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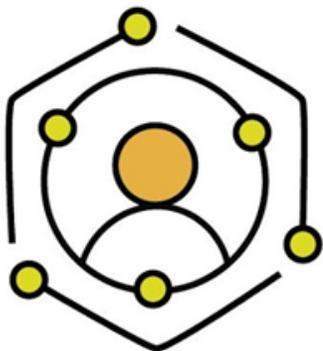


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How to organise a project-based learning online course

Approach, methods and tools





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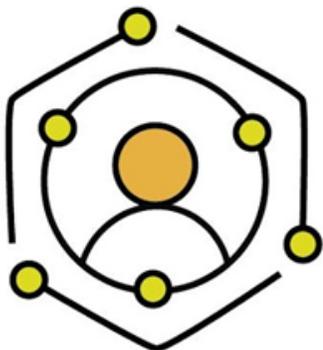
Abstract

The learning material is addressed at inspiring you in designing, developing and delivering a project-based learning activity within your course.

The case analysed as example has been implemented in a undergraduate degree in Tourism, in the field of sustainable rural tourism (agri-food).

Links to the used tools are provided across the slides – feel free to use, remix, and modify them.





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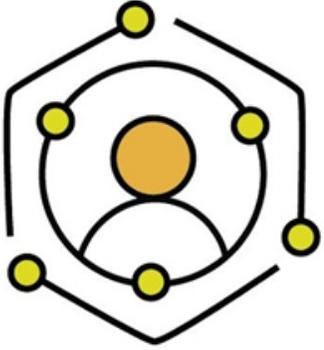


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Introduction: the experience

- This pathway has been implemented in the course of Economics and Marketing of Agri-food (Bachelor degree in Tourism) at the University of Macerata, Italy
- It has included consulting projects from students for real companies for business development (the Business Model Canvas was used for the purpose)
- It has been carried out fully online during the lockdown due to Covid-19 pandemic in Italy (Springtime 2020)





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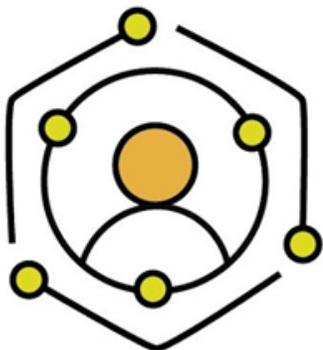


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Introduction: project-based learning

- This type of learning activity is carried out yearly during the course, and includes also field visits, workshops, and other experiential learning events
- The lockdown for the pandemic emergency caught the activity in its beginning: the teaching team decided to transform the F2F, place-based activity, in an online activity
- In this learning material, the teaching team share its experience and offers some inputs on how to organise a project-based learning activity fully online





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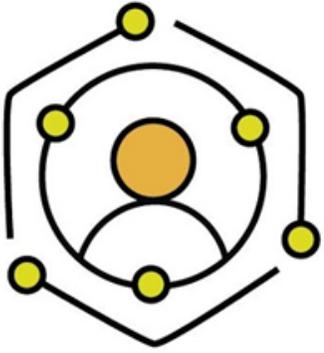


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Learning outcomes

- To understand the process of a project-based learning activity
- To understand how to use it online with the active involvement of stakeholders
- To know tools and methods that can be applied to project-based learning design online





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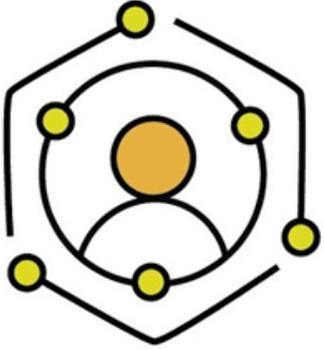


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Requirements and preparation

- Suitable to any group of students (all levels)
- Length: adapted to the task (usually from 20 to 30 hours, including workgroup)
- Integrated to the learning programme (content lectures refer to the field/activity)
- Stakeholders of your field (companies, associations, other types of organisations)
- Online tutors – at least one each two groups
- Online communication tools (such as GoogleMeet, MS Teams, Zoom, etc.)
- Online working spaces (for the groups), e.g. Google Drive, the repository of the course, etc.





