

# Insights from a Testimonial (DNs) **Networking Your Way into a DN**

**Horizon MSCA 2026 Calls Conference  
MSCA 30th Anniversary in Türkiye**

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Middle East Technical University  
Department of Psychology, METUsense Lab**



# Path to building a network

- BSc, Mathematics, METU, 2005
- MSc, Cognitive Science, METU, 2008
- PhD, Psychology, University of Birmingham, 2013
- Early Stage Researcher, MSCA PRISM Network, Bilkent University, 2016
- Postdoc at JLU Giessen, 2018
- Data Analyst, A.S. National Brain Research Center, Ankara, 2019
- **Permanent position at METU, since 2020**

This is



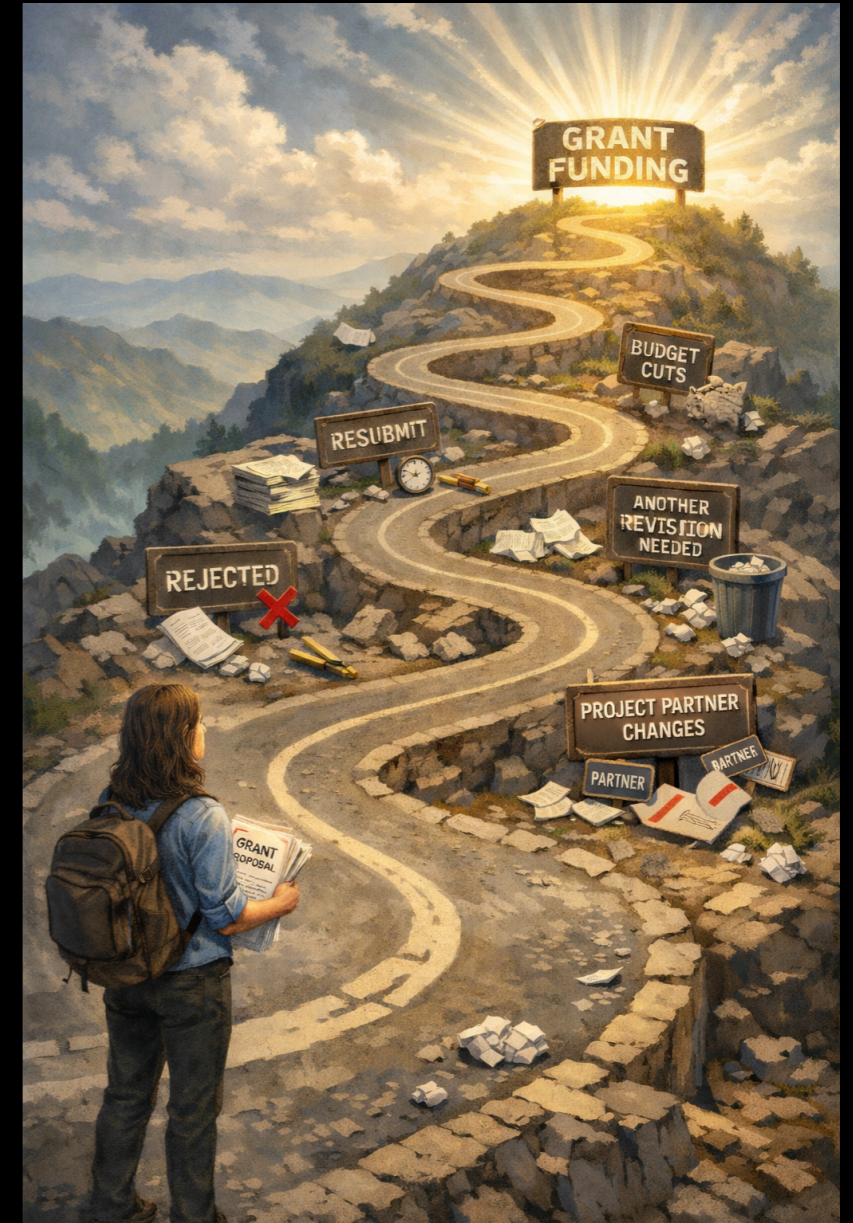
Perception of materials, objects and spaces through active **EXPLORATION**

HORIZON-MSCA-2024-DN-01

Coordinator: Prof Katja  
Doerschner, JLU Giessen,  
Germany

4.2m Euros (METU 237 292  
Euros)

Long and winding road...

