



DIGIFABS

Digital Change Agents for Food + Beverage SMEs

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DIGITAL
TRANSFORMATION**

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PROJECT
MEETING (TPM)
IN NITRA**

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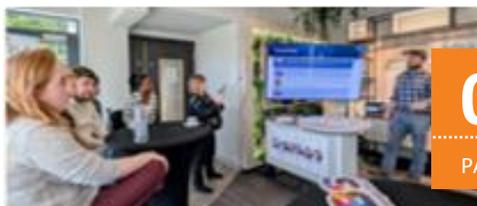
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FOURTH TRANSNATIONAL PROJECT MEETING (TPM) IN NITRA

Author: Dominik Gisa, FH Münster

Intense Week in Nitra Marks a Pivotal Moment for DIGIFABS

In early September, the beautiful city of Nitra, Slovakia, became the vibrant hub of the DIGIFABS project. More than 80 students, six educators, and the entire consortium gathered for an eventful week that combined the second part of the **Summer School pilot** with the **fourth Transnational Project Meeting**.

To maximize impact, the consortium decided to hold the project meeting alongside the Summer School. This approach allowed participants to plan the final year of the project in detail, align on upcoming activities, and most importantly connect directly with one of our key target groups: students. The result was an intense and highly productive week for our hosts in Nitra and for consortium members who took on roles as educators and student supervisors.

The Summer School, designed from research conducted throughout 2024, focused on equipping students with the skills and capabilities needed to become responsible, dynamic digital change agents. It also prepared them for the **SME Goes Digital Challenges**, which have now launched across five universities. These challenges bring students and SMEs together, supported by university educators, to take the next step in the digital transformation journey. This milestone marks a transition from separate activities for SMEs, educators, and students to a collaborative effort involving all three groups. The project meeting began with a review of previous work packages and the online phase of the Summer School, identifying key actions to optimize the final work package and maximize impact. Looking ahead, the consortium refined the timeline and activities for the last phase of the project.

A significant announcement closed the meeting: **Dominik Gisa**, our current project coordinator, shared plans to leave FH Münster. “Having been involved from the very start of the project’s ideation, I am very sad not to see it through to completion. However, I am happy to leave it in very capable hands.” Starting December 2025, **Maynara Furquim** from FH Münster will take over as project coordinator. Maynara brings extensive experience from international research projects and played a pivotal role in managing the Erasmus+ alliance project WeRIn. We look forward to a smooth transition and continued success under her leadership.

Read more at <https://digifabs.eu/news/>



EMPOWERING DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

Author: Denise Callan, Momentum Consulting

Empowering Digital Transformation: DIGIFABS Summer School in Nitra Brings Together 80+ Students Across Europe

Last September, the Slovak Agriculture University in Nitra hosted not only the Transnational Project Meeting but also the DIGIFABS Summer School, a vibrant event that united over 80 students from Germany, the Netherlands, Ireland, Poland, and Slovakia. The programme focused on digital transformation for food and beverage SMEs, combining expert-led sessions, interactive workshops, and collaborative projects.

Participants explored practical strategies and emerging technologies to help SMEs adapt to the digital era. A highlight of the week was the visit to the Agro-Complex Fair, where students experienced firsthand the latest innovations shaping agriculture and food production.

Key Takeaways:

- International Collaboration: Students from five countries worked together to tackle real-world challenges in the F&B sector.
- Hands-On Learning: Workshops and case studies provided practical insights into digital tools and strategies for SMEs.
- Industry Exposure: The Agro-Complex Fair visit showcased cutting-edge trends and solutions in agri-food technology.
- Future Impact: The event fostered a strong network of young professionals committed to driving digital innovation in SM.

Looking Ahead

The momentum continues with the SME Goes Digital Challenges, now underway in all five participating regions. Student teams are partnering with local food and beverage SMEs to implement tailored digital solutions, turning ideas into action and accelerating transformation across Europe. Stay tuned via the [DIGIFABS website](#) for updates on these exciting projects and the impact they will create!



UPDATE ON THE

SME GOES DIGITAL CHALLENGE

Author: Roshmita Kanungoe, Maynooth University (MU)

The SME Goes Digital Challenge, a core activity within DIGIFABS, is now well advanced across the consortium. Multidisciplinary student teams from universities in Ireland, Germany, the Netherlands, Slovakia, and Poland have been collaborating closely with food and beverage SMEs to address real-world digitalisation challenges.

