HCI
Lecture 6

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The trunk test

- With a slightly macabre sense of humor, Steve Krug calls the "trunk test" an empirical method to determine whether a website's navigation is well-designed.
- The test is named this way because you have to imagine being kidnapped, blindfolded, and placed in the trunk of a car. You are then taken to an unknown location, where you are pulled out and unblindfolded.
- What can you understand about where you are?

The trunk test of a website

- When faced with a random page of a website, if the navigation is well-designed, you should be able to immediately understand the following:
    - **Which website is this?** (Site ID)
    - **Which page are you on?** (Page name)
    - **What are the main sections of the site?** (Sections)
    - **What options do you have at this level?** (Local navigation)
    - **Where are you within the content structure?** ("You are here" indicators)
    - **How can you perform a search?** (Search bar)

Web navigation

- The kidnapping metaphor isn't so far-fetched.
- UX designers often assume that users reach their site by following clear, linear, and precise paths.
- However, the web is a network of interconnected pages linked in many different ways.
- Users often land on a page unexpectedly, without any prior context—just like a kidnapped person.
- That's why it's crucial to design your site's navigation in a way that makes it easy to use for all users, whether they arrive step by step or suddenly.

The homepage

- The homepage is the first page that opens when a user visits a site through its address.

- It serves as the welcome page, the business card, and the first impression a site gives of itself.

- Because of this crucial role, the homepage must contain a large amount of information.

Contents of a homepage

- **Site identity and mission:** The homepage must immediately convey the site's nature and goals while persuading the user to stay rather than leave for another site.

- **Site hierarchy:** Persistent navigation should provide an overview of all the site's content and features, as well as how they are organized.

Contents of a homepage

- **Search:** On most websites, the homepage should feature a clearly visible search bar.
- **Call-to-action elements:** Like a magazine cover, the homepage should entice users to explore the site by hinting at interesting content.
- **Content promotion:** The homepage should highlight the most recent, best, and most popular content.

Contents of a homepage

- **Feature promotion:** The homepage should encourage users to explore the site and try its features.
- **Temporary content:** It should highlight frequently changing content to entice users to return often and showcase updates to signal that the site is active and evolving.
- **Business:** The homepage should allocate space for advertising, promotions, and potential co-branding initiatives.

Contents of a homepage

- **Shortcuts:** Frequently accessed content should have a link on the homepage to make it easier for users to find.

- **Registration:** If the site includes registration features, the homepage should provide links, text fields, and buttons for new users to sign up and returning users to sign in. It should also indicate when a user is logged in (e.g., "Welcome" or "Welcome back").

Goals of a homepage

Beyond these practical needs, the homepage should also aim to achieve more abstract goals:

- Show the user what they are looking for.
- Suggest potentially interesting content, even if it's not directly related to their search.
- Clearly indicate the starting point for their navigation.
- Establish credibility and trust by making a great first impression.

Issues with a homepage

Given its importance and visibility (for some visitors, it's the only page they will see), the homepage presents several challenges:

- Everyone involved in the site wants an announcement or a link to their section on the homepage, leading to competition for visibility.

- Every member of the organization wants to have a say in the homepage's design due to its significance.

- Unlike lower-level pages, which can be tailored to specific content and audiences, the homepage must appeal to all visitors.

Fundamental questions

- Given all the content and people involved in creating a homepage, compromises on what to present are inevitable.
- One fundamental and non-negotiable point is the following: the homepage must communicate the overall idea of the site.
- One way to check if this is happening is to see if the homepage answers the following questions that users ask when they visit:
  - What is this?
  - What's here?
  - What can I do here?
  - Why should I stay here and not go somewhere else?

