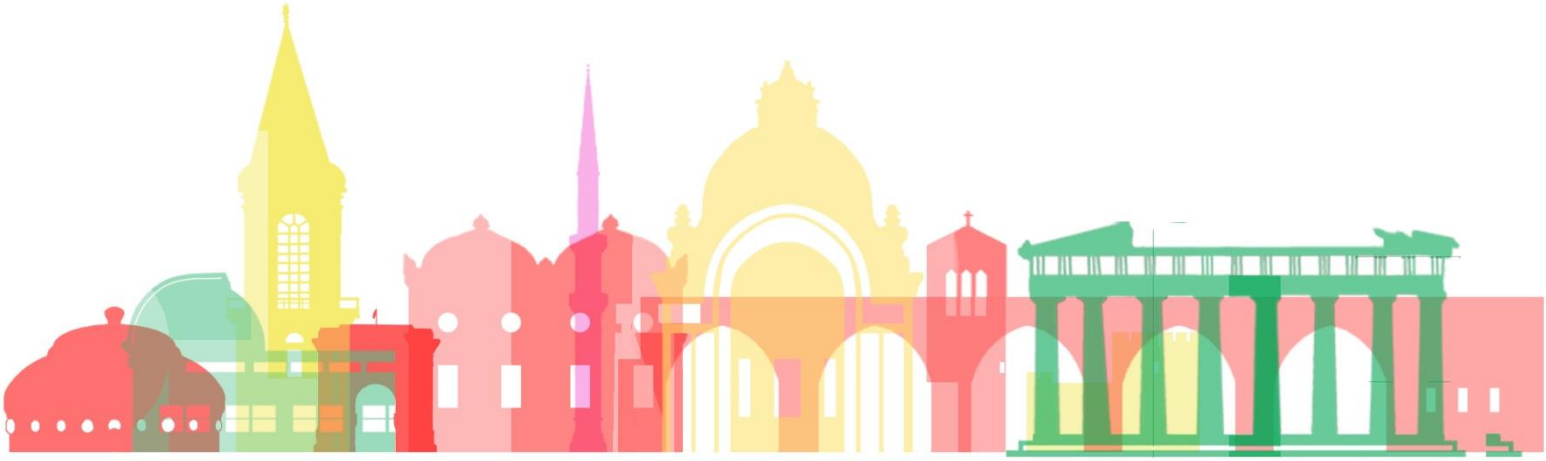
PALIMPSEST CITIES

GAMIFICATION AND STORYTELLING FOR ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY AND CULTURAL HERITAGE AWARENESS

ÇOK KATMANLI ŞEHIRLER: MIMARLIK TARIHI VE KÜLTÜREL MIRAS FARKINDALIĞI IÇIN OYUNLAŞTIRMA VE HIKÂYE ANLATICILIĞI

Recommendations Report

Written by: Klaudia Allajbej (INNOVED)



INDEX

INTRODUCTION

The “Palimpsest Cities: Gamification and Storytelling for Architectural History and Cultural Heritage Awareness” project is a higher education initiative focused on promoting inclusion and diversity across educational fields. The primary outcome is an innovative, inclusive, learner-centered curriculum exploring the architectural history and cultural heritage of multi-layered cities through interdisciplinary, hybrid methodologies.

The project consortium carefully developed the Palimpsest Cities course and initially tested it at Alanya Hamdullah Emin Pasa University and Istanbul Technical University. Additionally, some course activities and modules were trialed in workshops and dissemination activities conducted by the project partners.

The course was first tested at the two universities during the winter semester of 2023. Surveys and focus groups involving both students and instructors were conducted to gather feedback for course improvement. The revised version of the Palimpsest Cities course was then implemented in the summer semester, accompanied by a similar evaluation process to assess its effectiveness.

The Center for Education and Innovation (INNOVED), the lead partner responsible for evaluating the test lectures and implementations, synthesized this report to compare the results from the first and second evaluations of the Palimpsest Cities course and to provide recommendations.

DISCLAIMER

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.

COMPARISON BETWEEN THE FIRST AND SECOND EVALUATION

COMPARISON OF CONCLUSIONS FROM PRE-TEST QUESTIONNAIRES

The conclusions from the first evaluation:

Instructors from AHEP and ITU Universities displayed varying levels of knowledge about their university's region's (Alanya and Istanbul) history and cultural heritage. Their teaching styles also varied, with many preferring a blend of conventional and interactive methods. Instructors expressed concerns about student enjoyment, workload, timing, and the elective nature of the course, yet they showed openness to receiving new inputs. They were comfortable using a variety of digital tools for educational purposes but had concerns about program intensity and time management.

