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Introduction: Cultural Sensitivity in Tourism Encounters

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Travelling not only widens your mind, it shapes it.
– Bruce Chatwin

Travel is an attitude, a state of mind.
It is not residence, it is motion.
– Paul Theroux

(...) une seule chose compte, envers et contre tous les particularismes, c'est l'engrenage magnifique qui s'appelle le monde.
– Ella Maillart

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The preparation of the case studies in this collection started before the COVID-19 pandemic hit the world. Before the pandemic, tourism pressure, crowding and carrying capacity issues (summarised in the oversimplified term “overtourism”) were the topic of the day (Marques, 2021). The sudden pandemic, however, came to impose lockdowns and severe travel restrictions. People stopped and started to look around more carefully, exploring and unearthing realities so close to them that they had many times been ignored. For many, it was an opportunity to claim a better way of travelling, a slower and more sustainable form of mobility. But will these practices remain in a post-pandemic world? Perhaps restrictions and pandemic challenges are not sufficient to change mindsets and ways of conceiving, developing, and living tourism experiences. Such work needs to be done on different fronts, including educational contexts. The cases in this volume explore different perspectives on travelling and tourism experiences, from cultural routes and heritage to female residents’ perspectives on a neighbourhood.

In pre-pandemic times, a gap between tourists and local residents was partly a result of increased global tourism. A truly engaging travel experience requires energy, effort, and commitment, on the part of the tourist in particular. Facilitating educational experiences in which young people come to appreciate the places and cultures they visit may, in the long run, turn out to be a way of minimising this negative impact and contributing to a more balanced relation between visitors and residents (Richards & Marques, 2018). At the same time, young people are also hosts in their places of residence, as well as future professionals in tourism, culture, leisure, and policymaking.

The Erasmus+ project *CultSense – Sensitizing Young Travellers for Local Cultures* (www.cultsense.com) strives to create awareness of local people and

cultures, as well as to foster healthy travel attitudes, at home and abroad. Promoting more understanding, respect and deep intercultural exchange between tourists and residents can contribute to better experiences for all parties involved.

Valuing different forms of heritage, of oneself and of others, is the first step to understand and overcome differences. Appreciation for intangible cultural heritage is still undervalued, although aspects such as “living like a local” or “getting to know local cultures” are major motivations in youth travel (WYSE, 2018). The CultSense project highlights the importance of this type of heritage, fostering educational outputs, aiming at intercultural dialogue and awareness, involving both teaching staff and students. Young people who appreciate the cultural heritage of places they visit are potentially more appreciated by locals.

Why CultSense?

By working directly with students, the CultSense project aims to contribute to change cultural behaviour in the long-term and address the issue of increased mobility pressures that result in tensions and conflicts between residents and non-locals. Inspired by the framework of TLC (Tender Love and Care), it focuses first on Tourism, Leisure and Culture (TLC) programs, providing tools for educational contexts and disseminating them through different channels and networks.

By sensitizing young people to local cultures, the project aims to contribute to better quality of life for locals, more meaningful experiences for (young) people experiencing cultural heritage and an overall better understanding of European values and identity.

This approach is part of a larger movement which aims to address the issue of visitor pressure. Cultural sensitivity is part of the answer, and the pandemic has brought us closer to the locals and provided an opportunity to pause and consider better ways to do tourism.

On Cultural Sensitivity

What is cultural sensitivity and how is sensitized tourism understood in CultSense?

Although not a new concept, cultural sensitivity has recently seen new developments, in particular in the field of travel and tourism (e.g. Hurst et al., 2020). This is partly due to increased mobility which has brought tensions to light. Adding to this, the debates on (socio-cultural) sustainability have raised more awareness on the way that people travel. The current developments on cultural sensitivity have also influenced travel- and tourism-related fields of policy making, governance structures, bottom-up or citizen initiatives, education and academia. In this context, the notion of cultural sensitivity has gained more attention and is becoming key to think and implement more respectful practices in tourism.

