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**Market Basket Virtual Student Collaboration Model**

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**SUMMARY:**

The five Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in this project have large part-time (in-work) student populations. These part-time students, and many full-time students as well, have no or limited opportunity to travel for their study programme or to apply for an Erasmus exchange programme. They still need to develop skills like intercultural communication, digital competences, teamwork and research skills in an international setting to enhance their employability in today's globalised working environment. Professionals who can work effectively in international, virtual, multi-disciplinary teams are increasingly demanded by employers.

Initially a cooperation was set up by the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences (Hogeschool van Amsterdam) in the Netherlands and the Business Academy Aarhus in Denmark in 2009 to tackle this problem. Marketing and Multimedia students in two countries worked together virtually on designing creative marketing campaigns without having to leave home. This project was called Market Basket 1.0.

The Market basket 1.0 had a positive evaluation by and effect on students and lecturers, therefore we now aim to further develop and test this model. We also hope to inspire other HEIs to use the Market Basket Virtual Student Collaboration model (MAB 2.0) and we aim to stimulate the growth of a Market Basket network. A full implementation pack with handbooks and a full set of teaching materials will be developed and offered via a new Open Platform and make MAB 2.0 ready for European wide distribution.

The need for information about cross-cultural topics and market information among small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) induced us to include SMEs as important stakeholders. Chambers of commerce, our SME business networks and our sixth partner in the consortium, Technology Park Varazdin, will provide real-life assignments from the SMEs or start-up companies for the student teams to work on. This will add the entrepreneurial element to the students' assignments.

These virtual student teams from different countries and from different disciplines and courses will work together on the specific project assignment e.g. an international advertising campaign, an innovative product launch or market research. Students (nor lecturers) will ever meet in person, but use skype, email, social media, the networks' online platform and other sharing methods. In this way they will acquire the virtual (and intercultural) collaboration skills which they will need for their future workplace. Afterwards, students evaluate, analyse and benchmark cross-border working methods and techniques, cross-cultural competencies and publish their research findings for the companies in a report on a dedicated website.

The methodology used in carrying out this two year strategic partnership project is as follows:

The first phase will be the development of an implementation pack with training materials and necessary resources and an Online Platform as an Open Educational Resource. The second phase will be the testing, evaluation and adjusting of the implementation pack and platform through concrete pilots. During the testing phase the MAB 2.0 will be open to students from various Bachelor programmes of the participating HEIs, e.g. Marketing, Project Management, IT, Multi-media , Communication Management and many other programmes. Partners outside the consortium can join the pilots which will stimulate further dissemination.

Other dissemination activities during the project will be training sessions for teaching staff, multiplier events for non participants, presentations at international conferences and publications in educational magazines.

The final result of the MAB 2.0 project will be a well-documented and tested educational model whereby students collaborate in virtual, international, multi-disciplinary teams on research projects commissioned by actual SMEs.

The impact and long term benefits of the final MAB 2.0 model are many fold. As a plug-in model it will be possible to implement virtual collaboration within HEIs without radically changing the curriculum. As a well-documented and tested model it will be easier for lecturers to gain support from the institute's IT services and quality assessment departments. Moreover, the model will foster cooperation and bridge the worlds of education and work by working with real assignments of SMEs via the business networks.

We intend to promote free access for the public to the intellectual outputs of the project. We will upkeep the Online Platform after the EU funding has stopped adding to the sustainability of the project. The Market Basket Online Platform will be the hub for any interested university to implement MAB 2.0 and will be a knowledge centre for the business sector.