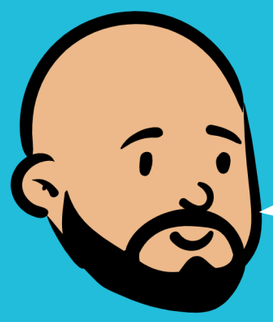
Design Thinking Project Reflection

<u>CandNo.276003</u>



INTRODUCTION

As a group of international students with diverse backgrounds and nationalities, we decided to propose a challenge that would be engaging and connect with us all on a personal level. We could all identify with the challenge of ‘Student Activities’ and found it particularly intriguing and personally relatable. We were all looking for activities to engage in given that we all just started our master’s degree and most of us were new to the UK. Thinking about Student Activities on Campus encouraged us to think deeply about our own context and connect with peers who might also be navigating similar challenges.

We could all relate with the desire to look into the student activities challenge, but all had varied interpretations of the term ‘Activity’, even when we shared similar experiences or environments. This made the challenge more interesting for all of us. For example, for me, activities were athletic in nature and involved some sort of physical movement. On the other hand, my teammates viewed library visits, language cafés, or book clubs as activities. The realization of the wide interpretations of what activities can be and that they encompassed more than just physical or athletic ones, was somewhat new to me. Subconsciously, I seem to have assumed that others would look at activities in a similar way to me.

We had long discussions and, sometimes, comical debates about various interpretations. Then it also dawned on us that we all have somewhat drifted away from our normal activities since starting our master’s program. Our usual hobbies we used to take part in were totally off our radar now. This got us thinking: ‘How could we be more active again?’ and ‘How might we help other students be more active?’

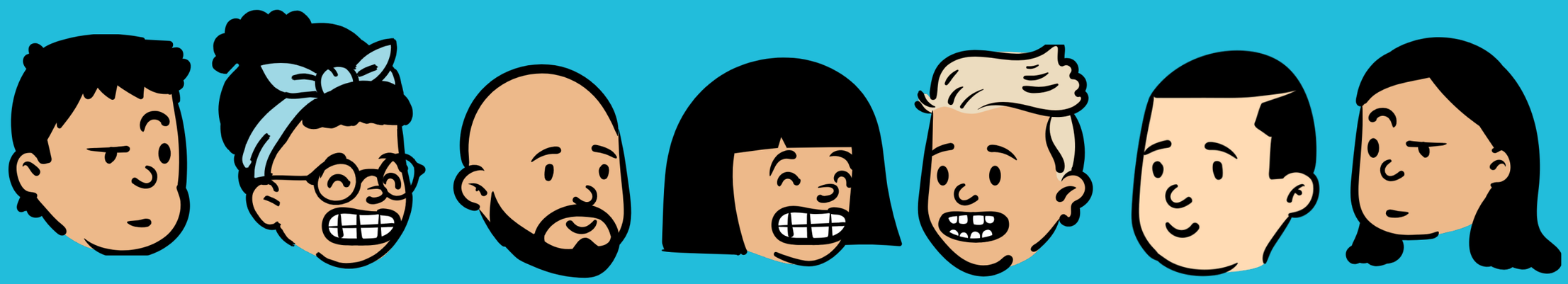
It is like we suddenly saw our own inactivity and thought, why not tackle this for ourselves and for everyone else?

CAMPUS COMPANION
University of Sussex

How can we be more active ?

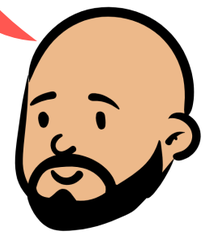
We have all stopped being involved in activities...

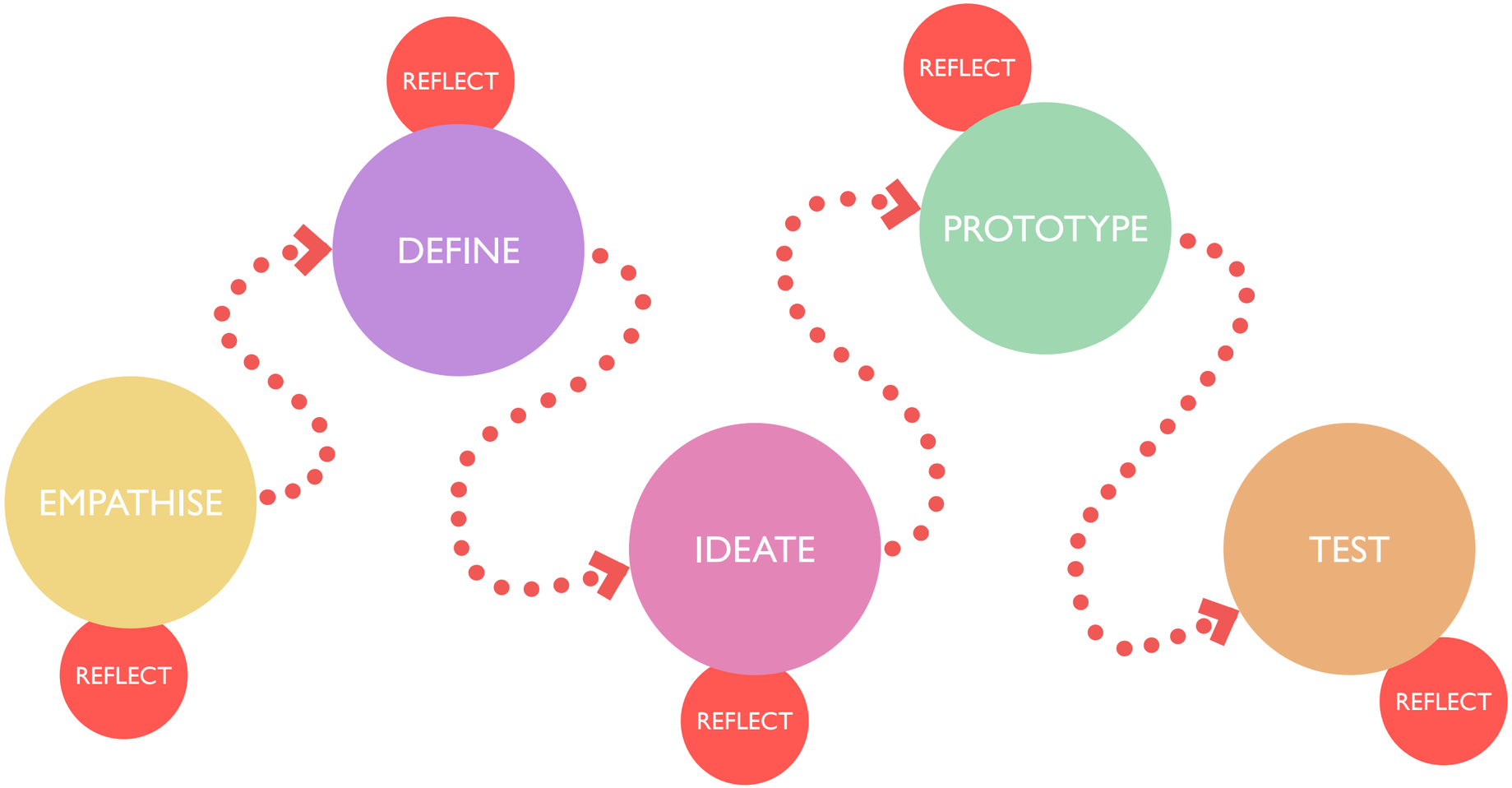
How might we help other students be more active ?



