What is Virtual Exchange?

LU workshop – 23 April 2024

Timeline

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The creation of regional hubs for Virtual Exchange

| 1998 | 2003 | 2006 | 2011 | 2014 | 2018 |

Telecollaboration

Soliya

SUNY COIL Center

Virtual Exchange Coalition

Stevens Initiative

Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange

Universities start institutionalising Virtual Exchange

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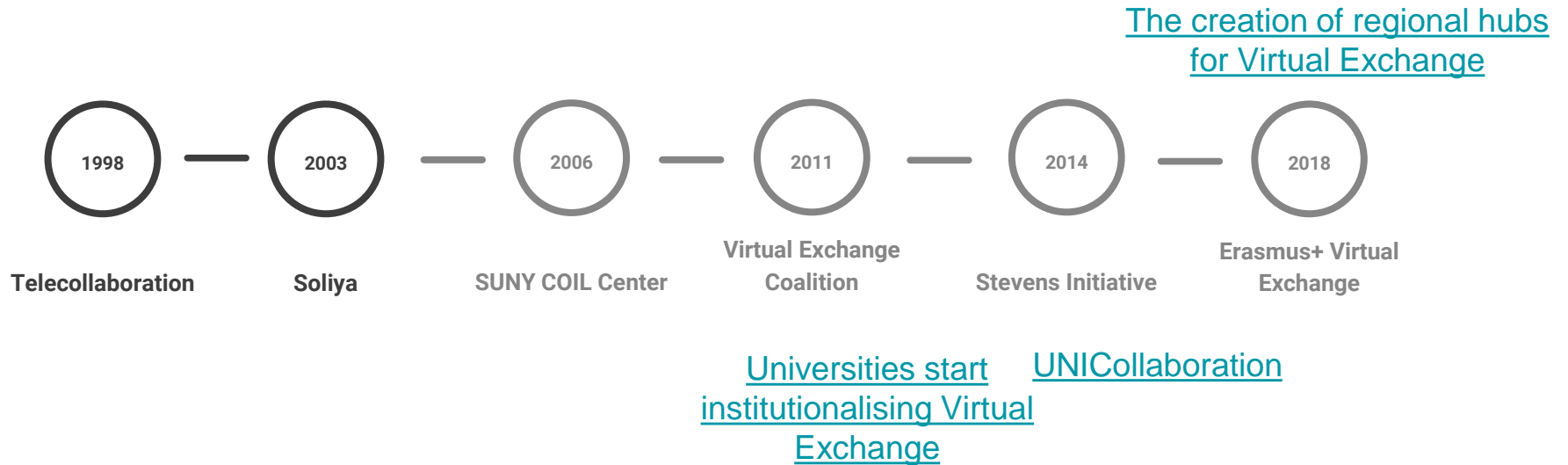
What is Virtual Exchange?

What is Virtual Exchange?

- Pedagogical approach developed over the last 3 decades from experience in the field of language education, educational exchange and study abroad
- Technology-enabled, people-to-people, sustained over a period of time
- Use of media platforms to enable deep, interactive social learning (not simply to deliver content)
- Interactions between students are facilitated to ensure they are meaningful
- Promotes reciprocity and allows for equity and inclusiveness
- Prepares, deepens, and extends physical exchanges, and can fuel new demand for physical mobility

What Virtual Exchange is NOT

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Virtual Exchange	Other forms of online learning
Emphasis on people to people, intercultural dialogue and/or collaboration	Emphasis on online access to university course content (video lectures etc.)
Educators/facilitators guide interaction between learners in different locations	Educators provide educational content to learners
Intercultural learning is one of the main educational outcomes *in addition to* course content	Mastery of course content is main (and sometimes only) educational outcome
Usually includes synchronous video communication with peers in small groups	Communication is predominantly asynchronous

Virtual Mobility vs Virtual Exchange UNICollaboration

Virtual mobility "the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) to obtain the same benefits as one would have with physical mobility but without the need to travel" (Bijnens, Boussemaere, & Rajagopal, 2006, 20 p. 5) and focuses on the **cooperation of educational institutions as well as the recognition of achievements**.

