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**DNDS**

Developing New Distribution Skills

## **„DNDS – Developing New Distribution Skills for SMES and HEI Students“**

Progress Report

Public Part

## Project information

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## Executive Summary

The automotive industry, i.e. the car and motorcycle business, is often a benchmark for other industries in anticipating developments. Its distribution is mainly organized through small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs). Moreover, environmental changes are strongly influencing customer needs which force dealers to adapt to the rapid changes in the consumer market. Topics like green mobility, Web 2.0 communication, tight credit conditions, new mobility options like rent rather than own, demographic changes, and many more require new skills and knowledge from automotive dealers and university graduates aiming to work in the distribution area.

The project "*Developing New Distribution Skills*" aims therefore, at identifying deficiencies and improving skills of automotive dealers and preparing better training for students with future careers in sales and distribution, specifically in the automotive sector. Based on these findings, training and education concepts are being developed and new teaching materials for the development of these skills are being elaborated and tested. The developed training concepts and materials will be made available to companies, especially small and medium sized automotive dealers, and the university sector.

From a regional point of view, the project covers the North-South axis from Poland, Czech-Republic, Austria to Italy. In none of these countries is there sufficient international sales and management education provision at university level. Furthermore, the regional coverage demonstrates an interesting sample of perspectives, including "old" and "new" Europe. All participating companies have dealers in the project countries, which allows an in depth analysis of the markets. The multicultural aspect of the project is exploited by promoting intercultural knowledge exchange between the partner universities and by comparing the different sales and distribution practices in each country. .

The project aims at reinforcing the link between academia and the business world, since especially in the difficult automotive sector, well educated sales people with country specific sales skills are needed. Since universities and training institutions in Europe are still lacking a sales focus in their business programs, the project aims at developing new teaching materials for students (and thus future dealers, dealer development managers, etc.), including applied approaches.

Increasing the quality of higher education and training is helped by developing flexible, internationally applicable, multimedia materials and curricula, being modularly adaptable for different target groups.

The sustainability and relevance of the project's efforts and results is ensured by tailoring the results exactly to the needs of the target groups and involving these groups (small and medium sized enterprises, higher education institutions (HEIs), training institutions/dealer training companies and students) in the generation of the training material. By spreading the results through automotive associations and educational associations in the participating countries, a regional, national and European impact will be reached. The participating higher education institutions will

integrate the results in their existing study programs, which are regularly evaluated by the students. The results of the project are also planned to be used in businesses and institutions outside the automotive sector in the future.

Nearly all outputs and results of the project are public and published on the web-platform: <http://www.new-distribution-skills.eu>.

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# 1. Project Objectives

Above all, the project aims at identifying automotive dealer management skill deficiencies and developing materials for self-improvement. These materials will also help students prepare for their future management careers in the automotive sector. On the one hand, the universities in the consortium would like to improve the preparation of their students and part-time students for their future careers in sales and distribution and respond to employers' needs and expectations in the automotive sector. And on the other hand, dealers in the automotive sector are provided with a self-assessment tool helping them to identify their training needs and provide continuing education as the life-long learning aspect becomes more and more significant in these times.

The main project objectives are:

- **Broad analysis of challenges and dealers' skill deficiencies** on a North-South axis of the participating countries (Poland, Germany, Czech Republic, Austria and Italy).
- **Development and use of an online tool for self-assessment** of the target groups (dealers and students).
- **Development and testing of new training materials** to address the identified skill deficiencies using the latest media and applied approaches (videos, case studies, etc).
- **Design training modules**, tailored for dealers and business studies students to meet the current and future challenges of the automotive industry.
- **Creating new curricula and training materials which** will be applied in practice (modular concept).
- **Hold an international conference** to present all the results to automotive industry management and academia.
- **Linking higher education and businesses** by the close cooperation of an interdisciplinary consortium sharing knowledge of businesses with higher education.

