



01 Tools and skills for efficient online communities

Part 2 A guide for online community participants



**Funded by
the European Union**

This project has received funding from the European Union's Erasmus+ program under the registration number 021-1-LT01-KA220-HED-000023277. This document reflects only the author's view and the Commission is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains



Authors:

Ana Aleknavičienė (VTDK), Andrius Gulbinas (VTDK), Vaiva Mickevičienė (VTDK), Veronika Žvirblė (VTDK), Nele Schmidt (EUF), Martin Vojtek (UPCE), Monika Skalska (UPCE), Dalibor Gottwald (UPCE), Andrea Seidlova (UPCE), Jaromir Široky (UPCE), Michaela Ledvinova (UPCE), Jiri Krupka (UPCE), Michalis Xenos (UPATRAS), Maria Margosi (UPATRAS), Anreas Mallas (UPATRAS), Adam Jakimowicz (BUT), Michal Chodorowski (BUT), Bartosz Sliwecki (BUT), Bartosz Czarnecki (BUT), Agnieszka Modzelewska (BUT), Milena Wiercinska (BUT), Luis Seco (UMAIA), Marta Vazquez (UMAIA), Joana Carreiro (UMAIA), Pedro Teques (UMAIA)

This document is licenced according

[CC BY SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)



Project Title: Challenge-Oriented Collaborative Online Communities in the Paradigm of Sustainable City

Short Term:	CityGo
Subsidy indicator:	021-1-LT01-KA220-HED-000023277
Duration:	2022-01-01 to 2023-08-31

Partner:

Vilniaus technologiju ir dizaino kolegija (VTDK)
Maieutica cooperativa de ensino superior crl (ISMAI)
University campus rio patras (UPATRAS)
Univerzita Pardubice (UPCE)
Politechnika Bialostocka (BUT)
Europa-Universitaet Flensburg (EUF)

Content

1	About this guideline	4
2	A guide for online community participants	5
2.1	Online learning community as a study module	10
2.1.1	Discord- the place of action	10
2.1.2	Content library – one place for content	15
2.1.3	Technical requirements	18
2.2	Studying in online learning communities	19
2.2.1	Follow the rules and procedures	19
2.2.2	Recommendations for a successful online learning community	20
2.3	How to keep members engaged?	21
2.3.1	Assessment issues	23
2.3.2	Keep engaged	25
	References	27

List of figures

Figure 1.	„Which of the digital collaborations enables you to work on a specific task at ease?“ (CityGo 2022a)	9
Figure 2.	Students experience regarding online learning (CityGo 2022a)	9
Figure 3.	Students preference regarding online learning (CityGo 2022a)	9
Figure 4.	Discord registration page https://discord.com/register	11
Figure 5.	Creating or joining server on Discord https://discord.com/channels	11
Figure 6.	Joining CityGo server on Discord https://discord.com/channels/@me	12
Figure 7.	CityGo community on Discord	12
Figure 8.	Welcome page of CityGo community	13
Figure 9.	Selection of the module	13
Figure 10.	Inside of the chosen module	14
Figure 11.	Structure of the channels inside of the module	15
Figure 12.	CityGo Digital Content Library https://citygo-project.eu/courses/	17
Figure 13.	Recommended CityGo student user journey	17

1 About this guideline

The pandemic has forced various educational institutions to adopt an online teaching format quickly. On one side, there were technological challenges that software providers adjusted to in a short time. On the other side, the teaching methodology was a huge challenge: Learning online makes it more challenging to keep the student at the computer for a long time, as well as to involve the student in the lecture and help him/her avoid 'distraction syndrome'. Months of lockdown, when teachers and students had to work in the format of distant learning, demonstrated that traditional methods are not optimal, it is necessary to change the approach and help teachers to overcome the challenges posed by online teaching and find new ways to embrace learning online.

The CityGo project aims to develop methodology and materials that enable higher education institutions (HEIs) to perform quality and engaging problem-based learning in a digital environment. This will be achieved through applying a model of collaborative online communities focused around a particular topic at the HEIs.

During CityGo project a consortium consisting of 6 Higher Education Institutions (CZ, DE, GR, LT, PL, PT) develops and tests a methodology of efficient teaching/learning in collaborative online communities, where students solve societal challenges on the topic of Sustainable City. Solving real-world problems in an online environment requires specific approaches to create trust, build engagement, overcome participants' anxieties, and provide them with the necessary tools in a timely manner. The community will offer to their members (students and teacher) a digital content library on relevant topics and a collaborative online platform, where members will meet each other and solve various issues.

These guidelines address these issues from the perspective of community facilitators and participants themselves – to include these aspects, the guidelines were prepared based on desk research, a student survey (n=330) and interviews with 60 teachers. These guidelines for the participants of the online communities include recommendations and how-to-guides on the use of an efficient and collaborative online learning environment were participant work on real-world problems.

The COVID-19 pandemic constituted a huge challenge to educators to urgently adapt all their classes to distance learning in order to maintain learning continuity with the same level of quality (Salta, 2022). On one side, there were technological challenges that software providers adjusted to in a short time. On the other side, the teaching methodology was a huge challenge: Learning online makes it more challenging to keep the student at the computer for a long time, as well as to involve the student in the lecture and help him/her avoid 'distraction syndrome'. Months of lockdown, when teachers and students had to work in the format of distant learning, demonstrated that traditional methods are not optimal, it is necessary to change the approach and help teachers to overcome the challenges posed by online teaching and find new ways to embrace learning online.

Being in the community has many advantages and makes sense (Brook, Oliver, 2003):

Table 1: Elements of sense of community

Element	Attribute
Membership	Boundaries that separate us from them Emotional safety A sense of belonging and identification A common symbol system
Influence	Individual members matter to the group The group matters to the individual Making a difference to the group Individual members influence the group The group influences the individual member
Fulfilment of needs	Benefits and rewards Members meeting their own needs Members meeting the needs of others Reinforcement and fulfilment of needs
Shared emotional connection	Identifying with a shared event, history, time, place or experience Regular and meaningful contact Closure to events Personal investment Honour Spiritual connection

In an initial qualitative study with 60 teachers (CityGo, 2022b), the project consortium has discovered that the teachers made big progress in embracing technology and applying it in their lessons: through self-directed learning, using various IT tools available, teachers have adapted to working online. However, a lot of teachers noted that the problem of active student involvement still is particularly prominent:

Many of the teachers say they feel the need for methodological advice on how to activate students' attention in online lectures, stimulate them to be more committed to the project and team members, help them deal with the information more effectively. And in our student survey (CityGo 2022a) students expressed that

"The professors couldn't understand when they were "losing" the students" and "Seeing that some teachers were unmotivated, only having recorded lectures, almost no live ones"

The CityGo project aims to develop methodology and materials that enable higher education institutions (HEIs) to perform quality and engaging problem-based learning in a digital environment. This will be achieved through applying a model of collaborative online communities focused around a particular topic at the HEIs.

During CityGo project a consortium consisting of 6 Higher Education Institutions (CZ, DE, GR, LT, PL, PT) develops and tests a methodology of efficient teaching/learning in collaborative online communities, where students solve societal challenges on the topic of Sustainable City. Solving real-world problems in an online environment requires specific approaches to create trust, build engagement, overcome participants' anxieties, and provide them with the necessary tools in a timely manner. The community will offer to their members (students and teacher)

a digital content library on relevant topics and a collaborative online platform, where members will meet each other and solve various issues.

These guidelines for participants of the online communities include recommendations and how-to-guides on an efficient and collaborative online learning environment where participant work on real-world problems.

