

**«INNOVATIVE BUSINESS INFORMATION AND SUPPORT SERVICES FOR YOUNG
ENTREPRENEURS IN HERBS PRODUCTION AND ECO-TOURISM»**

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(Development of simulation models)

Responsible beneficiary:
ZDRAVETZ ASSOCIATION
HELLENIC DEVELOPMENT CITY NETWORK
CLUSTER VARNA BUSINESS CONSULT

Project website: <https://floreo-gr-bg.eu/>

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The Partnership consists of:

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BY

Executive Summary

Project summary: The **FLOREO project** aims to increase the motivation, knowledge and skills of entrepreneurs to innovate, create and take risks when starting a business and will facilitate the business activities of existing **SMEs** in the cross-border region. It will open new possibilities for start-ups and organize actions to support existing businesses with a special focus on herbal production and ecotourism.

Future entrepreneurs can develop and test their business ideas in a simulated and real environment, use business support services related to the cultivation and supply of unique herbs and flowers that can be found only in the cross-border region of **Greece – Bulgaria**, and develop and test ideas in the field of alternative tourism such as herbal packages and ecotourism packages.

PURPOSE OF THE SIMULATION MODELS. TARGET GROUPS. IMPACT AND ADDED VALUE.

Simulation-based training is a dynamic learning technique that replicates real-world scenarios to enhance skills and knowledge. The goal of the simulation training is to go beyond traditional classroom instruction by creating immersive environments where individuals can practice and develop their skills and abilities and allow learners to gain practical experience, make informed decisions, and refine their performance within controlled settings.

The intention was to immerse young entrepreneurs in realistic scenarios in order to equip them with the necessary skills and confidence to excel in their roles.

Our trainers developed models, which allow simulating specific situations in herb business and ecotourism and where future entrepreneurs can apply theoretical knowledge, refine critical thinking skills, and develop confidence. Floreo simulation models are designed for the young entrepreneurs in herb production business and ecotourism.

Target group

Young entrepreneurs

Impact and added value.

1. Engagement- the simulation models developed have allowed engagement and trainees were motivated and interested in the learning process. This increased knowledge retention and improved the overall effectiveness of training.
2. Simulation training fills training gaps. They have been used to focusing on very specific skills.
3. Simulation models provided a realistic and immersive learning experience replicating real-world situations. This helped trainers to develop skills and knowledge that can be applied directly in the practice.
4. Flexibility: Simulations were designed to accommodate different learning styles and preferences.

5. Providing confidence - Simulation-based training provided an opportunity to apply theory and gain experience in skills or procedures, which provided trainees with the confidence to manage similar real-life scenarios.
6. Strengthened the knowledge of the trainees without boring them.

Research and Elaboration Report on the Developed Simulation Model №1 "Ecotourism Company"

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1. Executive Summary

The "Ecotourism Company" Simulation Model is a pivotal component of the Simulation program under FLOREO Project, with a central focus on empowering future entrepreneurs interested in ecotourism within the Greece-Bulgaria cross-border region. The above-mentioned region presents exceptional opportunities for agrarian, rural and cave tourism. This comprehensive simulation model has been specifically developed to provide an immersive and educational experience tailored to sustainable ecotourism. This expanded executive summary offers a detailed and specific insight into the critical aspects and objectives of this simulation model.

Simulation Model Objectives:

- **Empowering Future Ecotourism Entrepreneurs:** At its core, this simulation model is designed to empower and equip aspiring ecotourism entrepreneurs with the knowledge, skills, and insights necessary to thrive in this dynamic and environmentally conscious industry, by creation of new local capacities to stimulate self-employment and private business, incl. of young people by linking private initiative with entrepreneurial and business management training.
- **Promoting Responsible Tourism Practices:** It aims to instill a profound understanding of responsible tourism principles. Participants will learn how ecotourism can be a force for good by minimizing negative impacts on natural environments and local cultures in the Cross-border region.
- **Cultivating Market Viability Assessment:** Future entrepreneurs will delve into market research, enabling them to assess the market demand, identify target customer segments, and analyze competition effectively. This knowledge ensures that their ecotourism ventures are not only sustainable but also profitable.

- **Enhancing Operational Decision-Making:** The simulation guides participants through various operational decisions crucial for ecotourism businesses. They will navigate aspects such as trekking routes,

- accommodations, pricing strategies, safety protocols, and sustainability practices, honing their critical thinking and decision-making skills.
- **Fostering Cultural Engagement and Appreciation:** Cultural immersion is a vital component of ecotourism. Participants will learn how to interact
- respectfully with local communities, support cultural preservation, and create opportunities for tourists to engage meaningfully with indigenous cultures.
- **Delivering Environmental Education:** With a focus on the Greece-Bulgaria cross-border region's unique ecosystems, participants will gain insights into biodiversity conservation and the importance of protecting natural habitats. This knowledge underscores the significance of engaging with and empowering local communities.
- **Empowering Communities:** The simulation emphasizes the creation of economic opportunities for local communities in the Cross-border region. It encourages participants to support local initiatives, artisans, and businesses, thereby contributing to the economic development of the region.
- **Navigating Legal and Regulatory Challenges:** Participants will gain an understanding of the legal and regulatory landscape of ecotourism. This includes permits, licenses, and environmental regulations specific to mountain regions.
- **Risk Assessment and Management:** Future ecotourism entrepreneurs will develop skills in risk assessment and management. They will learn how to

handle unexpected challenges such as adverse weather conditions, medical emergencies, and wildlife encounters.

- **Financial Planning, Marketing, and Promotion:** The simulation equips participants with financial planning skills, including budgeting, pricing strategies, revenue projections, and investment decisions. It also instructs them on effective marketing and promotional strategies for ecotourism businesses.
- **Long-term Sustainability and Innovation:** With long-term sustainability in mind, participants will explore strategies for diversifying their ecotourism offerings, expanding their customer base, and innovating to stay competitive in this evolving industry.
- **Promoting Collaboration and Adaptive Learning:** Encouraging collaboration among participants is vital. They will engage with peers, form partnerships, share best practices, and collaborate on community
- engagement projects. Adaptive learning is encouraged by allowing participants to experiment with different approaches and assess the consequences of their decisions.

Simulation Modules:

The simulation comprises six modules, each with specific learning objectives:

1. **Understanding Sustainable Ecotourism:** This module defines sustainable tourism and highlights its importance. It introduces good practices from various mountain regions worldwide and discusses the ecological and cultural significance of mountain destinations.
2. **Launching Your Eco-Tourism Business:** Participants explore different niches within sustainable eco-tourism and learn the importance of selecting a niche that aligns with their passion and expertise. They also develop comprehensive business plans.