Hence, the projects benefits the different kinds of users involved in the project:

- **Students:** Students of the participating universities and universities of applied sciences were involved from the very early stage of the project. They mainly contributed to the survey carried out in order to identify the skills deficiencies of dealers. Moreover, the students participated in a project consortium meeting with the purpose of presenting the results and discussing further actions.
- **Dealers:** The involvement of dealers was achieved by directly asking about their future needs and challenges in the frame of a survey. In addition, dealers were involved as stakeholders in feedback and testing of developed materials and feedback is being provided continuously.
- **Associations:** There is an extensive exchange with automotive associations as strategic partners on an EU and national level, raising awareness by spreading information in associations' networks.

- **Companies/enterprises** (emphasis on small and medium sized companies) are involved in the testing of cases and use of the required tailored training modules. Involvement is ensured through strategic stakeholder networks from the automotive industry.
- **Training institutions (e.g. dealer training institutions and companies)** will benefit from the developed teaching approach and training materials.

All these users will be invited to attend the final international conference in order to guarantee and foster knowledge exchange on EU level.

The primary target users groups of the project “Developing New Distribution Skills for Small and Medium sized Enterprises and Higher Education Students” are students and dealers, but the whole target group includes the above mentioned users.

The potential impact of the project is fostering new skills, responding to changes and promoting lifelong learning in the business sector.

Increasing awareness (by dissemination) of the need for new skills in the distribution field is a short term objective of the project A long-term objective is the strengthening of small and medium sized enterprises in the EU.

## 2. Project Approach

### I. Methodologies, surveys, analyses and tests

As the first objective of the project was to identify the challenges and skill deficiencies of automotive distribution companies a three-tiered research design was chosen.

The following investigations have been conducted:

#### **1) Dealer Analysis – the dealers view**

A qualitative research study was conducted in “old” and “new” European member states along a north-south axis through the EU. 215 small and medium sized dealers were interviewed. The added value is the findings concerning cross-cultural and national differences.

#### **2) Delphi Study (“Committee of Experts”) – the experts view**

21 experts originating from the project partner countries Austria, Poland Italy and the Czech Republic were interviewed a face-to-face or by telephone. These experts were selected from various fields (distribution, green mobility, IT, sales, finance etc.); different countries and different organizations such as automotive enterprises, dealers, training institutions, companies, HEIs and automotive associations.

Common current themes surfaced in most countries:-

1. Sales dynamics and customer relationship management (regional customer base, customer satisfaction, events, local promotion)(all countries except for Poland.
2. Online sales (all countries except for AT).
3. Customer mobility needs, mobility as a service (all countries).
4. More complex dealer offerings including insurance, finance, car rental, accessories rental, substitute vehicles, maintenance (all countries).
5. The role of emotions in purchasing (all countries except IT).

The added value was the input and extensive pool of knowledge of the experts from different areas and countries.

Based upon these findings of skill deficiencies, current best skills and future needed skills – the 6 most crucial areas of competences and skills required for future success in distribution were chosen. These chosen areas the basis for the development of the 6 modules (of the curricula) and comprise the following topics:

1. Introductory MACROECONOMICS – Strategic analysis of the environment
2. MOBILITY as a commodity/service
3. MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS AND SOCIAL MEDIA
4. SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGEMENT and CHANNEL MANAGEMENT
5. SALES AND SALES COMMUNICATION
6. FINANCE

#### **3) Best practice examples - “Learning From the Best”:**

**15** best practice companies (e.g. highly successful dealers) were selected from the networks of Italian, Austrian, Czech, German and Polish dealers. Each of the 15 dealers is presented (anonymised) and their current skills/knowledge that contributed



to their success. The added value was the lessons learned from the best practice cases.

#### **4) Self - Assessment Tool**

In order to make a comprehensive assessment of skill deficiencies and future skills requirements an online self-assessment tool was developed for automotive distribution SMEs.

Out of the 6 crucial areas (mentioned above) an online-assessment-tool was developed, translated and pre-tested with 15 selected dealers in I, A, CZ, GER and PL. The final tool is on the web platform and distribution SMEs are invited either directly through the participating enterprises or indirectly through the stakeholders to test their skills. The instrument provides the users with information about the skills they need to be successful in the future. It also proposes which (training) modules can help to provide the missing future skills.