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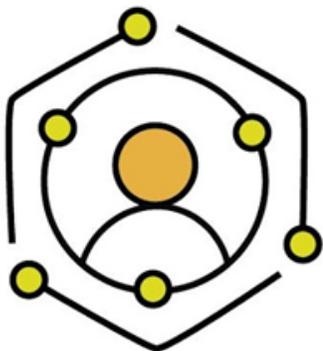
Target

- Bachelor students
- Master students
- Post-grad students
- Adult education students

Other staff/professionals involved in the process:

- Stakeholders (entrepreneurs, companies, associations, etc. of the field of study)
- Tutors
- Other teachers or experts for special lectures on key topics





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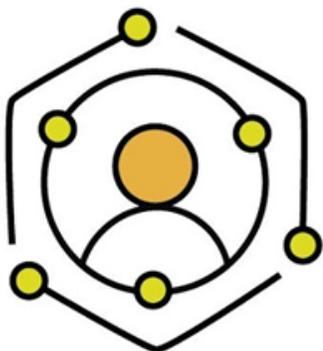


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Recruitment/Dissemination/Engagement

- Usually this activity is implemented within a course, and there is no need of dissemination
- Some students are not comfortable with teamwork: you can either decide to make it mandatory for the exam, or to leave the student to choose if participate or not the activity – providing a personalised path in case s/he prefers individual work (also depending on regulations in your country/university)
- Engage students in teamwork is however very important to stimulate acquisition of transversal skills, and participation should be promoted
- Students are in general happy to work with ‘the external world’, and the added value of relations with the labour market should be stressed when presenting the activity, alongside with the added value of practicing what has been learnt, or will be learnt, at theoretical level





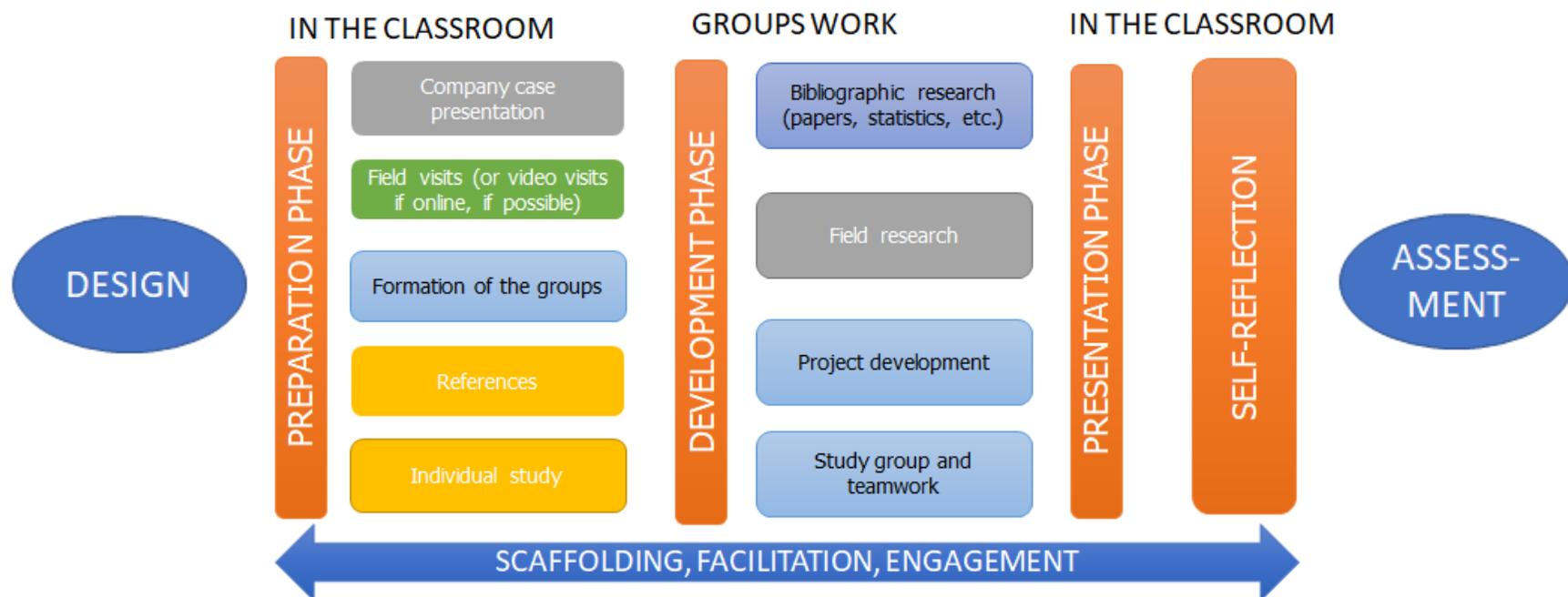
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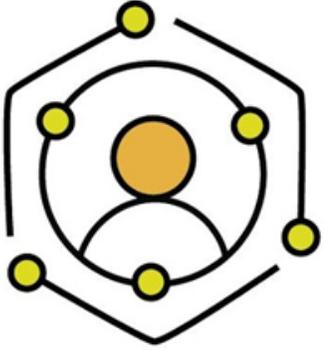
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Course design overview





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Design Phase

STEP 1. Define the project that you want that the students develop – it could be a business plan, a marketing plan, the business model canvas, a new travel itinerary, an event, or any other type of project consistent with your field.

