TPK5100

Reflection report for a product-based project

Trondhome - The international students guide to Trondheim

Group 24

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I.   Introduction

As a group of mainly international students we made it our mission to make the landing in Trondheim as smooth as possible - and so *TRONDHOME* was born.

Our idea was to create a website that contains all the important information for international students who have just arrived in Trondheim. Many of us had the same problem, namely that the information was contained on different pages, which had to be searched for individually and which mostly contained a lot of irrelevant information. Therefore, the first idea was to build a website that avoids students searching around on various pages and divides all the necessary information briefly and concisely into 4 sections that seemed important to us: *Studies, Living, Activities* and *Useful Links.*

Initially, we saw the purpose of the site in preparing the student for the upcoming time in Trondheim and to offer the student all the necessary important information about studying, housing and paperwork to be done. However, we quickly realized that the procedure before arrival, such as the application or similar, is different from university to university and is also strongly dependent on the exchange program. Therefore, we changed the target audience from all internationals thinking about Trondheim to students already arrived in Trondheim. With this change of thinking, the focus was also put on points such as *Activities* and *Living* in Trondheim, which are important for the student's well-being and satisfaction during their stay in Trondheim. In the *Living* section, for example, topics such as food, transportation, housing and also Learning Norwegian are addressed and helpful tips and insider information are provided. The *Activities* section covers hiking routes, sports (gyms, NTNUI etc.), city culture, sightseeing and museums and last but not least the nightlife (clubs, bars etc.) in Trondheim. In addition, of course, the topic of studies must not be missing: So the *NTNU arrival duties* are clearly listed on the website and described point by point, in order not to make mistakes and to accelerate the bureaucratic process, so that you can quickly devote yourself to the beautiful things in Trondheim. We have also added tips during the studies as a university survival guide, so that students can get through their university life more easily. Lastly, we have also thought about the numerous links that students are confronted with, which are often distributed in a very chaotic way and can be overwhelming. Therefore, we have decided to add the links that are most important to us clearly arranged under a separate section, so that students can access them comfortably and quickly without having to go through the tedious search.

Finally, it should be mentioned that we decided to use informal language to better reach the target group.

II.   Evaluation of project management effort

a) Evaluation of the organization of the project group
For the course project we used the same group as for the hand-in assignments, so we already had some weeks worth of knowledge of working together before the project even started. This gave us a head start when dividing tasks, since we already had an idea of each other's strengths and weaknesses. All but one in the group were international students

studying abroad in Trondheim. In return the last group member (Jon) was native to NTNU, and knew thus more about the campus, how Norway and NTNU works. Early on he was set to be the project manager, and handled the practical aspects of the group work. Writing summaries of each meeting, planning when and where to meet, and making sure every aspect of the project got done in time.

Mathuti was given the role as *Content Leader*, since she had the clearest understanding and vision for how the end product should be arranged. Main content creators were Rojina, Genc and Clémence, and Clémence also had the role as *Architect Designer*. Ethan and Filip were the most tech-savvy, and took on the roles of *Technical Engineer*, i.e website creators. Even though roles were set, everybody was in understanding that everybody had to help create content for the website, since it was the "heart" of the product. Also the Architect Designer role was discontinued, since its responsibility was covered by the other roles.

Mathuti and Jon were familiar with Trello from before, teached the rest of the group how to use the website. In retrospect this could have been done better. For example, at the end of the project Jon and Genc were collaborating on a task, and ended up writing about the same topics. This is a waste of resources, and if Trello had been updated earlier or checked more often it could have been avoided. No other tools for task-management were considered. The group agrees that Trello worked well, but with more initial work in looking for tools for task management, other suitable and user-friendly alternatives might have been discovered.

b) Evaluate the effectiveness of the risk management plan
The risk assessment done in the pre-report identified two R1-classes of risk. One of them was *Communication failures*, and early on in the project the mitigation plan was put into use for this risk. Being a group of seven is great for dividing the work into manageable loads and effective collaboration with great discussions, but it also means there's seven different time schedules to keep in mind. From the hand-in assignments we knew this was a problem, where we solved it by those available meeting physically and the rest working from home with a task given. This was far from ideal.

In accordance with the mitigation plan, a weekly meeting was set up to work with both hand-in assignments and the project. After doing a survey internally in the group, Mondays kl14-16 (2 -4 PM) became the chosen time. We met at Gløshaugen, but Rojina had Norwegian-classes at the same time up at Dragvoll. She had to sacrifice some of the class to be able to join the meeting each week, and this was a very unfortunate situation. Also Mathuti had classes till kl15, and since Rojina had to leave after some time to catch the Norwegian class, seldom the whole group was gathered. The time situation was far from perfect, but project progress was made each week.

The other R1-class risk was time budgeting. The weekly meetings implemented to help with communication also helped keep the group in check. There was steady progress, and no major altercations happened in the project, and no life-changing event put one of the group members at risk. Each week somebody had a situation that affected if they could participate in the meeting or not, but they always read the summary and did their work afterwards, so no time was lost.

