feature is an entertaining way to walk through the user's journey on the app. Important milestones (participation at an activity) as well as selected entries from the gratitude journal would be displayed on the branch of the tree. The tree is an immediate and powerful tool as it is an immediate reminder of all the great people and things we have in our life.

- The Map :

An interactive map displaying all the activities' locations.

THE GRATITUDE PARTNER

- The Conversation Feed:

A space to interact with one's Gratitude partner or simply discuss with other Assembleat's users.

The Gratitude Partner is someone with whom you can share your list of blessings. Having a gratitude partner on Assembleat will help users motivate each others and be creative with their gratitude journal it is also a great way to foster meaningful online interactions. On Assembleat your Gratitude Partner can be :

- Someone you *already* know

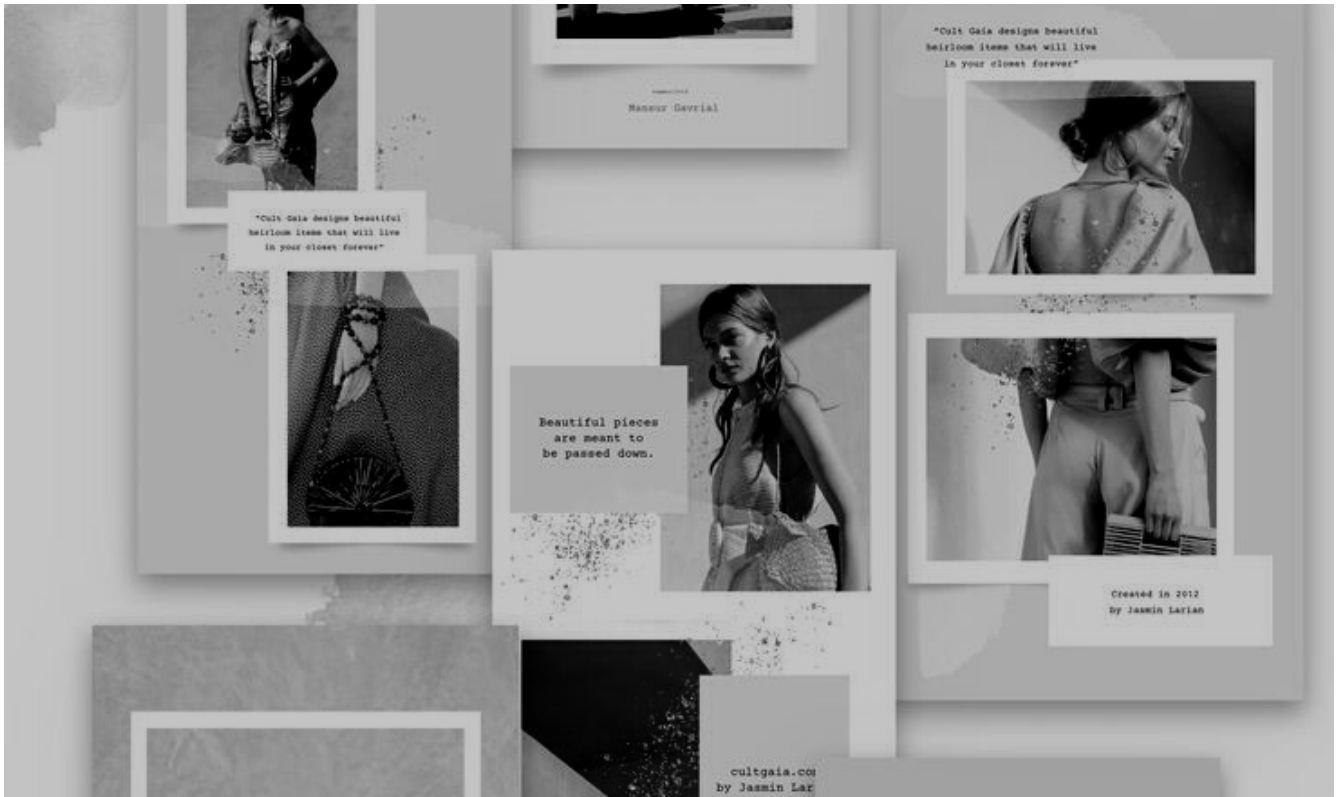
In this case, Assembleat offers a new way to strengthen a relationship. Both people will feel valued and more confident. Therefore, they will seek more actively new relationships. For instance, studies shows that expressing gratitude to your spouse everyday maintains and boosts the satisfaction and quality of the relationship.