ROAD MAP

This is the road map for our design process and I will reflect throughout the document, sometimes highlighting comments in a little bubble





EMPATHY

Our discussions led us to the first building block of our design thinking journey which is ‘Empathy’; emphasizing the ability the to step into others’ shoes to appreciate their diverse viewpoints (McDonagh, 2006).

Adopting a designer’s perspective, guided by Kouprie and Visser’s empathy framework, our approach began with a Discovery phase, focusing on university students’ needs in activities and mapping stakeholders (Figure 01) for a comprehensive view (2009). In the Immersion phase, we used an 8-question interview (Figure 02) and a parallel Google Forms survey to understand student engagement challenges. The Connection phase was crucial, as although conducting interviews further enhanced our emotional engagement and understanding of the surveyed students’ perspectives, we were ourselves also the students in question and are yet to fully comprehend what it is like for a student looking for activities on campus. Therefore, we were ready for the Detachment phase in order to prepare us to think of a design decison that balances both empathy and practical considerations.

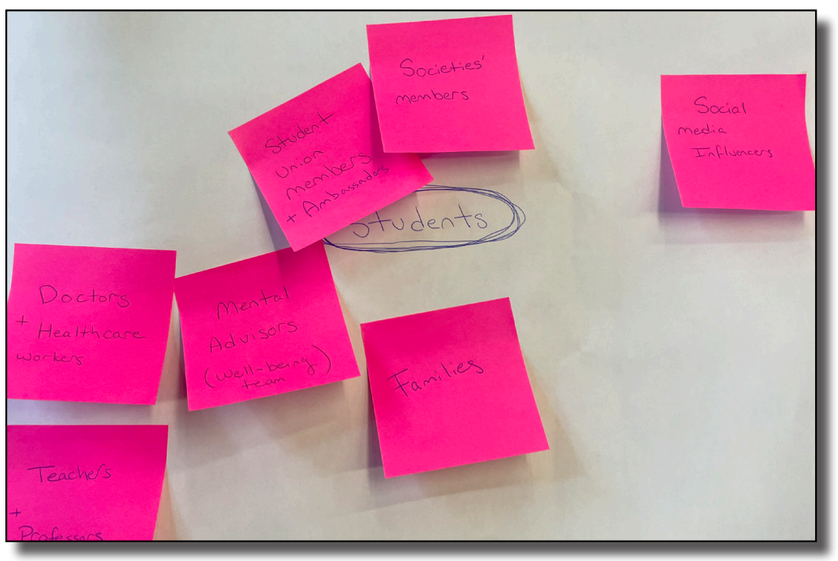


Figure 01: Stakeholder map

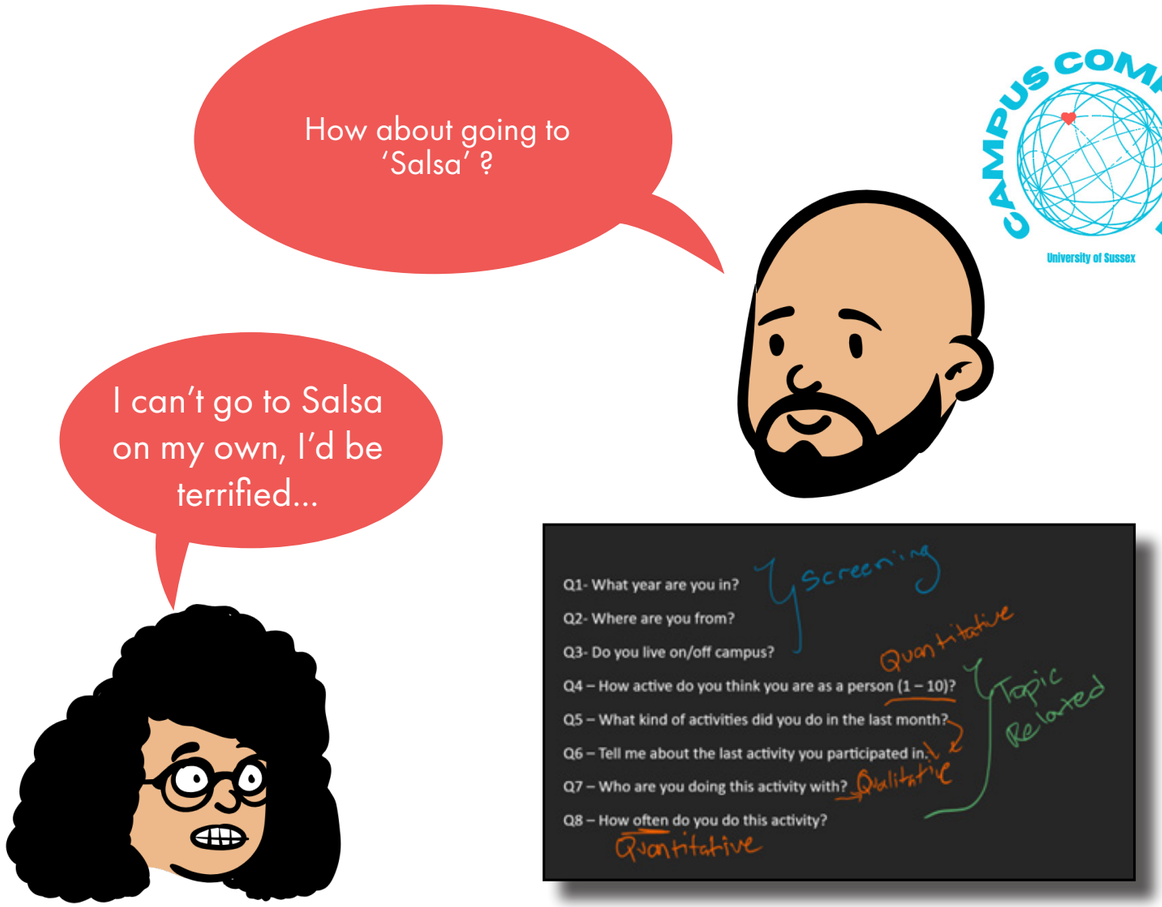


Figure 02: Interview Questions

Conducting Interviews, I realized just how much we can learn more about our challenge from direct conversations. These interviews brought to light the emotions of each participant in a way that our surveys could not quite capture. It’s fascinating how much more you can understand about someone’s feelings when you’re speaking with them face-to-face.

However, I think we might have missed an opportunity to delve deeper. Our interview questions did not probe as deeply as they could have. We were concerned about not overwhelming our interviewees that we might have held back a bit. A tricky balance to strike; ensuring the comfort of the interviewee while trying to get to the heart of their experiences. (Potter & Hepburn, 2012)

The issue of cultural differences and reluctance to join activities was even more significant than I thought. It was quite surprising when, one of our interviewees mentioned feeling hesitant to join an activity on their own. This really highlights how important social connections and cultural considerations are in a university setting.