3. **Key Features and Sustainable Practices in Ecotourism:** This module covers sustainable trekking routes, responsible accommodation, cultural immersion, environmental education, community engagement, waste management, carbon neutrality, and more.
4. **Real-Life Examples:** Through real-life examples, participants witness how EcoTrek Adventures implements sustainable practices. They learn about treks in the Rhodopes and homestay experiences in Trigrad village.
5. **Challenges for the Future Ecotourism Entrepreneur:** This module presents participants with practical challenges related to conservation partnerships, sustainable infrastructure, community empowerment, responsible trekking, cultural preservation, risk management, marketing, and long-term sustainability.
6. **Business Idea Viability Challenge:** This module assesses market viability, access and infrastructure challenges, financial feasibility, seasonal demand management, sustainability and conservation efforts, community engagement, regulatory compliance, and risk assessment.

2. Introduction

The "Ecotourism Company" Simulation Model introduces participants to the world of sustainable mountain tourism through a captivating and immersive experience. This detailed and specific expansion of the introduction provides a deeper insight into the model's setting, its founders, and its core mission.

Case study company Name: EcoTrek Adventures

Founders: EcoTrek Adventures is the brainchild of Borisa, an experienced mountaineer and dedicated environmental enthusiast, currently a part-time employee in a Municipal center town in the cross-border region. Borisa's passion for preserving natural landscapes and promoting sustainable tourism led to the inception of this eco-conscious enterprise.

Company Overview: EcoTrek Adventures, nestled in the heart of the picturesque Rhodope Mountain region, is dedicated to providing unique and environmentally conscious trekking experiences. This company operates with a small yet highly knowledgeable team of local guides, each deeply rooted in sustainable tourism practices and possessing a profound connection with the local culture and environment.

Mission: EcoTrek Adventures is on a mission to promote sustainable mountain tourism in Smolyan province, a region celebrated for its rich biodiversity and cultural heritage. The company's overarching goal is to offer travelers an opportunity to engage with nature while leaving a minimal ecological footprint and creating a positive impact on the local economy and communities.

Setting: The simulation model unfolds in the charming village of Trigrad, situated within the cross-border Rhodope Mountain region. This location offers diverse landscapes, breathtaking mountain ranges, and a rich tapestry of local communities, making it an ideal backdrop for an immersive ecotourism experience.

Simulation Environment: Participants are transported into the heart of this ecotourism venture, where they can explore the terrain, observe wildlife, and interact with the simulated environment. At the core of this immersive experience lies the meticulously reconstructed Business Support & Information Center (BSIC), a hub for future entrepreneurs venturing into herb production and ecotourism.

Adjacent to the BSIC is the captivating Herb Alley, serving as a hands-on training ground for participants. Here, they immerse themselves in practical herb cultivation and value-added processing. This center serves as the central nerve center for the simulation, offering participants access to a wealth of resources

and guidance from experienced mentors and experts in the fields of herb production and ecotourism.

State-of-the-Art Technology: The BSIC is equipped with state-of-the-art technology, providing a comfortable and innovative learning space for workshops, seminars, and interactive sessions, aimed at promoting entrepreneurial culture. It's here that entrepreneurs can network with like-

mindful individuals, collaborate on innovative projects, and receive tailored business support services to shape their ventures effectively.

Herb Alley: This herbal haven within the simulation serves as a practical training ground for aspiring herb producers. It showcases native species of conifers, broadleaf trees, shrubs, and an impressive selection of over 50 native herbs exclusive to the Rhodope Mountain region. The Herb Alley serves as a focal point for hands-on training, complete with workshops and individual activity gazebos.

Herb Processing machines and facilities: Gazebos within the Herb Alley house state-of-the-art herb grinding and packaging machines. These machines facilitate seamless processing, ensuring that herbs maintain their optimum quality and potency. Participants can experiment and develop their herb-related ideas in private activity gazebos equipped with necessary tools and resources.

Marketplace Simulation: The simulation environment includes a virtual marketplace mirroring real-world consumer preferences and market demands for various herb products. Participants can test their marketing strategies, explore consumer trends, and adapt their product offerings accordingly. This dynamic marketplace enables participants to fine-tune their business plans and gain a competitive edge.

Educational Resources: Fifty professionally prepared herbaria and two study albums with herbs, complete with botanical descriptions, are available within the simulation. These resources enhance participants' understanding of plant identification, properties, and applications.

Integration with Other Simulation Models: The "Ecotourism Company" Simulation Model is seamlessly integrated with other modules under the FLOREO Project. This ensures that participants benefit from a comprehensive

learning experience that covers diverse aspects of sustainable entrepreneurship, including herb production, innovative product development, and small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) development.

Educational Objectives: Upon completing this simulation model, participants will emerge with a comprehensive understanding of sustainability in ecotourism, cultural engagement, strategic decision-making, and risk management. They will

be equipped with the skills required to establish and manage successful ecotourism enterprises in the ecologically rich cross-border region.

Contributions to the Local Economy: By fostering sustainability and innovation, this simulation model plays a pivotal role in the growth of the local economy. It supports eco-friendly business practices and bolsters the competitiveness of SMEs in the dynamic Rhodope region.

3. Methodological approach

The "Ecotourism Company" Simulation Model adopts a dynamic and experiential approach to facilitate learning and skill development among future ecotourism entrepreneurs. It combines various pedagogical methods and cutting-edge simulation technologies to create an engaging and realistic learning environment. Here are some key aspects of the methodological approach employed:

- **Scenario-Based Learning:** The simulation is scenario-driven, where participants are presented with a series of real-life situations and challenges that ecotourism entrepreneurs commonly encounter. These scenarios are meticulously crafted to reflect the complexities of operating an ecotourism business in a remote mountainous region. Participants are required to make decisions, solve problems, and adapt to changing circumstances, thus enhancing their critical thinking and decision-making skills.
- **Hands-On Learning:** To reinforce learning, the simulation encourages hands-on experiences. Participants have the opportunity to engage in practical activities such as herb cultivation, herb processing, and even creating their own ecotourism itineraries. This experiential learning approach allows them to apply theoretical knowledge in a practical

- context and gain a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities in the field.
- **Collaborative Learning:** Collaboration is a key feature of the simulation. Participants can interact with one another, forming teams or partnerships to tackle specific challenges. This mirrors the collaborative nature of the

ecotourism industry, where working together with local communities, conservation organizations, and fellow entrepreneurs is often essential for success.