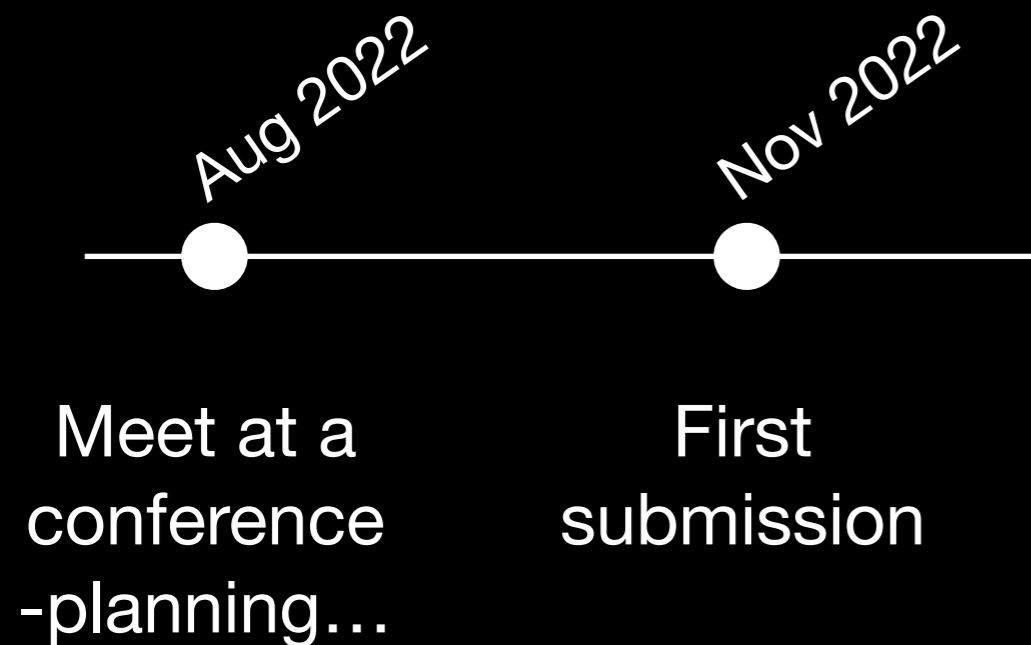


# Why my case may be useful -Back to 2022

- New topic for me (material sounds & language)
- Very limited track record at the start (one conference abstract)
- Small project as a starting point (2 MSc theses in progress)
- Most junior PI in the consortium

## 3 months to the deadline MSCA call 2022

- Fill in Part B tables for METU
- Link your project to the one of the **research objectives**, and the **skills** that are acquired