DEFINE

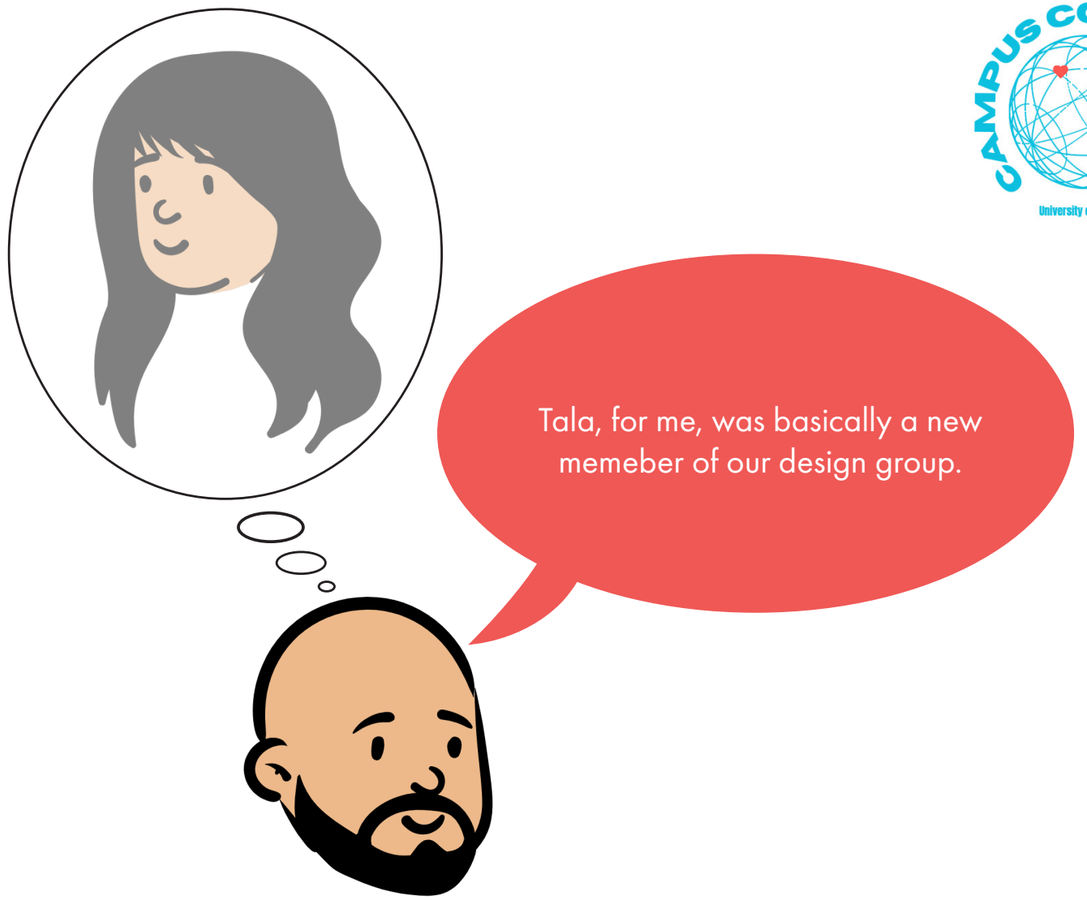
To effectively synthesize and interpret the data collected from our interviews and surveys, we utilized the empathy map as a structured framework (Figure 03). This involved codifing our observations on post-it notes and strategically placing them in corresponding sections of the map, which are ‘think’, ‘feel’, ‘say’, and ‘do’. This visual and interactive method provided us with a clear and organized way to process the hidden emotions and internal mindset of our users. (NN Group, 2018)

Building on our empathy map’s insights and observations, we created a research-based persona to capture our user type. The empathy lecture had me understand that the development of personas was a critical step in our design process as this fictional characted embodied a tangible representation of our target user (Golf-Papez, 2023).

‘Tala’, our persona, was a ground for all our observations, where now we have introduced a human element into our process, basically a new memeber to our design group. ‘ Tala’ helped us to seamlessly start converging the once were individual narratives into a more cohesive understanding of our audience.

Nevertheless, creating the Point of View (POV) Statement after developing the persona was a far more challenging task than I initially anticipated. **Claire, Raghad** and I found ourself wrestling with how to synthesise and articulate a broad enough POV statement for creative flexibility, yet very narrowly-focused to reflect our users’ needs and challenges accurately (Interaction Design Foundation, 2020) It required several iterations and a significant number of feedbacks to get it right.

Now I was prepared to start branching out for ideas for the next phase...



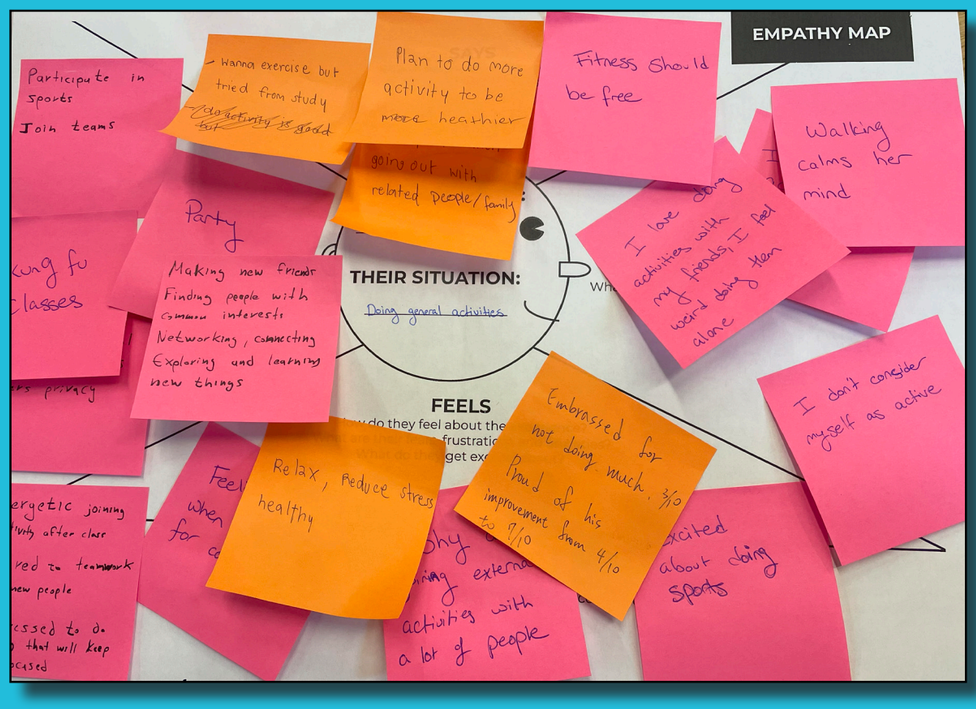


Figure 03: Empathy Map

PERSONA

Name of persona: Tala

Situation they are in: Looking for general activities

Describe the person
(Demographics, psychographics)

Tala is a Lebanese Post-graduate student. She came to the University of Sussex to pursue her dream of studying Masters. With a student budget Tala cannot pay too much for going to activities although she is really excited about joining various university activities.

Jobs to be done (What is this person trying to do/achieve? What are their needs?)

To join activities that will get her to meet new people and network
To belong
Improving health and well-being

Pains (What are this person's fears, frustrations and anxieties?)

She is shy and worried about her health in the UK's cold climate

She has an anxiety to join new activities without knowing anyone

Interesting quotes

The only thing that matters is that you improve yourself every day

Gains (What makes this person happy?)

- General Connections
- Friends and Family
- Achieving good grade
- Enjoys Activities
- Walks calm hers down

Influencers (Who can influence this person's decisions/attitudes?
Friends
Family
Students
An application
Social Media
Personalities

Figure 04: Persona

Reframed POV Statement

‘International students aspire to become more active participants in campus life; *nevertheless*, they face social challenges such as cultural difference misunderstanding and social anxiety that hinder their engagement. These challenges encompass a lack of awareness about available activities and discomfort in participating in events with unfamiliar individuals.’

IDEATE

Let me start here with a confession; I feel a bit embarrassed reflecting on my initial stance with the group. I insisted that the only solution to our problem was an 'Activity Loyalty Program,' and I admit that in hindsight I was wrong. However, the Ideate your Solution Workshop was a real eye-opener for me; it emphasized that ideation isn't about rushing to a single solution. Instead, it's about coming up with lots of different ideas, then mixing and grouping them together to find the best and most creative one. (Golf-Papez, 2023)

The new approach of generating many ideas challenged my earlier stance where I was latching onto one simple solution instead of exploring other more varied solutions, and as they say "The best solution is rarely the first one." (Golf-Papez,2023).