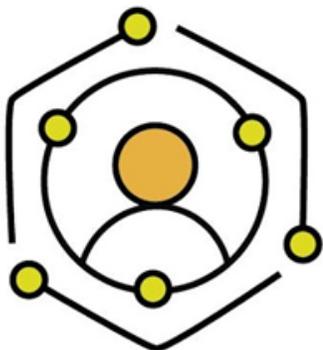
STEP 2. Identify the case and contact the stakeholders to ask for their availability. They should at least be available for:

- the presentation of their 'case' (company or service)
- an interview with the group
- participate the final presentation and give feedback

STEP 3. Appoint online tutors (ideally one each two groups)

STEP 4. Define the channels of communication of the groups – would you like them to have a 'room' in the university channel? Shall they work autonomously? Plan and act accordingly to this decision.





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Preparation Phase

STEP 1. Schedule presentation of the cases (during regular classes), with the concerned stakeholders.

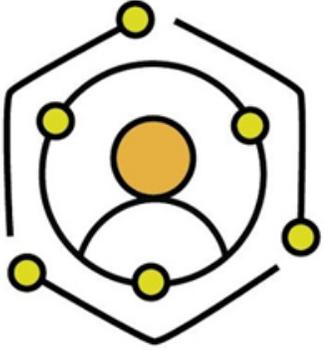
STEP 2. Prepare the Guide that the students can follow to design and deliver their project [[EXAMPLE](#)]

STEP 3. Devote at least one lesson to explain the task, the addressed cases description, and the process, which is, of course, related to the theoretical part that has been already introduced in previous lessons.

STEP 4. Fix deadlines for each of the activities, and report them into the Guide. The first activity is usually: create a group, unless you want to form groups.

STEP 5. Appoint tutors to each group.





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Development Phase

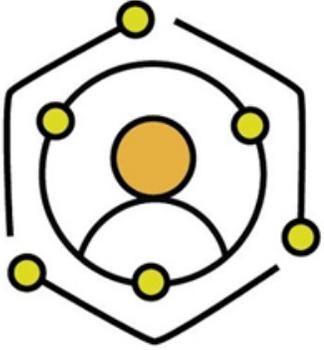
STEP 1. Held a short updating meeting with the tutors (ideally each week, or max each two weeks) to be informed on how the groups are progressing.

STEP 2. Enrich scaffolding and suggest interesting readings.

STEP 3. Recall the tasks that should be carried out from time to time during regular classes.

STEP 4. Provide feedback upon request, take action if the tutor points out major problems ('vanished' students, under performant group, etc.)





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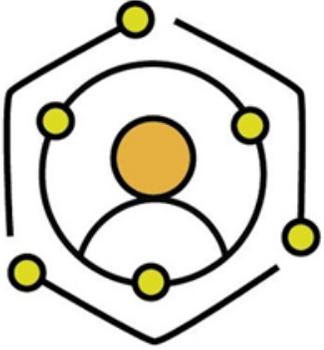
Presentation (project delivery) Phase

STEP 1. The week before the delivery/presentation of the students' projects, recall the evaluation criteria that will be applied to the final work [[EXAMPLE](#)].

STEP 2. Schedule as precisely as possible the presentation day, in order to have the company/stakeholder participating the event, and time to provide their feedback on the projects [[EXAMPLE](#)]

STEP 3. Invite who should attend the presentation day e.g., tutors, but also other stakeholders, policy makers, associations etc. that can be interested to the topic (it does not apply if your national or organisational rules do not allow external participants to educational activities within curricular courses).





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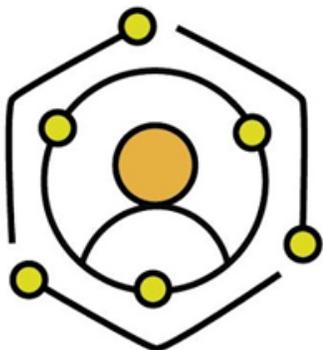
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Assessment Phase

STEP 1. You should have already prepared the assessment matrix (criteria and descriptors should be already known by students): fill the matrix during the presentations/at the end of them

STEP 2. Depending on your decision, the feedback of stakeholders could be included in the final assessment. Suggestion: this should be formative evaluation for students, and different cases mean different stakeholders, which makes difficult to provide an objective and shared assessment to all groups.