There were some moderate R2- and R3-class risks identified, but here no action had to be taken. The workload for each person was manageable, the technical skills of Ethan and Filip were utilized, and the scope of the project was kept in check.

c) Effectiveness of the communication plan for the project
For our project we decided to use Messenger as the main part of our communication plan. The use of Messenger brought advantages and disadvantages. For example, some of the group were not familiar with the Messenger app or are used to other apps (such as Whatsapp). So these people had difficulties, especially in the beginning, to see the messages at all and to react to them in time. This caused minor communication problems and late replies, especially in the beginning. On the other hand, after getting used to it, using the messenger app was passable for short messages, but it was not possible to find links, documents or other files sent as messages in the group chat straight away, which was a shortcoming of the app with which one had to be satisfied. In retrospect, it would probably have been better to use the more common app Whatsapp, but since communication had already started via Messenger, we decided to leave it at the Messenger app.

To keep control of the project tasks we used a website called *Trello*, which lets multiple users add and update statuses on tasks, so everybody can see what is done and what is still left to do. Tasks updated status by moving them to the appropriate column, for example from *Pending* to *Done* when a content section was created, and from *Done* to *Integrated* when the content was added to the website. This worked well for keeping up with the project, and nobody had any problems with keeping track of what their tasks were, since tasks were assigned through Trello.
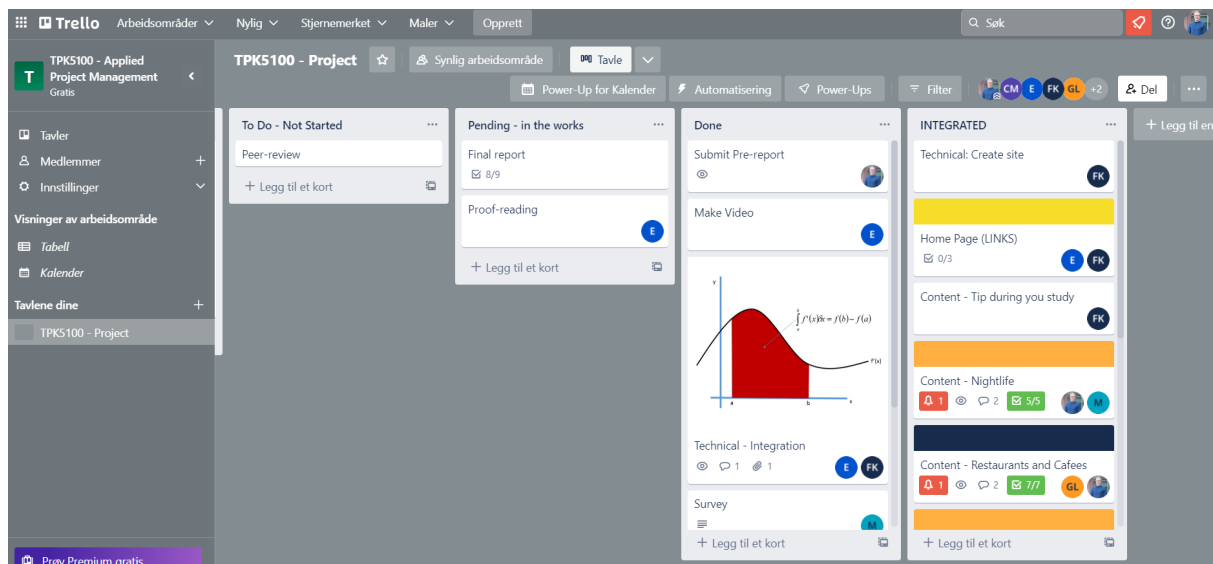
Due to the fact that the group consisted mainly of international students, some group members had a different way of giving time and place information. For example, Jon often referred to times as "kl", which initially led to confusion as the rest of the group was not familiar with this abbreviation. On the other hand, Genc also occasionally had the habit of indicating times without pm and am, but with the very common version of times for German speakers, for example writing 21 o'clock instead of 9pm, which also led to confusion in the group.

In summary, however, it can be said that the group was almost always able to communicate very well and, with a few exceptions and despite the many cultural differences in the group, communication was mostly without problems. If anything could have been changed in retrospect, it would have been the choice for the communication app Messenger in the first place.

d) Project results
Before the main part of the project started, we met as a group to start the pre-report to make clear which success criterias we wanted to meet. This involved four key points: Communication with the client, End-user involvement, Planning, Clarity of project priorities and Roles and responsibilities (which is already discussed in a)).

On the communication plan with the clients: since we found ourselves in a special situation in this project, in which the clients were also involved in the production of the product, we aligned the wishes and target ideas that we pursued with our product with our own wishes. This made it easy for us to implement new ideas in the project since everyone was involved in the Development of the product.

For the End-user involvement we included assessments such as surveys for rating our idea as well as our end-product itself. Both of the surveys were done, however there was limited time on the second survey, thus not securing the same amount of input as the first one. This is discussed in more detail later on in this report.

We planned our meetings on a week to week basis: This included a weekly meeting for working on the assignment and project. The plan went ok: Since not everyone could always be present at the same time slot, the group was not always complete, which could sometimes delay the processing of the tasks. However, an attempt was made to compensate for this by giving the missing members more work parts for the next tasks. Ultimately, everyone was able to experience the same level of workload beyond the project. It is important to mention that at the end of our meetings we always discussed the tasks for the next week in order to prepare ourselves sufficiently for the next meeting and to tick off the remaining things that still had to be done.