- Someone you don't know *yet*

In this case, Assembleat provides a judgement-free zone where people are free to express themselves. Once they declare that they are seeking a gratitude partner, people will be paired randomly with another user. Although this relationship starts online, Assembleat proposes various activities to meet in real life to significantly decrease loneliness levels. The application will make it convenient to schedule a real life meeting between partners. At the end of such meeting Assembleat will offers the possibility to each partner to write a short message expressing their gratitude to the other person. Studies show that expressing gratitude in newly formed relationships strengthens the bond.



THE "PUBLIC SPACE"



- Associations pages :

Assembleat's goal is to create long-lasting partnerships with social organizations. These organizations would have a page where they would communicate on their commitments and activities. It will be a creative way to get Assembleat's user involved in charity projects and events.

- Assembleat's Activities

The application would provide incentives to meet people in real life in a positive, benevolent and judgement-free zone by partnering with various associations and organizing several activities each week.

A small, symbolical fee would be asked to users who wish to participate. The groups would be composed of 7 to 14 people with 1 volunteer in charge of the animation.

We propose three activities which could be easily implemented

- Assemble-it
- The Living Library
- Ref(I)ection

ASSEMBLEAT'S ACTIVITIES



ASSEMBLE-IT

The participants would join to construct the table and chairs they would later eat on. After the activity the furniture would be given to a charity.



THE LIVING LIBRARY

Everyone has a story. What's yours?
Like in a regular library where you would consult books, in a human library you listen to people's personal stories. Organizing a "human library" is fairly simple, each pair would spend 20 min together than switch to another participant.



REF(L)ECTION

Eating with people who do not know who you are and whom you ignore the identity. At any time you can choose to reveal yourself to others. But the ultimate goal is to let your true self shine without the fear of being judged.

WHY A MOBILE APPLICATION ?

When we presented our proposal to our friends and relatives many pointed out that we could have chosen to only implement our three central activities (Ref(lection, Assemble-it and the Living library) without the mobile application. However, after consulting Ms Marin, a *Fondation de France* volunteer working on a mission tackling social loneliness, and based on our research, we believe that a mobile application is the most efficient way to empower users.

Indeed, one of the difficulties one encounters when trying to tackle perceived social loneliness is the reluctance of young adults to admit their issue as they fear it will make them seen as inadequate in a society where social acceptance is primordial. In an attempt to alleviate this fear we decided that our finalised proposal should include two elements: a step-by-step approach and the faculty to remain anonymous. The step-by-step approach is paramount as it allows the user to set his/her own pace. This fosters an impression of control which is soothing for lonely and insecure people. The possibility to stay anonymous and the liberty to reveal oneself whenever respond to the underlying shame felt by people suffering from perceived social loneliness. Through our research we established that a mobile application would be an ideal way to combine these two factors. We believe that by starting by creating an account and getting familiarized with a gratitude-oriented vision, users will be more confident if/when they choose to join the activities proposed.

Although Zygmunt Bauman addressed the detrimental impact of social networks on loneliness we have decided to propose a mobile application. As we believe, it is not social networks themselves, but people's way of using them which foster unhealthy online environments, conscious and unconscious comparison and perceived social loneliness. Finally, an online application would be the easiest and fastest way to reach our target: young adults from 18 to 25.

