



# Final report – Expat Virtual Platform

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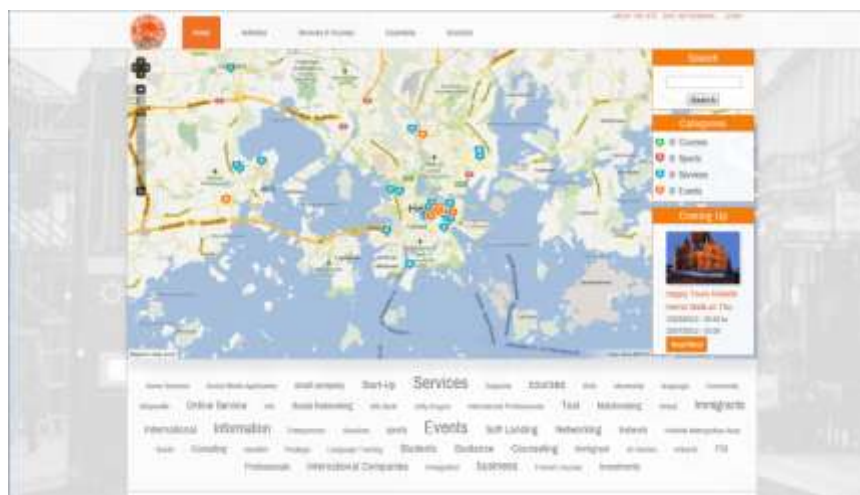
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## Introduction

As part of the Expat-project's implementation plan, the Expat Virtual Platform was developed in 2012-2013 to provide up-to-date information to expats through internet. The platform development was carried out and led by Laurea University of Applied Sciences together with Expat-project partners and local actors in the Central Baltic Sea region. The platform was developed based on the Expat-project's activities, including research and development activities, surveys as well as participatory feedbacks from the target group. The Expat Virtual Platform pilot included a pilot page<sup>1</sup> and 5 local webpages<sup>2</sup> which contains local expat services and activities.



1 [www.expatproject.eu](http://www.expatproject.eu)



2 [www.helsinkiexpats.info](http://www.helsinkiexpats.info)

<sup>1</sup> [www.expatproject.eu](http://www.expatproject.eu)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.helsinkiexpats.info/>

During the development of the platform, Laurea carried out 6 face to face interviews with responsible peoples in big companies recruiting internationals in Espoo region, three workshop with expat themselves as well as a survey that was sent to the target groups. Apart from the Espoo interview activity, there were also local activities carried out by Expat-project partners locally. The results of those activities delivered to us insights that were useful in identifying what is required and how could the services are presented in a way suitable to all expats.

Based on the mentioned activities, the platform was created to fulfill the needs of the expats and a simplified one-stop-shop virtual platform was then developed. The platform offers expats an inventory of the service providers, who are offering diverse services for expats. This inventory of the service providers was created during the Expat-project, to implement up-to-date information for the platform and map all the current actors around the expat-field. Service providers are offering various activities for expats and these activities can be also easily found through the platform.

The Expat Virtual Platform was launched in February 2013 and the feedback was continuously collected based on the follow up of the number of visitors of the platform and direct feedback from users and partners.

## Analysis of the platform service

The Expat Virtual Platform was created to serve as an information tool for those expats who are or planning to visit the project partner member countries. It is a simplified version where services and events are gathered and updated based on the occurrence and time. The platform is also a tool where expats are able to realize and act based on what is relevant to them.

### **Information to expats**

One of the major clusters of the platform is to offer information to expats. Through a detailed map that allocate all services in the city where an expat lives and all the current happenings, it allows an expat to be able to find a place to network socially and professionally based on the event. This might be beneficial to the expat himself, their spouses or children. In this case the platform already offers a first hint, and leads an expat to the right place where more support or actual happening could be found. This way an expat is able to socialize and network as well as self-direct towards integration to the society and for work life.

Among that the platform links expats to the soft-landing support and services such as registration, language courses, and professional networking possibilities as well as the public services. In addition the platform offers access to important links that are beneficial to expats in one place and with less clicking among web pages.

### **Information tool to service providers**

The Expat Virtual platform acts as an information tool as well to service providers in the cities. This is also the core value of this platform which benefits the local actors. Based on the Expat-project research in the cities, we observed that there are many actors who offer Expat services do not know who else is doing similar work. By providing this platform, service providers can market their services. At the same time they are also able to see and connect with likeminded ones and most

probably generate the services together in the future. Network of Networks is a term that describes this activity.

### **Connecting public and private actors under one roof**

As it has been realized throughout in the project activity, many Expat Service providers are individuals or private companies. These companies usually do not have the contacts with the public service providers who are believed to be more resourceful and powerful in the field. By presenting all services here, it is possible for all service providers to see each other's work and possibly collaborating in some aspects of world. This way also may lead private service provider's guide their clients to the right authorities in case the need is wider than their scope of offering.

### **Value of the service to different parties**

As stated above, Expat virtual platform's aim for development is to mainly provide information about different services and possibilities for Expats to take part in various activities in the cities that they live. It is also an informative tool of how the expat service is like for the people who plan to come to any of the cities that the project was piloted. In this case, the platform serves as a support tool for expat's pre departures as well as during the life in the cities. The value in addition relies on the expats themselves, service providers as well as the local companies and organizations around the Baltic cities.