#### **5) Creating new curricula and training materials and Development of teaching and training materials (tailored to needs of dealers and business students)**

The methods applied were an in-depth analysis of needs, a detailed check of existing programmes and the development of a modular concept. Major focus is put on interactive and multimedia supported materials based upon the case study method:

- 1 Case study fitting best to the topic of the area (e.g. background case, exercise case, complex case, decision case, ...)
- 1 video of managers of enterprises or SMEs explaining the area problems and possible solutions (can be used for the cases, best practices or literature studies)
- Parts of the analysis reports, best practices and literature teaching material

#### **6) Set-up of a network for linking HEI and businesses**

Methods used for the set-up of a network were composing an interdisciplinary consortium, sharing knowledge of businesses with HEI and extensive exchange of information via web platform and public events.

## **II. Dissemination and exploitation strategy and activities**

All partners are actively involved in disseminating the project and the results.

Dissemination (Posters and flyers) materials were developed jointly.

The dissemination and exploitation strategy is characterised by raising awareness of the need for new skills in the distribution field. Methods are extensive exchange with automotive associations as strategic partners on EU and national level, raising

awareness by spreading information in associations' networks, raising awareness by spreading information in universities' partner networks and involving enterprises. This should contribute to the sustainability of the project results.

Dissemination activities undertaken as follows:

- Development of the project website as a central marketing instrument, information platform and download centre
- Information articles for publication in all project partners languages (EN, PL, GE, IT) published by public (local) newspapers and on the web platform
- Project Presentations at conferences and seminars and presentations to experts
- Poster Presentations at conferences and seminars
- Publication of the results in the frame of a cross cultural conference in Austria
- Presentation of the project on a dealer conference where more than 500 European dealers (also from non-project countries) participated
- Press releases (resulting in numerous published articles in newspapers)
- Several on-going contacts to target groups and stakeholders (including dealer conferences)
- Newsletters (internal and external)

### 3. Project Outcomes & Results

The **identification of the challenges** and skill deficiencies of automotive distribution companies as the first main aim of the project period is completely fulfilled. In order to be able to explore the future needs concerning skills, competencies and lifelong learning several research steps have been undertaken:

The investigation of dealers.

The Delphi Study with experts from various fields and best practice examples.

The broad analysis of challenges and dealers' skill deficiencies on a North-South axis of the participating countries (Poland, Germany, Czech Republic, Austria and Italy)

The survey results are available on the project website.

Moreover, based upon the analysis and findings, the 6 content areas of the training modules were chosen.

#### **The set-up of the project website/web platform:**

The set-up a web-based project platform, where the progress of the project can be continuously published and important documents are available for download, is complete. Public results and future deliverables are made accessible to a broader audience, i.e. automotive SMEs, HEI, training companies and the stakeholders (regional, national and EU associations). The web platform is also available after completion of the project and serves as means to up- and download documents, teaching materials and experiences shared whilst educating and training staff of automotive SMEs.

Link: <http://www.new-distribution-skills.eu>

#### **Online Self-assessment tool for SMEs:**

Currently, the online self-assessment tool for dealers is worked out at a the final stage of development. It is based upon the 6 crucial areas of competences and skills in distribution. The tool is translated into 5 languages, pre-tested with selected dealers in I, A, CZ, GER and PL and thereafter improved according to their feedback. The tested tool will soon be provided to the public via the web platform. Therefore, the aim of the development and use of an online tool for self-assessment of the target groups (dealers and students) is nearly reached.

**The development of the teaching and training materials** regarding the six training modules, containing one case, suitable literature and other previously collected background materials (reports, studies, etc.) is work in progress and will be available soon. The concept for training modules is needed for being able to compose curricula. This activity is addressing the objectives of the **development and testing of new training materials** and the **design of training modules**, tailored for dealers and business studies students to meet the current and future challenges of the automotive industry.