The importance of first impressions

- A user's first impression is very important for a specific reason:
  - NOT because the user carries that first impression throughout the entire navigation of the site,
  - BUT because UX experts have empirically proven that web users have developed a sensitivity that allows them to quickly assess whether a site presents itself well or not.
- Moreover, if users can form a clear and accurate understanding of the site's content, they will be better equipped to navigate it effectively.
- In other words:
  - Very often, the user's first impression correctly reflects the site's effectiveness.
  - If the first impression is positive (because the user quickly understands the site's purpose), navigation is often made easier, reinforcing that impression.
  - So, the user carries the first impression with them, but because that first impression helps them navigate the site, not because it creates an emotional impact that stays with the user.

Excuses for not working on the informational content of the homepage

"There's no need. It's obvious what the site offers."

- The problem for those working on a website's content is that they know it so well that they take it for granted and forget that nothing is obvious to users who are visiting for the first time.

- It's important to remember empathy, the need to put yourself in the users' shoes.

Excuses for not working on the informational content of the homepage

"The explanation may be useful on the first visit, but then people will get bored."

- Of course, if the explanation of the site takes up half of the homepage, users will quickly become bored. However, if the explanation is properly sized, it will be informative for new users and non-intrusive for returning ones.

Excuses for not working on the informational content of the homepage

"Anyone who really needs the site will understand what it's about."

- The view that users who don't immediately understand the site aren't part of the target audience is very narrow and risks diverting the site managers' attention away from an important segment of potential customers.

Excuses for not working on the informational content of the homepage

"**Marketing will take care of communicating everything.**"

- This mindset overestimates the power of marketing.

- An effective campaign can bring users to the site, but the deciding factor is making them stay, and for that, you need a site that is understandable and easy to navigate.

The role of the homepage on the Web

- Links are everywhere: on the pages themselves, in emails, tweets, messages exchanged through social networks, and messaging apps.

- Every page of any site is accessible via links from all over the web and communication services.

- In such a context, does it still make sense to give so much attention to the homepage, considering the role of persistent navigation on a site's pages?

The role of the homepage on the Web

- The answer is simple: yes. Why?
  - Because the internal pages of a site must primarily present their content, and they don't have enough space to communicate the site's overall idea.
  - Because even if users are instantly directed to an internal page of a site, they often use the persistent navigation (in this case, the site's logo/link) to go back to the homepage and get a better sense of orientation.

The focal points of the homepage

- All the content on the homepage can help the user understand the essence of the site, but there are three specific points where explicit statements about what the site is can be found:
    - **Tagline**
    - **Welcome blurb**
    - **"Learn more"**

Tagline

- The **tagline** ("tag": label) is a brief phrase visually connected to the site's identity.

- Its position is typically immediately below the site's logo or to its right.

- It serves as a short description of the entire site, a phrase that characterizes the whole initiative by summarizing its meaning and strengths.

Qualities of taglines

- **Clear and informative:** they explain well what the site or the organization behind it does.
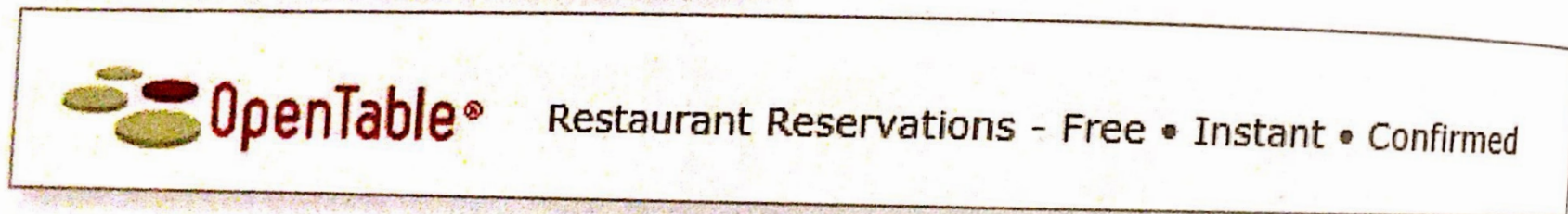
From Krug's "Don't make me think"

Qualities of taglines

- **Sufficiently long, but not too much**: 6-8 words are enough to express a complete thought while maintaining quick readability and retention.