### 1. Beneficiary Legal Name: Middle Eastern Technical University (METU)

#### General Description

#### Role and Commitment of key persons

#### Key Research Facilities, Infrastructure and Equipment

#### Status of Research Premises

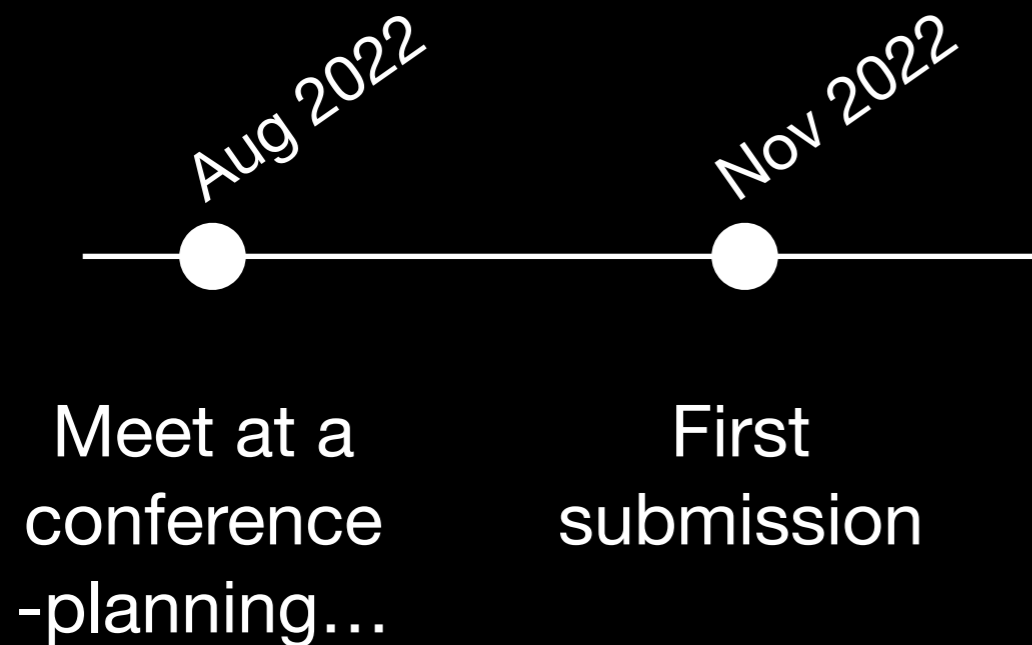
#### Previous Involvement in Research and Training Programmes

#### Current Involvement in Research and Training Programmes

#### Relevant Publications/datasets/softwares/ Innovation Products/

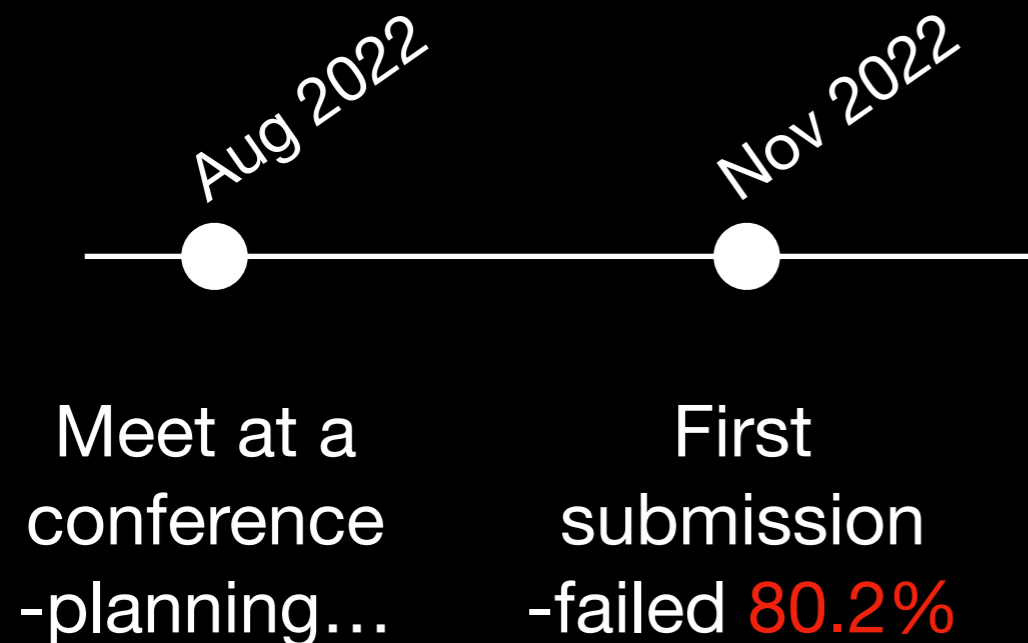
## 3 months to the deadline MSCA call 2022

- Fill in Part B tables for METU
- Link your project to the one of the **research objectives**, and the **skills** that are acquired



**Strengths:** **Ambitious**, **interdisciplinary**, and **well-structured**, presenting a convincing, measurable plan that integrates advanced AI-based methods, strong supervision, and comprehensive **open-science** and **training** components.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks clarity in **linking individual projects to overall objectives**, provides **limited detail** on data analysis and training organization, and addresses **gender and diversity** dimensions only superficially.



**Strengths:** **Strong engagement** between academic and non-academic sectors, a well-structured **training and dissemination plan**, and clear strategies for **public engagement** and impact that will enhance researchers' skills and career prospects.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks concrete detail on long-term **sustainability**, **IP management**, and **technological impact**, providing an unconvincing account of **broader societal and economic outcomes**.