2 A guide for online community participants

Dos

- Identify your needs for online learning
- Pay constant attention to the relationship between teacher and students.
- Respect possible cross-cultural differences and possible differences in the level of English between students and teachers.
- Avoid publicly sharing the Discord community link.
- Monitor the community openly.
- Consider yourself “part of the community”.
- Make sure you have read and agreed to the rules.

Don'ts

- Facilitators must not ask for evidence of previous study of similar subjects
- Do not use interactive elements during the module.
- Do not study in large groups of students.
- Do not access or use illegal content, harassment, etc.

The main topic of the project – Sustainable City – has been a much-discussed topic in the last few years, both within the professional and lay public. And it is a very popular topic as well.

You don't need to provide proof of previous education or coursework to register for the training modules. However, for each module, there are basic prerequisites (knowledge or technical training required) that will make it easier for participants to complete the module. **It is always necessary to familiarize yourself with these prerequisites.** This is the reason why in the City-Go project the target audience is international students joining a – more or less – open learning module.

Which of the platforms to use, is the decision of the teacher or the institution and based on the specific needs.

According the student survey (CityGo 2022a) the most popular platform is Microsoft Teams – 29% (110 mentions), in second place is Discord – 20% (75). Facebook and messenger were mention 15 times (4%), Zoom – 14 times (4%), Instagram – 12 times (3%) and Youtube – 7 times (2%). 10 (2%) students indicated that not a single platform is good enough and 4 students (1%) indicated that all platforms are good. Question was not answered by 103 students (27%). Other platforms include Webex and Kahoot 4 mentions each, Google Classes and Moodle 3 mentions each; Trello 2 mentions; Goodnotes, SharePoint, Big Blue Buttons, WhatsApp, Stockoverflow, GitHub, Kaltura, Gather Town, Viber, Skype, Twitter, CKZ, Skillshare and TikTok have been mentioned once.

According to the CityGo 2022a survey, almost 88% of students consider small groups of up to four people to be the optimal group size. Group sizes of 5-10 or even larger are not optimal (see Figure 1). The majority of students surveyed identified group work as a convenient method of the educational process. Given that the current global job market is dominated by the expectation that potential jobseekers will have interdisciplinary competences such as communication and teamwork, **expect to be involved in group work.**

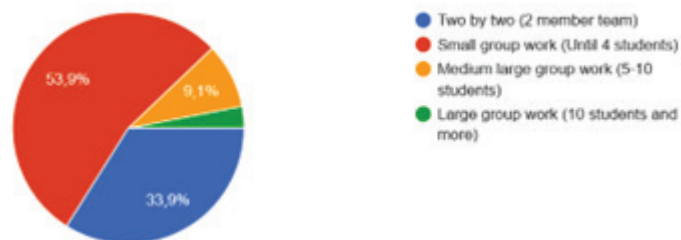


Figure 1. „Which of the digital collaborations enables you to work on a specific task at ease?“ (CityGo 2022a)

Students experience and preference regarding online learning



Figure 2. Students experience regarding online learning (CityGo 2022a)

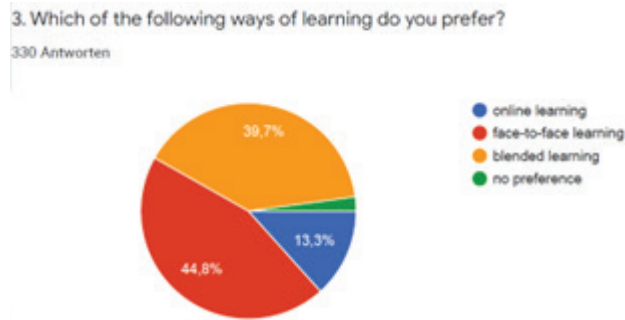


Figure 3. Students preference regarding online learning (CityGo 2022a)

56 % of surveyed students had good experiences when online learning (CityGo 2022a), while 44 % did not have good experiences with online learning.

45 % of surveyed students preferred face-to-face learning, while 40 % prefer blended learning and 13 % prefer pure online learning.

Even though a lot of students have good experiences with online learning, only a small amount prefers online learning over blended formats or face to face learning. This is most likely due to the challenges in connection to the existing or experienced online teaching methodology. Thus, online communities could be a new way to motivate learners, as they see a lot of advantages in online learning:

“Online learning gave the opportunity to stay connected even when I couldn’t physically be present. For cases that someone is sick, leaving in other city/country, working and/or cannot travel for that to university all the time, it is highly valuable.”

As well as practical reasons

“It saves more time, because you don’t have to travel to the college.”

Based on the results of the questionnaire survey, a little over half of the students had a good experience with online learning. In the open answers students expressed that.

2.1 Online learning community as a study module

2.1.1 Discord- the place of action

Dos

- Choose online platform(s) according to your needs and budget
- Try out CityGo’s Project choice Discord - install it, choose a channel and start communication Evaluate your capabilities.
- Participate in a conversation.
- Use voice and video options.
- Configure notifications.
- Participate in events.

If you are a student and you want to experience a new form of online collaborative learning, accept the challenge, and embark on the City Go adventure.

First of all, if you don't already have a Discord account, the first step is to create one. Go to the Discord website (<https://discord.com/register>) and do your registration. Then, follow the instructions to create an account with your email address, username, and password.

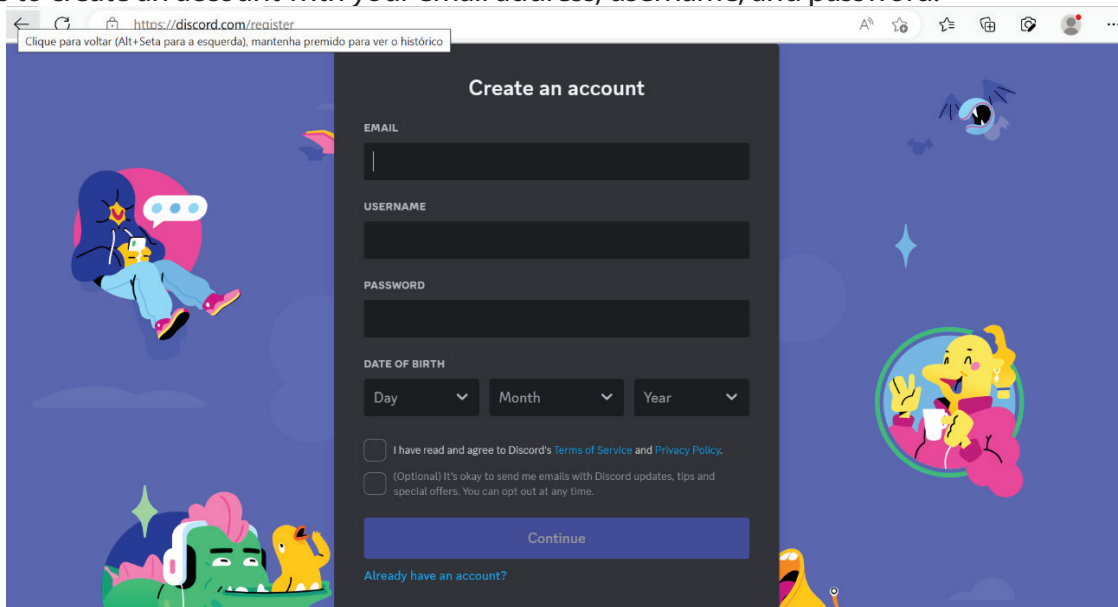


Figure 4. Discord registration page <https://discord.com/register>

Once you have created your account, you need to join the servers you are interested in. Ask the servers' owners to provide an invite to the server. This invite can be sent via email or direct message on Discord. After receiving the invite, click on "Already have an invite? Join a server" and follow the instructions.