From "Don't make me think" by Krug

Qualities of taglines

- **Differentiation:** A tagline also serves to distinguish a site from all others. A good tagline (as suggested by Nielsen) is one that no one else would use except for the site's creators.

Urbanspoon Boston
Boston restaurants and reviews from critics, food bloggers, and friends.

Urbanspoon Tucson
Tucson restaurants and reviews from critics, food bloggers, and friends.

Urbanspoon Brisbane
Brisbane restaurants and reviews from critics, food bloggers, and friends.

From "Don't make me think" by Krug

Qualities of taglines

- **Pleasure, liveliness, and cleverness:** A tagline being clever is a good quality, as long as the cleverness helps convey the message and doesn't obscure it.

From "Don't make me think" by Krug

Qualities of taglines

- **Generic taglines are not effective** because they don't convey meaningful content that provides an instant representation of the site.

From "Don't make me think" by Krug

Sites that don't need a tagline

- There are two special categories of sites that can do without taglines:
    - Sites that have achieved significant fame (e.g., Google, Amazon)
    - Sites that are already highly recognizable due to their offline presence (e.g., Ferrari, the Olympics)

Welcome blurb

- The **welcome blurb** is a concise description of the site, placed in a prominent block on the homepage, typically in the top-left under the site's ID or at the center of the content space.

From
"Don't make me think" by Krug

«Learn more»

- More detailed explanations of products and services are sometimes necessary, especially in the context of sites that promote innovative products or new business models.

- Another type of focal point is a brief explanatory video that allows users who are willing to watch it to learn more.

- Of course, users should be given the option to skip the video, especially if they are returning users who have already seen it.

An additional question for the homepage

- After quickly showing the user the purpose of the site, the homepage should answer another question: **"Where do I start?"**

- After a brief look at the homepage, a user should understand:
  - Where to perform searches
  - Where to begin navigating the site
  - Where to start accessing the site's most interesting content

Starting points

- For the following types of sites, recognizing the starting point of the most important processes on the homepage is crucial:
  - Sites that require user registration
  - Sites that require users to log in
  - Sites that rely on step-by-step procedures (e.g., mortgage application, flight ticket purchase)
- The critical issue is making these entry points clearly distinguishable and identifiable, even amid the richness of content on the homepage.

