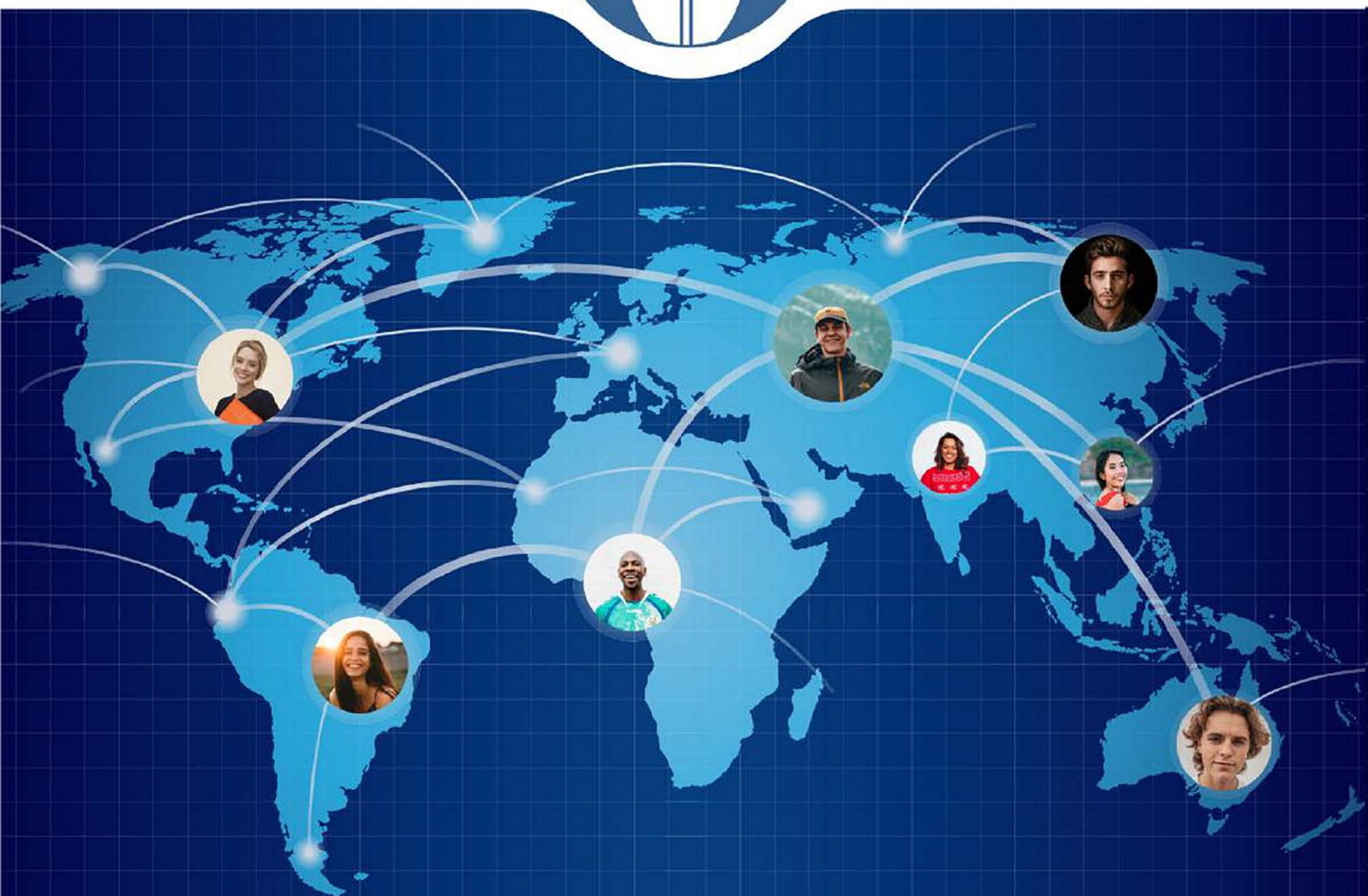




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Intercultural, interdisciplinary design thinking in action: Creating new pathways to inclusive internationalisation with impact during the pandemic

— Prof Marloes Ambagts- van Rooijen and Prof Refiya Scheltinga

“Intercultural, interdisciplinary design thinking in action: Creating new pathways to inclusive internationalisation with impact during the pandemic.”

In the wake of the COVID 19 pandemic, the field of internationalisation of higher education is in rapid transition. Worldwide, academic mobility has been rapidly increasing over the past two decades (Knight, 2020). However, the current traveling restrictions have limited the possibilities for physical international academic mobility abruptly. Over the same two decades, Internationalisation at home (Beelen & Jones, 2015) has been proposed as an inclusive and purposeful approach to Internationalisation. Meaningful cross-cultural interaction and collaboration within the culturally diverse student can be an important resource for global, international and intercultural learning in this context. Nevertheless, the current limited possibilities to meet physically in the domestic campus have impacted activities implemented as part of Internationalisation at home as well. Although the current crisis poses challenges to higher education, it may also provide opportunities and even a necessity to rethink Internationalisation policy and in practice, for example by finding new ways to integrate local, regional, national and global dimensions in the curriculum and by making use of new technological opportunities, and stimulating carbon-neutral forms of mobility.

