

Actually Being There: the cultural experience workshop

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Abstract

For the first time, the IWIPS conference will take place outside Europe, the US or Canada. Taking place this year in Southern Mexico, in the beautiful city of Mérida and its surroundings, this workshop is an opportunity to immerse oneself systematically into the richness and diverse variety of its culture. The workshop will use practices and techniques of visual ethnography in order to capture, through digital photography, daily life scenes and details which would give us an outsider look into the local and inner culture, and along with its posterior analysis, the idea to better understand the object of study.

1 Introduction

Based on the successful series of photography books entitled “One Day in a Life of a City”, in which famous photographers flocked into a city taking pictures for a whole day in order to capture both the daily as the unusual scenes of a city, this workshop will use the same technique during the workshop day in the city of Mérida and its surroundings.

It is rather interesting to discover that, according to Fig 1., culture could be considered as an iceberg, with a visible part (explicit culture) and an invisible part (tacit culture).

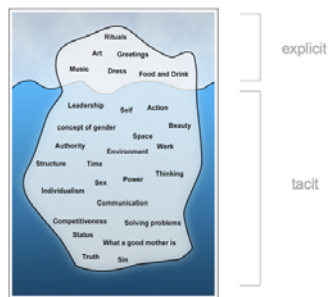


Fig. 1 Culture seen as an iceberg

Being a tourist travelling through a country, on a normal holiday, one can easily spot the visible explicit part of a culture (music, rituals, dress code, food and drink). However, in order to discover the invisible part of culture, one must immerse into the culture, thus by living on it or by careful study.

2 Visual Ethnography

Sarah Pink describes ethnography as a methodology, as an approach to experiencing, interpreting and representing culture and society that informs and is informed by sets of different disciplinary agendas and theoretical principles. For visual ethnography, that means incorporating visual methods for data gathering and analysis in the work of ethnography. Firstly, we will use digital photography as a way to collect and preserve the record of observations.

Secondly, the collected data produced by the culture will be studied, trying to make sense and explain the observed images and mementos represented. AS we expect the majority of the participants would be foreigners to the local culture, details would be easily spotted for the trained eye. Local knowledge from the organiser and volunteer assistants would help on the images interpretation.

Lastly, each participant's results will be communicated to the others by a slideshow of images and their interpretation helping us to apply knowledge by producing one or more visual ethnographies.

3 Objectives

The workshop aims to reach the following goals:

- Explore the basis of visual ethnography and digital photography interesting to the workshop

- Categorise and organise the themes and subjects that would be of interest for the workshop according to the participants.
- On a field trip, out in the city of Mérida and its surroundings, participants will record data through digital photography (video could be considered as well).
- Analysis of the recorded data. Each participant will interpret or highlight each image useful for the workshop; will create slideshow with meaningful images. An interpretation is expected.
- Group discussion on the interpretation of the images in the context of the culture
- Obtain conclusions, hopefully to better understand the hidden part of the culture iceberg through the experience from the workshop
- Enjoy the culture!

4 Format of the workshop

4.1 Workshop organisation

The workshop will last one day with two sessions of 1.5hrs during the morning and one more in the afternoon. The workshop begins with a short introduction to the topic by the workshop organiser. Elements of digital photography will be taken into consideration for the benefit of the participants, in order to establish a common ground for them. Then, participants will be instructed to go on a field trip to capture images and stills of the daily life local culture which will help us to understand its inner characteristics and discover and explain as much details as possible.

Finally, participants will be requested to prepare a brief PowerPoint presentation of his/her observations for the group to share. The group's presentations will be then the basis for conclusions for the workshop.

During the final session in the afternoon the results will be brought together and structured for further publication.

4.2 Participant Selection

The participants to the workshop will be selected based on their interest on the subject, encouraging those whom have experience in such projects and those who are keen interested in discovering the local culture during the congress. The number of participants is limited up to 20.

4.3 Pre-Workshop activities

Each workshop participant is requested to come along with a digital camera (any model, any characteristic with a decent resolution, eg 3-5 megapixels, will do). A laptop with Microsoft PowerPoint is encouraged, but not necessary for the workshop.

4.4 Target audience

The goal is to bring together industry practitioners as well as academic researchers with a diverse cultural background dealing with issues in cultural immersion, internationalisation and localisation of products, culture and psychology, linguistics, cultural issues of technology, usability and user interface design.

4.5 Expected outcomes and publication

The discussed results of the workshop would serve as a first initial guideline into the Mexican culture of this area. Therefore a further publication in form of an article e.g. in the SIGCHI Bulletin is taken into account.

4.6 Technical Requests

During the workshop a data projector, flip charts, pens, wireless Internet access and a black board is required. Each participant will be required to bring his/her own digital camera, and present his/her final results with a presentation software (eg Microsoft's PowerPoint).

5 Organiser background

Mario A Moreno Rocha is a full time researcher and lecturer of Human-Computer Interaction in the Universidad Tecnológica de la Mixteca in Oaxaca, México. With compressive experience on workshops organisation and teaching, Mario has worked together with Dr Christian Sturm on trans cultural projects and has a deep knowledge of Mexican culture through travel and writing.

6 References

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