At the beginning we agreed on how much effort we wanted to put into the project. Setting the expectations for the project was important, since the international students had a busy schedule besides studying, and this made it easier for everyone to plan out the workload. After this could be clarified, it was discussed where the focus should be set during the semester in this course. We quickly agreed that the project has a higher priority than the assignments. This also became visible when we skipped the last assignments that were no longer mandatory in order to focus on the project. Since everyone had a similar idea of the effort involved in this project, each group member was satisfied with a basis for dividing up the individual tasks.

Without going into more detail about the product, it was easy to spot deviations between our original stated success criteria and your final evaluation of the project: First of all, it should be mentioned that despite the division of roles and responsibilities, these had to be redone during the project, as it was easy to see where more and where less work was required. Two people were assigned the role of content creator, which ultimately turned out to be understaffed. In addition, end-user involvement was given more priority than it actually was.

As already mentioned, due to the strict timeline, the last assessment could not be carried out in the same detail as the first one.

- The project was seen as successful, but not very successful, as not everyone always managed to attend the meetings.So we would agree that the project is successful but we do not strongly agree on this. If you look at the end product as a success factor, then you have to differentiate here: If the product does not have to be considered perfect, because it was a very tight schedule, then it was successful. Otherwise, of course, there is room for improvement and the product itself can be seen more as a prototype and not the end product itself.

We evaluate our project management effort as successful:

Scale	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Your response				x	

III.   Evaluation of the impact (project success)

a) Target audience of the project
As soon as we figured out that we wanted to create a website for international students coming to study at NTNU in Trondheim, it was obvious that the target audience of our product, Trondhome would be international students.

Naturally, we didn't really define precisely our target audience. So in the beginning of the project, we designed and imagined the website for international students, coming from all over the world (EEA and non EEA). The aim was to provide them all the information they would need before coming to Trondheim, including the application process.

We created a survey that we spread to the international students in order to get a better understanding of their needs. This survey permitted us to identify with what the international students had some troubles. With the answers, we realized that students got the information they needed before coming, but were rather looking for information right before coming and once they arrived in Trondheim. This reason added to the complexity in the application process because of various countries and universities convinced us to define more precisely our target audience: we changed it from students who are applying at NTNU to international students who just arrived in Trondheim or are right before their departure.

So, in our case, the survey helped us not only to identify the needs of the international students, but also to change and define more precisely the target audience of our website.

The needs and the target audience work together, and permit us to define the different sections of the website.

b) Evaluation of the quality of the final product
To evaluate our final product, we have gotten direct feedback from international students, and written down their comments as they discovered the website for the first time. Furthermore, we have conducted an online survey where we gathered answers and remarks on the different sections of our website.

Most students interrogated are content with the website.

The parts that seem to be unsatisfying are the subsections "Learning Norwegian" and "Tips during your study". For the former, that may be explained by the fact that only three people on the team have attempted to learn Norwegian (Rojina, Clémence and Mathuti) but none of them have worked on that section. For the latter, the problem is the lack of content. That is due to improper brainstorming on nice tips to put in there. Other suggestions include: writing more advice for daily life, and more information on getting the student card, police appointment and tax appointment.

Another point of improvement could be the aesthetic of the website, which is very basic and simple. This was a direct choice made by the team, but it seems important to the students that the website is pretty and enjoyable.

Positive points that have been brought up are the language used in the website (which is informal and "fun"), the overall content but specifically the sections "Activity" and "Living" and the way the content in sections.

The language and general humor in the website is intentional. We figured that this would make the website more engaging, and more user-friendly, to contrast with the very dry and unamusing way other websites may present information. Moving into a new city is stressful and a bit of humor is needed to handle the process easily.

The survey and direct feedback has been very useful for us to understand what we did right and what we did wrong, even though we already had an inkling as to what could be improved. Nevertheless, it is important to note that all our surveys are conducted on people who have been in Trondheim for approximately 2 months. It would have also been interesting to have answers and opinions of people that have just arrived in the city or that are preparing to come.

- Biased information, lacks a lot of information which could be useful. We wanted the content on the website to be short, informative and relatable, and it was hard to formulate all the content under these restrictions. Our goal was not to build a crowded website. Therefore it may lack information here and there depending on personal preference of the student.

    We evaluate the quality of our final results as outstanding:

Scale	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Your response			x		

IV. Factors that have contributed to failure / success

Success factors (1):

- Commitment: Trello is used for organizing different phases and it helps to know the responsibilities better
- Having a good project leader and practical use of leadership. Following up the processes by the team leader. Getting feedback and follow up by members
- Weekly meetings which help to divide the responsibilities and make sure that every topic is covered to meet the deadlines.
- Early planning: Talking about what should be done and expectations, so that having enough time to meet the deadline
- Clarity of responsibilities and roles of members of group
- Motivation of project team
- Adequate documentation and reporting
- Trust between members and loyalty to decisions
- Effective and friendly atmosphere for communication between group members

Failure factors:

- Facing challenges to set the meeting time: Members who could not participate in meetings were forced to get tasks
- Language and culture barrier (2)
- Reassessment of content and target

    Skip from making content in some parts such as before apply, how to apply and departure, because of

    ☐ Diversity in types of application such as erasmus, international, EEA

☐ Different processes for each group of students

☐ Time limitation and deprioritized

V.   Most important lessons from your project

1) You should first identify the learning objectives of your final product before deciding on the type of product. In your team, consider taking more than one group meeting to discuss what to choose as a product. Usually, there is not enough time to think about all the positives and negatives of the current suggestion during the meeting so each member of the team should consider the possibilities after the session. You should thoroughly focus on the outcome of the product and if it does not correspond with what you expected do not hesitate to change your mind and start a new project. It is much easier to work on a project which you are interested in.