In Ireland, **Maynooth University** launched the national edition of the Challenge with a series of factory visits to participating SMEs. These on-site engagements gave students first-hand insight into business operations, digital maturity levels, and concrete challenges, while enabling SMEs and students to align expectations for the collaboration.

As part of the kick-off phase, students also visited **BIA Innovator Campus**, where they engaged directly with food producers and technology-driven SMEs. These early interactions helped ensure that the solutions developed during the Challenge were practical, relevant, and grounded in real industry needs.

Across all participating countries, SMEs were matched with student teams, challenge scopes were defined, and mentors guided the co-creation process. Throughout the programme, teams worked

closely together to validate problem statements and develop feasible digital solutions tailored to each SME.

The national Pitch Events have now taken place, showcasing the outcomes of the students' work. More detailed coverage of these events and their results will follow in a later bulletin.

Stay connected via the [DIGIFABS website](#) to track ongoing developments across Europe.



AUAS STUDENTS & SME GO JAMU: SME GOES DIGITAL CHALLENGE

Author: Kiet Bronkhorst, Preneurz Amsterdam

From Challenge to Practical Implementation

The SME Goes Digital Challenge is an integral part of the DIGIFABS project. Each higher education partner organised student teams and matches them with an SME to tackle a real digital transformation challenge.

One of these collaborations brought students from the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences (AUAS) to Go Jamu, a wellness-driven beverage company based in Amsterdam, inspired by the centuries-old Indonesian herbal tradition of Jamu. As the company continues to grow, managing data, inventory, and disconnected systems has become increasingly complex.

During the challenge, students explored a key question: how can Go Jamu centralise its data and automate processes to work more efficiently and scale further?

Their visit provided valuable insight into the company's operations, the digital tools they rely on, and the challenges they face while preparing for growth. From CRM gaps to scattered data across e-commerce and outreach platforms, the importance of digital integration quickly became clear. Together, the team explored solutions ranging from workflow automation to centralised dashboards.

According to co-founder Milad, the challenge addressed an issue the company had been facing for quite some time. "A lot of our information

was spread across different systems. We lacked one central place where everything comes together and updates automatically," he explains.

The student team analysed existing tools, evaluated alternatives, and developed a practical step-by-step plan to connect systems and streamline workflows, including automated inventory updates linked to website orders and a central environment for organising business data.

Through regular check-ins, feedback rounds, and on-site meetings, the collaboration remained highly iterative and hands-on. The students also brought up-to-date knowledge of automation tools and AI applications — insights that Go Jamu could immediately apply.

For Milad, the biggest impact was turning an ongoing challenge into a clear and actionable roadmap. "They made something that had been in my head for a long time concrete," he says. "Important work that I had been postponing was structured into a practical plan."

The collaboration highlights the value of connecting students and SMEs in real-world innovation projects, bridging theory and practice while delivering meaningful, scalable solutions. As the DIGIFABS initiative continues, student teams will keep developing digital prototypes designed for real-world impact.

Read more about this project in [full blogpost](#).



GERMAN STUDENTS REPORT ON THEIR DIGIFABS EXPERIENCE

Author: Marly Hany, FH Münster

Learning by Doing in the SME Goes Digital Challenge

Students from the Science to Business Marketing Research Centre at FH Münster University of Applied Sciences were among those who participated in the DIGIFABS SME Goes Digital Challenge. Here, Marly Hany shares their experience on behalf of the group.

“This project was a valuable learning experience that combined academic knowledge with real-world application in the food and beverage industry. Through the DIGIFABS project, we were introduced to the role of digitalisation in traditional food businesses, which prepared us to work on a real business case with Essmann’s Bakery.

We learned a lot by working with Essmann’s Bakery on this location analysis project. Visiting their factory in Altenberge (Germany) gave us valuable insight into production processes, workflows, branch operations, and their bakery products.

The main objective was to develop a scoring model for location quality and prototype an interactive heatmap to support Essmann’s expansion decisions in selected regions of Germany. To achieve this, we worked with tools including Google Looker Studio, Kepler, and German demographic and spatial data sources such as INKAR and Overpass Turbo. We also conducted correlation and regression analyses to identify which location factors are most strongly associated with store performance. The result was an interactive heatmap highlighting high-potential areas and supporting data-driven expansion planning.

