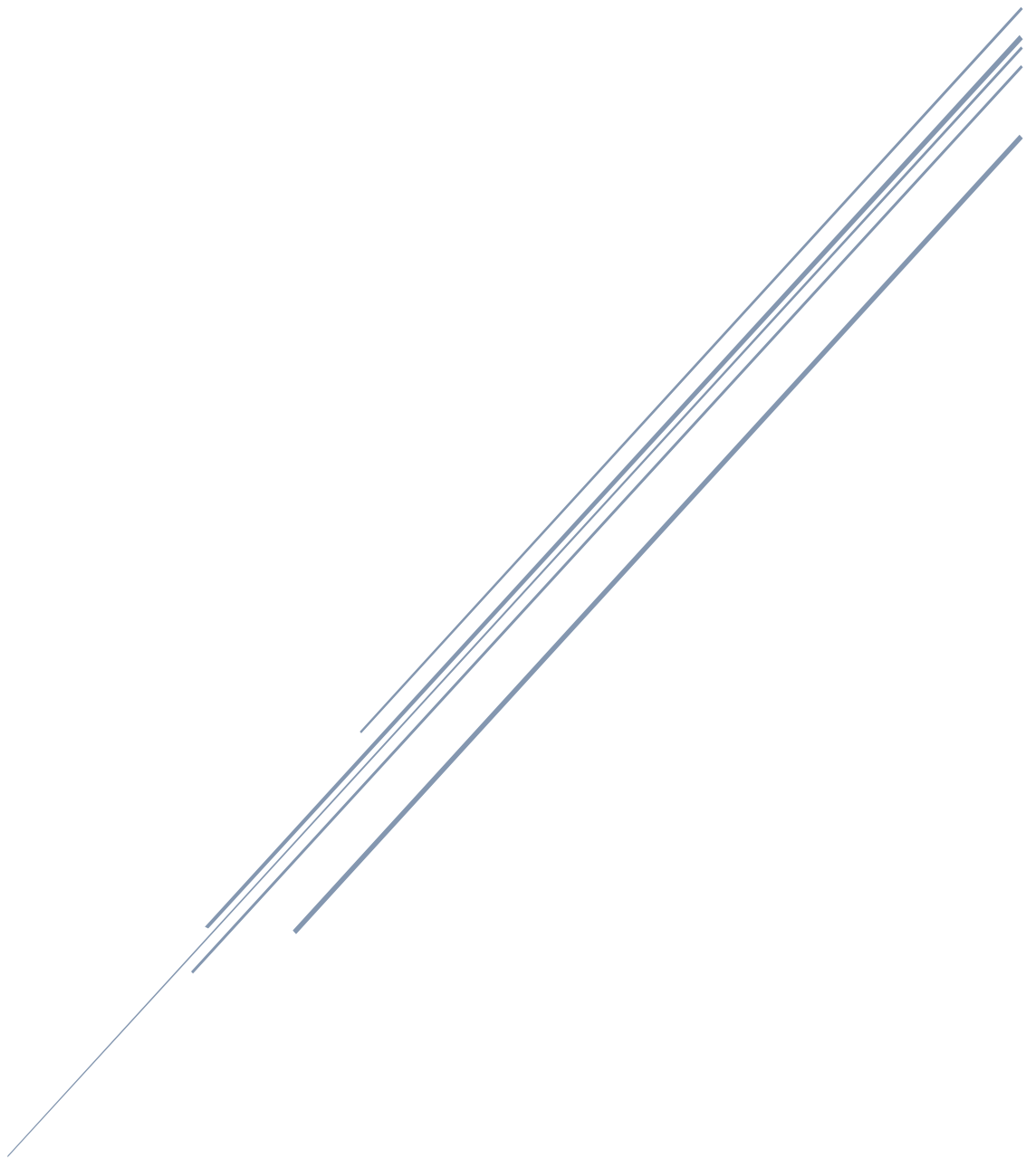# BUILDING COMMUNITIES FOR A BRIGHT FUTURE

A study about creating communities for better students' integration

Saxion University of Applied Sciences

Mihai Vijoli

Building communities for a bright future

A study about creating communities for better students' integration

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Declaration of own work

I hereby declare that:

- I am fully informed about the Thesis C assessment criteria;
- all the work I have conducted to fulfill these criteria is entirely my own;
- I have not been assisted by any other person, except the coaching offered within HBS guidelines.

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Preface

The bachelor thesis "building communities for a bright future" consists of a single case study conducted within the Saxion University of Applied Sciences. It has been written to fulfil the graduation requirements of the International Hotel Management Program at the Saxion Hospitality Business School. I was engaged in researching and writing the thesis from January to June 2020.

The project was undertaken at the request of the Saxion's Education and Student Support Department, where I undertook an internship and a part-time job. My management question was formulated together with my supervisor, Eveline Coenen. The research was challenging, but conducting extensive literature and field research has allowed me to answer the question that we identified. Fortunately, both Ms Coenen and my tutor, Mr Verwijmeren, were always available and willing to answer my queries.

I would like to thank my supervisor and my tutor for their excellent guidance and support during this process. I also wish to thank Sarah and Justin for motivating and inspiring me from the beginning until the end of the thesis.

To my family and my friends: I would like to thank you for believing in me and for your continuous support. I would not have made it without you!

I hope you enjoy your reading!

Mihai Vijoli

Iasi, Brasov, June 6th, 2020

Summary

In the light of global trends, such as increasing technological innovations and the increasing number of Coronavirus cases, along with the continuous growth of access to higher education, the importance of communities within universities and students' integration is becoming unquestionable. This goes hand in hand with the shift from an offline education to online education, a trend which is accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic. This study aims to gain insights into the community building process within Saxion University of Applied Sciences and its effect on the integration of Saxion's students. These insights are relevant to the education sector to be able to create tailored communities for the students' needs.

Literature research was conducted to gain a thorough understanding of community building processes and students' integration concepts. First, a literature review was carried out by making use of several search methods. Based on the literature review, "students' integration" and "community building" were chosen as core concepts. The literature revealed that the students' integration is categorized into academic integration and social integration, while the communities can be divided into "learning communities" and "communities of practice". These outcomes helped in creating an operationalization of the concepts. The student chose to conduct a single case study and learn from the experts inside the university. The experts taking part in the study included researchers, academic staff, representatives of different communities, but also a group of students. There were mixed opinions on the researched topic.

The results showed that different communities are activating within Saxion Univerisity of Applied Sciences. The research also revealed that Saxion's ESS department is undertaking activities to support these communities; however, some other support activities are needed. Moreover, the study showed that the activities undertaken by the ESS department have a positive impact on the students' integration, while the missing activities and communities have a negative effect. Furthermore, the research revealed different solutions for the management problem.

The most suitable piece of advice consists of an online community platform. This platform created different opportunities for Saxion's students to integrate academically and socially in an interactive way.

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1. Introduction

The report's introduction offers the reader an overview of the background information about the client, a description of the management problem, the objective of the advisory part, but also explanations about the research questions and the research's aim.

1.1. Reason for writing the report

Saxion University of Applied Sciences is one of the institutions with the highest number of students in the whole Netherlands (About Saxion: Our organization, 2019). The university has around 27,000 students, from which approximately 3,500 have an international background (About Saxion: Our organization, 2019). The number of Dutch and international students is expecting growth. Change is challenging but also opportunity. Having a strong position at a national and international level (About Saxin, 2019) allows Saxion to attract more and more students.
Moreover, Brexit will have a significant impact on the number of international students coming to the Netherlands. A survey by Burns (2016) shows that 47% of international students would find the UK less attractive for studying purposes. This process would lead to a higher number of international students in countries, which are already popular among internationals. Such states are the Netherlands, Denmark or Germany. The effect of Brexit would inevitably be visible within Saxion as well. Furthermore, the decisions of the Dutch government to reduce the tuition fee by 50% during the first year of studies would attract even more students in Dutch universities (Government.nl, 2020).
Saxion and especially the Educational Student Support (ESS) Department of the institution is trying to improve its students' integration. The ESS is the department that focuses on student support and education innovation. This department is already providing support to the students in this direction by offering them the opportunity to join different social and professional communities, by giving Dutch classes to Internationals or by providing research or sports facilities to the students.
Lately, the organization observed that even though Saxion is trying to implement different strategies, the integration of students is still not successful and the impact of the activities undertaken by the ESS department is not satisfactory. This phenomenon is visible in the high number of drop-outs (especially in the first year of studies), small attendance in some of the communities events and complaints from international students (personal experiences of the research student who is working for Saxion).

To cope with this challenge and to make an impact on the integration of Dutch and international students, the ESS department assigns a Hotel Management student to research about this matter.

1.2. Organization's performance ambitions

The ambitions of the Saxion University of Applied Science can be found in Saxion's strategic plan for the period 2016-2020 (Saxion Strategic plan, 2016). The five actions items that the university is focusing within this time frame are excellent teaching, inspiring teachers, applied research and added value, focus on living technology and vital organization. The ESS is aligning its strategy to these actions items as well, where possible. The ambition of the department is to put research outcomes in practice to increase students' life satisfaction and to create an impact on the integration of both Dutch and international students. The ESS department hopes that by putting more emphasis on the communities within Saxion, they could create a better environment for its students.

1.3. The necessity of the organization

The ESS department needs to find ways on how to build communities to facilitate better integration of Dutch and international students.

The ESS needs communities so that in the end, the student (Dutch or International) can benefit from such gatherings by improving the quality of their students' life. By offering the opportunity for students to form such communities or to attend them, the ESS hopes that the integration of students will increase on the both academic and social level.

1.4. Concrete product

To provide the organization with proper advice regarding the community building process, the student decides to deliver a general implementation plan, which will include actions on community building, based on the needs of different stakeholders within Saxion University of Applied Sciences. The project will be based on literature, the needs of both the students and the ESS department while focusing on aspects of students' integration.

1.5. Advice objective

The objective of the research is to deliver a general implementation plan for Saxion's Educational and Student Support Department, to build communities within Saxion University of Applied Sciences with the purpose to enhance the integration of international and Dutch students.

1.6. Management questions

From the description presented by the ESS department on the challenge that they are facing, the student formulates the following management question. The question refers strictly to the problem addressed by the ESS and consist of two core concepts: the creation of communities and the integration of Dutch and international students.

"How can Saxion's Educational Student Support Department build communities to facilitate the integration of Dutch and international students?"

1.7. Research objective

It is essential to gain more insights regarding the core concepts of this project. The research will focus on creating better insights into the community building processes within the Saxion University of Applied Sciences, as well as on the effects of these processes on the integration of Saxion's students. The purpose of these insights is to create healthier communities inside the educational institution. Hence, the objective of the research is to gain insight into the community building process within the Saxion University of Applied Sciences and its effect on the integration of Dutch and international students in order to formulate recommendations on how to create communities within the Saxion University of Applied Sciences.

1.8. Central research questions

The research aims to answer the following research questions (RS):

RS1: What are the current types of communities inside of Saxion University of Applied Sciences? The following sub-questions will help in answering the research question above:
- What are the current activities undertaken by Saxion's ESS department to support these communities?
- What are the missing activities to support these communities?

RS2: What are the missing communities inside of Saxion University of Applied Sciences?

RS3: To what extent are Saxion's students integrated?

The following sub-questions will help in answering the research question above:

- To what extent are Saxion's students academically integrated?
- To what extent are Saxion's students socially integrated?

RS4: What are the effects of the current activities undertaken by Saxion's ESS department on the students' integration?

RS5: What are the effects of the missing activities and missing communities on the students' integration?

1.9.   Reading guide

In the following chapter, first, the theoretical framework will be presented. The core concepts "community building" and "students' integration" will be defined, explored and operationalized under the form of a tree diagram. Chapter 3 will consist of a description of the methodology of the research. They consist of the research strategy, methods of data collection, the selection of data sources and methods of data analysis. Chapter 4 will include an extensive discussion about the research results and a conclusion which answers the research questions. Afterwards, the debate continues with the validity and reliability of the research. The next chapter contains the advice for the Saxion's ESS department based on the literature review and the research results. The report will end with an afterword with regards to the process of writing the thesis, bibliography and appendices.

2. Theoretical framework

For providing a reliable and relevant conclusion for the ESS department, it is necessary to explore the core concepts of the research, which are "community building" and "students' integration". Firstly, the discussion goes about finding and evaluating the literature. Afterwards, the two core concepts will be defined, and different aspects and dimensions of "community building" and "students' integration" will be analyzed. Additionally, based on a literature review, the operationalization of the core concepts is presented under the form of tree diagrams.

2.1. Search methods used

While searching for data that is necessary for the theoretical framework, the student used different search methods. One of them is the snowball method, defined as a "backwards" strategy: the student used previously used sources to find new sources. Another approach was the "forward-searching method" via Google Scholar or other search engines. For finding credible sources, the student used different search engines. These include the Saxion online library, where different databases, such as EBSCO Fulltext, Hospitality & Tourism complete, Sage Premier, ScienceDirect and SpringerLink. Other important search engines were Google Scholar but also Picarta.nl. Please see Appendix I for examples of how the sources were found.

The research student made use of different search terms to be able to answer the research questions. The search terms were "**policies community building**" AND "**education**" for the first descriptive questions. With regards to the second descriptive question, the search terms were "**integration**" AND "**Dutch students**" AND "**international students**".

The student utilized the AAOCC tool to verify the quality of the search result. AAOCC refers to the Authority, Accuracy, Objectivity, Currency and Coverage of the articles and answers the following questions:

- Authority: to what extent is the author reliable? Does the author take responsibility by providing contact details? Does the author provide a bibliography that supports his statements?
- Accuracy: is the purpose of the document cleared out for the reader? Is the information valid and reliable?
- Objectivity: is the information unbiased and objective? If any opinions are stated, are these stated as facts? The reason for writing should be apparent.
- Currency: is the information up to date?
- Coverage: is the information completely accessible? Is the data available without limitation fees, browser or software requirement?