The Tragedy of the Commons
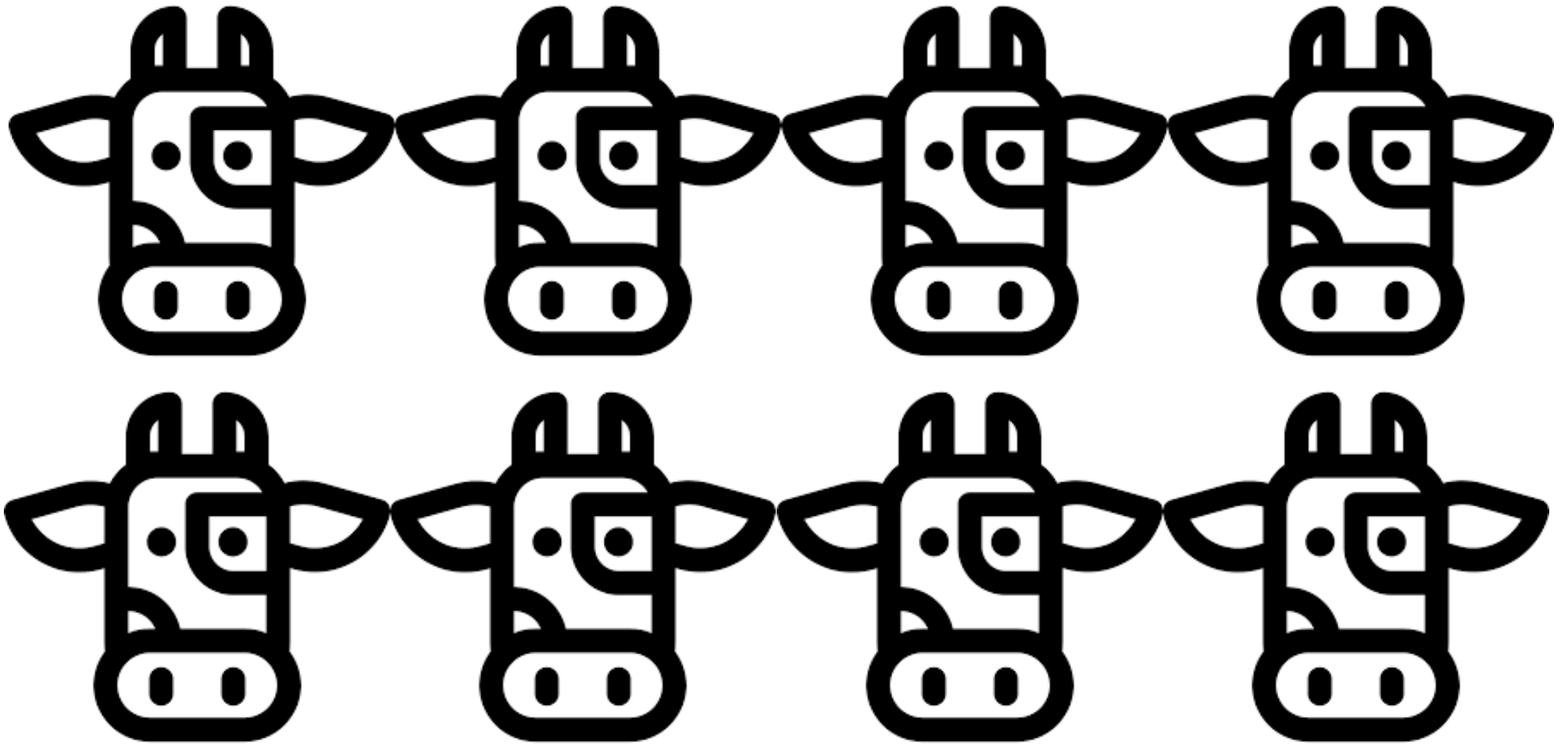
The Tragedy of the Commons

- The "tragedy of the commons" is an economic argument dating back to the 19th century, made by the English economist William Foster Lloyd.

- There is a common pasture, shared by several shepherds.
  If one shepherd brings an extra cow to graze, they gain one more cow to exploit and sell, with a profit of +1.
  The cows of all the other shepherds, as there is a little less grass due to the new cow, will lose some weight, with a loss for each shepherd, but still much less than -1 (the equivalent of losing one cow).

- Since introducing a cow results in a gain of +1 for the shepherd who introduces it, and a smaller (in absolute value) loss of -1 for all the other shepherds, the action seems very attractive to each shepherd.

- If all the shepherds think in the same way and take the initiative, the pasture quickly becomes overloaded, grass stops growing, and all the shepherds lose everything.

The Tragedy of the Common Space of a Homepage

- Similarly, within an organization, all stakeholders have an interest in promoting their own unit on the homepage.
- Each link on the homepage brings a gain of +1 for its related content, at the expense of the other content, which loses a bit of space or, at least, some of the user's attention (still a less harmful loss than -1, equivalent to a link disappearing from the homepage).
- If everyone thinks this way, the homepage will end up being overloaded, with a significant impact on understandability and navigation.
- With a very cluttered homepage, users prefer to go elsewhere, and all the units of the organization lose everything.
- This is a risk that should be addressed when discussing the content of a homepage: compromises need to be made in order not to compromise the success of the site.