#### **Dissemination and Exploitation**

According to the jointly agreed dissemination and exploitation plan several activities were undertaken in all partner countries. Until now, the consortium and the project have reached a high level of publicity and dissemination. The objectives of

awareness raising and **linking higher education and businesses** are going in a positive direction.

### **Meetings and Partnership**

Several face-to-face meetings of the project consortium were arranged and communication was on a high level due to regular virtual meetings. Therefore, the partnership is stable and fruitful. The personal meetings contributed to a high extent to the work and progress of the achieved results. Moreover, the continuous quality management within the project ensured good progress and of course, quality.

### **Quality assurance**

The intention is to evaluate the whole project during the lifetime and after the lifetime, including its findings and the usability of the developed materials. All project member and selected stakeholders, as well as external evaluators from other HEIs are invited to give their feedback on the web platform. The quality management guarantees to check long-term and short-term objectives of the project, especially with a respect to exploitation and dissemination. The quality criteria were defined in the start up workshop of the project and agreed upon in the quality agreement by the project members. Minimum measurable quality criteria were defined for all work packages and deliverables (e.g. web platform, scientific reports, workshops, studies, best practices, case studies, self-assessment-tool, modules, curricula, teaching and training material, ...). The quality manager (one partner responsible) makes sure and controls the regularity and amount of feedback given. One deliverable has been composed with the minimum quality criteria for workpackages, deliverables and outputs.

## 4. Partnerships

The entire project consortium consists of:

- 1) Upper Austria University of Applied Sciences - The Coordinating Institution, Austria
- 2) Škoda Auto University, The Czech Republic
- 3) Polytechnical University of Marches, Italy
- 4) The University of Gdańsk, Poland
- 5) KTM-Sportmotorcycles AG, Austria
- 6) Snap-On Business Solutions GmbH, United Kingdom and Germany

Concerning the competences and know how, the strengths of the project partners are distributed differently: The University of Applied Sciences Upper Austria has a strong qualification in project management and in the field of sales management research. Škoda Auto University has a strong connection to the automotive industry, being a university directly connected to the Skoda company. The University of Gdańsk has deep knowledge in the field of sales and business to business marketing and have the potential to transfer the gained results to other industries in Poland (e.g. banking sector). The Polytechnical University of Marches is experienced in and able to transfer the project data to a different industry, the fashion industry. They have competence in organizing events and participating in projects with large consortia. Snap-On Business Solutions GmbH as a professional training company of SMEs can build a bridge between higher education and dealer education. They know the market well and serve also as bridge to other training institutions. KTM-Sportmotorcycles AG is a motorcycle company and one of the few automotive companies having set up a clear concept of dealer management.

The consortium has already involved associations as means of feedback, publication, mainstreaming and multiplication support on regional, national and EU level. Several associations with a huge member network have granted their strategic cooperation.

The added value of the multi-country partnership is about the management and collaboration of people with specific expertise and cultural background. In particular, the whole project consortium benefits from the personal meetings to a very high extent. The face-to-face communication and interaction makes the work and the results stimulating and interesting. Additionally, the cooperation of universities and companies shows on the one hand the different approaches of both sides, but also the common aims and interests. From the geographical point of view the project covers partner countries from the axis North to South Europe, which makes the different perspectives and the common ground visible, also in partnerships with target users.

Experiences derived from working together in this European Partnership are, that regular communication and exchange is essential. In order to ensure this regularity we arrange Skype/Adobe Connect telephone conferences at least once in two months and we use an online platform for data and document exchange. Hereby, as mentioned above, the face-to-face meetings are of high significance.

## 5. Plans for the Future

The time in the next period of the project will be spent on completing the workpackage and tasks according to the project plan:

### **1) Innovative Training programme and curricula:**

Developing curricula for a training programme and a dealer management major for HEI management programs. Teaching materials developed (case studies, analysis, reports, literature) are assigned and adapted to different target groups (students & dealers). A main activity will be to disseminate the self-assessment tool to representatives of the target group (dealers) on the web platform in order to gain insight into the training needs and to increase the target groups' awareness.