Please refer to Appendix II for examples of how the quality of the search was evaluated.

2.2. Operationalization of the core concepts

In the following part, the student proposes the definitions and operationalization of the core concepts.

2.2.1. Community and community building

Human beings are social creatures. The interaction with another is essential as it provides humans with a vast amount of information necessary to carry out daily activities. To have constant communication and to maintain relationships with others, humans created communities. A community is, according to Bellah et all. (1985) "a group of people who are socially interdependent, who

participate together in discussion and decision making, and who share certain practices that both define the community and are nurtured by it". However, to create such an organization of individuals, people must take action and start the process that is called community building.

In the table below, the student presents three different definitions of community building. The first definition by the Committee for economic development (1995) presents community building as a process that increases the community well-being by looking into rules, contributions, and problem-solving assets. Weil (1996) defines community building more specifically and introduces the specific tasks in the formation of building communities: activities, practices and policies. Moreover, Weil presents in her definition the target group as well, which is represented by individuals, groups, organizations, neighbourhoods, and geographic and functional communities. The third definition by Blackwell and Colmenar (2000) is the most specific one and sees community building as an effort of citizens or professionals that have a common purpose: to solve a problem or to make an improvement. Community building aims to develop better networks, to enhance support, but also to set higher standards and expectations in the community.

All three definitions presented are presenting the concept of community building as an act of support between the members of a group. However, only Weil (1996) and the Blackwell and Colmenar (2000) are specific about the target group which are in one case "individuals, groups, organizations, neighbourhoods, and geographic and functional communities" and in the other matter "residents" and "professionals". The Committee of economic development (1995) and Blackwell and Colmenar (2000) present community building as an effort which is continuous and is embraced by all the members of the community. The only definition that is presenting the purpose of community building in a clear way is the one of Blackwell and Colmenar (2000). The definition gives the outcome of community building as new or more robust social networks, new sizes of support within the group, but also redefined expectations and standards within the community.

Based on the analysis above, it is clear that the definition by Blackwell and Colmenar (2000) is the most elaborate. Therefore, the student will use their definition during the research paper.

Author, year	Definition of "community building."
(Committee for economic development, 1995)	Community building is "an ongoing comprehensive effort that strengthens the norms, supports, and problem-solving resources of the community."
(Weil, 1996)	Community building refers to activities, practices, and policies that support and foster positive connections among individuals, groups, organizations, neighbourhoods, and geographic and functional communities.
(Blackwell & Colmenar, 2000)	Community-building refers to "continuous, self-renewing efforts by residents and professionals to engage in collective action, aimed at problem-solving and enrichment, that creates new or strengthened social networks, new capacities for group action and support, and new standards and expectations for life in the community."'

Table 2.1 Definitions of the first core concept

2.2.2. Community building processes

To achieve a functional community, Hyman (2002) proposed a framework for community building. Even though its framework targets neighbourhoods, the steps and the stakeholders are easily transferable into the academic world. Firstly, according to Hyman (2002), it is crucial to facilitate the stakeholders' engagement to exchange ideas and bonding relationships. The second action in the community building process creates one where the students or members of the university can share and prioritize their concerns. Next step would be the community organizing. The community needs to

have a proper leader, which can be trusted and capable. Moreover, the organization needs to be able to understand which are the resources within the community, but also the support from other communities that can be obtained through the community members network. The fourth step refers to community action. This step focuses on resources, planning and execution. The report by Hyman (2002) suggest that firstly proper attention needs to be considered regarding the supplies needed: how much human capital it is required, and what will they do? And what other organizations are necessary so that the action will be a success. Moreover, regarding the planning and execution, the author advises having very well-dined plan or strategy which consist of: "clearly stated goals, a preferred set of outcomes, criteria for what constitutes success and some mechanism for accountability". Hyman's framework last step refers to communication and message development. It is advised that the community and the community partners are always informed about the progress and efforts of the community using positive messages.

The framework of Hyman is supported by elements of other research papers as well. For example, Gardner (1994) present a series of 10 "ingredients" for building community: 1. wholeness incorporating diversity 2. a reasonable base of shared values 3. caring, trust, and teamwork 4. effective internal communication 5. participation 6. affirmation 7. links beyond the community 8. development of young people 9. a forward view 10. institutional arrangements for community maintenance. Some of the "ingredients" are in the study made by Rovai (2002) among distance-learning university students. Rovai (2002) articulates the fact that the expectations regarding community building are usually the same in different contexts (university, neighbourhoods etc.)

2.2.3. Communities of practice

The higher education sector implements "communities of practice" (CoP) as one of the core concepts of the curriculum. Wenger (2009) defines communities of practice as a "group of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly". Wenger explains that the communities of practice come under a variety of forms or different names (learning networks, thematic groups, etc.). However, all of them consist of three elements: the domain, the community and the practice.

According to Wenger (1998), all communities possess qualities such as mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire. The theories mentioned above were put into practice by the Central Queensland University Australia (CQU) in the paper research: "Creating and Facilitating Communities of Practice in Higher Education: Theory to Practice in a Regional Australian University" by Peter Reaburn and Jacquie McDonald. They present in their research a series of best practices which, can help in the creating and facilitating process of communities of practices within the higher education. The eleven tips recommended by the authors align with the theory about "community building" presented above. The tips are divided into two stages: before the creation of the CoP and after it. The researchers suggest that in the preliminary phase the "champion" (the person who initiates the CoP) needs to find a name for the community of practice. The next step would be for the champion to make contact with existing CoP to learn from their methods, but also join one of their meetings. Furthermore, the champion must make contact with potential CoP members in a personal manner (face-to-face, videoconference, personal email). The next step would be to call the first meeting, which should be held in a relaxed way. It is vital that all the members feel welcomed and involved during the first meeting. Another critical step in the process is to plan the sessions at the beginning of the year. In this way, there are bigger chances that all the members will be present and active in the CoP. After the set-up of the CoP, the authors suggest that every meeting should have a guest speaker. They can be from or outside the CoP. All members are expected to come with suggestions regarding the guest speakers. Reaburn and McDonald further suggest that during the meeting, all the members need to be involved in the conversation, especially the new members of the CoP.

Next to that, the studies advise that different communication channels should be used, depending on the purpose of the message (face-to-face, Linkedin, Facebook, Email, ISL...). In case that the "champion" has too many responsibilities, the organization needs to find one more "champion". The

next tip suggests that the CoP shares their achievements with other organizations within the university. On top of that, smaller projects should be worked on as a group. Additionally, the authors suggest that CoPs should maintain regular contact with the members of the CoP. The connection is made via the communication channels mentioned above (members should agree on which communication tool is best to communicate with each other). Finally, the authors encourage CoP to align with the needs and values of the university.

2.2.4. Learning communities

Another concept, besides the communities of practice, that is being used in higher education, refers to learning communities (LC). These communities were defined by Gabelnick et all. (1990) as "any one of a variety of curricular structures that link together several existing courses – or actually restructure the curricular material entirely – so that students have opportunities for deeper understanding and integration of the material they are learning, and more interaction with one another and their teachers as fellow participants in the learning enterprise". A more current article by Kuh (2008) presents the critical goals of learning communities; to encourage the integration of learning across courses, and to involve students with 'big questions' that matter beyond the classroom. Students take two or more linked courses as a group and work closely with one another and with their professors. Many learning communities explore a common topic and frequent readings through the lens of different disciplines. Some intentionally link 'liberal arts' and 'professional courses'; others feature service learning". Kuh and Zao (2004) argue that the benefits of learning communities include student academic performance, engagement in educational fruitfully activities (**academic integration**, interaction with faculty members), gains associated with college attendance and overall satisfaction with the college life.

In the literature, several studies present good practices in the creation and development of learning communities. Shroeder and Mable (1994) found six critical principles in the development of learning communities. Firstly, learning communities are characteristically small, unique units that have a common purpose and a powerful peer influence. Secondly, the authors advise that the student interaction within the LC should be characterized by the four I's- involvement, investment, influence and identity. Thirdly, the LCs are easily accessible, and they are supporting ongoing interaction and social stability. Another principle is the fact that LC should be student-centred and that students should be perceived by staff as young adults. Moreover, active learning communities should focus on collaboration between faculty, students and residence hall staff. Finally, the researchers consider those learning communities should exhibit a clear set of values and normative expectations for active participation. Another study by Gabelnick et all. (1990) offers guidelines for creating thriving learning communities. Among others, the researchers advise the development of recruitment, marketing and registration, but also ensuring appropriate funding, space and teaching resources. Moreover, Gabelnick et all. (1990) recommend proper management of the enrollment expectations and faculty load.

The operationalization of community building can be visualized in a tree diagram under Appendix III. The community building concept has been divided into communities of practice and learning communities. Further on, the student operationalize these two concepts into different stages. Per each step, it is explained how the university/ department of the university can assist in the community building process.

2.2.5. Integration of students

The diversity in educational systems, different languages and the cultural heterogeneity makes every country in Europe a unique place to study. Therefore, it is quite a challenge for international students to integrate within the new country and culture. Still, at the same time, most of the local students seem to have a problem in integrating into the international community within their university.

According to Theory of Student Departure of Tinto (1975; Tinto, Leaving college: Rethinking the cause and cures of student attrition, 1993), integration has an academic aspect as well as a social one. Therefore, this research will look into the definition of both academic and social integration.

Both concepts, academic and social integration, were defined by Tinto in 1975 and later, the concepts were explained more in-depth by the same researcher. Most of the research papers about students' integration use the definitions proposed by Tinto. After comparing different reports on the topic, the student decides that during this report, the definitions of Tinto will be the starting points of the core concepts "social and academic integration".

According to Tinto (1975), students have a lot of educational experiences, competencies, values, but also families and community background. Therefore, Tinto (1975) concludes that students do not only need to perform in academic life to integrate, but also in a social context by taking part in student activities that can be related or not to the university. Baker and Siryk (1999) made a future contribution to Tinto' study and presented four concepts of academic integration, namely *academic-, social-, personal-, and emotional* adjustment and *attachment*. The academic adjustment refers to the degree of which a student can cope with demands such as application, motivation or performance in the academic environment. The social adjustment refers to the ability of the student to make friends, be part of social activities or being able to work in a group. The third concept refers to the level of distress in adapting to the local academic way of life. The attachment relates to the level of commitment to the goals of the institution.

When it comes to social integration, Rienties et all. (2011) present three factors that are relevant to students: *The perceived reputation of the institute* by the social network of students; *social support* by family and friends; and *social life.* The perceived reputation of institute is the perceived reputation of the institute by family, friends, general public and future employees and it is influencing the social integration of the student (Gloria, Castellanos, Lopez, & Rosales,2005). In the educational psychology researches (Ozga & Sukhnandan, 1998; Severiens & Wolff, 2008; Zhou et al., 2008) was found that the second factor, the support of the social network has a positive effect on the academic journey of the student. The third factor, the social life one, has an essential influence on academic performance. It is beneficial for the students to have a friend from the local culture and from the same culture as the student (Rienties et al.,2011; Neri & Ville, 2008). Moreover, sharing accommodation with other colleagues (Neri & Ville, 2008) or being a member of a student association, or a sports club can influence the social integration, states Neri and Ville (2008).

The concept of integration (tailored for higher education) has been operationalized into academic and social integration. Both concepts are further divided into sub-aspects that bring different perspectives on the integration process. Please see Appendix IV.

2.2.6. Communities and students' integration

Most of the studies mentioned in the previous chapter state that students' participation in communities has a positive outcome on students' engagement, integration and overall satisfaction. Zhao and Kuh (2004) wrote one of the most relevant research paper on this topic. The study included 365 higher education institutions from around the world. The outcomes of the research confirmed previous research papers in this area and indicated that the participation of students in learning communities has a positive influence on students' integration. Moreover, Zhao and Kuh (2004) recommend universities to increase the number of communities for a better chance of students' success.

3. The approach to the research

In the following the description of the chosen research strategy, the methods of data collection, the selection of data resources and finally, the methods of data analysis will be presented.

3.1. Research strategy

The research is not trying to test a hypothesis or a statistical generalization. These procedures are characteristic of quantitative analysis (Jackson, 2008). The focus of this research was on understanding the nature of the research problem (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). The study aimed to find the opinion of different stakeholders with regards to community building and student integration. Therefore, qualitative research was the correct strategy for this research. Having decided for this kind of research required a case study research, which is an "intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of (similar) units … observed at a single point in time or over some delimited period of time" (Gerring, 2004).

Gerring (2004) argues that case studies can be based on single or multiple cases and can include qualitative and quantitative data. In this research, a single case study, one of the Saxion University of Applied Sciences, has been chosen. Dane (2010) suggests that questions like *who, what, where, how many* and *how* are more appropriate for quantitative research. However, when studying organizations, like in our case, it is almost impossible to obtain a sufficiently large sample; therefore, the case studies are more appropriate (Yin, 2009).

Stake (1995) categorizes case studies into intrinsic, instrumental and collective. The case study in this paperwork was an intrinsic one because it aimed to acquire a better understanding of a particular case of interest (Stake, 1995). To be more specific, this case study was looking into a better understanding of the process of community building within one organization to understand the effects of this process on Dutch and international students.

In conclusion, this was a qualitative, based on a single, intrinsic case study. The case was the Saxion University of Applied Sciences because the client of this paper was the Education and Student Support Department of Saxion UAS.

After determining the research strategy, in the following, the chosen methods of data collection will be elaborated.

3.2. Methods of data collection

Gao (1990) recommends using multiple sources while conducting a case study. He further advises collecting data through documents, archival records, interviews, direct observations, and physical artefacts (Yin, 2009). Yin (2009) states that case studies findings are more convincing and accurate if based on several different sources, because "multiple sources of evidence allow for data triangulation and the development of converging lines of inquiry". Gao (1990) articulates that a good case study includes "appropriate cases, triangulation, and the search of disproving evidence".