- **Mentorship and Expert Guidance:** The simulation model incorporates mentorship and expert guidance. Experienced mentors and subject matter experts are available within the simulation environment to provide insights, feedback, and guidance to participants. This mirrors the real-world scenario where aspiring ecotourism entrepreneurs can seek advice from experienced professionals.
- **Data-Driven Decision-Making:** Participants have access to a wealth of data and information within the simulation. This data includes market research, ecological data, financial reports, and more. By analyzing this data, participants can make informed decisions, track their progress, and adjust their strategies accordingly. This data-driven approach prepares them for the data-intensive nature of modern ecotourism businesses.
- **Progressive Learning:** The simulation is designed to progressively challenge participants. As they advance, the complexity of the scenarios and the scale of their ecotourism operations increase. This gradual progression ensures that participants build their knowledge and skills incrementally, preparing them for the challenges of scaling up a real-world ecotourism business.
- **Feedback Loops:** Feedback is an integral part of the simulation. Participants receive feedback on their decisions and actions, allowing them to understand the consequences of their choices. This feedback loop encourages reflective learning and continuous improvement.
- **Interdisciplinary Learning:** The simulation encourages interdisciplinary learning. Participants gain insights into various aspects of ecotourism, including environmental conservation, cultural preservation, business management, and community engagement. This holistic approach prepares them to navigate the multifaceted nature of the ecotourism industry.

- **Gamification Elements:** To enhance engagement, the simulation incorporates gamification elements such as points, challenges, and rewards. These elements motivate participants to actively participate, compete, and strive for excellence in their ecotourism ventures.

4. Simulation Objectives

The simulation's objectives are underpinned by extensive research and practical insights into the field of ecotourism, sustainable business practices, and rural mountainous regions. Here's a detailed breakdown of the research used and applied to formulate these objectives:

- **Understanding Sustainability in Ecotourism:**

Research Basis: The first objective of the simulation is to impart a deep understanding of sustainability in ecotourism. This objective draws upon a vast body of research on sustainable tourism practices, including studies on ecotourism's environmental, socio-cultural, and economic impacts. Research findings on the principles of responsible tourism, such as the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria, serve as a foundation.

Application: Participants are exposed to this research through interactive modules and case studies. They learn how ecotourism can contribute to conservation efforts, benefit local communities, and minimize negative environmental impacts. Practical scenarios challenge them to make sustainable decisions in areas like waste management, energy conservation, and wildlife protection.

- **Market Viability Assessment:**

Research Basis: The second objective focuses on market viability assessment, drawing on market research methodologies commonly used in the tourism industry. This includes market demand analysis, competitor profiling, and target audience identification. Real-world data on tourism trends in the Greece-Bulgaria cross-border region is utilized.

Application: Participants engage in market research activities within the simulation, such as analyzing tourist preferences and studying competitor offerings. They use real market data to understand customer segments, identify gaps in the market, and fine-tune their ecotourism business concepts to meet consumer demands.

➤ Operational Decision-Making:

Research Basis: Operational decision-making in ecotourism is informed by best practices and guidelines established by leading organizations like The International Ecotourism Society (TIES). Research on trail development, accommodation standards, safety protocols, and sustainability practices in ecotourism operations informs this objective.

Application: Participants face operational challenges within the simulation, such as designing trekking routes, setting safety measures, and choosing eco-friendly accommodations. They apply research-based knowledge to ensure the safety and satisfaction of tourists while minimizing the environmental footprint.

➤ Cultural Engagement and Appreciation:

Research Basis: This objective builds on research into cross-cultural communication, cultural sensitivity, and community-based tourism. Studies on the positive and negative impacts of tourism on local cultures, as well as strategies for preserving and celebrating cultural heritage, serve as references.

Application: Participants learn how to interact respectfully with local communities through scenarios that require them to engage with indigenous groups and incorporate cultural experiences into their ecotourism offerings. They apply research-backed approaches to ensure that cultural exchange benefits both tourists and local residents.

➤ Environmental Education:

Research Basis: Environmental education objectives draw from research on biodiversity conservation, habitat protection, and sustainable resource management. Scientific studies on the flora and fauna of the Rhodope Mountain region provide specific knowledge about the local ecosystem.

Application: Participants receive virtual environmental education within the simulation. They interact with guides who share information about the region's biodiversity, ecosystems, and conservation efforts. This knowledge equips them to educate tourists about the importance of environmental preservation.

➤ Community Engagement:

Research Basis: Research into community-based tourism models and case studies of successful community engagement in ecotourism initiatives informs this

objective. Studies on revenue-sharing agreements, community-led tourism enterprises, and sustainable livelihoods are referenced.

Application: Participants are tasked with developing strategies to engage with and support local communities. They apply research-derived insights to create economic opportunities for communities, promote local initiatives, and establish mutually beneficial partnerships.

➤ Legal and Regulatory Landscape:

Research Basis: This objective draws on legal research regarding tourism regulations, permits, and environmental laws specific to mountainous regions. Expertise in navigating the legal and regulatory framework applicable to ecotourism, including compliance with protected area regulations, is vital.

Application: Participants encounter legal challenges within the simulation, such as acquiring permits for trekking routes or complying with environmental regulations. They apply research-based knowledge to ensure their ecotourism operations adhere to legal requirements.

➤ Risk Assessment and Management:

Research Basis: Risk assessment and management in ecotourism operations are informed by research on safety protocols, emergency response planning, and risk mitigation in remote environments. Case studies of past incidents and best practices in risk management are studied.

Application: Participants face simulated risks and emergencies, such as adverse weather conditions or medical incidents, within the simulation. They apply research-backed risk assessment and management techniques to ensure the safety of tourists and staff.

➤ Financial Planning, Marketing, and Promotion:

Research Basis: These objectives are based on research into financial management in tourism businesses, pricing strategies, revenue projections, and effective marketing techniques for ecotourism. Studies on digital marketing and sustainable branding are referenced.

Application: Participants engage in financial planning activities and marketing campaigns within the simulation. They apply research-derived strategies to develop budgets, set prices, project revenues, and create compelling marketing materials that highlight their sustainable practices.

➤ Long-term Sustainability:

Research Basis: Long-term sustainability objectives are grounded in research on business innovation, diversification strategies, and adaptability in the ecotourism industry. Case studies of ecotourism businesses that have successfully adapted to changing market conditions are examined.