"**Virtual exchange** [...] is centred on the **interaction and communication** of geographically separated participants (Virtual Exchange Coalition, 2019). Instead of access to educational offers of cross-border universities, the focus is clearly on **exchange, competence building, and interaction in small groups** (European Commission, 2018). Administrators implementing these concepts in higher education are confronted with a variety of organisational, didactic, and administrative challenges." (Schoop, Clauss & Askbar Safavi, 2020, pp. 19-20)

Different Models of Virtual Exchange UNICollaboration

a) Co-Designed

- 2+ professors (and their support staff) adapt parts of their existing courses to host a period of collaboration between students
- training, support and mentoring are recommended

b) Ready-made

- experienced VE providers (e.g. Soliya and Sharing Perspectives Foundation) offer programmes on various topics
- individual students may join, or one of these programmes can be integrated into the curriculum

Co-Designed VE

Terminology

COIL
Collaborative Online International Learning

Telecollaboration

Global Classroom

International Virtual Classroom

Global Learning Experience

Example

Medical Anthropology
SUNY New Paltz (NY, USA)
(1) experience working with people from a different culture
(2) gain experience working in a different medium (producing audio podcasts rather than a traditional research/term paper)
(3) broaden the perspective offered in the course (which focuses principally on examples of social inequality and its impact on health in the United States)

Media Studies: Podcast Production
American University of Cairo (Egypt)
(1) gain appreciation for research on a topic that they probably won't get to select
(2) work on a collaborative project and develop soft skills
(3) gain an understanding of how the media production process works

Tasks

Step 1

- Choose topic, get to know one another

Step 2

- Research and local interviews

Step 3

- US students edit final content, Egyptian students produce podcasts

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I think that my cultural background (I am White, middle class, and queer) causes me to steer towards the social justice and human rights-based aspects of the course. I steer towards the topics of reproductive justice, sexual health, and gender-based violence. Interpreting the course content in this manner, it was a bit jolting to realize the extent to which my partner did not interpret the assignment in this manner. A middle ground had to be reached in the content of the project, and that included avoiding discussing Egypt's policy towards homosexuality, and simply focusing on how it treats those with a "homosexual" disease. (POD-US-8, mid-COIL)

As I've mentioned before, the homosexuality part had me concerned at first because this is an unacceptable issue in Egypt. But my partner convinced me to approach it professionally because it's a very important part of our topic, which is AIDS. (POD-EG-10, mid-COIL)

SUNY COIL Stevens Initiative Assessment White Paper (Guth & Helm 2017)

Benefits of Co-Designed VE

Students

- Gain knowledge regarding course content through peer perspectives
- Learn to collaborate online in international teams and also acquire other transversal soft skills

Professors

- Add an enriching international component to their course
- Customise a VE to their specific desired learning outcomes
- Learn innovative pedagogical approaches to education
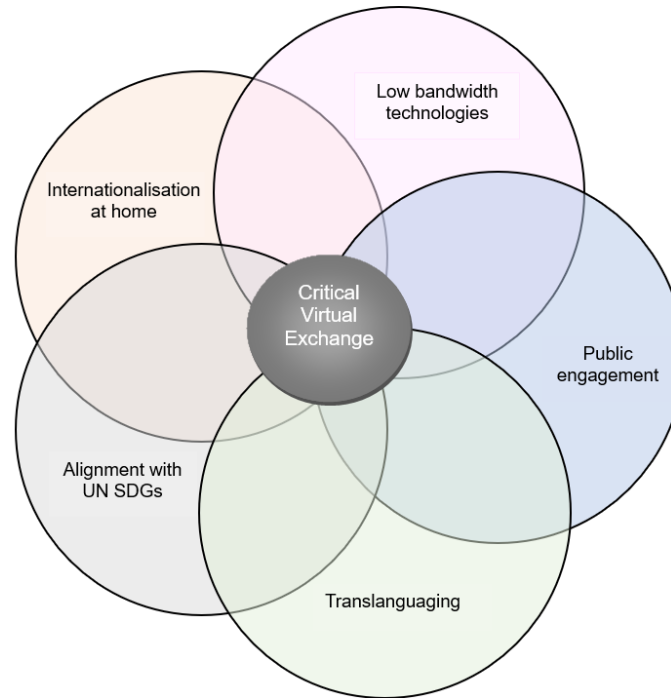- Strengthen partnerships