In the research conducted by the student, he mainly collected the data after conducting semi-structured interviews. For different points of views, the student doing the study decided to have several conversations.

One of the interviews was with a coordinator of the student association. For the client, it was essential to have their perspective and therefore, they had a high priority during the research. Secondly, another interviewee was a management senior of the ESS. It was essential to know the current situation regarding community building within Saxion and what were the policies that apply to Dutch and international students. One more interview was with a member of the Innovative Learning Lectorate. The "lectorate" was researching the topic of community building, and they brought new insights to the research of the student.

Furthermore, another relevant perspective was one of the social media community managers of Saxion. The manager brought new insights on community building and the impact of technology on it. Finally, an interview with a teacher was crucial as she gave ideas on what are the needs and expectations of the students and teachers. The student initiated a focus group to have the perspective of Dutch and international students. A focus group is according to (Clark, Riley, Wilkie, & Wood, 1998) a highly sophisticated technique for drawing out information, particularly about attitudes and motives. The authors suggest multiple steps to ensure an active focus group research. These steps include a thorough work out of parameters of the topic. Another step is to bring together groups that have already something in common to create "comfort". Thirdly, it is essential that the discussion is focused, but not led by the researcher.

Moreover, the researcher needs to try to anticipate discussion that may threaten some members of the group. Furthermore, it is vital that every member of the group speaks freely with one another and that everyone feels included in the conversation. The student followed all the steps mentioned before. The students that were selected had things in common because they were all Saxion's students; however, their selection was from different courses, and with different backgrounds for a better validity and reliability of the research.

Moreover, to allow for data triangulation, the student analyzed documents offered by Saxion with regards to the policies of community building within Saxion UAS.

3.3.   The selection of data sources

While in the previous topic, it has been discussed the different sources that were used while conducting a case study, in this section, the sampling plan was analyzed. In other words, a sample was drawn from the population. The population represents the "elements" (people, companies, organizations) that will be made statements about during the research (Verhoven, 2015). In this case study, the student chose a non-probability sampling. This type of sampling is characteristic of interviews (Verhoven, 2015). Interviews are usually held with experts or stakeholders, and the objective is not to find data from the general public concludes Verhoven (2015). Since the research is concentrated on a specific issue, a purposive sampling has been chosen for the study. The purposive sampling was meant to select the "experts" from the field, adds Verhoven (2015),

In the research, the "experts" were chosen by using the purposive sampling method. On the one hand, the study required academic and non-academic staff from Saxion who have specific knowledge about community building policies. These experts include the Saxion's ESS department senior manager (Debby van der Kamp), Saxion's online community manager (Koen van Veen), the Top Talent Program director (Marike Lammers) or the teacher Adrienn Eros. On the other hand, representatives of the student associations and students themselves were required. They had an in debt insight regarding communities and how they affect the integration of the students within higher education. The research student selected for the interview a representative of the only international study association within Saxion. Next to that, the chosen students had different backgrounds (Romanian, German, Brazilian, Dutch) and were attending various courses (Hotel Management, Tourism Management, Facility Management, Human Resource Management, Finance and Accounting).

The student selected the documents to be analyzed based on the client's recommendations, who had a lot of experience within Saxion. Furthermore, he asked for documentation from the interviewed persons who have experience with Saxion's communities. One concrete example of such documents was the concept of "home-groups", a community which is being developed by Saxion's ESS department.

3.4. Methods of data analysis

The interviews (please see Appendix VIII for an interview guide example) mentioned above represented the most consistent part of the data available for the research. For the analysis of the interview, the student decided to use the "8 steps model" by Verhoven (2015). For every interview conducted, the student presented a transcription of it (please check Appendix 5 for a passage from the focus group transcript). Once the transcription is available, the student implemented the model proposed by Verhoven (2015) as follows.

1. The text has been divided into small pieces that are relevant to the research.
2. The next step that has been implemented was open-coding. When conducting open-coding, Boije (2010) suggests that the use of one word should summarize every piece of information. However, the student decided to summarize the text by using one than a word. For example, for the following part of the text:

   So you could also organize really small scale social things, where you take the bus, you go to the National park. You go with whoever wants to go; you mix the group. Normally the internationals, maybe not the only ones studying(inaudible), but organize it the broader way, but a limited number of students because if it is too big group then you do not mix anymore, but several smaller groups. Go and enjoy! To really create the opportunity to go and meet each other.

   The student used in this case the open code "social integration- example". The student took this decision because he considered that by using multiple words, it would be easier to categorize the terms while proceeding with the axial coding.
3. The following step was the grouping of the terms. The student utilized the tree diagrams illustrated under Appendix III and Appendix IV for the terms grouping. And categorized every open code to one of the tree branches. However, if a term could not fit in one of the existing branches, a new branch has been created. Moreover, he numbered each term to have a better overview of similar terms. For example, if in a paragraph the discussion was about students' social life in terms of social integration, then that paragraph would have been coded as 1.4.2, where "1" represents "the first person interviewed", "4" represents "social integration" and "2" the "social life" sub aspect.
   One the other hand, if the paragraph would have been about "pitfalls in social integration", then the student decided to create a new branch and to add new numbers to the process. The whole process of sorting out codes in groups and subgroups it is called "axial coding" (Boeije, 2020). Please check the table under Appendix VI for an overview of the axial coding.
4. After numbering and grouping the terms, the research students introduced them in a model based on the relationships found. This model can be found in Appendix VII.
5. The last part is the discussion of the model in terms of the central question: Does it answer the question?
   Does it raise more questions?
   Is more information needed? If so, then it is required to go back to collecting information until a complete answer to the central question can be formulated.

The same method has been used for the transcript of the focus group. However, the student needed to pay more attention during the codding process, as more speakers were involved in the conversation.
The last source, the document analysis, has a different system when it comes to the methods of data analysis. Firstly, the student analyzed the documents needed to see which data is relevant to his research. In some cases, the information also required to be translated from Dutch into English. After the translation and finding relevant data for the study, the model presented above has been implemented, starting with the second point.

4. Research Results

This chapter focuses on the results of the research and focuses on the two core concepts, community building and students' integration, but also on the relation between the two terms.

4.1.Community building

4.1.1. Types of communities

Type of community	Offline			Online		
	Social	Professional	Combined	Social	Professional	Combined
Pre-formation stage		Homegroup			Top Talent Program	
Post formation stage	HOI	Smart Solution Semester	Study associations	Instagram community	LinkedIn communities; Into Saxion	Facebook communities, Buddy box

Table 4.1 Types of communities

After analyzing the data from different sources (interview, focus group, document analysis), is visible that Saxion University of Applied Sciences hosts types of communities, which are in various stages with regards to their formation.

Firstly, it is clear that there are two big categories of communities. On the one hand, there are the offline communities, which pursue their activity in the real world and on the other hand, there are the online communities, which carry on their "business" in a virtual environment.

The student divides both the online communities and offline communities into social-, professional- or combined (social and professional) communities. This division has been chosen based on the activities of the communities. While some of them concentrate only on social or professional activities, others combine them both.

Secondly, the communities have been categorized based on the stage of their formation. While some communities are still in the pre-formation stage", others are already existing and are classified in the "post-formation stage".

Based on the research, the student observed that there is one offline community, which is in the pre-formation group. This community is called "homegroup" and a sub-department of the Saxion's ESS department developing it. The homegroup has been categorized as a professional community because its primary purpose is to help Saxion's students develop both on a professional and personal level while being part of a community formed by students and by a coach. While looking at offline communities in the post-formation phase, the student identified three different communities have. The first community, HOI, is a social community, which has the purpose of connecting students at the beginning of the academic year in a fun way. The other community is formed by several communities, which work together in the Smart Solution Semester. These communities have a professional focus, and their primary purpose is to connect students from different academies and make them collaborate while working on a real project. The third example consists of the study associations, which are communities, that combine both professional and social activities. According to the interviewee, which represents one of the study association, their activities include on one side educational and professional workshops and the other side, parties or entertainment activities.

In terms of online communities, the student identified one community, which is in the pre-formation stage, namely the Top Talent program. This program, which used to be an offline community, is redesigning its activity in the online world. The purpose of the learning community is to form communities of students who want to deepen or enlarge their knowledge. In terms of the post-

formation communities, more examples for each sub-aspect have been found. An example of online social community is the Instagram page "Saxionjustkidding", where students are posting funny content with regards to Saxion and the Corona situation, but also share posts with other students inside their academy. With regards to online professional communities in this stage, two communities were mentioned by the interviewees. One refers to the LinkedIn communities, which have the purpose, for example, to connect the university with the alumni. Another one is IntoSaxion, which is a community, that connects potential students with current students in to exchange relevant information with regards to the studies. Finally, the last type of communities, which combine social and professional activities in the online can be found on Facebook. In the communities formed on this online platform, students share both fun information, such as events or memes, but also "serious" information such as housing rents, books or job openings.

Besides the actual communities presented above, the research reveals that some communities are missing. These communities refer primarily to online communities or to learning communities focusing on Dutch culture. These types of communities will be described below, in paragraph 4.1.1.3.

4.1.2. Facilitating communities

4.1.2.1. Activities undertaken by Saxion to support communities

In the previous chapter, it was visible that within Saxion, there are already many communities, which have been created or are still in the pre-formation stage. In the following, the activities that are undertaken by Saxion to support these communities will be described and analyzed.

The research student describes the activities and their categorization: Saxion's actions in the pre-formation stage, actions in the post-formation stage and actions implemented in both phases.

Firstly, in the pre-formation stage, Saxion is allocating human resources, which is taking responsibility for researching and creating the vision and the concept of the upcoming communities. This action can be seen in the "home groups", where researchers within Saxion have created a concept of the future community.

Another essential step in this stage refers to funds. These funds are allocated either by the institution or by the government and have the purpose of covering the human resources expense, the teaching materials, facilitating an online platform etc. One concrete example is the online Top Talent Program, which is, according to the director of this community, funded almost integrally by Saxion and partly by the Dutch Education Minister.

Besides the two activities mentioned above, Saxion is assuring that the communities' goals align with the institution's goals. Research teams are taking this action already in the concept phase of the communities. For example, the home groups are in line with the Saxion Education Model, which is part of the Saxion Strategy Plan. One more example is given by the study association representative, which states that their community is aligning their activities to Saxion Sustainability goals, especially when it comes to Conscious Business.

Another activity facilitated by Saxion is the training of the coaches that are involved in these communities. This action is visible in the case of the home groups, where a teacher can become a coach only after the completion of training offered by Saxion. Some other communities have a different policy, where the coaches are not obliged to follow training but rather to grow together with the students during the post-formation phase. This pattern is present in the case of the Top Talent Program, for example.

Some of the communities do have students who are assisting the coaches. Such a community is the home groups. In this situation, Saxion provides training for the students as well for the students to be ready to assist the coach and the community.

Furthermore, Saxion is also taking measures for the internationalization of the communities. Specific policies are integrated within the communities so that they are internationally oriented. For example, during the Smart Solution Semester, mixed students from the Dutch and International course are

supposed to sustain a project in English. Moreover, another example is in the case of the study associations, where Dutch study associations can obtain funds from Saxion by organizing internationally oriented activities.

Moreover, in this stage, Saxion is allocating spacing facilities for the communities. This activity can happen both in the online, where communities can meet in Teams, but also in offline. An example for the offline is the office of the study associations, which are also facilitated by Saxion.

Finally, Saxion is facilitating internal communication channels for the communities. The example above, Teams, can be used in this case as well. However, according to the representative of the study associations, Saxion offers platforms for data archiving or data sharing as well, which can be security wise trustworthy.

4.1.2.2. Missing activities in assisting communities

Besides the activities described before, while analyzing the data, it became clear that the communities do need more help from Saxion's side. In the following, the missing activities will be discussed.

Firstly, the research revealed that Saxion is not supporting enough the communities in terms of promotion. This statement is made clear by both the study association representative and the students who were present in the focus group. On the one hand, the study association representative mentions that their community does not receive enough support in promoting their activities to the students. On the other hand, Saxion's students strengthen his affirmation and consider activities happening inside Saxion are not reaching the students due to insufficient promotion.

Secondly, the research concludes that specific communities need support in having equal policies. According to the study association representative, some study associations are paid while conducting activities during the Open Days. This does not happen in the case for their association: "We've heard from other academies that if you do that during the open days, you get paid per hour, and we didn't, we didn't know that". And our academy just, I guess doesn't want us to get paid." Moreover, he mentions that some of the rules do not apply to all the study associations. As an example, he remembers that some other student associations were allowed to sell products in their offices, while their academy did not allow that.

Moreover, during the research, it was visible that the communities do need more support in integrating both Dutch and International students in their activities. From the international students' point of view, the study association within Saxion are very Dutch oriented, and most of the Internationals do not have the chance to participate in events organized by these communities. This statement is also confirmed by the study association representative, which affirms that Imanage (study association International Business course) is the only international study association within Saxion. The research reveals another example with regards to the Smart Solution Semester, where Dutch students can have problems in integrating due to the lack of English language and International can have the chance to be part of a community with only Dutch members, including the coach.

Finally, Saxion should offer assistance in extending the buddy program initiated during the HOI week for the communities. According to the students, the buddy system has an outstanding influence on their first week of school; however, students consider this assistance necessary for longer than one week. The teacher interviewed, shares the same opinion and states that a well-trained buddy can be beneficial for the communities, as according to her, students speak more freely to other students than to the teachers or coaches.

4.1.1.3. Missing communities

Besides the missing activities, the research shows that some communities are missing as well. Firstly, an online community, which combines professional and social activities, is missing within Saxion. The students identified during the focus group that within Saxion an online community is missing, where both social, academic and professional topics can be tackled. The students consider that an online community would be necessary to avoid the many communication channels that are present within

Saxion at the moment. Moreover, they believe that having an online community platform would help students be more informed about social events: "And you could join but maybe like some sort of app or like a platform where like events happening that are in there, and then you get an invitation. So also by like other student associations or something if they like, whatever in summer." Another student sees a lot of potential in the existing online communities on Facebook; however, he thinks that the engagement is low and that Saxion should offer more support for these communities to grow. The ESS representative sees an opportunity in the online communities as well and states that the ESS department is already trying to implement an online community, which is "more like a chat and game environment."