Application: Participants are challenged to develop long-term sustainability plans within the simulation. They apply research-based strategies to diversify their ecotourism offerings, expand their customer base, and innovate to remain competitive in the evolving market.

By applying these research-based objectives within the simulation, future ecotourism entrepreneurs gain practical experience and insights that are directly transferable to real-world scenarios in rural mountainous regions. This research-driven approach ensures that participants are well-prepared to navigate the challenges and opportunities of operating responsible and sustainable ecotourism businesses.

➤ Collaboration:

Research Basis: Collaboration is a key driver of success in the ecotourism industry. Extensive research on collaborative models in tourism, community-based tourism initiatives, and best practices in partnership building informs this objective. Studies on successful partnerships between ecotourism businesses, local communities, and conservation organizations serve as references.

Application: Participants are encouraged to collaborate with peers within the simulation. They apply research-based insights to form partnerships, share best practices, and jointly develop community engagement projects. This collaborative approach mirrors real-world situations where ecotourism businesses often cooperate to create more significant positive impacts.

➤ Adaptive learning:

Research Basis: Adaptive learning is based on research in educational psychology and adult learning theory. Studies on the effectiveness of scenario-based learning, experiential learning, and feedback-driven learning are incorporated. Additionally, research on how businesses adapt to changing environments, such as evolving market trends and environmental conditions, is integrated into this objective.

Application: Participants are exposed to adaptive learning experiences within the simulation. They experiment with different approaches, make decisions based on real-time feedback and experiences, and observe how their strategies

evolve. By applying research-derived adaptive learning principles, they become more agile and capable of responding effectively to dynamic challenges in the ecotourism industry.

5. Elaboration of simulation modules

The development of the "Ecotourism Company" simulation model involved a meticulous process that integrated extensive research, instructional design principles, and practical considerations. The goal was to create a comprehensive and engaging learning experience for participants. Here's an in-depth look at the elaboration process for the simulation modules:

➤ Understanding Sustainable Ecotourism:

- **Research Foundation:** This module was built on a solid foundation of research on sustainable tourism principles, particularly in mountainous regions. Extensive literature on responsible tourism, environmental conservation, and cultural preservation was consulted.
- **Elaboration:** The module was elaborated by designing interactive lessons that explained the essence of sustainable tourism, highlighted the unique features of mountain tourism destinations worldwide, and emphasized the ecological and cultural significance of these regions.

➤ Launching Your Eco-Tourism Business:

- **Research Foundation:** This module was informed by research on entrepreneurship in the ecotourism sector. It drew from studies on successful ecotourism businesses, business planning in rural areas, and the legal and regulatory aspects of tourism.
- **Elaboration:** The module was developed by guiding participants through the process of developing a comprehensive business plan. It included

lessons on market research, target audience identification, competition analysis, financial planning, and scalability. Legal and regulatory considerations specific to mountainous regions were also incorporated.

➤ Key Features and Sustainable Practices in Ecotourism:

- Research Foundation: This module was heavily influenced by research on sustainable practices in ecotourism. Studies on responsible trekking, eco-friendly accommodations, cultural immersion, and environmental education served as references.
- Elaboration: The module was elaborated by detailing the sustainable practices of EcoTrek Adventures, the fictional ecotourism company. It showcased responsible trekking routes, eco-friendly accommodations, cultural immersion experiences, environmental education initiatives, community engagement strategies, waste management, carbon neutrality efforts, and more. Real-life examples, drawn from research, were incorporated to illustrate these practices.

➤ Real-Life Examples:

- Research Foundation: This module relied on case studies and real-life examples from the field of ecotourism. Detailed research into actual ecotourism ventures in mountainous regions provided valuable insights.
- Elaboration: The module featured two real-life examples: trekking in the Rhodopes (The Devil's Path) and a homestay experience in Trigrad village. These examples were elaborated by describing the experiences, ecological highlights, cultural interactions, and community contributions associated with each. They were carefully crafted to align with the principles of sustainable ecotourism.

➤ Challenges for the Future Ecotourism Entrepreneur:

- Research Foundation: This module was grounded in research on the challenges and opportunities faced by ecotourism entrepreneurs in mountainous areas. It considered factors like conservation partnerships,

sustainable infrastructure development, community empowerment, responsible trekking, cultural preservation, risk management, effective marketing, and long-term sustainability.

- Elaboration: The module was elaborated by presenting these challenges as scenarios within the simulation. Participants were tasked with addressing each challenge using their knowledge and decision-making skills. Detailed feedback and consequences were provided based on their choices, allowing for a dynamic learning experience.

➤ Business Idea Viability Challenge:

- Research Foundation: This module drew from research on market viability assessment, infrastructure considerations, financial feasibility, seasonal demand management, sustainability and conservation practices,

- community engagement, regulatory compliance, and risk assessment specific to ecotourism businesses in remote mountain regions.

- Elaboration: The module was elaborated by presenting participants with scenarios related to business viability challenges. They had to assess market demand, evaluate infrastructure limitations, determine financial feasibility, devise strategies for managing seasonal demand, incorporate sustainability practices, engage with local communities, navigate regulatory requirements, and address risk factors. The simulation provided feedback and outcomes based on their decisions, facilitating a learning-by-doing approach.

The elaboration process prioritized not only the delivery of theoretical knowledge but also the application of this knowledge in realistic, scenario-based challenges. Each module aimed to replicate the complexities and decision points that future ecotourism entrepreneurs might encounter in the field. Extensive research and instructional design principles were integral to crafting a simulation that offers a holistic and immersive learning experience.

6. Conclusion

The "Ecotourism Company" Simulation Model is a dynamic and multifaceted educational tool meticulously designed to equip aspiring ecotourism entrepreneurs with the essential knowledge, skills, and experiences necessary for thriving in the challenging realm of sustainable mountain tourism. Through planning, research and preparation, test, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, the model seamlessly aligns with and contributes to the overarching goals of the FLOREO Project and it plays a pivotal role in advancing the project's mission to empower entrepreneurs, foster innovation, and bolster the competitiveness of SMEs in the cross-border region. It stands as a testament to the commitment to empower entrepreneurs, establish a supportive business environment, and elevate the competitiveness by promoting entrepreneurial culture and setting up conditions for mobilization of young people for entrepreneurial activity in the cross-border region. Through collaborative efforts and a shared dedication to sustainable business practices, the model promises to leave an indelible mark on the landscape of cross-border entrepreneurship.

