

Training in Rustavi, 28-30 January 2022



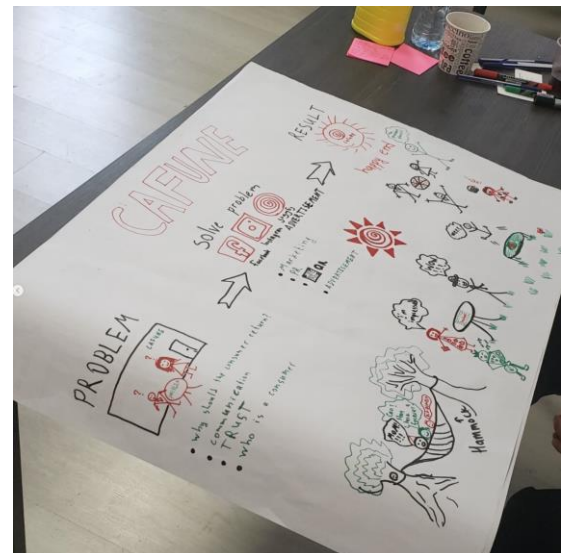
It was a whirlwind journey from start to finish, and the funniest (and simultaneously greatest) thing is that it's only just begun. After several days in beautiful Georgia at the end of January, the Czech contingent is already planning on heading back at the end of March and May to complete the training of students in Rustavi and help accelerate the local technological, academic, and entrepreneurial scene by encouraging young talent to stay in their home country. Back in November, my friend Ondra Brem (from the Czech Technical University, Faculty of Informatics) and I were contacted by UNICO (which has been run and co-founded both by people we know well from the university as well as two other excellent chaps who are the creme-de-la-creme of the local AI scene) if we want to participate on a UNDP-backed project in Georgia. We didn't know much apart from this, but knowing the cool guys on the side of UNICO, and given we have dedicated our lives to educating the public about how to most effectively use technology to solve global issues, it was a no-brainer to say 'Oh my god absolutely we are IN'. We then sat down to evaluate the depths of the project, and progressively became more enthralled. We found out that the local ex-industrial urban giant, Rustavi (very close to Georgia's capital city of Tbilisi) is not only experiencing a

massive brain drain of its educated people abroad, but also stagnating economically and academically (and, as a consequence, from an entrepreneurial perspective as well).

Upon arriving to Georgia, and eating all the khinkali and khachapuri we could find, we prepared for the three days of training in Rustavi. This encompassed several things - reflecting on our first set of training in November, meeting the companies involved in the programme, and liaising with Misha (the local coordinator of the programme) and getting students to attend and get the most out of the programme.

Let's start with first things first. In November, Ondra, and I put the first set of training together. It was complicated - doing things online is always trickier than being able to teach in person and laughing and interacting with the group - I think COVID proved this to everyone. While the attendance wasn't as high as we wanted to, we kicked off a Slack group and taught the young adults the basics of artificial intelligence, design thinking, and (from our online hackathon experiences), were able to whip up a reasonable interest in the programme and give us something to launch off. However, we knew that telling people stuff is one thing, but making sure they can actually actively solve problems is a whole other kettle of fish. So, we aimed to recycle a lot of the material for the larger group, and focus on problem solving, demystification of tech, career advice, more design thinking, with a special focus on artificial intelligence and how it should/should not be used to tackle the plethora of problems we face in the modern world.