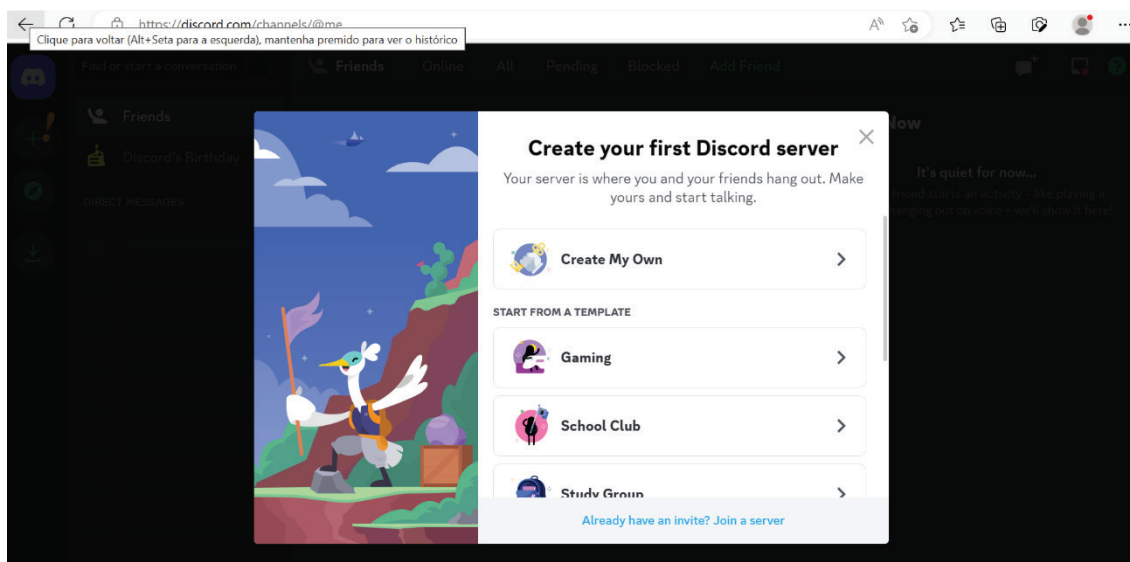


Figure 5. Creating or joining server on Discord <https://discord.com/channels>

Our CityGo server can be accessed through the link <https://discord.gg/GsAksz3V>.

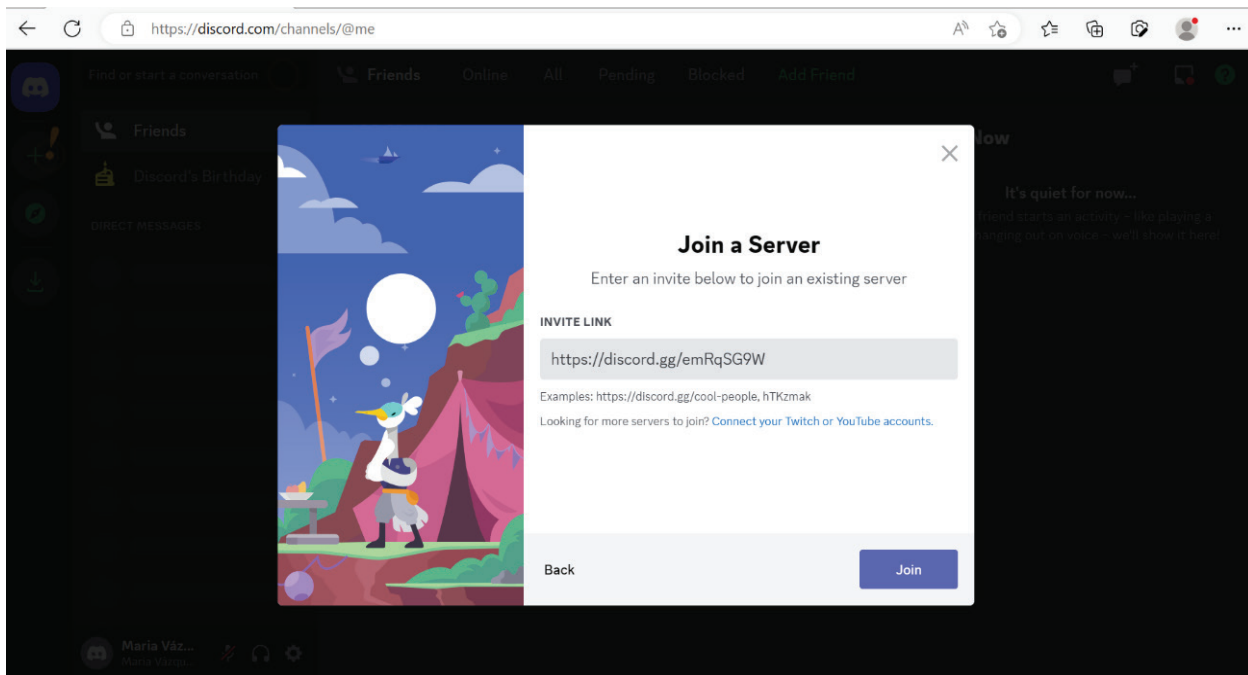


Figure 6. Joininf CityGo server on Discord <https://discord.com/channels/@me>

The first contact with the CityGo server will look like the figure bellow, where you can find a Welcome in CityGo Community message, and, on the left side of the navigator five channels with information regarding the rules each of us must obey to have the right of belonging the community, a select-team channel were you can choose the module (or modules) you are inter-esting in attending, an introduce-yourself channel where you are invited to present yourself by telling the community your name, where you are from, etc., and a help-desk channel.