### **Value to local and expats community**

- Easier access of information
- Support the attractiveness of Finnish expatriates
- Knowledge of where to reach out different activities hence network possibilities

### **Value to service providers**

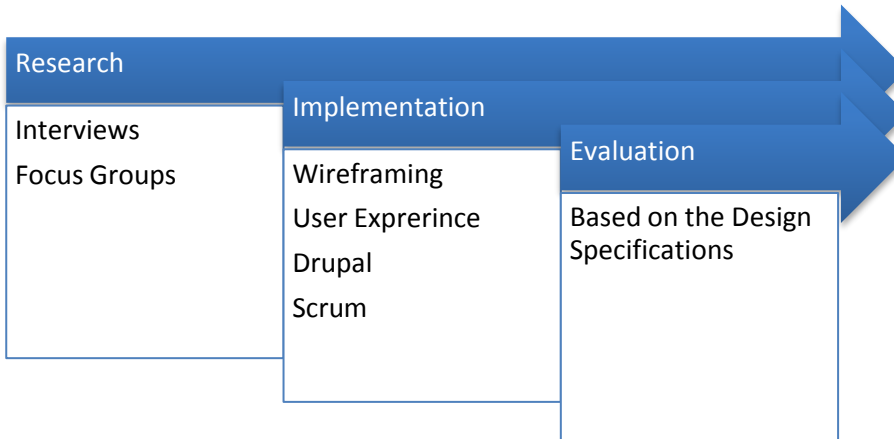
- Service display and marketing tool , reach out population
- A place to connect with others "Network of Network"

### **Value to the International companies and organizations in the region**

- Employees integration and wellbeing
- Information gateway to different activities in cities and region

## Technical Aspects of the Platform & Implementation based on research

The platform was built up from three separate phases: research, implementation and finally the evaluation of the implementation. The components of each stage can be seen in the diagram below.



Throughout the development of the platform the project group executed various qualitative evaluations. These were done by the companies that hired expats in Helsinki region. In addition, a statistical survey done to the expats in the Baltic Sea region were considered in identifying the components and themes of the Expat virtual platform. In addition Focus group and website benchmarking were among the key matters taken in to account in the development of the platform. Although the qualitative and statistical evaluations were done with companies and expats respectively, guided interviewing and Focus Groups were done by with students and some Expats that are living in Finland. Students were taken in to an account in order to give a different perspective of a platform as a useful service. In addition, various website benchmarking research methods were used to expand the research field.

### Wireframing

Wireframing stands for simple outlines of the web page. It is a simple way to visualize what the website could look like. During the platform development, the designing was done by drawing wireframes of the web page on paper. The next phase was to create a layout in Photoshop based on those wireframes and then creating a prototype web page with Drupal based on that layout. The remote testing and presentation to stakeholders was done through that prototype, through this prototype they were able to easily browse and comment the different phases. The process was interactive and the web page was evolved throughout the development phase.

### User Experience (UX)

The goal for the website was to provide an easy and enjoyable experience, for the users of the site. This means that the site was designed and built from the perspective of the user, not from the developer. The research phase had a great influence in this area. The gathered information was the foundation for the personas which were created to represent the target group. The personas were used to create a better understanding of who the web page will be built for; and what the users will expect and need.

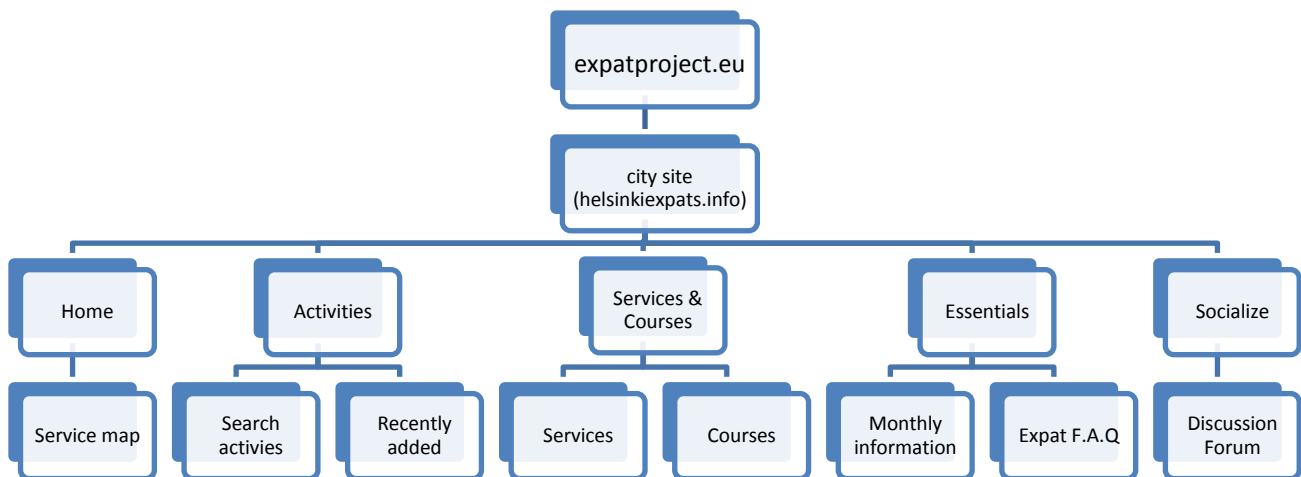
## Content management system

Content management system (CMS) provides a rational framework and also tools that make building and managing a Web site easier. CMS used in this project was Drupal. Thousands of Web sites are built with Drupal and it is one of the most popular Web content management systems. Although there are other content management systems such as Wordpress and Joomla, Drupal suits the purposes of this project the best due to the high level of configurability and the extensive selection of modules.

## Service blue print

The main consideration with the platform service blue print was “How many clicks does it take for the user to get to the information they want?”. This was covered by the Information Architecture which covered issues like how many levels of pages will the website architecture have, how many choices there is available in each of the levels, what paths exists for the user to travel through the site and how many clicks is required to travel from the home-page to desired content.

The best structure for the web site is a top-down hierarchy and that is also the case in this web site. Hierarchy is four clicks deep, meaning that, the user can get from the home-page to desired content in four clicks. All the content is based on the primary and secondary researches.



Title of the page	Purpose of the page	Information on the page	Source of the information	Update interval
<b>Front Page</b>	To provide easy access to services and events with innovative map view	Map that shows different events and services that are available.	Event, service & course providers	Dynamic
<b>Activities</b>	Show expat activities in more typical text-based view	Feed that lists different kind of activities for expat. These are also shown in the service map	Event providers	Dynamic
<b>Services &amp; Courses</b>	To list the expat services & courses.	Feed of the services & courses. These are also shown in the service map	Service & course providers	Dynamic
<b>Essentials</b>	Give essential information about Finland.	-A year in Finland (monthly slider) -Frequently asked Questions	- Wikipedia for basic information - Picture databanks	Rarely
<b>Socialize</b>	Possibility to connect yourself with other expats	Discussion feed and information about social medias	Interviews, Workshops	Dynamic
<b>Page Footer</b>	Project background & Contact	Information about project and contact form	Project team, Expat documentation	Rarely, When needed

The Expat Virtual Platform pilot included a pilot page and 5 local webpages for each city, which are listed in the table below.