2) Our advice is to agree on regular meeting time each week first so that everyone is able to participate and could be informed about the current project status. At the beginning, the group should set up the general roles of team members. It was effective to have one person who organized and reminded the appointment time, led the meeting plan and summarized the conclusion of each discussion.

   After selecting the product, the group should project a clear simple time plan of tasks needed to develop the final product. Dividing the work packages among all the members definitely leads to completing the sub deliverables and the deliverables much faster so the work becomes much more efficient.

3) We learned that the most important thing for working on a team project is communication. During our meetings we spent a lot of time designing the product, discussing the product form and the way we wanted to develop it. Since it was a team project, it was important that everyone agrees on what the product was to look like. Each member presented their proposals, ideas and modification until the whole group accepted the final solution.

4) Our experience suggests that the regular weekly meetings and our clear communication helped our team to organize the work and deliver the final product on time. At the end of each meeting we summarized the current outcome and set up a new goal for the next week including dividing the tasks among all team members. Using this working form our team managed to deliver the final product on time and in the quality demanded.

VI.   Reflection on learning and unlearning

What we needed to learn
When developing a website some technical know-how is needed no matter if the website is made from scratch or by using a template; how to add text, pictures and link the different parts of the website together to a coherent product. Also the usage of Trello had to be taught and learnt by the group members that've never used it.

We also needed to learn about each other, and especially small cultural differences could have a greater impact on the work than one would've thought. In Norway, time is denoted with the prefix *Kl*, as mentioned earlier.

A crucial learning point in this project was getting insight into the needs of international students who've arrived in Trondheim for the first time. They are a crucial stakeholder in this project, which is placed in the G1 category (high influence and high interest). If international students wouldn't take interest in the product, then we wouldn't have developed a product worth anything.

Can you describe or reflect on situations where learning was critical to the success of your project?

Early on in the project we decided that we wanted to create a product that benefits international students, since the majority of the group were studying abroad in Trondheim. In the modern day and era there's an app for everything, so naturally our thoughts drifted in that direction. Ethan had some app development experience from before, and took a closer look at what an app would mean in the context of our project. He argued that it was a lot of extra work to develop an app, and a website would accomplish the same result with only a fraction of the technical labor cost. Thus we decided to develop a website instead of an app.

When working on the content creation for the website, we had to learn how to divide the tasks evenly between us in a clear manner, so no overlap of work was done. Also the status of each task had to be known, so any team member could identify and take over any potential slack. As previously mentioned, Trello became the tool used to solve this.

What we need to unlearn

During the whole process of working on this project, the most important things that we needed to unlearn are:

- Perfectionism
- Over-confidence in the project planning
- Individualism

These 3 traits/beliefs are very common in most people, but when working on a group project, they can make or break the success of the venture.

Can you describe or reflect on situations where unlearning was critical for the success of your project?

Unlearning perfectionism in this context refers to unlearning the fact that everything needs to be "perfect" or up to the standards of each member in order to be accepted. For instance, there were several moments where the team knew that the work produced was not optimal but moving on was essential to be able to finish in time. A specific situation would be the one described in the Introduction: we had to reassess the content and the target public in the middle of the project. Indeed, we decided to scrap some content (previously called "Before arrival", "How to apply" and "Departure"). There were a few different reasons, the main one being that we ran out of time and had to either scramble to fill those sub-sections or deprioritize it.

This example also illustrates the second trait that we had to unlearn, which is overly trusting the project planning that we decided on in the beginning.

Finally, it has also been very important that each member does not display individualism and works as a team with everyone. This means trusting others to continue and share the work. In the beginning of the project the tasks were very separated, and thus the content lacked homogeneity (in the style and tone). Actively trying to come together and not work on the content as separated from the rest has been crucial.

VII.   References

(1) Hussein, Bassam (2018). <u>The Road to Success: Narratives and Insights from Real-Life Projects</u>, Fagbokforlaget. p.92.