Generating many ideas and not settling quickly resonates strongly with me now. New ideas pushed us beyond the obvious and increased the innovation potential for our solutions. I was now transitioning into the ideation phase with a different approach, I worked together with my by putting the 'how might we' questions (Figure 05). We all contributed and designed 5 questions to invite a wide spectrum of ideas that tend to foster a more holistic and creative problem-solving process. (NN Group , 2021)

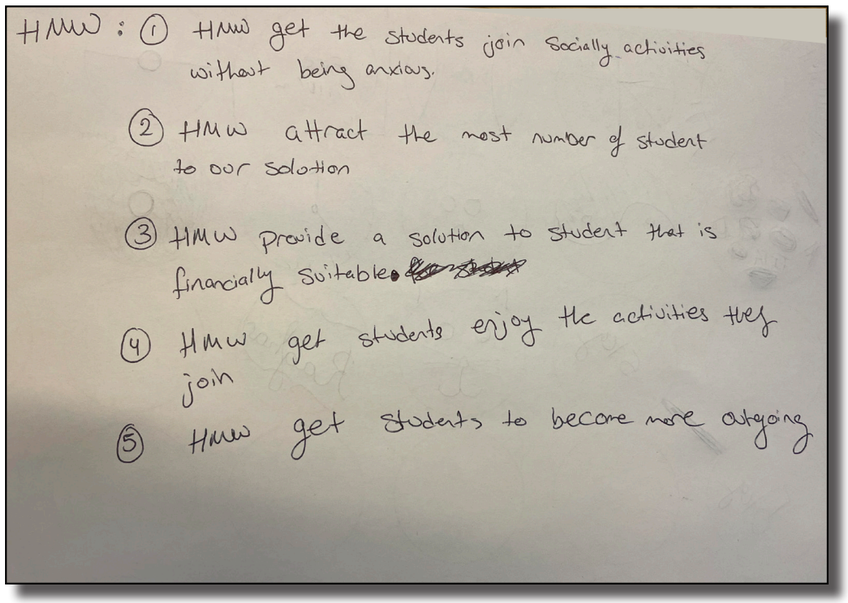
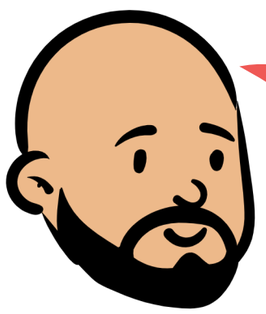


Figure 05: How Might We Questions



It's a learning curve for me, understanding that being fixated on a single solution too early can limit our creative potential. The ideation phase, with its emphasis on broad, open-ended inquiries, is teaching me the value of diversity in thought and the power of collective brainstorming in reaching innovative solutions.

Following the HMW questions, we all wrote down our ideas on post-it notes and stuck them onto a large white sheet of paper (Figure 06). I still included my 'Activity Loyalty Program' idea among the mix, however, this time, I was genuinely open to other suggestions. This approach allowed us to visually see the range of ideas we all had collectively come up with.

Placing our ideas on the How-Now-WOW matrix helped us build perspective. Each idea had its own set of strengths and weaknesses. We noticed that some were quite practical and easy to implement, yet did not bring anything new to the table, while others, were novel but seemed a bit challenging. (Figure 07)

Moreover, we were aiming for something that would make a significant wider impact, something truly ambitious. Our "Aha!" moment came when **Raghad** introduced the concept of a **'random buddy system'** to connect active students ona random basis. This idea emerged as a standout idea, was novel, innovative, and exactly the kind of game-changing concept we were looking for. None of us have come across a similar application or facility that has already been set up by the University of Sussex that connects buddies with their activities or where you can check available activities.

The excitement and potential of this idea really resonated with us all. It was a leap towards something bold and new, and we were ready to explore how to make it work. (Gamestorming, 2011)

OUR IDEA

A solution that matches university students with their best-fit activity, based on our users interests; Majors, departments, nationalities or languages. If they come across an activity that interests them, they have the option to participate and potentially connect with buddies who share the same interests.

Now that we've narrowed down to our top idea, it's time to start prototyping!

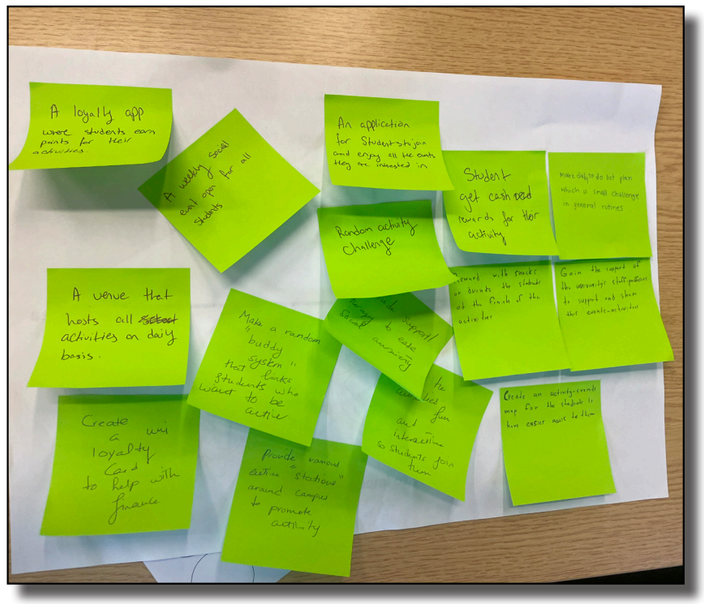


Figure 06: Braindump

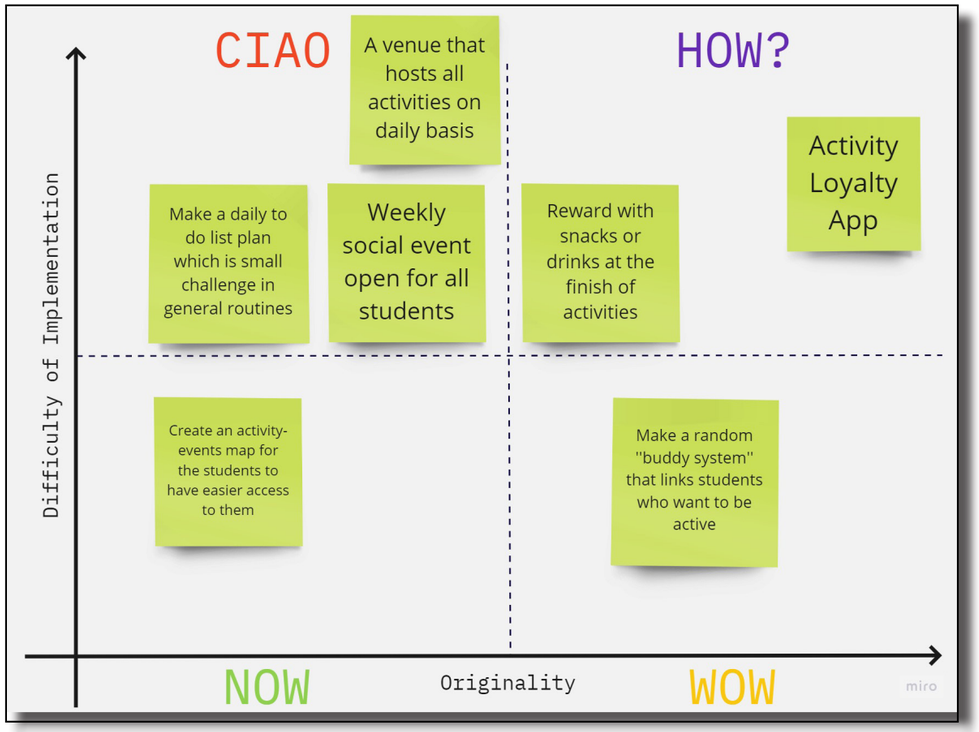


Figure 7: How - Now - WOW! Matrix

PROTOTYPE

LOW FEDILITY PROTOTYPING

Although, it was only stick figures sketching in a frame, I enjoyed low-fidelity sketching. To my own astonishment, I felt like the Picasso of low-fedility sketching with my BIC pen and paper – who knew?