**Strengths:** Coherent and well-structured work plan with clear deliverables, milestones, and strong institutional complementarity, demonstrating **effective collaboration**, **infrastructure readiness**, and commitment across all partners.

**Weaknesses:** Does not sufficiently address potential scientific, technical, and management **risks** that could affect project delivery and supervision.



The screenshot shows the website header with the UFUK AVRUPA logo and navigation menu. The main content area features a 'Travel Support' banner with a background image of Earth from space. Below the banner, a section titled 'GENERAL INFORMATION' provides details about the support program.

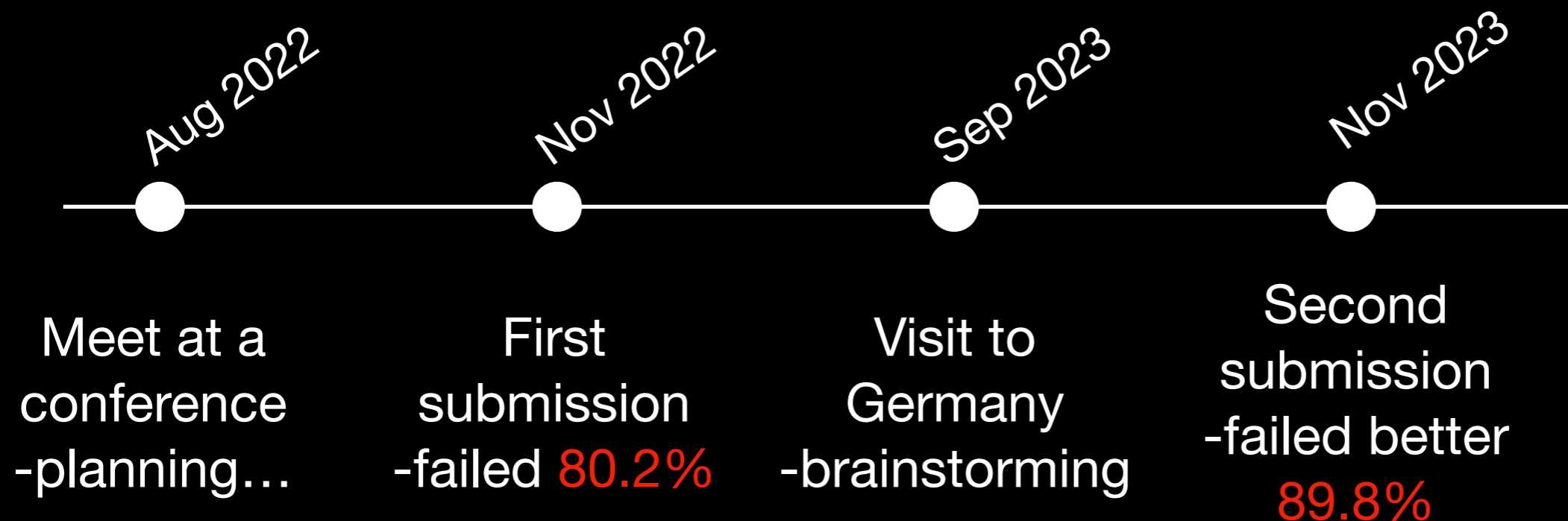
**GENERAL INFORMATION**

Travel Support is applicable for project researcher candidates who wish to take part in the projects to be presented to European Union Framework Programme (EU FP). Applicants should be working in an institution. Academicians, public sector or private sector employees are appropriate for the application to Travel Support.