Cultural sensitivity has been extensively discussed within the ARCTISEN project to form a mutual understanding about the concept, particularly in an Arctic context (<https://sensitivetourism.interreg-npa.eu/>). In their research on the Arctic, Viken, Höckert & Grimwood (2021) conclude that cultural sensitivity is not something that is ever finally achieved in tourism, but rather something that is constantly negotiated, and continuously and consistently exercised, through various processes and becomings. Marques (2021), on the



other hand, claims that there is a need to research and develop strategies to increase visitor awareness of local cultures so that tourists appreciate places they visit more. That way they would be appreciated more by the people living in those places. Projects such as ARCTISEN or CultSense, which involve industry and education partners, contribute by creating awareness of local cultures to foster what could be called sensitized tourism – a tourism experience geared towards increasing knowledge and awareness of habits, attitudes, principles, behaviours, beliefs, lifestyles, and rituals of the local people at destinations.

Cultural sensitivity in tourism is first and foremost “a disposition that can be enhanced and mobilized through reflection on one’s own pre-assumptions, cultural norms and values” (Viken, Höckert, and Grimwood 2021, p.3). Given this pre-condition and openness to such reflection, cultural sensitivity can be developed and continuously nurtured, which is the approach adopted in the CultSense project. As a competence, cultural sensitivity can be approached through the combined lenses of tourism, cosmopolitanism, and intercultural competence.

Tourism, at home and abroad, is a form of opening up horizons and expanding views on the Self and the Other(s). Therefore, when considering cultural sensitivity in the context of mobility, the tourism body of knowledge should be included, in particular that of cultural tourism and creative tourism. Utopian or not (Marques, 2021), travelling can be a culturally sensitive experience that opens up new worlds. Hence understanding the tourism experience in the framework of cosmopolitanism makes sense as a second pillar of cultural sensitivity.

Despite the debates surrounding the concept of cosmopolitanism (e.g. Johnson, 2013), with some valuing it and others critiquing it for being a limited and exclusive perspective, the term can prove useful in understanding and studying cultural sensitivity in different contexts. Beyond the polemics, the concept taken in its positive form of “citizen of the world” can offer a fertile ground for reflection, in particular if we ask ourselves with John Urry “are there processes going on which in some ways might be engendering cosmopolitanism?” (Block, 2005, p. 80).

In order to tackle these processes within the tourism context, intercultural competence is key to allowing cultural sensitivity to be developed. Intercultural competence can be understood as the “skills and abilities that an individual needs in order to interact appropriately and efficiently with persons from a different culture (...). (It is) a continuous learning process that is determined by specific experiences, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation” (Scherle and Nonnenmann, 2008, p. 126).

With different studies exploring intercultural competence in the tourism realm (e.g. Fan et al., 2021), it is important to underline that cultural sensitivity is not limited to other cultures or international tourism experiences. Cultural sensitivity allows to look at one’s own culture, and at other cultures at our doorstep or on the other side of the world. People can be tourists in their own city and yet have an open mind, and respectful attitude towards all other elements of the community they visit. It is yet common to see that in many places there is a lack of knowledge on co-habiting communities (consider indigenous communities, ethnic and religious minorities, among others).

Cultural sensitivity is a disposition, an awareness, a mindset, and a competence which can become a fertile ground for a more positive (tourism)

experience. Like cultural sensitivity itself, its study and understanding are also always in progress and subject to evolution and enhancement. This publication is part of that process.

How to read the CultSense Case Collection?

Creating Cultural Understanding Through Travel – CultSense Case Collection is a starting point for sensitizing TLC students and all readers towards local cultures they experience when travelling. To our knowledge, this collection forms the first volume specifically aimed at working on cultural sensitivity. Other materials, courses, reports, videos, among others, have been developed recently by different entities and projects, such as the Iceland Academy, ARTCISEN or CultSense. This ebook is, therefore, another steppingstone in creating a solid body of knowledge on cultural sensitivity.

The case studies have been co-created with and for students and teaching staff. In co-operation with students, the teaching staff collected ideas through brainstorming and developed the case studies to be used in education and training programmes for TLC. The case studies are based on exploring best practices on how shifts in particular dimensions of awareness occur, i.e., what kind of interventions or experiences lead to changes in awareness. These case studies cover a set of different topics, in line with the topics of the videos created within CultSense. The videos have been developed for educational purposes and, together with other materials, can be found at www.cultsense.com. These case studies are part of the learning modules aimed at TLC students, focusing on how to integrate awareness into the tourism experience and on how to align such awareness with local cultures and values. The cases are also focus of attention in the CultSense pedagogical toolkit.