Recently, several actions have been undertaken to address this issue. Some governmental programs have been implemented to reduce loneliness. For example, when becoming UK Prime Minister in 2016 Theresa May created a Ministry of Loneliness. Many NGOs, such as *Fondation de France* or *Les Petits Frères des Pauvres*, have identified loneliness as an intersectional issue, often related to unemployment and poverty, and have dedicated special programs to the issue. There are a few NGOs specifically dedicated to tackling loneliness, like *Man Shed*, an Australian association to help men, who tend to be lonelier than women from early adulthood through their seventies, to establish friendship bonds.



A UNIQUE SOLUTION

Assembleat is a unique way to fostering self confidence among users by encouraging them to take an active part in a project and creating a sense of purpose and a feeling of belonging to a benevolent collective. These elements help establishing meaningful and long lasting social bonds. Assembleat is an original and creative solution, first because it targets precisely perceived social loneliness, as opposed to other solutions implemented which goal was to tackle the broader issue of loneliness. Then, Assembleat is the first program tackling loneliness which model's include gratitude. Although, there are many free applications available to foster gratitude, these applications either work around the concept of the gratitude journal, propose a "positivity only" social network or offer free courses on positive psychology. However, none of them explores the concept of a "gratitude partner".

We believe that our solution is feasible and easy to implement as all activities requires few investment and man power. Indeed, Assemble-it, Ref(lection) and the Living Library all can be organized in a student cafeteria for instance.

In 2017 the Fondation de France published a report on social isolation among people from 15 to 30. In this report the association highlights 5 principles to fight against loneliness. We have designed our proposal to include these elements while adapting them to the specific needs of people suffering from perceived social loneliness.

5 PRINCIPLES TO FIGHT AGAINST PSL :

- **Personalization:** Assembleat's real life activities and the application design are tailored to support each user on his/her path to a meaningful social life.
- **Decompartmentalization:** By pairing gratitude partners randomly and erasing physical or age-related elements from the profiles Assembleat is fighting social barriers.
- **Empowerment & reciprocity:** Assembleat increases opportunities for reciprocal and purposeful relationships.
- **Quality & collective purpose:** Through its real life activities and by providing a place for social organizations to recruit volunteers.
- **Long term approach:** Assembleat's long term goal is to reconstruct a collective by fostering the sense of belonging.

A psychiatrist and many volunteers working in missions tackling social loneliness have been consulted during the elaboration of our application.

TESTING THE LIVING LIBRARY



We run a test of the “living library” with a group of 8 students from 18 to 23. In pairs every student spent 20 min with each other before rotating. Their reactions were very positive:

Mia, 23, Sorbonne University *“It’s a great way to challenge stereotypes through positive conversations. And realize how quick you can judge or un-judge someone”*

Ganyu, 22, Master New Luxury and Art de Vivre at Sciences Po *“It helped me better understand myself”*

Armand, 24, Master in Management ESCP Europe *“Even though we are all students from the same age group, we still have very different experiences.”*

ASSEMBLEAT'S IMPACT

We are convinced that Assembleat could effectively address the problem of perceived social loneliness among young adults. This solution should generate several positive effects at both micro: for the individuals themselves and macro levels: for society as a whole.

The application, should help to reduce an individual's sense of loneliness, thanks to its different functionalities. On one side, the user's personal space is centered around the practice of everyday gratitude journal. By logging entries in the electronic journal the user will gradually become aware of the little positive things in his/her life.

On the other side, the application's public page will allow users to communicate with each other in a benevolent and positive atmosphere. It will consequently allow them to develop new relationships. National organizations fighting against loneliness would have a page on the "public space" in order to post content and propose events.

Although the application has been designed to target a quite small age range we are convinced that addressing the issue during this fraction of people's life will have a long-term positive impact on both themselves and society at large. We believe that Assembleat is a sustainable solution as the positive and caring community and various activities proposed will retain users.





MEASURING ASSEMBLEAT'S IMPACT

Assembleat's results will be both qualitative and quantitative. Perceived social loneliness is a subjective feeling that is difficult to measure. Therefore, we will rely on two different tools to assess the efficiency of our work.

