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Please cite the original version:

Engberg, M. (2023). Co-creating CultSense. *FUI-bloggen* 13.6.2023.



13.06.2023 | Kommentareri

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Co-creating CultSense

Co-creating CultSense – Sensitizing Young Travellers to Local Cultures: Practical Approaches from an Educational Perspective

Sensitizing Young Travellers to Local Cultures: Practical Approaches from an Educational Perspective
The Erasmus+ project [CultSense – Sensitizing Young Travelers for Local Cultures](#) was launched in September 2020 and is set to expire in August 2023. As a member of the international project team, I was in my teaching able to develop meaningful learning experiences by collaborating with students in designing their own learning experiences within the themes of CultSense.

The CultSense project aims to change cultural behaviour of young people in the long-term and address issues of increased mobility pressures, and tensions and conflicts between locals and travellers (so called overtourism). By creating a specialised educational approach to developing more understanding attitudes towards other cultures, the project aims at providing tools for Higher Education students (who account for the biggest share of young travellers) and Higher Education teaching staff.

Co-creating CultSense in education

I strongly believe that co-creating with students enables them to develop confidence, creativity, and critical thinking skills and those skills will hopefully contribute to success in their future workplaces.

Co-creating also enables me as an educator to create meaningful learning experiences for students. The students in my courses became so called pedagogical co-designers (Bovill et al 2016). I was able to create a dialogue between the CultSense project and the students in the tourism courses. I took the students on board the project by introducing the CultSense project and what assignments there were and what my thoughts on them were. I considered students' opinions and their advice when finalizing the course assignments. This did not mean that I let students make all decisions about their learning. There was still structure while including the 'voice' of the students.

By taking small risks and developing opportunities for co-creation, I was able to model my own CultSense learning process for the students. I was transparent in how I was learning together with them. A few students took part in tourism courses one after the other and they became 'experts' in understanding the essence of the project. I could follow their learning process throughout the courses and a blog post on their learning process can be found at <https://www.cultsense.com/news-events/3-students-and-1-project-blogpost-by-jonas-wilperi-and-fredrik/>.

The reflective process is inevitable and a very important part of the learning process. Part of the course assessment was to write publicly accessible blogs. I believe that this encouraged the students to take pride in their work, and showing their efforts in the public domain helps the students to generate a genuine sense of achievement. Two webinars were organized by Novia UAS students in the virtual space SpatialChat. The first webinar was arranged in the spring 2021 for students from the CultSense partner institutions. The European students met online to share information on aspects of their own culture. The target group of the webinar was determined by the international CultSense team, but the aim, content and progress were planned by co-creation with the students. The Novia students' reflections on the webinar and what they learnt from organizing it can be found at: <https://www.cultsense.com/news-events/402-2/>.

The second webinar was organized in the spring 2022. This time the Novia students invited stakeholders from the regional tourism industry in Southwestern Finland along with fellow students to a learning café discussion. Similarly, the webinar was co-created with students of the Event Management course. The students' reflections can be found at <https://www.cultsense.com/news-events/514-2/>.

By the academic year 2022-2023, the CultSense project had developed pedagogical material aimed at Higher Education teaching staff that I was able to use in my teaching. The students in one of my tourism courses also brainstormed ideas and researched possible areas of touristic interest from a Finnish cultural perspective. A case study on the sauna as part of the Finnish intangible cultural heritage and a tourist product was developed by lecturers at Novia UAS into a case study to be used in education for teaching students of tourism, leisure, and culture. The case studies from the partner institutions explore 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 and can be found at <https://www.cultsense.com/academicpublications/casestudies/>. The CultSense Pedagogical Toolkit can be found at <https://www.cultsense.com/tools/cultsense-pedagogical-toolkit/>. The toolkit provides a wide selection of materials for teachers to work on

cultural sensitivity. The toolkit is primarily developed for the fields of tourism, leisure, and culture but the tools can be adapted to a range of topics and fields of interest.

Conclusion

Within the framework of the CultSense project, co-creating assignments together with my students has developed me as an educator, and I want to believe that I have become a more culturally sensitive educator in the process. Co-creating with my students has helped me develop my own thinking patterns and has provided me with an understanding of cultural sensitivity, and a more in-depth approach on how to sensitize young people to local cultures. The more co-creative discussions I had with my students, the better I was able to connect different cultural viewpoints into an entity that shapes and develops my worldview. This deepened understanding will with time be translated into courses on the topic.

It was easy to build an amicable teaching environment where students felt committed and involved. The Finnish students had their own travel experiences, and the Erasmus exchange students were able to relate to their ongoing exchange in the discussions. I sometimes get valuable feedback and one memorable note was from an Erasmus exchange student in her evaluation of a tourism course, where we had worked with material from the CultSense project. "Thank you, Ms. Engberg for helping me grow intellectually and see things from new perspectives." The American travel writer Paul Theroux connects in one of his quotes to my student's comment above. "Travel is an attitude, a state of mind. It is not residence, it is motion."

Attitudes are not set in stone, but they mostly change gradually and slowly with new information. If I as an educator can make a tiny difference in the minds of my students and they communicate that to me, I feel that I have achieved something that makes it worthwhile for me to continue developing myself as an educator.

References

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The blogpost has been reviewed by Novia's editorial board and accepted for publication on 13.6.2023.

Granskat av Novias redaktionsråd