Our experience with DIGIFABS during the Summer School in Slovakia was very insightful, especially through exchanges with professors and the programme’s interdisciplinary mindset. Finishing the project by winning third place in the pitch event made the experience even more rewarding.

Without the DIGIFABS project and the collaboration with Essmann’s, we would not have gained such a practical understanding of how data can be used in strategic location planning.”

It is wonderful for the DIGIFABS project to receive this feedback from our students. If you are interested in hearing the SME perspective, read our interview with Julian Feller, Head of Marketing at Essmann’s Backstube GmbH.



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SME GOES DIGITAL CHALLENGE

STUDENTS IN CONVERSATION

WITH ESSMANN'S BACKSTUBE



Author: Sonja Raiber, WeST mbH

As part of the DIGIFABS Challenge, Essmann's Backstube GmbH, the regional SME introduced in the previous article, continues its collaboration with FH Münster University of Applied Sciences in a student-led applied project. In this interview, the family-owned bakery from the Münster region (North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany), which operates more than 60 locations, shares its perspective on working with students to develop a data-driven approach to future store location planning and reflects on its experience of the project.

The project evaluates key factors such as demographic data, purchasing power, pedestrian and traffic flows, competitive density, and anchor locations, integrating them into a structured decision-making model for future store locations. Academic methods are directly applied to the strategic development of this regionally rooted company.

Julian Feller, Head of Marketing at Essmann's Backstube GmbH, explains that the company chose to participate because the exchange between academia and business practice is highly valuable. As a medium-sized company

with a strong regional focus, Essmann's regularly faces strategic questions that benefit from data-driven analysis. The collaboration provides new perspectives, enables testing innovative ideas, and offers students insight into entrepreneurial decision-making.

The project focuses on developing a data-driven location analysis for future store expansion. Various influencing factors, including pedestrian and traffic flows, demographic data, purchasing power, competitive density, and anchor points, are systematically analysed and combined into a scoring model. The results are visualised in an interactive heatmap supporting strategic decision-making.

Through the collaboration, Essmann's aims to gain structured decision-making support for early-stage location assessment. Transparent evaluation logic, reproducible results, and a practical pre-screening tool for potential expansions are particularly valuable. The company also expects new impulses for strengthening its data-driven approach and critical reflection of existing assumptions from an external academic perspective.

DIGIFABS HOSTS SME GOES DIGITAL PITCH EVENT

Author: Denise Callan, Momentum Consulting

The piloting phase of the DIGIFABS project, the SME Goes Digital Challenge, concluded successfully on January 14th with a hybrid pitch event hosted by the Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra.

During the pilot phase, over 80 students from five participating universities joined a Summer School in Nitra, attended online bootcamps, participated in factory visits, and collaborated with assigned SMEs to develop digital transformation solutions addressing real business challenges. Their work culminated in the final pitch event.

Student teams presented in national blocks, each delivering a three-minute pitch outlining the SME challenge, their proposed solution, expected benefits, feasibility, and next steps. Each block was followed by a private jury evaluation, with a Q&A session taking place while the jury deliberated.

Students worked with SMEs across the food and beverage supply chain, including farms, bioenergy companies, processors, restaurants, and retailers. Common challenges included data fragmentation, regulatory compliance, quality assurance, and food waste. Proposed solutions ranged from automated reporting and integrated data systems to predictive AI for irrigation and digital stakeholder engagement platforms.

Data fragmentation and the lack of structured digital strategies emerged as key themes across many SMEs. Several solutions have already been adopted or

are in implementation, with some companies securing grant funding to support rollout.

Team Bravo from the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences was announced as the winner for their work with Good Jamu, a wellness-focused beverage startup in Amsterdam.

Participating SMEs will receive detailed reports, while project partners will finalise learning materials for publication.

More about the cases presented at our [newspage](#).



MEET OUR PARTNER: ECECT

Author: Maria Kyprianou, European Centre of Emerging Competencies and Technologies (ECECT)

The European Centre of Emerging Competencies and Technologies (ECECT), a non-profit organization established in 2020 and based in Nicosia, Cyprus, is committed to driving innovation and fostering collaboration between academia and industry. With a focus on leveraging emerging technologies such as AI, IoT, and robotics. ECECT aims to deliver transformative education and training programs that empower small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and professionals with the skills they need to thrive in the digital future.