We will rely on both the UCLA Loneliness Scale and the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS). These two indicators will be used in parallel and their results will be compared. The 1996 UCLA Loneliness Scale is the most commonly used tool to measure loneliness. It consists of a 20-item questionnaire. Participants rate each item from 1 ("I never feel this way") to 4 ("I often feel this way").

The Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) has been widely used in both clinical and non clinical studies, mainly in the field of Psychology. It is a 10-item questionnaire, participants first rate each item on a 5 point scale, 1 being "Not at all" and 5 being "Very much". Then the score of all ten items is added to deliver a final score. Scores can range from 10 to 50, the lower scores representing lower levels of Positive Affect and higher scores representing higher levels of Positive Affect. The PANAS measures both positive emotions and expressions (such as joy or contentment) and negative emotions and expressions (such as anger or sadness). Therefore, it is a useful tool to evaluate the immediate psychological outcome of an activity. These two complementary indicators have been found to provide both valid and reliable data and have been used in numerous scientific studies on loneliness. Moreover, the two questionnaires take less than 5 minutes to complete and are easy to use for respondents. These tools will allow us to obtain rapid and comprehensive data to analyse and assess the efficiency of our work.

We are aware that these two indicators will not allow us to assess respondents' mood with the maximum accuracy. As they are self report questionnaires, respondents can overstate or understate their feelings.

THE PROJECT'S RISKS

The main risks are linked to the format of the mobile application. We are first faced with the challenge of differentiation in an already cluttered mobile application market. The dimension of trust is inherently linked with this challenge as Assembleat is a novel solution unlike any other and people trapped in the vicious circle of loneliness are distrustful toward novelty. Therefore, we have thought of a marketing strategy involving established social organizations in order to build a trustful relationship with the users. We have conceived a promotion campaign in collaboration with national associations, student societies and professionals. These actors could help us reaching as many people as possible by relaying information on the application or allowing us to use their platform.

One risk is linked with the portrayal of loneliness in our society. Feelings of loneliness, especially for young adults, are associated with a feeling of rejection and low self esteem. Therefore, many of them are reluctant to talk about their perceived loneliness as they fear it will make them seen as inadequate in a society where social acceptance is primordial. Consequently, the promotion would highlight the privacy and secrecy of every information posted on the application. Moreover, the Assembleat's staff should be irreproachable in their professional and personal lives in order to foster trustworthy relations with the users. Therefore, the reputational risk should be taken into account.

Furthermore, in order to retain customers, the application should be able to evolve. As a result, by working on novelty, improvement and surprise we hope to keep users engaged. The application should be easy to use and intuitive in order to avoid a high learning cost. We have decided to set up surveys to allow us to improve the application.

The application will be free. However, to participate to Assembleat's 3 main activities (Assemble-it, Ref(1)ection and the Human Library) the user will be required to pay a small symbolical fee. Therefore there is a risk of losing customers because of payment-related churn.



A LONG TERM VISION



IN THE LONG TERM WE ARE CONVINCED THAT ASSEMBLEAT WILL EMPOWER INDIVIDUALS, AID THEM GAIN IN SELF-CONFIDENCE, HELP THEM FOSTER AND MAINTAIN RELATIONSHIPS AND CONSEQUENTLY TO REDUCE THE FEELING OF LONELINESS.

Assembleat has been designed to answer a medium to long term goal. Therefore, one of the risk is linked to each user personal handling of the application. Indeed, for Assembleat to be truly effective, certain features, such as the gratitude journal must be used for a continuous period of time, at least 10 days according to our estimations. If only used punctually or in the short term,

Assembleat will provide an access to a positive community and be a support for young adults who feel lonely.

In order to mitigate operational risks we have decided to launch the application in several stages. The application would be first tested in selected French universities before it is proposed to the public. The results of this experience would allow us to provide more concrete elements during the promotion of the application.