Interesting examples of homepages

Brembo

brembo.
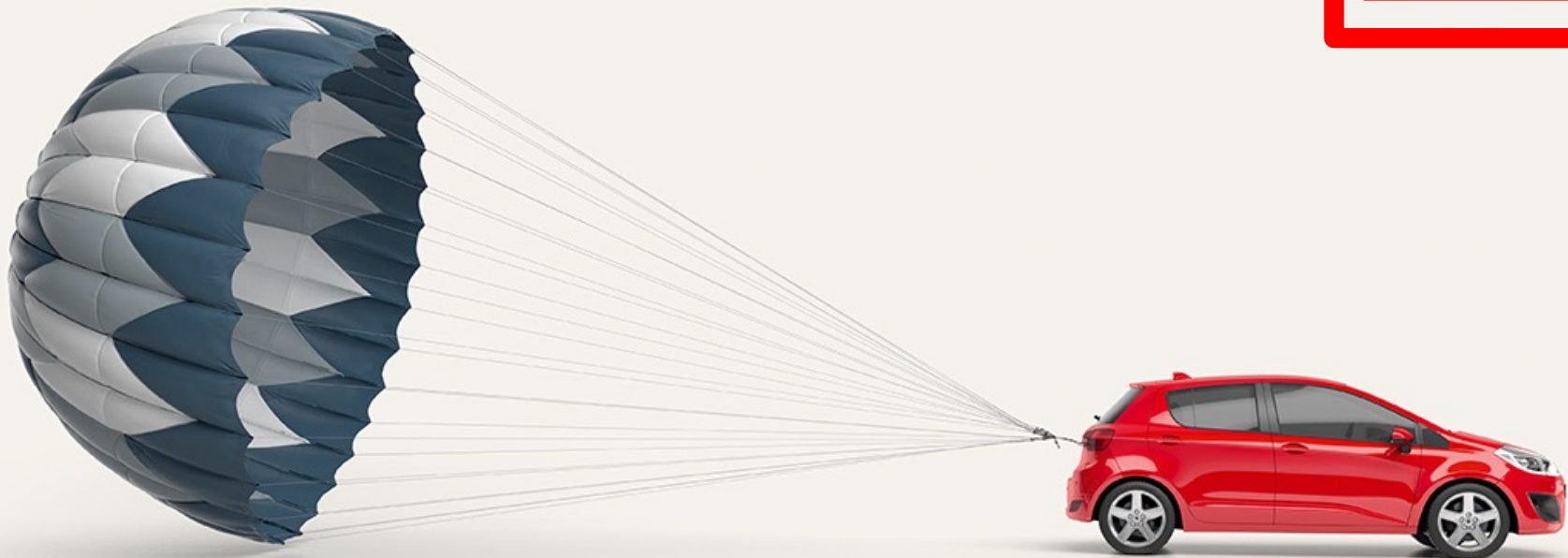
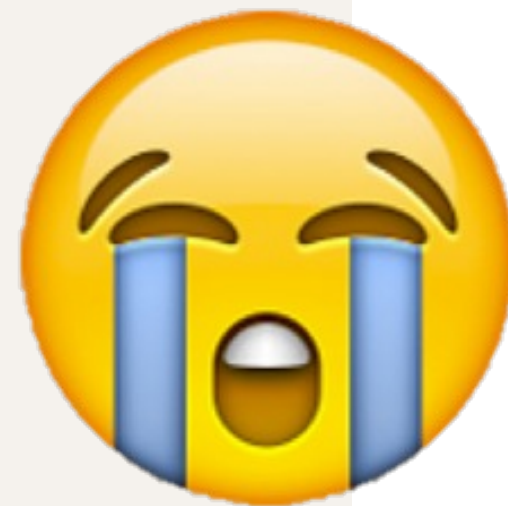# Are you using the right brakes?

Pass to Brembo!

akes?

Pass to Brembo!

"Passa a Brembo!"

Why it's not that serious

- This translation mistake, resulting from the naivety and lack of linguistic competence of those managing the site, would be a tragedy for a site focused on communication, translation, or international public relations.

