ITERATIVE SERVICE DESIGN: FROM EXPERIENCE TO CONCEPT
DESIGNING A DIGITAL SERVICE TO SUPPORT FOREIGN ENTREPRENEURS

PROCESS REPORT

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María Crucera Vasco
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Contact person
David Morgan
david@knightmoves.be

Student
María Crucera Vasco
Study no. 20141327

Supervisor
Nicola Morelli

Semester Coordinator
Amalia de Götzen

Secretary
Judi Stærk Poulsen

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Abstract
This Master's thesis describes the process of designing a digital service for a Belgian government agency to support foreign entrepreneurs in Belgium, and how service design tools, alternated with research and stakeholder involvement, have gradually build on the service experience to define the details of the final concept. First the difficulties experienced by foreign entrepreneurs when they try to start a company in a different country are explored, and networking is identified as one of the biggest challenges. Especially for foreign entrepreneurs, the main benefit of an extensive social network is the ability to gather more knowledge, and access more opportunities and resources. These needs are then contrasted with the interests and requirements of the government, and a common ground is tried to be achieved. The solution is an online meeting place for entrepreneurs, with focus on peer-to-peer knowledge sharing and connecting with fellow entrepreneurs and experts both digitally and physically.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the many people who have been involved for their contribution to the project, showing interest and dedicating time to help.

A big thanks to the entire Knight Moves team for all their useful contributions and good moments during the semester. A special thanks to David, who followed my steps from the very first day and whose feedback guided me through *the dark side.*

I thank my supervisor Nicola for his useful advice, constructive criticism and guidance during the process, and Amalia for her feedback during the semester meetings.

A thanks to all the participants who contributed in this process, and to all who helped me get in touch with them.

I thank my fellow service designers -and friends- who supported me in the distance. Thanks for the long emails, messages, and Skype conversations.

And last but not least, thanks to my family, without whom I would not be here.

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

This Master Thesis is a project completed in the last semester of the Service Systems Design Master's program at Aalborg University Copenhagen, from February-June 2016. The project was made in collaboration with Knight Moves, a service design studio based in Ghent, Belgium.

Being this the last semester of the study program, we had more freedom to choose the topic we wanted to work on, and therefore I approached this project as an opportunity to work on something I was passionate about and to demonstrate what I had learnt during the previous semesters of the Master. The topic chosen for this project was *"service design to support foreign entrepreneurs in Flanders"*.

The project started with an exploration of the topic and the identification of a problem area. After that, implementing the service design methodology and tools, involving the stakeholders when possible in the process and supporting with relevant research when needed, a solution was designed. The outcome of this project is therefore a conceptual service solution for the problem identified during the research. This report details and reflect on the project process and methodology used chronologically.

LEARNING GOALS

STUDY GUIDE LEARNING GOALS

At the beginning of the semester, the following learning goals were selected from the study program (Aalborg University, Faculty of engineering and science, Board of studies for Media technology, 2012):

• Must have knowledge about the possibilities to apply appropriate methodological approaches to specific user areas.

• Must have knowledge about design theories and methods that focus on the design of advanced and complex product-service systems.

• Must be able to work independently, to identify major problem areas (analysis) and adequately address problems and opportunities (synthesis).

• Must demonstrate the ability to evaluate and address (synthesis) major organisational and business issues emerging in the design of a product-service system.

• Must be able to independently initiate and implement discipline-specific and interdisciplinary cooperation and assume professional responsibility (synthesis).

• Must have the capability to independently take responsibility for own professional development and specialisation (synthesis).

PERSONAL LEARNING GOALS

In addition to the goals stated in the study plan, there were some personal goals that I wanted to achieve:

• Being used to work in groups, one of my main personal goals for this semester is to work independently and assume full responsibility for the project. This means to be able to reflect upon, argue and defend all the steps and decisions taken throughout the process and to be able to deal with and overcome any difficulty or unexpected situation that might arise during the project.

• As a last semester student, to demonstrate confidence applying all the knowledge and experience gathered during the three previous semesters of the Master program, using relevant methods and tools for each project phase.

• To improve my project management skills, define and implement a strategy to successfully finish the project within the planned deadlines.

• To involve the target group and other relevant stakeholders as much as possible along the process. To be able to discover their needs and motivations, translate their insights into a meaningful design concept and validate the results.

PROJECT COLLABORATION

KNIGHT MOVES

The project is made in collaboration with Knight Moves, a service design studio based in Ghent, Belgium (*http://www.knightmoves.be/*).

Knight Moves has supervised this project from beginning to end. Their role has been mostly guiding and advising throughout the different phases. Although they did not actively work on this project, they participated in some of the tasks and were always willing to help where needed. Having the opportunity to discuss with other service designers and their feedback has been incredibly valuable for the development of this project.

Knight Moves has also been my point of contact with the government agency that was acting as a client. Because they put me in contact with them, I had the possibility to integrate their experience and insights into the project.

KNIGHT MOVES
SERVICE DESIGN

THE TOPIC

THE CLIENT

VLAIO, Flanders Innovation & Entrepreneurship (in Dutch: *Agentschap Innoveren & Ondernemen*), hereafter referred to as “VLAIO” or “the government”, is a Belgian government agency charged with implementing the economic, innovation and enterprise policy in Flanders, the Dutch speaking northern part of Belgium (Agentschap Innoveren & Ondernemen, 2016).

They have acted as the clients for this project.

AGENTSCHAP
INNOVEREN &
ONDERNEMEN

Vlaanderen
is ondernemen

THE STARTING POINT

Knight Moves has previous experience in working with the government. They did a project with VLAIO, a digital service for entrepreneurs (Knight Moves, 2016). The goal of this project was to design a centralized online service where entrepreneurs could deal with all their administration processes, as the government is aiming to make all their services digital and more customer-friendly (figure 1).

This project that Knight Moves carried out together with the government was the starting point to define the topic of my own project, as foreign entrepreneurs was a target group that had not been particularly addressed within the scope of their project.

Fig 1. Previous project that Knight Moves did for VLAIO

THE INITIAL TOPIC

Based on these atributes, the initial topic for the project was stated as follows:

“Service design to support foreign entrepreneurs in Flanders”

PROJECT LIMITATIONS

PROJECT LIMITATIONS

This project has been conditioned by several factors:

Time

The project was framed by the lenght of the academic semester, which run from February to June 2016. The lenght of the project was therefore established from the very beginning, and the project phases were planned according to this time frame.

Location

The project scope was geographically limited to Flanders, the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium. Being physically located in that area helped me to completely immerse in the context of the project.

Stakeholders engagement

Many of the activities carried out during this project were conditioned to the availability of the stakeholders involved and their disponibility to engage in the project at certain steps.

Previous Knight Moves project

Some of the decisions taken during this project have been influenced by the previous project that Knight Moves did with VLAIO.

METHODOLOGY

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

The project structure was defined based on IDEO's 5-step iterative design process (d. School, 2015) combined with the Scrum framework (James, 2016).

The iterative nature of service design calls for a plan that provides the space to rework ideas and restructure tasks as needed, but also fosters constant progression of the project.

Scrum uses fixed-length iterations, called *Sprints*. Each of these Sprints was planned for approximately 3 weeks. At the beginning of each Sprint, there was some time dedicated to plan the following weeks in detail: what the goal of the Sprint was, what needed to be done, which methods were going to be used and what should be expected by the end of it. Moreover, daily tasks were planned every morning. The intention of these short iterations was to maximize flexibility, productivity and control of the project.
I used a Scrum board to keep track of all the tasks: *to do*, *in progress* and *done*. In order to support this methodology, I used Trello, a web-based project management application (*https://trello.com/*).

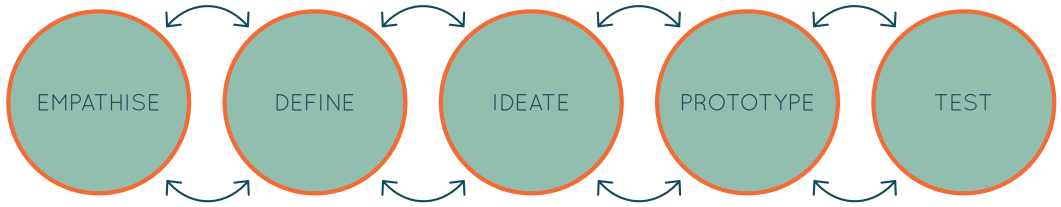


Fig 2. Adaptation of IDEO's design steps

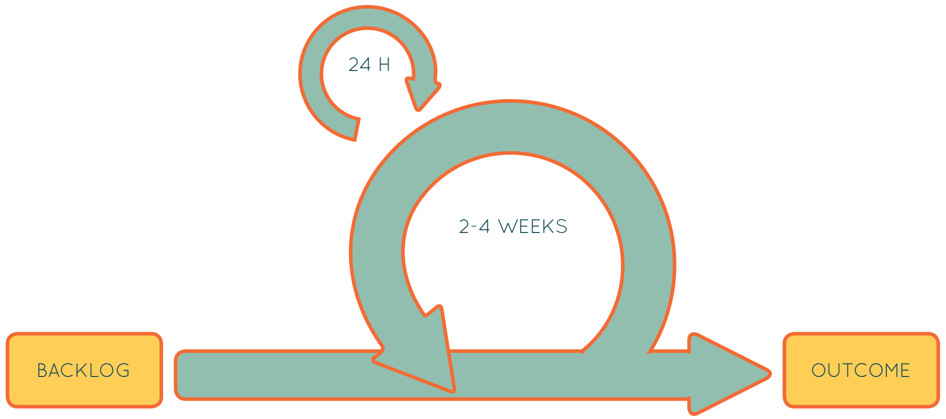


Fig 3. Adaptation of the SCRUM methodology

PROJECT TIMELINE

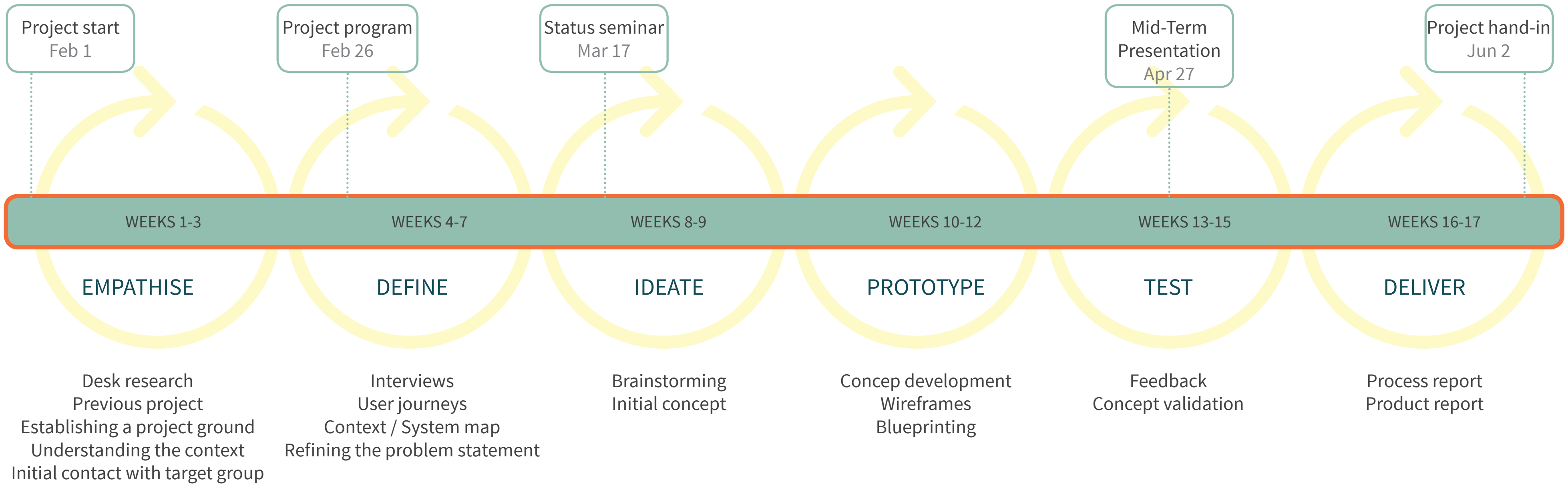


Fig 4. Project timeline

This timeline presents an overview of how the different phases of the project have been distributed along the duration of the semester, and the tools that have been used in each one of them.

EXPLORING THE TOPIC

FRAMING THE PROJECT

ENTREPRENEURSHIP & ENTREPRENEURS

With so many entrepreneurs worldwide, a lot of research has already been conducted in search of a definition of the term entrepreneurship. Nevertheless, the different approaches within the field of entrepreneurial research, including: anthropology, social science, economics and management; result in a lack of a single definition for entrepreneurship (Ahmad and Seymour, 2008).

For instance, the European Commission describes entrepreneurship on its Green Paper as a mindset that covers an individual's motivation and capacity, independently or within an organization, to identify an opportunity and to pursue it in order to produce new value or economic success (Commission of the European Communities, 2003). It has therefore a focus on people and their choices and actions in starting or expanding a business. This applies to all kind of sectors and type of business, from self- employed individuals to firms of different sizes and different structures (Commission of the European Communities, 2003).

The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor conceptualizes entrepreneurship as a continuous process that includes nascent entrepreneurs involved in setting up a business, entrepreneurs who own and manage a new business and entrepreneurs who own and manage an established business (Bosma, Holvoet and Crijns, 2013).

Consequently, there are also many ways to define an entrepreneur. A simple definition, and probably the most common way of how people understand the term, is someone who owns and runs a business (Filion, 2011). However, and as stated above, because of the lack of a single definition of entrepreneurship there are also many dimensions that can be considered in a definition of what an entrepreneur is: innovation, risk, value creation, projective and visionary thinking, leadership, opportunity recognition and creativity, amongst others (Filion, 2011).

All these different factors imply that entrepreneurs are a very diverse group of people, with a diverse set of skills and motivations. On the other hand, there are certain common characteristics associated to the entrepreneurial mindset, including a readiness to take risk and a taste for independence and self-realisation (Filion, 2011).

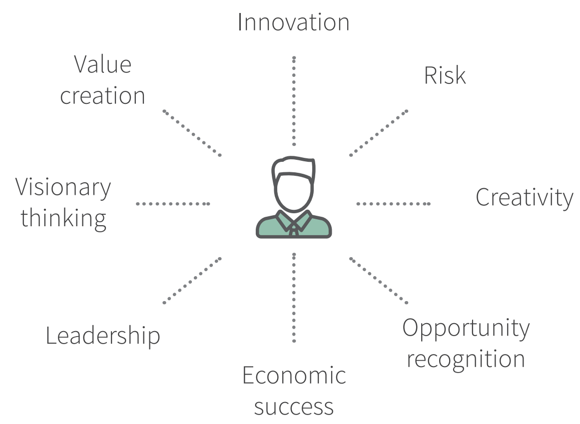


Fig 5. Some of the characteristics that entrepreneur possess, according to Filion (2011).

FRAMING THE PROJECT

LIMITING THE TARGET GROUP

Due to this variety of terms and definitions, it was obviously necessary to limit the scope of the target group for this project.

It was therefore decided to set the focus on small foreign entrepreneurs. This means individuals (or small groups), not originally from Belgium, who run or are planning to start their own company in Flanders. This excludes bigger enterprises or companies in later stages that are already established in other countries and want to open a branch in Flanders.

The reason for choosing individuals with small business is, besides accessibility reasons during the development of the project, that this target group normally experiments more difficulties in early stages of the process, whereas bigger companies or companies that are already established in other countries have already gone through those initial steps, and can more easily move towards later phases. This does not mean, of course, that bigger companies trying to expand to Belgium do not encounter any challenges; but that the difficulties that they might experience are different from those that small business owners have to deal with, and are out of the scope of this project.

In relation to the type of industry or sector, no limitations have been defined, and therefore all small businesses have been initially included within the scope of the project, independently of their area of activity.

FRAMING THE PROJECT

GEOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT

This section provides some background information about Belgium's government structure. This is intended to give an understanding of the context where the project is framed, and how it has affected subsequent steps in the design process. The initial information was mainly gathered through desk research, and later contrasted and completed with an interview with VLAIO. Figure 6 provides a graphical representation of the federal state and the different communities and regions of Belgium.

Fig 6. Representation of the Belgian federal state

FRAMING THE PROJECT

THE BELGIAN GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE

Belgium is composed by a federal, regional and local governments, each one of them with different competences and regulations (Belgian Federal Government, 2016). See figure 7 for an overview of the institutions and their competences.

As a federal state, Belgium has a federal government and a federal parliament.

Then there are three communities, based on language: the Flemish community, the French community and the German-speaking community. Each community has its own parliament and government (in the case of Flanders, the Flemish parliament and the Flemish government).

Apart from the federal state and the communities, there are also three regions: the Flemish region (north), the Brussels-Capital region (small area in between the other two regions) and the Walloon region (south). Each region have its own legislative and executive organs: these are known as the regional parliament and the regional government. However, in Flanders, the community and regional institutions are merged, so there is only one parliament and one government.

Then, every region is divided into provinces. In Flanders there are 5 provinces, and each one of them has its own provincial government. In short, the province is responsible for everything in its territory that is of provincial interest.

And last, every province is divided in communes. Only in Flanders there are 308 communes. Each commune has its local authorities, who are closer to the individuals and have power over the collective interests of their inhabitants.

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2">Level</th><th>Institutions</th><th>Competences</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Federal State (Belgium)</td><td>Federal Government & Federal Parliament</td><td>Public finances, army, judicial system, social security, foreign affairs, public health & home affairs...</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Flanders</td><td>Communities (3, based on language, eg. Flemish)</td><td rowspan="2">Flemish Government & Flemish Parliament</td><td>Culture, education, use of languages, individual matters, health policy...</td></tr>
<tr><td>Regions (3, based on territory, eg. Flanders)</td><td>Economy, employment, agriculture, energy, transport, foreign trade, supervision of provinces, communes, ...</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Provinces (5 in Flanders, eg. East-Flanders)</td><td>Provincial Governments</td><td>Education, social & cultural infrastructures, social policy, environment, highways & waterways, economy, transport...</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Communes (308 in Flanders, eg. Ghent)</td><td>Local authorities</td><td>Public works, social welfare, maintaining public order, housing, education, police forces, social services, ...</td></tr>
</table>

*Fig 7. Structure of the Belgian Government (*information retrieved from: http://www.belgium.be/en/about_belgium/government)

EARLY RESEARCH

INFORMATION OVERLOAD

After this initial contact with the Belgian system, I wanted to explore how the process of setting up a company worked. I started by conducting some online desk research. I decided to start exploring from the beginning, and just typed on a search engine "*how to start a business in Belgium*". As expected, that request gave millions of results. The first results that showed up were a website from the Belgian federal government and several blogs or websites from different organizations. There was no sign of the official VLAIO website or any of the other government agencies dedicated to entrepreneurship within the few first pages of results. However, if the online search was conducted in Dutch, both of them showed up on the first page of the results.

In relation to the content of these websites, there was a lot of information available but not compiled in one place. A lot of websites had references to other websites, which at the same time referenced to a third one. There was an incredibly amount of data about procedures, requirements, organizations and conditions that could be found dispersed throughout the web. Duplicated or overlapping content was found in some of the websites. And again, the quantity of the information provided in Dutch was clearly superior to that provided in English, and even some websites provided different information depending on the language they were consulted in.

This cross-reference of websites and information was clearly not organized in a friendly navigable format. I started to map out some of the websites that were cross-referenced (figure 8), starting from the VLAIO website, but because of the huge amount of data I soon realized that this was a too ambitious task and I was not sure at this point whether it would contribute to the project.

The insights from this online research could be summarized as follows:

1. There are many organizations dedicated to help entrepreneurs in Flanders and many different parties involved in the process of setting up a company. The points of single contact* are supposed to deal with this decentralization, but it is not clear who does what, or how they are interconnected. My initial thoughts linked this point to the complexity of the structure of the Belgian system (page 18).

2. The information available online is difficult to navigate through. Besides the language barrier, it is not clear which websites are official sources of information and which ones are not.

Point of single contact: see glossary on page 89.

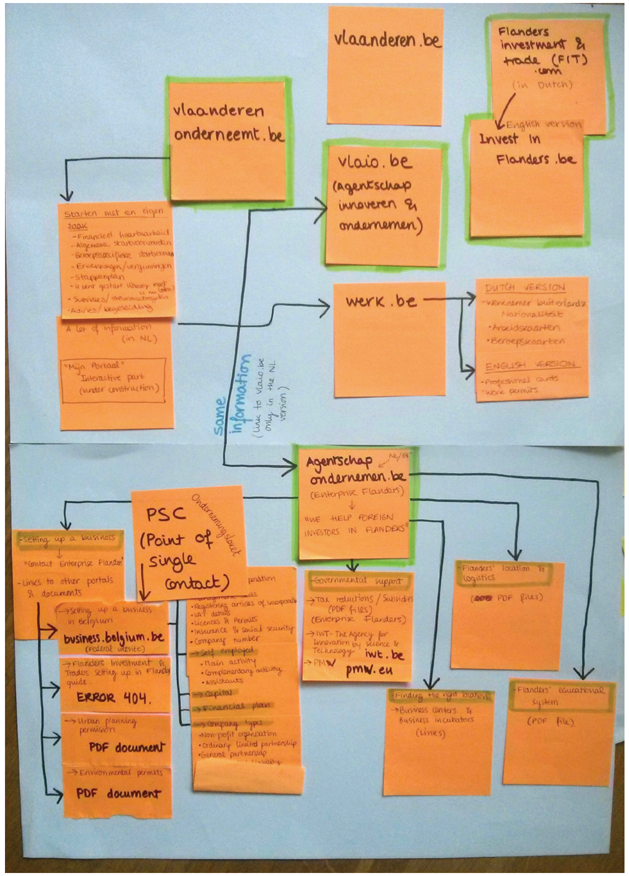


Fig 8. Attempt to map out the different websites and their relationships

FIRST CONTACT: VLAIO

FIRST MEETING VLAIO

After digging into this sea of online information, I had a first interview with two project managers of VLAIO. The purpose of this interview was to contrast the information gathered online and gain more understanding of how the different institutions at the different levels are connected. I especially focused on the complexity on the system and how all the different levels and institutions could affect the process, as I was still exploring the project frame to build a solid initial ground for the project.

This meeting was organized as a semistructured interview (appendix A). Prior to the meeting, I had noted down a list of questions and topics that I wanted to learn more about, but I had also left room for unforeseen topics that could arise during the discussion. Some of the questions were related to how VLAIO approaches the topic of setting up a business, how involved in the process they are, and how they relate to other institutions.