Students exhibited varied satisfaction with conventional lectures, with significant interest in using mobile applications and digital tools for learning. Most students had visited historic locations in their university's region but mainly as tourist attractions. Learning preferences leaned towards field trips, stories, and hands-on activities, with mixed awareness and interest in gamification. Many students were familiar with storytelling and showed varying degrees of interest in creating digital stories or films.

The conclusions from the second evaluation:

The analysis of AHEP and ITU University students indicates a strong preference for interactive and digital learning tools. Most students are satisfied with conventional lectures and show significant interest in using mobile applications and digital tools for education. They express high interest in exploring historical landmarks, with a majority having visited such locations. While students possess moderate knowledge of architectural history and cultural heritage, there is notable interest in incorporating games into learning despite limited exposure to gamification. There is substantial enthusiasm for creating digital stories or films as part of the learning process, and all students anticipate that the Palimpsest Cities course will enhance their understanding of the region's cultural heritage.

COMPARISON OF CONCLUSIONS FROM AFTER-TEST QUESTIONNAIRES

The conclusions from the first evaluation:

The conclusions from the first evaluation indicate that instructors from AHEP and ITU University observed a puzzling shift in knowledge levels about the history and cultural heritage of their university's area. However, most instructors found the Palimpsest Cities course positively influenced their teaching styles, making them more interactive. Gamification techniques were widely approved, with increases in perceived knowledge levels. Storytelling's effectiveness in student learning received mixed reviews. Instructors acknowledged the importance of combining traditional methods with innovative approaches and showed openness to incorporating new tools like the "Timeline Travel mobile application". Concerns were raised about the course's intensity, with suggestions to cancel certain modules and use the initial weeks more efficiently. A balanced approach to gamification was recommended.

Regarding the Timeline Travel module, there were concerns about students copying content from resources instead of creating it.

Students displayed positive shifts in knowledge about architectural history and cultural heritage, with their understanding levels increasing. Satisfaction with the introductory lecture varied, but most students understood the project goals and methods. Gamification concepts were well-understood, and field trips were highly praised for aiding comprehension of gamification techniques. The Timeline Travel app received mixed reviews, while storytelling techniques were widely understood and enjoyed. Preferences for digital story creation varied, and the "City-on-Trial" workshop was well-received. Feedback on the "Model of the Palimpsest City" activity was generally positive, though some suggested focusing on smaller areas for detailed research. Students preferred a mix of conventional lectures and the Palimpsest Cities course. Overall, the course was found engaging, with field trips and hands-on activities being particularly appreciated. Suggestions for improvement included shorter model-making activities, better use of the Timeline Travel app, and a simplified curriculum.

The conclusions from the second evaluation:

The conclusions of the second evaluation provide insights into the effectiveness and challenges of the Palimpsest Cities course during its second implementation. The course swap between universities received mixed feedback, with positives including the application of teaching methods in different contexts, increased student enthusiasm, and enhanced learning about historical structures in Alanya and Istanbul. Challenges included limited on-site visits, preparation difficulties, and reliance on secondary resources for digital storytelling. Gamification techniques were effective, but a balanced approach was recommended. Storytelling was generally viewed positively, and opinions on the "Timeline Travel" app varied. The "City-on-Trial" workshop was effective, while the "Model of Palimpsest City" activity had mixed reviews. The curriculum was considered overly intense by some, and a combination of traditional methods with the Palimpsest Cities course was preferred.

Key points for course improvement included positive feedback on the revised curriculum, the successful Treasure hunt module, and the need for better preparation in activities like the "City-on-Trial" workshop. While undergraduates showed enthusiasm and active participation, challenges included finding new topics for the Timeline Travel app and maintaining focus during games. Suggestions for improvement included creating a city library for students, gamifying discussion sessions, and implementing modules interchangeably. Concerns were raised about course swapping and the need for more site visits during digital storytelling and model-making activities. Despite challenges, the course was deemed beneficial, with room for enhancements.

Students showed an increased understanding of architectural history and cultural heritage, with notable improvements in knowledge levels. Satisfaction with introductory and closing lectures was high, and most students fully understood the course goals and methods. Familiarity with gamification and storytelling techniques improved, and field trips were unanimously enjoyed. The Timeline Travel app received positive feedback for its interface and educational value. Students enjoyed creating digital stories and participating in the "City-on-Trial" workshop, which deepened their engagement. While opinions on the "Model of the Palimpsest City" activity were mixed, it was generally well-received. A mix of conventional

lectures and the Palimpsest Cities course was preferred for its balanced approach. Overall, the course feedback was positive, with students appreciating the well-designed content and engaging lectures. Suggestions included joint courses with other students and more hands-on learning experiences. Students expressed gratitude for a good semester and enjoyed the course.