But …

- VE practices are still electives available to some students only (EVOLVE Project Team, 2020)
- VE-based IaH is not inherently equitable and inclusive (O'Dowd & Beelen, 2021)
- can reproduce, or perpetuate existing exclusion, even create new, digital inequalities (Satar & Hauck, 2021)
- prone to Western hegemonies (Helm, 2020)

    - the terms under which the exchanges take place, can be influenced by

    - the teaching partners' academic positions

    - their linguistic competence, the linguistic competence of their students

    - access to and experience in the use of technology

    - institutional constraints (lack of support, acknowledgement, rewards)

    - gender, race, age

    - geo-political challenges

Critical VE

- use of low-bandwidth technologies

- exchanges which specifically target student populations traditionally underrepresented in study abroad and/or IaH programmes (from low socio-economic backgrounds)

- alignment of VE project outcomes with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

- inclusion of local outreach activities, i.e. student contact with local businesses, NGOs, and non-profit organisations as part of VE projects
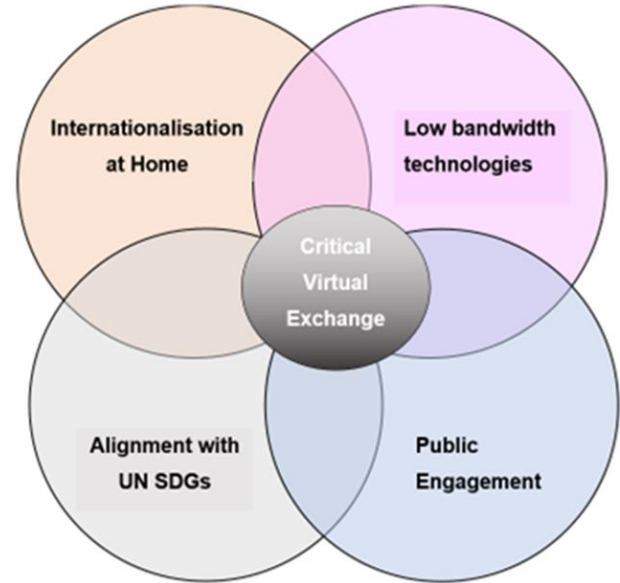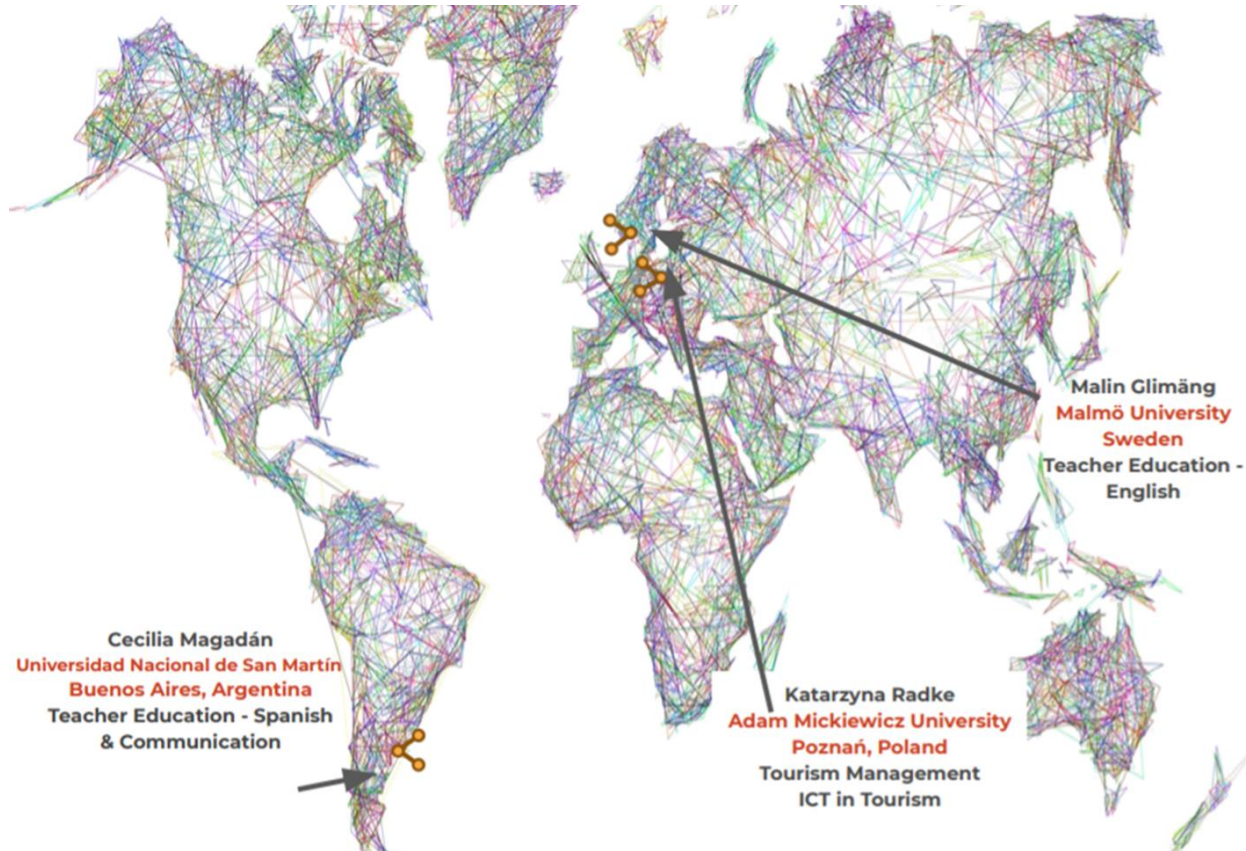
CVE: a framework