(2) Caffery, Jo; Simeon, Lalen; Kusunan Kurika, iteni. 2022. The Importance of Mutual Understanding of Key Terminology in Development Projects: A PNG Example Accessed on 22.10.2022
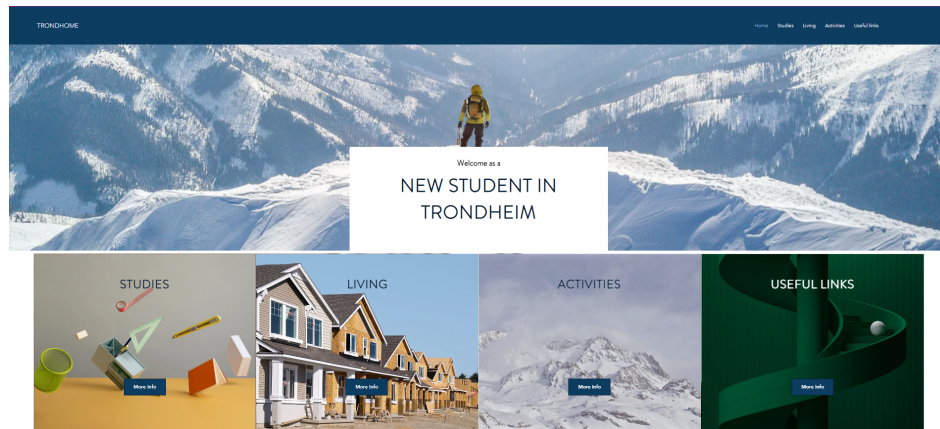
VIII.   Appendix

Appendix A: Pre-report

Link to pre-report: 📄 TPK5100 - Group 24 - Pre-report.pdf
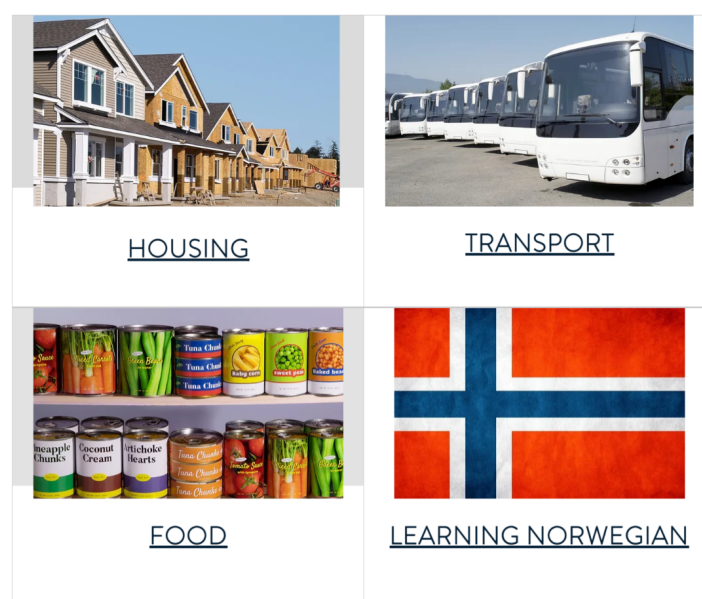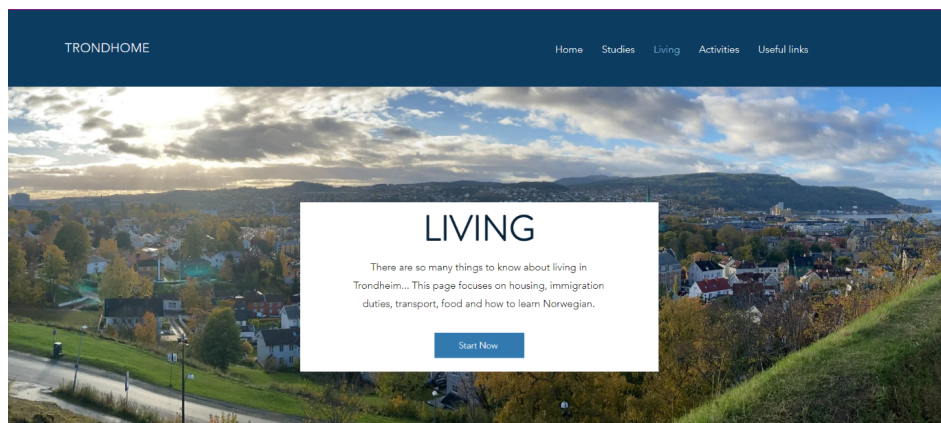
Link to time-scheduling appendix for the pre-report:
📄 TPK5100 - Group 24 - Pre-report - Time Scheduling.pdf

Appendix B: Product

Link to *Trondhome*: [Trondhome - The international students guide to Trondheim](#)
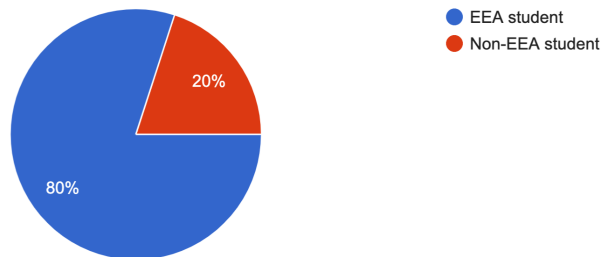

Picture 1. Home page

Picture 2. Layout of the "Living" page

Appendix C: Video presentation

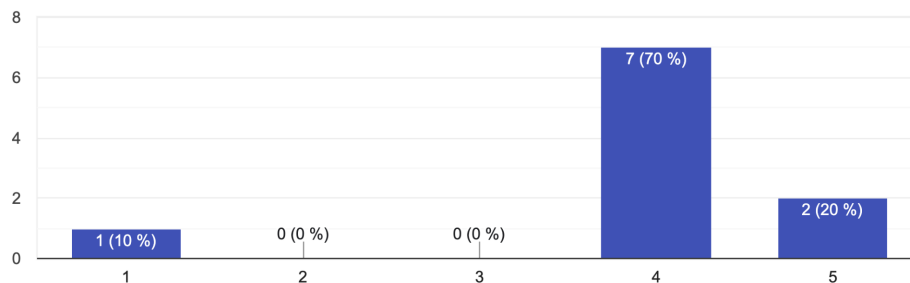Link to video presentation: Trondhome - Video presentation