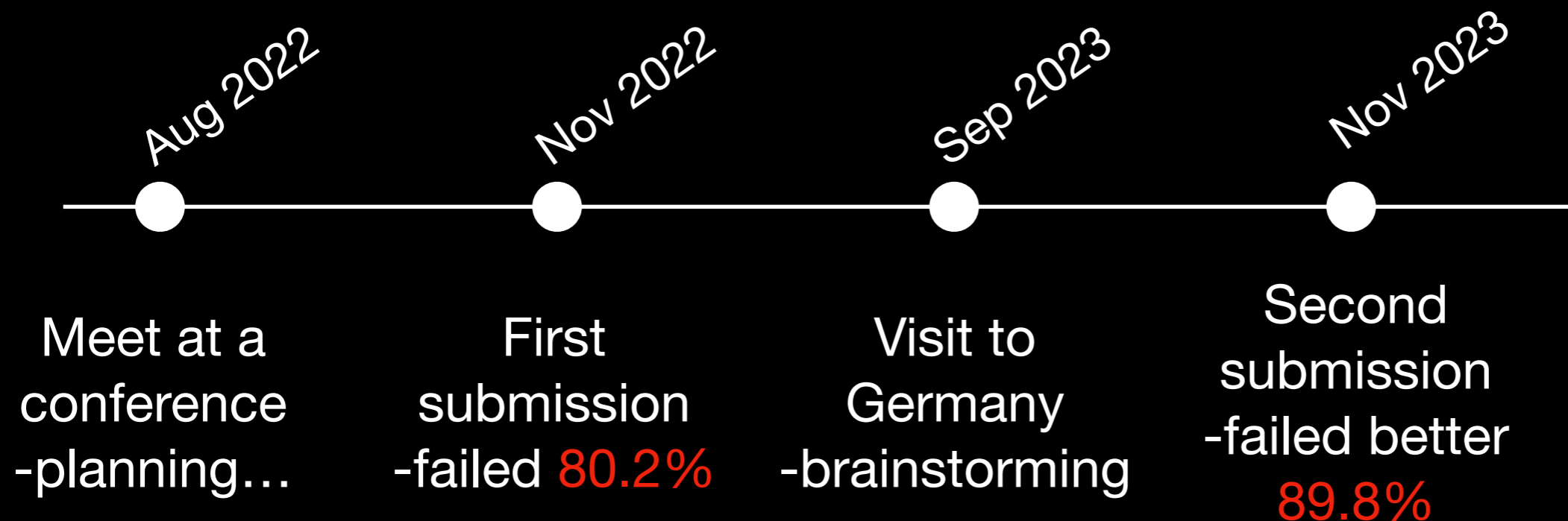
**Strengths:** **Ambitious**, methodologically **robust**, and **multidisciplinary**, with clearly defined objectives, strong open science and data management practices, an excellent training programme, and well-qualified supervisors ensuring **gender and diversity** integration.

**Weaknesses:** Lacks sufficient **justification for its focus** on active exploration, **novelty** of some objectives are unconvincing, and fails to clearly **link all individual projects to the overall research aims** (i.e., nonhuman studies).



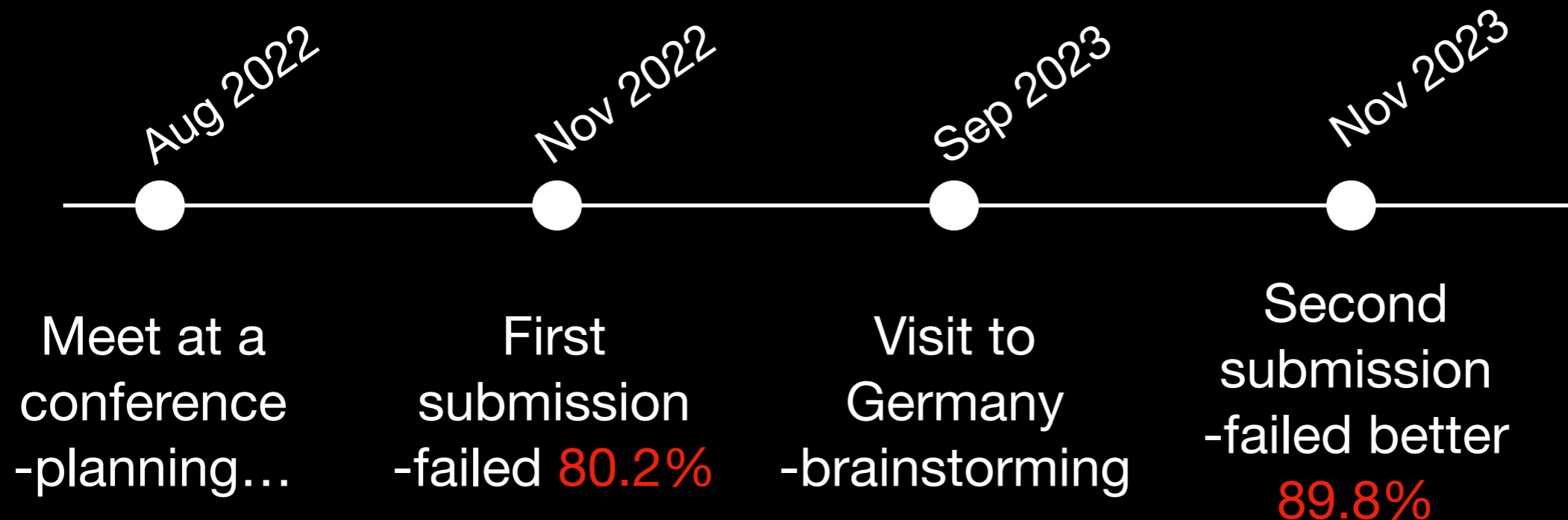
**Strengths:** Strong non-academic collaboration, convincing long-term **sustainability**, excellent plans for dissemination and impact, and clear pathways to **economic, scientific, and societal benefits** that enhance researchers' employability and outreach potential.

