

## **Innovative Approaches to Tourism Education: A Case Study of Collaborative Design Thinking for Sustainable Solutions**

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**Keywords** | Design thinking, International collaboration, Sustainability in tourism, Cultural awareness, Interdisciplinary problem-solving

**Objectives** | In the dynamic landscape of tourism, sustainability emerges as a paramount concern, necessitating comprehensive education in sustainable practices for aspiring professionals. This study focuses on integrating educative innovativeness in the tourism field, recognizing sustainability as an indispensable mandate for the future leaders of the travel industry. The objective is to provide an interdisciplinary understanding of responsible tourism, fostering environmental consciousness and social impact. This was achieved through a one-week face-to-face Summer School design thinking workshop, building on experiential learning from a virtual exchange project that centered on exchanging ideas on sustainable goals and practices. Applying design thinking principles, the workshop addressed global sustainability challenges in restaurant design, aiming to promote cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary collaboration among students enrolled in the following undergraduate degrees: Tourism (Portugal), International Business (Germany) and Interior Design (Canada and USA).

**Methodology** | The research employed a case study approach, focusing on a Design Thinking workshop that brought together 24 higher education students from the aforementioned countries. This workshop, conducted in Germany in May 2023, served as a follow-up to a semester-long virtual exchange project centered around sustainability. Data was collected through a combination of observations, participant reflections, and artifacts generated during the five distinct phases of the workshop. These phases—Orientation, Cultural Awareness, Sustainability & Environmental Issues, Design Thinking Charrette, and Charrette Presentation—provided a rich context for understanding the participants' learning journey.

**Main Results and Contributions** | The multi-phase structure of the interdisciplinary Design Thinking workshop significantly empowered students to deepen their understanding of sustainability, cultural awareness, and interdisciplinary collaboration, specifically within the context of tourism. Notably, during the Design Thinking Charrette phase, students showcased

their capacity to think innovatively by conceptualizing a sustainable culturally themed restaurant. This imaginative concept integrated eco-conscious materials, energy-efficient technologies, and locally-sourced organic ingredients, exemplifying the students' ability to intertwine creative thinking with sustainability principles in the domain of tourism. While these ideas remained conceptual, they served as tangible demonstrations of the students' creative abilities and their adeptness at incorporating sustainability into practical contexts. The diverse academic backgrounds of the participants motivated them to examine sustainability from environmental, social, and economic perspectives, underscoring the workshop's effectiveness in nurturing a comprehensive and holistic understanding of the subject.

**Limitations** | Even though the workshop provides a robust platform for collaborative learning, it is essential to acknowledge the time-constrained nature of the event. The condensed schedule may limit the depth of exploration in some phases, requiring students to engage with complex topics in a focused manner.

**Conclusions** | In conclusion, the interdisciplinary workshop successfully achieved its objectives by empowering students with diverse academic backgrounds to collaboratively explore and conceptualize sustainable solutions within the tourism industry, specifically focusing on restaurant design. The positive feedback and holistic approach demonstrated the workshop's success in fostering creative thinking, interdisciplinary collaboration, and a comprehensive understanding of sustainability within the context of tourism education. This prepares participants to proactively contribute to a more sustainable future in the dynamic and evolving field of tourism, equipping them with valuable skills for leadership and innovation in the industry.

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