RETURN ON INVESTMENT

Assembleat would be a non-profit organisation. We have separated our ROI in two parts : The Investment Phase and Ramp-up and the Operational Phase. Based on our analysis of the market we believe the app would take two years to build a strong and active following.

Therefore during this phase the major dent in our budget would be the communication and marketing costs. The marketing campaign should highlights the strong ties between Assembleat and established national organizations working on loneliness and local students organizations which could relay our message efficiently among their peers. We would also like to launch an online marketing campaign in collaboration with social media influencers promoting a healthy and positive lifestyle. Moreover, to alleviate the weight of the salaries we wish to engage people from the "Service Civique".

	Investment Phase + Ramp-up 2 years	Operational Phase 5 years +
Revenues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - State grants - Donations - Naming Partnerships - Fees charged to users 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fees charged to users - Donations - Operating grants - Sale of advertising space
Costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Capital expenditure on mobile software - Marketing & Communication - Salaries - Rental of HQ - Expenses linked to activities (space + material) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Software Maintenance - Rental of HQ - Expenses linked to activities (space + material) - Salaries - Marketing & Communication



PARTNERSHIPS

For our proposal to work effectively, we would need to collaborate with other actors tackling and/or interested in the issue of loneliness. We are looking to have partnerships both in the marketing of our application and in its operation.

Partnerships under operation would be focused on organizing learning and benevolent activities which users can participate in. These would be in Assembleat's public space where such organizations would outline their commitment and post events as earlier mentioned. One such partner could be *Astrée*, an established French association founded in 1987 that tackles loneliness through accompanying people who feel lonely and helping them to re-establish their social connections. *Astrée* offers training to listening intermediaries and we intend on taking advantage of this to ensure that our 'living library' is enriched with expertise so that users would be able to know how to listen to others. As the foundation is already working with schools to train benevolent students as listening intermediaries, our partnership would help expand the reach to more high schools and universities that are the target demography of our solution. We could also have a partnership under our proposed weekly activities where users can join *Astrée* volunteers when visiting schools to talk and share about loneliness. This would be in small groups that users have to sign up for prior to such an event.

Our proposed activities under Assembleat would require a partnership with an eco-friendly and ethical furniture company. This is why a partnership with *Reine Mere* handicraft production line would be ideal. We would benefit from their expert furniture designers to organise sessions with our users where they will be taught how to make tables and chairs. These would then be used while sharing a meal together and later donated to charity. The symbolic fee paid by users to engage in our activities will help cover part of the costs to facilitate such activities and the transportation of these furniture.

Rolling out the first phase of our proposal and implementing it over time will involve high costs that we cannot sustain ourselves. As mentioned earlier, we would be looking to engage people from the "service civique" as part of our workforce to reduce the strain on salaries. But we would still need to have financial backing to sustain other activities. A partnership with French donor fund *Après Demain* would help us cover some of our costs. The fund supports initiatives that propose viable solutions to social isolation which puts us in a perfect position to benefit from it as our proposal is focused on promoting social interaction to combat perceived social loneliness. They also provide strategic guidance that would be useful for us as we roll out our idea and implement it.

CONCLUSION



THERE WILL ALWAYS BE A REASON WHY YOU MEET PEOPLE. EITHER YOU NEED THEM TO CHANGE YOUR LIFE, OR YOU'RE THE ONE THAT WILL CHANGE THEIRS.

MADELINE SHEEHAN

We would also be looking to have partnerships with the French state. For instance, with the ministry of youth, sports and associative life. This partnership would help us with statistical data and measuring the impact of our activities as well as obtaining state funding to run and develop our activities. It would also widen the pool of activities we have on offer by including proposals from the ministry with the aim of enhancing cohesion and encouraging youth development.

In conclusion, many international organizations such as the European Commission and the United Nations have identified loneliness as a burning issue.

We hope that Assembleat's contribution, as small it may be, will help improve the mental and physical health of young adults struggling with perceived social loneliness.