- However, Brembo is like Ferrari: it's a global excellence with prestigious clients all over the world.

- The website serves only as a point of reference to establish communication between suppliers and clients, and its content is not crucial for the company's success.

Italo

.italo

OFFERTE   DESTINAZIONI E ORARI   SERVIZI ITALO GO   VIAGGIARE CON ITALO   PROGRAMMA FEDELTÀ

🚆 ACQUISTA BIGLIETTI   ✏ Cambia Prenotazione   💳 Carnet

| Da ⌄ | ⇄ | A ⌄ |

Assistenza   Italo in Viaggio   Italo Impresa   IT ∨   Accedi

OFFERTE   DESTINAZIONI E ORARI   SERVIZI ITALO GO   VIAGGIARE CON ITALO   PROGRAMMA FEDELTÀ

🚆 ACQUISTA BIGLIETTI | ✏️ Cambia Prenotazione | 💳 Carnet

Da	⇄	A

Goditi su **Italo**live le serie tv Sky più amate con NOW TV

E in più su **Italo**live in esclusiva per te
1 mese di Serie TV e Show **NOW**
in streaming sul dispositivo che preferisci.

SCOPRI DI PIÙ

Per i clienti Italo è incluso 1 mese di Serie TV e Show di NOW TV, anziché 9,99€/mese. Dal 2° mese: 9,99€/mese. Info e costi su nowtv.it.

Great compromise on space

The most important part of the homepage, the upper half, is used to provide the main service of the company: the purchase of train tickets.

The lower part of the screen, where the user can focus their attention at a later time, contains secondary information, such as promotions, discounts, offers... which are typical examples of temporary content that changes frequently.

Great compromise on space

Additionally, with the carousel system, multiple promotions can coexist on the homepage, taking turns occupying the lower half of the screen with fixed time intervals, allowing the user to click on the most interesting promotion to get more information.

Trenitalia, instead…

The offer has been adjusted following the health emergency.

Cerca

ITA ▼

Trenitalia for Business   Modifica Biglietto   Supporto   ▲Area riservata ▼

FS TRENITALIA
GRUPPO FERROVIE DELLO STATO ITALIANE

Le Frecce ▾   Altri treni ▾   Trasporto regionale ▾   Offerte e servizi ▾   CartaFreccia ▾   Info e assistenza ▾

ⓘ Info sul traffico   ▶ Trenitalia misure e iniziative in merito al Coronavirus   ‹ ‖ ›

RIMODULATA L'OFFERTA
A SEGUITO DELL'EMERGENZA SANITARIA

✓ PRINCIPALI SOLUZIONI   FRECCE   REGIONALI   ♥ I miei viaggi preferiti ▶

☐ Andata e Ritorno

🚆 Da   📅 Andata 17-03-2020   23 ▼   Adulti 1 ▼

SPACE

Siti del gruppo   Lavora con noi

TRENITALIA
GRUPPO FERROVIE DELLO STATO ITALIANE

Le Frecce

Modifica Biglietto

Offer

Info sul traffico   ▶ Trenitalia misure e iniz

L'OFFERTA
A SEGUITO DELL'EMERGENZA SANITARIA

✓ PRINCIPALI SOLUZIONI   FRECCE   REGIONALI   ♥ I miei viaggi preferiti ▶

☐ Andata e Ritorno

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Cerca

ITA ▼

TRENITALIA
GRUPPO FERROVIE DELLO STATO ITALIANE

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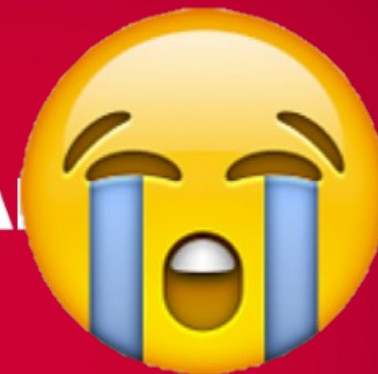Le Frecce ▾   Altri treni ▾   Trasporto regionale ▾   Offerte e servizi ▾   CartaFreccia ▾   Info e assistenza ▾