From emergency remote teaching to purposeful design

The overnight transformation from predominantly face-to-face to online education has been forcing educators to rethink and adjust their educational approach. In many cases, this sudden transition has led to forms of emergency remote teaching, rather than effective online education, which requires careful design and specific pedagogies (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020). In the context of internationalized education, this means that many universities have shifted their focus towards online mobility, virtual exchange, and other online Internationalisation at Home activities to equip their students with global, international

and intercultural competences very quickly. However, internationalized education requires a fundamental review of program content, design, pedagogy and assessment to achieve meaningful intercultural learning (Leask, 2009). Moreover, studies describe the challenges of using technologies to facilitate learning in cross-cultural and cross-national contexts (The Evaluate Group, 2019). All these considerations were at the basis of our design process, when our team set out to design our EXPLICO project in June 2020.

Case study: Interdisciplinary design thinking in action

Anticipating that not all our students might be able to go on exchange in 2021, our programs (International Business and European Studies at The Hague University of Applied Sciences) asked us to join forces to design a shared alternative to our mandatory study exchange. Traditionally, students in both programmes are expected to achieve learning outcomes focused on advanced intercultural competence and personal and professional development in a mandatory study abroad trajectory, which is part of an integrated intercultural competence continuum. Taking our expertise in internationalisation at home, intercultural competence development education and collaborative learning as a starting point, we set out to design a purposeful and solid online alternative for our study exchange.

In a brainstorming session with lecturers, exchange coordinators, management and specialists in Internationalisation, global citizenship and virtual exchange, we explored the outcomes and impact we expected from a solid alternative to a student exchange experience. After formulating our learning outcomes focused on advanced intercultural competence development and personal and professional development, we decided to take an experiential teaching and learning approach based on the intercultural competence development model described by Deardorff (2006).

Exchanging perspectives for local impact

We carefully designed a project, called EXchange Perspectives for Local Impact in Covid times (EXPLICO). We based the design of the project on theory and good practices in virtual collaboration, intercultural collaboration, (online) intercultural teaching and learning, using the design thinking approach (Cross, Dorst & Rozenburg, 1992) as a means to facilitate an authentic, challenging and meaningful international learning experience for all students. To lay the groundwork for intercultural collaboration, we brought our highly diverse students (many of whom were following courses online from their home countries across the world) together in interdisciplinary, intercultural teams. In the first week of the project, the teams got to know each other, completing ice breaker activities exploring team members’



Perspective from The Netherlands

identity, community and experience during the pandemic. Afterwards, the teams were asked to define, investigate and propose solutions to societal problems for beneficiaries in their local communities around the world, based on structured online activities following the phases of the design thinking process. Independently, the student teams collaborated online towards semi-structured weekly deliverables that explicitly required input from all team members' perspectives. As part of this process, we asked the teams to empathize closely with their beneficiaries and continuously consult and involve them in defining their problems and validating their solutions. Every week, the team's coach would join them online to give the students feedback on their deliverables, deepen their reflections and motivate them in their process.

Design thinking to facilitate meaningful intercultural interactions

Throughout the course, we explicitly used the design thinking approach to give the students a framework for meaningful intercultural interaction within the teams and between the teams and their beneficiaries and other stakeholders in their beneficiaries' problem. Additionally, the iterative process continuously made the students address their assumptions and biases when making decisions together and while reviewing these decisions with their beneficiaries and stakeholders. Recognizing that intercultural competence development requires continuous reflection in action, we asked the students to reflect on their intercultural experiences during and after the project, using a guided reflection trajectory. This trajectory is based on the DEAR method (Scheltinga, 2017), an existing model for intercultural reflection we have been using to let students reflect on their study abroad experience. In combining collaborative design thinking with structured reflection in action we purposefully designed the project to leverage the students' diverse perspectives, experiences and networks as much as possible as a means to develop intercultural competences making them aware of their own agency to make a difference in a difficult time and to build an interdisciplinary, and intercultural network in the process.

Lessons learned from EXPLICO

Over the past semester, over 400 students successfully completed the EXPLICO project, proposed many creative and feasible solutions to their beneficiaries' problems and exchanged perspectives with people outside their own bubbles in times of lock down. Looking back on two six-weeks EXPLICO projects, we are glad that we managed to offer over 400 students a solid alternative to their mandatory study abroad in times of global crisis. Additionally, we are even more glad that designing and piloting this

project has made us explore new, purposeful pedagogies for Internationalisation at home (or at a distance) and taught us valuable lessons about inclusive and impactful Internationalisation we will build on in the years to come. We gladly share these lessons, hoping that they inspire you in rethinking your own Internationalisation practices and moving towards more inclusive, sustainable and impactful pathways of Internationalisation in and beyond the pandemic.

1. Interdisciplinary teams can be a rich and accessible learning environment for intercultural learning and perspective taking.
2. Even within the same university, the disciplinary, cultural and geographical diversity of the student population has great potential for Internationalisation at home.
3. Collaborative student-led projects with both a clear structure and substantial room for students' choices, input and focus increase student ownership and inclusive practice.
4. Careful design of collaborative tasks is essential: it is very important to build connections, create a safe space for discussion and facilitate collaboration through course design.
5. The coach is very important for the perceived learning benefits of a project such as this one. Motivation and engagement seem to be key roles of the coach.
6. The design thinking process can be an excellent framework to support meaningful and authentic intercultural interaction and to explicitly leverage diversity and address biases and assumptions in the process.
7. Connecting to real-life beneficiaries and creating a concrete impact on their lives may raise resistance in students at first, but can provide a valuable, authentic and motivating learning environment for developing global competencies - and a sense of accountability and agency that goes beyond the project in the long run.

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