ECECT's Role in DIGIFABS

ECECT plays a key role in the DIGIFABS project, which focuses on fostering digital transformation and innovation within the food and beverage (F&B) sector. Leveraging its expertise in engineering, project management, and digital marketing, ECECT supports the project's core objectives. A standout feature of the organization is its class365.eu platform, an open-source educational tool that provides accessible learning opportunities for individuals of all ages. ECECT's experience in digital education and Erasmus+ funded initiatives make it ideally positioned to promote digital skills and transformation.

As the leader of Work Package 9 (WP9), ECECT is tasked with ensuring that the outcomes of DIGIFABS have a lasting impact beyond the project's duration. This includes developing a micro-credentialing model, sustainability plan, and identifying funding sources to keep digital transformation skills relevant over time. These efforts aim to address significant challenges faced by SMEs, such as digital skill gaps, limited market size, and access to finance.

ECECT Team

ECECT is driven by a diverse and talented team. George Georgiou, the founder of ECECT, has over 25 years of experience in the IT sector, specializing in IoT, robotics, and emerging technologies. He is supported by

Fotini Georgiou, who contributes expertise in electronics, embedded systems, and robotics. Maria Kyprianou, an experienced project manager, offers valuable insights in entrepreneurship and sustainability, ensuring the smooth execution of initiatives. Meanwhile, Efi Rafik Gill, the social media marketing manager, plays a key role in enhancing ECECT's digital presence through targeted marketing campaigns, amplifying the organization's outreach and engagement.

As the DIGIFABS project progresses, ECECT remains committed to empowering SMEs in the F&B sector with the tools they need for digital transformation. Through its focus on sustainability, skills development, and industry-academia collaboration, ECECT ensures that DIGIFABS's outcomes will continue to benefit businesses and learners across Europe long into the future. With its diverse initiatives and expert team, ECECT is well-positioned to lead the way in digital innovation and transformation.



George Georgiou
Director / Research Engineer



Maria Kyprianou
Project Manager



Efi Rafik Gill
Social Media Manager

MEET OUR PARTNER: WEST mbH

Author: Sonja Raiber, WEST mbH

Wirtschaftsförderungs- und Entwicklungsgesellschaft Steinfurt mbH (WEST mbH) is the business development agency for the district of Steinfurt, located in the north-west of North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany. The district is home to approximately 460,000 inhabitants and offers excellent conditions for economic success. A strong mix of industries, highly qualified professionals and a well-developed transport and digital infrastructure characterise the region, with the food industry playing an important role in the local economy.

WEST sees itself as a reliable partner for businesses in the district. Companies can turn to WEST for support in finding cooperation partners, accessing funding opportunities and navigating business development topics. The organisation provides hands-on advice to both start-ups and established companies, supporting them throughout their development journey.

Business Development and Innovation Support

In the area of start-up counselling, WEST is the first point of contact for entrepreneurs in the Steinfurt district. The team supports founders in developing business models and business plans, provides guidance on public funding programmes, and organises workshops and seminars focused on self-employment and entrepreneurship.

For established companies, WEST offers comprehensive corporate services, including advice on funding opportunities, support with applications, and access to relevant networks. The organisation also organises events and actively participates in funded projects related to digitalisation and sustainability, ensuring that companies receive up-to-date and practical support.

A key initiative is **TRAIN – Transfer and Innovation in the Steinfurt District**, a joint programme with Münster University of Applied Sciences. Through TRAIN, WEST connects companies with suitable academic experts, enabling innovation and digitalisation projects in close collaboration with the university often supported by public funding.

Infrastructure, Talent and Regional Development

Beyond innovation support, WEST operates a commercial property exchange where companies can find available land, production halls, office space and retail properties across the district. WEST also plays an active role in strengthening future talent through the ZDI Centre Steinfurt District, which connects companies and schools and promotes STEM (MINT) professions by introducing pupils to career opportunities in technology and science.



Christian Holterhues
CEO & Project Partner
The voice of industry



Sonja Raiber
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The voice of industry

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