Site	Website-address
<b>Pilot page</b>	<a href="http://www.expatproject.eu">www.expatproject.eu</a>
<b>Helsinki Region</b>	<a href="http://www.helsinkiexpats.info">www.helsinkiexpats.info</a>
<b>Turku Region</b>	<a href="http://www.turkuexpats.info">www.turkuexpats.info</a>
<b>Tallinn Region</b>	<a href="http://www.tallinnexpats.info">www.tallinnexpats.info</a>
<b>Riga Region</b>	<a href="http://www.rigaexpats.info">www.rigaexpats.info</a>
<b>Stockholm Region</b>	<a href="http://www.swedenexpats.info">www.swedenexpats.info</a>



## Aspects of business model creation (options and functionalities)

A business or operational model can be developed for this platform. In this case the platform should not only stand as a project but more as a tool that various actors will have to be engaged and co-develop it.

In case of a business model, the platform in addition to the aspects of the financing of resources and maintenance has to strongly identify the right players to run this service.

### **Stakeholders Engagement**

In order to be able to run the platform and an operational or business model, there is a need of various actors' involvement. These actors will be expected to enrich the platform as a product not only monetary wise but also publicity wise and research and development wise. Among the key stakeholders are, Expats themselves, Public and Private companies, public and private Service providers, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Media as well as international network on the similar services

### **Expatriates**

Expatriates are one of the most important stakeholders as they are the target group of the platform. They are the main beneficiaries of the project. The platform is created in order to ease the access of information they need. Expats are considered as influencers of the project at greater extent. This platform is built through a process which includes the direct involvement of them such as interviews, workshops.

### **Public and private companies**

Public and private companies that employs internationals like Nokia, Siemens, Logica and Educational institutions such as VTT are the main reason for international talents to enter into CBSR or in this case Helsinki Finland. Expat platform can be made as an information tool for these companies. Based on the experiences from the case studies in Stockholm and Amsterdam, these companies are also potential funders since the platform offers the services tailored also to the people who work for them. Companies nevertheless might not be so influential in the development of the platform but the beneficiaries with importance in the sustainability of the platform.

### **State owned service providers**

State owned service providers such as In Espoo, Virka Info or immigration office play vital role issues related to expatriates. Their services are important to expatriates since they support the integration and immigrant matters for expats too. These are necessary stakeholders due to the fact that their activities support expats as well. In practice the public service providers will be expected to co-share different solutions as well as influence the information on services for expats in the platform. Due to the support they have from the cities or regional authorities, Public service providers can also be the fore runners of the formal practices that expats have to be aware.

### **Private Service providers**

Private Expat services providers such as Otaniemi International Network, Helsinki meet ups or jolly dragon are important network to be considered. These are ones which are flexible and who understand expats in an informal way. Since most of their activities rely on social interconnection and network, they are more open minded hence great co-developers of the platform. These service providers could use the platform as their marketing tool and a place to realize what is offered with likeminded actors hence more services and activities through collaboration. These actors are necessary for the co-development of the platform since they represent the missing gape that needs

active participation. Private service providers also have new and more perspectives to boost the platform development.

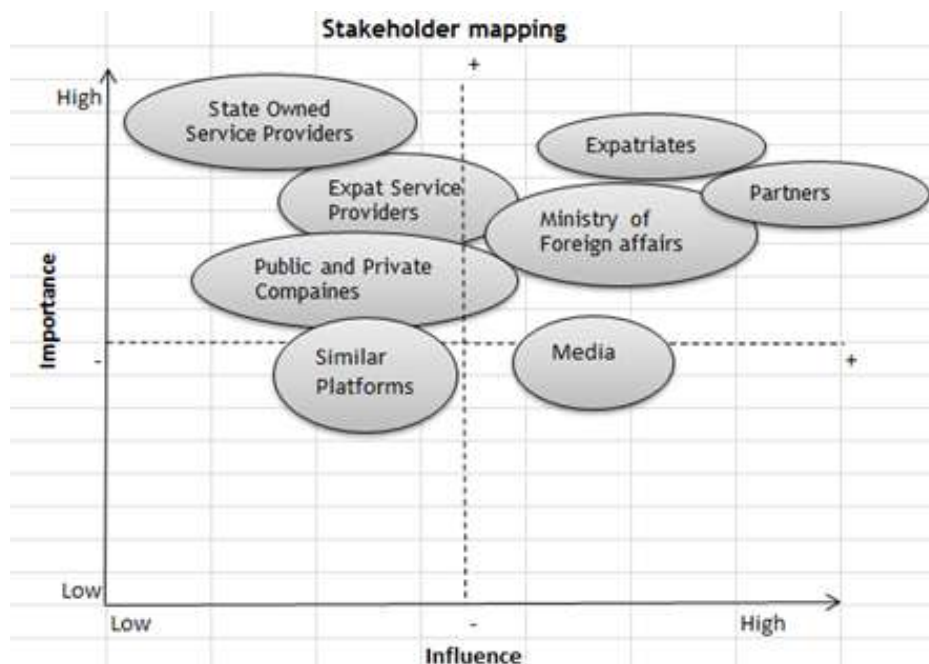
### Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Ministry of foreign affairs is part of government that makes all the policies, rules and regulations regarding expatriates. So it is influential as well as highly important stakeholder. This is because, as expat virtual platform represents soft landing activities, it is a tool for soft departure due to the outlook of the local activities presented in it. The ministry of foreign affairs is a stakeholder that can communicate this platform to the policy makers, as well as influence its visibility to the international eye through institutions such as embassies of chambers of commerce.

### Media


Media is an important tool to the development and sustainability of the platform. The platform needs publicity in order to be able to get to be known by people. This way, different types of media such as newspapers, televisions or radios and internet sources are necessary. In addition media is a tool to bring more viable stakeholders and possible funders who might consider expat virtual platform this platform as a service that supports their line of business, interest group or complement their service line.