The case studies in this ebook are thought of as a platform for reflection and discussion of different contexts, where cultural sensitivity and an understanding of local settings play a role in the visitors' and locals' experiences. They were written to provide a base for work in the classroom, in particular – but not exclusively – in TLC programs. Each case comes with a suggestion of specific Learning Objectives that can be used to guide the reading and discussion. The case studies start with a story that illustrates some of the issues at hand, followed by questions to prompt reflection and discussion. These can preferably be used in small groups to make students aware of the vast range of underlying issues and to reflect on possible solutions for them. Learning about different cultural settings can be both inspirational and a foundation for expanding knowledge about local cultures in Europe.

Structure of the ebook

In this ebook you will find a series of papers, which can be read out of curiosity, as a leisure activity, for inspiration, for research, for self-reflection, and as educational material in formal and informal educational contexts. The case studies are divided into four sections: Emotions, Culture and Tourism; Tastes of Culture; Spirituality and Sacred Sites; and Engaging with Local Cultures.

The first section deals with various emotions in culture and tourism. Siri Driessen writes about Auschwitz, as an example of a war tourism site, where young visitors deal with mixed feelings, emotions, and confront the moral responsibility of their behaviour. The impact of touristic visits to former war sites remains a point of discussion and the various sensitivities need consideration of visitors as well as site managers. The next case study is set in Amsterdam's Red Light District – De Wallen. Astrid Mörk, Amanda

Brandellero, Lénia Marques, and Siri Driessen discuss the issue of liveability in the area, as well as the need to find a balance between commercial and residential interests. The case study specifically taps into the experiences of female residents. By exploring how women living in the area feel about objectifying and sexualizing gazes, the challenges and tensions that relate to gender, gendered and sexualised public spaces, are highlighted.

The second section approaches (eno) gastronomy as an essential part of the cultural experience. Silvia Aulet, Guilherme F. Rodrigues, and Joaquim Majó explore Catalan gastronomy as a bridge for understanding local cultures. Through an analysis of Catalan gastronomy, including traditional dishes and products of local cuisine, they show how gastronomy is integrated into the local culture. Following this, Goretti Silva, Alexandra I. Correia, Carlos Fernandes, and Mariana Oliveira approach the gastronomic culture of Minho, a region in Portugal, and the Sarrabulho dish as part of the local Portuguese identity. It is suggested that gastronomy provides opportunities to improve the tourist attractiveness of the destination through grassroot, bottom-up approaches to regional development.

The third section discusses emotions of spirituality and sacredness. Peter Björkroth and Maria Engberg examine different aspects of sauna and the process of commercializing the tradition of sauna to suit tourism and modern tourists in Finland in the 21st century. The authors examine this within the framework of Goffman's dramaturgical model of social interaction and MacCannell's model of 'staged authenticity'. Silvia Aulet, Guilherme F. Rodrigues, and Dolores Vidal-Casellas on the other hand, explore different approaches to visitors' perception of World Heritage Sites in Catalonia, Spain, where almost all sacred spaces are related to the Catholic religion. The case study analyses three well-known Catalonian world heritage sites, while considering their different tourism offerings and their functions as religious sites.

In the fourth and final section, Engaging with Local Cultures, Goretti Silva, Alexandra I. Correia, Carlos Fernandes, and Mariana Oliveira explore Erasmus mobility as a culture-led experience. The experiences of incoming Erasmus students to IPVC in Portugal were investigated with the help of a survey clarifying the students' perceptions of the local culture. Mihai Țichindelean, Cosmin Tileagă, Alin Opreana, Flavia Bodi, Delia Beca, Oana Rus, and Ioana-Amalia Ene inspect a country's beauty through the cultural route Via Transilvanica in Romania. The article describes the uniqueness of each of the seven regions presented in the article and explores how this route-based tourism product could impact economically and culturally on the local communities along the route.

Creating Cultural Understanding Through Travel – CultSense Case Collection is part of a larger range of tools developed within the scope of the Erasmus+ project CultSense – Sensitizing Young Travellers for Local Cultures. This volume has of course its limitations, as it offers only cases from the project partner countries, all from Europe. We hope that this is only a starting point and that this body of knowledge will be expanded in the future. The project team hopes that this volume will be a useful basis for sensitizing readers to better understand and respect the norms, values, beliefs and cultures of the places they visit. The CultSense project team could not agree more with Paul Theroux, when he utters that "travel works best when you are forced to come to terms with the place you're in" (Potts, 2011). In line with Theroux, the case studies can serve as tools of reflection for teaching staff, academics and (future) professionals – the case studies offer an opportunity to practise "coming to terms with the place you are in".

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