Secondly, another missing community consists of integration communities (into Dutch society) for international communities. According to the interviewed teacher, all the communities composed of international students (Master-, Bachelor-, Exchange students) should receive a course at the beginning of their studies. She considers that courses about the Dutch culture and Dutch language would be beneficial for the students in integrating academically and socially in the Netherlands.

4.2. Students' integration

4.2.1. Realized Integration of Saxion's students

In the previous chapter, the student presented the outcomes of the community building part of the research. In this part, he analyzes the students' integration from an academic and social perspective.

4.2.1.1. Academic integration

The academic integration of the students has been divided into four parts: academic adjustment, social adjustment, personal or emotional adjustment and academic attachment.

The academic adjustment refers to the degree of which a student can cope with demands such as application, motivation or performance in the academic environment. The students who were present during the focus group and the study association representative gave their insights into this matter. For example, the students of the International Business course had difficulties in adjusting academically and performing since many of the students did not have sufficient knowledge in working with Excel. Another student mentions that the degree of academic adjustment was deficient during the first year of studies; however, once he started participating in community-like activities, the level of motivation and performance grew exponentially. A third interviewee mentions that her motivation and performance are on a high level, mainly since her academy is tiny and feels like a community: "So I think it's really a small community and everyone motivates each other and helps each other out." Moreover, the other interviewees state that the SCC's support and the link of the assignments to the real world motivate them during the study.

The second topic refers to the social adjustment of the students. The social adjustment refers to the ability of the student to make friends, be part of social activities or being able to work in a group. It is clear, according to the study association representative, that students who are members of the study association or attend their events can make friends easier or to be part of the workgroup. The opinion of another student is that he could adjust socially very quickly and that the participation in the HOI week, but also his membership in a study association helped him in making friends and be part of social activities. The presence during the HOI week is mentioned by the other interviewees as well, and it is clear that it has a positive effect on the social adjustment of the students. Carlos, another interviewee, admits that for him it was also easy to adapt socially and the main reason is that his course, hotel management, is a small community. It allows knowing everybody and interacting with many people. Moreover, he mentions that being present at the events organized inside his academy helped him in making new friends.

The third topic refers to the personal or emotional adjustment of the student, which refers to the level of distress in adapting to the local academic way of life. All the students mention that they had a certain degree of distress in adapting to the local academic way of life. However, they do recognize that the teachers and the SCC have a vital role in supporting the students in coping with the local academic life. In the teacher's opinion, for individual students it is challenging to adapt on a personal and emotional level, because the cultural differences are very high, namely the Dutch culture is very different to the culture of the students.

Finally, the fourth topic, the academic attachment of the students, refers to the level of commitment to the goals of the institution. The student mention that they do not feel committed the purposes of the institution, mainly because they are not aware of them or they do not "get confronted with them". On the other hand, the study association representative mentions that the students participating in the activities of the study association feel committed to these goals as their union take serious Saxion's focus on sustainability.

In the following, the next type of integration, social integration, will be discussed.

4.2.1.2. Social Integration

The social integration has been divided into three topics. These topics are the perceived reputation of the institution, the social support that is received by the students and finally, the social life.

The perceived reputation of institute is the perceived reputation of the institute by family, friends, general public and future employees, and it is influencing the social integration of the student. The perceived reputation of the institute by the families, especially the families of international students, is a positive one. One of the students mentions that her family back home, in her home country, have a positive perception towards Saxion since the Dutch educational system has a good reputation. Concerning the friends of the students, most of the impressions went more in a negative direction. Some of the interviewees' friends see Saxion as "unsupportive" or "unstructured". Other higher educational institutions in the Netherlands called Saxion as an institution which is "more adjustable for your needs, your individual needs instead of just being part of the mass." Finally, the institutions, which are in contact with the study association, have a positive perception about Saxion: "And companies really usually get really surprised and very happy that we explain that sustainability for us is very important."

The second topic, social support, refers to the support received by the student from their social network. The students interviewed do recognize that the social network and their support has a positive impact on their integration. However, they expect more help in creating a social network inside Saxion. All the students agreed that the study associations do activities in this direction. Still, some of them state that Saxion does not offer sufficient support in extending the social network of the students, while others were satisfied with the support received from Saxion. The Saxion's ESS representatives do see a necessity in supporting the students in expanding or creating a social network, however, they do consider that the student unions outside and inside of Saxion can have a better role in this direction.

Lastly, the third factor, the social life one, has been discussed. This factor refers to the quality of the social life of the students. The interviewed Dutch students mention that the quality of their social life is outstanding as they do have other Dutch friends from their home cities or friends from the study associations. One of the interviewees mentions that she is aware of the fact that Saxion is offering activities for the improvements of the social life of the students; however, she is not interested in these events as she already has her group of friends. The international students mention that they are satisfied with their social life; however, in their opinion, Saxion cam make some improvements. The improvements were mentioned in the missing activities from the previous chapter. The housing offered by Saxion also influences the quality of social life. According to one of the interviewees, the international housing had a positive impact on her social life: "The biggest influence that Saxion had on my social life was the housing in Deventer, because just by living there ...it is like 100 other international students. It made a huge difference in the first year. And I created the best friendships

there." Finally, students mention their social life improved due to the events organized inside of Saxion. However, students agree that many of them are just Dutch- or International oriented: "Of course they have those projects for international students to meet at the beginning of the semester for example, but then there are not Dutch students involved."

4.3. Community policies influence on students' integration.

From the analysis above, it can be visible that there is a connection between the measures undertaken by Saxion on community building and the students' integration. Most of the current policies have a positive impact on the students' integration. However, based on the analysis made on the missing activities, it is clear that some of the students' integration problems link with those activities. The research reveals that Saxion's EES department has a policy with regards to the funding of communities and sees community as an essential factor in the academy. These policies have a positive effect on students' integration. Most interviewed students were aware of Saxion's communities; some participated in their activities.

Secondly, it is visible that the communities' goals inside of Saxion align with the goals of Saxion. Moreover, the members of such communities are more aware of the goals of Saxion and therefore, better integrated from an academic point of view. However, students that do not actively participate in such communities are not aware or barely aware of the goals of Saxion. This trend leads to the fact that this group of students have difficulties in adapting academically.

Another policy refers to the training of the coaches inside of Saxion. One example of such a coach is the student career counsellor (SCC), which, according to the students, has a positive impact on their personal and emotional adjustment. Hence, the policy on training coaches has a positive effect on the academic integration of the students.

The policies on internationalization undertaken by Saxion do have both positive and negative effects on the integration of the students. For example, in the study associations case, the impact for some academies was a positive one as their activities started to integrate international students as well. On the other hand, the policies undertaken in the Smart Solution Semester had both positive and negative effects on the integration of the students. For example, for the students who had a mixed group of international and Dutch students, the outcome was a positive one as the integration between the two groups grew. On the other hand, in case an International student would have joined a community of Dutch students and Dutch coach; consequently, the level of social and academic integration would have been a negative one. Usually, in this case, the group would have excluded the international student by communicating in Dutch and by just assigning specific tasks to him.

On the other hand, the missing policies harm the integration of the students. For example, because Saxion has not a clear policy on helping the communities promote themselves and their activities, many students are not aware of the activities undertaken by communities and their events. Hence, their social and academic integration is suffering because there are missing social or professional activities that could be beneficial in their integration process.

Secondly, because there are no clear policies with regards to an online community/ platform, the students' integration is harmed. By having an online platform, students consider that they would be more aware of ongoing activities within Saxion, but could also ask fellow students or teachers questions with regards to practical-, social- or academic matter.

Thirdly, since some of the communities do not have clear policies for integrating both Dutch and International students in their activities, the integration of one of the groups is not possible. For example, in some of the cases, the International Office is organizing events only for internationals, where Dutch students do not feel welcome or in other instances the study associations only organize events which are focused on the Dutch students. These actions were confirmed during the focus group, where Dutch students were more involved in the study associations, while international students affirmed that such communities do not reach them.

Furthermore, Saxion does not have a clear policy on integrating International communities into Dutch society. Not having a clear plan has a negative influence on the integration of international students. For example, for international students is harder to enter the Dutch job market due to language barriers. Moreover, not being aware of the Dutch culture and the differences between different cultures can lead to a slower integration of the Internationals.

Finally, the extensions of the policy regarding a buddy system are also having a positive influence on the students' integration. The students do recognize the need of a buddy during the first weeks of schools, which would have the role to lower the distress of the students in adapting to the local academic life by guiding the students towards the right decision. The idea of a buddy system is mentioned by the interviewed teacher, which considers that the buddy system is implemented for the international exchange student and has a positive effect on the integration of this community.

4.4. Conclusions

The previously conducted research analysis serves as input in answering the research questions mentioned in the introduction of the research paper; questions which in the end will help in solving the management question of the Saxion's ESS Department.

The first question addresses the current communities existing within Saxion University of Applied Sciences: *Which are the current types of communities inside of Saxion?*

The study reveals the current communities operating in Saxion, their categorization, and examples of each category. The classification focuses on the community formation stage (pre-formation/ post-formation), on activity's location (online/ offline) and based on the type of conducted activities (professional, social, mix of social and professional).

The second question refers to the support received by the communities from Saxion: *Which are the current activities undertaken by Saxion's ESS department in supporting these communities?*

The student analyzed the current activities undertaken by Saxion's ESS department in supporting these communities. During the report, it is visible that Saxion's ESS department is supporting the communities both in their pre-formation stage, but also in their post-formation phase. The help that is offered by Saxion consists of human resources, allocation of funds and spacing, assurance that the goals of the communities align with the goals of Saxion, training of the coaches inside the communities, internationalization policies and the facilitation of internal communication channels.

Next to that, the research tackles the absent activities: *What are the missing activities that should be implemented by Saxion's ESS department in order to support these communities?*

During the analysis, it has been made clear that there are missing activities, which should be undertaken by the ESS department. These actions are concluded based on the opinions of students, community representatives or teachers. Such activities include the support from Saxion's ESS department in the promotion of the communities or the implementation of an online platform which would have the role of a robust online community. Moreover, the study indicates that specific communities need equal policies to avoid discrimination between them. Furthermore, even though Saxion is implementing integration policies inside the communities, it is considered that some of them need to be changed or improved for better integration of both Dutch and international students. Another missing activity refers to courses about the integration of International communities within the Dutch culture. Finally, the study shows that the buddy system implemented in the first week of school (HOI week) should be present for a more extended period.

The research reveals that there are missing communities as well. Therefore, the following question has been formulated: *"What are the missing communities inside of Saxion University of Applied Sciences?"*

The analysis shows that an online community platform is missing. Both the students and the representative of the ESS department share this opinion. The two parties see the necessity of an online platform, which should include both academic and non-academic activities or discussion topics. Moreover, another missing community refers to a learning community focused on the Dutch culture, which should consist of all the international students, who start their studies at Saxion. This community would have the role of better integration of the internationals into the Dutch society and Dutch educational system.

In the second part of the analysis, the research student tackles the students' integration: *"To what extent are Saxion's students integrated?"*

Firstly the sub-question with regards to the academic integration is addressed: "To what extent are Saxion's students academically integrated?"

With regards to the academic integration, students presented the degree to which they could adapt academically based on four factors: academic adjustment, social adjustment, personal or emotional adjustment and academic attachment. In terms of academic adjustment, students have difficulties, especially during the first year of studies. However, it was found out that being part of a community and receiving support from SCC help them in adjusting academically. Furthermore, the social adjustment of the interviewed students went smoothly while being students of Saxion. The reason for that is their active attendance to events, membership of communities, participation in HOI week. Moreover, the research indicates that the size of the academy influences the social adjustment of the student as well.

Additionally, the level of personal or emotional adjustment of the students in the local academic life is for most of the students problematic, especially for the International students who need to adapt to a new way of teaching, but also to a new culture. The study shows teachers and SCCs have a significant role in decreasing the stress caused by the adaptation to the local academic life. Finally, the students' attachment to the institutional goals is not very present, because students consider that they do not get enough "confronted" with Saxion's goals.

Secondly, the thesis student addressed the social integration through the following sub-question: "To what extent are Saxion's students socially integrated?"

With regards to the social integration of the students, the research student discussed three main points: the perceived reputation of the institution, the social support received by the students and the quality of the social life of the students. From the analysis, it has been found out that the reputation of Saxion when it comes to families of international students is a positive one. On the other hand, the friends of the students tend to have a negative perception of Saxion. Other stakeholders, such as other educational institutions inside the Netherlands or companies collaborating with Saxion, have a positive attitude about the institution. Moreover, in terms of the social support of their network, students do not have a clear answer. They stated that they do expect more help from Saxion in creating a social network. Lastly, the quality of the social life of the students is at a high level for both international and Dutch students. However, international students do expect more help from Saxion so that they can improve the quality of their social life.

In the last part, the effects of the current activities undertaken by Saxion's ESS department on the students' integration are discussed: *"What are the effects of the current activities undertaken by Saxion's ESS department on the students' integration?"*

With regards to the current activities, which support the communities, the research reveals that they do have a positive impact on the integration of students. The only exception refers to the internationalization policies inside the communities, which, in some cases, have a negative influence on the students' integration.

Moreover, the effect of the missing activities and communities is addressed through the following research question: *"What are the effects of the missing activities and missing communities on the students' integration?"*

All the missing activities and communities mentioned do have a negative influence on the integration of the students, without exception. The adverse effects can be seen in both the academic and social integration of the Saxion's students.