Appendix D: Results of satisfaction survey

Are you a...
10 réponses

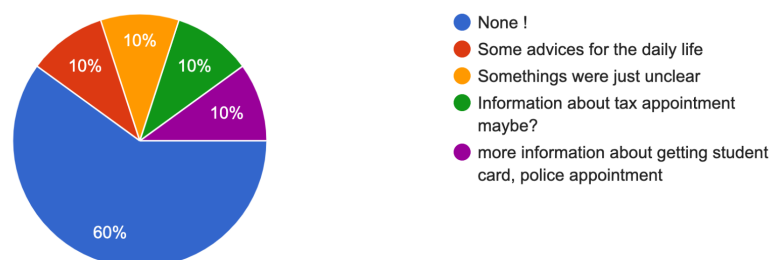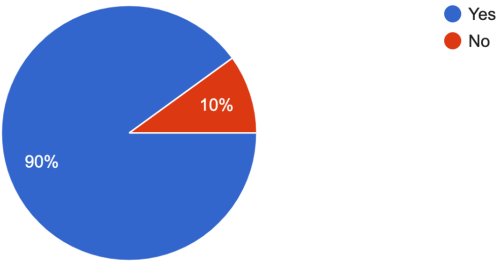
● EEA student
● Non-EEA student

Section "Studies"

NTNU arrival duties: the information in this sub-section is:
10 réponses

NTNU arrival duties: What information is lacking here in your opinion?
10 réponses

● None !
● Some advices for the daily life
● Somethings were just unclear
● Information about tax appointment maybe?
● more information about getting student card, police appointment

Tips during your study: Have you learned anything here?

10 réponses

- Yes
- No

10%
90%

Tips during your study: what would you add here?

10 réponses

- Nothing!
- How to survive on my own :)
- more tips about work related stuff
- how to book rooms
- how to survive the winter

10%
10%
10%
10%
60%
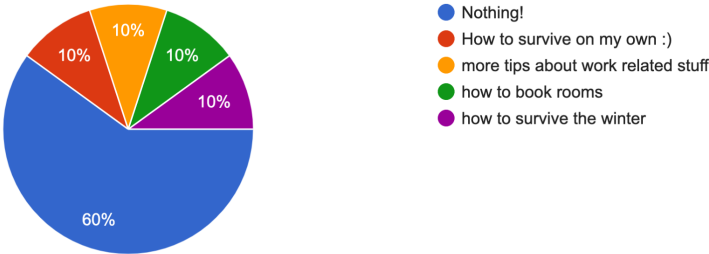
Section "Living"

How would you describe the information in each sub-section?

- Unsuficient
- I don't really care for it
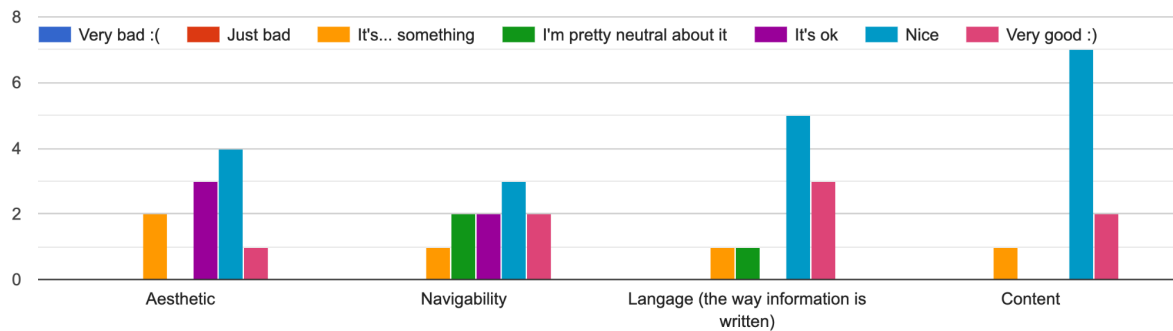- It's alright
- Pretty nice
- Informative !

Section "Activities"