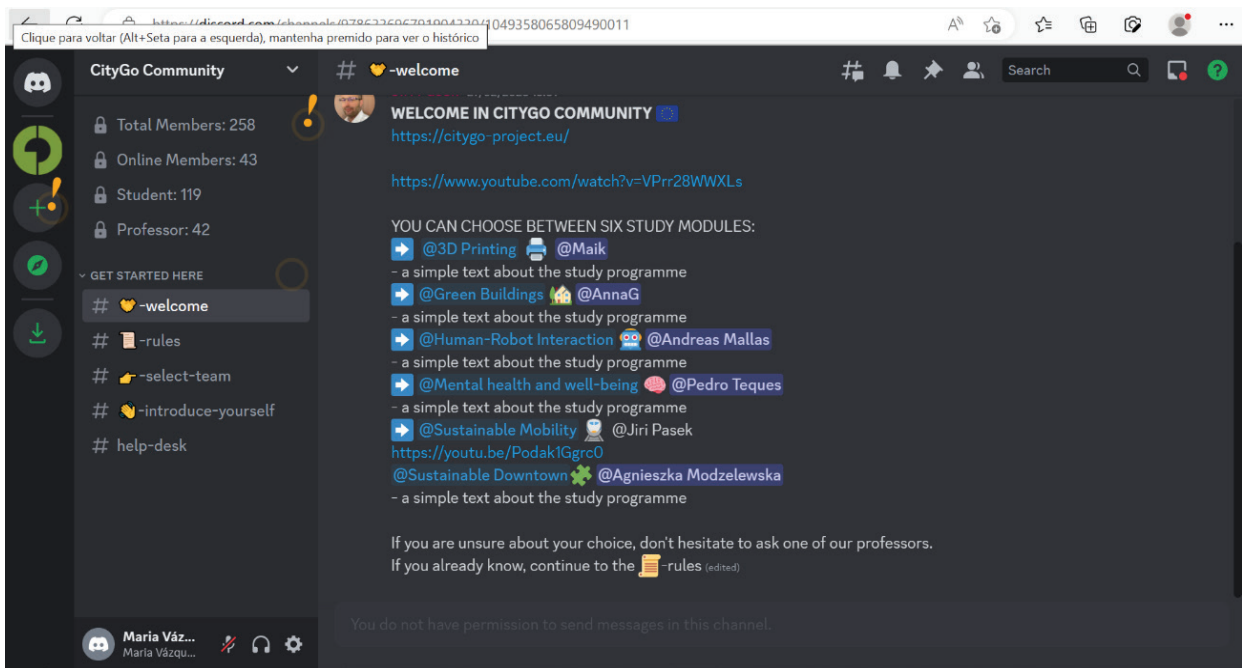


Figure 7. CityGo community on Discord

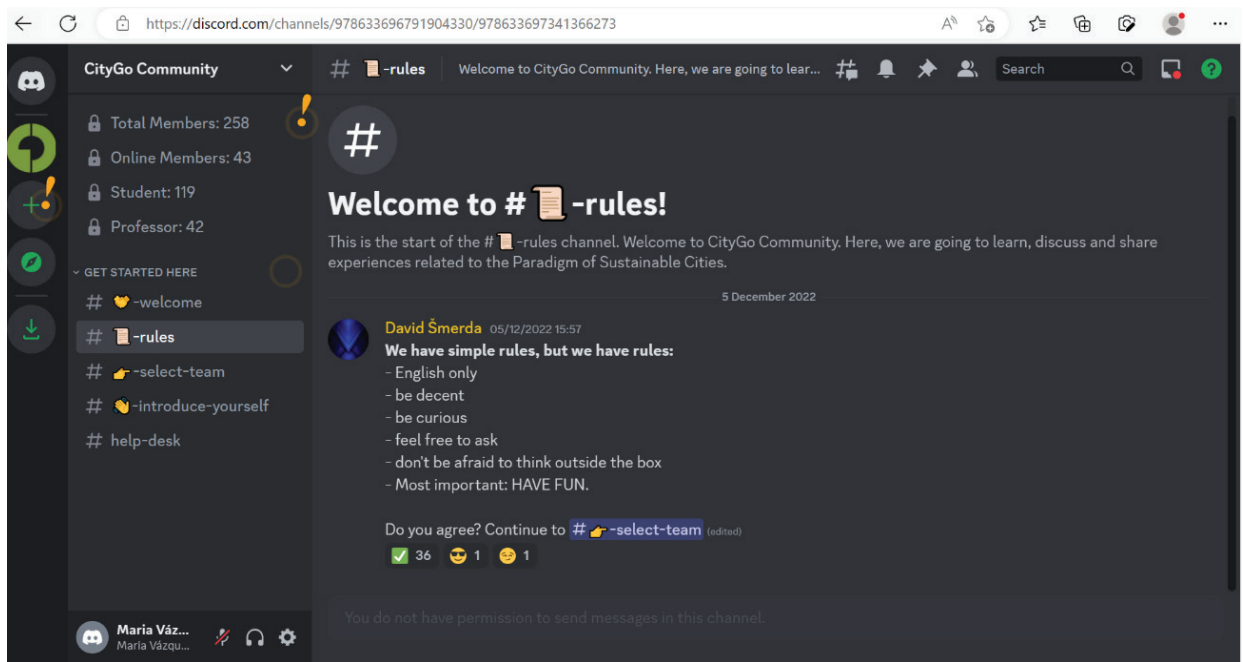


Figure 8. Welcome page of CityGo community

To choose between one of the six modules just click on the corresponding emoticon (see next figure), another click on the emoticon will remove you from the team.