Below is a picture that stipulates the above partners and their level of importance or influences in the future of the platform as an independent operating model.



### Other necessary stakeholders

As a platform moreover, it is necessary to pair with partners from other countries that can share good practices and knowledge exchanges for a proper development. The Hague expat Centre and Stockholm Global Expat partners would be good partners to start with, as they have a god experience in their countries hence gaining the knowledge.



For the platform to be fully functioning on itself, the need to engage the above mentioned stakeholders is necessary. It is however necessary to consider the expat virtual platform as a nonprofit service in order to be able to gain reputation and support from eligible parties. This platform could also be well complemented with a physical setting which is organized but informal, for expats to meet time to time in various activities. A voluntary basis in operating this platform could be encouraged. This has been a point that some of the service providers and unemployed expats in Helsinki already started to think about and willing to take charge.

## Conclusions

### **Future sustainability of the platform: Helsinki-Uusimaa as a model**

The current platforms have been a pilot. The pilot platform of Helsinki-Uusimaa region however has been impressive to many actors in Finland where the platform took an active role as well as outside Finland. Since the pilot of February 2013, the platform has had over 14000 page views and was visited by over 1600 people whereby more than half of them return to view the platform again. This stands as a remarkable feedback that describes the potential of this platform.

It was decided in the Expat-project consortium meeting that each partner region will be responsible for the development and maintenance of its local pilot website after the closure of the project on 31.12.2013.

In order for the website to function and develop properly in terms of the future sustainability, various aspects will have to be thought clearly. Among others are the financial aspects to run the platform, resource distribution as well as a good quality of stakeholders. In order to be able to insure these aspects as a success, an idea of developing a business model or a clear plan of utilizing networks of networks (meaning existing service providers and their stakeholders).

The current pilot has been developed and managed with one partner, namely Laurea University of Applied Sciences. After the project ends, Laurea will continue to run this pilot as an operational model and not a business with resources from the educational activities and supporting regional development of the Helsinki-Uusimaa Region.

### **Developing through curriculum**

Throughout its development Laurea has recruited several Information Technology Students from Finland and abroad who worked with the technical lead in various aspects of development. This work is as part of the students study requirements and in specific modules. In Laurea, students work through projects throughout their degrees.

The platform stands as an important case for Laurea, not only for its ICT project but also for the strategic intent which focuses in internationalization the Metropolitan region as well as actively participating in regional development activities. Expat Virtual Platform in this way is a tool to support some functions of internationalization of Helsinki-Uusimaa region as well as a good case of internationalization through regional development.

### **Functional models are concentration**

Basic operational system and functions will be taken in to action during the development of this platform. These are, developing Consortium with stakeholders, marketing the platform to the region and right stakeholders, technical development and model improvement through interim research activities.

Since the platform will operate as a supporting tool for already existing services, dedicated student actors will be assigned interim assignment where the stakeholder meetings and network will be conducted. In the same way, there will be dedicated groups for marketing, technical development as well as research activities in the organization. These groups of maximum 2 students will work

each other in Laurea research environment and keep updates of the interim development from each team for improvements and efficiency of the platform.

The marketing team will for example develop and execute marketing plan of the platform as well as collect feedback of the areas that need further development. Technical development team will be responsible for the content management and user interface maintenance whereas research and development team will work with both marketing and technical teams to conduct research in areas that will be addressed by the two.

### **Actors' diverse knowledge**

Although the above teams are expected to be 2<sup>nd</sup> year students or more, in each team there are Laurea staff members who are aware of the process and product that is developed. These are usually people who have experienced in the working world and lecturers. Among the staff members who will be working on this project is Laurea ICT department lecturers, who have been the support experts for the entire development of the Expat Virtual Platform during EXPAT project. Working with student project groups in service design and development is a key part of Laurea staff responsibilities.

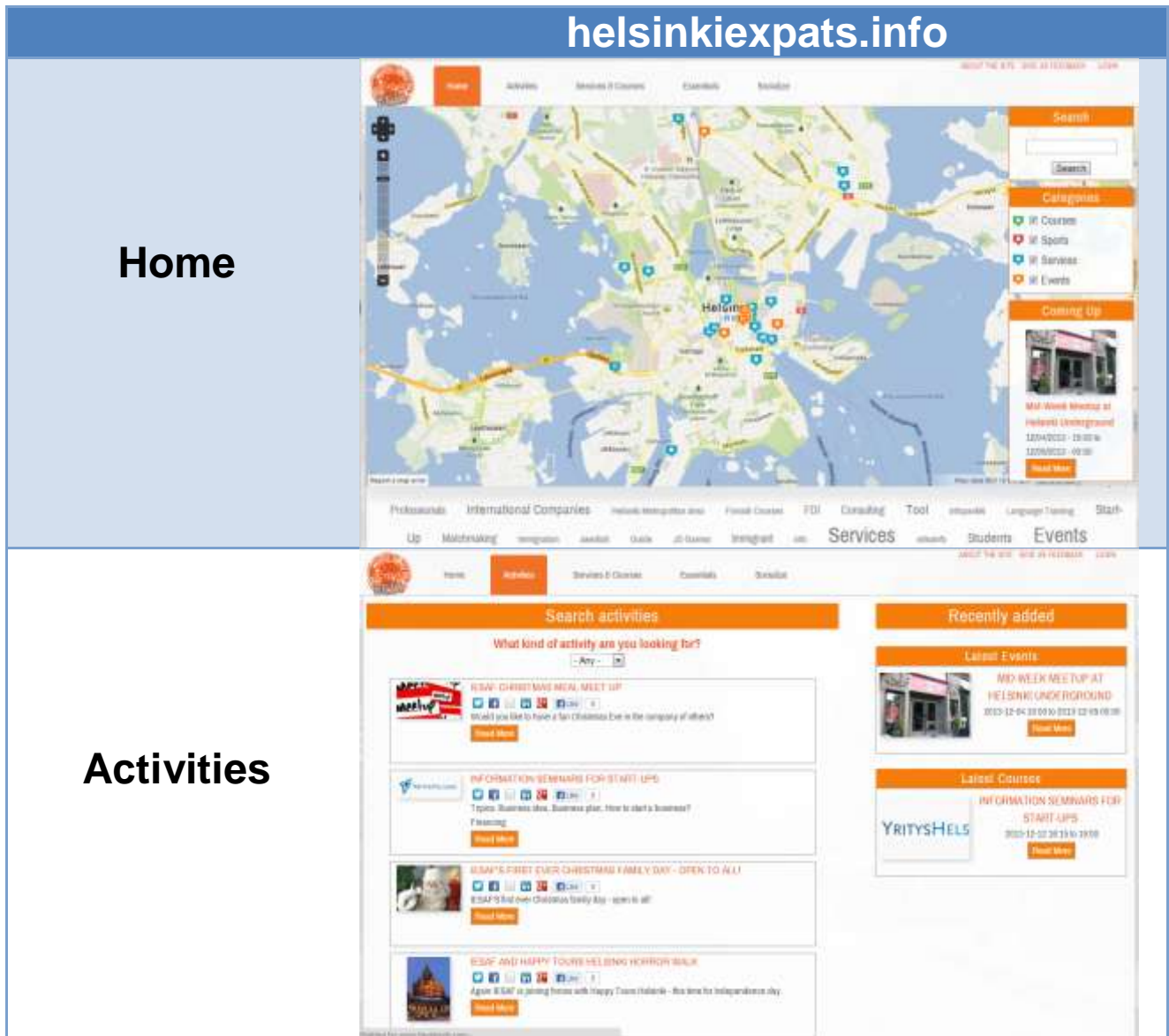
Throughout this continuation, the engagement of the above proposed key stakeholders will be considered. Furthermore, the results of the case studies as well as the thought to develop international partnership in strengthening the platform as a service will be vivid. Potentially, communication with companies and organization working with expats will be a core consideration. This is due to the need to realize key sponsors as well as active financial stakeholders.

