URBAN GOODCAMP

UCITY LAB
CHALLENGE PROGRAMME

City & organisation	Ljubljana, IRI UL and the Faculty of Arts
Urban challenge(s) addressed	Urban mobility, waste management
Name/title of learning practice	UCITYLAB Challenge Programme
Type of case study	Curricular
Programme level learning practice/ case study	Local (city level)

BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

Years of establishment: 2019

Motivation behind intervention
The pilot programme was developed and piloted as part of the UCITYLAB - UniverCity Action Lab project (Erasmus+, Strategic Partnerships) in cooperation between IRI UL and the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology (Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana). The general aim of UCITYLAB pilots was to address urban challenges in a hands-on way, through a problem- and project-based approach. The IRI UL pilots were conceptualised on the basis of two key identified needs: the need for people-centred expertise in initiatives tackling urban sustainability issues and the lack of problem-based learning opportunities for social science and humanities – in particular anthropology – students. While individual study fields may have more opportunity for engaging with urban challenges and urban stakeholders within their study curricula, the availability of project- and problem-based learning experiences in anthropology is rather scarce. In effect, this is narrowing down the general (public) perception of applicability of anthropological knowledge and methods in governance, policy-making, business, or industry, as well as the students' understanding of where their knowledge, competencies and skills could be meaningfully applied. At the same time, it has been increasingly recognised that sustainability challenges require an interdisciplinary approach – one which also incorporates the social dimension into the context of developing sustainable, people-friendly, and smart cities.

General content of intervention
The pilot was implemented within four one-semester master courses over two study years (3 implemented as part of UCITYLAB project, and 1 as a continuation after the project concluded), involving four groups of anthropology students. The key aim of IRI UL's pilot was to integrate the concept of people-centred development approach into anthropology teaching and learning and to incorporate anthropological expertise, research methodology, and theory into the development processes of solutions to urban challenges. With the support of academic and practitioner mentors, student teams were tasked with applying ethnographic methodology to design and co-create research-based project ideas (concepts) for two broadly identified challenges: urban mobility and waste management.

Target group: Students of ethnology and cultural anthropology (Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana).

Length of the course: One semester.

Average number of students attending: 10-15

URBAN CHALLENGES ADDRESSED AND THE CONTEXT

Which urban challenge: Urban mobility; waste management.

Why was it addressed
The two broadly defined challenges were selected between the members of the network of external partner organisations (local governance – municipality, business partner, NGO, research organization, applied research project) – the two urban challenges were most relevant to their core business and identified as having the most potentiall to benefit from student engagement and qualitative research. Likewise, both have either proved as the most relevant for the city where the research was to take place (Ljubljana), both as being challenging, or already providing some innovative solutions.

How is it addressed
The two challenges were addressed first through exploratory research (desk research, interviews), narrowed down by using qualitative research methods (participant observation, interviews, surveys), and on the basis of research results, students teams were tasked with designing a concept for an innovative solution (e.g. a project, a product, a service).

ORGANISATIONAL DESIGN

Stakeholders involved:
- IRI UL (UCITYLAB project partner)

External partner organisations:
- Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana
- The City of Ljubljana (municipality)
- Voyego / Endava (digital mobility services company)
- IPoP (Institute for Spatial Policies, NGO)
- ZRC SAZU (Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts)
- The Invisible Life of Waste: Development of an Ethnography-based Solution for Waste Management in Households (applied research project co-funded by the Slovenian Research Agency)
- Faculty of Electrical Engineering
- FH Joanneum, University of Applied Sciences (Graz, Austria)

Resources required (human, capital, physical)

HUMAN

Academic mentors (1)

Research mentors (2)

External mentors (4)

Students (approx. 50 students involved in all 4 programmes)

FUNDING

Erasmus+, Strategic partnerships (development of challenge programme concept and toolkit, implementation, dissemination etc.). External partners (academic and other mentors) were not compensated financially for their involvement.

PHYSICAL

Lecture rooms for delivery of lectures and workshops (provided by the involved University partners)

LEARNING DESIGN

ECTS:

Contributing to 5 ECTS (the challenge programme was delivered within the course Epistemology of Everyday Life, which includes 30 hours of lectures and 30 hours of seminar work, the challenge programme was integrated into the latter).