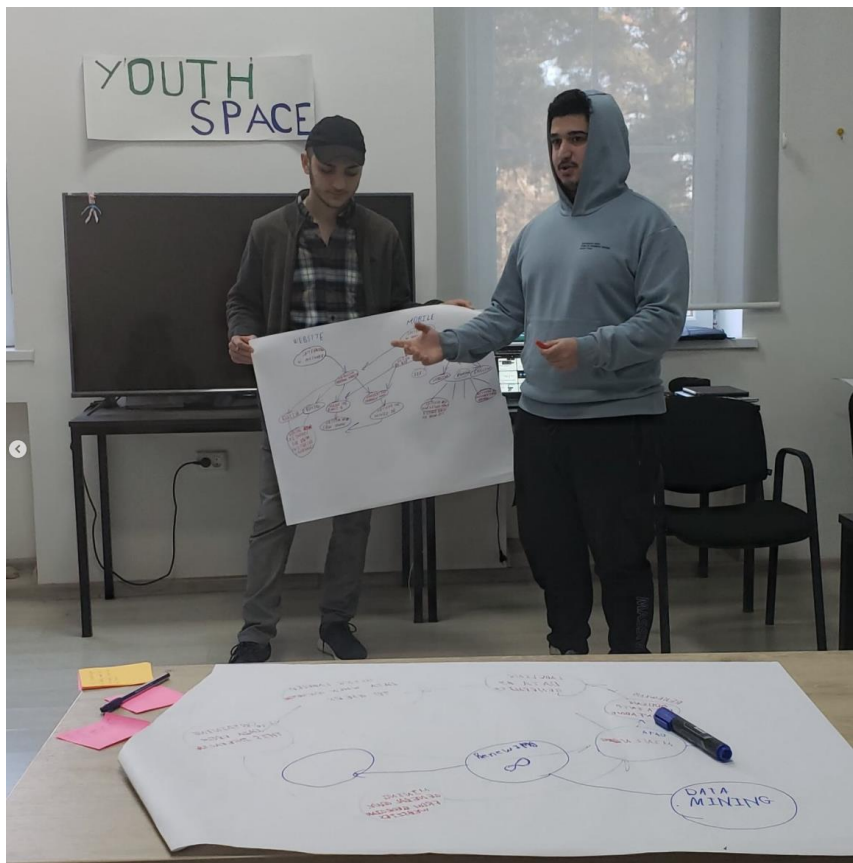
Secondly, and this is perhaps the most important thing, we wanted to meet all the company representatives face to face. If we wanted to teach everyone how to solve problems they come across, we needed to understand the problems ourselves and get to the bottom of the individual pains the companies face. As is often the case, companies



often think they need to solve a particular problem but in fact, the issue can lie somewhere completely different.

We met with Bank of Georgia, Ivery Kutsnashvili (who was representing several businesses, but mainly wanted to create a platform for matching procurement opportunities

in construction and possible solutions and materials on the market), SIQA, and Kafune. Bank of Georgia was in need of automating website navigation and customer service through, ideally, a chatbot. SIQA (an educational organisation which has been functioning since the 90s) needed to digitalise and automate many of their internal processes in order to optimise their functioning and be able to solidify and strengthen their community, communication, and consequently cadence of services offered. Finally, Kafune, a local Rustavi community centre/cafe found themselves in a situation where they need to bridge the gap between the shutdown of their old venue and the construction of a new one, effectively manage their online community, and maximise profits to be able to maintain operations.



After these meetings (saturated not only with information, but also robot-racing with SIQA, plenty of laughs, and excellent problem-solving discussions and technology know-how sharing), we were ready to hit Rustavi and kick everything off with the students.

The first day, we focused on design thinking and sharing our own experiences from companies and start-ups (where, often, the product is marketed in a different way than it actually works, or companies purchase the product without

really thinking about whether it solves their concrete problem). This got an interest from the students - they quickly engaged with the fact that we're not just trying to push them boring information, but actually try and prepare them for a life in a world where most jobs they will eventually occupy don't even exist. Saturday, we went a little deeper, by sharing basics of artificial intelligence and having the students start the free Elements of AI course which will help them understand the handling and annotation of data and systemic problem-solving. The final day, the students were at their most relaxed and we actually bonded amazingly as a group, proving yet again how valuable in-person meetings are. The students sang local national songs for us, we discussed gaming (specifically League of Legends - emotions really grew during this time!), and shared some memes. The presentations were a fantastic start to untangling the problematic at hand and coaching both from us, and experts like Vojta Nosek (the founder of UNICO) and Pavel Kordík (UNICO's co-founder and dean for the cooperation of academia and industry at the Faculty of Information Technology, Czech Technological University), we're confident that our next trip in March will be fruitful and we'll

be able to showcase some MVPs. In the meantime, we remain on hand on the Slack community for help both with the Elements of AI course, and to answer any questions. And sharing memes? Perhaps. We're here to learn *and* have fun after all.



To all our Rustavi friends: მადლობა და წარმატებები

And to everyone else reading: check out our video to get a bit more of a feel for the whole trip, its programme, and the initial ideas from the students.