INSIGHTS

This interview reinforced my initial conjecture about the Belgian system being complex to grasp. I learnt that, although entrepreneurs can do all their administration through the business counters, it is not compulsory that they delegate all the tasks to them. Entrepreneurs can also contact other institutions themselves to get the documents that might be needed, such as certificates or licenses, but in this case they need to know where to do what. The interviewees mentioned that, only on the Flemish level, there are more than 20 semi-independent government agencies focused on different activities, and therefore understanding the whole picture becomes a challenge even for local entrepreneurs.

During this interview we also discussed the amount of available information online. As one of the interests of the government is digitising all their services, it is important for them that this information is accessible and easy to understand.

FIRST CONTACT: THE ENTREPRENEURS

FINDING THE TARGET GROUP

Since the beginning of the project I tried to reach out to foreign entrepreneurs who had started their own company in Flanders. After the interview with VLAIO, I wanted to explore the other side of the coin and gain a perspective from the entrepreneurs' point of view. In order to get in contact with this target group, I made use of social media (LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter), and asked all my network. Knight Moves also helped with the process, but the most effective way of reaching the right people was by word of mouth, through someone who knows someone. Finding foreign entrepreneurs was a long process that actually took longer than expected, but once I managed to reach the right people everyone was willing to collaborate.

THE INTERVIEWS

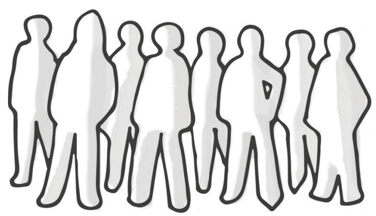
Six in-depth interviews were conducted in order to gain an understanding of the process of setting up a business in Belgium from the entrepreneurs' point of view (appendix B). Five of the interviewees were foreign entrepreneurs (from Portugal, The Netherlands, England, Romania and Pakistan) who had started a company in Flanders. The sixth interviewee was a Belgian entrepreneur who wanted to expand his business abroad. This last interview, despite not belonging to the target group, aimed to contrast the opposite situation, and explore which difficulties Belgian entrepreneurs deal with when planning to export to another country, and whether the Flemish government supports them with any initiative.

#	Gender	Country	Sector	Channel
1	Male	Romania	Business development & technology	Face-to-face
2	Male	The Netherlands	Information technology	Skype
3	Male	Belgium	Art curation	Skype
4	Female	Portugal	Videography, production & communication	Face-to-face
5	Male	England	Internet of Things	Face-to-face
6	Male	Pakistan	Innovation training & coaching	Skype

Fig 9. Overview of the interviewees

It could be argued that the group of interviewees could have been a bit more diverse. Although they all came from different countries, some of them worked in similar sectors, and four of them had received external support from incubator or university programs. Since there had not been made any sector specification when defining the target group, this was not exactly a disadvantage in the project. It is true, however, that the insights from other entrepreneurs operating in very different sectors (such as, for example, hospitality or healthcare) might have differed a bit. But again, the focus of these interviews was to learn more about how foreigners experience the process of setting up a company in Flanders, rather than about particular sectors.

Three of the interviews were conducted via Skype, due to availability and accessibility reasons, and three others were conducted in person.



FIRST CONTACT: THE ENTREPRENEURS

MAPPING USER JOURNEYS

For the interviews conducted in person, I created a user journey template and small cards with touchpoints and actors(figure 10). As the entrepreneurs were being interviewed, they mapped out their stories with the cards. These user journey cards were created as a storytelling tool to assist the entrepreneurs in the interviews to remember, understand and communicate their experiences. Having tangible artifacts to refer to while they were talking helped to spark the conversation and make the interviewees engage with and reflect on the story they were telling. Moreover, having a tangible outcome by the end of each interview made it easier for me to analyze the interviews afterwards than by just having a conversation.

Fig 10. Cards and templates used during the interviews

INTERVIEWS ANALYSIS

WHAT WAS SAID...

There's a lot of support for entrepreneurs, but you need to know how to find it. If you don't know it's there, it's like it doesn't exist: you won't get anything.

I had the support from the Cronos group, who took care of all the legal procedures. So I 'skipped' all the administration part and focused on business. It made everything so much easier.

We were part of the iMinds incubator program. It was a hassle to get there, but once we were accepted we were very relieved: they were our backup through the entire process. And if that hadn't worked out, then we wouldn't have had any interest in staying here.

I first tried to find what to do online, but there were so many different websites that I didn't know which sources to trust. I don't even think it's clear for local entrepreneurs.

If I hadn't have had the support from my university I wouldn't have even considered starting a company in Belgium.

When I decided to move to Belgium I didn't only start a new company, but also a new life. I didn't know anyone so I had to find everything by myself: I posted on LinkedIn and Meetup groups, and I attended every networking event I found. It was very time-consuming but worth it.

Fig 11. Some quotes mentioned during the interviews

Fig 12. Keywords cloud created to depict the most mentioned topics during the interviews

INTERVIEWS ANALYSIS

THE USER JOURNEYS

By discussing the user journeys with the entrepreneurs and analyzing the material after the interviews, I noticed some common patterns:

1. The administration part of the process of setting up a business was never done by the entrepreneurs alone. This is, all the necessary paperwork and legal formalities that are necessary to set up a company. In most cases, they mentioned how time and effort consuming this process was, and how they preferred to delegate these tasks to someone else (experts, accountants, organizations that support entrepreneurs, etc.). This suggested that the administration is merely seen by entrepreneurs as something that needs to be done, something that would get them to the next step, but not as their primary focus, which is, of course, their company.

2. All the interviewees mentioned the importance of networking. Networking as having a group of people and connections to rely on. Those entrepreneurs who had had some direct connection with a network (through their university or through an incubator program) experienced less hassle throughout the process. This is because they used those networks to gain access to information and resources that otherwise they would not have had. Those networks were the first place they would go to when they needed help, advice or any kind of support. On the other hand, all interviewees who had not had any direct connection with a network did emphasize how difficult it was to find the right people, the right information, and the right opportunities.

3. A lot of the difficulties they struggle with happened before starting to set up the company.

INSIGHTS

After going through the material from the interviews, the initial analysis suggested that the main problem for the entrepreneurs was not so closely related to the complexity of the Belgian government system, as I had anticipated. In fact, from the interviews I learnt that since the entrepreneurs do not take care of the administration themselves (or alone), they do not directly deal with this complexity.

TWO LEVELS

DIVIDING THE JOURNEYS

The insights that came out of the user journeys made me divide the process of setting up a company into two different levels: information and administration. The purpose of this was twofold. First of all, it would help communicate the insights of the interviews; and second, it would reduce the complexity of the entire journey*.

*The steps mapped out here are a simplified version of the process and the journeys that were created during the interviews. This should be adapted to each specific situation and conditions.

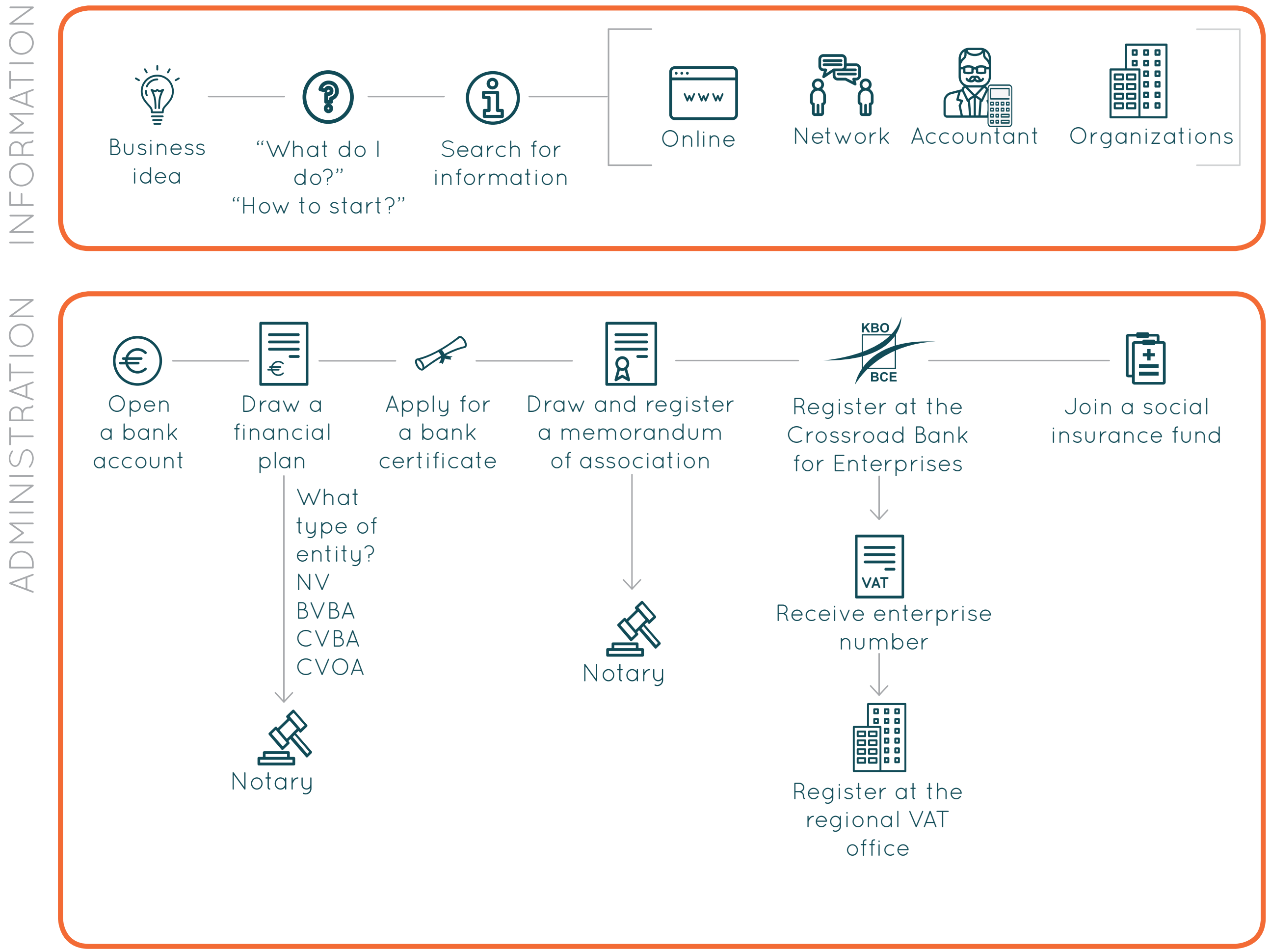


Fig 13. The process of setting up a company divided into two levels

INITIAL FOCUS

INFORMATION VS. ADMINISTRATION

The information level (figure 13) starts when entrepreneurs devise an idea, and is followed by the process of finding out what to do and how to do it. The main sources of information that entrepreneurs use here are first online sources, then networks and eventually experts (such as accountants, lawyers or organizations). It was pointed out here that, when entrepreneurs move to a new country, they do not possess the connections to rely on an established network yet.

The administration level (figure 13) includes all the formalities and necessary paperwork that entrepreneurs need to set up their company and legally perform their activity. This process normally involves different institutions (such as banks, notaries, the business counters*, the commercial court or the VAT office) and it is the one that entrepreneurs often commit to external parties.

NARROWING DOWN THE DIRECTION

At this point, having made this differentiation between the phases of the journey helped me to set a focus for the following steps. As I had learn from the interviews, although the administration process is still seen as a burden, entrepreneurs do not often deal with this bureaucracy themselves. Besides that, one of the business counters' fuctions is guiding entrepreneurs through all the formalities they need to follow. Therefore, I decided to explore the first level of the journey instead: the information level.

It had been discussed during the interviews how entrepreneurs approached the process of getting information. Overall there was a general perception of information online being overwhelming and not very clear. However, one of the findings of the interviews was also that online sources were not the primary option that entrepreneurs chose. This was due to several reasons: lack of awareness of the websites that provide information, absence of clear guidance or not understanding or trusting the provided data. Additionally, all the interviewees mentioned "networks" as a source of information and guidance. Some of them had emphasized the effort they had put into networking when they arrived to Belgium: how they have attended all kind of events, and tried to get in touch with as many people as possible. As an anecdote, one of the interviewees mentioned that he met one of the current investors of his company through his landlord. They were chatting one day while the landlord was repairing something in his apartment, and he mentioned what his startup was about, to which he replied "I know someone who might be interested in your idea".

Another reason to reinforce the focus on this first level and not on the administration level was the previous project that Knight Moves had done with VLAIO. As previously explained on page 10, that project tried to centralize all the information and all the transactions in one website. I considered, therefore, that the administrative struggle was covered by the scope of that project, and I did not want to step into the same topic.

**Business counter: see glossary on page 89.*

NETWORKS

WHY ARE NETWORKS SO IMPORTANT?

Having reached this point, “networking” was starting to stand out as a possible focus area for the project.

Networking had been referred to several times during the interviews, understood as a mechanism to get in contact with people who could be of benefit for the entrepreneur’s own interests. Schallenkamp and Smith (2009) define a network as a system of relationships for the purpose of enhancing one’s competitive advantage. Especially for foreign entrepreneurs, the main benefit of an extensive social network is the ability to gather more knowledge, and access more opportunities and resources (Phelan et al., 2006; Premaratne, 2001).

All the interviewees prioritized information obtained through networks over information obtained from a website. One of the main reasons for this was the high number of online sources, which made entrepreneurs doubt about the reliability and accuracy of their content. On the other hand, if the information comes from someone with similar beliefs, experiences or patterns of associations, entrepreneurs consider that as a point of validity. However, this does not mean that entrepreneurs trust all the information they get from their network, just that these relationships reinforce the credibility of the source (Schallenkamp and Smith, 2009).

For this project, I want to emphasize that networks have been defined as a way to get access to knowledge, opportunities and resources. Therefore, connecting with other people has been understood as a means of reaching these assets.

PRESENTING THE FINDINGS

SECOND MEETING
VLAIO

After interviewing the entrepreneurs, I had a second meeting with VLAIO. The purpose of this meeting was to present the initial findings of the interviews with the entrepreneurs and get their impression about it. We discussed why entrepreneurs perceived networks as a relevant source of information, and why they were not using the online facilities. We also discussed about the interests of the government regarding a service for foreign entrepreneurs.

The outcome of this meeting can be summarised as follows:

1. The government was convinced that entrepreneurs prefer finding information through their networks than online because the online information is very difficult to navigate through. Therefore, they still believed that the main issue is a communication problem, and that if the information were presented and organized in a very clear way, entrepreneurs would use it.

2. They mentioned that there are already some organizations (such as Voka* or Unizo*) that organize events for entrepreneurs, and they see this as a form of networking.

3. Regarding a more specific solution, they were interested in a long-time, online service that entrepreneurs use. One of the challenges they mentioned was finding out what it is exactly that entrepreneurs try to find online, what is it that they struggle with.

4. They emphasized that if a company wants to start in Belgium, the government would try to do everything they can to facilitate this process, because otherwise they would go to another country: in the end it is a matter of competition, and the eventual interest of the government is to attract new companies to Belgium.

Fig 14. Flemish Administration Center, Ghent, Belgium

Voka, Unizo: see glossary on page 89.

VALIDATING THE DIRECTION

INTERVIEW WITH BUSINESS COUNTER

At this point of the project, I interviewed a person who had worked at *Xerius*, one of the business counters in Flanders, for more than 10 years. He had recently become an entrepreneur himself, quitting his job at the business counter to start his own company. The interview was conducted via Skype.

During this talk, we discussed the role of the business counter in the process of setting up a company in Flanders. Although I had done some previous research about it, it was good to get first-hand insights from someone who was directly involved in it. He also highlighted how the administrative processes were becoming more and more digital (which, again, relates to the other project that Knight Moves did). But one of the most interesting insights from this interview came up when we mentioned the networking part. Because the analysis of the interviews with the entrepreneurs was starting to point into that direction, I wanted to discuss this topic during this interview. Coincidentally, the business that the interviewee had just started was a company that organizes inspiration tours for entrepreneurs. His concept was to organize 3-day-trips with a group of entrepreneurs and "inspirators" (normally experts in a specific entrepreneurship-related topic), and the purpose of the trips is to get inspired by other entrepreneurs and like-minded people. He mentioned that staying three days together helps to create strong and valuable relationships that could be further developed after the trip. I found this a very interesting concept, which in a way reinforced the "networking direction" towards which the research was evolving.

INSIGHTS

The original plan was to have had the interview with the business counter at the very beginning of the project, when the entrepreneurial landscape was being explored. However, for availability reasons we had to reschedule the meeting a couple of times, and it ended up being later than expected, after all the interviews with the entrepreneurs. If the interview had taken place at the beginning of the project, I would have addressed it in a different way, because at that point I was still trying to understand the connection between all the different agencies and organizations in Flanders. However, because the interviews with the entrepreneurs were pointing in a different direction, I planned the interview as a way to try to validate or discard that direction.

VALIDATING THE DIRECTION

INTERVIEW WITH FIT*

I also had the opportunity to had a short interview with the Director of Inward Investment at FIT (Flanders Investment and Trade). FIT is the Flemish agency for international entrepreneurs, and the interviewee worked at the investment department, which main focus is attracting and supporting foreign companies to Belgium. The interview was conducted by telephone.

During this interview we discussed some points that FIT had identified as possible improvement points for foreign investors . This was not a hundred per cent the same target group as the addressed within the scope of this project, but I could still find some commonalities. One of the points that the interviewee mentioned, besides other issues related to taxation, administration costs and legal formalities, was “hiring people”. Foreign companies, especially if they are small or not so well-known in Belgium, often encounter difficulties to attract the right people. FIT follows a series of measures to address this problem, such as:

-Bring them in contact with the VDAB (the official Flemish agency for employment).

-Give advice about how to hire people, which channels to use, and bring them in touch with interesting networks.

-When a company is looking for a location, they provide additional information on the availability of finding the people they need in that area.

-They organize the “Investment of the Year Trophy”, in which they nominate foreign companies for their investment in Flanders. This also helps the companies to build a stronger image, get better known and recruit people.

INSIGHTS

The interview with FIT was not part of the initial plan, but I unexpectedly got the contact details of the interviewee during one of the other interviews with the government, and I thought it could be interesting to have an additional point of view. Just as with the business counter, this additional contribution was used to verify the problem.

*FIT: see glossary on page 89.

DEFINING THE CHALLENGE

TWO PERSPECTIVES

BALANCING USER NEEDS AND CLIENT REQUIREMENTS

At this point, I wanted to start defining a concrete problem statement to be addressed during the rest of the project. I had been in contact with the entrepreneurs and some government agencies, I had interviewed both groups, and had drafted initial insights out of the interviews and research.

The situation, visualized on figure 15, was as follows: on one hand, I had explored the challenges that foreign entrepreneurs face, and "networking" had been identified as one their biggest concerns. On the other hand, the government's interests pointed towards an optimized digital solution to deal with an online communication problem, which they believed was the reason why entrepreneurs did not use the information available online.

The needs and interests of both groups were clearly differing, and this presented the following challenge: "*How to find a common ground to serve both perspectives?*" "*How to create a solution that solves the challenges of the entrepreneurs but at the same time is interesting for the government?*"

In order for the solution to be successful, it should provide value to both parties. Although I had been in contact with both groups, the government and the entrepreneurs, there had not been any interaction between them. For availability reasons, it was impossible for me to organize a session with both groups together. This would have been the most logical and convenient step to follow to align both perspectives, and make each group understand what the needs and interests of the other group were. Therefore, I had to find another way of achieving this.

REFLECTION

I believe that one of the roles of service designers is acting as the binder between the different stakeholders involved in a project, and therefore they should be able to successfully communicate insights amongst the different groups. A lot of research has been done about communication techniques in service design, and visualizations are one of the most common ways of communicating insights. Segelström (2013) states that visualization practice is seen as one of the unique characteristics of service design, and discusses that it can be considered both as an stage of the analysis process as well as a communicative effort.

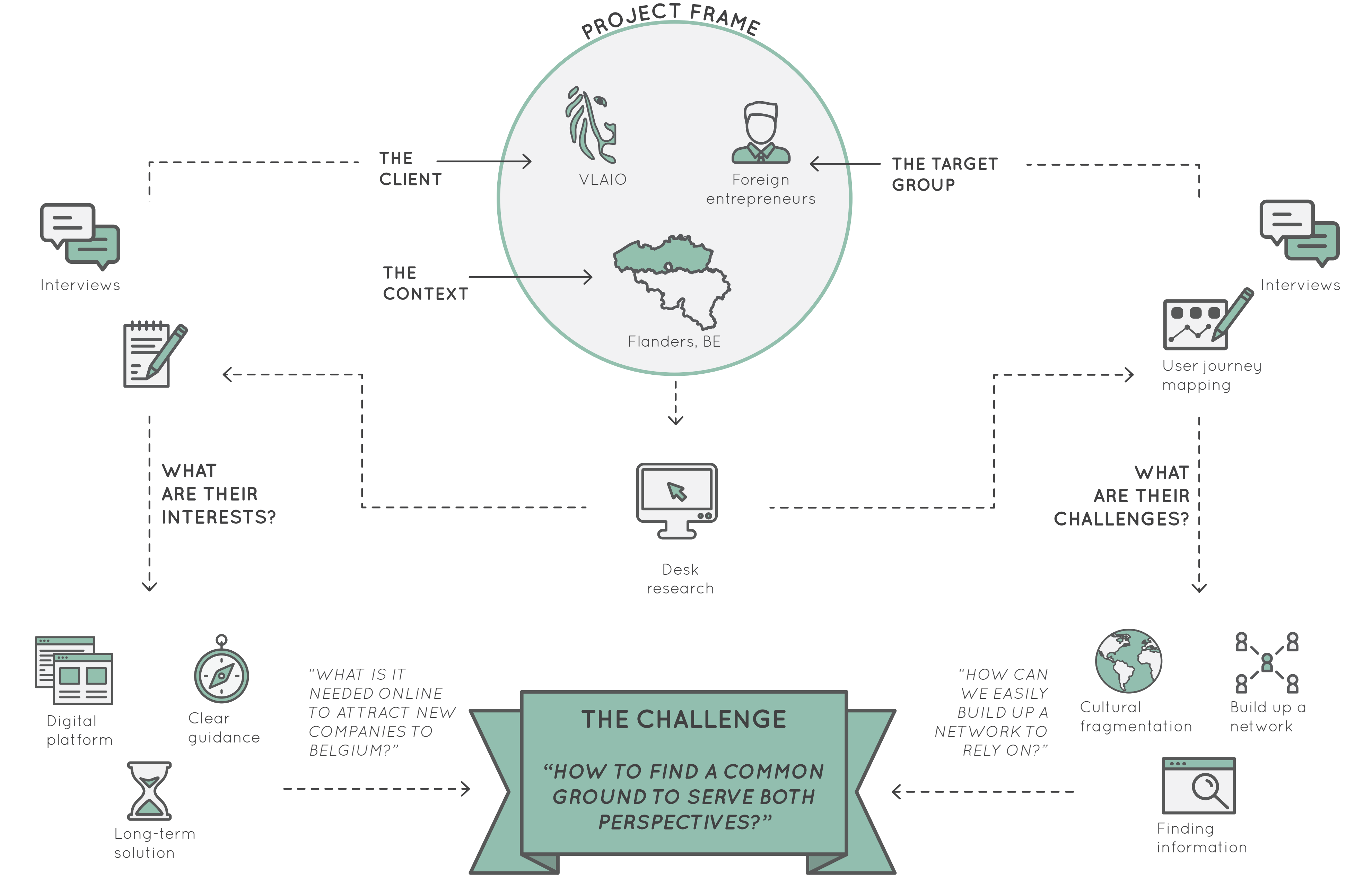


Fig 15. The process of trying to align both perspectives

VISUALIZING THE FINDINGS

PERSONAS AS A COMMUNICATION TOOL

In order to address the challenge of balancing user needs and client requirements, I decided to create personas and use them to communicate the findings of the research. This was meant as a tool to make the client empathise with the addressed target group and understand their point of view (Sanders 2002, Pruitt & Grudin 2003).