Learning objectives

Primarily, the programme was designed to provide anthropology students with an opportunity to:

- enhance their theoretical knowledge by introducing elements of the people-centred development approach, as well as insights into theories of complex systems, emerging technologies etc., which were hitherto not significantly addressed within existing curriculum;
- apply this knowledge and methodology to concrete urban challenges and a safe space to experiment with different research and co-creation techniques;
- strengthen their competencies for working in an interdisciplinary team and with external stakeholders;

gain new knowledge on specific urban challenges through engagement with practitioners from different fields (research, business ...).

Training methodologies:
- Introductory workshop on urban challenges, people-centred development approaches
- Lectures on complex systems, relationship between people and technologies, emerging technologies, interdisciplinary research
- Student team research – fieldwork, participant observation, interviews, analysis (supervised by course instructor and assisted by stakeholder organisations)
- Design of project concepts/ideas (student teams)
- Presentation of team project ideas and stakeholder "jury" feedback at the concluding event
- One- or four-day Co-Creation Workshops on people-centred development approaches and interdisciplinary research in cooperation with the Faculty of Electrical Engineering or FH Joanneum (Graz)

Written assignments for students: individual reflexive essays

Format: One-semester, curriculum-integrated, project- and problem-based learning approach.

Student support systems: Academic and external mentors – lectures, workshops, evaluation and feedback.

Assessment methods

Ongoing assessment through feedback by academic and external mentors;
Final assessment based on individual reflexive essays (reflecting on the process and the content of the course, as well as summing up their research findings and solution concepts).

Integration into curricula (if applicable)

Yes – integrated into the Epistemology of Everyday Life course at the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana (one-semester course / seminar).

HINDERS

In relation to urban challenges: N/A

In relation to delivery of intervention
Engagement of external partners required an effort on the part of involved partner (IRI UL), since the external organisations they were not formally engaged in the project within which the intervention was developed and delivered (UCITYLAB), therefore their participation in activities was voluntary and depended on personal motivation of individuals in these organisations. Expectations of the intensity and frequency of their engagement had to be reasonable.

ENABLERS

In relation to urban challenges
Waste was in particular seen by students as an appealing topic they could easily relate to, and were especially motivated to work on finding innovative solutions for waste reduction, recycling, reuse etc. As there were a number of existing projects applied to the topic of waste in Ljubljana, the baseline data to kick-start their research projects was likewise available.

In relation to delivery of intervention
Personal motivation of involved individuals from stakeholder organisations was crucial (due to lack of funding or an existing structural approach to deliver such a course).
Previous collaboration and established trust between some of the involved stakeholder organisations.
Integration of the programme in exiting curriculum – selection and engagement of students in the programme was not an issue.

REFLECTION

Success factors
Personal motivation and engagement of involved stakeholders (see above).

Engagement of external stakeholders within the curriculum activities (guest lectures, workshops) – motivation of students, positive feedback from students on being able to learn from concrete experience from experts in the field, to learn about implemented projects and the way of working in NGOs, companies, local governance, research institutes etc.

Outputs, outcomes and impact
Challenge programme involved 7 stakeholder organisations, approx. 50 students, and resulted in 14 project ideas, developed by student teams. The structure, concept and content of the UCITYLAB pilot programme, developed over the three iterations, has created valuable impact for the involved stakeholder groups, in terms of expanding the students' knowledge and competencies, building and strengthening collaboration among stakeholder organisations across disciplinary and sectoral boundaries, and integrating problem- and project-based learning into the curriculum. The positive impact was demonstrated in particular by the fact that the programme was continued for the fourth semester, which was beyond the lifetime of the "parent" project (UCITYLAB).

Lessons learned and recommendations
- When intensive engagement of external partners is expected within projects, their formal involvement would be beneficial (in terms of funding, efforts needed to be invested for their engagement etc.).
- Integrating interdisciplinary dimensions within curriculum-bound courses was highly appreciated and positively evaluated by the students in their feedback (e.g. workshops involving students from different fields of study; co-creation sessions; mixed teams).
- Cross-sectoral cooperation within study programmes was likewise seen as highly beneficial (gaining access to experience from the field, opportunity for the students to showcase their skills and knowledge; understanding the applicability of their knowledge and methodology.

Other: N/A

Note: The information contained on this description was extracted from the "Case Study report" (published by the Urban GoodCamp consortium in March 2022), available at: https://www.urbangoodcamp.eu/uploads/1/6/2/1/16214540/ucamp_-_case_study_report_1.pdf)

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