How would you describe the information in each sub-section?
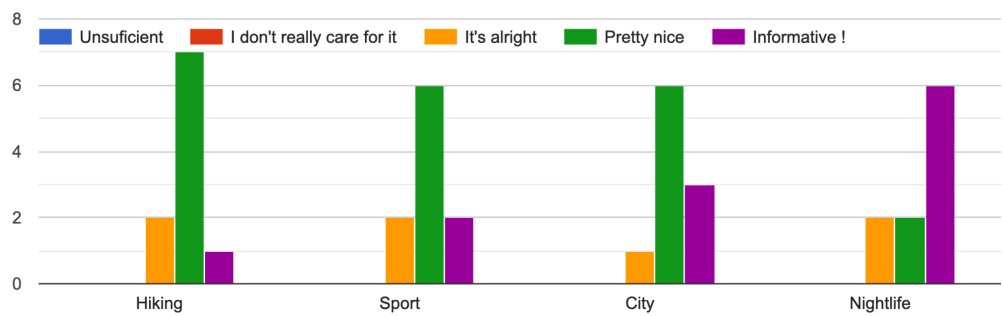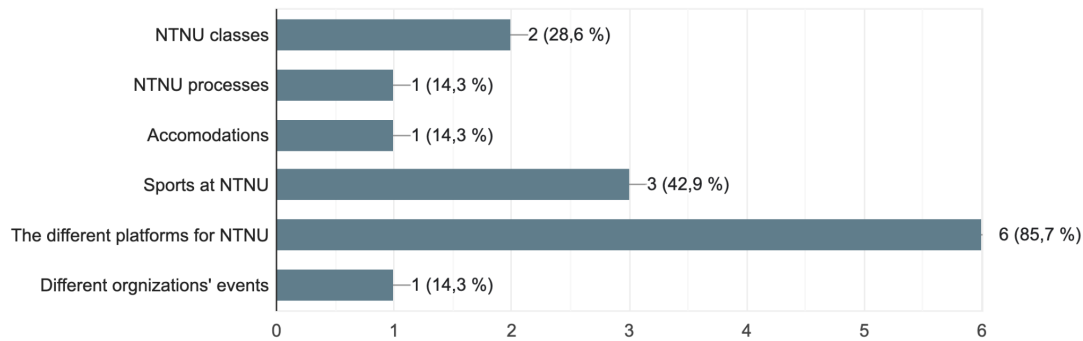

Section "General opinion on website"

How would you rate the website's general...

Appendix E: Results of need scoping survey

What are the subjects you would have had a lack of information about, if it weren't for "on field" discovery?

7 réponses

Subject	Count
NTNU classes	2 (28,6 %)
NTNU processes	1 (14,3 %)
Accomodations	1 (14,3 %)
Sports at NTNU	3 (42,9 %)
The different platforms for NTNU	6 (85,7 %)
Different orgnizations' events	1 (14,3 %)

Studying at NTNU: which of theses topics did you have the least amount of information on? (Before you arrived)
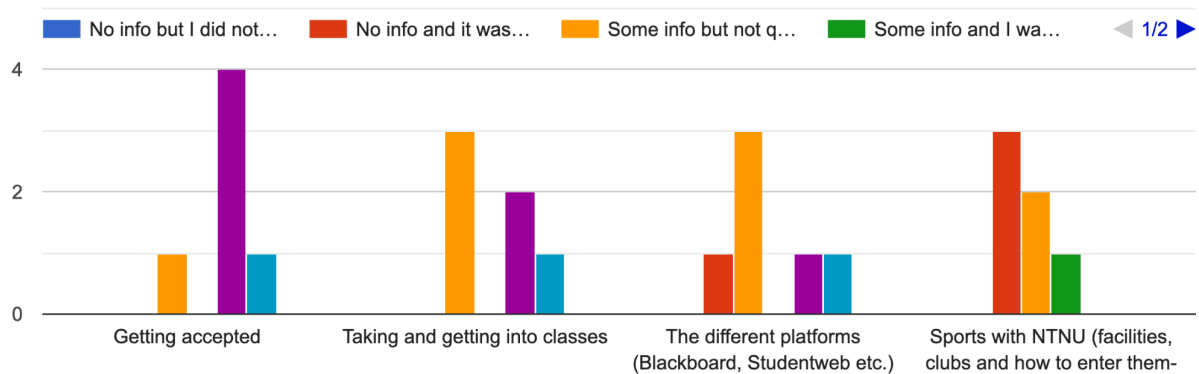
Dark blue: No info but I did not care
Red: No info and it was annoying
Orange: Some info but not quite enough
Dark green: Some info and I was alright with it
Purple: A lot of info (thank god!)
Blue: A lot of info but I did not care about this topic

Living in Norway: which of theses topics did you have the least amount of information on? (Before you arrived)