Critical Virtual Exchange – A Framework (Hauck, 2023)

An example: Reading the City

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**Adam Mickiewicz University
Poznań, Poland**
Tourism Management
ICT in Tourism

Reading the City: first iteration

This project encourages you to develop your critical, creative and digital skills by collaboratively **studying the city as text**.

The focus is on critical multiliteracy and the promotion of intercultural communicative competence through first-hand experience of virtual exchange in cross-cultural groups.

The task sequence involves popular, critical and personal studies of place. You will explore the potentials of multimodal meaning-making by **comparing and discussing official visitor websites depicting your respective cities**.

First you **focus on the particular stories and values that these websites promote**.

Then you select and share some **examples of how your cities figure in the news and in aesthetic texts such as literature, poetry or music**.

The aim is to **identify some controversial issue specifically linked to your city**. This could concern topics such as **segregation, poverty, crime, different kinds of prejudice, pollution**, etc.

The project is linked to the United Nations' sustainable development Goal 11: "Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable."
https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/envision2030-goal11.html

Reading the City: second iteration

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SDG 11: *"Make cities [...] inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable"*

VE Question: How is goal 11 addressed in your city? Where are opportunities/challenges?

VE task: Co-creating public **sustainability campaigns** in VE teams

Investigating the world → Recognizing perspectives → Negotiating ideas → Taking action (OECD, 2018)

This kind of project can really open up other ways of thinking. You see the bigger picture and that you are actually a global citizen.

MULTIMODAL PRODUCTIONS/CAMPAIGNS

Ready-made Exchanges

Interactive Open Online Courses

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Characteristics:

- Based on a theme, e.g. the environment
- Developed in collaboration between Sharing Perspectives Foundation and participating educators to develop curriculum and short video lectures
- 8-10 weeks
- Weekly assignments (videologue and reflection)
- Weekly 2-hour facilitated interactive video sessions in small groups of students from other participating universities
- Facilitators provide educators with feedback on student participation and performance

Example: Climate Movements

- Duration: 9 weeks
- Language: English
- Details
  - 160 hours in total (contact hours + assignments), equal to 6 ECTS
  - 2-4 hours weekly preparation and assignments
  - 2-hour weekly online group sessions
  - Video-project assignment & optional further readings

CliVEx: Climate Virtual Exchange - Sharing Perspectives Foundation

Benefits of Ready-made VE

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Participants

- Truly diverse, cross-cultural exposure

- Learner-led process adapting to each group's needs

Participating institutions

- Exchange implementation taken care of, including technical support

- Curriculum with specific learning goals

- Can be developed ad-hoc