I started by sketching a low-fidelity version on a piece of paper. This was to get a clearer picture of what our application might look like and understand the user flow better. It was a basic sketch, but it served as a tangible representation of our idea. This allowed us to gather immediate feedback from others. We could then make adjustments to our design right there and then, ensuring we didn't head in the wrong direction with our concept.

I had an inspiration from the Branding Journal to do a blue and white logo for 'Campus Companion' incorporating a globe, as our app that connects students through activities (Figure 09). The globe at the center, with interconnected lines, symbolizes the connections the app create for all students who come from different parts of the world. The brand name was written as a circle surrounding and encircling the globe, as if embracing it, symbolic of a bridge of support around Sussex's international students and their journey to be more active. A red heart marks the University of Sussex, the app's birthplace and our commitment to student engagement. Finally, The baby blue backdrop inspires trust, inviting all students to break through social barriers. (The Branding Journal , 2023)

MID AND HIGH FIDELITY

After reviewing feedback on our low-fidelity prototype, I moved onto to the mid-fidelity version on a Miro board, enhancing it with essential features, an improved filtering process, a sidebar, and a 'save for later' function. Once I had the mid-fidelity prototype, I recognized its potential to be a real tangible product. (Figure 10)

It was at this point **Rahul** joined our team later but proved to be a great asset. He provided fresh perspectives and I was eager to absorb his knowledge on crafting a high-fidelity prototype in Figma, a more adaptable tool suited for prototyping and product development.

Together, we worked on Figma, translating our ideas into a format that allowed for greater flexibility. I started to shift towards a more learning approach as I was acquiring new skills. The learning phase was crucial for me to gain a more comprehensive understanding of our vision for the final product. My collaboration with **Rahul** proved to be dynamic and fruitful, resulting in a high-fidelity prototype that met our expectations and showcased the synergy of our combined effort and experience.

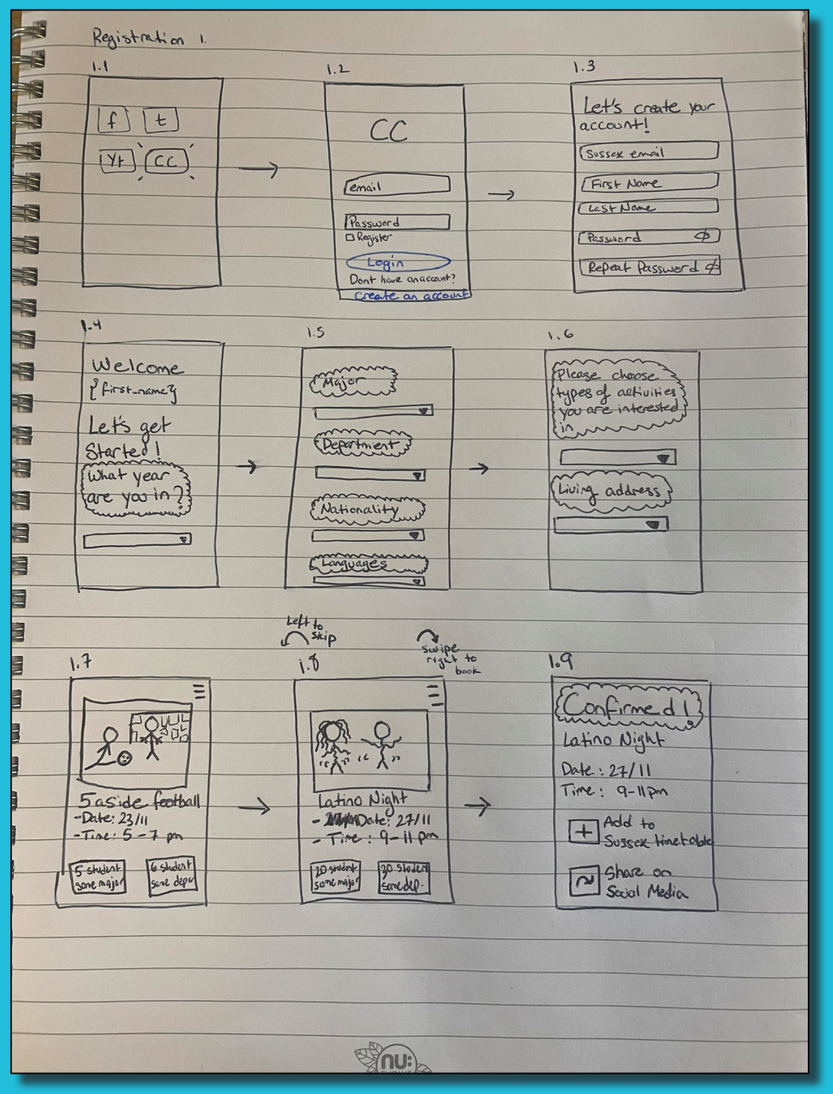


Figure 8: Low fidelity Prototype

After the low-fidelity I designed the logo and brand colours

Then I created mid fidelity on Miro board

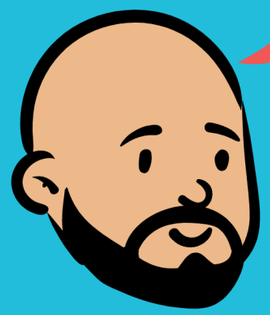
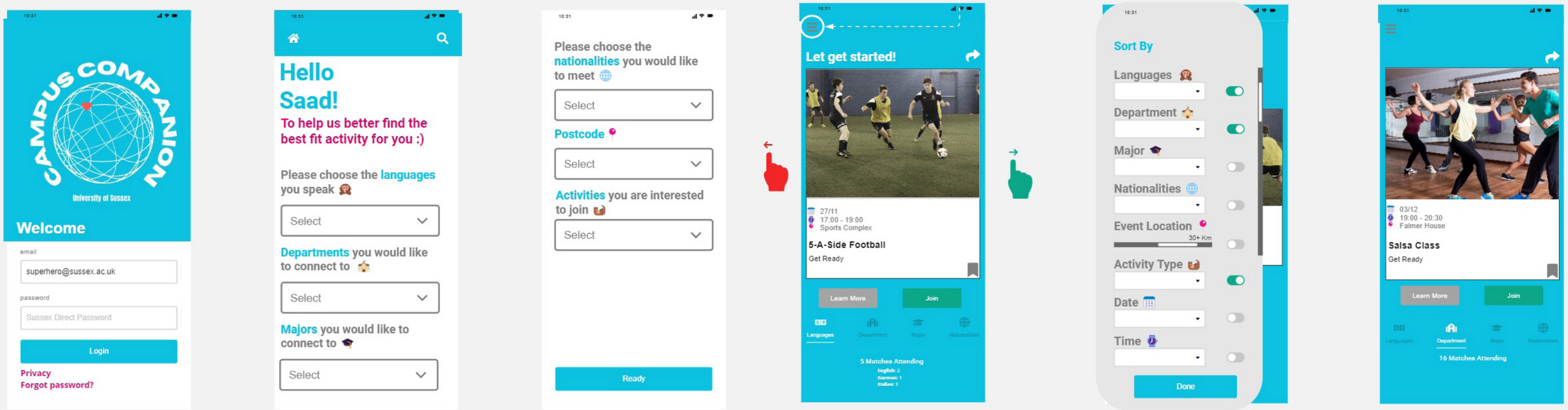