5. Discussion

In this chapter, the quality of the research will be assessed using two criteria: validity and reliability. The two criteria will be discussed separately, and the validity of the text will be divided into three parts: construct, internal and external validity.

5.1. Validity

The validity of research refers to how "accurately a method measures what it is intended to measure (Middleton, 2019).

5.1.1. External validity

External validity for qualitative research means focusing on the generalizability to other situations. According to Baarda et al. (2001), theoretical generalizability means "to what extend do the conclusions apply to similar situations". The objective of the research is to gain insight into the community building process within the Saxion University of Applied Sciences and its effect on the integration of Dutch and international students. Even though this study is focused only on Saxion University of Applied Sciences, the conclusions are applicable for other higher education institution as well. For this research, the student conducted five interviews with specialists in the area of communities or integration. This means that the outcomes can be applicable for other universities as well, especially for university of applied sciences from the Netherlands, where group works and communities are part of the DNA of such institutions.

Moreover, the thesis student conducted the focus group with students who have Dutch and other nationalities such as Romanian, German. These nationalities are present in a high number in different universities of applied sciences; therefore, their insights and conclusion can be used to other international higher education institutions as well. Furthermore, the student analyzed documents, which were based on the current literature. This means that for every higher education institution focusing on innovation in education, the conclusions from this research are relevant.

On the other hand, the focus group was conducted with only 5 persons, which means that not all of Saxion's students were sufficiently represented in this research. This action harms the external validity because the conclusion might be irrelevant for another institution consisting of students of other nationalities or other study courses.

5.1.2. Internal validity

Having internally valid results means that the correct conclusion can be drawn from them. (Verhoeven, 2015). Moreover, Boeije (2012) mentions that qualitative researchers prefer to put an extra emphasis on the validity of the results, "the degree to which they can be applied to other situations, places and people, and the extent to which the research design is appropriate for answering the central question." There are several methods used to ensure the internal validity of the research. One of them refers to triangulation. The triangulation has been assured by looking at the central question from various points of view (Verhoeven, 2015). The researcher gained his data from conducting interviews, conducting a focus group, but also by analyzing internal documents of the company. This approach, combined with the existing literature led to increased internal validity. Another way that can be applied to increase internal validity is through member validation. This process refers to asking the interviewees to confirm if the data collected from them is valid. The researcher was not able to perform this process, and therefore, from this point of view, the internal validity is weakened. Finally, internal validity can be increased, in the case of the single case studies, by collecting a significant amount of data. The researcher gathered a lot of data from interviews and the focus group. By doing this, the internal

validity of the research increased. However, the data collected from the document analysis is relatively low, a matter which can harm the internal validity of the study.

5.1.3. Construct validity

Lastly, the student will discuss the construct validity of the research. Construct validity refers to "the degree to which inferences can legitimately be made from the operationalizations in your study to the theoretical construct on which those operationalizations were based" (Trochim, 2020). Trochim (2020) also mentions that construct validity is related to generalizing from the program or measures to the *concept* of the program and measures.

For this research, the student created an operationalization based on the literature review. The literature review focuses on two core concepts: students' integration and community building. Extensive literature research shows that students' integration divides into academic and social integration. The student operationalizes academic and social integration in sub aspects which indicate the level of integration of the students from different perspectives. Furthermore, the community building concept has been divided into two major communities, which, according to the literature, are the most commonly used in higher education: learning communities and communities of practice. Each type of community was further divided into preformation actions and post-formation actions, which can be taken by the home institution to support these communities. All the sub-aspects from both core concepts were used to formulate the main research questions and the corresponding sub-questions. The instrument was created based on these questions as these were found the most critical information to collect in this case study.

After conducting and transcribing the interviews, the student initiates the coding of the data. Open- and axial coding improved the created operationalization form the previous stages. The improvements have been made by adding new elements to the operationalization, but also by eliminating less relevant aspects. This process showed that the operationalization consisted of valuable components to collect the data.

5.2. Reliability

The reliability is a standard for judging qualitative studies and refers to the consistency of the inquiry processes used over time (Williams, 2020). According to Williams (2020), to check the reliability of a qualitative study, a closer look at the followings is needed: the process of conceptualizing of the study, the data collection, findings interpretation and results reporting. Moreover, Williams (2020) suggests that for increased reliability, the logic for selecting interviewees needs to be present in the study.

Firstly, the study conceptualization process was made by the student in the period before the oral defence of the thesis. The concept had positive sides, for example, the study's theory, which increased reliability. The negative sides included a lack of consistency, which had negative influences on the study's reliability.

Secondly, the data collection was processed online due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This process had a negative influence on the reliability of the study, as some interviews were interrupted due to bad internet connection or outdoor noises. However, the student based all interviews on an elaborate interview guide, which was based on scientific literature. This fact had a positive influence on the reliability of the study.

Thirdly, the findings' interpretation was conducted according to the literature and by making use of open- and axial coding. The elaborate coding process and the transcriptions of the interviews and focus group also increased the reliability of the study.

Moreover, the results reporting was made objectively and in a transparent manner, after several consultations between the student and the first examiner. However, it can be possible that, due to

many changes made in the result section's structure, some of the information was lost along the process.

Finally, another factor influencing the research reliability positively refers to the fact that the researcher kept track of all the activities performed from the beginning until the end of the research. The notes of the student consist of dates and the specific actions that were undertaken by him. For example, on the 5th of March, the student noted a meeting with the client and the examiner. On the 6th of April, the student noted two actions, a community building meeting with a Saxion's representative and the start of transcribing his second interview.

6. Advice

The following chapter will present the advice for Saxion's ESS department. The objective of the research is to deliver a general implementation plan for Saxion's Educational and Student Support Department, to build communities within Saxion University of Applied Sciences with the purpose to enhance the integration of international and Dutch students. The questions that will be addressed within this chapter is: *"How can Saxion's Educational Student Support Department build communities to facilitate the integration of Dutch and international students?"* First, several options are considered, so that in the end, a single recommendation will be selected. Then, the final advice will be thoroughly explained and elaborated on, including an implementation plan and the financial implications.

6.1. Current situation

Currently, Saxion's ESS department is taking several actions to improve the integration of the students. These include the facilitation of communities (Top Talent program), a service point, Dutch courses or special events for the international students. Even though Saxion's ESS department is taking several steps in increasing the integration of both Dutch and international students, many of the students consider that these activities lack in impacting their integration. The students also believe that Saxion is not promoting their activities sufficiently and also using too many communication channels.

6.2. Preferred situation

The Saxion' ESS department has the objective to enhance the integration of the students with the help of communities. The department hopes that the participation of students in communities will bring better integration of both international and Dutch students, but also a better integration between the two groups.

6.3. Advice options

The findings have shown that there are different aspects of the Saxion's communities that should be improved to create a better integration of Dutch and international students. The highlighted elements during the research refer to an online platform, which would have the role of an online community. Secondly, the research reveals the wish for improved integration policies within the communities and thirdly, to better support from Saxion with regards to the promotion of the communities. Finally, the study suggests the creation of Duch culture communities and extension of the HOI Buddy Program.

6.3.1. Scenario 1: Online community platform

The findings show that currently, Saxion does not have a proper online community, where the students of Saxion could interact with each other or with other academic or non-academic staff. Moreover, the students interviewed see the necessity of such a platform, mainly because they are overwhelmed with information through various communication channels. The interviewee representing the ESS department also considers the need for a robust online platform, especially during the Corona crisis.
Moreover, while conducting the research, the Coronavirus disease (World Health Organization, 2020) erupted in Europe and led to several new policies, which include the closing of universities. This situation means that higher education institutions can no longer facilitate the traditional communities the need for online community platforms is even higher.
In practice, this means that Saxion's ESS department needs to invest in two online platforms. One needs to facilitate social contacts and the other one academic advice.

6.3.1.1. Scenario 1 A: Online platform for social contacts

Firstly, as suggested during the interviews, the students need an online environment where they could interact with each other. The online platform consists of several sub-groups designed students' hobbies or interest. Moreover, the online platform facilitates the interaction between the students and the different social communities of Saxion. For example, if the students would be interested in attending a party, then he would have the possibility to see parties offered by the student unions or recommended by other students. Alternatively, the student could form an online community within the platform with other students who are willing to attend or host a party.

6.3.1.2. Scenario 1 B: Online platform to support academic development

The online platform that supports academic development needs to be a community where students could interact with their teachers, but also with the departments within Saxion that take care of the educational development of the students. Moreover, students can use this platform for participating in educational workshops offered by teachers or by other peers. For example, a student willing to learn new skills in Excel could attend seminars provided by teachers or other students. However, they have the option to ask questions about where to find such a course in the FAQ page.

6.3.2. Scenario 2: Enforce the use of English

Another significant finding refers to the current policies regarding the integration of Dutch students and International students within the communities. Is evident that some of the existing systems are harming the integration of Saxion's students. In specific communities, the research reveals that the policies are hurting the integration of Dutch students, while in other communities, one of the international students.
Firstly, it is necessary to assure that students are not "forced" to be part of communities which are not relevant for their studies or knowledge. For example, many Dutch students need to take part in the Smart Solution Semester Community and attend communities, where the spoken language is English. Even though many of them do not follow English courses, they are obliged to speak English and to write a report in English. These policies harm the integration of both Dutch and international students. Moreover, the English speaking communities need stricter rules about the requirement of speaking English. Many international students complain about the fact that Dutch coaches or Dutch students do not stick to English during meetings, classes, etc. Stricter rules with regards to the language of command, increase the integration of international students within the academy. Such a policy could be that all the promoted events by communities should include an English translation as well.

6.3.3.Scenario 3: Promotion plan for Saxion's communities

As the research revealed, there is a lack of support in terms of the promotion of the communities. First of all, the interviewed students were not satisfied with the fact that Saxion does not sufficiently promote the activities inside the university, and many of the students are not aware of current events running in Saxion. Due to the lack of awareness, students declared that they do miss a lot of opportunities, which could help them better integrate. These opportunities refer to social and academic events of the different communities inside of Saxion.
In practice, Saxion needs to develop a promotion plan to support the communities to become more visible, but also help them in promoting their events or achievements. The promotion plan would lead to a better reputation of Saxion's communities, to higher membership subscriptions and consequently to better students' integration.

6.3.4. Scenario 4: Building Dutch culture communities

The research revealed that many international students could not integrate socially and academically while being students at Saxion because of significant cultural differences between their culture and the Dutch culture. The interviewed teacher stated that many students are not aware of the cultural differences, and therefore the students cannot bond friendships with students from the host country. Moreover, due to language barriers, according to the interviewee, the students can hardly find jobs or relevant information with regards to their living in the Netherlands.
In practice, Saxion needs to implement learning communities in the first weeks of school for all international students. Training on cultural awareness, cultural differences, but also on dealing with situations regarding different cultures is a necessity. Moreover, these communities need continuity during the whole year but with a focus on learning Dutch.

6.3.5. Scenario 5: Extended Buddy System

The study shows that the students have outstanding experiences with the buddy system, which is implemented every year during the HOI week.
In practice, Saxion needs an extension of the buddy system from the HOI week until the end of the first quarter. By doing so, first-year students will have a buddy student with whom to interact in difficult times or to ask for tips and tricks for their study and life in the Netherlands. This system will have a positive influence on the integration of all Saxion students in the higher education system. Still, it would have extra benefits for international students who need to face a whole new culture.

6.4. Comparison of advice options

The student will consider several factors to choose the most feasible option for Saxion's ESS department. The first one is the impact. This factor will be split into "impact on social integration" and "impact on academic integration."
The research student evaluates this factor by looking at the number of students who are "affected" by the scenario.
Secondly, the student will consider the budget of the scenario. This factor will look at how much money (€) is needed to implement the scenarios.
Thirdly, time is another essential factor which will be analyzed. It is vital to know when the effects of the implemented options will be visible. Lastly, the thesis student will look at the feasibility of the options. The feasibility will be measured from the stakeholders' cooperation point of view and will look at how many stakeholders need to be involved in implementing the project.

6.4.1. Operationalization of factors

The matrix which will evaluate the advice options will use scores from 1 to 5 to assess the advice options. Rating 1 is the lowest, and score 5 is the highest. Assessing a scenario with one represents the "worst" option while evaluating it with a five represents the "best" alternative. The table below operationalizes each score for a better understanding of the reader.
All the options have the same "weight." This means that every factor has equal importance when assessing the best scenario to be implemented. The student takes this decision because he considers that by giving each element equal importance, the objectivity of the final decision will raise.

Factor ╲ Score	Impact Social integration	Impact of Academic integration	Budget (€)	Effect time (months)	Implementation time (weeks)	Feasibility (number of stakeholders involved)
1	Low to no impact (Impact to low to be noticed)	Low to no impact (Impact to low to be noticed)	Over 100,000	Over 24	Over 32	Over 4
2	Small impact (visible changes on impact on social integration)	Small impact (visible changes on impact on academic integration)	70,000-99,999	13-24	17-32	4
3	High effect (new opportunities created for social integration)	High effect (new opportunities created for academic integration)	40,000-69,999	6-12	9-16	3
4	Optimal effect (strong impact on social integration is seen)	Optimal effect (strong impact on academic integration is seen)	10,000-39,999	2-5	5-8	2
5	Maximum effect (the impact on social integration is fully visible)	Maximum effect (the impact on academic integration is fully visible)	0-9,999	0-1	0-4	1

Table 6.1: Operationalization factors

6.4.2. Outcomes

The following matrix illustrates the comparison of the proposed advice options:

	Impact Social integration	Impact Academic integration	Budget	Effect Time	Implementation time	Feasibility	Total
Scenario 1: Online platform	5	5	3	5	3	2	**23**
Scenario 2: Improvement of policies	4	3	5	1	4	1	**18**

Scenario 3:Promotion plan	3	3	5	2	3	1	**17**
Scenario 4: Dutch culture community	4	2	1	1	1	1	**10**
Scenario 5: Extended buddy system	4	3	2	1	3	3	**16**

Table 6.2: Scoring the factors

As seen in the table, the first scenario receives the maximum amounts of points for academic and social impact. This score is because the online platform would have a positive effect on the integration of all Saxion students, both academically and socially. For example, the impact on academic integration will have a maximum effect as students could receive support from different stakeholders on the same platform. The budget scores an average rating of 3. The reason behind this score is the platform which will be created and maintained by a 3rd party company. Data found on the internet reveals that a platform's cost is 15,000 € and its maintenance would cost Saxion 1,500 € yearly. The salaries of the Saxion managing team for this platform would be around 50,000 €. The next factor is the time that is needed to see the effect of the online platform. The "effect time" scores a maximum of "5". Having a platform allows Saxion to see the results very quickly by looking for example, at the numbers of users who join the platform or by looking at the engagement rate. The next factor, the implementation plan scored a "3", which means an average score. If needed, a 3rd party company can create an online platform in approximately 15 weeks. Finally, the feasibility scores a "3" as well. This score is because not a lot of stakeholders are involved in creating the platform, only the 3rd party company, the management team of the platform and the marketing team representatives.