**Weaknesses:** Some claimed scientific and societal impacts are not sufficiently substantiated or **aligned with the proposed training** activities (regarding innovation in XR technologies and VR/AR skill development).



**Strengths:** A rigorous and **coherent work plan** with well-structured work packages, credible **deliverables**, strong **risk** mitigation, balanced consortium collaboration, effective **supervision**, and a thoughtful, **diversity**-aware recruitment strategy.

**Weakness:** *“Not all technological **risks** have been adequately anticipated.”*



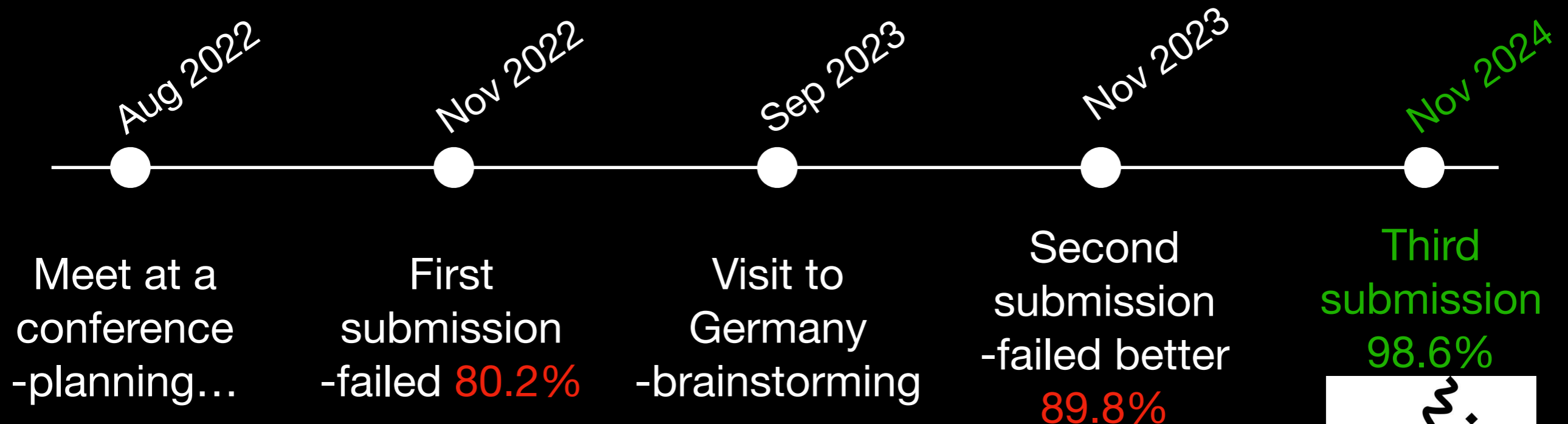
# Take home message from 2 failed attempts