The assessment of the Platform development will be done after 2 year. This time the awareness of how should the platform develop further will be highlighted. This can be through a new project or ownership if necessary. It is possible that in the future this idea will be developed further with different partners' universities around the world as part of a funded project hence a new knowledge sharing activity.

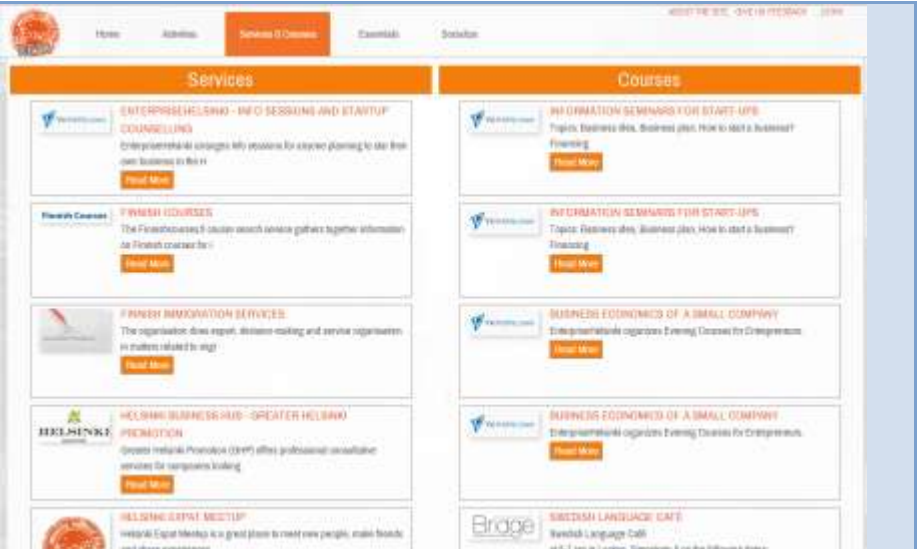
Above all, the Expat-project has been a viable project for the development of expats' services in the Central Baltic Sea Region. In Helsinki in specific, the Expat virtual Platform stood as an ideal way of collecting focused services those international needs, with a content that is already existing under one roof. Through the correct partnership or stakeholdership, this platform can benefit Helsinki Expats in many ways hence simplify their daily challenge by offering them information that might be challenging to find. To address this aspect however, the decision makers have to be well aware of the functionality and differentiating factors of this platform as well as realizing a functional team where Marketing, Research and Development as well as Technical competencies join efforts to develop the platform as a future service.