Figure 9: 'Campus Companion' Logo

Figure 10: Mid fidelity Prototype



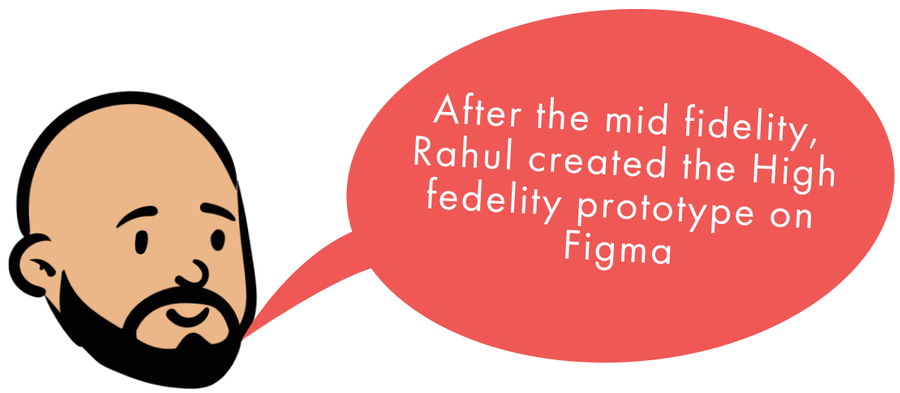
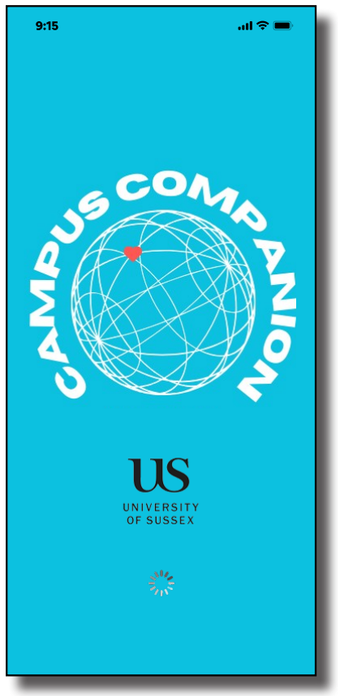
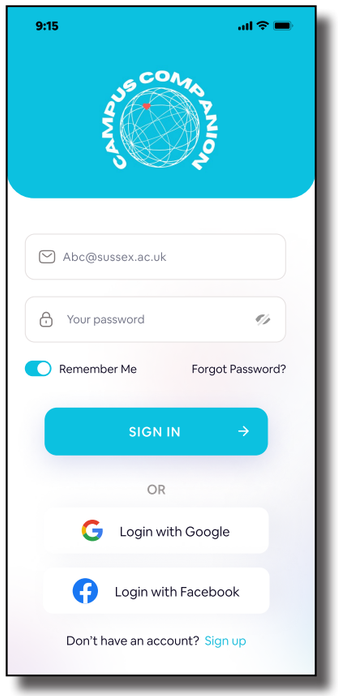
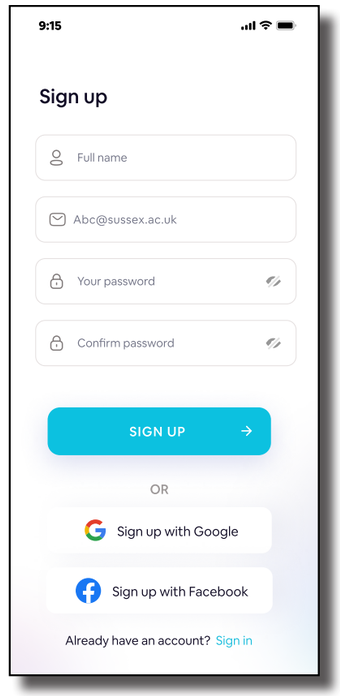
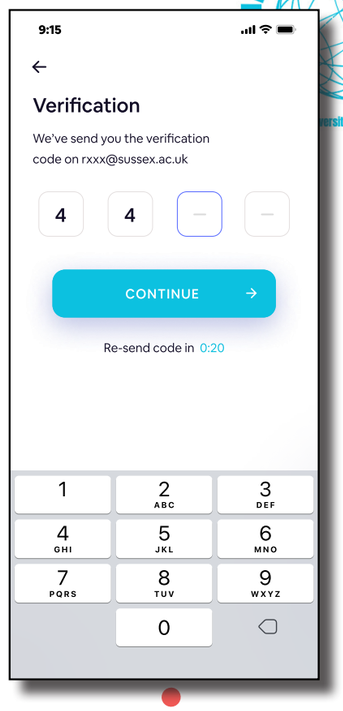