ℹ Info sul traffico   ▶ Trenitalia misure e iniziative in merito al Coronavirus   ‹ || ›

RIMODULATA L'OFFERTA
A SEGUITO DELL'EMERGENZA SANITA

😭

✓ PRINCIPALI SOLUZIONI   FRECCE   REGIONALI   ♥ I miei viaggi preferiti ▶
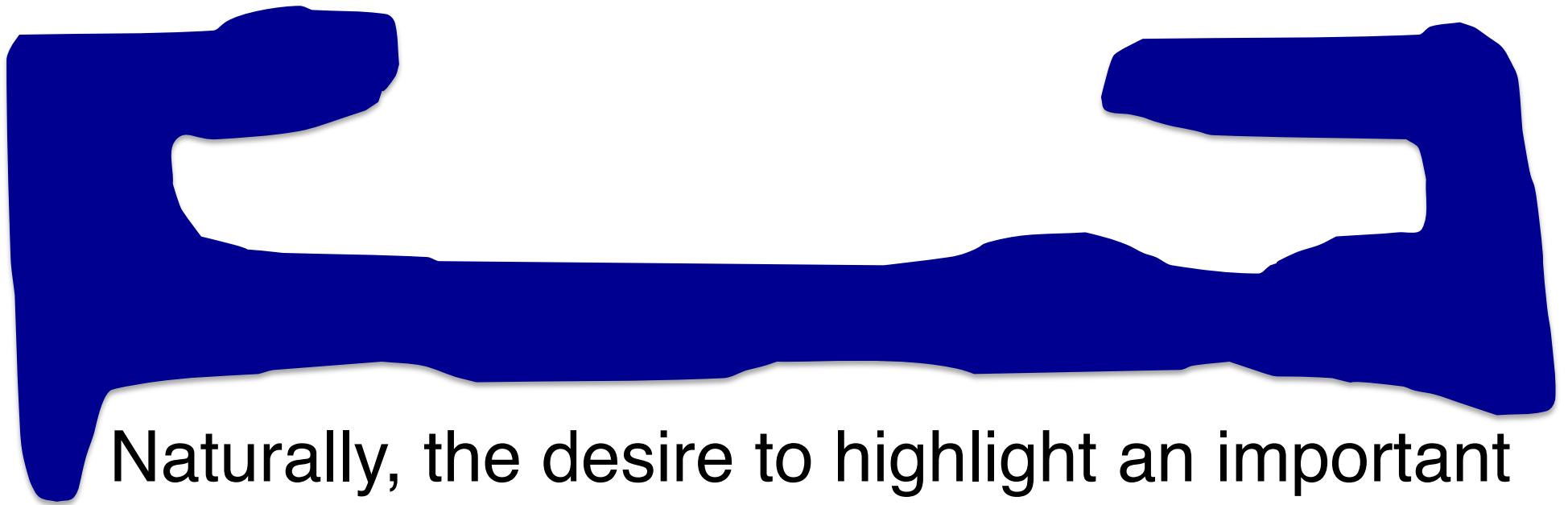
☐ Andata e Ritorno

🚆 Da   📅 Andata 17-03-2020   23 ▾   Adulti   1 ▾

Poor use of space

Naturally, the desire to highlight an important message about the coronavirus emergency is understandable, but this waste of space is unjustified.

