FIT Europe 2nd seminar

« Blockchain & Innovation for Digital Society »

Hosted by INSA Lyon, June 7th to 11th 2021

At the beginning of June 2021, students from France, Germany, Italy and Romania have experienced a week under the theme of innovation. From tasting roasted chickpeas appetizers to flying over the Basilica Notre-Dame de Fourvière through discovering the French start-up scene, FIT Europe participants could take part in many experiences… From home! Indeed, alongside attending conferences on the emerging technology that is blockchain, IT Master students lived a complete immersion in the world of innovation thanks to digital! A perfect illustration of the seminar's thematic around Digital Society.

On June 7th, students from Bucharest (Romania), Lyon (France), Milan (Italy) and Passau (Germany) were immersed for a week in the French start-up ecosystem through the second seminar of the '**Future IT Leader for a Multicultural Digital Europe – FIT Europe**' project. This project, co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme, is intended to provide IT students with high level European training on emerging technologies (such as Artificial Intelligence, Internet of Things, Blockchain and Assistive Robotics) along with its related socioeconomic implications (such as innovation, multiculturalism, ethics or privacy). The four academic institutions (INSA Lyon, Politehnica Bucharest, Università degli Studi di Milano, Universität Passau) and their corporate partners (La French Tech One, IT Center for Science and Technology CITST, Engineering SPA, ATOS) have gathered forces to promote IT graduates' employability with the FIT Europe project.

During the Lyon seminar, the participating students addressed the thematic of blockchain in its fundamental and practical aspects through three cornerstones, **developing essential competencies and soft skills for their future career**. The first cornerstone was the **high-level scientific keynotes** on the technical and fundamental aspects of the blockchain proposed by academic and industrial experts. Thanks to those keynotes, the students could acquire skills on the most advanced scientific topics in the field. Then, the second cornerstone of the seminar consisted in **presentations** given by industrials of various sizes (from start-ups to large companies) that widened the technical approach offered in the keynotes by dealing with the implementation of blockchain and its applications in the general ecosystem of digital. The IT master students could face the reality of integrating blockchain in an already existing ecosystem. Finally, the third cornerstone of this seminar consisted in **four challenges proposed by four French start-ups**. This opportunity allowed the students to work in international teams, developing intercultural skills, and to reflect on real cases from the start-ups' current environment.

A different academic approach was offered to IT master students. Indeed, **researchers and industrials from France, Germany, Italy and Romania conducted high-level keynotes that enriched the skills and knowledge of the participating students regarding the technology, its transfer and integration in existing systems and its impact on society**. Thanks to the possibility of hybrid training, they were given a previous access to online courses dealing with the fundamental basis of blockchain in order to participate to the seminar with core knowledge on the topic. This initiative made possible the development of a serie of high-level keynotes.

The overall objective of the Lyon seminar was to enable computer science Master students to understand better both the technical aspects and the potential of blockchain technology. '*The speakers would come and listen talks previous to theirs in order to make sure they wouldn't restate some topics and would give the*

students complementary teaching' explained Professor Lionel Brunie from INSA Lyon. Beyond the competencies they acquired on blockchain, the IT master students could discuss the companies' specific needs in terms of competencies for future engineers. Moreover, students and experts talked about the qualities required to create a start-up as well as the important steps of the process to start a business. These different experiences offered to the future IT leaders a general inventory on human resources in the field of computer sciences.

FIT Europe is also meant to facilitate interactions and networking between students and experts through discussions and collaborative work, a real challenge for a remote seminar. However, after the experts' keynotes the participants had the opportunity to meet and network in a virtual coffee room on Glowbl. **The platform, laureate of the "Scale-up Excellence" program supported by La French Tech, offered more than a typical digital seminar**. Indeed, students and experts could virtually navigate between rooms in which they could participate to discussions around different tables just like if they were attending an in-person event. This innovative video-conferencing tool enabled networking among people from all over Europe in a period in which travelling is not possible.