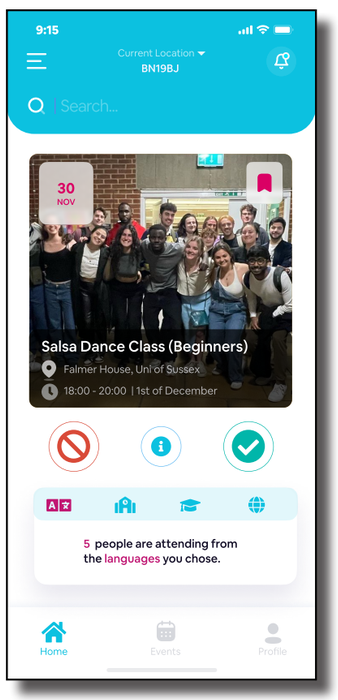
Figure 10: High fidelity Prototype

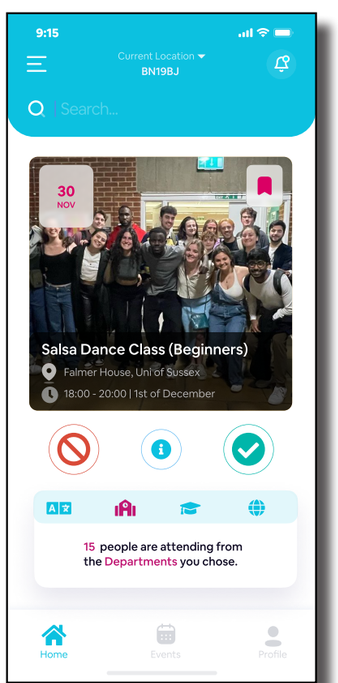


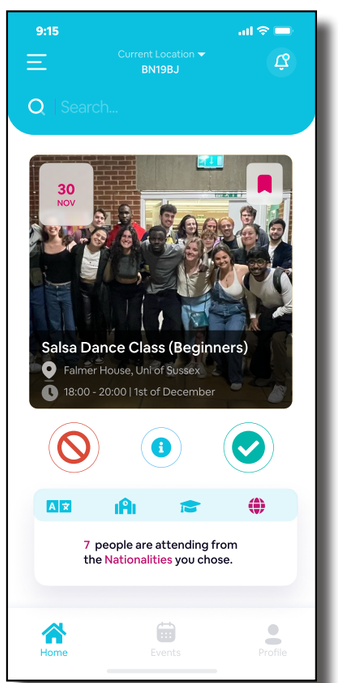


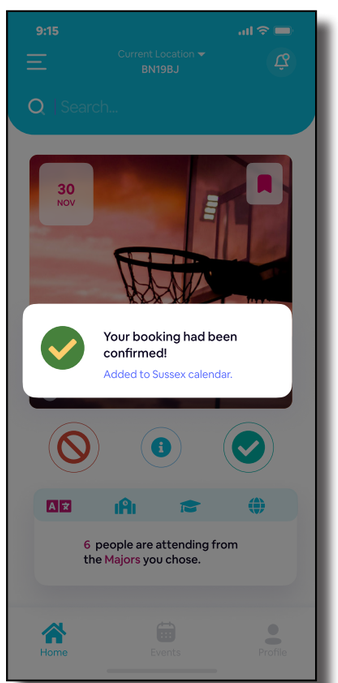




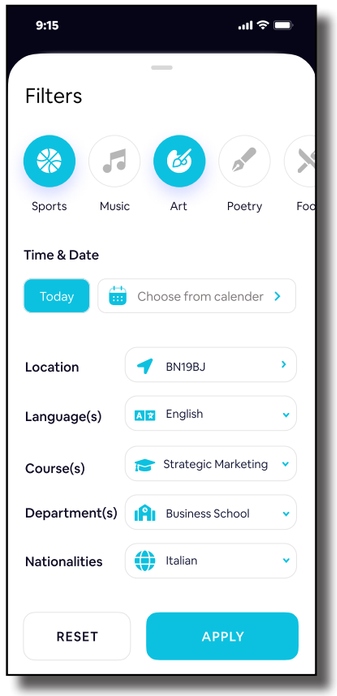


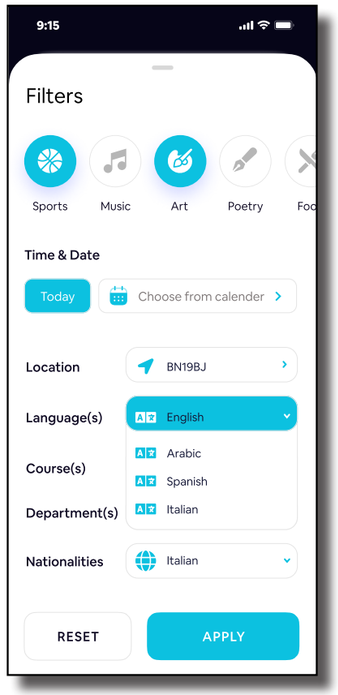


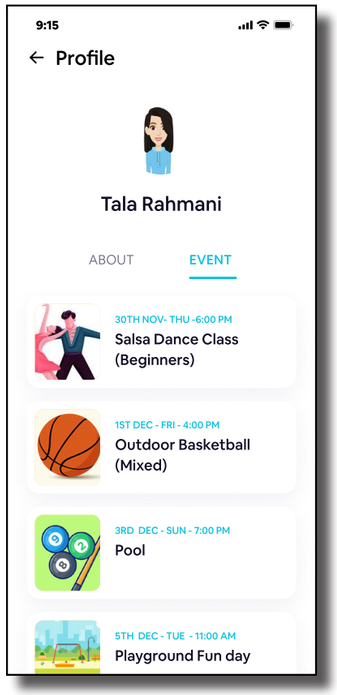


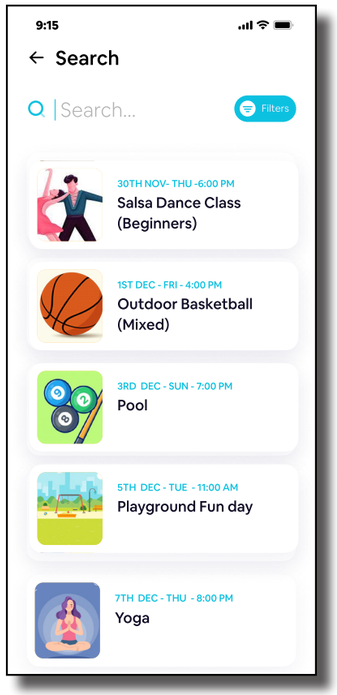


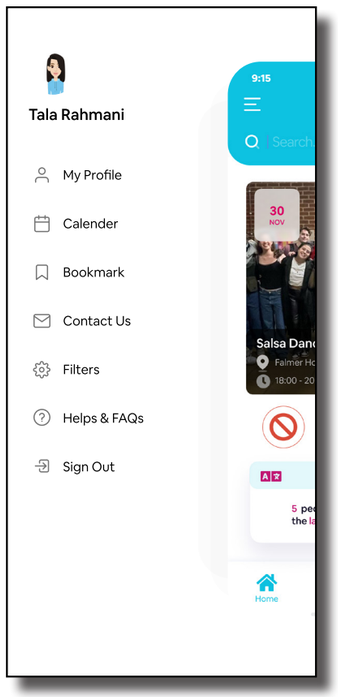
CAMPUS COMPANION
University of Sussex

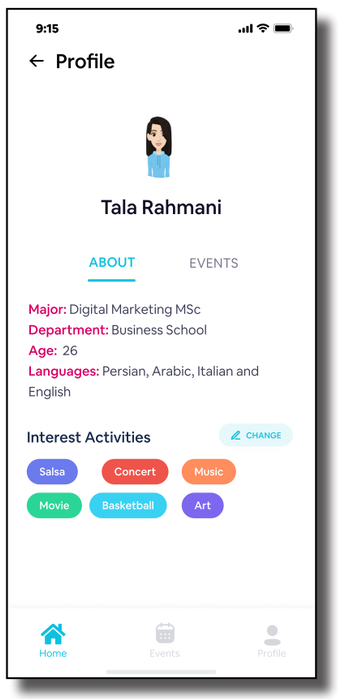


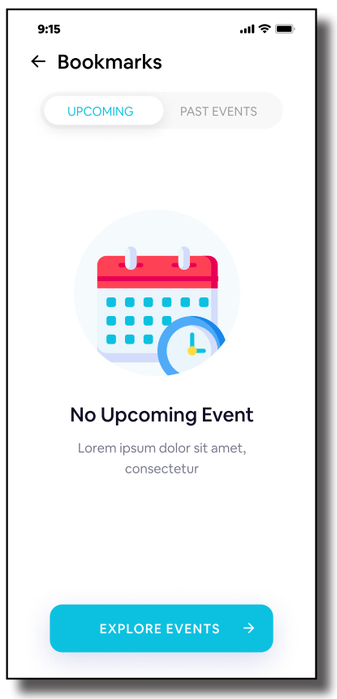












TEST

Given some time constraints, we opted for a shorter yet more fruitful testing sessions.The goal of our testing was to gauge whether our classmates and friends could understand and navigate our application effectively. But most importantly whether our solution is **desirable**? Does it really appeal to the needs and emotions of our target audience? (Medium, 2017)

We utilized the 'Feedback Capture Grid' to answer this question systematically and document feedback across four key areas: 'Likes', 'Wishes', 'Questions', and 'Ideas'

(Lewrick, 2018). **Raghad** acted as the moderator and led the question sessions, I observed the test, while **Suhail** managed the test.

Our approach was to let users interact with the application on their own, allowing us to observe their understanding or any confusion with any of the features. The feedback we collected was invaluable for improving our prototype and gauging the extent of user acceptance achieved.