## Appendix

### Website screenshots:



## Services & Courses



## Essentials



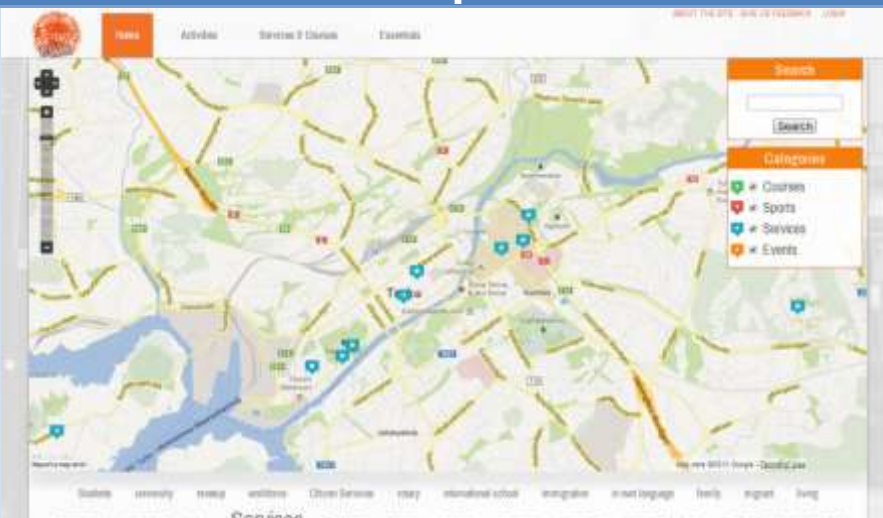
## Socialize





# turkuexpats.info

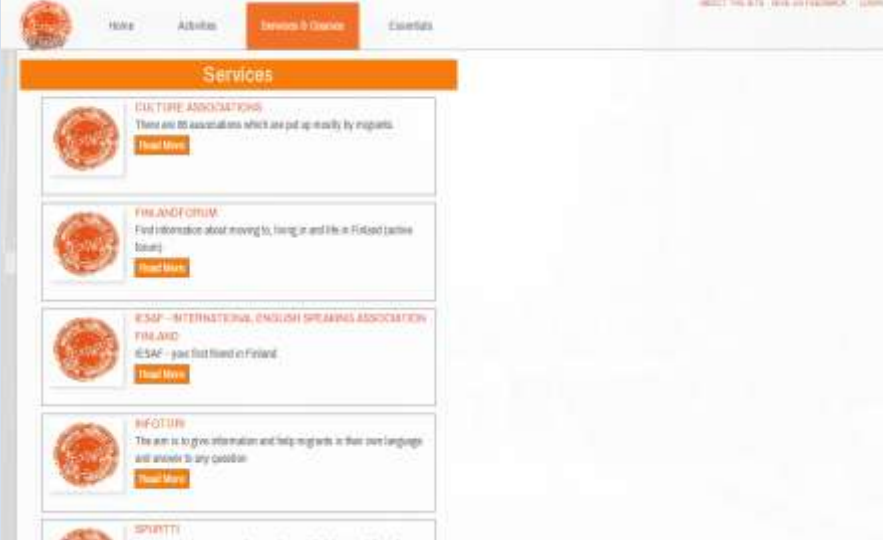
Home



Activities



Services & Courses





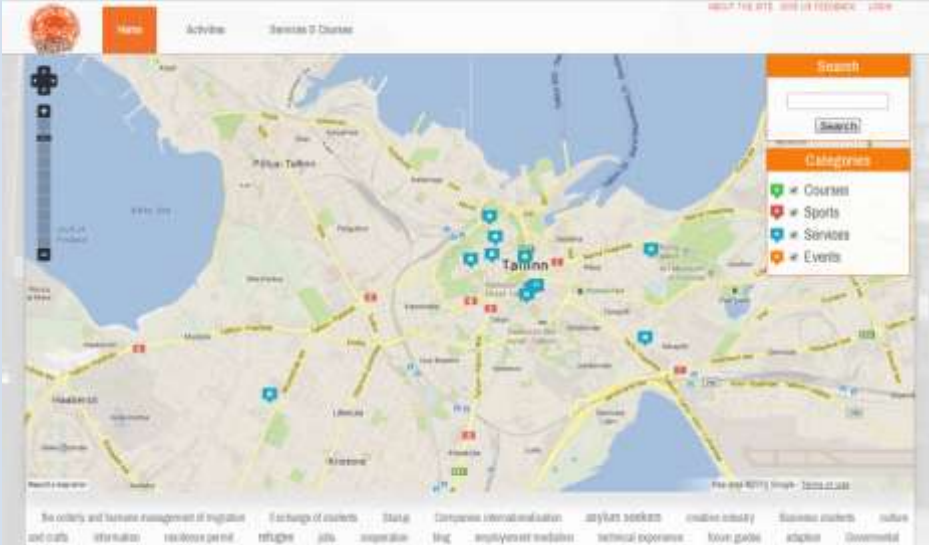
## Essentials





# tallinnexpats.info

## Home

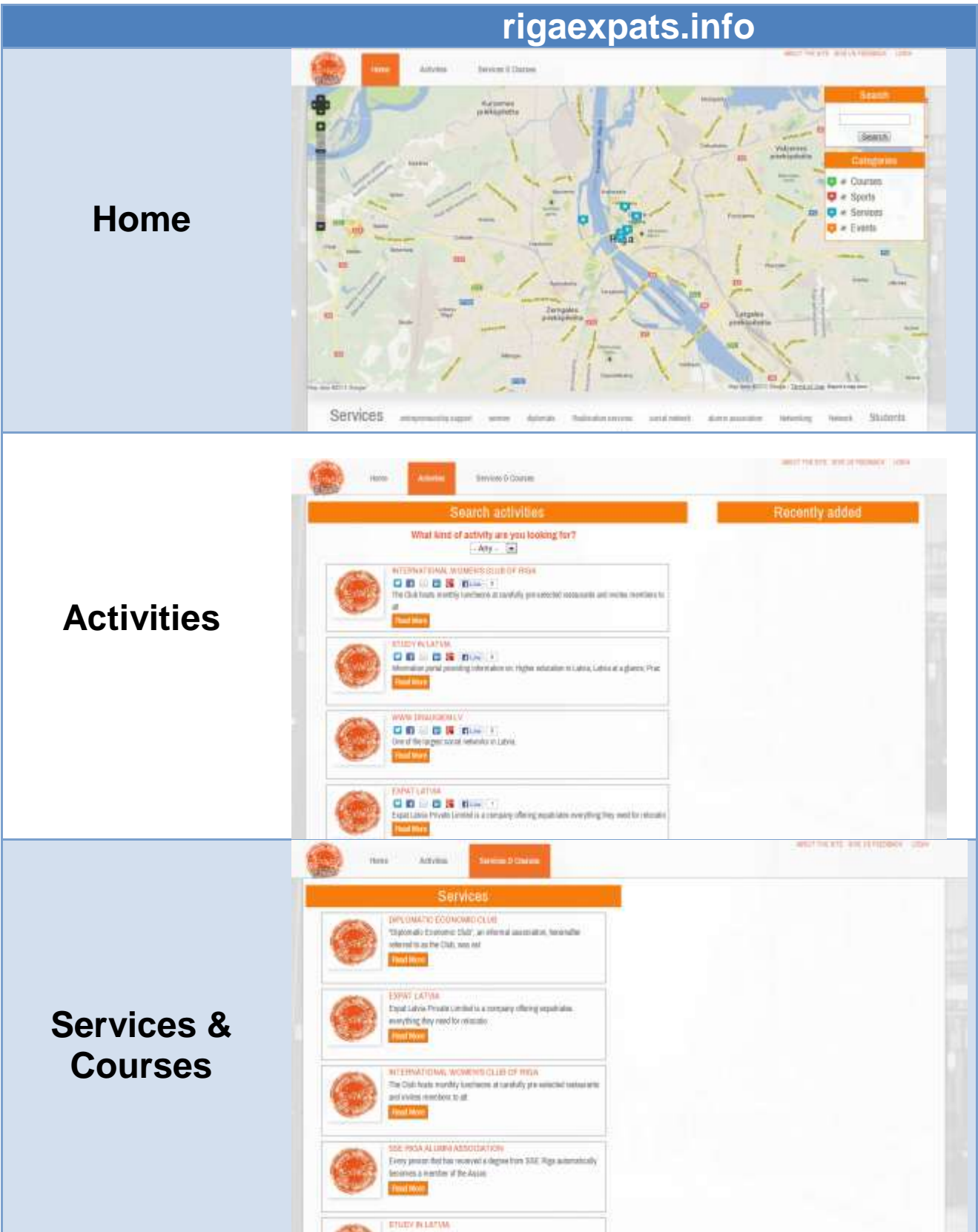


## Activities



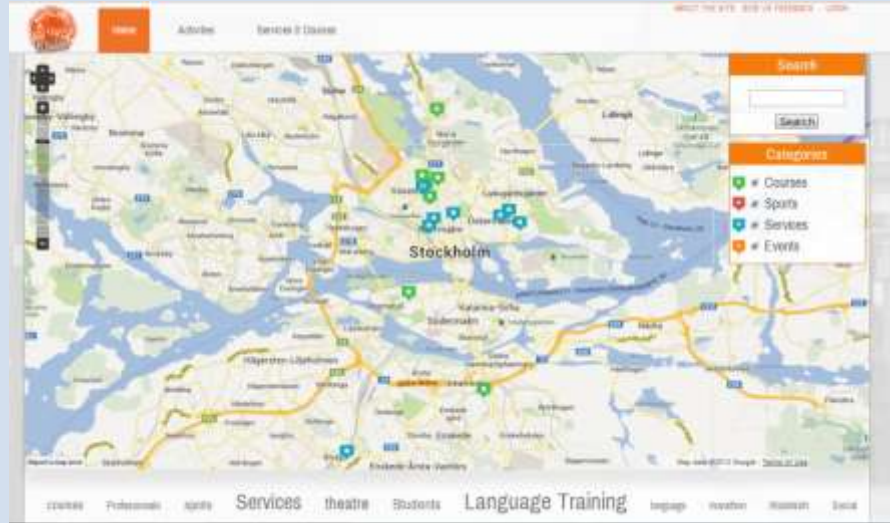
## Services & Courses





# swedenexpats.info

## Home



## Activities

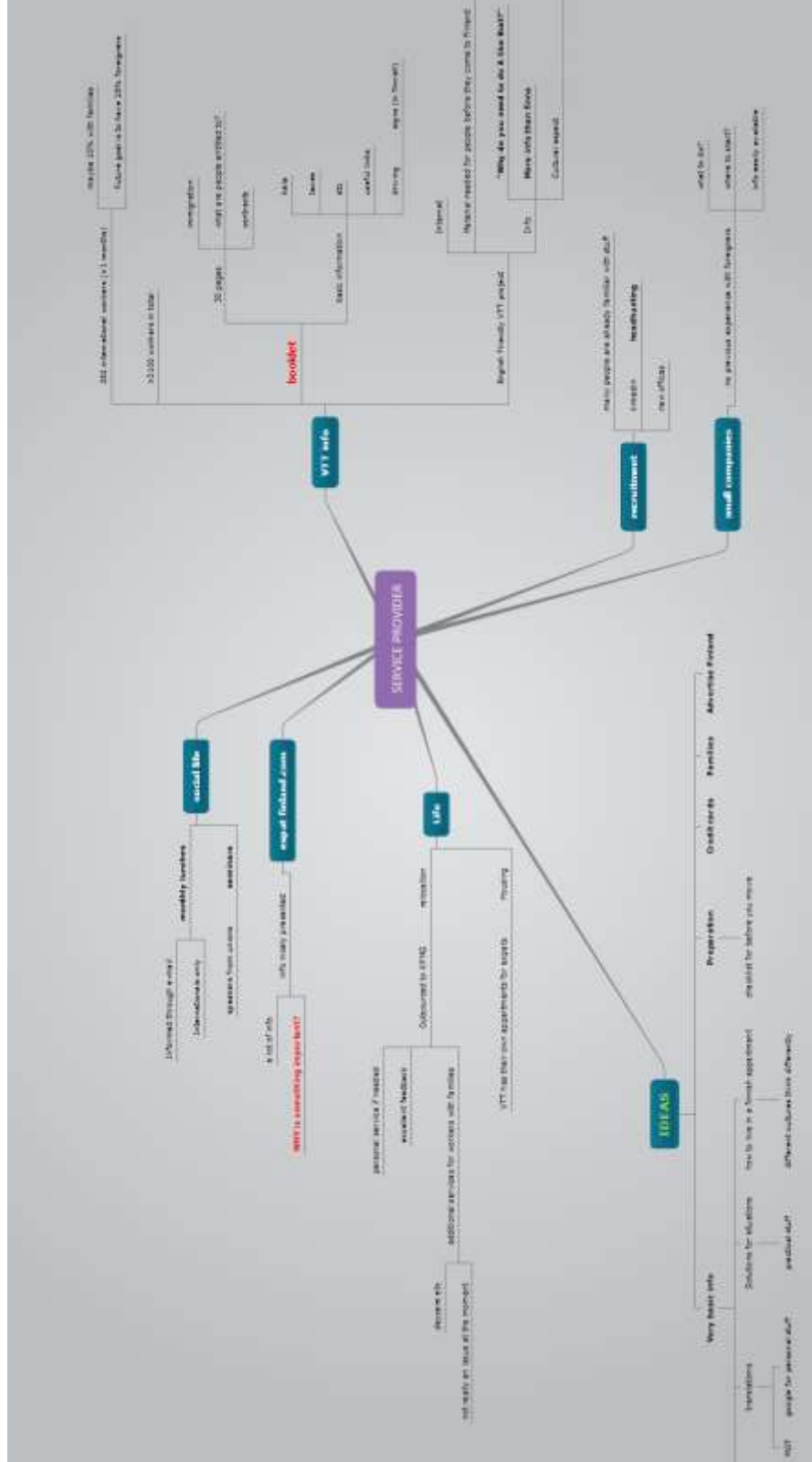


## Services & Courses

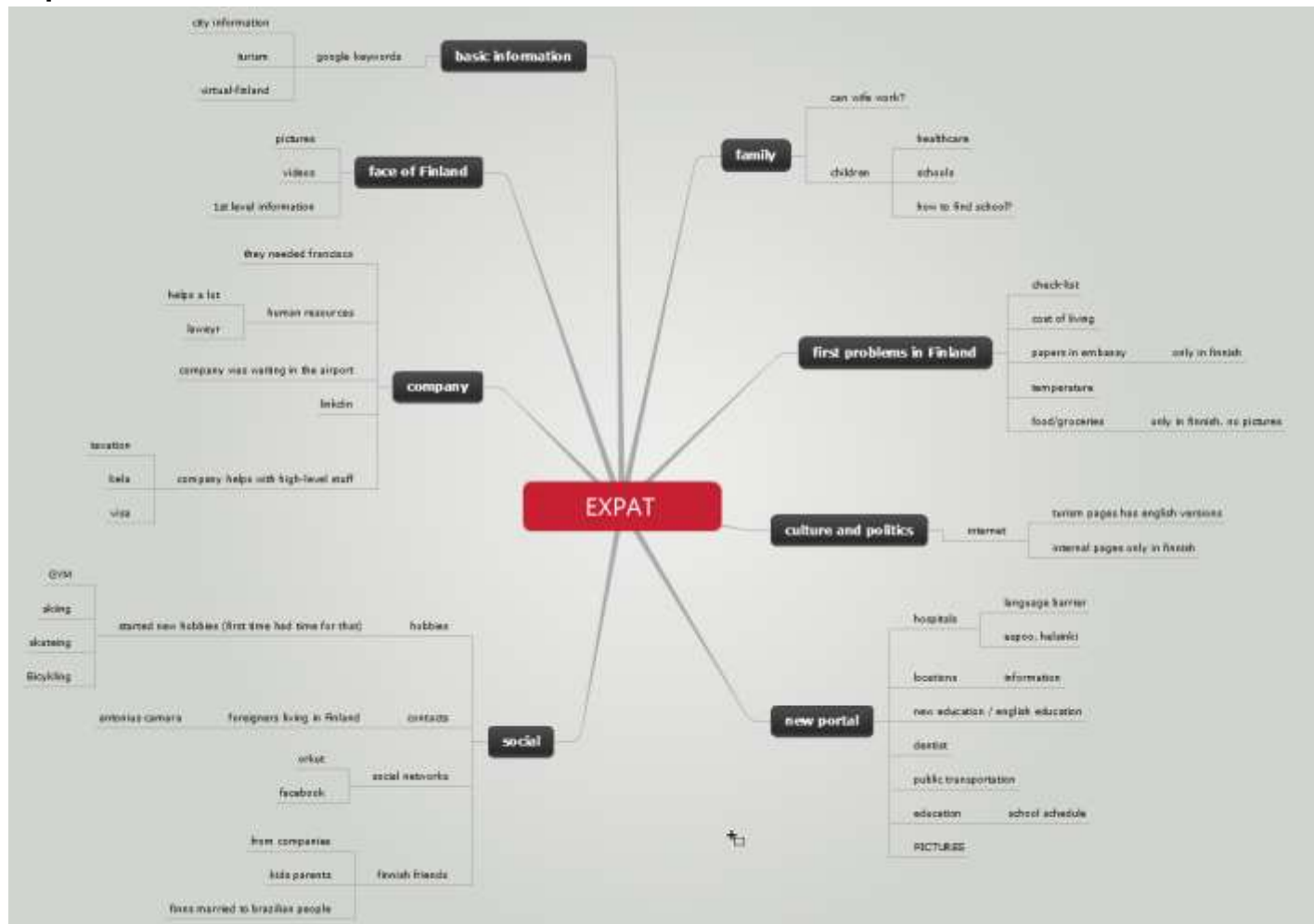


Interview results - mindmap layout example

Service provider:



## Expat:



## About the Expat-project

Expat-project (2012-2013) was co-financed by EU Central Baltic Interreg IVA Programme 2007-2013. Its ultimate aim is to make the Central Baltic Sea Region a more attractive destination, a more welcoming region to settle in, and a home to stay for international talents.

