

Note of intent - The Great Transition
Topic picked: Virtuality and Loneliness (topic 2)

We face nowadays a very high level of loneliness among young people: 40% of 16- to 20-years-old say they often, or very often, feel lonely (survey from BBC Loneliness Group). We usually associate loneliness with the elderly; but it turns out young people are lonelier than any other age group. Social media are usually blamed for the increasing loneliness among the young. According to the Pew Research Center, " Fully 95% of teens have access to a smartphone, and 45% say they are online almost constantly." Therefore, when we started thinking about our project, we instinctively said to ourselves: "young people are already using their phones too much, our project must be linked to a decrease in phone use". However, the problem with young people that feel alone is that you have to be able to "go get them". How can we reach these young people, if not with the object they use every day: their phone?

So we approached the problem of loneliness differently. First of all, we decided to set ourselves a clear framework: we chose our university, Sciences Po. Indeed, we had to link our project - getting young people out of their loneliness - to a means of action (their phone) and to a specific place. We made the following observation: young people spend a lot of time scrolling on social networks. But there is another place where they are very often, a place that is not virtual but real, where there are opportunities to meet: the university. Hence our choice to focus on Sciences Po.

The opportunities to meet other students at Sciences Po are not as numerous as you might think. Most of the human contact takes place through the associative life (that makes the university's reputation). The latter is an excellent way out of loneliness, as associations group students according to their interests. When a student finds an association that suits him/her, he/she tends to get involved and meet new people. However, among the fifty or so associations present on the Paris campus, the same ten names still stand out. How can we ensure that students are more aware of all the existing associations? Thanks to an application.

The application we have designed would list all Sciences Po associations. Rather than being an application created from scratch, it could be integrated into the Sciences Po application (which already exists). It would therefore be managed and updated directly by the Sciences Po administration. This would not only increase the use of the application, but

also make it more visible and promote cohesion within the student body, making our project sustainable.

In concrete terms, here is how a student could use this application. First, you would receive an email from Sciences Po during the first week of class to encourage you to download the application. Once you open the application, you can log in, using your student ID and Sciences Po email address. You will then find a list of all the existing associations. For each one of them, you will be able to click on their “profiles”: this profile would list the association’s general purpose (whether it’s political, cultural etc), the kind of events they organize (previous & upcoming events), their recruitment processes, the overall structure (number of members, their divisions) and finally some contact information (Facebook, email address...). To find the associations that best match your interests, you would have the possibility to answer a questionnaire on your personal and professional interests, hobbies, passions: in other words, what you like or what you’re curious about in general. Thanks to this quick questionnaire, you would be matched with a list of five to ten associations, ranked according to their matching potential. You could then either accept or reject each association proposition. For each association you accept, the app will then give you the name of an association member whom you may contact to receive further information. This last step is crucial as it’s a very concrete way to help with loneliness: students are offered a direct opportunity of social contact which they can easily grasp.

This project could be easily started with a beta version on the Paris campus. Then, if it is successful, it could be developed in the other campuses (Reims, Poitiers etc).

Our goal would be to have the platform ready for the start of the next fall semester. Here is a timeline to make it happen:

- January 2020: define who is in charge of the SciencesPo app and if there is an interest for our project. If we have a positive answer, find someone who will be responsible for the app development and coding (using the existing Sciences Po app, which considerably reduces the workload of the developer of the application).
- February 2020: gather the names of all the associations that will still be active for the next school year (i.e. those that renewed their enrolment).
- March 2020: contact all registered associations to provide the following information: their logo, a short description, a couple of their past events, a few photos and the contact details of their members. Build the questionnaire (around twenty questions).

Give all this information to the person who is in charge of coding the platform.

- May 2020: a gamma version of the platform is available. It is open to any Sciences Po student who wants to give it a try and then gives his/her feedback (ease and speed of use, relevance of the questionnaire and the associations he/she got matched with etc).
- Over the summer: finishing touches, thanks to the feedback of the students who tested the gamma version of the platform.
- August 2020: SciencesPo sends out an email to all prospective students introducing the app and explaining how students can create an account and sign up for associations.
- End of August, first week of school: the platform is available to all students, directly on the Sciences Po application !

As you may read it, our project to tackle loneliness among young people is clear and actionable. The other feature is that it is not only an app that we chose to design it is also a framework which can be spread in any university or company that actually have such associations or groups but lack the idea to gather and present them on the same platform. If our project is successful, our next challenge would be to present this idea such that anyone could be comfortable meeting with other in real life and never feel alone anymore.