I draw three different personas out of the interviews and the research (see following pages), with a focus on how they managed to find information and their ability and possibility to have access to a network. The story of each persona was relevant as a mechanism to create empathy, and make the personas more "tangible". They also highlighted what the entrepreneurs considered their main challenges and the most valuable or positive parts of the experience.

The personas and the situation I was trying to balance were at this point presented to one of my contact persons in the government. This was a quick interaction and it was done online, as it was not possible to schedule another meeting. However, I managed to get feedback on the challenge I was facing. We agreed that networking was seen as an important need for foreign entrepreneurs, and therefore that it would be included in the solution.

LUKASZ

25 Years old | Poland | Electrical eng.

> "If I didn't have had the support from the university and the incubator program I wouldn't have even considered starting a company in Belgium."

THE COMPANY

NAME Konex

ACTIVITY Real-time patient monitoring systems for hospitals

STATUS Idea

DIMENSIONS

INFORMATION: Digital — Face-to-face

ADMINISTRATION: Do-it-myself — Outsourced

ACCESS TO NETWORK: Easy — Difficult

THE STORY

University
Lukasz is a Master student of Electrical Engineering at KU Leuven.

The idea
Together with another student, they worked on a project about real-time patient monitoring, and they decided to bring it to life.

Not knowing what to do
They didn't know where to start, everything seemed very unrealistic to them: they only had a prototype of their idea, they needed to work on their business plan and they didn't have much money.

University network
They asked their professors and fellow students for advice. They told them about an incubator program.

Application
The incubator was their only chance to create a real business out of their school project. They worked hard on the application. All the other applicants were Belgian so they were playing with the language disadvantage. But they applied anyway.

Incubator program
They went through a long selection process but eventually got accepted. They met a lot of people who could help them, investors, and the incubator could guide them through the administration process.

THE POSITIVE EXPERIENCE

- University professors
- Other students with similar experiences
- Incubator program

THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES

- Not knowing how to start
- Finding support

GIULIA

34 Years old

Italy

Restaurant manager

"There's a lot of support for entrepreneurs, but if you don't know where to find it, you won't get it. Searching is a very time-consuming process."

THE COMPANY

NAME Mangiamo

ACTIVITY Italian restaurant and catering services

STATUS Planning phase

DIMENSIONS

INFORMATION: Digital ●·········· Face-to-face

ADMINISTRATION: Do-it-myself ··●········ Outsourced

ACCESS TO NETWORK: Easy ·········●·· Difficult

THE STORY

The idea

Giulia wants to open a restaurant in Antwerp, like the one her family owns in Italy, and where she was in charge of all the administration.

Online research

She is confident enough to manage everything on her own and starts searching online for loans, permissions, locations, etc. "Why would I pay someone to do it when I can do it myself? I like having control over my own business"

Frustration

She finds many different websites from different organizations. She doesn't have references from any of them, so she is not sure which one she should contact. She's very cautious and wants to make a good choice.

Ask for help

She joins some online forums and discussion groups for expats. Someone recommends her to go to VOKA. She decides to contact them for advice.

External support

She calls them and makes an appointment with them. She gets advice about loans and finances, and they put her in contact with Xerius. She is happy that she can do everything online, although the website is in Dutch.

THE POSITIVE EXPERIENCE

- Possibility to do administration online
- Advice from other expats in Belgium
- Experts support

THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES

- Understand information online
- Trust and confidence
- Time-consuming

THOMAS

29 Years old | England | Photographer

"Best advice: Do your homework before you start. Spend some time exploring the new market, then you know what to expect. And talk to as many people as possible."

THE COMPANY

NAME Picturesque

ACTIVITY Photography and video reports for events

STATUS Recently established

DIMENSIONS

INFORMATION: Digital — Face-to-face

ADMINISTRATION: Do-it-myself — Outsourced

ACCESS TO NETWORK: Easy — Difficult

THE STORY

The idea

Thomas has worked in the UK as a professional photographer and now he wants to open his own studio in Ghent.

Preparation

Even before moving to Ghent, he spent some time online: reading about all the formalities he needed to follow, checking similar business' websites. He also joined some online groups, social media, forums, etc.

Business counter

He was not in Belgium yet, but he wanted to know what he needed to do when he arrived. He contacted Xerius because he run into their name in one of the online groups and thought they could help him.

Online applications

He could start doing some applications online, but he needed to have an address in Belgium to establish his company.

Start working

When he finally moved to Belgium, he tried to finish all his documentation as soon as possible and focus on finding clients.

THE POSITIVE EXPERIENCE

- Business counter
- Online groups
- Online applications

THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES

- Trustful information
- Location
- Waiting time

MERGING BOTH PERSPECTIVES

THE DESIGN CHALLENGE

After this short feedback session, it was decided that *networks* would be the focus area into which the project would evolve. Although the two perspectives (entrepreneurs and government) were a bit more aligned now, there were still different requirements from each side that I wanted to merge:

“The government wants to know what the main challenges for entrepreneurs are, so they can attract new companies to Belgium”

“Foreign entrepreneurs need help with networking as a way of accessing more opportunities, knowledge and resources”

These two statements were used as requirements for the design challenge to address, which was stated as follows:

“How can we foster networking opportunities amongst foreign entrepreneurs in Flanders with a digital solution that at the same time provides insights to the government about the needs of the entrepreneurs?”

DEFINING THE EXPERIENCE

EXPLORING THE PROBLEM AREA

IDEATION
SESSION I

Having settled a direction for the project, it was time to start ideating on how to continue and move forward. I organized two brainstorm sessions: one internal and one external.

The first session was together with two service designers from Knight Moves, and the purpose of it was exploring the relationships between entrepreneurs and networks. We used the Lotus Blossom technique (Michalko, 2006), in order to come up with the biggest possible amount of ideas. The starting point was the values that networks provide to entrepreneurs, and from there we went through social networks and mechanisms that would contribute to produce these values, and which features would make them possible. The outcome of this brainstorm was therefore a series of characteristics that entrepreneurs associate with networks and value creation. After the first session, I took some time to cluster the ideas according to the values they produced.

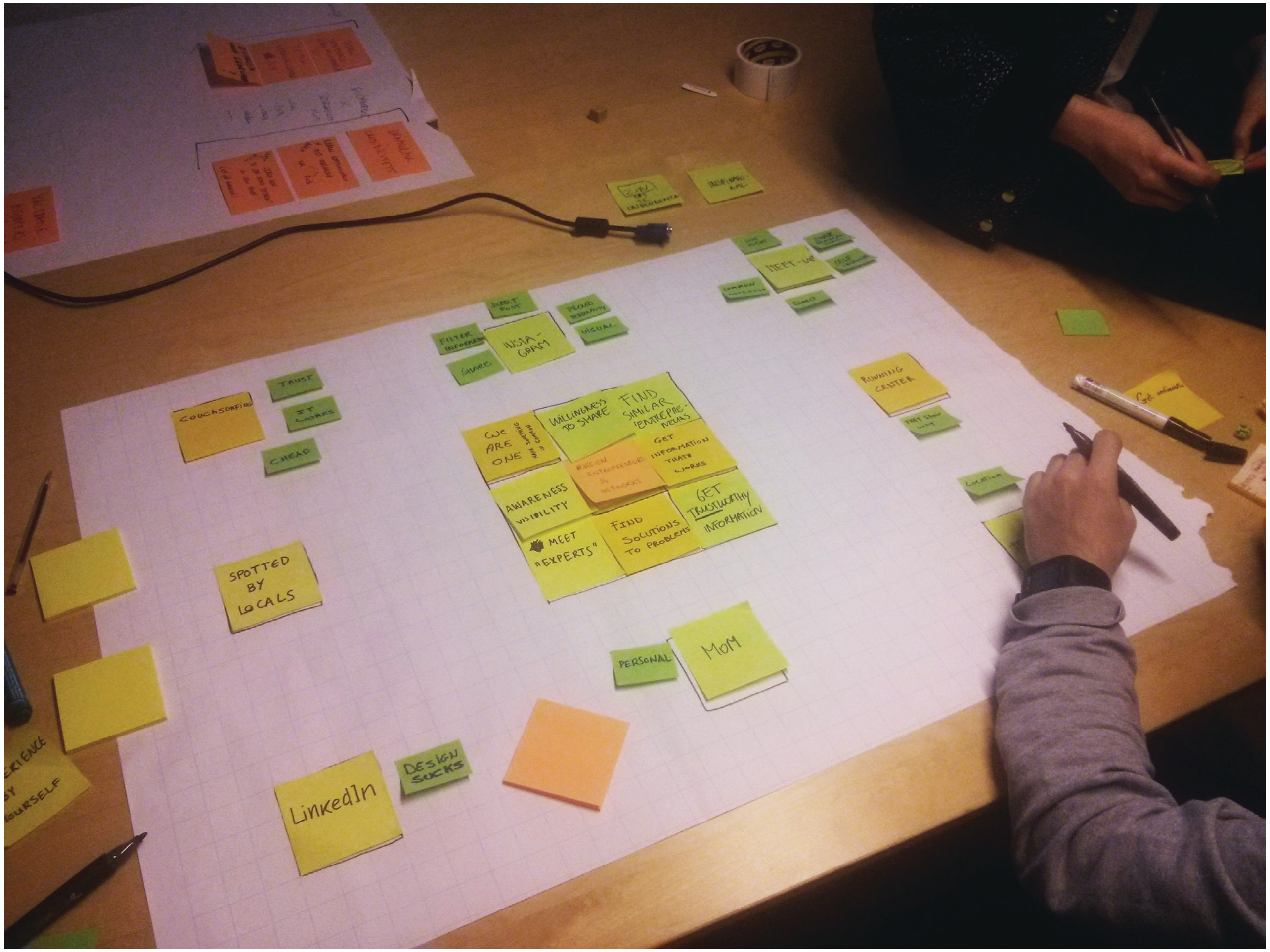


Fig 16. Brainstorm session I

EXPLORING THE PROBLEM AREA

IDEATION
SESSION II

The participants of the second session were two freelancers in the field of communication and community management. More specifically, two foreigners (from Finland and Slovenia) who were working self-employed in Belgium. Although there is a slight difference between being self-employed and being an entrepreneur, these two participants were of special relevance at this point of the project: they were the organizers of a Meetup Group for entrepreneurs in Ghent (*http://www.meetup.com/Entrepreneurs-Anonymous-Gent/*) and therefore their contribution regarding entrepreneurs and networking could be very valuable. During this brainstorm session we also used the Lotus Blossom technique, this time with the outcome of the first session as a starting point. The goal of this session was to identify mechanisms that would encourage the values created by networks.

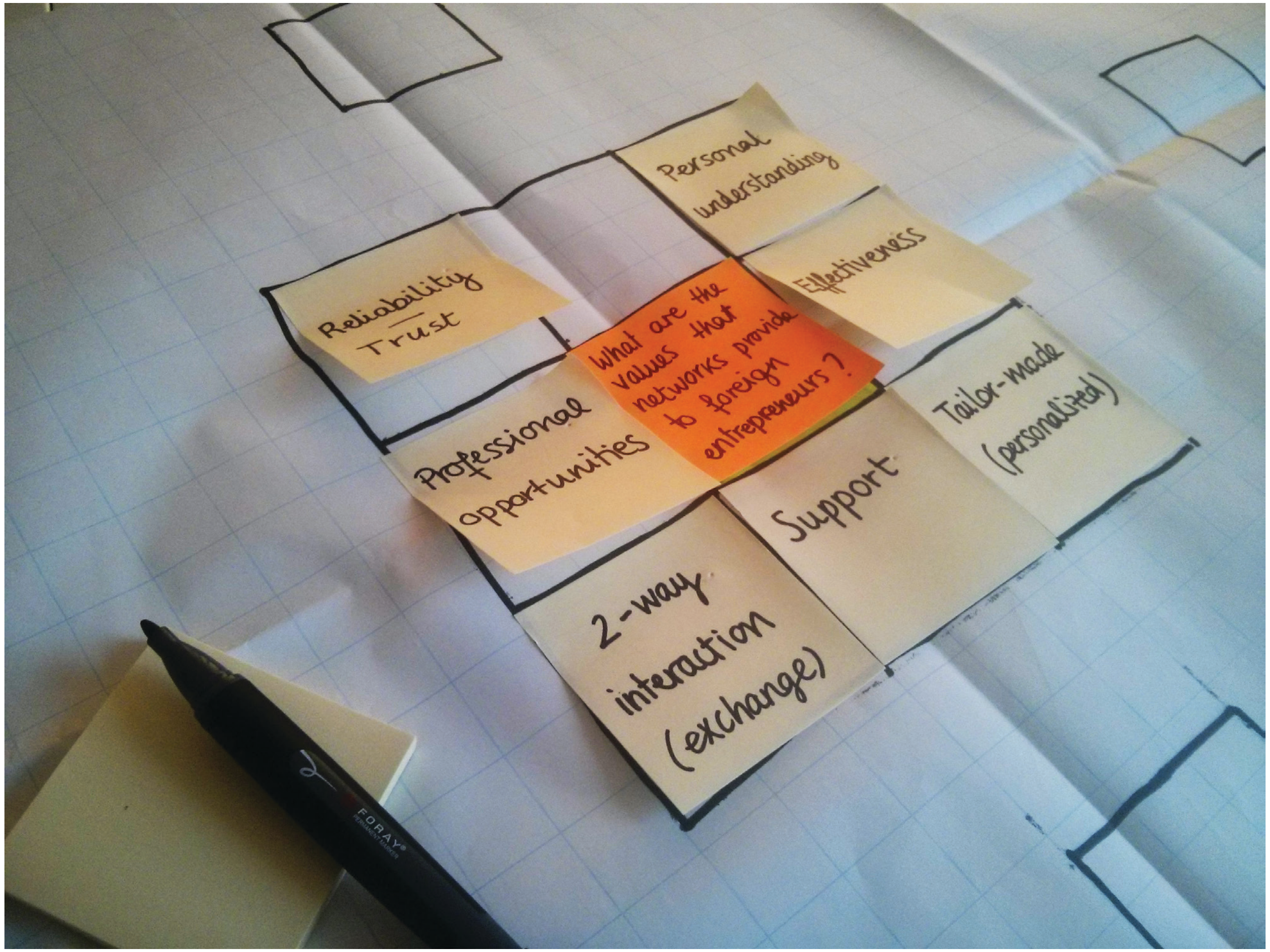


Fig 17. Brainstorm session II

ANALYSIS

CLUSTERING IDEAS

After the second brainstorm, the ideas were combined together with those from the first session.

More than actual ideation sessions, these could be considered as exploration techniques, as the results from these brainstorms were not exactly new ideas, but a wider range of values that networks are associated with and possible mechanisms to achieve these values.

The values were classified in four major groups: reliability, interaction, tailor-made and effectiveness.

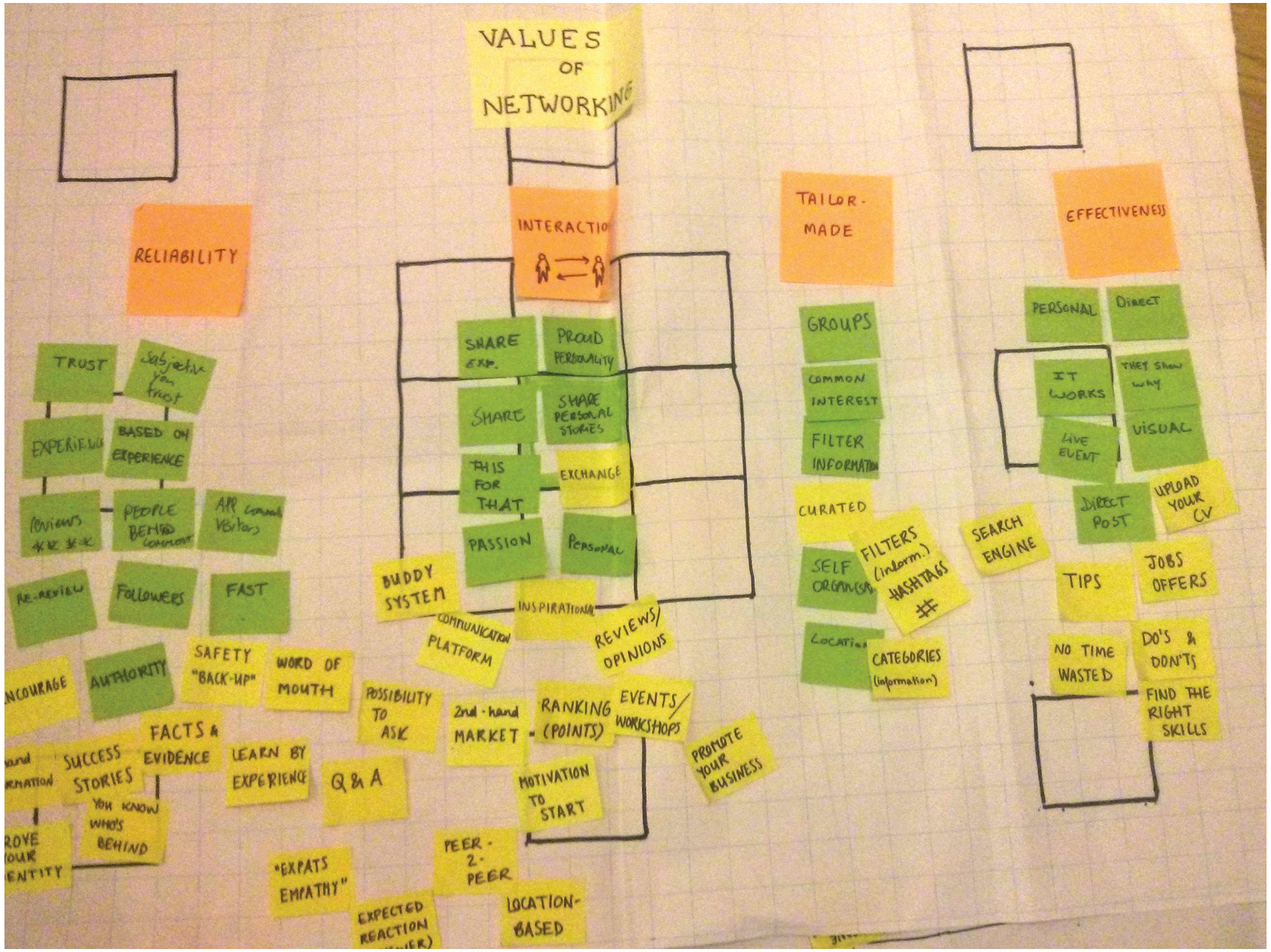


Fig 18. Idea clustering

INITIAL SERVICE EXPERIENCE

FROM PROBLEM TO EXPERIENCE

One of the central aspects of start defining the service solution was understanding the user experience. Based on the previous research and analysis, I wanted to start by defining the experience that the service should produce. I first created a short visualization to communicate the problem that had been identified, and used one of the personas as the center of the story (figure 19).

Although this was done in a very abstract way (i.e. with a big box representing the overload of information that entrepreneurs face), this short visualization was a straightforward way of communicating the problem I was trying to address.

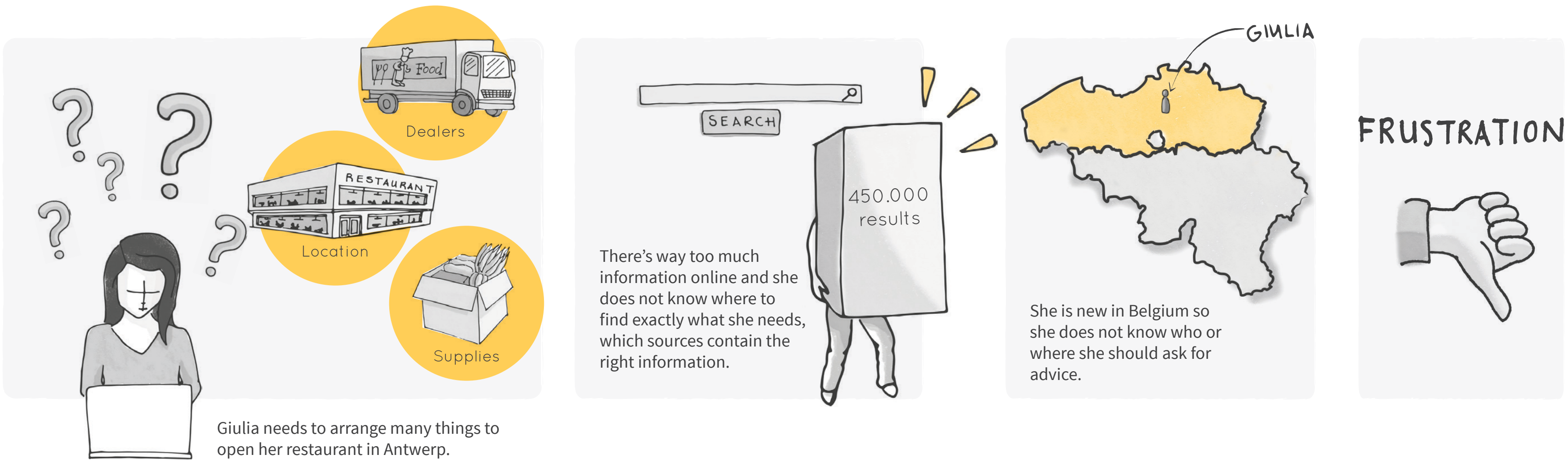


Fig. 19. Visualization of the experience of the problem.

