



## **European conference Guidance to the labour market**

***6-8 October 2019 's-Hertogenbosch (NL)***

***Interview with participant Mario Verzele of Flanders-based SUEM.BE***

***'The Erasmus+ meeting cultivated inspirational European collaboration'***

**At the start of October, Mario Verzele of SUEM.BE came to Den Bosch for the Erasmus+ meeting 'Guidance to the Labour Market' with the intention of finding partners in the fields of big data, virtual reality and artificial intelligence. Speaking afterwards, he told us that 'I made many extremely valuable connections', so he would appear to have achieved this aim!**

SUEM.BE is the Belgian umbrella organisation for supported employment. 'We provide support to people with disabilities or limited access to the job market to help them find and keep a job within the regular labour market. I didn't know what to expect from my visit to the Erasmus+ meeting, although I had hoped to find partners with knowledge of big data, virtual reality and artificial intelligence. At SUEM.BE, we are convinced that knowledge sharing and collaboration are vital: after all, what's the point having us all invent the wheel separately?', says Verzele.

### **Valuable contacts**

Verzele's visit in his capacity as a staff executive certainly bore fruit as he made numerous valuable contacts in Den Bosch. 'I spoke to lots of different people with a healthy interest in collaboratively exploring opportunities in the field of big data, virtual reality and artificial intelligence. I'd never have made contact with these partners on my own!' The Erasmus+ meeting concept really appealed to him. 'You start with an abstract idea on the Sunday evening and by Tuesday afternoon you have developed a concrete project proposal with a diverse range of European partners. Hats off to the organisers for a great idea! In the subsequent days, we were given the freedom to shape and flesh out our initial idea in line with the original plan. We now have a valuable and concrete idea for how we would like to take things further.'



### **Inspiring**

Verzele is referring to the plan to develop a script, together with a variety of European project partners, for a simulation or virtual reality game that will allow vulnerable jobseekers to practise for job interviews at home. 'The partners' individual backgrounds and expertise will substantially contribute to the success of this project. Some are experts in the field of training, while others are at home in the world of e-tools. Together we can achieve so much more! With this in mind, we have also held exploratory discussions about another possible joint project: an internet project focusing on big data.'

Verzele says that he finds collaboration at the European level particularly inspirational. 'For example, I've made connections with professionals in Slovenia, a country that invests substantially in support services for jobseekers with limited access to the labour market. It's wonderful to learn from each other. If I'd stayed behind my desk in Flanders, then our organisation would never have been part of all these amazing initiatives!'