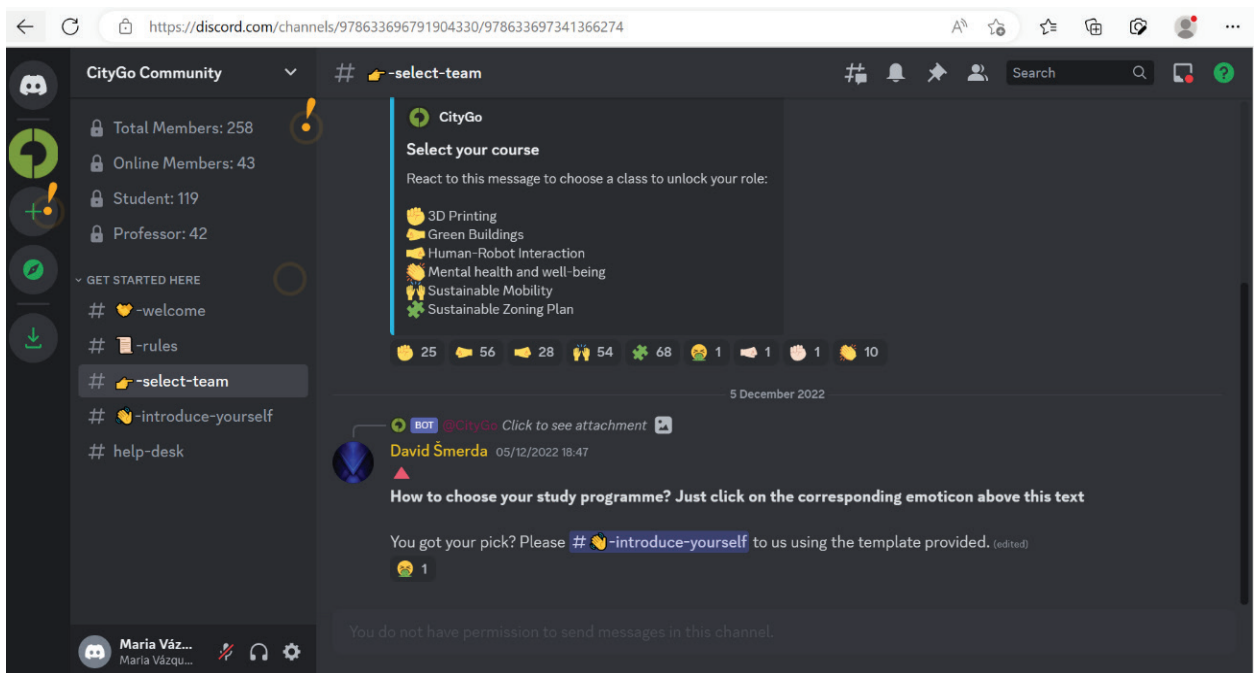


Figure 9. Selection of the module

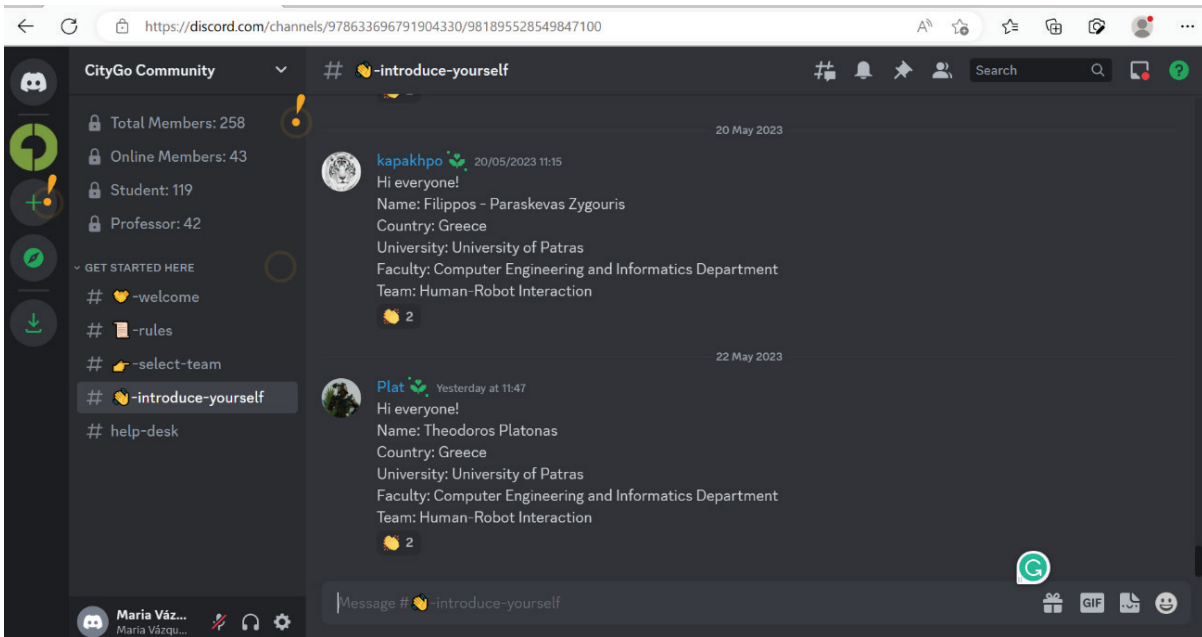


Figure 10. Inside of the chosen module

Navigate the server:

After joining one (or more) of the available modules, you will see a list of channels on the left-hand side of the screen. Each channel is used for a different type of communication. For example, there may be a channel for teacher announcements, another for student questions, and a third for group discussions. Click on each channel to see the messages and conversations. It is important to mention that, in addition to the channels available to the entire community, each module has specific channels oriented toward the themes and organization of the module. For example, if you choose “Sustainable Mobility” you will have access to the specific channels of the module under the umbrella “Sustainable mobility”, and the general channels, available for all the members of the CityGo server, under the umbrella “CityGo-Community”.

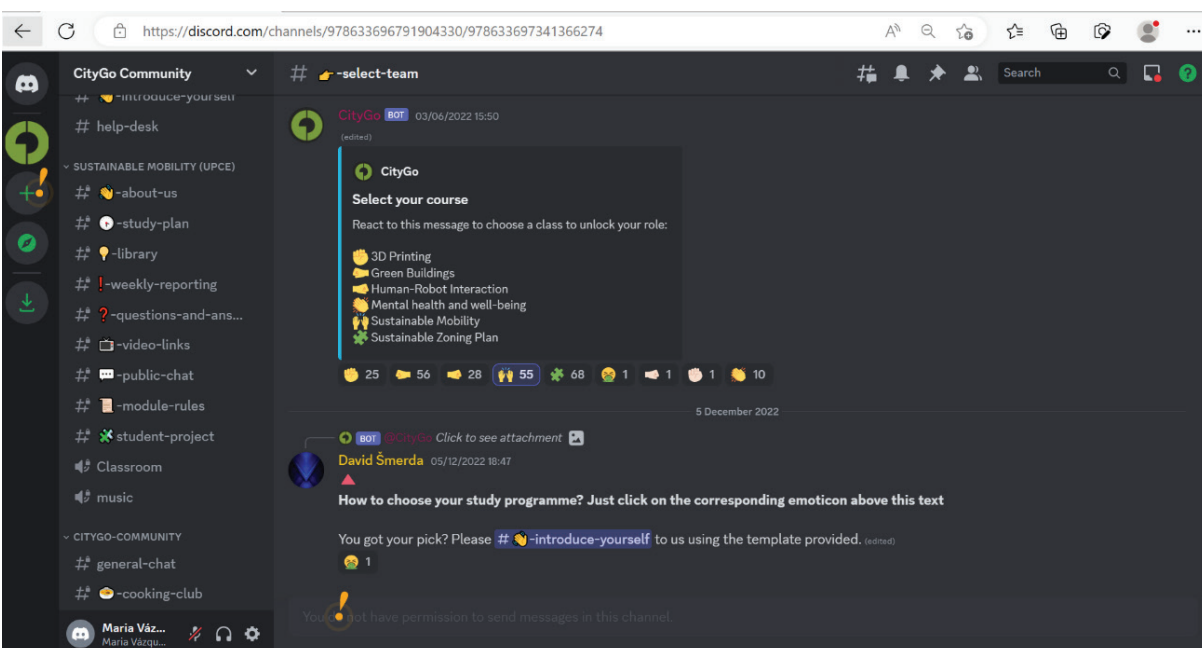


Figure 11. Structure of the channels inside of the module

Participate in a conversation:

To participate in a conversation, simply type your message into the text box at the bottom of the screen and press "Enter". Your message will be displayed on the channel for everyone to read. If you want to reply to a specific message, click on the "Reply" button below the message and type your response.

Use voice and video options:

Discord also offers voice and video options for real-time communication. To use these options, click on the corresponding voice or video channel and click on the "Join" button. You will be taken to a voice or video chat room where you can talk with other people.

Configure notifications:

By default, Discord sends notifications for every new message on the server. This can be helpful for staying up to date, but it can also be distracting. To adjust your notifications, click on the gear icon in the lower-left corner of the screen and select "Settings". Then, click on the "Notifications" tab to choose which types of notifications you want to receive and how you want to receive them.

Participate in events:

Many Discord servers host events, such as live classes, Q&A sessions, and study groups. To participate in an event, check the corresponding channel and follow the organizer's instructions.

These are the basic steps for using Discord as a communication platform for an online module. Remember to be respectful and follow the server rules.

2.1.2 Content library – one place for content

Dos

- **Sign up with the digital content library and structure the learning journey.**
- **Use Interactive learning material.**
- **Choose a topic related to a real-life problem.**
- **Focus on environmental success stories and quality of life issues.**
- **Choose a topic that encourages the analysis of empirical data, rather than getting a pre-conceived analysis from lectures or secondary sources.**
- **Be interdisciplinary - work in a team with students from another discipline.**
- **Think of your local watershed as a meaningful way to understand the community.**
- **Include an ecological footprint assessment - this is a valuable starting point.**
- **Focus on how you can apply your new knowledge in a real world context.**
- **Beware of overload - feelings of cognitive or emotional overload can make you feel disengaged, disempowered and even resentful, which can disrupt**

Don'ts

- **Just use the old materials, e.g., papers, scan and upload them.**
- **Do not choose topics that are only designed to provide theoretical knowledge.**
- **Sustainability is NOT a hoax.**
- **Avoid gloom and doom events - focus on success stories.**
- **Don't get caught up in isolated activities and work.**
- **Avoid choosing a topic only in your area of expertise – this can be difficult due to the in-terdisciplinary nature of the issues involved.**
- **Do not focus on how well you will be able to recount the information, but rather on how you will be able to apply the new knowledge.**

A digital content library allows you to learn in their own time and at their own pace, helping to ensure that students have a foundation of knowledge in certain subjects. In addition, having all the learning resources needed for the module in one place makes it easier for teams to work in groups.

The Digital Content Library is a learning platform with interactive learning materials aimed at particular competencies both professional (e.g. using BIM for project design, creating the graphic layout of the project etc.) and transversal (e.g. communication, teamwork etc.). The Digital Content Library on Sustainable City helps working online on problem-based projects to improve their learning experience, make your study path more efficient and tailored, and make digital learning student-centred, engaging and immersive.