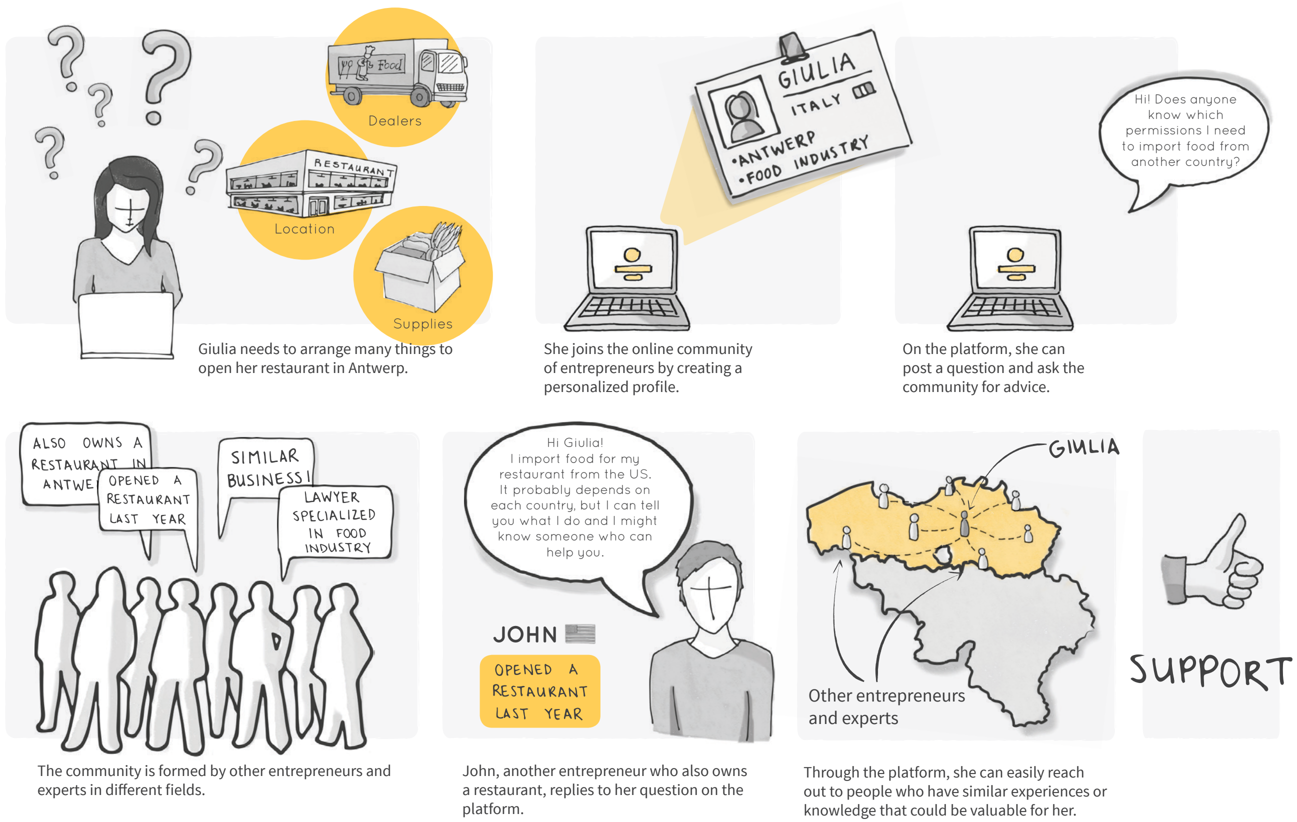
INITIAL SERVICE EXPERIENCE

FROM PROBLEM TO EXPERIENCE

From the problem, I moved on to illustrate the experience that the concept solution should produce (figure 20). One of the requirements that the government had mentioned was that it should be an online platform, so that was already taken into consideration.

This representation still had a very high level of abstraction, but that is the reason why it worked well in terms of isolating the experience of the entrepreneur without defining any concrete details.

Basically, the experience could be summarized as follows: entrepreneurs can find support in other entrepreneurs and experts, in the form of exchanging knowledge as a way of reducing the complexity of the information found online.



Giulia needs to arrange many things to open her restaurant in Antwerp.

She joins the online community of entrepreneurs by creating a personalized profile.

On the platform, she can post a question and ask the community for advice.

The community is formed by other entrepreneurs and experts in different fields.

John, another entrepreneur who also owns a restaurant, replies to her question on the platform.

Through the platform, she can easily reach out to people who have similar experiences or knowledge that could be valuable for her.

Fig 20. Visualization of the experience of the solution.

ADDITIONAL INPUT

SERVICE DESIGN WORKSHOP

At this point of the semester, I was offered the opportunity to facilitate a service design workshop. This workshop was one of the activities organized by Entrepreneurs Anonymous, the Meetup group whose organizers I had been in contact with for one of the brainstorm sessions (*http://www.meetup.com/Entrepreneurs-Anonymous-Gent/*). The purpose of this workshop was to give the participants a brief introduction about service design and present some tools to help them deliver better customer experiences. The participants were fifteen entrepreneurs from very different fields (some Belgians and some foreigners). Therefore, and although the workshop was not directly related to this project, I did not hesitate in being the facilitator and try to get some extra input. During the workshop, I presented some of the material of the project (e.g. the personas) while explaining some service design tools, and had the opportunity to talk about this project to some of the participants when the workshop was finished. This was done in a very informal way, since it was done after the planned activities for the workshop and everyone was already in a more relaxed mood.

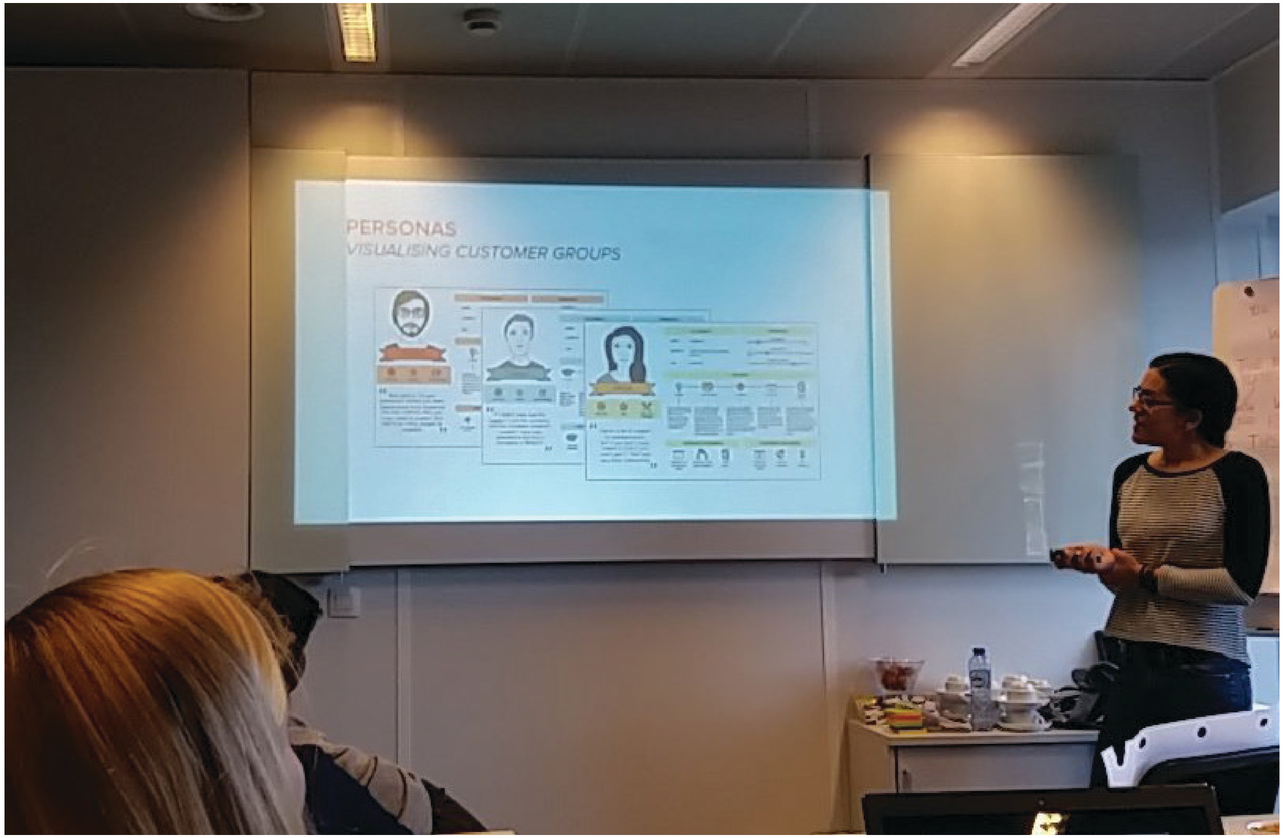


Fig 21. Presenting the personas during the workshop.

ADDITIONAL INPUT

THE IMPORTANCE OF FACE-TO-FACE INTERACTIONS

During these conversations I realized the importance of this kind of events and how entrepreneurs value face-to-face interactions. I saw how the participants quickly created bonds with each other (within the context of a one-evening workshop), talked about their companies or ideas and even exchanged a few business cards: this was clearly an opportunity for networking. I could even extrapolate this experience and use my own case as an example: I would have never been able to facilitate such a workshop if I had not met the organizers of the Meetup group while I was looking for entrepreneurs to interview. This was again, although in a slightly different context, a proof of the power of networking.

All these small insights contributed to add different nuances to the service experience, and to decide that some form of physical interaction should also have a place in the concept of the solution.

Fig 22. Participants during the workshop

SUMMARIZING THE INSIGHTS

DEFINING REQUIREMENTS

Before going further into defining a solution, the insights gathered during the research were summarized into a service proposition. The purpose of this was not to lose track of the research outcome and to establish clear requirements for the subsequent steps.

Polaine, Løvlie and Reason (2013) propose a framework of three questions to develop service propositions:

1. Do people understand what the new service is or does?
2. Do people see the value of it in their life?
3. Do people understand how to use it?

Before transforming these simple questions into an early-phase concept, I translated the main insights of the research and ideation phases into requirements to be addressed with the service proposition.

The solution should:

- Be delivered through a digital platform
- Provide access to knowledge, opportunities and resources
- Facilitate contact between entrepreneurs
- Facilitate contact between entrepreneurs and experts
- Include some form of face-to-face interaction
- Be provided by the government
- Provide useful information to the government about the challenges that entrepreneurs face
- Organize the information in a clear and searchable way

SERVICE PROPOSITION

DEFINING A SERVICE PROPOSITION

With these requirements in mind, it was more coherent to answer the questions proposed by Polaine, Løvlie and Reason (2013).

1. Do people understand what the new service is or does?

The new service is a point of contact where foreign entrepreneurs who are new in Belgium can get in contact with other entrepreneurs and experts when they need help or advice with business-related topics.

2. Do people see the value of it in their life?

This question raised the following questions: why would entrepreneurs choose to help other entrepreneurs?, what is the benefit for them? By helping other entrepreneurs, they are contributing to strengthen their network, which can bring them more opportunities in return. The main value is therefore an exchange of knowledge through the service (either digitally through the platform or face-to-face through personal meetings). Additional values are more promotion or recognition for both entrepreneurs and experts. The value for the government is twofold: the service provides them with a direct communication channel with the entrepreneurs, and collects first-hand information about possible areas of improvement.

3. Do people understand how to use it?

In a simplified way, an entrepreneur who wants to use the service should: 1) Create a profile on the platform 2) Specify their preferences 3) Get access to relevant information and networking opportunities.

SERVICE PROPOSITION

The summary of the requirements gathered during the research and these three questions pushed me into thinking more in terms of a solution rather than just an experience for the first time in the project. They helped drafting an early understanding of the form that the service was taking. However, to make the service proposition more workable for the following steps, I decided to merge the three questions into a simplified statement that envisioned the experience that the service was aiming to create:

“A meeting point for entrepreneurs where they can exchange knowledge with other entrepreneurs, the Flemish government and experts”

GETTING INSPIRED

EXISTING SERVICES

At this point of the process and with the service proposition in mind, I wanted to get inspiration from existing services. I did some research in services that take in some sort of knowledge exchange or networking and services that are specifically targeted to entrepreneurs. This section presents a compilation of them.

THE ONTARIO NETWORK OF ENTREPRENEURS

(http://www.onebusiness.ca/)
The Ontario Network of Entrepreneurs is a network of business professionals and entrepreneurs across the province of Ontario, Canada.

AMINO

(*http://www.amino.dk/ [in Danish]*)
Amino is the largest discussion forum for entrepreneurs in Denmark. It is a large active community, with more than 125,000 registered users.

FARMCAFE

(*https://www.farmcafe.be/ [in Dutch]*)
FarmCafe is a service where farmers can get help with their agricultural or horticultural projects. They can create a plan and get in contact with a network of experts in many fields of agriculture and horticulture.

GOVLOOP

(https://www.govloop.com/)
GovLoop is a community of more than 200,000 public sectors professionals. It aims to foster collaboration, peer learning and problem solving through a variety of mechanisms: blogs, discussions, research guides, online trainings, mentorship programs, and more.

BECONNECTIONS

(https://www.beconnections.com/)
BeConnections is a B2B network that connects companies to one another on a global scale, allowing its users to target their audience and search for new business opportunities by region and sector, worldwide.

CREATING A SOLUTION

FROM EXPERIENCE TO CONCEPT

MULTI-LEVEL SERVICE DESIGN

With the service proposition and the requirements in mind, it was time to start synthesizing this experience into a concept.
At this stage of the project some research was done on how to approach the transition from the experience to defining the service solution. Patrício et al. (2011) address this complexity by taking a multi-level approach to service design. They propose a model that divides this process in three stages, with focus on 1) the service concept, 2) the service system and 3) the service encounter (figure 23).

For each of the levels, they suggest a series of service design tools that are best suited to build up the experience in a systematic manner (Patrício et al., 2011; Sarmento and Patrício, 2014).

Inspired by this layered framework and aiming to reduce the complexity of such a system, different service design tools were chosen to iteratively define the concept requirements.

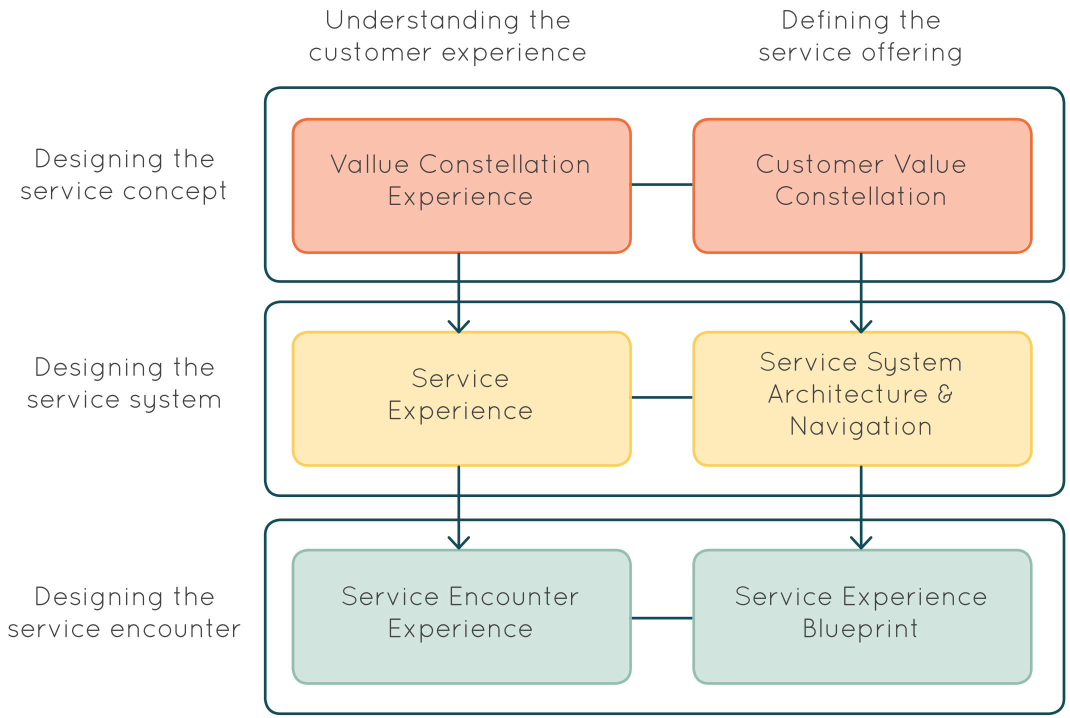


Fig 23. Adaptation of the general model of multi-level service design proposed by Patrício et al. (2011).

VALUE EXCHANGE

ACTORS MAP

The service proposition stated on page 48 introduced the concept of a knowledge-sharing platform into the project: a place where entrepreneurs can exchange ideas, encourage and foster interaction with peers, and trigger new opportunities. The platform would provide a channel for entrepreneurs to ask questions and receive advice from other entrepreneurs and experts.

In correspondence with the first level of the model proposed by Patrício et al. (2011) and inspired by system maps (Tassi, 2009), the values that such a platform would provide to the main actors involved were visualized in the following diagram.

This reduced version of the system worked as a tool to speculate about the further development of the solution and draws the attention to specific areas (discussed in the following pages).

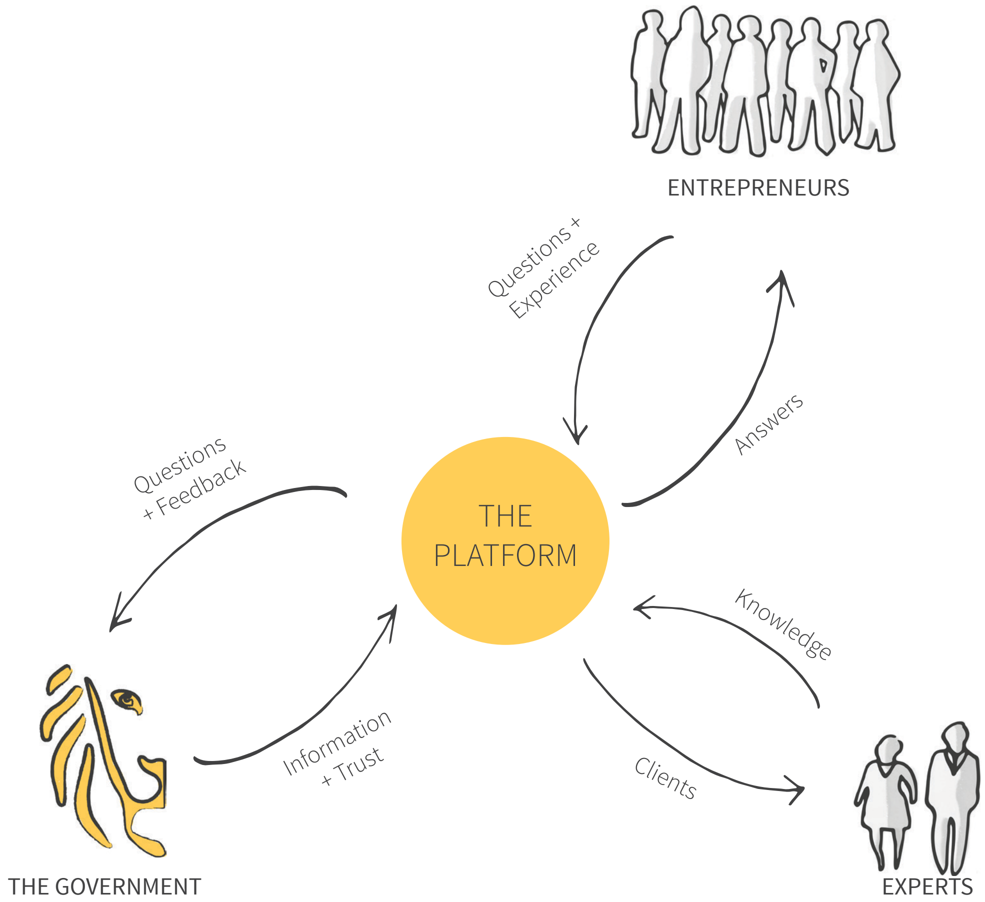


Fig 24. Initial system map illustrating the value exchange provided by the service

CATEGORIZING THE USERS

TWO TYPES OF USERS

Looking at the initial system map, I realized that the interactions of entrepreneurs with the platform would vary depending on their needs, their business stage and whether they have been in Belgium for a long time or not. For instance, an entrepreneur who is planning to start his company soon might need advice about where to find the right documentation, whereas an entrepreneur who already has established his company might use the platform as a way to stay updated about events. This suggested that a working differentiation was needed to further define the details of the service in concordance with these different approaches.

As a result, the following subdivision was created:

NEW ENTREPRENEURS

This category refers to entrepreneurs who have not started their own company yet or who are new in Belgium. These potential entrepreneurs are most likely to be asking for advice and help from fellow entrepreneurs with more experience, which means that their main interaction with the platform would be demanding information.

EXPERIENCED ENTREPRENEURS

This category refers to entrepreneurs whose companies are already established, or who have been in Belgium for a longer period. This group has therefore more knowledge that can be added to the service and, ideally, their offer would be more prominent than their demand.

MOTIVATION MATRIX

MOTIVATION MATRIX

One of the points of concern that immediately arose from this categorization of users was the motivation for experienced entrepreneurs to share their knowledge and help new entrepreneurs: *Why would they help someone they do not know, or someone who could even be a potential competitor?*

This question needed to be addressed, and in order to unveil the reasons why the different actors would participate in such a service, I created a motivation matrix (figure 25) (Morelli and Tollestrup, 2007).

This technique forced me to reflect upon the role that each actor would have in the service and adopt their point of views to understand how they would react towards the other actors.

The motives for entrepreneurs to be part of this service needed to be defined, as such a service would not be possible without users contribution. The motivation for new entrepreneurs were clear, since they would benefit and get knowledge and support from the platform, but special attention needed to be paid to the motivation of the experienced entrepreneurs, and to what new entrepreneurs would give them in return (yellow-framed boxes, figure 25).