The 2nd Scenario scores relatively high on the impact on social integration with a score of "4". The improved policies can lead to better communication between international and Dutch students, which will lead to an inclusion of all students within the university. The impact on academic integration scores a three, which means that Saxion creates "new opportunities" for academic integration. These opportunities refer to the chance for international students to have a fully international experience, but also the opportunity for Dutch students to choose whether they want to follow a global path. Moreover, the budget scores a "5" since the research student considers that only one person would be in charge of implementing the new policies. This person would have to work on the project for 1 hour per week. Taking in consideration that to monetize one hour of work it will cost Saxion 115 euros (overhead included), the amount that Saxio needs to spend for workforce ends up at 5980 euros per year (115 euros x 52 weeks). The time that is required to see the effects of the project scores a "1". The effects of such policies are visible after four years. Saxion ESS Department can check whether the integration of the students improved (from 1st year to 4th year) or not. The implementation time scores a "4". There is no need for a long time to change the rules or to improve them. Finally, the feasibility of the project scores a "1". All the departments and academies need to be informed about the new policies inside of Saxion.

The 3rd scenario scores medium on the impact of both academic and social integration with a score of "3". The promotion plan will bring new opportunities for the students to participate in social and educational activities organized by the communities within Saxion. The budget for this option scores a "2". The student considers that Saxion would need to assign a person for a minimum of one hour per week to take care of the promotion of the communities. This action would lead to a total cost for the workforce of 5980 euros per year (same calculation as in the previous scenario). The time needed to

see the effects of this scenario scores a "4". For the online promotion, for example, it is easy to check the reach of the students; however, it takes longer to see how many persons start participating in the activities of the communities or decide to join them. Moreover, the implementation time scores also an average score of "3". The reason behind it is the high number of communities running inside of Saxion. A high number of communities means a high workload and different promotion plans. The last factor, the feasibility of the promotion plan, scores a "1". The stakeholders that need to be involved in this scenario are one person who would be in charge of the promotion plan and one representative of each community who would communicate their activities and promotion plans.

The 4th scenario scores a "4" on the impact on social integration. By learning Dutch, international students can have more opportunities to adapt socially while in the Netherlands, because they can have a deeper interaction with the local culture. The impact on academic integration scores a "2" because this scenario will have a small effect on academic integration. Since the studies within Saxion are in English and very internationally oriented, learning Dutch will not bring a significant impact on the students academic integration. The budget scores a "1". By offering such communities for 1st years students, the researcher considers that 7000 students are starting every year their studies within Saxion. Out of 7000, 14% are internationals, which represents 980 students. If Saxion divides these students into groups of 30 people, it will result in 32 groups. This means that 32 hours are needed per week so that each group can have one hour of Dutch culture classes. 32 hours x 115 euros (monetizing one hour of work within Saxion)= 3680 euros per week (191,360 per year). This budget is much higher than the budget for the other scenarios. The time to see the effects of such communities scores relatively high because it would be necessary to check the results of such a project over multiple years. Moreover, the implementation plan scores a "1". It would take a lot of time to prepare the curriculum for such communities, to organize them, to train coaches and to coordinate all the international students starting their first year. Finally, the feasibility scores high with a "1". Many parties need to be involved in implementing this project (ESS, academies, bachelor students, exchange students, master students).

The last scenario has an optimal effect on the social integration of the students and scores a "4". Such a project would bring benefits for all future Saxion students as they could have a buddy from the first day of school, who could give them tips about social events within the school or the Netherlands. The impact on the academic integration of this scenario is lower and scores a "3". The buddies will have a high impact on the academic integration of new students as they would explain to them how to deal with exams, how to manage their time correctly or tips about using Saxion's online platforms. However, high costs are involved in such a scenario. Besides buddies-coordinators for each academy, Saxion needs to provide training and salaries for the buddies. These necessities would lead to a high amount of money that needs to be invested by Saxion for this scenario. Only one hour of work from the buddies would cost Saxion 2,800 euros (280 groups needed if we divide the 7,000 students into groups of 30 people). The time to see the effects of this scenario scores relatively high because the integration of the students would need evaluations over multiple years. The implementation of the scenario score "3". Students need to be hired, trained and coordinated. Finally, the feasibility of the scenario scores also a "4". Implementing such a situation requires different stakeholders, such as the ESS department, academies and buddies.

To conclude, the matrix shows that scenario number 1 is very significant to improve the integration of the students of Saxion University of Applied Sciences. Developing an online community platform is crucial for the integration of Saxion's students since it has a significant impact on all Saxion's students, and it also involves a medium budget. Moreover, giving the current Covid-19 situation, the importance of this scenario is even higher.

6.5. Online community platform

The online community platform project focuses on improving the integration of Saxion's students. The Saxion ESS department can achieve this goal by creating a platform, where the implementation of the students' academic and social needs is present. On the one hand, the platform needs to include social activities or information about social events running on the campus. On the other hand, the project needs to include academic information, such as information about the academic year structure, minors, internships, etc. Moreover, the platform needs to include academic support. The academic support needs to be interactive. For example, students could ask questions in a live chat, where he could receive answers from ESS employees, teachers or fellow students. The project focuses on increasing the students'integration, but also on reducing the communication channels, a problem which was discussed during the research discussion.
The student chooses to merge scenarios 1A and 1B based on the wish of the students to have fewer platforms, but also by looking at the marginal costs, which will decrease.

The implementation of the project, based on different phases and concrete actions, follow the PDCA cycle. This model allows having structured and monitored operations but also continuously improving processes (Johnsons, 2002). The PDCA cycle is a tool which helps to control and monitor the quality of changes and improvements within the organization and is an abbreviation of the four main steps in the cycle: Plan, Do, Check and Act (van Vliet, 2011).

Figure 6.1: PDCA cycle

6.5.1. Planning of the project

The research student will hand in his thesis on the 15 of June. There will be some time until the thesis will be assessed and read by the representatives of the ESS department. Once the ESS department decides to implement this project, the next step would be to go with the project through a "europese aanbestending". This means that the Project Portfolio Board needs to approve the online platform and also to schedule when the project will get the necessary resources. We will consider this process together with choosing the software supplier will have a duration of 3 months.
Therefore, we will consider that the implementation plan will start on the 15th of September and will last for 15 weeks until the launch of the platform. It means that the launch day will be approximately on the

1st of January 2021. However, the project will continue with the evaluation and effects of the platform on the student's integration. Saxion's ESS department will conduct this evaluation regularly (every semester). The following presents the proposed planning of the project:

	Time frame	Activities	Stakeholders
Plan		Europese aanbestending	Project Portfolio Board
		Choosing 3rd party Software company	Project Portfolio Board, ESS department
	Week 1-3	**Phase 1- Discovery phase**	
		Creating an "online platform" team	ESS Department, Academies, Students, Teachers
		Meetings "online platform" team- Content, features, user experience	ESS Department, Academies, Students, Teachers
		Meetings with platform supplier- Discovery phase	Online platform team, 3rd party supplier
Do	Week 4-9	**Phase 2- Design phase**	
		Meetings "online platform" team- design, future pictures	ESS Department, Academies, Students, Teachers
		Meetings with platform supplier- Design phase	Online platform team, 3rd party supplier
		Promotion of the platform	Online platform team and marketing team
	Week 10-12	**Phase 3- Development phase**	
		Development phase	3rd party supplier
		Promotion of the platform	Online platform team and marketing team

	Week 13-14	**Phase 4-Modification phase**	
		Meetings with platform supplier-Modification phase	Online platform team, 3rd party supplier
		Promotion of the platform	Online platform team and marketing team
	Week 15	Launch of the platform	
Check	Week 16-26	**Phase 5-Evaluation phase**	
		Collecting data from the website	3rd party supplier
		Research on the level of integration of students' within the platform	ESS department
Act	Week 27	**Phase 6-Improving phase**	
		Implementation of new insights	ESS department

Table 6.3: Planning of the project

6.5.2. Description of the project phases

Phase 1: Discovery phase

The first phase of the project consists of creating a multidisciplinary team that will be responsible for the management of the platform in the pre-launch period, but also the meetings with the different stakeholders, such as the 3rd party software company and the Saxion's marketing team. The team consists of a representative of the ESS Department, two representatives of the academies (one representative for the Dutch programs and one for the International programs), one teacher, two students (One Dutch, one international) and one representative of the marketing department. The mix of different team members with diverse backgrounds will allow integration of all parties involved within the platform. Still, it will also take into consideration the different needs of the various stakeholders.

After the formation of the team, they will have meetings on the content, features and user experience of the platform. The starting point of these meetings will be the table below, which illustrate the research outcomes with regards to the different wishes of the interviewed people.

Content structure	Features	User experience
Academic page	Workshops page	-Live sessions where all the online platform

		users can offer workshops
		-Live comments available
		-Having the option to join the live session
		-Option for the organizer to have a limited number of available spaces
		-Option to donate money
	Community page	-A page where every member of the platform can create a community based on their academic interests
		-Option to have an open community or a closed community (available for everyone or based on invitation)
	FAQ	-A page where every member of the platform can ask and answer questions related to their studies
		-Academic and Non-academic staff responses will be highlighted
		-Option to vote for relevant answers or questions
	Live chat	-live chat where students can get in contact with the Servicepoint and International Office within Saxion
	Courses	-A page where all the platform members can take free or paid courses or workshops
	Calendar	-An interactive calendar which shows the platform members important academic events

		-Option for the students to set reminders, to apply in advance for events in which they are interested, or to buy tickets in advance (if needed)
Social page	Live sessions page	-A page where for example young Djs can perform for Saxion's students
		-Live chat available
		-Donations available (sustaining young music producers)
	Community pages	-A page where every member of the platform can create a community based on their social interests
		-Option to have an open community or a closed community (available for everyone or based on invitation)
	Events page	-A page where all the members can add internal and external social events
		-Similar options as in Facebook: Organizers can invite people to the events etc.
	FAQ page	-A page where every member of the platform can ask and answer questions related to social life
		-Relevant answers will be highlighted based on the votes of other users

Table 6.4: Website structure

Besides adding new features or user experiences, the team would need to take into consideration a series of rules that were discussed during the research for better integration within the Online community platform:

-All the platform needs to be in English, excepting the closed communities where only Dutch members are present
-The members need to always communicate in English (when answering FAQ for example), except for individual conversations in the live chat
-All the courses and workshops need to be in English or translated into English (not applicable for workshops on foreign languages)
-The members who do not compel with the rules will have their posts deleted and if necessarily their account will be banned.
During their meetings, the team will have to improve the rules above and if necessary to add new ones which will lead to better integration of the students.

After agreeing on that, the team will meet the 3rd party company several times to present the overall content structure, and documentation describing the features and user experience on all key pages.

Phase 2: Design face

In the second phase, the team needs to decide on the design of the website. The team members need to have several meetings in which they will decide which pictures they will use for the online platform, but also to consult the existing regulations within Saxion with regards to colours, layouts or logos. After deciding on these aspects, the team will have several meetings with the 3rd party company in which they will consult each other on the design of the platform.
Moreover, according to the research, Saxion must promote its current activities. Therefore, the team will have meetings with the Marketing department of Saxion, where they will give insights about the project. By doing this, the Marketing Team can already start promoting the future platform to Saxion's students and employees.

Phase 3: Development phase

In this phase, the 3rd party company will develop the website, based on the discovery and design phase information received from the client. The online platform team will not have any meetings with the 3rd party company during this period; however, they will have constant meetings with the marketing team. They will work together on creating content about the new platform. The content will appear on all Saxion communication channels (Facebook, Instagram, Linkedin, Twitter, MijnSaxion, Email, etc.). Moreover, the content will be customized for each target group: students, communities, teachers or non-academic staff. For example, the students will be approached through vlogs, while non-academic staff will receive emails.

Phase 4: Modification phase

During the 4th phase, the 3rd party company will present the outcome of their work during the development phase o the online platform team representing Saxion. After the meeting, the Saxion team will have several meetings in which they will decide whether they want any changes on the platform, but will also test it. Moreover, during the sessions, random students or Saxion staff will be invited to test the platform and to tell their opinion about it.
Besides testing the platform, the team will keep on meeting the marketing team and promote the new platform. In this phase, the testimonials of the people who tested the platform will be crucial and shared within the Saxion's communication channels.
After intensive promotion, the platform's launch will be on the 1st of December.

Phase 5: Evauation phase

During the evaluation phase, the ESS department will collect feedback from the different stakeholders to check the level of integration of Saxion's students after using the online platform. The ESS

department will send a survey to all the students using the platform, but also to the academic and non-academic staff of Saxion. Moreover, the department will analyze the data from the 3rd party company, which will continue to maintain the platform. Based on the data received, Saxion can analyze the integration level of the students as well. For example, they can check how many international and Dutch students joined the platform from each academy. Moreover, they can check the engagement within the platform. For example, they can check the average number of reactions for FAQ posts or the number of attendants, based on their nationality, for live sessions.