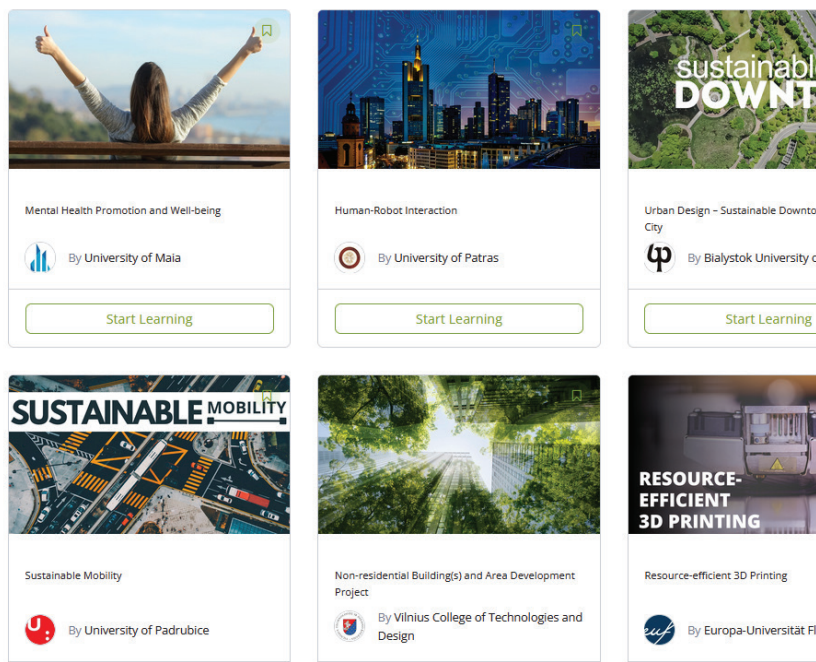


Figure 12. CityGo Digital Content Library <https://citygo-project.eu/courses/>

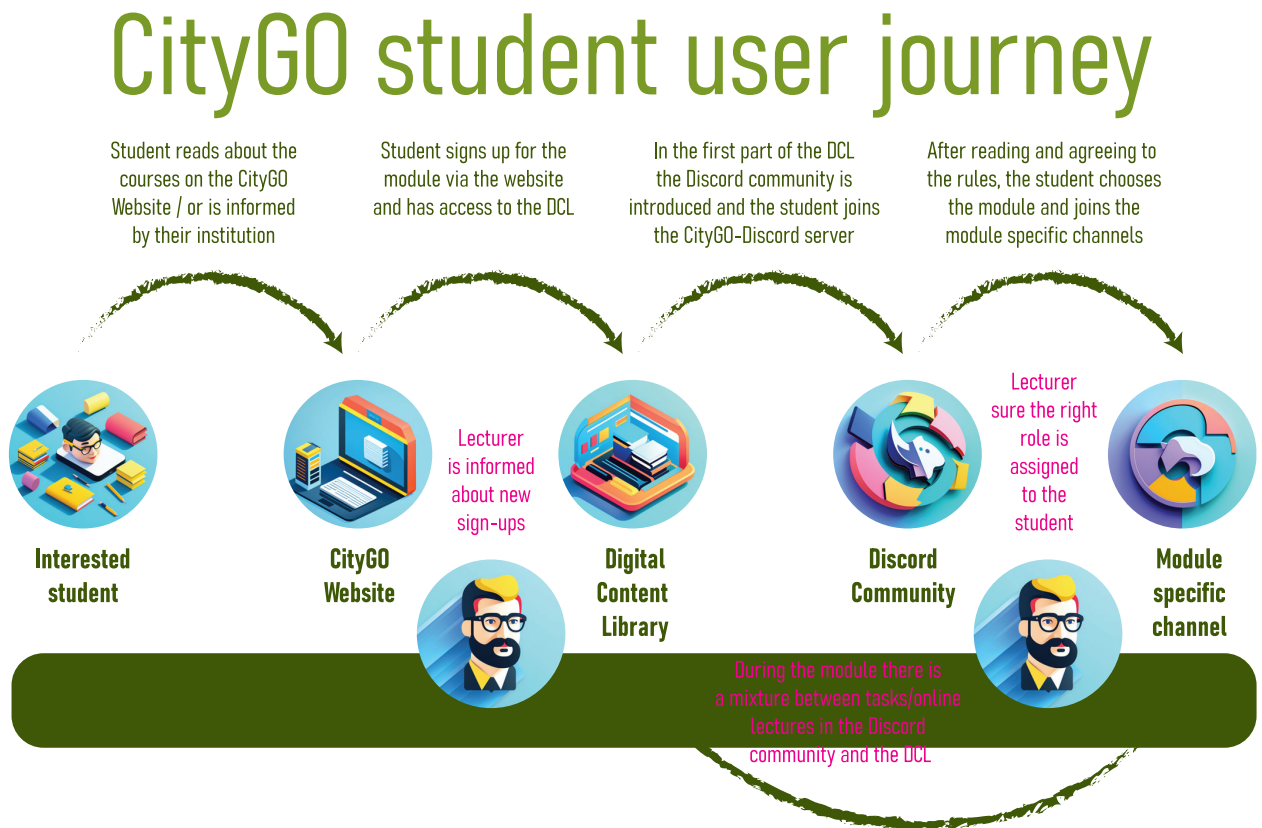


Figure 13: Recommended CityGo student user journey

Recommended CityGo user journey consists of 6 main steps:

1. First, you read about all available modules on the CityGo website (<https://citygo-project.eu/courses/>) or are informed about them by the institution/person responsible for the module.
2. Register for a module of interest on the website and get access to the digital content library.
3. At the beginning of the module, the module leader introduces you to the Discord community. You log in to the CityGo Discord server.
4. Once you have read and agreed to the rules, you will select the module you are interested in and join the channels for that particular module.
5. Make sure you have chosen the right channel and are assigned the right role. If not, inform the facilitator. The facilitator must be sure that you have chosen the right channel and have been assigned the right role.
6. During the module there is mixture between tasks, lectures, assignments and etc. in the CityGO discord community and the Digital Content Library.

2.1.3 Technical requirements

Dos

- **It is necessary to respect the requirements of individual modules for specialized HW and SW.**

Don'ts

- **Neglect the preparation of hardware and software.**
- **Overestimate your IT skills.**

A Reliable Laptop

- It is best to go a laptop that can support all your classes, whether you conduct classes one-on-one or in groups.
- Some platforms require teachers/students to have a high-speed laptop to teach/study. For this reason, consider investing in a laptop that has 8 GM RAM with an Intel Core i5 processor or above.
- Most online teaching/learning platforms run well on Google Chrome and Microsoft Edge, so make sure to have that fully up-to-date, along with Windows 8/10 or Mac OS 10.10x or higher.

Stable and Secure Internet Connection

- A stable and secure internet connection is vital for online teaching/learning.
- The internet speed requirements vary vastly from company to company. For example: Zoom – 1.5 Mbps upload and download speed, Discord – 5Mbps upload and download speed, MS Teams – 1.5 Mbps upload and download speed.
- You can do an internet speed test [here](#).
- A wired internet connection can actually improve its ping, speed and stability. There are two ways to get a wired internet connection:
 - Option 1 – buy an ethernet cable. An ethernet cable connects the router to your computer device. This is not ideal if your router is fixed to a location very far from your laptop.
 - Option 2 – Ethernet over powerline adapters. Another way to get wired internet access is by using a powerline adaptor. While not a perfect substitute for an ethernet cable, it is still a faster option than a wireless connection.
- There are still some things you can do to improve your Wi-Fi connection:

- Find out if you are with the best Wi-Fi provider in your area
- Contact your internet provider to see if they can increase the speed limit
- Update your devices
- Turn off your camera in the online classes to reduce bandwidth (if required)

A headset

- For a headset, you'll need to get one that fits comfortably on the ears and has a microphone.
- Whatever headset you choose, make sure it has a microphone attached and noise-cancelling properties.

