Practice Papers

Using web 2.0 in higher tourism education

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ABSTRACT

This practice paper provides knowledge and inspiration on the integration of web 2.0 technologies in tourism higher education. The integration of web 2.0 in higher education rests on socio-cultural learning theories and important elements in a web 2.0 educational design are interaction, joint creation of content, critical thinking and collaboration between students and teachers both face-to-face and online via social media such as discussion forums, blogs and wikis. The paper explains how social media can help provide a frame for student preparation, support project working methods and activate and challenge students in engaging and motivating teaching and learning activities that result in in-dept learning. Such activities should be carefully planned. Particular attention is paid to providing students with instructions on how to interact with content and with each other in online learning environments. For learning to happen in a virtual learning environment, the learning process of students should be carefully scaffolded. The paper provides examples of web 2.0 learning activities from the INNOTOUR platform, which is a joint platform for students, teachers, businesses and researchers of tourism. The article exposes how the integration of web 2.0 in teaching involves much more than the integration of new educational tools. We argue that it is a radically different way of understanding and co-creating knowledge and learning, which has a range of implications. Among these are curriculum revisions to create alignment between learning objectives, web 2.0 learning and teaching processes, and student assessment.

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1. Aim

The aim of this practice paper is to provide knowledge and inspiration on the integration of web 2.0 technologies in tourism higher education. The introduction outlines the distinctive features of social media and web 2.0 and gives an account of the theoretical basis for learning processes underpinned by these tools. Following this, the design of teaching and learning activities with web 2.0 tools is outlined and discussed and examples are provided from courses in International Tourism and Leisure management at the University of Southern Denmark with particular focus on the INNOTOUR platform, which was awarded the 2010 national e-learning prize in Denmark. Finally, we discuss how the use of web 2.0 tools and teaching methods place new demands on participants and adaptation of curricula, including examination, so these reflect the new teaching forms and the web 2.0 philosophy.

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2. Web 2.0 characteristics

The web 2.0 concept cannot be traced back to one single technological development. Rather, it can be attributed to a number of different elements that together constitute what may be called the "web 2.0 movement" (Alexander, 2006). The following is a brief description of the most significant elements that resulted in a shift away from the more static web 1.0 mode of thinking about web content. Many companies, for example, used their websites as a kind of business card with contact details and electronic copies of product brochures. As a result, web content was sender-controlled with poor opportunities for interaction. In contrast, web 2.0 provides an opportunity for ordinary users to generate content that can be shared, revised and discussed with other users.

> "Web 2.0 refers to the principles and practice of facilitating information sharing and social interaction by users generating, altering and uploading web-based content whereas its predecessor, Web 1.0 limits users to the passive viewing and download of largely copyrighted information." (Liburd, 2012).

2.1. The three elements of the web 2.0 movement (based on Alexander, 2006)

Web 2.0 is primarily about "**micro-content**", i.e. about user contributions; comments, tags, videos, pictures and more. It is the users themselves, who produce, share and comment on one another's content. The result is a highly social and often collaborative process. Web pages are not considered in their entirety but as small items, such as comments on someone's wall or blog.

Another important aspect is **openness**, both in relation to ideology and technology. The possibility for multi-directional communication and easy access for users is essential. Users should be able to readily create a profile, create and share content etc. The web 2.0 movement is therefore a movement away from production and storage of items in personal folders and on personal hard drives toward the use of open, networked services, where, with a single click, users can choose to share their content with the world. Access is not limited to one's own content, but it is also possible to access other users' resources. Use and reuse, including modification and/or additions to others' texts in, for example, a wiki is an important element of this openness.

The final item to be mentioned here is "**folksonomy**". This is the users' own way of categorizing or "tagging" the content they produce and/or link to on the web. In other words, web 2.0 is the users' voice, what might be called "wisdom of the crowds". Some have sharply criticized this openness and accompanying democratization of knowledge on the basis that academic standards are undermined (Carr, 2007). However, this critical perspective does not present a solution to the trend towards closed production of knowledge in higher tourism education.

Web 2.0 is therefore not just a series of new services, such as blogs, wikis and social networks etc. on the internet. It is also a new practice amongst users, characterized by social and egocentric behavior with participative and narrative focus. It is the users' desire to share anything and everything in their lives with others via text, pictures and video that is the driving force behind web 2.0. In addition, it meets a need for visibility and public statement of opinion in the form of small comments, "likes" and smileys etc. As a result, a web 2.0 practice based on the following elements has arisen:

- Create, write and store (user-generated content).
- Describe, tag.
- Share—"push out".
- Rewrite.
- Use and reuse of material.
- Subscribe to news via RSS feeds. Fetch relevant news content.
- Use relationships to find new knowledge.
- Distributed authorship. Copyright claims are waivered or shared with other users.
- Creative Commons—a more lenient form of copyright in the digital age that allows the tailoring of copyrights to published material. See http://creativecommons.org/.

2.2. Social media

Social media are often referred to in the web 2.0 context as the designation for web-based tools that connect people and make it possible to share information, pictures and videos etc. These tools and features comprise blogs, wikis, social bookmarking sites, trackback, podcasts, video blogs, YouTube, Slideshare, Flickr and social networks such as My Space and Facebook.

Social software is what facilitates "the creation of communities and resources in which individuals come together to learn, collaborate and build knowledge" (Owen, Grant, Sayers, & Facer, 2006). This practice paper focuses especially on the social media: discussion forums, blogs and wikis, since they facilitate a series of learning processes that both engage and challenge students.