STEP 3. After the presentation, therefore the following classroom activity, organise a self-reflection activity with the students, to stimulate them on making sense of the experience in their own personal-professional development [[EXAMPLE](#)]



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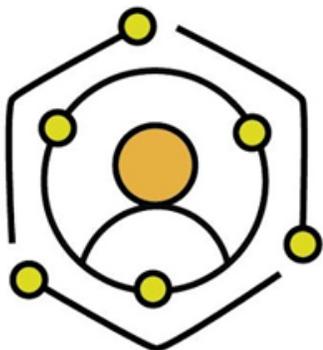
Costs

There are no special costs related to this activity.

Tools used can be those adopted by the university, or free tools.

The staff involved is the university staff.





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Methodology

Project-based learning. Some references:

Annavarjula, M., & Trifts, J. W. (2012). Business Consulting Projects. *Journal of Teaching in International Business*, 23(3), 222–235.

Cook, R. G., & Campbell, D. K. (2006). *The Experiential Student Team Consulting Process: A Problem-Based Model for Consulting and Service-Learning*. Custom Pub.

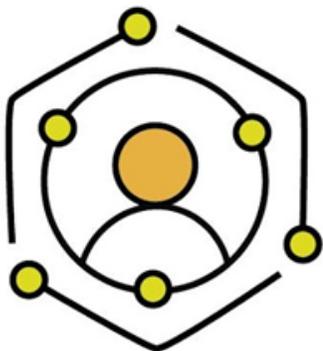
Hart, J. (2019). Interdisciplinary project-based learning as a means of developing employability skills in undergraduate science degree programs. *Journal of Teaching and Learning for Graduate Employability*, 10(2), 50–66.

Heriot, K. C., Cook, R., Jones, R. C., & Simpson, L. (2008). The Use of Student Consulting Projects as an Active Learning Pedagogy: A Case Study in a Production/Operations Management Course. *Decision Sciences Journal of Innovative Education*, 6(2), 463–481.

Kolmos, A., Egelund, J., Nicolaj, H. & Clausen, R., Holgaard, J. E., & Clausen, N. R. (2020). Progression of student self-assessed learning outcomes in systemic PBL.

Roessingh, H., & Chambers, W. (2011). Project-Based Learning and Pedagogy in Teacher Preparation: Staking Out the Theoretical Mid-Ground. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 23(1), 60–71.





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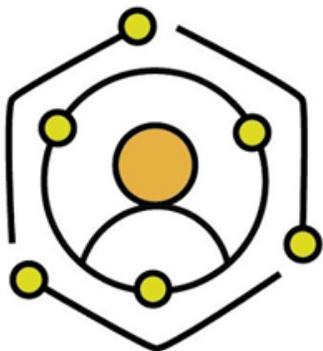
Results

Project-based learning is acknowledged as method to develop meaningful learning and support development of transversal skills

When implemented outside the classroom, collaboration can take the form of consulting field-study projects (Cook & Campbell, 2006), as simulation of a business consultancy given by professionals (role played by students) to a company

Project-based learning involving the territorial economic context serves several purposes, such as (a) to support awareness of students about business and the labour market; (b) to create links between students and the labour market; (c) to increase links between the university and economic players that beyond education can also include research and third mission aims.





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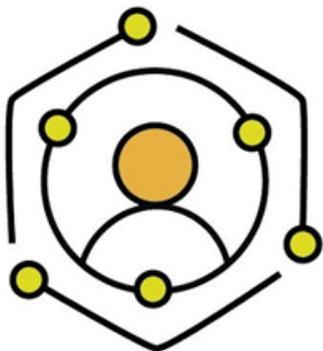
Potential critical issues

Remote support provided by tutors should be timely and continuous

Entrepreneurs are busy persons – students should be warned that it is likely that they will be able to make interviews during unsocial hours

Guidelines must be given in written (e.g. deadlines, templates, roadmaps to delivery, etc.)





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Contacts

If you want to learn more about the experience in Economics and Marketing of Agri-food (Bachelor degree in Tourism, University of Macerata), an article explain the case as open education practice:

[Open pedagogy practices: a case study in undergraduate education](#)

If you want to learn more, or you have any doubt or further request, feel free to contact:

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