HD webcam

- An HD webcam is also a necessity when teaching/learning online.
- If the webcam on your laptop is only 720px in quality, you might need to buy a new one. This enables others to see you clearly without any blurry or pixelated video quality. It is truer to life and professional, enhancing your relationships with others as they feel better connected to you on screen.
- Webcams can also change contrast, brightness, and other colour settings depending on your home lighting, so they can help you look your best. Some even have shutters that close your webcam when you are not using it.

The above requirements must then be supplemented by the requirements of the specific hardware and software that will be used in the individual learning modules.

2.2 Studying in online learning communities

2.2.1 Follow the rules and procedures

We have simple rules, but we have rules:

- **English only;**
- **Be decent;**
- **Be curious;**
- **Feel free to ask;**
- **Don't be afraid to think outside the box;**
- **Most important: HAVE FUN.**

Each learning module may have its own rules, so it is important to familiarise yourself with them.

Requirements for student:

- **Be team member;**
- **Be honest, open and polite;**
- **Be respectful in communication.**

2.2.2 Recommendations for a successful online learning community

Creating a successful online learning community is not as easy as it may seem. In a nutshell, the key components of online learning community are:

- **Interaction: The exchange of ideas and feedback between you and teachers or among peers.**
- **Collaboration: Working together towards a common goal, building collaborative part-nerships, often by sharing knowledge and resources.**
- **Modelling: Observing and emulating others' behaviours, attitudes, and skills.**
- **Scaffolding: Get support and guidance in your learning, especially when you are mak-ing progress on your learning path.**
- **Reflective Practice: Taking time to think critically about what has been learned and how it can be applied in new situations.**
- **Diversity: Encouraging and valuing the contribution of individuals with different back-grounds, perspectives, and experiences.**
- **Social Presence: Creating a sense of community and connection, even in an online en-vironment.**

Building a sustainable learning community involves balancing these elements and fostering a supportive and engaging environment for you and other community members to thrive.

2.3 How to share learning materials? The Digital Content Library

Without involvement, engagement, and active learners in the learning process, there is es-sen-tially no learning process at all. Every student must take an active role in their education; the distinction lies in the level of each student's participation. Low, medium and high categories all have engagement and vibrancy. For pupils to engage and actively participate in learning,

facilitators must use creativity. In our research teachers mentioned the lack of engagement and motivation as a big factor (CityGo 2022b). The surveyed students (CityGo 2022a) say that it is important to actively participate in the classes for a successful online learning experience.

Everyone's perception of engagement may be different. The foundation of learning is engagement in the module; a student who is not engaged has a lower chance of success. Engagement that goes beyond test-taking strategies or check-listing procedures is the key to student success. Curiosity, inventiveness, and fulfilling interactions are motivating factors for students who are interested in their studies. Because professors will not meet students every day, student participation in the virtual world will seem significantly different from that in the real world (traditional education). There should be several strategies for teachers to maintain student interaction. Think about some of the more important concepts from grit and growth mindset, and how they can help students take control of their education, which goes hand in hand with increasing student engagement (Lase et al., 2021).

The following strategies are meant to keep and enhance students' engagement and participation in online learning:

- **Community:** Interactions with peers, teachers, and/or teaching assistants help face-to-face learning by fostering a sense of community and encouraging pupils to learn. Through online forums, similar interactions are simulated in online learning. Creating a community assists the collaboration and bonding of a group of learners. Given the potential for students to (a) not feel isolated and alone; (b) encourage students to use discussion-based features; (c) use business hours to engage students in a more casual environment; and (d) Encourage students to stay in touch with each other, community is important in online courses (Groccia, 2018). Perhaps the most significant changes in teaching as a result of the affordances of online technologies are in the area of learner-to-learner engagement. Online technologies connect students to a global audience and promote more meaningful interactions among students in the same class. Meaningful interactions are an essential component of active learning, both online and in face-to-face classes, and must be carefully nurtured. Peer-to-peer interactions have an incomparable value for learning when they are structured for discussion, questioning, explanation, and feedback, according to research (Dorum et al., 2010).
- **Synchronous & Asynchronous Instructional:** According to a study by Huang et al. (2015), asynchronous communication is frequently far better than synchronous design in terms of motivating and engaging pupils. According to additional research by Levin et al. (2006), synchronous online education participants demonstrated higher levels of critical thinking than those who only participated in asynchronous learning. Consequently, it is typically advised to use both synchronous and asynchronous communication while using distant learning (Zoumenou et al., 2015). When taking into account students' needs, programs, and accessible technical assistance, research supports both synchronous and asynchronous learning, according to Watts (2016)'s library review.
- **Order something uncommon:** Teachers' favourite strategies for engaging students include humour, surprise, and lessons. Laughter and humour can be useful skills for developing relationships and relaxing in everyday life. It will reduce stress and frustration while also allowing others to see life from a different perspective (Lase, 2019). These elements combine to create a personalized environment that encourages students to think of new ways to connect to a concept. This environment can be created by anything from a demonstration to a song to a game show quiz.

- **Rewarding:** Learners are encouraged to be more productive by rewards because they foster a sense of pride and accomplishment.

1. **Digital badges can incentivize learners to engage in positive learning behaviours**
2. **Identify progress in learning and content trajectories**
3. **Signify and credential engagement, learning, and achievement.**

- **Gamification features:** It is possible to choose game characteristics that will help players achieve particular learning goals categorized under the three learning domains of cognitive, emotional, and psychomotor learning. By determining the psychological domain shared between the learning outcome/educational objective and the desired, altering student experience of engagement, it is feasible to choose a game attribute for use in a gamification strategy (Rivera & Garden, 2021).

In this context, online community moderators are also responsible for building engagement. For example, if someone asks a question and no one responds, they may feel as if they are not being heard – and possibly as if they do not belong in the community. That is why, when there is a post like this, moderators can comment and share their thoughts, or they can ask for more information about what they are discussing. This will encourage other members of the community, who might otherwise remain silent, to participate in the discussion! By taking part in such discussions, moderators are actually strengthening bonds with other members of the community. And because they are there to support and guide them, they'll feel more comfortable sharing their ideas and opinions, resulting in an even larger community.

2.3.1 Assessment issues

Social contact, communication, learning paradigms, and assessment methods fundamentally change when classes are transferred from the traditional classroom to an online environment.

In the context of online learning, learners should take the initiative to start the learning process. It is the responsibility of the participant to read the text, click on the links, participate in the discussion, pose questions, decide to learn the objectives, and schedule time to learn. In an online environment, the focus shifts away from the teacher and allows more sharing among the learners. Online conversations resemble small group discussions in terms of interaction.

However, an assessment still serves the same precise function it always has: to gauge your level of knowledge, skill, and expertise. You can be confident that you won't need to reinvent yourself in order to succeed even though assessments conducted online may require a greater range of abilities linked to the online component.

Learners should keep in mind the following:

For online assessments, it's important to be extremely organized, which might be difficult for students who would rather not think about assessments in advance. You should not worry excessively about it, but being aware of what is expected of you right away and periodically making sure that the assessment procedures haven't altered can prevent you from freaking out.

Since you won't be in a classroom with a lecturer or a supervisor when you are completing the

assignment, everyone wants to make sure you are prepared, so online assessments frequently come with thorough and helpful instructions. If you read the instructions as soon as you can, you'll have plenty of time before the test to get any questions answered.