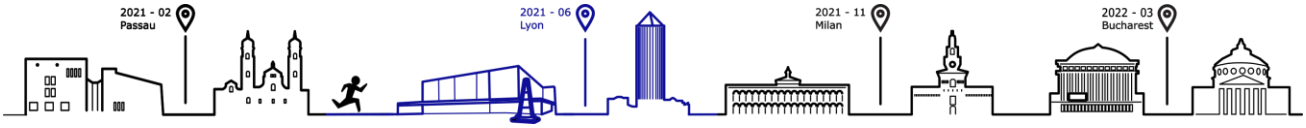
Should blockchain be integrated to the existing system of the start-up? Which solution should be used in a given context? Can blockchain be leveraged with the Internet of Things? **Gathered in 4 international teams, the participating students worked in competition during the entire week on projects presented by Aitenders, Iexec, Equisafe and Kresus**, 4 start-ups working with La French Tech One. Despite the fact that the seminar could not be held in-person, the computer science students **could implement the skills they acquired throughout the week** by working on challenges currently faced by start-ups. Four mentors from the start-ups, followed and guided each team so that their project would be aligned with the start-up ambitions.

On the last day, the students' teams presented their project to the FIT Europe participants. *'We were extremely impressed by the presentations and the work the students have achieved'* said Prof. Lionel Brunie, '*it was really amazing! Above our expectations because, even if we had high expectations as we know the students, the context was very difficult since we were not attending the seminar in-person and the students only had a few days to work on the project'*

After the presentations, a time was dedicated to the debriefing and discussions when students and experts debated on many topics, such as the future of blockchain, technology's sustainability or the start-up world. Thanks to the survey tool integrated in the Glowbl platform, the FIT Europe team could ask the students if they would want to create their own start-up in the future. And what a surprise for them when they discovered that 50% of the respondents answered positively to the question! Indeed, during the following discussion, some of the students explained that they were already working on creating their start-up and that the FIT Europe seminar reinforced their desire to become start-uppers. After these enriching discussions came the moment to award the team that presented the best project in the morning. However, the jury announced they could not choose a winning team as all four projects were of high-level quality. *'The 4 projects were so different one from another that it was impossible for us to put them in competition and distinguish a winner'* explained Dorothée Brac de la Perrière, manager of the FIT Europe project at INSA Lyon.

At the end of the seminar the students and the FIT Europe team are looking forward to the next seminar that will be held in November 2021 at Università degli Studi di Milano.

INSA Lyon would like to thank their industrial and academic partners along with the start-ups for their involvement in this seminar. In addition, INSA Lyon would like to express their gratitude to the European



Commission for co-funding the project. Finally, INSA Lyon would like to acknowledge the students for their commitment during the seminar.

Further information:

The European (France, Germany, Italy and Romania) task force of the FIT Europe project comprises four leading Universities, four corporate partners, with the support of local authorities, and it aims at gathering companies' needs and priorities, and developing and implementing relevant evolutionary process of 4 seminars, far beyond a classical student's exchange framework or a new ICT module. For each seminar, we focus on an emerging technology that is disrupting the current technological paradigm (such as AI, Internet of Things, Blockchain, Assistive Robotics, Artificial Intelligence) along with its related socioeconomic implications (such as Innovation, Entrepreneurship, Multiculturalism, Globalization, Ethics, Privacy). Target groups in the committed institutions are young, local and international IT master students and teacher-researchers whose expertise could be sharpen through workshops and seminars between the academia and the industry in shared curricula. The industry will also profit from this trialogue.
An open resource library, a white paper and multiplier events in the four European countries will ensure an appropriate dissemination in order to increase awareness among diverse stakeholders.
As a conclusion, FIT EUROPE aims to create a platform which enables the industrial and academic participants to develop methods and practices, analyse social and/or economic impacts of emerging technologies and to produce new knowledge on how IT can contribute to boundary-breaking innovations that will enable ambitious development and growth in intelligent socio-technical futures, all of which combines to realise the goal of educating 'Future IT leaders for a Multicultural, Digital Europe'.

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