Human capital is one of the decisive factors that contribute to the high competitiveness of the Central Baltic Sea Region. In an interdependency world economy today, the regions and cities need to cultivate its human capital and to best retain the international professionals available at place in order to maintain and to increase its global competitiveness.

While Europe is a relatively attractive destination for highly skill immigrants, the Central Baltic Sea regions are not benefit fully from the international talents moving in and living here – nor are the internationals benefit from the opportunities the region should have on offer. The Expat-project addresses the factors that hinder the expats' smooth arrival and good quality of life in the Central Baltic Sea Region and developed methods and solution to improve the identified challenges, serving this way the interests of both the expats and the region as a whole.

The Expat-project conducted various research activities, includes best practice of soft-landing service models in Hague, Amsterdam, Stockholm and Toronto; three field studies on soft-departure services available in sourcing country in Shanghai, Seoul and Tbilisi; an online questionnaire on the internationals' opinion of their quality of life and a pilot development of a virtual service platform for internationals. The project results are presented in a series of reports providing aforementioned benchmarking results, analysis and policy recommendations.

Expat-project partners:

- Uusimaa Regional Council, Finland (Lead Partner)
- Culminatum Innovation Ltd, Finland
- Laurea University of Applied Sciences, Finland
- Turku Science Park Oy LTD, Finland
- Regional Council of Southwest Finland, Finland
- City of Uppsala, Sweden
- Riga Planning Region, Latvia
- University of Latvia, Latvia
- Institute of Baltic Studies, Estonia
- eGovernance Academy, Estonia

More information:

[www.expatriationproject.info](http://www.expatriationproject.info)



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