Phase 6: Improvement phase

The last step focuses on acting on the points of improvements that could arise from the previous phase. The ESS department should then create a working group and based on these insights to develop new planning. This planning should have a clear overview of what needs to be done when it needs to be done and who are the responsible stakeholders for it.

It is essential to mention that once the project phase finishes, Saxion needs to take into consideration the maintenance of the platform. The software company will be in charge of this operation. Maintaining the platform will bring new costs for Saxion, which need a yearly payment.

6.5.3. Financial implications

Various costs need to be taken into consideration for the implementation of the project. The table below illustrates the platform's investment budget. The student presents the elaboration of the expenses in the paragraphs following the table.

6.5.3.1. Investment budget

Type of costs	Costs (€)
Platform	17,500
Salaries team members	50,040
Total	**67,540**

Table 6.5: Investment budget

Costs of developing the platform
The cost of developing an interactive platform depends on the number of features of the platform. The more features, the more time is needed for the developers to create the online platform (McCue, 2018). After consulting different website and forums (Forbes, Reviewmylms.com, Webfx.com, websitebuilderexpert.com, websitesetup.org), the student concluded that the costs required for a platform proposed by him are between 15,000 € and 20,000€. Therefore, he decided that the costs of the platform will be an average of 17,500€.
The cost of 17,500€ does not include the yearly maintenance costs, which will cost Saxion approximately 2,000€ per year. The student decided to make an overview of the expenses until the launch day.

Salaries online platform team
The personnel costs of the team involved in the online platform project vary. The reason behind it is the participation of different stakeholders within the group. For example, the salaries of the teachers are much higher than the ones of the students. We will consider that the average hourly rate for the

teachers and non-academic personnel will be €57 (J.W. Meijerhof, personal communication, June 11 2019), as cited in the "Flavours of Malaga: Spicing the guests' experience" thesis project. For the students, a salary of 25€ per hour will be considered.

We estimate that each person will invest 12 hours per week for the project. The total number of working hours per week will be 72 hours (12 hours x 6 people). This will result in a salary of 2,736 €/ week (57€ x 4 person x 12 hours) for the academic and non-academic staff of the team. The wages of the students will consist of 600€ / week(25€ x 2 person x 12 hours). The total amount of money spent on salaries for 15 weeks equals 50,040€ (15 weeks x (600€+ 2,736€)).

6.5.3.2.   Operating budget

The table below presents the operating budget of the platform. Saxion needs to pay these amounts yearly.

Type of costs	Costs (€)
Website analytics reports	100
Domain name	12
Website hosting	100
Tech maintenance	1,500
Saxion's maintenance team	232,170
Depreciation	3,500
Total	**242,332**

Table 6.6: Operating budget

 The amounts provided above (Website analytics reports; Website hosting; Tech maintenance; Domain name) are the average prices found on the websites presented under paragraph 6.5.3.1.

The Saxion's maintenance team consists of two full-time employees who will take care of the "maintenance" of the platform. By maintenance, it is meant that they will take care that the students will obey to the integration rules, will report incidents to the software company or will add new content on the platform. Their salaries were based on an average of €57 per hour (57 X 8 hours X 5 days X 52 weeks).

For the depreciation, the "straight-line" method has been used. The depreciation factor and the remaining book value were not taken into consideration, as they are not valuable for this asset. Therefore, the depreciation was calculated by dividing the cost of the platform by five years.

The student does not present the benefits of the implementation plan as it is complicated to monetize the benefits of an online platform, which encourages academic and social integration. The purpose of such a platform is not to generates profits, but to offer the students a better educational and social experience within Saxion.

Afterword

Writing the thesis was a challenging process, where I learned many new things, both professionally and personally.

I have written my thesis for the Saxion's newly created ESS department, which has the role in offering support to Saxion's students, but also in developing and innovating education within the institution. Besides conducting the thesis, I also had the opportunity to work part-time for the same department as a student support officer. My double role within the department gave me a lot of satisfaction, as I had different perspectives about the processes and activities happening inside the institution. On the other hand, having a part-time job and writing a thesis can be very tiring. Finding the right motivation to start researching for your thesis after four hours of work in the morning can be quite struggling. However, I have learned that by exercising this habit and by scheduling your time effectively, everything can be possible.

One of the main things that I found puzzling the process of researching was the constant changes. Firstly, the changes occurred when the communication between my client and me was not optimal. Miscommunication led to the change of the management question right before the thesis proposal defence. This decision gave me a lot of stress due to the amount of work needed to be changed in a short time. However, this experience also taught me that by having excellent communication, you could avoid a lot of unnecessary work. In the future, I will invest more time in the interaction with the stakeholders of the projects.

Another change occurred when the Corona Virus started. Working as usual, in the library or at schools, was no longer possible. Furthermore, the planning needed to changed quickly and adapted to the new living conditions. All the meetings, interviews, even the focus group moved online. These situations can create a lot of uncertainty; however, I have learned that having a quick reaction and adapting to new challenges is vital when dealing with change.

Moreover, during the writing process, my tutor and examiner had the brilliant idea to create a group consisting of two other students and me. All of us had similar thesis assignments and clients within the university. Being part of a group helped me understand the importance of cooperation, but also boosted my motivation and energy. Inside the group, we exchanged information, gave each other feedback and motivation. Now, in the end, of this process, I can say that: "Communities do work"! In the future, I will take into consideration the power of workgroups and will always cooperate with other people while working on a project.

Finally, during the last few months, I have learned how important it is to be consequent and remain focus on your work. Working almost every day on the thesis project gave me a lot of energy and helped me to see the whole report as a story. When the corona crisis started, I was not able to write anything for two weeks. However, I always thought about the fact that the story must continue and I need to finish the report. In the future, I will continue to remain consequent when, for example, I will work on a project or when I will start a new hobby because this will give me more chances to succeed.

Besides the personal experiences described above, it is essential to know that this research can have an impact on other educational institutions as well. Many university students within the Netherlands cope with integration problems of students within higher education. According to Zwaan (2018), as cited in Pieters (2019), the drop out percentage in the Netherlands stands at 25%. This percentage is even higher in other countries such as Austria or France (studies & Nordic institute for Studies in Innovation, 2014).

This means that a platform presented by the student can satisfy the need for better students' integration not only within Saxion but also on a larger scale. Universities from France and Austria, for example, where the drop out rate is higher than in the Netherlands could also implement a platform, which is focusing on students' integration.

Moreover, the need for such a platform is even higher during the next period, when due to the COVID pandemic, many higher institutions will continue their studies online. The traditional integration methods are temporarily not applicable, and an online platform would be an efficient alternative.

Furthermore, in the long term, online communities platforms will remain attractive for both students and universities. From the students perspective, the platform remains attractive as generation Z (the future students) grew up in a technology era. On the other hand, universities will continue using platforms as they can cut costs on the long term by using fewer communications channels in communicating with their students.

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8. Appendices

Appendix I- Search methods used

Search term	Search engine	Number of hits	Chosen source	Database/website
"Policies" and "community building" and "education"	Google Scholar	83,600	Rovai, A. (2002). *Building sense of community at a distance.* International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning, 4(1), 1-9.	Springerlink
"Factors" and "students' integration."	Google Scholar	3,950,000	*Understanding academic performance of international students: the role of ethnicity academic and social integration* (Rienties et al., 2012)	Springerlink
Relationship between "Dutch students" and "International students"	Google Scholar	1,100	Bart Rienties, Dharma Luchoomun & Dirk Tempelaar (2014) *Academic and social integration of Master students: a cross-institutional comparison between Dutch and international students,* Innovations in Education and Teaching International, 51:2, 130-141	SRHE

*The other articles were found using the snowball method
Table 9.1: Search methods used

Source Author (year)	Authority	Accuracy	Objectivity	Currency	Coverage	Comments
Tinto, V. (1993)	+++++ (Tinto is a sociologist who is a theorist in the field of HE and mainly concerned about student performance)	+++++ (Tinto is concerned about the topic and writes about it)	++ The research has been initiated to contribute to more excellent knowledge regarding students' integration, which makes the research objective.	+ The article is not current; however, many other research papers use this article as a reference.	++++ The information is highly relevant since it uses an empirical approach to students' integration rather than conceptual, which has mainly been done.	Vince Tinto is a professor who researches and writes about student retention and learning communities.
Hyman, B., J. (2002)	+++ (Hyman is a consultant and has management experiences for more than 2020, Harvard Business School graduate)	++++ The information provided is specific, and the author gives concrete examples on how to build a community	++++ (The article has an objective tone, and the article does not make any references to donations or advertisements)	++ (2002) The information is not completely up-to-date since it had been published in 2002.	+++ The article does not cover the whole topic. However other articles were used to add value to the theoretical framework)	
Rienties, B. (2013)	+++++ (Rientes is a professor who is interested in social interaction in learning. He publishes academic journals and books about this topic.)	++++ The article has different points of view from various researchers	+++ (The research was based on questionnaires, theories, academic papers on the topic)	+++ (2013) The research is seven years old, which makes it relatively up-to-date	+++ The article does not cover the whole topic. However other articles were used to add value to the theoretical framework)	
Glass C. and Gesing P.(2018)	+++++ (Chris Glass is a PHD graduate with multiple research papers published on student-related topics Peggy Gesing is a researcher and a teacher with an	++++ The article has a different point of views from various researchers.	++++ (A mix of quantitative and qualitative research method was utilized, as well as a lot of theory and other	+++++ (2018) The study was conducted in 2018, making it very up-to-date.	++++ Both researchers contributed to conceptualizing student' integration and defining the concept, making it very relevant since not much research regarding the	

	experience of over 12 years)		academic papers based)		meaning of students' integration has been conducted.	

Table 9.2: AAOCC criteria

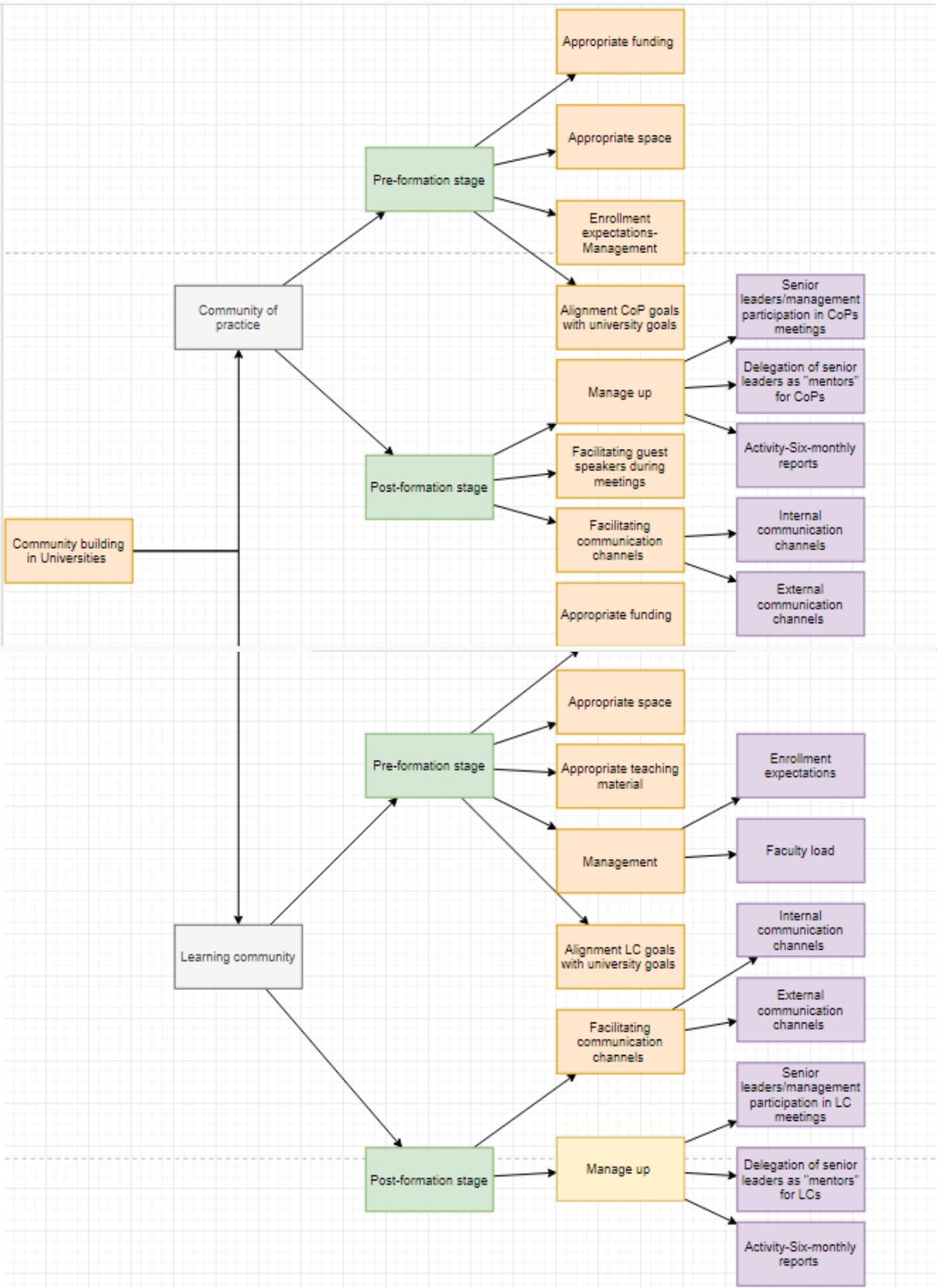## Appendix III- Operationalization Community building