Because this group of entrepreneurs have already started their companies, the motivations for them should include additional benefits to their business. One of the benefits that such a platform could provide to a recently founded company is promotion and advertisement, which could be a reward for users who actively contribute to the community. This lead me to think of the inclusion of gamification elements in the online platform as a way of encouraging participation, since the effect and success of gamification techniques have been widely recognized in many different contexts (Aparicio et al., 2012; Hu and Chen, 2015; Bista et al., 2014).

gives to	ENTREPRENEUR (new)	ENTREPRENEUR (experienced)	GOVERNMENT	EXPERTS
ENTREPRENEUR (new)	-Connect with people who could help them -Find opportunities and resources -Get the right knowledge	-Credibility in the community -More visibility -Word of mouth promotion -Potential opportunities and resources	-Firsthand information on challenges that entrepreneurs face -Feedback to improve the process & relationship with entrepreneurs	-Demand more work -New clients
ENTREPRENEUR (experienced)	-Advice -Support -Personalized information based on experience -Empathy -Opportunities -Resources	-Promote their own business -Expand their network -Share their knowledge and experience with other entrepreneurs in a similar situation -Stay informed	-Active community (gives reputation to the government) -Less *"work"* for the government -Self-sufficient platform	-Word of mouth promotion (based on previous experiences, interactions and satisfaction)
GOVERNMENT	-Official channel for safe communication -Trust & reliability -Support -Feeling of *"being heard"*	-Safe place for interaction -Status for being part of the community (long-term)	-Find out what entrepreneurs are interested in and what their main difficulties are -Communicate with entrepreneurs -Make things easier for entrepr. -Become an *"entrepreneur-friendly"* region	-A place to offer and promote their activities -Extra reliability
EXPERTS	-Expertise -Safety, trust -Reliable information	—	-Motivation for entrepreneurs to join the community -Reinforce and backup the information offered to entrepreneurs	-Promote their activity, attract new customers -Increase their credibility by *"partnering"* with the government

Fig 25. Motivation matrix

MOTIVATING THE USERS

INTRODUCING GAMIFICATION

Gamification refers to *the use of game elements in non-game contexts to change people's behaviour* (Aparicio et al., 2014; Hu and Chen, 2015; Bunchball, 2010). An important part to implement gamification is understanding what and what does not produce a change of behaviour in the users of an online community. Several studies maintain that this behavioural change is produced by specific emotions, and these emotions in turn are produced by different game mechanisms (Aparicio et al., 2012; Hu and Chen, 2015; Bista et al., 2014; Bunchball, 2010). What these mechanisms are doing is satisfying a series of basic human desires, and that is what creates the experience that motivates users to take certain actions. Bunchball (2010) establishes a correlation between the basic game mechanisms and the human desires they satisfy (figure 26).

By considering the different human desires stated by Bunchball (2010), it was decided to focus on rewards, status and competition. Rewards were selected to encourage interaction in the community, and status and competition as a way to increase users visibility. Based on these three elements, the following game mechanisms are suggested to be implemented in the platform.

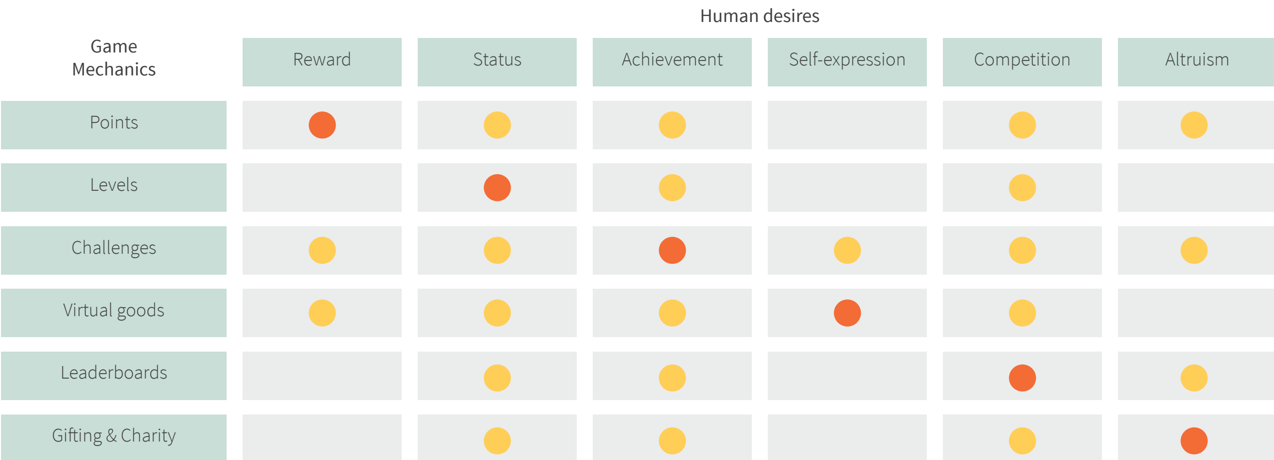


Fig 26. Adaptation of the interaction of basic human desires and game mechanic explained by Bunchball (2010). The red dots refer to the primary desire a particular game mechanic fulfills, and the yellow dots show the other areas that it affects.

GAMIFICATION ELEMENTS

POINTS

Points are the most popular game mechanism and can be used to reward users in many different dimensions. For example, users can get points from other users and can earn points themselves based on their activity on the platform. This means, for example, that when users contribute to a discussion, evaluate some content, or participate in an event, they will get points. The more active they are, the more points they will get. Even for one-time actions (such as uploading a profile picture, or indicating preferences in their profile) a certain amount of points can be rewarded. This will motivate users to make use of all the functionalities of the service, and at the same time will seek to make entrepreneurs complete their profiles on the platform, which will reinforce their credibility and trust. By receiving points from other users, entrepreneurs will also be encouraged to care about the quality of their contributions, which will eventually increase the overall quality of the platform. Points should be added to their profiles and should also be visible for other users. Making these visible contributes to give status to the entrepreneurs, who by knowing that other users can see how many points they have, will try to increase the amount.

MOTIVATING THE USERS

GAMIFICATION ELEMENTS

LEVELS
Levels are associated with a certain amount of respect and status.There will be different “status levels” based on the amount of points that entrepreneurs get. These levels will be shown on the entrepreneur’s profile in the form of badges (figure 27), and will be associated with a certain status. They will contribute with more promotion (their profiles will be more visible and easier to find) and trust.

Fig 27. Entrepreneurs will add badges to their online profiles to show their status when they reach certain amount of points.

GOODS
Users who reach certain level or certain amount of points could receive additional rewards. These rewards could be in the form of discounts, early bird invitation to events, sessions with experts, etc. It is important to keep entrepreneurs motivated to keep using the platform, but on the other hand it is also important not to give too many rewards to the most active participants, or they would be even more encouraged to keep dominating the platform, which might be discouraging for other users.

LEADERBOARDS
Leaderboards are used in gamification as a way to track and display desired actions, and encourage behaviour driven by competition. Especially in the business world, competition can become a good motivation driver. However, the purpose of this platform is not to create a competitive atmosphere. Therefore, a leaderboard is not the most appropriate technique. However, the same principle that the leaderboard follows can be adapted to the service: when users search content on the platform, or receive suggestions based on their preferences, those users with higher status on the platform or with more points will be displayed first. This means that, although it is not a direct form of encouraging competition, those users with more points will gain visibility.

BUILDING A COMMUNITY

CRITICAL MASS

As great part of the service success relies on the users that will join and interact with the community, it is essential to nurture participation from the beginning. In this regard, the following concern appears: *how do we convince the first members to join the service?*

This has an incredible relevance and can be especially decisive during early stages of the service, as no users would join an empty community. In fact, one of the definitions of an online community is “a group of like-minded people whose purpose is to support each other, to learn, and to promote their understanding via electronic collaboration in a group” (Wenger, cited in Preece, 2001). This means that a community does not exist without people, and therefore that building up a community from the beginning might require extra attention and effort.

Several researchers have addressed this topic and it has been agreed that in order to successfully move from the creation step to a step where a community can be considered well-established, it is necessary to involve a critical mass of users (Raban, Moldovan and Jones, 2010). Although the term critical mass comes from physics and refers to the amount of radioactive material that must be present for a nuclear fission explosion to occur; it is metaphorically used in sociology to refer to a threshold of users and actions needed before a social movement becomes self-sustaining (Raban, Moldovan and Jones, 2010; Oliver, Marwell and Teixeira, 1985).

PARTICIPATION INEQUALITY

It is however unclear which factors comprise this threshold, and Raban, Moldovan and Jones (2010) discuss that it cannot simply be a particular number of users, since not all users contribute with the same level of engagement. Nielsen (2006) uses the 90-9-1 rule to address this topic, which states that in most online communities, 90% of users are lurkers who never contribute, 9% of users contribute a little, and 1% of users account for almost all the action (figure 28).

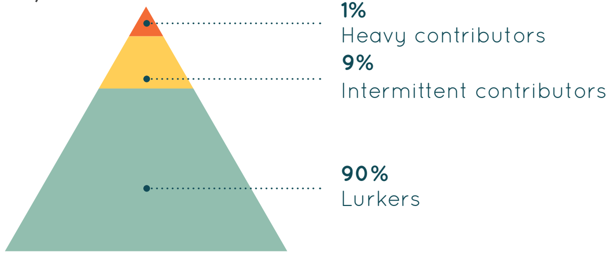


Fig 28. Visualization of the 90-9-1 rule (Nielsen, 2006)

This phenomenon is known as participation inequality, and implies that a small portion of the users of an online community are therefore responsible for most of the content that is produced on the community. Nielsen (2006) also states that this phenomenon is always present in every online community, and although there is no way to completely overcome it, a series of measurements can be taken to try to equalize it.

BUILDING A COMMUNITY

CONSIDERATIONS & CONSTRAINTS

Based on these measures mentioned by Nielsen (2006), a series of suggestions are proposed to address this concern:

SIMPLE REVIEW SYSTEM

Related to the point-based reward system explained in the previous section, users should be able to evaluate content and other users in a very simple way. The action of adding a review should require the smaller amount of steps possible. For example, by just assigning a score from one to five or a star-based review system (figure 29). Each score or each number of stars will add points to the users' profiles. With these mechanisms, contribution only requires one click, and therefore it is more likely that more users will add reviews than if they had to actively write their opinion. This possibility, however, should also be offered, for those users who would like to add something extra to their reviews.

Fig 29. Review systems that only require one click.

EASY SIGN-UP PROCESS

The process to become a member of the community should not require a lot of effort from the users. Having to provide a lot of details to gain access to the platform will discourage the users from signing up. It should be enough to use an email account (to verify their identity) and a password. However, additional details might need to be added afterwards to the users profile (both to verify their identity and to indicate their preferences).

PERSONALIZED CONTENT WITH MINIMUM EFFORT

The personalized content offered to the entrepreneurs will be also influenced by other users' preferences. This means, for example, that an entrepreneur that has interacted with or followed a discussion might get suggestions about other discussions that other entrepreneurs who also participated in the initial discussion followed. The purpose of this is, that even if users have not indicated all their preferences on their profile, they can still get curated content that might be interesting for them.

QUALITY CHECK

How can the service ensure the quality of the content provided by the users? Just because some users are very active it does not mean that everything they contribute with comes from a reliable source or has a minimum level of quality. On the other hand, users that participate sporadically might also put in very good contributions. This includes the previously mentioned review system, where users can evaluate the contributions of other users. Knowing that your contribution will be evaluated by other entrepreneurs will motivate people to put more effort on the content they create.

BUILDING A COMMUNITY

CONSIDERATIONS & CONSTRAINTS

IDENTITY VERIFICATION

Proving the identity of the persons in the platform is also a relevant quality check, and an email account might not be trustworthy enough. This suggests that other measurements should be taken to verify the identity of the users. This could be done by linking the user profiles to other existing services, such as LinkedIn or other social media platforms. In addition, the entrepreneurs could be linked to their own businesses by connecting their profiles to their enterprise numbers*.

REWARD THE PARTICIPANTS

A good incentive to join a community is knowing that there are additional benefits (in the form of digital or non digital goods) that can be obtained by participation. This is addressed by the gamification elements mentioned on page 57.

PROMOTE QUALITY CONTRIBUTORS

As the participation inequality phenomenon explained on page 58 suggests, there will be some users who will create most of the content of the platform. These users, providing that they receive good reviews from other users (which, in turn, would confirm the quality of the information they provide), could be proclaimed “consultants” of the service. This title, as it is given by the service provider (the government), would increase the reliability on these users, and the overall trust on the platform.

INITIAL GROUP OF MEMBERS

Before launching the service, the government could personally contact entrepreneurs who are already in Belgium and invite them to join the service. This could be done by email or by sending a letter (the government should have access to a list of registered entrepreneurs in Belgium). This way, they would receive an early bird invitation to a new service provided by the government, which would make them feel unique and would work as an incentive to join the community.

EXPERTS KNOWLEDGE

It will be necessary to recruit a small team of experts at the beginning who will actively contribute to the platform. This, specially during early stages of the service, will need an additional incentive for the experts. This could be initially done as an economic reward: a small groups of experts would be initially hired to provide their services through the platform. Eventually, and providing that the service becomes successful, there will be additional benefits for the experts joining the platform (i.e. more clients, promotion, better status because they are “approved” consultants by the government, etc.), but in order to determine whether this would be a viable solution, a financial analysis and a business plan would be required.

**Enterprise number: see glossary on page 89.*

PUTTING THINGS TOGETHER

SYSTEM MAP

The previous considerations on how to build a community devised a lot of new details of the service solution. In order to visualize all these features and not to lose track of the concept, everything was merged into a system map (Tassi, 2009).

This representation provides an overview of the service system, and how the main actors interact with the platform and each other.

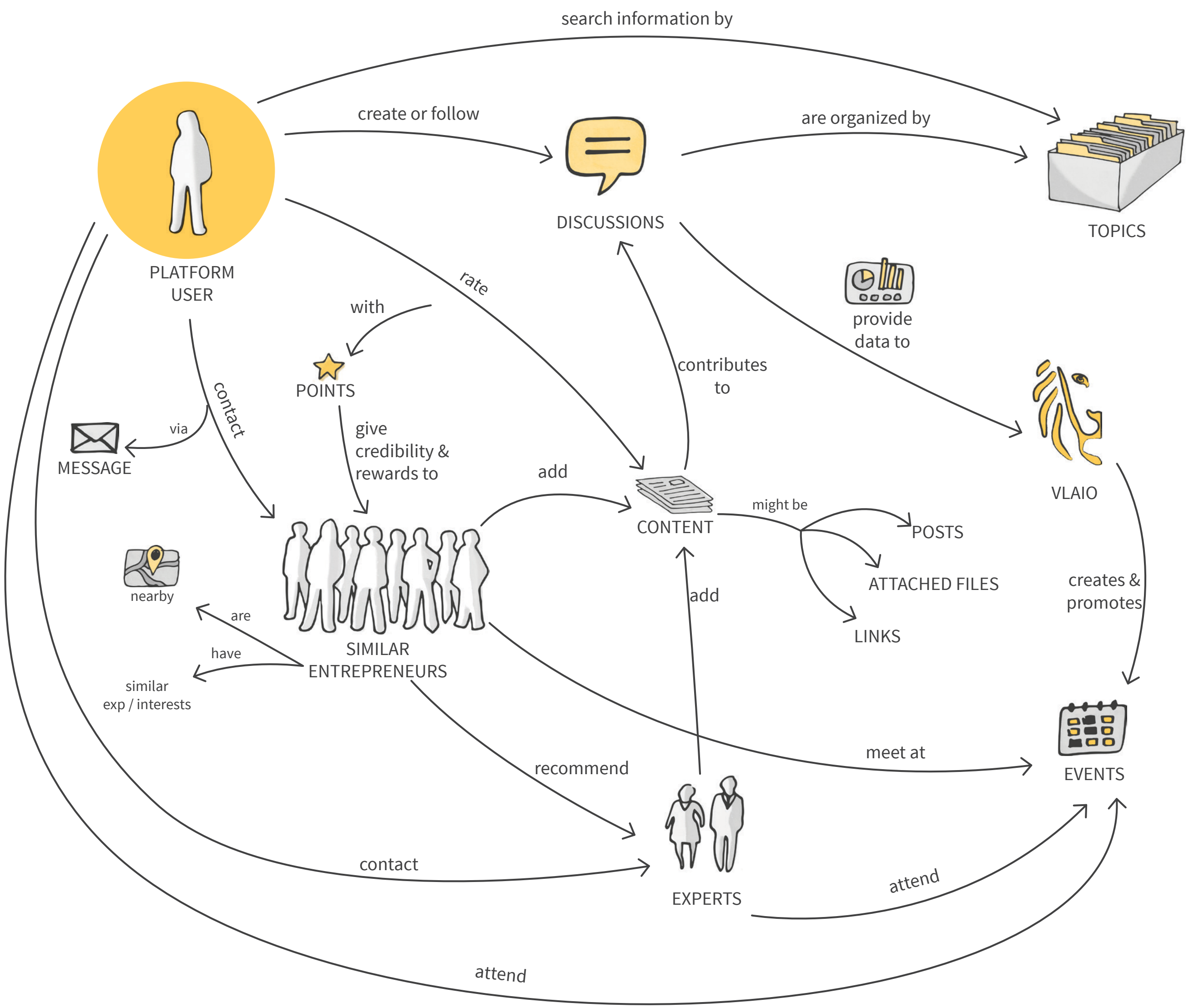


Fig 30. System map

PLATFORM STRUCTURE

FRONT & BACK END

The digital platform is the main touchpoint of the service. The structure of the platform is composed of three layers: storage layer, application layer and user layer (figure 31).

The storage layer is located on the database server and is where all kinds of knowledge resources are stored and organized: users (entrepreneurs and experts), businesses, events, discussions, etc. The organization of the information on this level determines how users can browse through it and find what they need.

The application layer is the connection between the storage layer and the user layer. This layer is the key to provide personalized content to the users, and it receives content from the other two layers. The information on this layer is updated through the database system, and is presented to the client browser in the format of HTML.

The user layer is the layer that end-users interact with, the front end, and it is presented as a web interface. It analyzes and receives requests from the client, and then sends the results from the server to the clients.

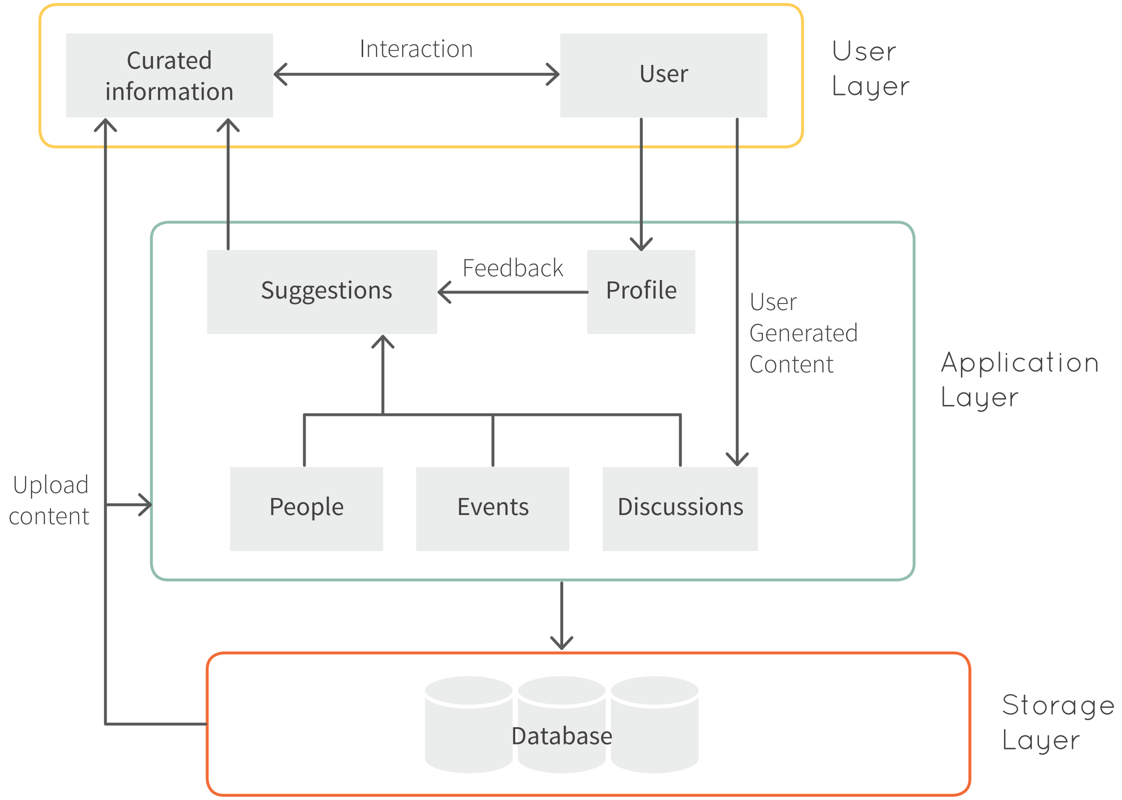


Fig 31. Structure of the platform

PERSONALIZED CONTENT

ORGANIZING THE INFORMATION

Providing the users of the service with curated content that is interesting for them is one of the outcomes of the service. Organizing the information on the platform and making it easy to navigate through is therefore a priority that needs to be taken care of. To achieve this purpose, categories and tags will be implemented in the platform.

CATEGORIES

Discussions will be organized by categories. These categories will be based on the topics of each discussion. Some suggested categories could be: *finance, administration*, *activities* or *adverstisement,* amongst others. Each discussion can only belong to one category. This would make easier for users to search for content related to one specific topic.

TAGS

Tags are a way to establish relationships between objects in the form of keywords. By having tags associated to each discussion, reply, event or companies; users will be able to refine their search and get content that is more relevant to them. Besides that, tags will be matched with the preferences on the users' profile, which will already filter the content that they receive.

Tags are useful for allowing crowd sourced categorization: users can add tags to the content they create, and this will be automatically categorized. This use of tags, however, presents a risk: tagging can also get very messy. When users are allowed to introduce their own tags, there will be synonyms, abbreviations and typos that unintentionally place content in the wrong place. This can prevent that content to appear in the suggested content showed to other users or any search results.

In order to prevent this issue, tags will be suggested to the users. For example, when entrepreneurs create a new discussion about a specific topic, some tags will be proposed to be added to that discussion, based on the content that they added, the most used tags by that entrepreneur or the most popular ones (figure 32).

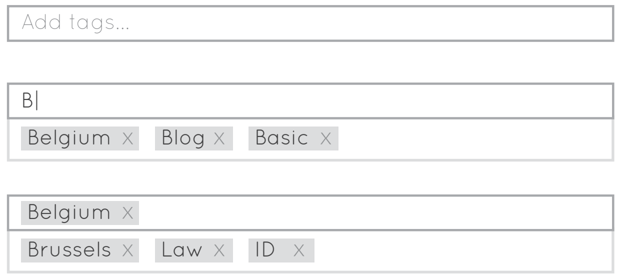


Fig 32. Autocomplete function and suggested tags will make easier for users to categorize content.

Another approach to prevent this miscategorization of content could be to control the creation of tags, instead of allowing users to freely use tagging. This approach, however, loses a lot of the interesting characteristics of why tags are useful. In order to decide how the tag system should be implemented, a deeper research and analysis should be performed.

THE USER LAYER

USE CASES

As seen on page 62, end-users of the service will interact with the top layer of the platform. This is why it was decided to focus on this layer to further develop the user experience.

Due to the systemic nature of the solution, the interaction flow would not be a linear set of activities but a net of interrelated actions. In order to approach this from a user interface perspective, it was decided to divide the user interactions with the last layer of the service platform into different use cases (Morelli, 2002). This would establish a simplified list of user interactions within each use case, which would in turn make it easier to design the structure of the interface.