A surprising and thoughtful question from a classmate stood out for me during the testing. They asked if our application had a 'save for later' button, which it didnt. This was actually surprising as it seemed to be an obvious feature that would help users save activities that they are interested in without having to commit just yet. This made me pause and think about how had we missed this? We took the feedback on board and added a new feature that lets users save events for later, catering to those who are not yet sure about their immediate or future plans. This was a solid example and highlighted for me the importance of user testing; it helped us discover a valuable feature that our app needed but was missed despite all our pre-testing efforts. (Figure 11)

During testing, we also found that integrating onboarding screens can help avoid confusion as those features would serve as a tutorial to guide users through the application. (Figure 12)

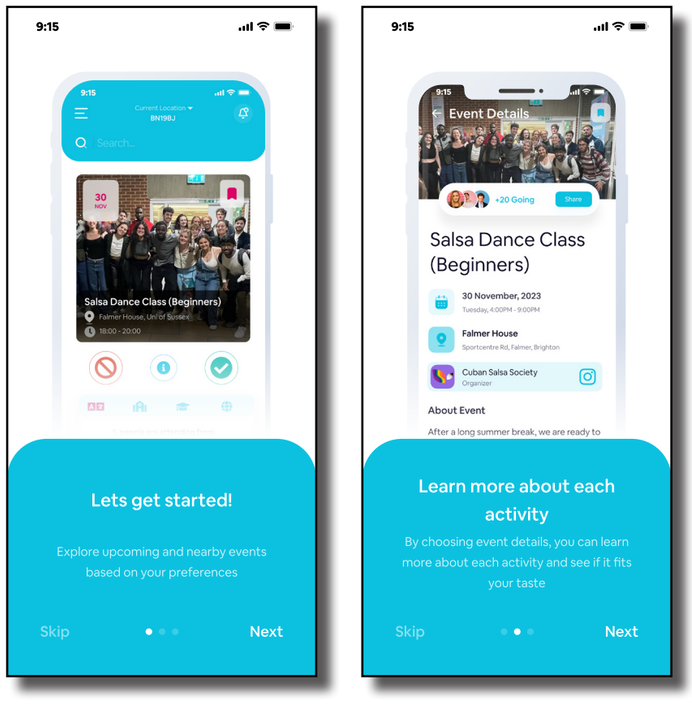
As for the **viablity** and **feasablity**:

Is our application **viable**? To ensure the viability of our product, we should futher continue our business plan and seek support and funding from the University of Sussex to develop and integrate the application.

Is our product **feasible**? Yes, I believe that our application can be developed in a sensible timeframe, and seamlessly integrated to the Sussex Mobile application.

Figure 11: New 'Save for later' button

Figure 12: Onboarding Screens

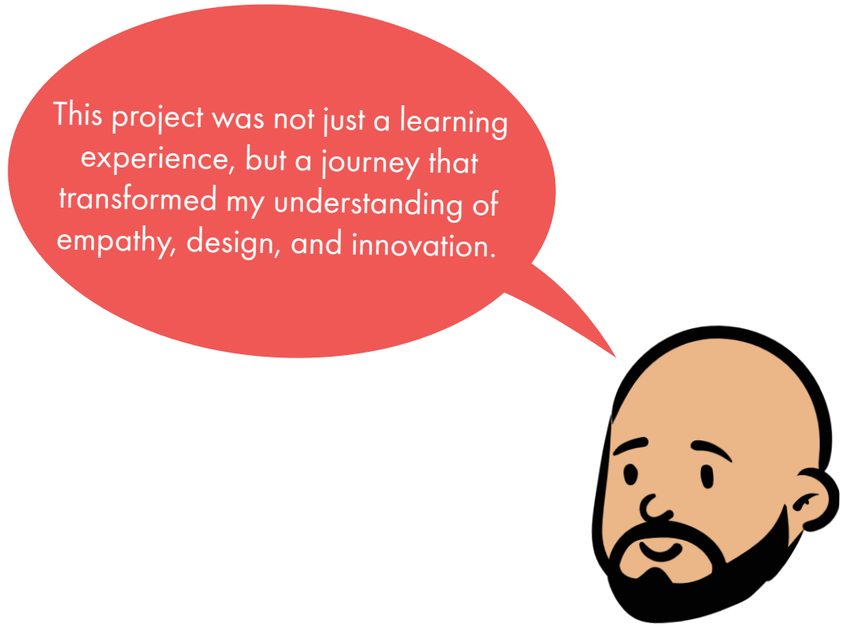


CONCLUSION

After all the hardwork, our design thinking journey was not about developing a solution, but also about our growth as individuals and as a team and enhance our collective experience of student activities at the University of Sussex. I started the journey with drive and ambition, but not fully aware of my bias to my own ideas. I have since learned to look more closely at my own process and adjust.

As a team, we began with a simple question: **'How might we help students be more active?'** and evolved it into a comprehensive design thinking process. Embracing empathy, together we delved into the diverse needs and challenges of our peers. Through interviews, empathy mapping, and persona creation, we gained deep insights into student life and their reluctance to engage in activities due to cultural differences and social anxieties, and our ideation phase challenged us to think beyond conventional solutions, leading to the innovative concept of **'Campus Companion.'** The prototyping stages, from low to high fidelity, taught us the importance of feedback and iteration.

Finally, testing with real users provided valuable insights, proving the necessity of a user-centered approach in design. Although I was putting a lot of effort into various aspects of developing the application, to my surprise, I was most informed working and engaging with others from insights gained at the face-to-face interviews, testing to learning from other members of the team.



REFRENCES

Gamestorming (2011). How-Now-Wow Matrix - Gamestorming. [online] Gamestorming. Available at: https://gamestorming.com/how-now-wow-matrix/ [Accessed 10 Dec. 2023].

Gibbons, S. (2018). Empathy Mapping: The First Step in Design Thinking. [online] Nielsen Norman Group. Available at: https://www.nngroup.com/articles/empathy-mapping/ [Accessed 10 Dec. 2023].

Golf Papez, M. (2023). Building empathy with people you design for. Workshop conducted from the University of Sussex, Falmer.

Golf Papez, M. (2023). Ideating for Solutions. Workshop conducted from the University of Sussex, Falmer.

Interaction Design Foundation (2020). Problem Statements. [online] The Interaction Design Foundation. Available at: https://www.interaction-design.org/literature/topics/problem-statements [Accessed 11 Dec. 2023].

Kouprie, M., & Sleeswijk Visser, F. (2009). A framework for empathy in design: Stepping into and out of the user's life. Journal of Engineering Design, 20(5), 437-448

McDonagh, D. C. (2006). Empathic Design: Emerging Design Research Methodologies. Doctoral Thesis, Loughborough University

Medium (2017). Desirability, Feasibility, Viability: The Sweet Spot for Innovation. [online] Medium. Available at: https://medium.com/innovation-sweet-spot/desirability-feasibility-viability-the-sweet-spot-for-innovation-d7946de2183c.[Accessed 10 Dec. 2023].

Potter, J., & Hepburn, A. (2012). Eight challenges for interview researchers. In J.F. Gubrium & J.A. Holstein (Eds.), Handbook of Interview Research (2nd Ed., pp. 555-570). London: Sage.

The Branding Journal (2023). What Is a Visual Identity and Why Does It Play a Crucial Role in Branding? [online] The Branding Journal. Available at: https://www.thebrandingjournal.com/2023/05/visual-identity/.[Accessed 11 Dec. 2023].

Lewrick, M. (2018). The design thinking playbook: mindful digital transformation of teams, products, services, businesses and ecosystems. Wiley-Blackwell.