COMPARISON OF CONCLUSIONS FROM FOCUS GROUPS

The conclusions from the first focus group – AHEP Instructors:

In the first focus group summary instructors from AHEP highlighted the effectiveness of gamified field trips and activities such as the treasure hunt in engaging students. Digital storytelling and city-on-trial activities were recognized for enhancing students' understanding of cultural heritage. Both instructors and students expressed positive sentiments about these activities, indicating their success in creating an engaging and educational learning environment.

Instructors observed positive changes in student behavior and appreciation of historic sites, noting increased awareness of different layers of the city and a deeper understanding of preservation perspectives.

The discussion revealed insights into the use of gamification and storytelling in architectural history education. Instructors expressed a desire for more courses to incorporate these techniques, citing increased student motivation as a valuable outcome. Points-based motivation during field trips was particularly effective in encouraging student participation.

Instructors discussed the evolution of their perceptions regarding gamification and digital storytelling techniques, recognizing the need for more student-centered approaches. They emphasized the value of enjoying the lesson as a teacher and the potential for increased student engagement through these techniques.

Suggestions for improving the course included providing more guidance at the beginning of activities, adjusting the duration of activities, and fine-tuning the overall course structure. Challenges encountered included a smaller-than-expected number of students and the perception of the course's importance. A proposal to increase the course's ECTS was pending approval, indicating a commitment to addressing challenges and enhancing the course's significance.

The conclusions from the second focus group – AHEP Instructors:

In the second focus group summary, instructors discussed the second implementation of the Palimpsest Cities course, emphasizing the benefits of the course swap between AHEP and ITU universities. This swap allowed students to explore Istanbul's architectural history firsthand, an opportunity not previously available in their regular courses. However, being away from Istanbul for most of the course duration posed challenges for activities like digital storytelling and model making, as students relied heavily on internet resources rather than firsthand observations, affecting the quality of their work.

Despite these challenges, the implementation of gamification and storytelling techniques showed promising results. Students demonstrated increased creativity and engagement, particularly when creating game boards reflecting Istanbul's cultural heritage. This approach made learning more enjoyable and enhanced their ability to connect with historic sites on a deeper level. Instructors noted that storytelling made architectural history more memorable and meaningful compared to traditional methods focused solely on facts.

Reflecting on the curriculum's intensity, instructors acknowledged adjustments made from the previous semester to reduce its impact on students. While the course remained demanding, especially compared to theoretical courses, the active engagement required was integral to the course's objectives. A key improvement suggested for future implementations was providing more structured preparatory readings and activities before field trips to better prepare students and enhance their overall learning experience.

The conclusions from the first focus group – ITU Instructors:

In the first focus group summary, ITU instructors discussed various aspects of the course, emphasizing the effectiveness of reflection tasks after field trips, such as drawing exercises. These tasks were praised for enhancing student engagement and attention to detail. Field trips, treasure hunts, acting, and drawing activities were particularly enjoyed by students, leading to positive changes in student behavior and increased awareness of cultural heritage. While the use of gamification and storytelling in architectural history education received mixed opinions, instructors agreed on the importance of balancing entertainment with education. They shared insights into their evolving perceptions, noting that student engagement and learning outcomes were significantly improved through these methods. However, challenges such as a packed curriculum and student dropouts were discussed, prompting instructors to adapt and reduce content to make the course more manageable. Suggestions for improvement included creating a more balanced course, reducing the number of modules, and incorporating more theoretical components. The discussion concluded with an emphasis on the need for a mixture of methods, including theoretical knowledge, to enhance the learning experience and improve student connections with historic sites.

The conclusions from the second focus group – ITU Instructors:

The second focus group summary focused on the second implementation of the Palimpsest Cities course, which included a course exchange with AHEP University. This exchange session, conducted in Alanya, involved master's and PhD students, while the basic course was implemented in Istanbul with undergraduates. The course exchange was deemed ineffective, as it contradicted the project's primary objective of fostering a deep connection with one's own city. The inability to revisit the field trip places limited students' opportunities for thorough engagement with Alanya's cultural heritage and sites. Despite these logistical challenges, gamification and storytelling significantly increased student interest, particularly among undergraduates. The treasure hunt game was notably successful, inspiring students to incorporate similar games into their presentations. However, instructors stressed that games should serve as a medium for learning rather than becoming the primary focus. The current semester's structure was considered manageable, featuring five main modules and well-spaced assignments, which allowed students to choose between creating a film or a model for

their final assignment. This flexibility encouraged thoughtful engagement and higher-quality work throughout the semester. Nevertheless, the primary challenge identified was the distance to the target field, which limited opportunities for follow-up visits and forced students to rely heavily on initial visual materials and internet resources. Instructors suggested avoiding course swaps and focusing on local activities to better align with the project's goals. Additionally, refining the timeline travel module and integrating collaborative workshops with local citizens or students were recommended to enhance the course.