The cases are divided as follows:
-Anonymous users
-Registered users
-Discussions
-People (other users)
-Events

HIGH-LEVEL WIREFRAMING

In the following pages, each one of these cases is explored and translated into high-level wireframes. This technique was chosen because of the balance between its high level of abstraction and the facility to visualize concepts, and because of the small amount of time needed to develop it, which allows you to iterate on a concept without consuming a lot of resources.

USE CASE 1

ANONYMOUS USERS

DESCRIPTION

This use case refers to users who do not have a profile on the platform, and therefore their interaction happens without being logged in. These non-registered users should be able to peek into what the platform can offer them. Therefore, they will have limited access to some parts of the platform (discussions, people, events), but they will not be able to access the full content or interact with it.

USER INTERACTIONS

-Browse limited content
-Sign up for the service

A landing page would be created as a form of interaction with these anonymous users (figure 33), with the purpose of sparking their curiosity and make them become members of the service.

DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

#1 Different pages for discussions, people and events. Non-registered users will still be able to navigate through some of the most popular content.

#2 Promotional video explaining what the service is. The purpose of having a video on the landing page is to present it in a catchy way that could attract more users to the platform.

#3 This section contains the benefits of the service. The aim is to create clear expectations about the service for entrepreneurs.

#4 Sign up form. The sign up process would only require name, email and password.

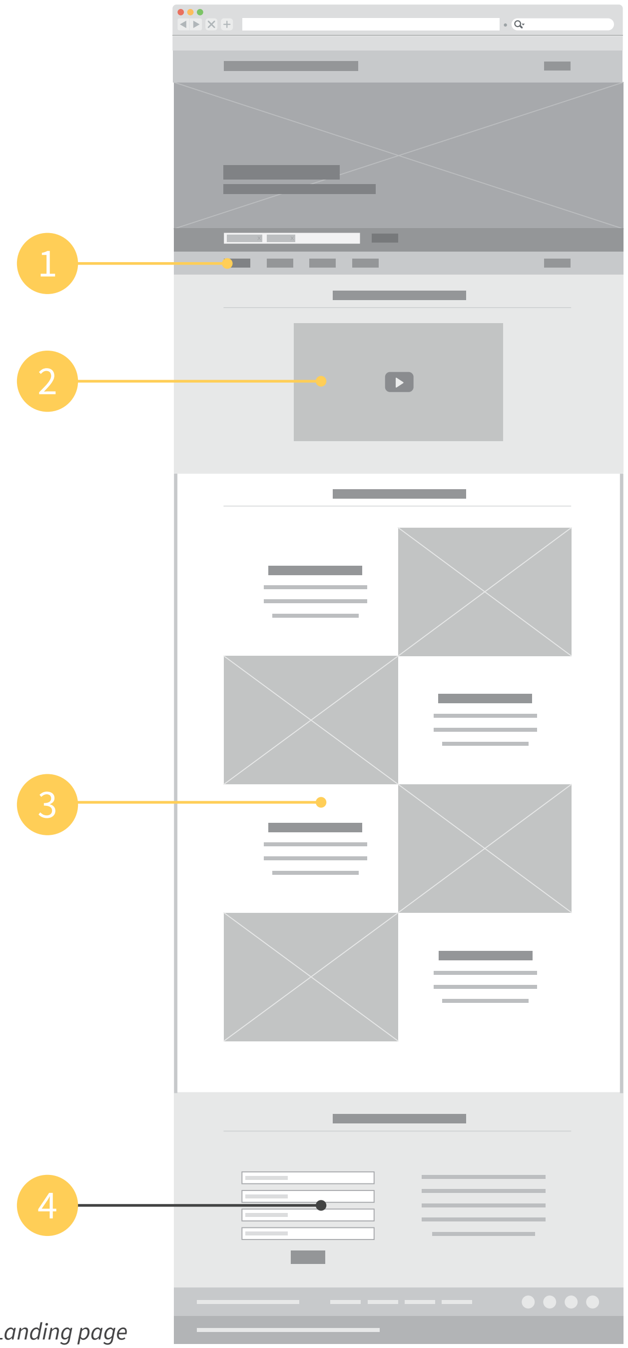


Fig 33. Landing page

USE CASE 2

REGISTERED USERS

DESCRIPTION
As opposed to the previous use case, registered users will have full access to the content on the platform. This use case does not cover any particular interaction with the platform, but it is meant to devise what members of the service see on the platform once they log in.

USER INTERACTIONS
-Log in
-Browse curated content

DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS
Figure 34 illustrates the screen that the users will see right after they log in.

#1 The search function allows users to find specific information and refine the content they see. This function will be available in all the screens of the interface.

#2 This section comprises a collection of different types of information (discussions, events and people) who could be of relevance to the user. This content is curated according to their profile preferences and interactions (see explanation on pages 59 and 63).

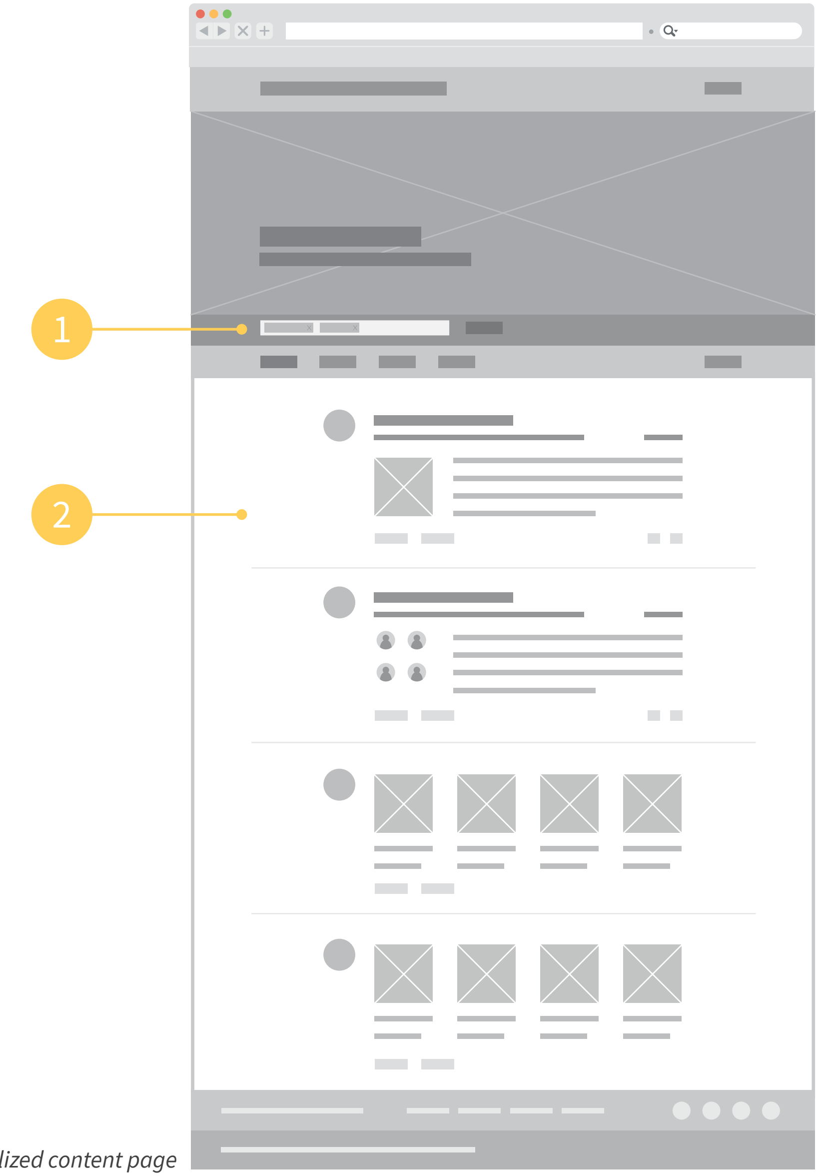


Fig 34. Personalized content page

USE CASE 3

DISCUSSIONS

DESCRIPTION
Overview of the existing discussions on the platform (figure 35).

USER INTERACTIONS
-Select category
-Browse through discussions
-Participate in existing discussions
-Create new discussions

DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS
#1 Filters discussions by category.

#2 Indicates which category the discussion belongs to.

#3 Title of the discussion and keywords (tags) associated with it.

#4 Add a new discussion.

#5 Users involved in a discussion. This indicates who the owner of the discussion is (the one who created it), and who are the users who have participated.

#6 Shows the number of replies in the discussion.

#7 Shows the number of views of the discussion.

Fig 35. Discussions page

USE CASE 4

PEOPLE

DESCRIPTION

The purpose of this section is to stimulate direct interactions between members of the community.

USER INTERACTIONS

-View user profiles
-View company profiles
-Send direct messages

DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

This section (figure 36) presents a list of fellow entrepreneurs and experts who could be of interest for the user to connect with.

#1 User, with picture if uploaded to their profiles. Here it will also be shown the points and badges that every user has (see page 57).

#2 Description of the user. This could be a short description written on their profile, or include keywords according to their expertise and interests.

#3 Change into location-based format. See page 70.

#4 Information about the company that each entrepreneur owns.

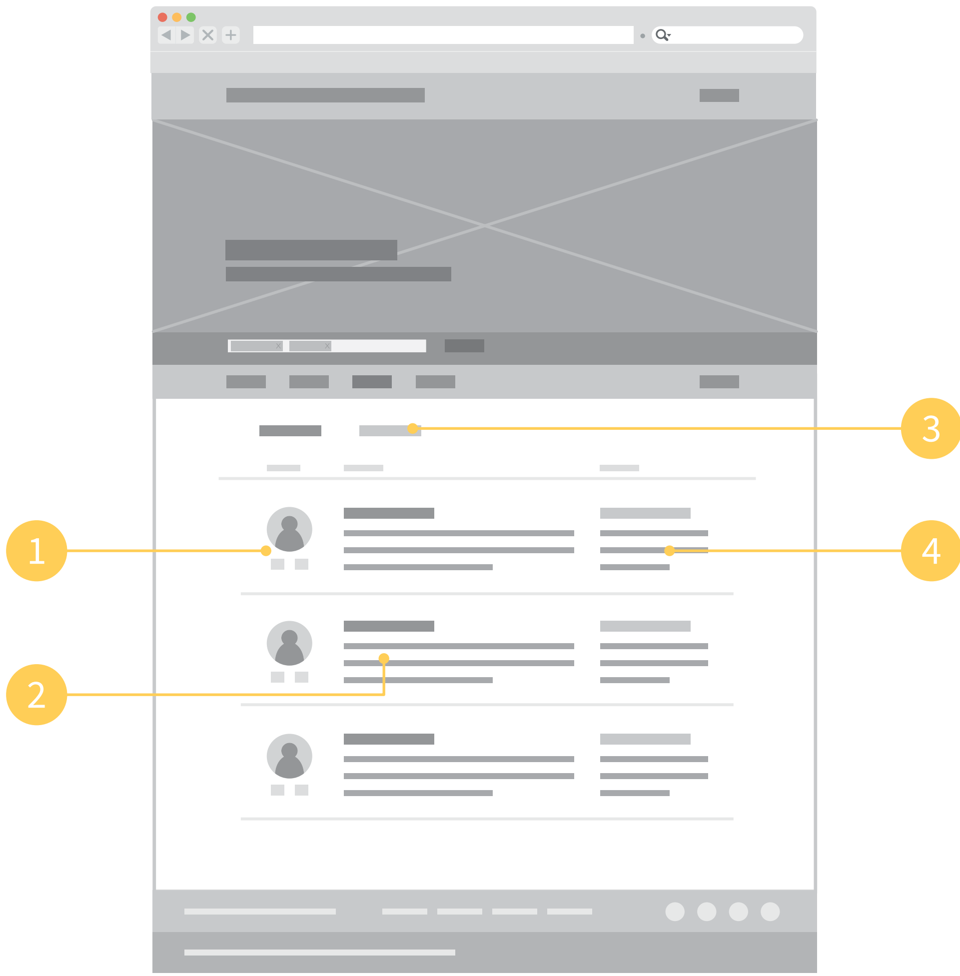


Fig 36. Page displaying other users and their businesses

USE CASE 5

EVENTS

DESCRIPTION

This page shows upcoming events that could be of relevance for the user.

USER INTERACTIONS

-Browse through upcoming events
-Sign up for events

DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

#1 Date and location of the event.

#2 Name and description of the event, and keywords (tags) associated with it.

#3 Change into location-based format. See page 70.

#4 Organizer(s) of the event.

#5 Because some entrepreneurs might attend an event based on who else is attending (and how relevant this people could be for them) and not give so much relevance to the kind of event, this section shows which members of the community have signed up for the event (both entrepreneurs and experts).

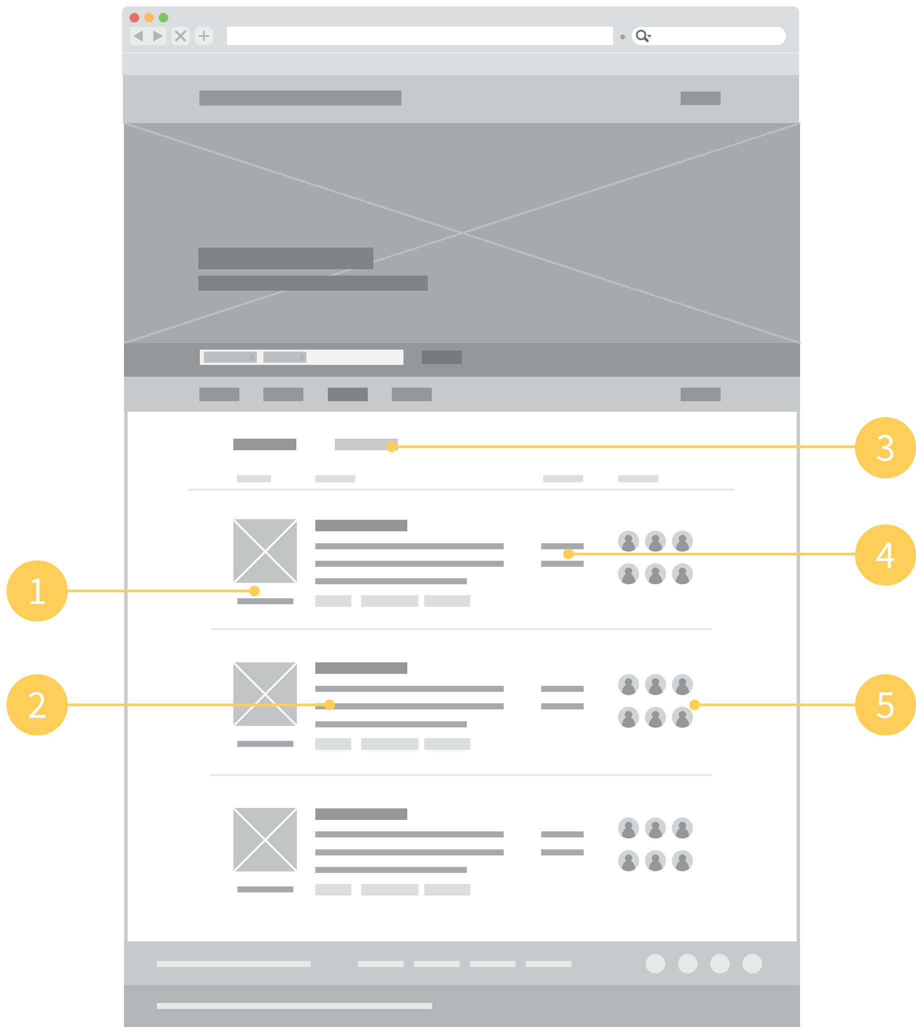


Fig 37. List of upcoming events

ADDITION TO USE CASES 4 & 5

LOCATION

DESCRIPTION
Because the service is based in a specific region, the location of other entrepreneurs, businesses and events has also a special relevance. Therefore, users should be able to navigate this content based on their location (if specified).

USER INTERACTIONS
-Find people, businesses and events based on their location

DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS
Figure 38 shows how the use cases 4 & 5 could be presented in the form of a map. Users could navigate through the map and specify a certain location.

#1 Companies and events placed on the map.

#2 Description with details of the company or the event. This should contain the same information that is explained on use cases 4 & 5.

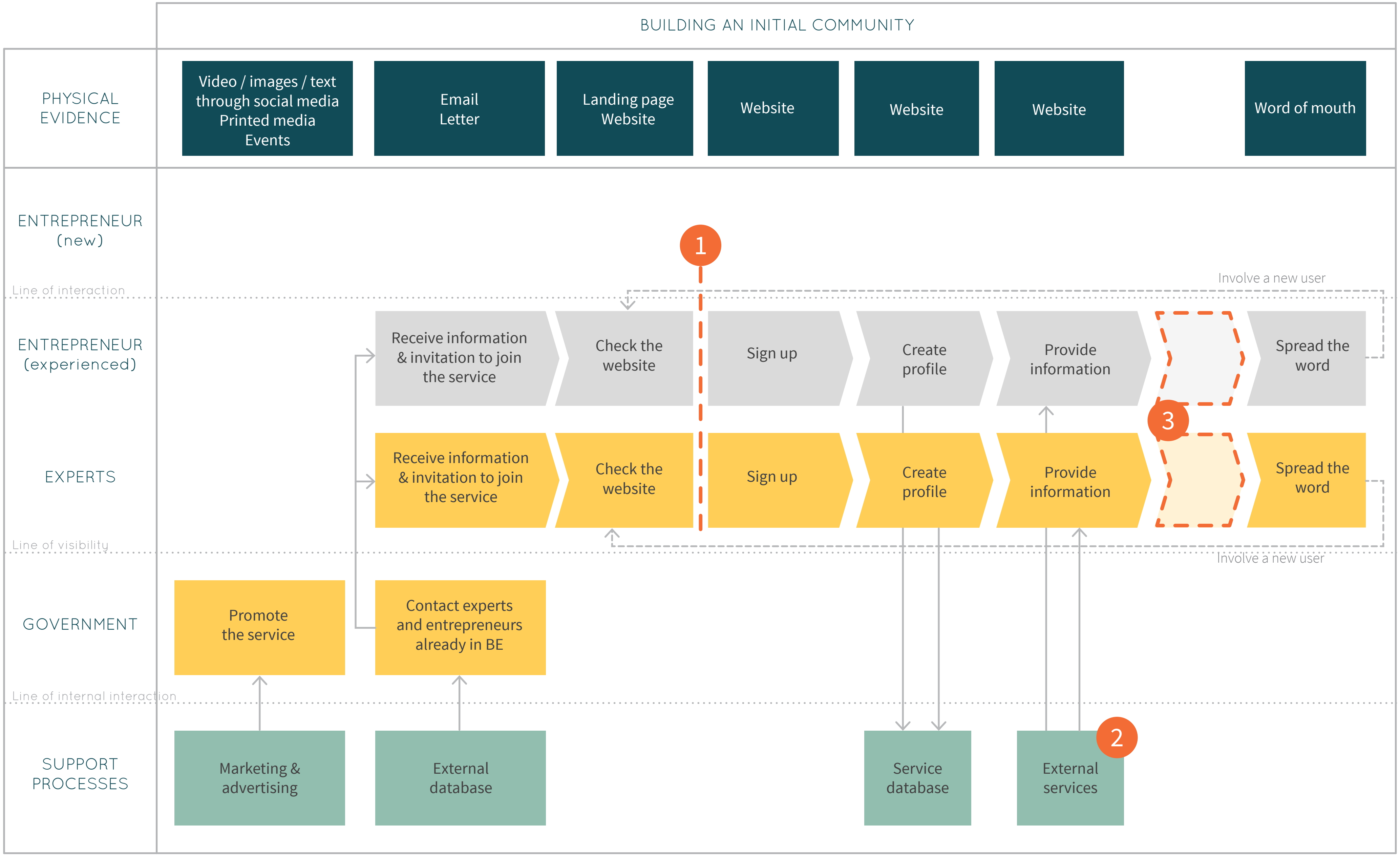
Fig 38. Location-based information

SERVICE BLUEPRINT

DEFINING THE SERVICE ENCOUNTER

Corresponding to the third level of the model presented by Patrício et al. (2011) on page 51, it was time to move into the design of the service encounter. The requirements established with the design of the wireframes and the previous analyses served as a starting point to define the rest of the elements of the service. The following service blueprint presents the concept incorporating the flow of interactions between the different actors (Stickdorn & Schneider, 2011).

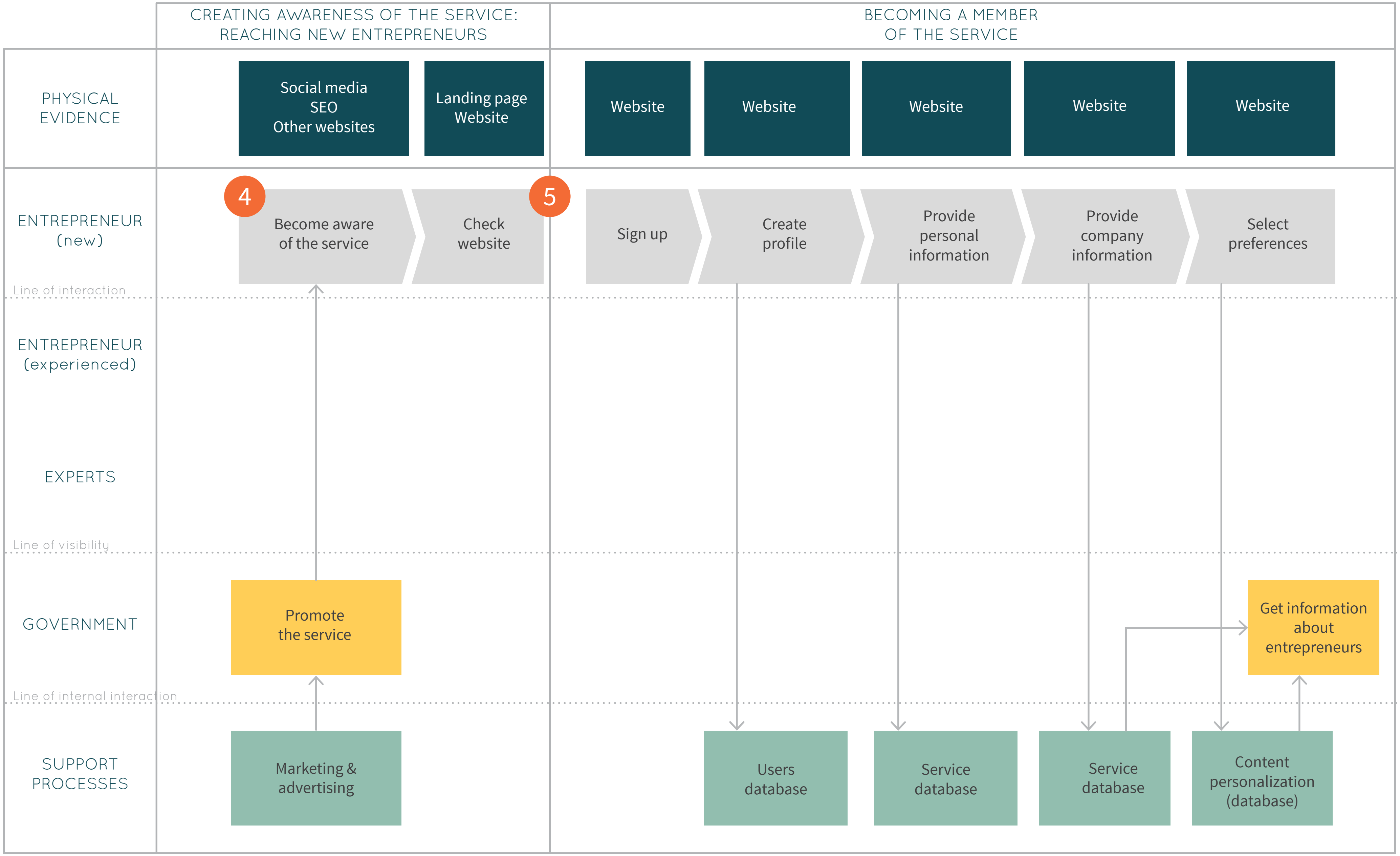
The service blueprint has also been devided in use cases. Some of them are similar to the ones described in the previous section, but some others differ or have a different approach. This is because the blueprint includes more actors than just the end-users. The use cases described in the blueprint are defined as follows:
-Building an initial community
-Creating awareness of the service: reaching new entrepreneurs + Becoming a member of the service
-Creating and participating in discussions
-Searching and contacting other users
-Participating in events



1 Decision point. New users (both entrepreneurs and experts) will only join the service if they see benefits in it. Therefore, it is crucial that the landing page showcases the advantages of the service for them in a clear and appealing format.