Research and Elaboration Report on the Developed Simulation Model №2: “Developing of SME-Herb Production”

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1. Executive Summary

The developed Herb Production Simulation model is a pivotal element of the FLOREO Project. This comprehensive simulation is developed to provide future entrepreneurs with unique and invaluable opportunity to gain mastery in the art of herb cultivation while establishing thriving businesses in the competitive herb production industry, particularly within the picturesque setting of Trigrad village, the Rhodope Mountains and the cross-border region in general.

At its core, this simulation model is designed to provide participants with a holistic, hands-on, and engaging learning experience. It serves as a bridge between theory and practice, offering a safe yet realistic environment where budding entrepreneurs can explore and apply their knowledge and skills in herb production and business management.

Comprising a series of interconnected modules, this simulation takes participants on an exciting journey from the initial stages of herb selection to the final steps of marketing the produced goods. It immerses participants in every facet of herb cultivation, processing, and business development, mirroring the real-world challenges and opportunities faced by herb producers.

Within this comprehensively designed and equipped simulation environment, participants encounter and navigate real-world challenges. These include unpredictable weather patterns, pest outbreaks, fluctuating market demands, resource constraints, and regulatory compliance. These challenges are meticulously crafted to sharpen participants' problem-solving abilities, adaptability, and critical thinking skills, ensuring they are well-prepared to face uncertainties in their future herb production enterprises.

One distinguishing feature of this simulation is its unwavering commitment to sustainability and eco-friendliness in line with the international trends and the project's goal in general. Participants explore innovative technologies, precision agriculture techniques, and sustainable energy solutions. They learn how to minimize environmental impact while ensuring the long-term viability of their

herb production ventures. Thus, they not only emerge as profitable entrepreneurs but also as socially responsible stewards of the environment.

With the herb production industry growing and becoming increasingly competitive, the model equips participants with the skills and knowledge needed to thrive in this dynamic landscape. Through practical training and access to market insights, they understand consumer preferences, identify niche markets, and develop unique and market-ready herb products.

The "Developing of SME-Herb Production" simulation model is more than just a training program; it's an empowerment tool. It provides future entrepreneurs with the confidence and competence to establish and run successful herb production businesses. By embracing sustainable practices and innovative technologies, participants are well-prepared to flourish in the ever-evolving market of the Rhodope region.

2. Introduction

Herb production, an age-old practice deeply rooted in the cross-border traditional knowledge, has a great potential to evolve into a dynamic and competitive industry. It's not just about growing plants; it's about cultivating nature's essence, encapsulating the spirit of a region, and meeting the ever-evolving demands of consumers seeking natural and sustainable products. The "Developing of SME-Herb Production" simulation model encapsulates the very

essence of this industry, while being aimed at promoting entrepreneurial culture and setting up conditions for mobilization of young people for entrepreneurial activity in the region.

It is worth mentioning, that the simulation model under review here is not a standalone venture but a pivotal component of the broader FLOREO Project. The FLOREO Project is a multifaceted initiative aimed at promoting sustainable rural development and ecotourism in the cross-border region. At its core, this project seeks to harness the potential of the region's natural resources, culture, and heritage to create economic opportunities while preserving the environment. To bring context to the simulation, we've crafted a compelling case study known as "HerbQuest." The case study revolves around Maria, a determined entrepreneur who embarks on a transformative journey to establish her herb

production venture, "HerbQuest." Maria's journey serves as an inspiring narrative that participants can relate to, offering real-world insights into the challenges and opportunities of the herb cultivation business.

Chosen as a simulation environment is the picturesque village of Trigrad within the cross-border Rhodope Mountain region. This region is renowned for its breathtaking landscapes, diverse flora, and rich cultural heritage. It's a place where tradition and innovation coexist, and where the unique ecological assets of the Rhodopes are harnessed for sustainable development. At the heart of this simulation environment lies the specially reconstructed and equipped under the project Business Support & Information Center (BSIC). This center serves as a hub and nerve center for future entrepreneurs looking to venture into herb production and ecotourism. Here, participants access a wealth of resources and guidance from experienced mentors and experts in herb production and ecotourism. The BSIC is a place of collaboration, learning, and innovation, where entrepreneurs receive tailored support to shape their ventures effectively.

Adjacent to the BSIC, the captivating Herb Alley offers a hands-on training ground for participants. It serves as an Eco Lab where entrepreneurs immerse themselves in practical herb cultivation and value-added processing. The Herb Alley is not just a collection of plants; it's a living laboratory showcasing the diverse flora of the Rhodope Mountain region.

One hallmark of this simulation model is its integration of technology. Participants explore innovative tools, precision agriculture techniques, and sustainable energy solutions. They also engage with a dynamic virtual marketplace that accurately reflects real-world consumer preferences and market demands for various herb products. This integration ensures that the learning experience is both immersive and up-to-date with the latest industry trends.

3. Methodological approach

The development of the "Developing of SME-Herb Production" simulation model follows a holistic and multidisciplinary approach. It aims to blend the realms of experiential learning, technology integration, and real-world problem-solving to

create a robust learning environment. The core philosophy driving this approach can be broken down into the following key principles:

- **Experiential Learning:** The simulation model centers on the concept of experiential learning, allowing participants to actively engage in the learning process. Instead of passive absorption of knowledge, participants are encouraged to make decisions, face challenges, and learn from the consequences of their choices. This hands-on approach fosters a deep understanding of herb production and business management.
- **Immersive Realism:** To create an immersive and realistic learning experience, the simulation model mirrors the actual challenges and opportunities faced by herb producers in the Rhodope region. It replicates the capricious weather conditions, the intricacies of pest management, market dynamics, and resource constraints. This immersion ensures that participants are well-prepared to tackle real-world scenarios.
- **Technology Integration:** Leveraging the power of technology is a fundamental aspect of this simulation model. It incorporates cutting-edge tools and precision agriculture techniques that are revolutionizing the herb production industry. Participants gain exposure to technologies such as smart farming tools, data analytics, and sustainable energy solutions. This not only prepares them for modern herb production but also aligns with the broader goals of sustainability.
- **Interconnected Learning Modules:** The simulation model comprises a series of interconnected modules, each focusing on a specific aspect of herb production and business management. This modular approach ensures that participants gain a comprehensive understanding of the entire herb production process, from seed to market. Moreover, it enables participants to see the interdependencies between different stages of production and make informed decisions.