Clarify the link between individual projects and overall aims

Justify collaborations and novelty

EU Policies: Strengthen gender, diversity, and impact dimensions

Address scientific, technical, and management risks specific to your project



This is



## Perception of materials, objects and spaces through active EXPLORation

12 Academic Beneficiaries:

JLU (Germany) - Coordinator

TU Delft (Netherlands)

University of Bologna (Italy)

University of Oxford (UK)

University of Birmingham (UK)

University of Bamberg (Germany)

Middle East Technical University (Turkey)

University of Helsinki (Finland)

INRIA (France)

UTIA (Czech Republic)

TU Darmstadt (Germany)

University of Waterloo (Canada)

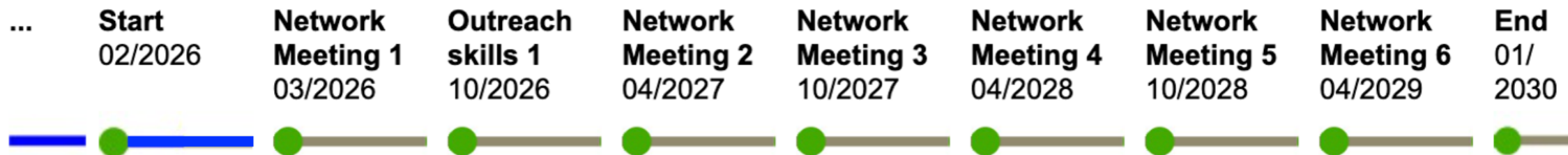
10 Associated Partners (including industry partners like Microsoft, Schlenk, Qualisys, and cultural organizations like Science Centers & art galleries)



# EXPLORA

## ● Timeline

Mouse over the timeline for more information. Links to upcoming meetings will become active soon.



[Go back to top](#)

<https://explora-network.github.io/web/>

explora-network.github.io/web/

ngebot & Pre... EXPRA Bilkent University... JASP | A Fresh Wa... e-Devlet Kapisi Files - ownCloud Calendar - ownClo...

Perception of materials, objects and spaces through active EXPLORation  
An MSCA doctoral network funded by the HORIZON 2020 framework - project lifetime 2026-2030

European Commission

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● Overview [Events](#) [Network Meeting 1](#) [Contact](#)

Exploratory behavior is at the core of what it means to be human. Being confronted with novel terrain, materials, tools, or artistic creations, humans instinctively explore the unknown in order to acquire information about it, to make sense of it, to act on it, and to appreciate what is in front of them. This involves dynamic engagement like walking, observing, handling objects, and manipulating them to witness changes in sight, touch, or sound. The relationship between perceptual experiences and the dynamic structures of the multi-sensorial information generated by active exploration is complex and still not well understood. Through a cross-sectoral, multi-disciplinary research and training programme, EXPLORA aims to uncover links between perceptual impacts and active exploration systematically, quantitatively, and empirically. We will create impact through transfer between science, engineering, design, arts and industry and by connecting multiple levels of STEAM education from middle schools to doctoral education. Understanding active exploration has the potential to advance the development of multi-sensory interactive technologies and the innovative design of immersive systems, as well as the modeling of intelligent adaptive behavior, thereby affecting nearly every facet of our life, including healthcare, education, mobility, AI, robotics and culture. Check out our [consortium](#), [projects](#), and the [EXPLORAKits!](#)

● Timeline

Mouse over the timeline for more information. Links to upcoming meetings will become active soon.

...	Start	Network Meeting 1	Outreach skills 1	Network Meeting 2	Network Meeting 3	Network Meeting 4	Network Meeting 5	Network Meeting 6	End
	02/2026	03/2026	10/2026	04/2027	10/2027	04/2028	10/2028	04/2029	01/2030

# Why my case may be useful

- New topic for me -and for the consortium, many collaboration possibilities
- Very limited track record at the start - it can only get better from here :)
- Small project as a starting point - Managable, most likely to meet all milestones...
- Most junior PI in the consortium - Explora is the most important item on my list!

# Overall Take-home Message

Build your network: Approach people -at conferences & via e-mail

Offer unique contribution even if it is complementary

Start small, but be visible

Rejection is part of the learning process -use feedback to improve



Relationships, clarity, and persistence  
Thank you!