Your ability to effectively complete the activity will be greatly affected by whether you have the appropriate workspace in which to conduct the evaluation. Make sure your environment isn't too noisy, excessively bright or dark, or too cluttered. Set up your online device early and have everything ready to go so that you may feel confident in what you are about to undertake.

You can quickly and in a way that works for you involve a lot more people in your preparation when working and being evaluated online. Online meetings, chats, and shared documents make managing group projects simple, and your family can watch you practice a presentation or join an online revision group.

The benefit of online testing is that no one will be keeping an eye on you at the final moments of getting ready. You can use this time to practice your relaxation techniques so that when the evaluation actually starts, you feel composed and ready. It is also simple to take a private break during the evaluation, breathe, and regain serenity.

Some aspects of having control will come naturally to you, such as preparing for examinations and timed essays by looking at past assessments or sample essay questions and getting ready for more practical online assessments thanks to your prior classroom experiences. The technical parts of the online evaluation, such as the platform you will use, the time details, and how and when you should deliver the finished product, may present more of a barrier. It's always a good idea to start by getting technical questions answered and familiarizing yourself with the platforms and online spaces you'll be using before your assessment. This will ensure that you go into the assessment feeling in control of the situation.

While the online assessment has many immediate advantages, it also gives you long-term professional benefits that an on-campus, face-to-face evaluation just cannot provide. You will learn how to manage content online, utilize a range of portals and platforms, manage your time effectively, and interact with the outside world through your computer screen almost unconsciously. It's a win-win situation because what makes an online student success also creates a highly sought-after professional. (Becker et al., 2022)

There can be a variety of online assessments like:

Discussion Post (boards/blogs/chat): To encourage engagement, individuals or groups might give summaries or have conversations about various subjects of discussion. When groups or students need a way to ask and respond to questions to encourage collaborative work, chats might be useful. Chat is another way for teachers to communicate with students during "office hours."

Quiz (short answer, multiple choice): The instructor and the learner can both monitor the learning progress with the aid of brief but frequent quizzes. Just 10-15 questions can be included in a quiz to collect enough data for feedback.

Projects: Projects may involve role-playing, case studies, problem-solving activities, team-work, brainstorming, or discussions on a range of subjects. Participants in group projects should obtain peer criticism from a variety of perspectives for their individual efforts. Learners or instructors can provide and receive fast feedback in an online setting. Additionally, learners can explore personal interests or topics that have been chosen for them by the teacher, write or produce for an audience, and publish or display their research through websites, blogs, forums, or discussion boards.

Portfolios: Learners can use a variety of combinations of papers, audio/video, and/or presentations to creatively demonstrate their learning and growth.

Presentations: Presentations may take the shape of educational websites like blogs, online tests created by students, audio or video files, or slide shows.

Case Study: Case studies can be applied to individual or collective evaluation. Because learners have more time to ponder and work together, an asynchronous communication environment (discussion/blogs rather than chat) is really more suitable for problem-based learning. Usually, learners work in groups of 5 to 6.

Experience-based practicum: Weekly or monthly, learners publish their experiences for their peers and/or the instructor to comment on and respond to. Such contact will enable the learner to consider their experience.

Reflective Journal: Journals can be nested in blogs that each learner maintains individually or as a class. You can make your own reflective diaries using free blogging software not connected to the module management system. (Chao et al., 2012; Tilghman, 2011; Patronis, 2017)

2.3.2 Keep engaged

People have an inherent curiosity about the world around them and a drive to explore, learn, grow, and develop. The desire to learn is a constant need of the human brain, and stimulating learning resources encourage this desire. The opposite is also accurate, though. The brain becomes bored and worn out when we get complacent. Learning restores engagement and fosters personal development; it aids workers in developing fresh viewpoints, fresh ideas, expanded critical thinking abilities, and readiness for fresh challenges. In this context, learners should keep high levels of engagement in order to develop themselves and learn (Schaufeli, 2013; Roffe, 2002). Understanding online learning settings as a multidimensional phenomenon that is influenced by various elements of learner participation, such as synchronous and asynchronous interactions, is helpful. Participants in online learning should keep in mind that communication and active participation, are essential in order to keep their interest and engagement. In this context, participants should:

Use the available technology, such as email and group chat forums, to stay in constant contact with their professor and classmates, if they have any queries about the module material or tasks, they should just communicate with them.

Participate in forums or ask questions regarding a project you are working on.

Read what their lecturers and other students have to say, and if they have any questions, seek for clarification.

As often as they can, they should check-in. They should speak out if feel like they're falling behind, and they shouldn't wait until the last minute to ask for assistance with an assignment.

Learners should develop their personal communication skills in order to be active within the online learning community. Although online students are geographically separated, their ability to interact with others is limitless. Starting an actual conversation with an online classmate can be as simple as directly asking a question, and as learners connect with more people, they'll be able to obtain information that is difficult to obtain even during online classes.

Learners should also be organized; people when feeling that they have missed information or deadlines etc, tend to give up and detach from their goal. Thus, learners should keep in mind the following:

All documents and information should be arranged in a way that makes sense to them.

Keep a copy of anything submitted in case a technical issue necessitates resubmitting it, including discussions from posts.

Take thorough notes on the readings and lectures.

Last, but not least, an online learner must want to succeed in order to succeed. Online learning necessitates independence, internal motivation, responsibility, and maturity.

References:

1. Becker, A., Becker, F., & Becker, L. (2022). Acing Online Assessment: Your Guide to Success. *Acing Online Assessment*, 1-100.
2. Brook, C., Oliver, R. (2003). Online learning communities: Investigating a design framework, *Australian Journal of Educational Technology* 2003, 19(2), 139-160 Edith Cowan University, online: <https://ajet.org.au/index.php/AJET/article/view/1708/794>
3. Chao, K. J., Hung, I. C., & Chen, N. S. (2012). On the design of online synchronous assessments in a synchronous cyber classroom. *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning*, 28(4), 379-395.
4. Lave, Jean; Wenger, Étienne (2008): *Situated learning. Legitimate peripheral participation*. 19th printing. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press (Learning in doing).
5. Matzat, U. (2010). Reducing problems of sociability in online communities: Integrating online communication with offline interaction. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 53(8), 1170-1193.
6. Modelski, D., Giraffa, L. M., & Casartelli, A. D. O. (2019). Digital technologies, teacher training and teaching practices. *Educação e Pesquisa*, 45.
7. Patronis, M. (2017). Summative and formative online assessments. In *Proceedings of 7th International Conference. The Future of Education* (pp. 8-9).
8. Prensky, M. (2001). Digital natives, digital immigrants part 2: Do they really think differently?. *On the horizon*.
9. Rezaei, D. F., & Ritter, N. L. (2018). Social media in education: gains in student learning and instructor best practices. In *Social Media in Education: Breakthroughs in Research and Practice* (pp. 12-33). IGI Global.
10. Roffe, I. (2002). E-learning: engagement, enhancement and execution. *Quality assurance in education*, 10(1), 40-50.
11. Salta, K., Paschalidou, K., Tsetseri, M. et al. Shift From a Traditional to a Distance Learning Environment during the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Sci & Educ* 31, 93–122 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11191-021-00234-x>
12. Schaufeli, W. B. (2013). What is engagement? In *Employee engagement in theory and practice* (pp. 29-49). Routledge.
13. Tilghman, B. (2011, April). Designing and developing online course assessments. In *American Institute of Higher Education 6 th International Conference Proceedings Volume 4–Number* (p. 333).
14. Wenger-Trayner, Etienne; Wenger-Trayner, Beverly (2015): *Communities of practice a brief introduction*. Online verfügbar unter <https://wenger-trayner.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/07-Brief-introduction-to-communities-of-practice.pdf>.