The development of the "Developing of SME-Herb Production" simulation model is grounded in a rigorous methodology that combines educational research,

industry expertise, based on the 78 years of experience of Agricultural University-Plovdiv, and technology integration. Here is an overview of the applied methodology:

- Needs Assessment: The development process commenced with a thorough needs assessment. This involved consultations with herb production experts in the university, entrepreneurs, and educational specialists. Their insights helped identify the key knowledge and skills gaps in the herb production industry and guided the design of the simulation.
- Curriculum Design: The curriculum for the simulation model was meticulously crafted to align with the identified needs and the general goals of Floreo project. It was structured to provide a well-rounded education in herb production, covering areas such as herb selection, cultivation planning, soil preparation, irrigation management, pest control, growth monitoring, harvesting techniques, and market research.
- Technology Integration: To keep the simulation model up-to-date with industry trends, technology integration was a priority. The development team collaborated with experts in precision agriculture and software development to incorporate tools for data-driven decision-making, resource optimization, and sustainable practices.
- Real-World Scenario Creation: The scenarios within the simulation model were developed based on real-world situations that herb producers in the Rhodope region commonly encounter. This included modeling the impact
 - of unpredictable weather patterns, pest infestations, market fluctuations, and resource limitations.
 - Interactive Learning Environment: The simulation model's user interface was designed to be intuitive and user-friendly, enabling participants to

easily navigate through the various modules and make decisions that directly affect their virtual herb production ventures.

- **Continuous Improvement:** An iterative development process was adopted, allowing for continuous improvement based on user feedback and emerging industry trends. This ensures that the simulation model remains relevant and effective in preparing future entrepreneurs.
- **Evaluation and Assessment:** A robust evaluation and assessment system was integrated into the simulation model. Participants are not only tasked with making decisions but also with evaluating the outcomes of those decisions, promoting critical thinking and reflection.

4. Simulation objectives and applied methodology

The "Developing of SME-Herb Production" simulation model was designed with a set of comprehensive objectives aimed at preparing future entrepreneurs for success in the herb production industry, yet within the framework of Floreo project. These objectives were developed through a systematic research process, which included a thorough analysis of industry needs, market trends, and educational requirements.

- **Industry Needs Assessment:** The research phase commenced with a comprehensive industry needs assessment. This involved engaging with our esteemed professors, herb production experts, agronomists, local farmers, and business owners in the Rhodope region. Key findings from this research included the increasing demand for sustainably grown herbs, the need for innovation in herb processing techniques, and the importance of aligning herb production with market trends.
- **Market Trends Analysis:** A detailed analysis of market trends was conducted to understand consumer preferences, emerging herb varieties,
- and the potential for value-added herbal products. This research highlighted the growing interest in herbal teas, cosmetics, and culinary herbs, presenting valuable market opportunities for future entrepreneurs.

- Educational Requirements: To ensure that the simulation model aligned with educational needs, consultations were held with educators and experts in curriculum design. Insights from this research indicated a need for experiential learning opportunities that combined technical knowledge with practical skills.

The development of the simulation model's objectives was guided by a specifically developed and structured methodology that aimed to address the identified industry needs, market trends, and educational requirements.

- Knowledge and Skill Acquisition: The primary objective of the simulation model is to equip participating entrepreneurs with a deep understanding of herb cultivation techniques, sustainable practices, and business acumen. To achieve this, the simulation includes modules that cover herb selection, cultivation planning, soil preparation, irrigation management, pest control, growth monitoring, and harvesting techniques. Participants are encouraged to apply their knowledge in a practical setting, fostering skill acquisition.
- Decision-Making Proficiency: The simulation aims to enhance participants' decision-making proficiency by presenting them with real-world challenges and decision points. Through these challenges, participants learn to make informed decisions related to herb production, resource allocation, and market strategies. The simulation fosters critical thinking and problem-solving skills.
- Sustainable Herb Production: Sustainability is a central objective of the simulation model. Participants are exposed to sustainable herb cultivation practices, including the use of innovative technologies, precision agriculture techniques, and sustainable energy solutions. They learn to minimize environmental impact while ensuring long-term viability.

- Market Orientation: The simulation model places a strong emphasis on understanding market dynamics and consumer preferences. Participants conduct market research, develop marketing strategies, and adapt their product offerings to meet market demands. This objective ensures that future entrepreneurs are well-prepared to navigate the competitive herb production market.
- Regulatory Compliance: Recognizing the importance of adherence to regulatory standards, the simulation model includes objectives related to understanding and complying with regulations related to food safety, labeling, and organic certification. This prepares participants for the complexities of regulatory compliance in the herb production industry.
- Resource Optimization: Efficient resource utilization is a key objective. Participants learn to balance investments in herb production with financial sustainability, especially in the early stages of their ventures. They explore strategies for managing limited resources without compromising on quality.
- Seasonal Challenges: Addressing seasonality is another objective, as herb production in the cross-border region is seasonal. Future entrepreneurs must strategize on diversifying product ranges and maintaining a stable income throughout the year. This objective encourages innovative thinking in product development.
- Branding and Competition: To stand out in a competitive market, participants work towards building strong brands and differentiating their products. They explore creative branding and packaging solutions and develop strategies to compete with established players.
- Evaluation and Feedback Loop

The simulation model incorporates an evaluation and feedback loop, which is an integral part of achieving its objectives. Participants not only make decisions but also evaluate the outcomes and reflect on their choices. This feedback loop promotes continuous learning and improvement, ensuring that the objectives remain aligned with industry needs and educational requirements.

5. Decision points and challenges

The "Developing of SME-Herb Production" simulation model incorporates a series of decision points and challenges intended to immerse participants in real-world scenarios faced by real-world herb producers. These challenges are informed by Agricultural University- Plovdiv 's extensive experience, subject research and are designed to enhance entrepreneurs problem-solving, critical thinking, and decision-making skills in the context of herb production and business management. The following specific decision points and challenges were considered in the elaboration process:

- Unpredictable Weather Patterns: Participants have to encounter scenarios reflecting the region's unpredictable weather. For example, they're facing an unexpected frost threat. Options include investing in protective measures like greenhouses, deploying frost blankets, or adjusting planting schedules. This challenge assesses participants' ability to assess weather risks and protect their crops effectively.
- Pest Infestations: Scenarios involving pest infestations, such as aphids or fungal infections, are presented. Entrepreneurs must decide on pest management strategies, including organic methods, chemical treatments, or introducing natural predators. This challenge evaluates their understanding of sustainable pest control practices.
- Market Fluctuations: Participants receive data indicating shifts in demand for specific herbs or herbal products. They must decide whether to modify marketing strategies, diversify product offerings, or maintain their current approach. This scenario tests their adaptability to market changes and their ability to strategize accordingly.
- Regulatory Compliance: Challenges related to regulatory compliance, particularly for food safety, labeling, and organic certification, are integrated. Participants must navigate complex regulations, complete documentation, undergo inspections, and update product labels. This decision point evaluates their understanding of regulatory requirements and their ability to ensure market access.