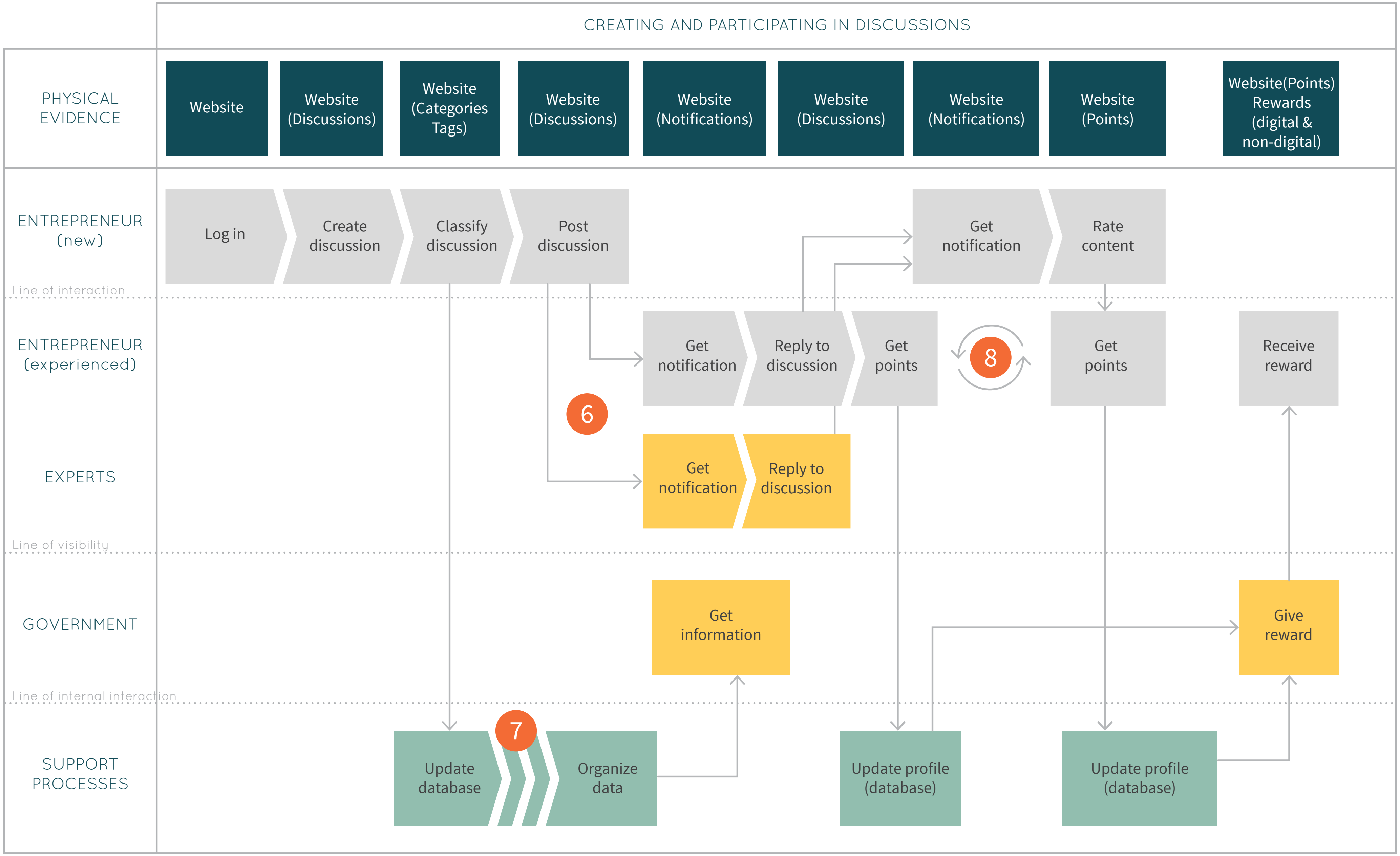
2 Users could link their profiles to external parties such as LinkedIn or other social media services.

3 This section includes the actual use of the service, which is composed by different use cases, explained in the following pages.



4 Potential entrepreneurs will also become aware of the service through third parties. For example, because it is mentioned in other websites or social media by other entrepreneurs.

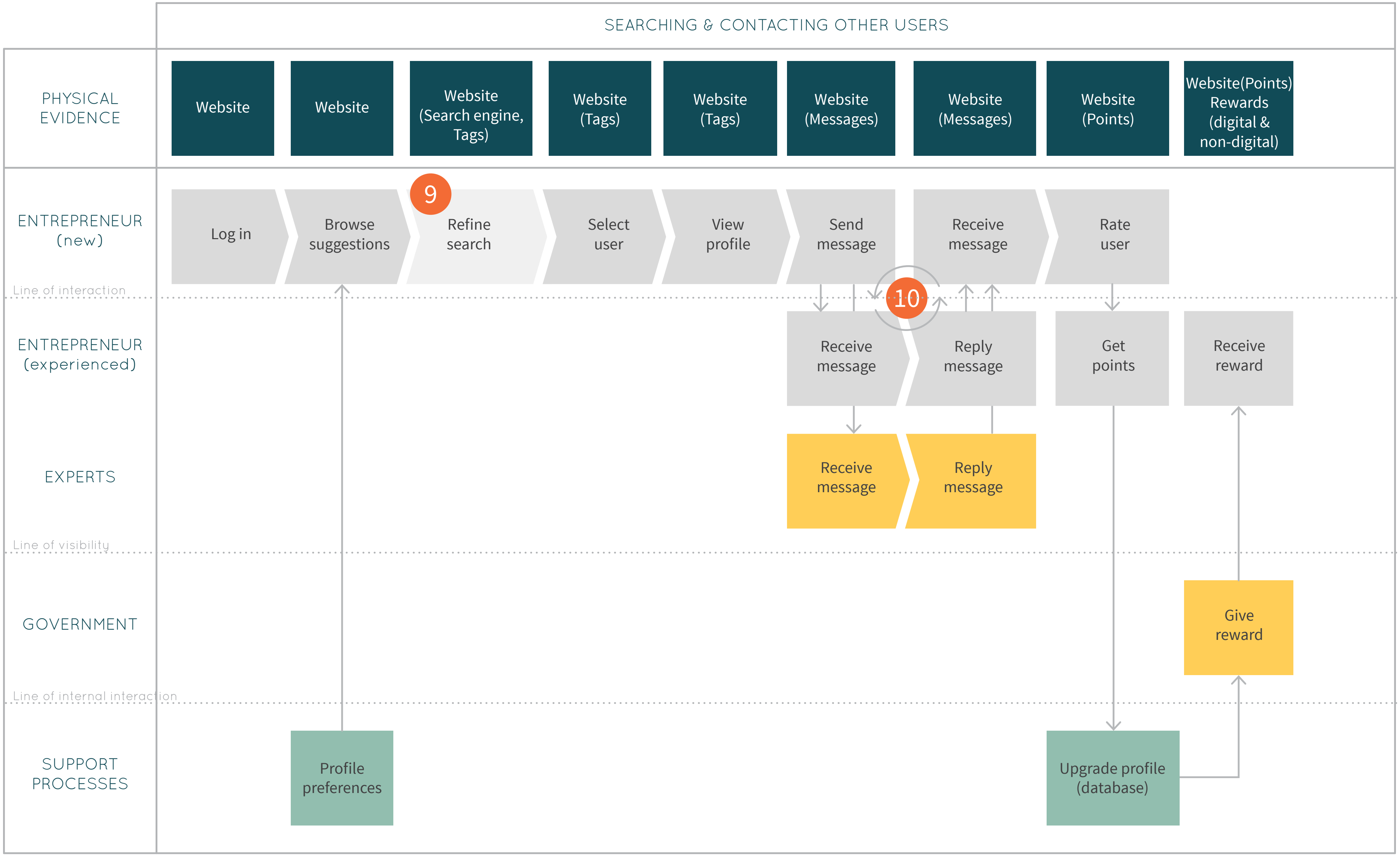
5 Decision point. Entrepreneurs need to know beforehand what this service can provide them with, and they need to see an added value in joining the service.



6 Users will receive notifications when other users post something that matches their preferences.

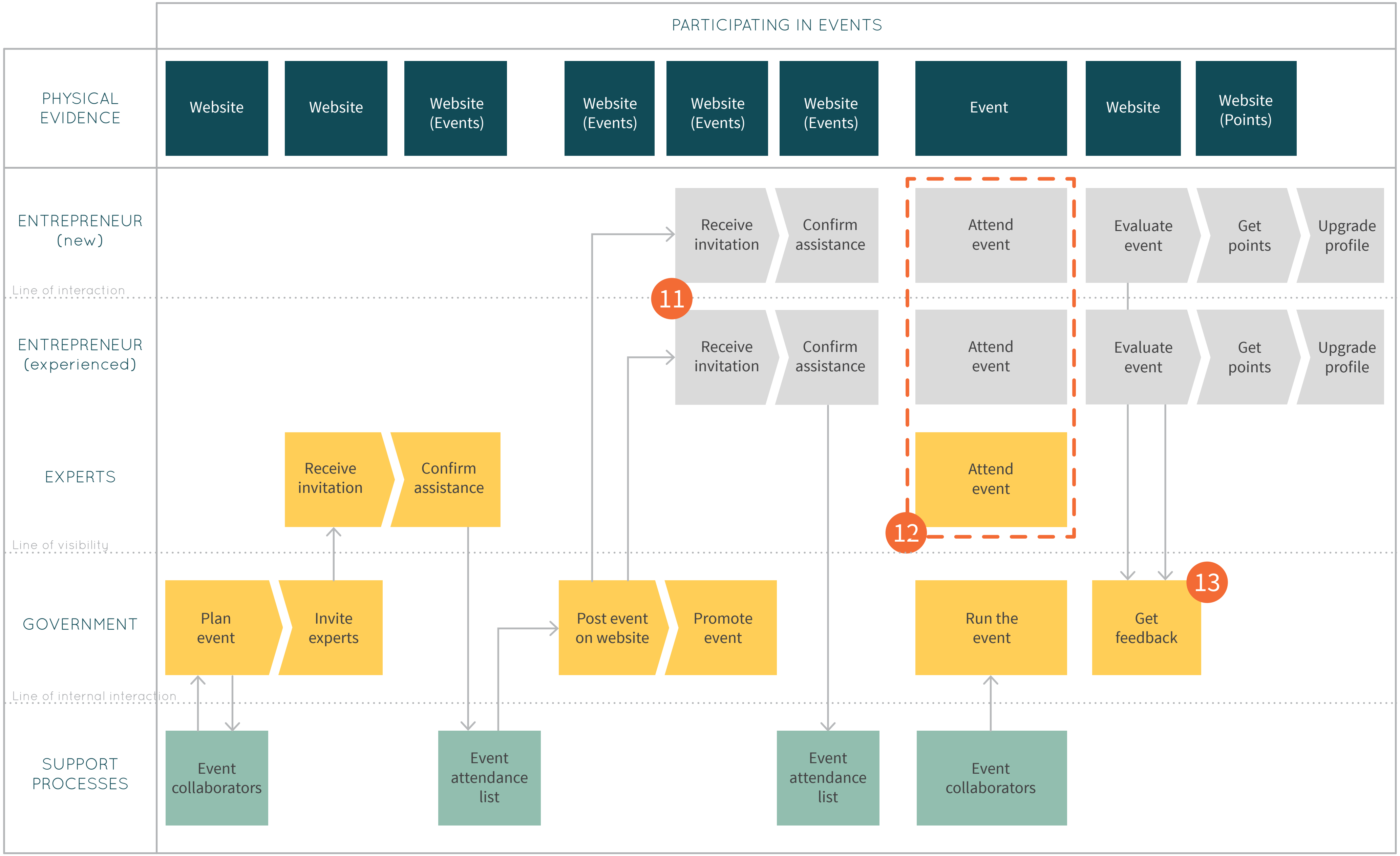
7 Eventually, the information stored in the system will inform the government about the challenges and discussions that are more relevant for entrepreneurs. This information should be presented in a readable, workable way.

8 Iteration. Users can reply to a discussion many times, and each reply can also be rated individually.



9 The content shown for each user is based on the preferences specified on their profile. If desired, the results can still be refined by using keywords (tags).

10 Messages are sent through the platform, and they are meant to spark interaction between entrepreneurs.



11 Users get automatically invited to events that might be relevant for them (based on their preferences). It should also be possible to sign up for events without receiving an invitation.

12 Networking during the event with other entrepreneurs and experts.

13 After the events, the government can get feedback from the attendees, and use it to improve and organize future events.

SERVICE BLUEPRINT

CONSIDERATIONS

The development of the blueprint helped focus on some details that had not been discussed yet:

THE SERVICE PROVIDER

The government is the service provider. However, no further specifications had been described, nor it had been defined yet whether this would be done by one particular person within the government, or by a specific department of their organization. There would be -at least- one person needed to be responsible for updating the content on the platform: promoting events, inviting experts, etc. This role could involve tasks such as those of a community manager, or could be done by somebody with a different title. Besides that, it would be needed to consider whether this person responsible for the platform should also be in charge of overseeing the content that users provide. In that case, that person would act as a community moderator, and some of his or her responsibilities could also include participating in some of the discussions, supervising the tags or moving discussions from one category to another to keep topics organized, and other decisions regarding content. All these suggestions should be considered when drafting a business plan for the service.

NOTIFICATIONS

Entrepreneurs should automatically receive updates of content that is interesting for them, as well as invitations for events. They should be notified without having to search for the content themselves. However, notifications can be annoying if they are received too often or if they link to content that users find irrelevant. This emphasizes one more time the relevance of curated content and individual preferences on the platform; and also points out that users should also be able to control these notifications and deactivate them if desired.

INFORMATION FOR THE GOVERNMENT

One of the benefits of the service for the government is getting information on which challenges foreign entrepreneurs face. It has not been decided how this information would be presented, but one suggestion is in the format of a report and analytics. By highlighting which topics are the most discussed or which areas arose more interest and by tracking the activity on the platform, the government could spot possible points of improvement for their services.