Dark blue: No info but I did not care
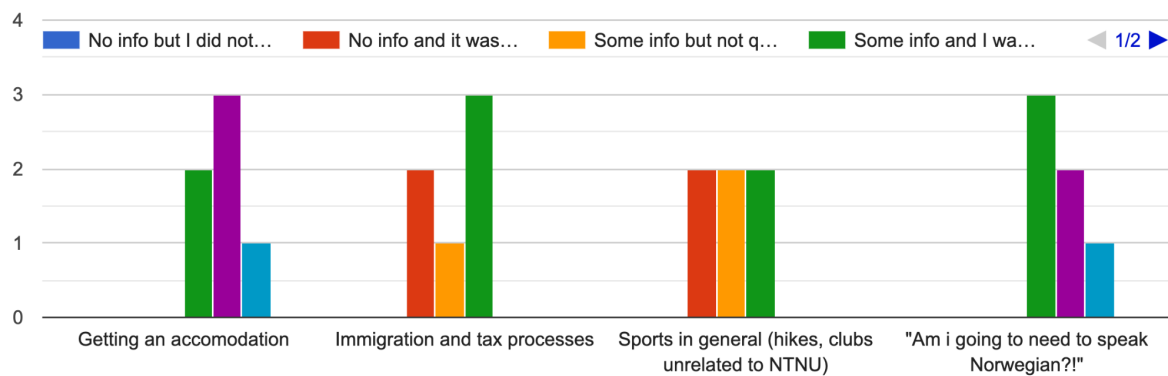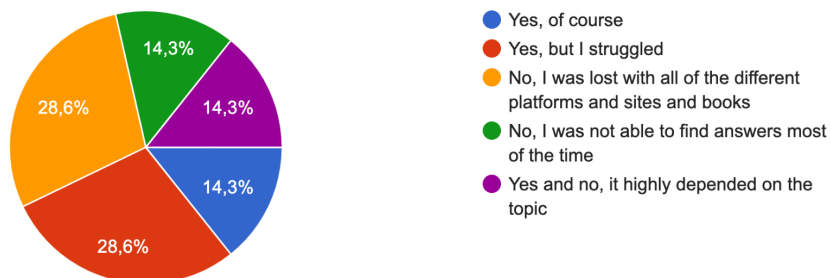Red: No info and it was annoying
Orange: Some info but not quite enough
Dark green: Some info and I was alright with it
Purple: A lot of info (thank god!)
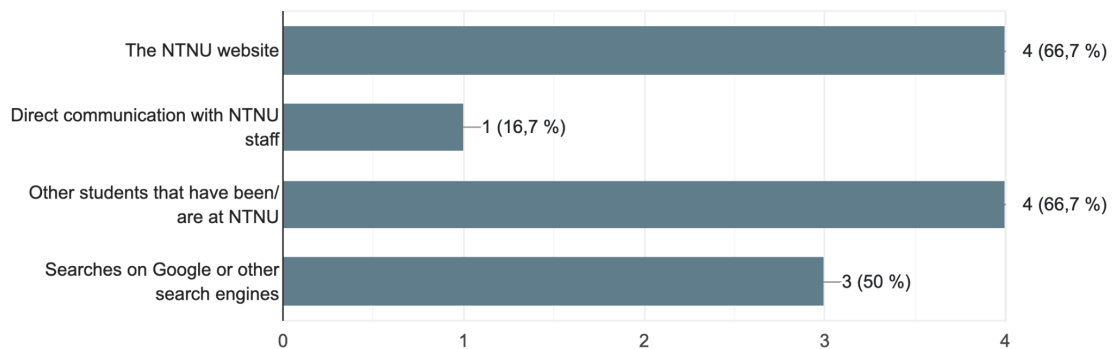Blue: A lot of info but I did not care about this topic

Did you feel like you knew where to go when you had any questions about NTNU or when you were looking for a specific thing?
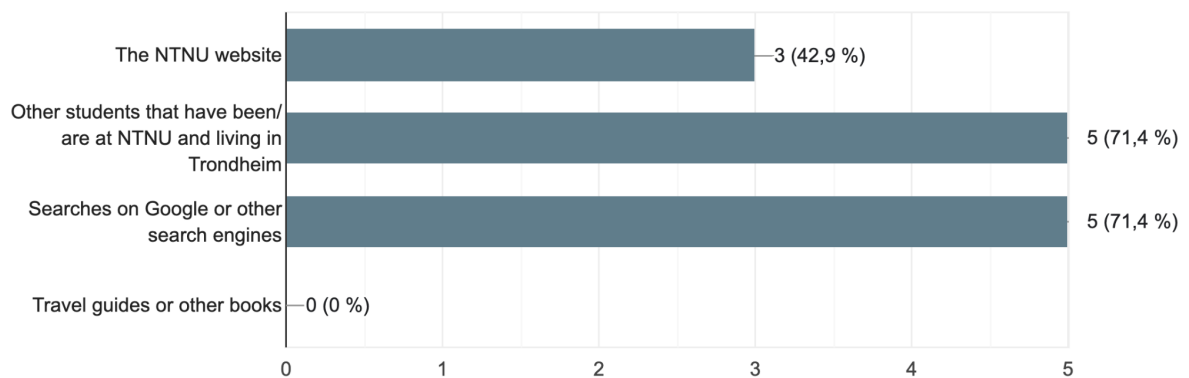7 réponses

- Yes, of course
- Yes, but I struggled
- No, I was lost with all of the different platforms and sites and books
- No, I was not able to find answers most of the time
- Yes and no, it highly depended on the topic

What has been your main source of information whenever you had a question about studying in NTNU?

6 réponses

The NTNU website	4 (66,7 %)
Direct communication with NTNU staff	1 (16,7 %)
Other students that have been/ are at NTNU	4 (66,7 %)
Searches on Google or other search engines	3 (50 %)

What has been your main source of information whenever you had a question about living in Norway/Trondheim?

7 réponses

The NTNU website	3 (42,9 %)
Other students that have been/ are at NTNU and living in Trondheim	5 (71,4 %)
Searches on Google or other search engines	5 (71,4 %)
Travel guides or other books	0 (0 %)

Are you interested in learning Norwegian? If yes, please select the tools you've used.

7 réponses

No	1 (14,3 %)
Yes, I used Duolingo or a similar app	3 (42,9 %)
Yes, I watched TV shows and movies with Norwegian subtitle…	0 (0 %)
Yes, I listened to podcasts	0 (0 %)
Yes, I used books	2 (28,6 %)
I would like classes	1 (14,3 %)