- Limited Resources: Floreo participants face scenarios with budget constraints. They need to allocate resources wisely among various aspects of herb production, such as quality seeds, irrigation systems, and labor. This challenge assesses their resource management skills and their ability to optimize resource allocation.
- Seasonality: Scenarios addressing seasonality in herb production are presented. Participants must strategize to maintain a consistent income year-round, especially during the dormant winter months. Options include diversifying product ranges, such as introducing dried herb blends or herbal skincare products. This challenge assesses their innovation and ability to adapt to seasonal fluctuations.
- Packaging and Branding: Participants are tasked with designing product labels that capture the essence of the Rhodopes while adhering to regulatory guidelines. This challenge evaluates their creativity in branding and label design.
- Competition: Scenarios involving competition with established herb producers are presented. Entrepreneurs must develop strategies to differentiate their products through quality, unique blends, and compelling storytelling. This challenge assesses their ability to create a unique value proposition and marketing plan.

6. Assessed integration with the other Floreo simulation models

- Integration with "Developing of SME- Drying Herbs":
 - *Herb Selection and Cultivation*: The herbs chosen and cultivated in the "Developing of SME-Herb Production" model are foundational for the "Developing of SME- Drying Herbs." The quality, variety, and yield of the cultivated herbs directly impact the drying process in the next stage.

Participants are made aware that the success of dried herb products relies on the initial cultivation.

- *Market Research*: The data collected from market research in the herb production model provides insights into the demand for specific herbs. This information guides the selection of herbs for drying and processing.
 - *Resource Management*: Decisions related to resource allocation in the herb production model influence the availability of resources in the drying model. Participants must find a balance between cultivating fresh herbs and preparing them for drying.
- **Integration with "Developing of SME- Cosmetic Product based on Herbs"**:
- *Herb Selection and Processing*: The variety of herbs grown in the herb production model becomes a source of raw materials for the cosmetic products developed by the entrepreneurs. The quality and quantity of herbs affect the availability of ingredients for cosmetics.
 - *Market Research*: Data on consumer preferences and market trends collected in the herb production model are valuable for designing herbal cosmetic products. It informs the development of formulations that align with market demand.
 - *Sustainability Practices*: Emphasis on eco-friendly cultivation and production practices carries over to the cosmetics model. Participants learn to incorporate sustainability into product development.
- **Integration with "Innovative Product Development"**:
- *Product Innovation*: The herb production model is an innovation hub where participants experiment with unique herb products. Some of these innovative products, such as herbal blends, teas, or infused oils, craft infused beer, juice concentrates, etc. can be further developed in the "Innovative Product Development" model.

- *Market Feedback*: Feedback from the herb production model, particularly the dynamic marketplace, helps fine-tune product innovation. Participants can adjust their product offerings based on market responses and trends.
- *Production Efficiency*: Lessons in efficient production practices learned in the herb model can be applied when scaling up innovative products for commercial production.

➤ **Integration with "Ecotourism Company":**

- *Local Sourcing*: The "Developing of SME-Herb Production" Simulation Model emphasizes community engagement and sourcing local resources. In the "Ecotourism Company" model, these local connections can be leveraged for ecotourism experiences, including Agricultural tourism, namely herb-related tours and activities.
- *Product Offerings*: Herbal products developed and marketed in the herb production model can be featured in the ecotourism venture. Participants learn how to create synergies between product sales and ecotourism services.
- *Sustainability Practices*: The emphasis on sustainable and environmentally conscious practices is mutually reinforced. Participants understand the value of ecotourism that aligns with responsible ecological practices.

7. Conclusion

The "Developing of SME-Herb Production" Simulation Model is more than a training program; it's meant to be a transformative journey for future entrepreneurs in the cross-border region Greece-Bulgaria. Through this immersive herb production venture and the specially equipped BSIC and Herb Alley, participants gain invaluable knowledge and skills that enable them to navigate the intricate landscape of herb cultivation and business management.

Participants become proficient in various technical aspects of herb production. They learn to select, cultivate, and process herbs while understanding their specific requirements through the expertise of Floreo's mentors. In-depth knowledge about indigenous herbs, including growth habits and potential applications, equips them to make informed choices. Keeping in mind Innovation is at the heart of the model, entrepreneurs are encouraged to experiment and develop unique herb products, infusions, or blends, under the supervision of trainers. The emphasis on eco-friendly practices and sustainable energy solutions ensures that future entrepreneurs are not just profit-driven but also socially responsible and environmentally conscious.

The model presents real-life challenges, from unpredictable weather patterns to market fluctuations. This immersive environment encourages participants to develop essential skills in strategic decision-making, resource allocation, and farm management. They learn to adapt to unforeseen circumstances and market dynamics, fostering agility and critical thinking. Floreo's entrepreneurs gain a deep understanding

of market dynamics and consumer preferences. They learn to align herb selection with market demand, develop market-ready products, and stay competitive. The dynamic virtual marketplace reflects real-world market fluctuations and helps participants fine-tune their business plans.

This model is designed to be seamlessly integrated with other Simulation Models under the FLOREO Project. The herbs cultivated here are the foundation for products offered in subsequent models, including dried herbs, cosmetics, innovative products, and ecotourism experiences. The close alignment of these models mimics the interconnectedness of real-world businesses. By fostering connections with the local community and sourcing resources locally, participants in the "Developing of SME-Herb Production" model lay the groundwork for building strong community ties. Their future herb production enterprises are not just businesses; they are integral parts of the local ecosystem, contributing to economic growth and sustainability.

Upon completion of this simulation, students leave with not only knowledge but a vision for the future. They are well-equipped to establish and run successful herb production and ecotourism enterprises in the Rhodope region. These

enterprises embody the principles of sustainability, authenticity, and quality, contributing to the growth of the local economy.