INTERFACE DESIGN

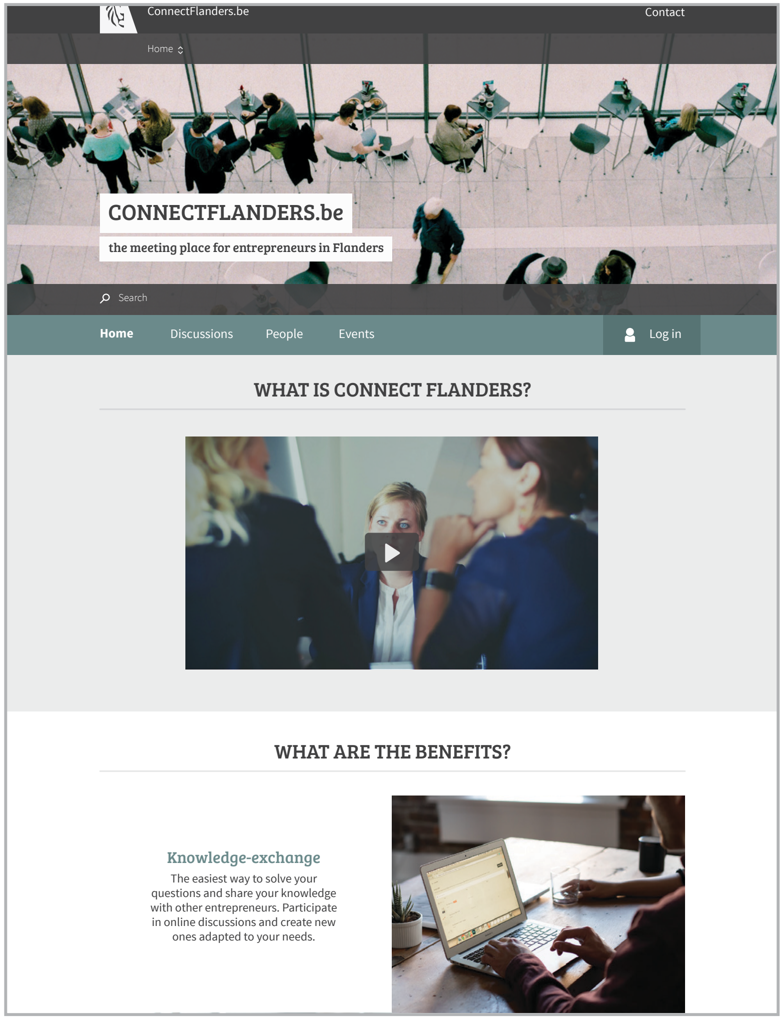


Fig 39. Landing page

INTERFACE DESIGN

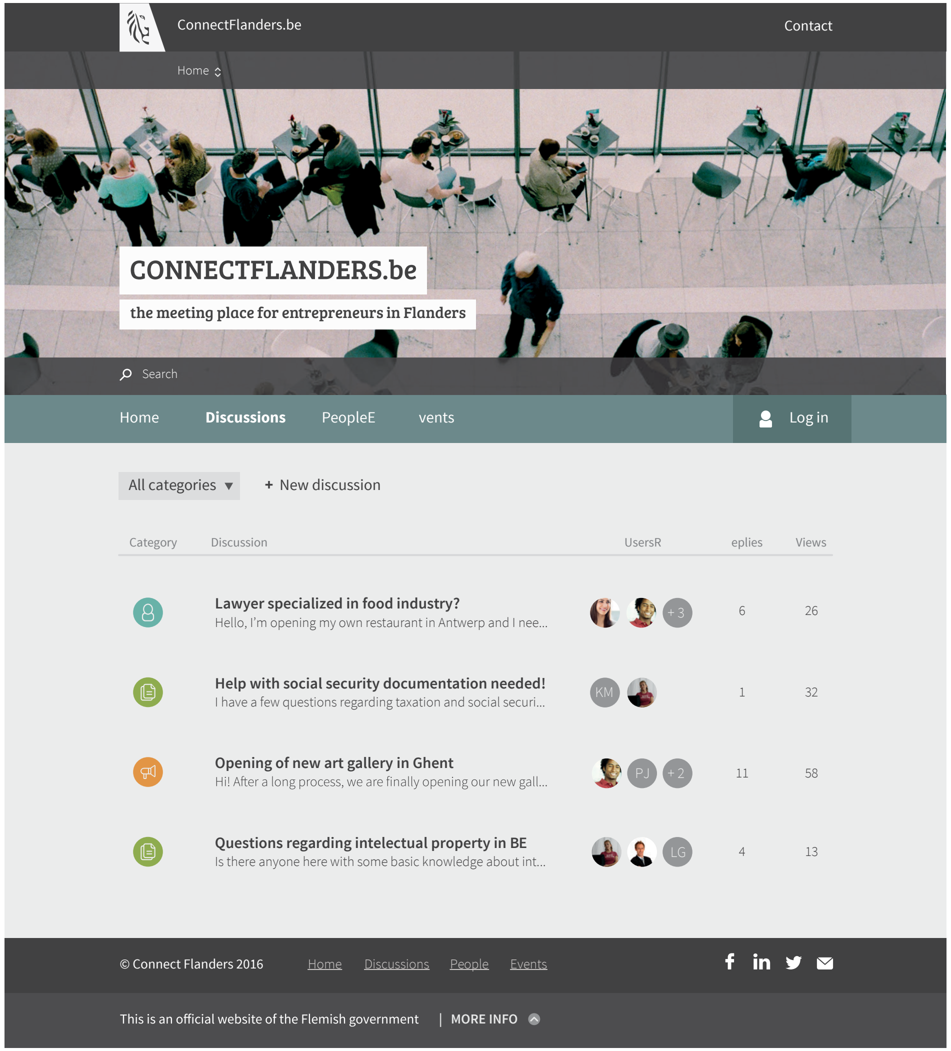


Fig 40. Discussions overview

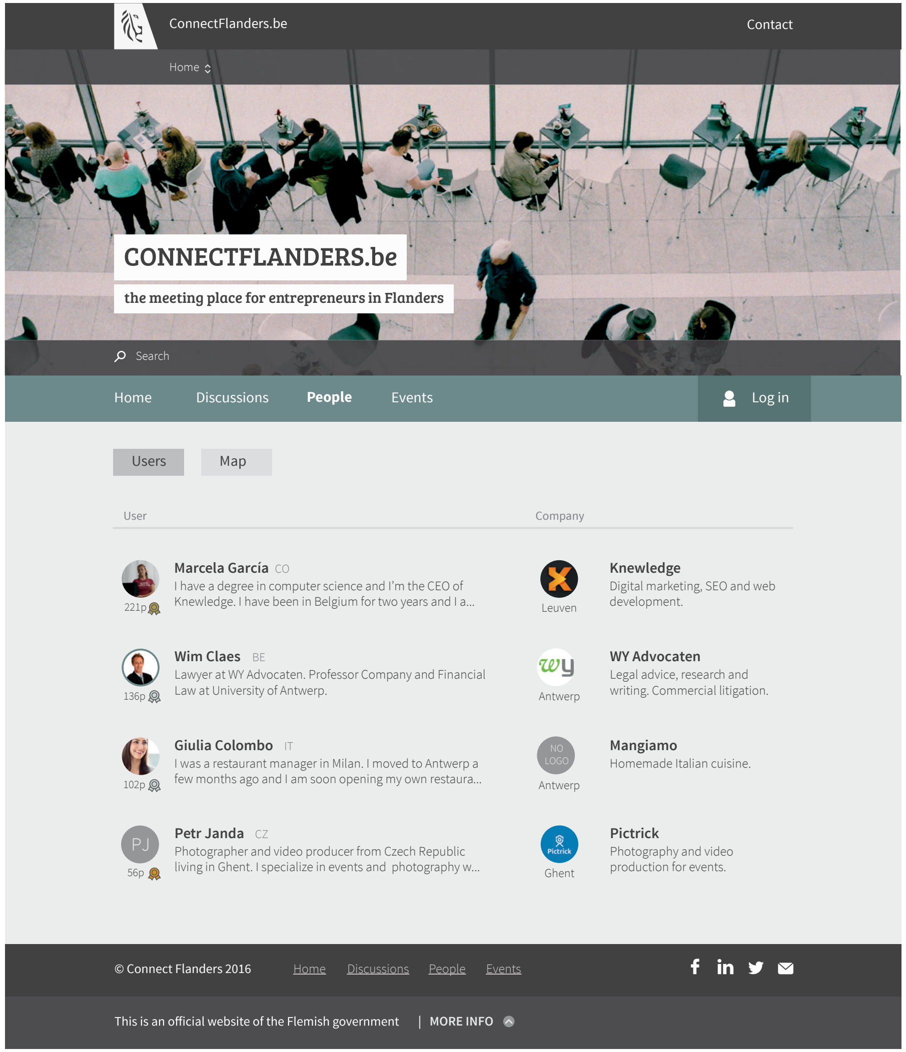


Fig 41. Users overview

INTERFACE DESIGN

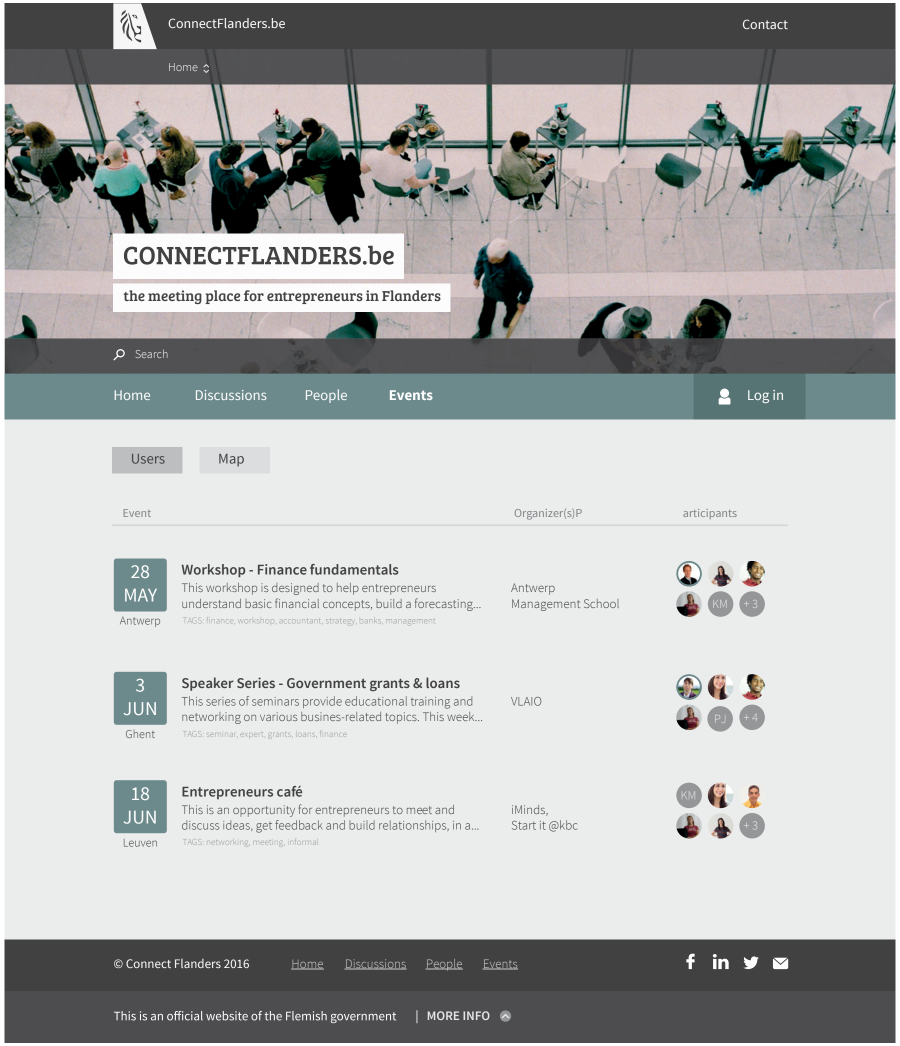


Fig 42. Events overview

MAKING THINGS TANGIBLE

These mock-ups of the interface were created to visualize how the service could be presented. This, first of all, was merely intended with communication purposes. Second, it contributed to define the last details of the service.

THE NAME

Up to this point, I had been referring to the concept as "*the service*" or "*the solution*". The creation of a mock-up of the interface made me choose a name for it. It was decided to use "*Connect Flanders*" as the name for the service. The first word, "*connect*" refers to the networking challenge that has been analyzed throughout the project and implies the action of linking two different things (or two different people). Moreover, the word "*connect*" also means to get along well with someone, which in this case can be associated to a positive atmosphere within the entrepreneurial community. The second word, "*Flanders*", obviously refers to the physical location where the service is based.

THE LOOK-AND-FEEL

The style of the design of the interface was inspired by the official websites of the Flemish government. The intention was to make this mock-up look a bit similar to their websites, so it would be easier to envision it as a service provided by VLAIO.

FEEDBACK SESSION

FEEDBACK SESSION

At the end of the project, I tried to organize another meeting with the entrepreneurs that were interviewed during the research phase. The intention was to present the solution and see if they could understand and relate to it. Unfortunately, it was impossible to find a suitable moment to do this, and I was only able to schedule a meeting with one of the interviewees.

The purpose of this small meeting was, therefore, to get some feedback on the concept. In order to do so, I made a presentation summarizing the outcome of the research and how the solution had been created. Besides that, and although the emphasis of this session was not on getting feedback about the usability of the interface, we used the mockup of the website to talk about the platform.

The entrepreneur was overall positive about the concept. She pointed out the need for a digital space to address entrepreneurship topics and was enthusiastic about the idea that this could be done in a local-regional level.

She could relate to the concept, and she mentioned that, when she first arrived to Belgium, she used one of the Facebook groups for expats to ask for specific information (see also page 82). This validates the fact that people seek advice in other like-minded people, even if they do not know each other.

As part of the feedback session, I had prepared some cards to discuss the notifications in the platform (figure 43). These included invitations to events, messages and discussions that other users had posted. I wanted to see how the entrepreneur reacted to these messages, and whether she would be willing to interact with them. She showed more interest in the events than in the messages or the discussions, as she felt like she was receiving a special treatment by being invited by the government. She was willing to reply to other entrepreneurs' messages, but she was also cautious about who the messages came from. For example, one of the messages contained little information about the sender but asked for very specific information. The entrepreneur said that she would be willing to answer those questions provided that she can identify the other person first. This remark reinforces the necessity to build trust on such a platform.

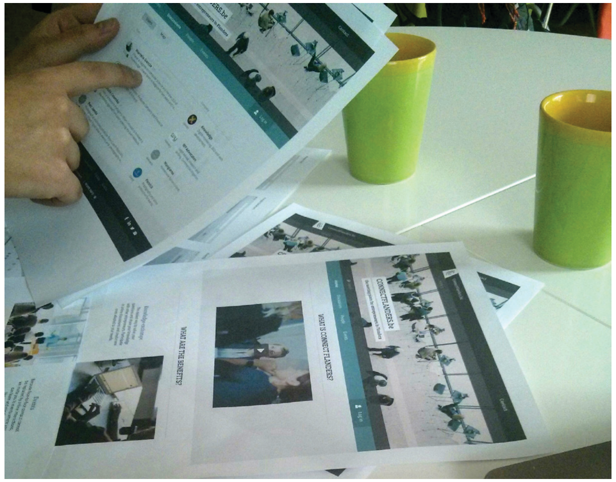


Fig 43. Discussing the service

FEEDBACK SESSION

FEEDBACK SESSION

After our meeting, I went to check the Facebook group for expats that the entrepreneur had mentioned, to see how the users interacted with each other. It seemed like a highly active community of expats in Ghent, although when I had navigated through old posts for a while I noticed that it was often the same people answering other people's questions (which again, relates to the participation inequality explained on page 58). In this group, people asked advice on all sorts of topics (from where to find dancing classes to where to buy special ingredients for a recipe), and I found some sporadic examples related to entrepreneurship (figure 44). The response rate to this posts, however, was not very high compared to the rest of the posts in the group. This, to some extent, validates the need of a specific channel to talk about topics related to business and entrepreneurship.

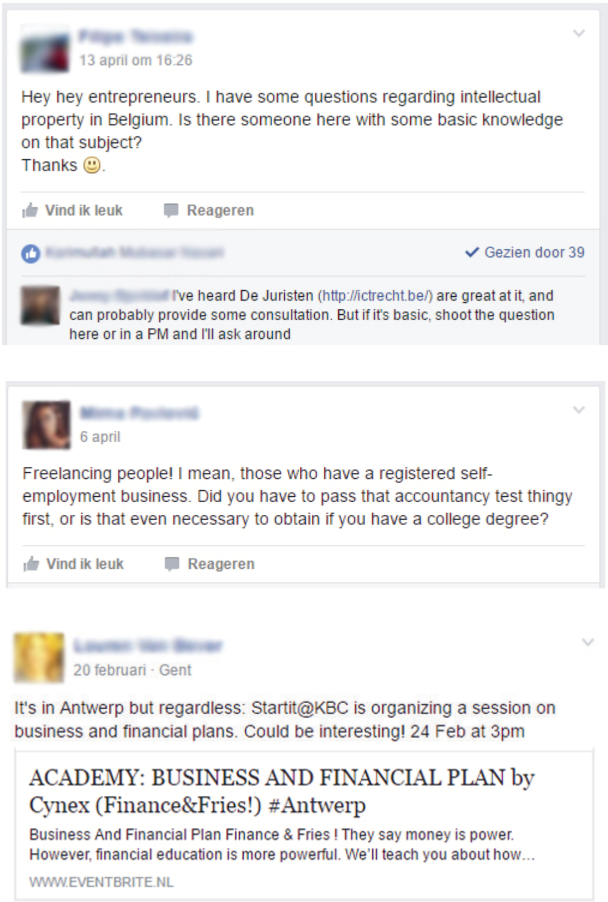


Fig 44. Entrepreneurship-related examples found on Facebook

FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS & SUGGESTIONS

In this section some considerations that would further define the concept are presented.

First, the financial aspects of the service have not been included in the scope of this project. Therefore, a financial analysis would be needed in order to write a business plan. This would be necessary to determine the economic feasibility of the service.

Second, the development of the concept has been influenced by input from the entrepreneurs and some governmental agencies. Due to accessibility reasons, this input was mainly gathered during early stages of the process. By the time when this report was delivered, it had not been possible to realize more iterations neither with the entrepreneurs nor with the government, to test the solution and further work on its development. In case that the service were to be implemented, more prototyping and testing sessions would be required.

Some suggestions to achieve this are:

- Creating an experience prototyping (Buchenau and Fulton Suri, 2000), which could be done by, for example, organizing one of the events announced on the platform. This would focus on aspects such as how the entrepreneurs react to an event invitation, or how they provide feedback after the events.
- Usability testing on the platform interface
- Testing how the service would be launched and how it would reach the initial members of the community. This could be done by building and launching the landing page online, in order to test how it could catch entrepreneurs' attention or whether they would sign up for the service.

Third, a more in-depth technical analysis. Because the main touchpoint of the service is the digital platform and the relevance of the organization of the information, technical details would need to be further defined. These would include the selection of specific technologies for implementation (and its previous research), how the information would be stored on the database and how all the new content on the platform would be managed.

REFLECTIONS

ITERATIVE SERVICE DESIGN

FROM EXPERIENCE TO CONCEPT

This project was approached through an iterative design process. That means that the design challenge has incrementally evolved towards a solution. Initially inspired by the multi-level service design model presented on page 51 (Patrício et al., 2011), specific service design tools were selected to build on the service experience. Figure 45 represents an overview of the tools and methods that were used during this process (yellow circles), and how each one of them added new details to the service (blue circles).

This transition from experience to concept was continuously going back and forth between inputs and outputs, between research and development. This means that the ideas that emerged from data and analysis evolved into new ideas that, in turn, needed to be concluded with new data. Therefore, the service experience went through several loops and was reinforced by research on specific topics where needed. Furthermore, there were internal iterations within every service design tool used: a first version was initially created as a draft, and several changes were later implemented until the definitive version was ready. These small iterations created a lot of room for discussion, feedback and critique before the actual output was implemented in the concept. This approach helped to build validity and reliability in both the process and the concept (Morse et al., 2002).

Sarmento and Patrício (2014) argue that the incorporation of customer experience factors can change along the different iterative cycles of service design. In an environment with so many dimensions as it is an online community, this iterative process also helped consider many aspects of the service which were very abstract and, in turn, difficult to design (usability, reliability, trust, motivation, etc.).

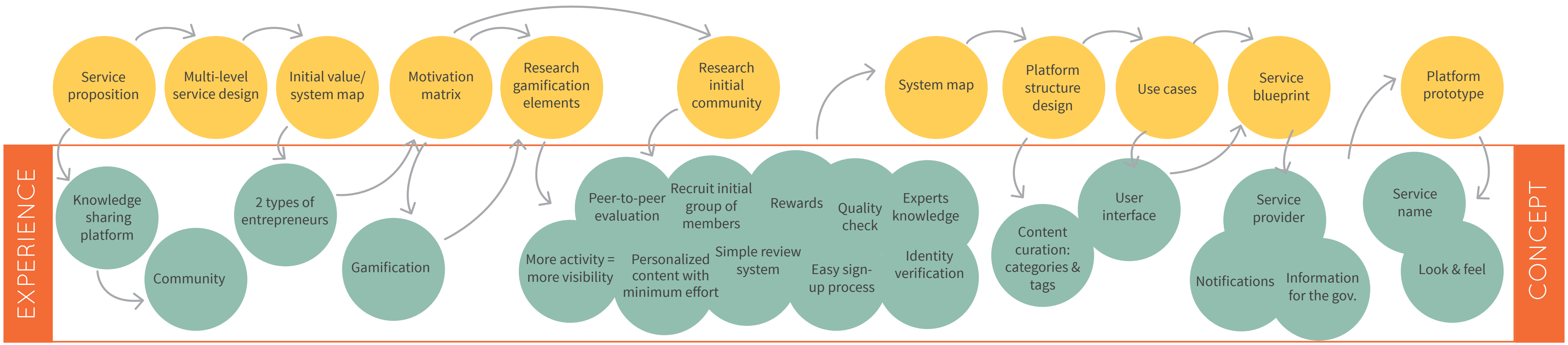


Fig 45. Visualization of the iterations between inputs (yellow circles) and outputs (blue circles) during the design process, and how these gradually transformed the experience into a concept.

PROCESS REFLECTIONS

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Although I consider that I followed the plan that was established at the beginning of the semester, I realized that planning becomes much more difficult when one works independently. When working on a team, planning includes delegating tasks and informing the other team members of their status. The scrum methodology was very interesting to integrate in this project, but I experienced that planning the design sprints works better in a team. However, by working at the Knight Moves office I joined their daily scrum meeting (a short stand-up meeting where everyone gives a quick status update on what they are working on), which kept me more focused on short-term planning.

WORKING INDEPENDENTLY

Working independently was undoubtedly the biggest challenge experienced during the semester. Not only for the amount of work and effort that such a project comprises, which when working on a group is splitted amongst the team members, but also for taking full responsibility for the project. When working independently one is accountable for every decision taken during the project, and as such, must be able to argue and defend it. Especially during the moments when decisions needed to be taken, working independently was seen as a disadvantage. Although Knight Moves regularly supervised the process, I experienced how taking decisions is easier when done with someone else who is also fully immersed in the project. On the other hand, working independently also had a positive turn. During this semester I gained more confidence as a service designer. The fact that I was responsible for the entire project made me stay more observant and be more critical throughout the entire process.

COLLABORATING WITH KNIGHT MOVES

As explained at the beginning of the report, the role of Knight Moves within this project was supervising and guiding the project. Although they did not actively work on this project, their support and feedback were incredibly valuable during the semester. I believe that one of the interesting outcomes of this collaboration was the exchange of value in both directions: I gained new approaches to service design, but also had the opportunity to bring in the methodology that we had been taught during previous semesters of the master.

PROCESS REFLECTIONS

INVOLVING STAKEHOLDERS

Involving stakeholders during the process was not an easy task. First of all, get in contact with the target group was a big challenge, as I myself was also new in the city and did not have a big network to ask. Second, it was not possible to plan meetings with this group and the contact persons at the government every time that the project required it. This was also a challenge I had to overcome, especially working under a tight deadline. Had this been possible, there would have been more iterations during the process, which might have influenced the final solution differently.

APPROPRIATING METHODS

One of the charms of service design is the freedom to adapt the methods and tools to every specific project. During this semester, I experimented with different design methodologies and used diverse service design tools with manifold purposes. The development of this project contributed to increase my expertise in utilizing diverse tools to address different situations.

NARROWING DOWN

Starting from such a broad topic as “foreign entrepreneurs in Flanders” implied that a problem area needed to be defined to focus on during the rest of the semester. Through desk research and the interviews I started exploring the topic, and which began with a complexity problem related to the Belgian fragmentation evolved into the networking issue. I consider that I used appropriate methods that made this focus evolve into that direction, but I also reflect that finding this direction was sometimes challenging. This is where the input from other sources became more relevant, such as the previous project that Knight Moves did with the government, the service design workshop or even the availability of the focus group. These external factors contributed to define the form that the project was taking, which could have perhaps been different without this additional information.

FINAL REMARKS

This project was overall a learning experience. Compared to the previous semesters of the Service Systems Design master, it was different in the sense that there was more room for experimenting and venture into the service design field more independently, which at the same time meant more responsibilities. Comparing the learning goals established at the beginning of the semester with the final outcome and reflections on the process, I positively believe that I did meet these goals by the end of the semester: throughout the process I reinforced my service design skill set, gained competences and knowledge in evaluating and addressing design challenges, as well as in analyzing and communicating insights, and learnt to synthesize all of these into the development of a design solution.

GLOSSARY

GLOSSARY

Business counter
(in Dutch: *ondernemingslokket*)
A business counter (also called one-stop shop) is a centralized point of contact for businesses. It performs a number of tasks in which entrepreneurs must get in contact with different bodies. Some of these operations are compulsory for every new company, but some of the business counters can also offer additional services. In Belgium there are 8 different business counters, with several offices spread over the entire country (Belgian Federal Government, 2013).

Enterprise number
(in Dutch: *ondernemingsnummer*)
Businesses have their unique enterprise number as a means of identification. This number is registered at a business counter and it is used in exchanges of information between businesses and the public authorities and in electronic data transfers in the new context of e-government. (Chancellery of the Prime Minister, 2014).

FIT - Flanders Investment & Trade
FIT is one of the organizations of the Flemish Government. It helps Flemish companies expand their business abroad and assists foreign companies in facilitating investment projects in Flanders (Flanders Investment & Trade, 2016).

PSC - Point of Single Contact
PSCs are online e-government portals that allow you to find out about the rules, regulations and formalities that apply to service activities, and complete the administrative procedures online (by submitting the necessary application forms and supporting documents etc. electronically) (European Commission, 2013)

VOKA - Flanders' Chamber of Commerce and Industry
(in Dutch: *Vlaams netwerk van ondernemingen*)
Voka is the most representative employers' organization in Flanders. It represents over 18.000 companies in Flanders and Brussels, and it collaborates with 29 sector associations, which strengthens the field of employers' organizations even more (Voka, [no date]).

UNIZO - Union of Self-Employed Entrepreneurs
(in Dutch: Unie van Zelfstandige Ondernemers)
UNIZO is an organization that supports small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) from the local up to the European level. It provides information and advice to its members and stimulates networking both within Belgium as with foreign companies (UNIZO, 2016).

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDE
VLAIO

CONTEXT
-What is your role at VLAIO?
-How would you describe the role of VLAIO in the process of setting up a business in Belgium?
-Compared to local entrepreneurs, what do you think are the biggest differences/challenges/ difficulties that foreign entrepreneurs experience? Do you think VLAIO is trying to address those? How
-Does VLAIO offer any specific support to foreign entrepreneurs? And to Belgians going abroad?
-What is the biggest challenge that VLAIO experiments with foreign entrepreneurs?
-How is the communication between VLAIO and the entrepreneurs?
-What is the purpose of the e-loket?
-How is information organized in the e-loket?
-How can foreigners use the e-loket?

-What is the relationship between VLAIO and FIT?
-Why are there two websites for the same purpose?
-Do VLAIO and FIT communicate with each other? How? (channels…)

-What is the relationship between VLAIO and the business counters (ondernemingslokketen)?
-What is the relationship between VLAIO and the point of single contact?
-Do VLAIO and the business counters communicate with each other?

VISION
-Do you think that VLAIO offers enough support to foreign entrepreneurs? Why/how?
-How do you expect that foreign entrepreneurs use your website? Do you think they find it useful?
-How would VLAIO like to be seen by foreign entrepreneurs?

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW GUIDE ENTREPRENEURS

INTRODUCTION
-Could you tell me a bit more about your background?
Where are you from?
What do you do?
How long have you been in Belgium?
-When did you start up your company in Belgium?
-Why did you decide to start up your own business in Belgium?

INFORMATION
-What did you do first when you decided you wanted to start a business in BE?
-Were you aware of what you needed to do?
(If yes, why did you know? If not, how did you know?)
-Did you search for information? If yes, which information? Where did you search? Did you find it?

-do you know the website vlaanderenonderneemt.be?
-do you know FIT?
-do you know business.belgium.be?
-Did you go to an ondernemingsloket (business counter)? Which one? Why?
-Have you used the e-loket?
-Did you notice any difference with your own country? Do you think this would have been easier in your own country?

THE PROCESS
-How would you describe the entire process?
(since you started searching for information until you finally established your company)
-What was the most challenging part in the process?
-What do you think that could have been better?
-After you started your business, did you remain in contact with the ondernemingsloket? (If yes, what for?)
-If you had to give advice to someone who is about to start a business in Flanders, what would it be?