Especially considering that the enormous empty space with no informative content has pushed the main functionality of the site down, cutting the graphical interface in half and preventing access without scrolling the window down.
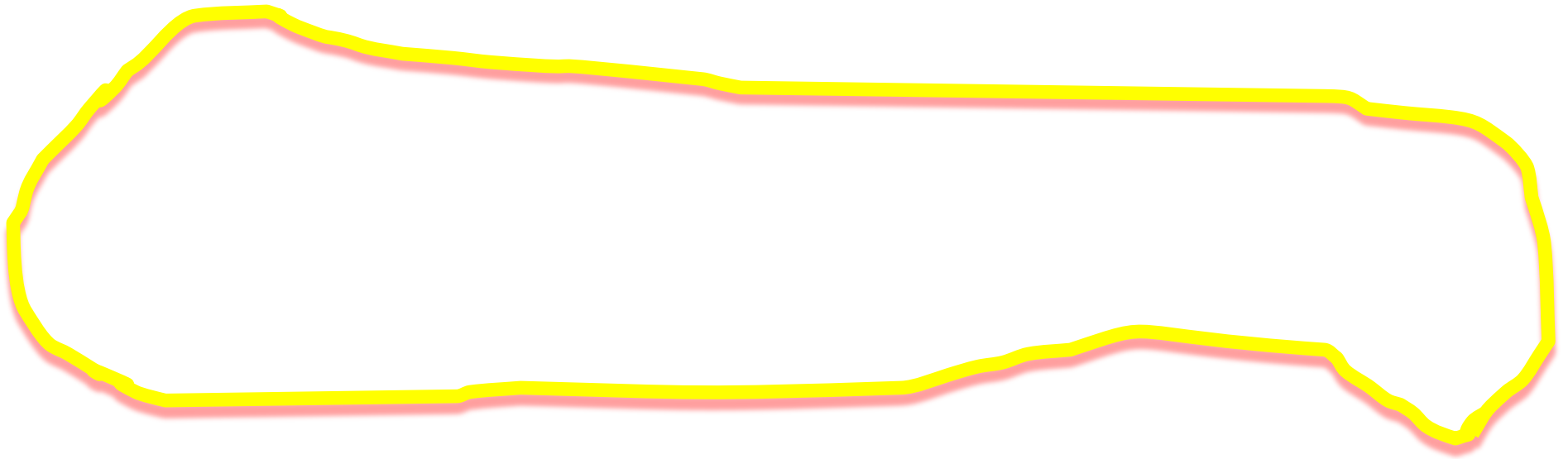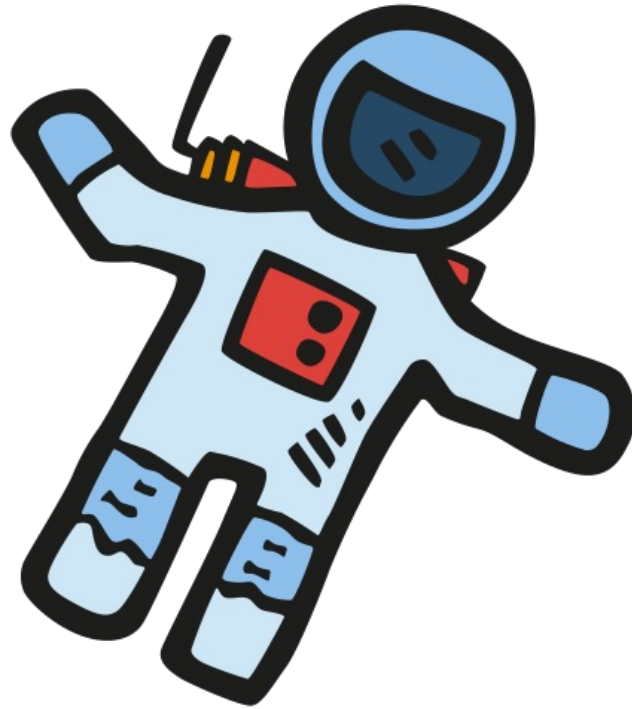
If we were to think like conspiracy theorists, one might hypothesize that this increased difficulty of access is intentional, aimed at discouraging travel during the coronavirus period. However, since the functionality is still accessible, albeit with difficulty, it is more realistic to suspect a poor UX decision.