Research and Elaboration Report on the Developed Simulation Model №3 : "Developing of SME- Drying Herbs "

The simulation model "Developing of SME- Drying Herbs " is designed to challenge the new entrepreneurs in the following areas :

1.Partnership Challenge: How will they establish strong partnerships with the local community ensuring the availability of the raw material. Consider strategies for collaboration and joint initiatives with herb producers and wild herb pickers.

2.Sustainable Infrastructure Challenge: How will they develop sustainable infrastructure for your drying operations in the remote mountain region? Address the challenges of waste management and energy efficiency in a way that minimizes the environmental footprint of the drying process.

3. Community Empowerment Challenge: How will they actively engage and empower the local communities in the mountain region? Develop initiatives that create economic opportunities for the communities through fair trade practices.

4. Risk Management Challenge: How will they address potential risks and challenges associated with drying process? Develop comprehensive risk management plans, train your staff in emergency response protocols.

5. Marketing and Promotion Challenge: How will they effectively market their company and attract the right target audience? Develop a comprehensive marketing strategy.

6. Long-term Sustainability Challenge: How will they ensure the long-term sustainability and growth of your business in the mountain region? Develop strategies for diversifying your activity, expanding your customer and supplier base, monitoring and adapting to changes in the market, and continuously innovating to stay ahead in the competitive landscape.

By addressing these challenges within the simulation model, the new entrepreneur can gain valuable experience and insights to overcome real-life obstacles and build a successful and sustainable ecotourism business in a rural, mountainous region.

Business idea viability challenge

1. Market Viability Challenge: How will they assess the market viability of your drying herbs business idea? Consider factors such as market demand, availability of raw materials, target customer segments, competition analysis, and the unique selling points of your offerings to determine if there is a sustainable market for your business.

2. Infrastructure Challenge: Evaluate the feasibility of transportation options, availability of amenities and the potential costs and logistics associated with establishing and maintaining your operations.

3. Financial Feasibility Challenge: How will they ensure the financial feasibility of your business in a rural mountain region? Develop a financial plan that considers initial investment costs, operational expenses, pricing strategies, revenue prognosis and potential return on investment to determine if the business idea is financially viable. Consider involving a potential partner.
4. Capacity challenge – Consider the capacity of the drying machines. Where to buy the machine from? What other equipment must be bought?
5. Packaging and storage challenge – How to package dried herbs and where to store them?
6. Labor availability challenge - How many workers to hire? Under what employment contracts? Is there free labor in the region?
7. Seasonal Demand Challenge: How will you manage the seasonal nature of drying herbs? Consider diversifying your activity.

8. Sustainability Challenge: Assess the environmental impact of their activities, develop strategies for waste management, energy effectiveness.
9. Community Engagement Challenge: How will they engage and collaborate with the local communities in the rural mountain region? Evaluate opportunities for community involvement, support local initiatives, establish mutually beneficial partnerships, and ensure that your business positively contributes to the social and economic development of the local communities.
10. Regulatory Compliance Challenge: How will they navigate the regulatory landscape and comply with the necessary permits, licenses, and regulations specific to the mountain region and drying herbs activity? Research the legal requirements, environmental regulations, and cultural considerations in the area, and develop a plan to ensure full compliance to avoid any potential legal or reputational issues.
11. Risk Assessment and Management Challenge: How will they identify and mitigate the potential risks and challenges associated with operating a drying

herbs business? Conduct a comprehensive risk assessment, develop safety protocols, and implement proper training and emergency response procedures to ensure the well-being of your guests and staff.

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Learning Outcomes

- By completing the "Developing of SME- Drying Herbs" Simulation Model, FLOREO's Future Entrepreneurs will gain a comprehensive understanding of herb varieties and their drying and storage requirements.
- They will be equipped with essential skills in strategic decision-making, resource allocation, and company management in the context of herb drying
- Participants will learn to evaluate market demand and align their herb selection with profitable and sustainable business goals.

Training in the simulation model will equip students with essential skills in strategic decision- making. They will learn how to analyze data, assess market trends, and evaluate environmental factors to make informed decisions

throughout the cultivation process. Technical tools like data analytics software and remote sensing will aid in identifying optimal planting schedules, irrigation plans, and nutrient management strategies. Participants will also learn to allocate resources efficiently, ensuring that water, fertilizers, labor, and other inputs are used effectively to maximize productivity and minimize waste.

Knowledge acquired during the participation in the model will enable participants to efficiently manage their drying herbs company.

Participants will be skilled in evaluating market demand for various dried herb products. Through technical market research and data analysis, they will identify consumer preferences, emerging trends, and market opportunities. By aligning their herb selection with profitable and sustainable business goals, participants can tailor their drying plans to meet market demands effectively. Technical expertise will be applied in selecting herb varieties that have high demand and align with the farm's production capacity.

Aspects of the simulation model will cover risk assessment and mitigation in herb drying in the starting SME. Participants will learn to identify potential challenges and how to address them. Technical risk assessment tools and decision support systems will help participants anticipate and mitigate risks, ensuring the resilience and success of their herb production venture.

Throughout this simulation model, training will encourage a culture of continuous learning and improvement. Participants will be empowered to embrace new technologies, data analysis methods, and industry best practices to enhance their herb drying and business management skills. The technical approach to learning will foster adaptability and encourage participants to evolve with changing market dynamics and technological advancements.

The overall aspects of the Herb and Technology Selection Module will equip participants with a wide range of skills and knowledge to excel in herbs drying. From understanding herb varieties and their drying requirements to strategic decision-making, resource allocation, and market demand evaluation, participants will be prepared for the challenges and opportunities in the competitive market. Technical proficiency in management, sustainability, and risk mitigation will ensure their drying herbs venture is profitable but also sustainable and environmentally conscious in the dynamic setting of the Rhodope region.

The "Developing of SME- Drying herbs " Simulation Model, part of the overall FLOREO Project training activities, provides a comprehensive and immersive learning experience for future entrepreneurs in the cross-border Rhodope region. Through this virtual herb production venture, participants are exposed to various technical aspects of herb cultivation and business management, preparing them to thrive in the competitive market of herb production and rural tourism.

Overall, the "Developing of SME- Drying Herbs " Simulation Model empowers participants with technical knowledge, problem-solving skills, and business acumen to establish and run successful herb production and ecotourism enterprises. By embracing sustainable practices and innovative technologies, future entrepreneurs are well-equipped to thrive in the dynamic and competitive market of the Rhodope region, contributing to the growth of the local economy and promoting eco-friendly and sustainable business practices.