Figure 9.1: Operationalization community building

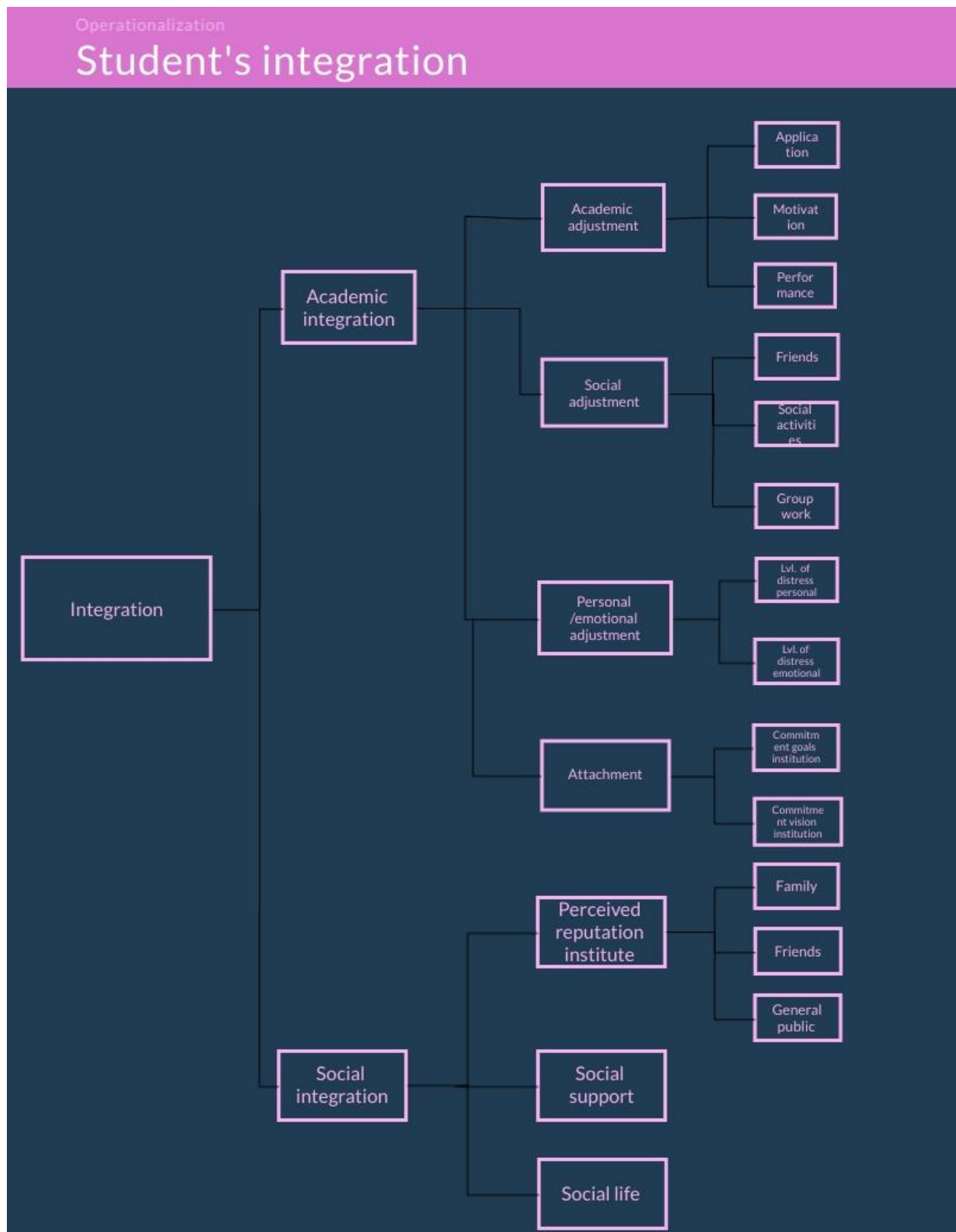## Appendix IV- Operationalization students' integration

Figure 9.2: Operationalization student's integration

Appendix V-Transcript example

Mihai (07:37):

please feel free to share any thoughts. And, um,

Katharina (07:44):

so what comes spontaneous to spontaneous here into my mind is actually those Um, well, in my studies I think it's like depending on the Academy, but we have, um, kind of like a lot of drinks together. So after each quarter, usually we finish off with some drinks or at least it's always in summer and Christmas there's like something and it is really nice, Oh we have, uh, regarding, uh, we had like a minor and I could not choose a between three minors that had to do it at Saxon within my studies, but then they try, I'm doing the minor at the moment kind of, but it's complicated. But they're trying to motivate us by giving rewards to the best uh, projects. So they say the best projects they get certain rewards or we did some things for companies and then they rewarded us. So, um, yeah, this is kind of, I think it comes in my mind as well. I'm not sure if you were thinking about those things as well.

Mihai (08:39):

No, no. Like it's like everyone can have his own, um, impression. So I, I really appreciate that. Any, any other thoughts?

Carlos (08:52):

Yeah. Okay. I think. Ladies first

Cristina (08:56):

Thank you. I think those rewards come back in the tourism studies as well because we work on so many practical cases with real clients and they always try to tell us, think about presenting this project to the client. And then maybe they will apply it and then you could have a new connection or you could get into their network or they're trying to motivate us academically by trying to put into a real perspective what we could achieve if we really dedicate ourselves to those projects.

Mihai (09:32):

All right, sounds good. And I think Carlos wanted to add something as well.

Carlos (09:39):

Yeah, for me was a bit personal because I started February in my class where most of my classmates were older and had more experience. So I, so we were really, really motivated and they all wanted to do great. But in terms of our white(inaudible) experience, it was, yeah, it was all a bit easier. So I told them like, can I then any possibility because I, I liked the challenge then, but it wasn't possible. It wasn't possible to do the first, like the first year and a half. It wasn't possible to do a proper pasta. So that probably demotivated me. And I noted that in the second year I was sustained by Honors program or

Figure 9.3: Transcript example

Appendix VI- Axial coding

Axial coding			
Dimension	**Axial codes**	**Open codes**	**Fragments**
Students' integration Saxion	Academic	Academic adjustment	1.3.1.; 1.2.7.; 1.3.5; 5.1.1
		Social adjustment	1.3.2; 1.3.3.; 1.3.4; 4.10.1; 5.1.2
		Personal/ emotional adjustment	5.1.3
		Attachment	4.10.1; 5.1.4
	Social	The perceived reputation of the institute	3.5.1.; 4.11.1; 5.2.1
		Social support	1.4.1 ;3.5.2; 4.11.2; 5.2.2
		Social life	1.3.2; 1.4.2; 3.5.3; 4.11.3; 5.2.3;

Table 9.3: Axial coding students' integration

Community building	Types of communities	Online communities	Pre-formation stage	Social	
				Professional	2.3.1;
				Combined	
			Postformation stage	Social	2.3.2; 4.6.4;
				Professional	2.3.1;
				Combined	
		Offline communities	Pre-formation stage	Social	
				Professional	2.3.3.
				Combined	
			Postformation stage	Social	4.6.6; 4.6.7
				Professional	2.3.3.; 4.6.8
				Combined	5.4.4; 5.5.5
	Facilitating communities	Activities undertaken by Saxion to facilitate communities	Pre-formation stage	Human resources	6.1.2.;
				Funds	3.1.2
				Aligning goals	3.1.3; 6.1.1
				Training coaches	1.7.1; 1.7.2; 1.7.3.; 1.7.4.; 1.7.5 1.7.6;4.2.4; 6.2.2
			Postformation stage	Internationalisation	1.2.1;1.2.6; 1.1.3.; 1.3.2; 1.2.2; 1.2.9; 1.2.3; 1.2.7; 1.2.10 1.2.4; 1.2.5; 1.2.8; 1.6.3; 4.8.1

				Spacing	3.1.4
				Communication channels	2.2.1; 3.2.2.
		Missing activities	Pre-formation stage	Equal policies	5.5.2
				Integration policies	4.6.3; 4.6.5
			Postformation stage	Promotion	4.6.2
				Buddy system program	5.5.6
		Missing communities	Online community	Combined	2.3.5;
			Offline community	Dutch culture	5.5.3.

Table 9.4: Axial coding community building
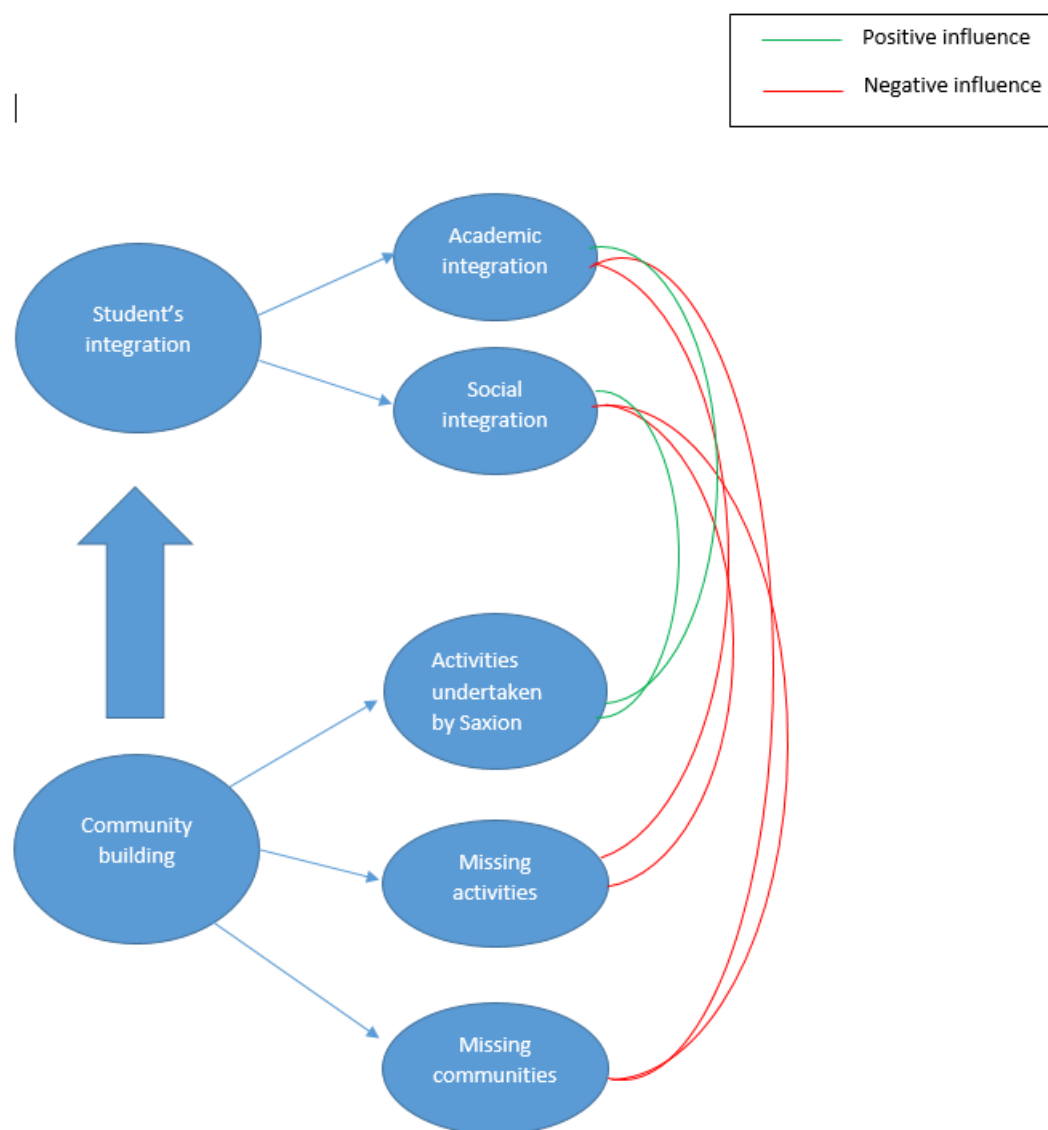
Appendix VII- Relationship model

Figure 9.4: Relationship model

Focus group guide- Students

- **Introduction to the research**
  - Small talk
  - Purpose: To gain insight into community building policies of ESS and their effect on the integration of Dutch and International students in Saxion University's, to formulate a general policy plan on community building
  - The data/ information provided in this interview will be processed and used for the research
  - Reaffirming confidentiality
  - Permission to record the interview
  - Duration of the interview

Focus group
1. Students' integration

A. Academic integration

A.1. Which measures should be taken by Saxion's ESS department to increase the **academic** adjustment of students?
- ❖ Application
- ❖ Motivation
- ❖ Performance

-Summarize

A.2. What could Saxion's ESS department do to increase **social adjustment** among its students?
- ❖ Friends
- ❖ Social activities
- ❖ Group work

-Summarize

A.3. Which measures can be taken by Saxion to decrease the **level of distress of students** in adapting to the local academic way of life?
-Summarize

A.4.What are good practices that Saxion could implement so that the students commit to the **goals of the institution**?
-Summarize

B. Social integration

B.1. In your opinion, which measure can Saxion ESS take to improve the **perceived reputation of the institution?**
- ❖ Family
- ❖ Friends
- ❖ General Public
- ❖ Future employees

-Summarize

B.2. Which measures can be taken by Saxion ESS to support students to expand its **social network**?
-Summarize

B.3. Which measure can be taken by Saxion's ESS department to increase the **quality of the students' social life**?

-Summarize

2. Community building
 What is your opinion about how can the ESS department assist communities of practice in the initial phase (before their formation)?

- ❖ Appropriate funding
- ❖ Appropriate space
- ❖ Management of enrollment expectations
- ❖ Alignment of Saxion's goals with CoP goals
- ❖ Online communities – COVID

-Summarize
A.2. Post-formation stage (6 minutes)
What is your opinion about how can the ESS department assist communities in the post-formation phase?

- ❖ Manage-up
  -participation of senior leaders in CoP meetings
  -delegation of senior leaders as "mentors for CoP."
  -activity reports
- ❖ Facilitation of guest speakers during the meeting

D. Completion
D.1.Thank you for participation
D.2. Sending results/ conclusions