Finally, selected European HEI distribution management bachelor programs will be compared with the developed dealer management major, identifying options for adaptation and innovation of their programs. A manual is developed for these investigated HEI in order to point out a path to how the qualified dealer management major can be implemented.

Teaching notes will be composed as instructions for all trainers and HEI lecturers when using the materials. The responsibility is shared between all project partners.

Teaching Material Compendia are the final product, containing all tested and evaluated elements, including multimedia-files, internet links and background data. The compendia are compiled and uploaded on the webpage for public view.

### **2) Testing of Modules, Cases and Teaching Materials:**

The designed modules for the HEI sector and dealer training will be tested and evaluated by dealers and universities as testers.

### **3) Organisation and holding of an international conference in Ancona, Italy**

The planned conference serves three main interests:

a broader audience is informed about the project findings (dissemination)

a broader audience is actively involved and invited to discuss, develop and therefore identify with the results (→multiplication, exploitation)

to discuss country specific aspects of curricula and teaching methods

### **4) Transfer of results to decision makers and endusers**

Stakeholders have been identified on regional, national and EU-level. They are associations and public training institutions cooperating with SMEs and supporting them through networking and representation in political institutions. They have already agreed on participating and on forwarding information to their members. During the project they receive regular information, are invited to participate actively in the Delphi study and in the dissemination conference. A further aim is to convince end-users to adopt and apply the project results.

### **5) Ongoing Quality Assurance**

### **6) Ongoing dissemination and exploitation activities**

## 6. Contribution to EU policies

According to the **Bologna Process** ‘Qualifications Frameworks based on learning outcomes have become a central part of the Bologna Process and of the European Higher Education Area. Learning outcomes are described as “the basic building blocks of the Bologna package of educational reforms” and endorse the proposition that this methodological approach is at the heart of the paradigm shift from teacher to student-centred learning’. (<http://www.eua.be/eua-work-and-policy-area/building-the-european-higher-education-area/bologna-basics/Bologna-an-overview-of-the-main-elements.aspx>)

In the project ‘DNDS – Developing New Distribution Skills for SMES and HEI Students’ **learning outcomes and objectives** are defined and used in the frame of the development of innovative training and teaching materials.

Furthermore, as the Bologna Process aims to facilitate **mobility** in the European Higher Education sector, the DNDS project contributes to fostering mobility of students and lecturers in general and promotes the cooperation in Europe between Higher education institutions (and companies).

In detail, the analysis of dealers in the project countries allowed an in depth understanding of the markets. The multicultural aspects of the project were exploited by intensive intercultural knowledge exchange between the partner universities and students participating in the project and by comparing the differing national approaches also from the view point of intercultural differences affecting sales and distribution practices.

The online-self-assessment tool helps the target group to understand their need for improvement and increases their awareness of learning necessity and hence, is in accordance with the life-long learning targets of the European Union also because it is mainly targeted at small- and medium sized companies (i.e. dealers).

The projects DNDS aims to enhance qualification in the area of economics (distribution management) and aims to contribute to a comprehensive structure and up-to date content of the master and bachelor business studies as well **as lifelong learning**. The modules will be applied at the different partner universities and therefore a common system and transparency is fostered (Promoting a European dimension in higher education). ([http://ec.europa.eu/education/higher-education/bologna\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/higher-education/bologna_en.htm))

According to the **Lisbon Strategy for growth and jobs** ‘education, training and lifelong learning play a key role in achieving the strategic priorities (increase of employment and tertiary degree or diploma), in particular when it comes to smart and inclusive growth’.

In particular, the ‘flagship initiative linked to education and training called “**Youth on the move**” aiming to enhance the quality and international attractiveness of Europe’s higher education system by promoting mobility of students and trainees’ is related to the project DNDS as students are involved in the project and are motivated to travel within Europe. Moreover, an adequate education based on the needs of the market at a **high quality level** increases the chances of being employed and the project DNDS develops such a training module. ([http://ec.europa.eu/education/focus/focus479\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/focus/focus479_en.htm))