The conclusions from the first focus group – AHEP Students:

In the first summary, AHEP students reflected on their experiences with memorable site visits, gamification, and storytelling techniques. The students expressed joy in exploring historical buildings and appreciated the innovative approach of using storytelling and video creation, which made learning more enjoyable and instructive compared to traditional methods. They particularly enjoyed the storyline and field trips, indicating positive engagement with these components of the course. The course encouraged collaboration and teamwork, especially during the final model-making activity, which the students found valuable despite the challenges of group work. They praised the unique concept of learning through practical experiences rather than traditional exams, which allowed them to work on meaningful projects. However, they faced challenges such as the limited availability of information for the Timeline activity and the difficulties of group work, with some students preferring individual activities. Constructive feedback included suggestions for more accessible information and adjustments to group activities. Personal challenges included managing the workload and balancing the course with other academic responsibilities.

The conclusions from the second focus group – AHEP Students:

The second summary focused on the students' experiences during the second implementation of the Palimpsest Cities course, which included a course exchange with ITU University. Students traveled from Alanya to Istanbul, experiencing varied historic sites, with some visiting iconic locations for the first time. They emphasized the educational value and personal impact of these site visits, which facilitated learning through course activities. The use of gamification and storytelling was unanimously appreciated, as these methods significantly enhanced engagement and focus. Students found the interactive nature of these techniques made learning more enjoyable and memorable, encouraging deeper research and collaboration. The field trip to Istanbul was identified as the most impactful activity, offering direct exposure to the historic and cultural context of the city and reinforcing classroom knowledge. Collaboration and teamwork were integral during activities such as the "City on Trial" week, fostering a sense of community and shared learning. Students suggested improvements such as having an introductory session about the sites they would visit in Istanbul to better prepare for the trip and aligning the course schedule to avoid conflicts with other demanding courses. Challenges included managing the time-intensive nature of digital storytelling and model-making activities, which led to fatigue and difficulty maintaining focus. Students overcame these challenges by simplifying their approaches and adjusting work strategies, though further scheduling adjustments and preparatory information were recommended to alleviate these difficulties.

The conclusions from the first focus group – ITU Students:

In the first summary, ITU students discussed their motivations for enrolling in the course, which initially had conventional expectations but quickly transformed due to its unique approach involving international collaboration, gamification, and experiential learning. Memorable experiences included a treasure hunt game, which, despite being challenging, led to the discovery of new historical places. The students found gamification and storytelling to be effective tools for engagement, with activities like the treasure hunt providing comprehensive and enjoyable learning experiences. The course encouraged collaboration and teamwork, fostering a sense of collegiality among the students as they worked on models and participated in various activities. Success was measured by gaining theoretical knowledge about Istanbul, discovering hidden aspects of the city, and recognizing the importance of teamwork and alternative learning methods beyond traditional lectures. Suggestions for improvement included better structuring of model-making sessions and balancing them with sightseeing activities. Challenges noted included a drop in the number of participants due to the course's selectivity and initial concerns about the workload.

The conclusions from the second focus group – ITU Students:

In the second summary, ITU students participated in the focus group, which focused on the second implementation of the Palimpsest Cities course. This swap of the courses provided architecture students with an opportunity to explore Alanya's historical and cultural heritage in depth. Most students had never visited Alanya before, and even those who had experienced the city in a more detailed way. Motivations for enrolling included the educational field trip, learning about ancient historical contexts, and applying gamification in architectural history. Erasmus students found it an exciting opportunity to explore beyond Istanbul and engage in interdisciplinary and experiential learning. Memorable experiences included visits to historical sites in Alanya, enriched by the guidance of local experts. Gamification and storytelling techniques were highly effective in engaging students, with activities like designing a board game about historical sites deepening their understanding and making learning enjoyable. Collaboration and teamwork were strongly promoted, which was a notable shift from the usual preference for individual work. The hands-on experience of visiting historical sites significantly enhanced students' understanding and retention of information. Suggestions for improvement included facilitating interactions with previous course participants, involving local academicians for in-depth presentations, and creating supplementary materials like podcasts. The main challenge encountered was managing extensive readings for the City on Trial project. Peer support and resource sharing were crucial in overcoming this difficulty.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Provide structured preparatory readings and activities before field trips. This will help students gain a foundational understanding and enhance their engagement during hands-on activities.
- Consider making certain modules optional or offering alternative assignments to cater to different learning preferences.
- Engage local academicians and experts for detailed presentations during field trips to provide in-depth context and enhance the learning experience of your students.

- Establish a resource library with materials related to the course content, including previous student projects, local historical information, and supplementary multimedia resources to support ongoing learning.
- Optimize the schedule to prevent conflicts with other demanding courses.
- Organize joint workshops with other departments, such as history, art, or urban planning, to provide diverse perspectives and enhance collaborative learning.
- Organize public exhibitions showcasing student projects, digital stories, and models. This can increase public awareness and appreciation of cultural heritage.