

Blended Intensive Programmes in Tourism Education: Experiences on the go

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Abstract: This paper describes two blended intensive programmes (BIPs) involving wine, both as a tourism and a cultural heritage asset. Having taken place in Portugal, these programmes brought together students from Romania, Germany, Poland, and Spain and included a wide range of activities, whose main goal was to encourage participants to develop innovative concepts related to wine culture and wine tourism development. Focussing on the design, implementation, monitoring and outputs of the programmes, the authors take on reflective approach, which can be framed within the scope of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL), highlighting strategies that can potentially improve students' learning experience in tourism and wine education. Considering the programmes addressed two complementary thematic strands, specifically, the perceptions and engagement of younger cohorts, particularly Generation Z and Generation Alpha, towards wine culture and how it might be reinterpreted, as well as tourism experience design, the paper reviews existing literature, providing examples which support the adoption of international immersive experiences. Moreover, it describes goals, learning outcomes, key outputs and learning tasks, putting forwards the tools and methods used with and by the students, including digital tools, such as Padlet, as well as multisensory observation diaries, offering insights into their potential, particularly when it comes to promoting experiential learning in a multi- and intercultural setting.

Keywords: Blended Intensive Programmes, Collaborative Learning, Internationalization, Interdisciplinarity, Tourism Education, Wine

1. Introduction

A staple of the Erasmus+ 2021–2027 framework, Blended Intensive Programmes (BIP) have emerged as a model of blended mobility in higher education. Described as short-duration, immersive learning experiences that integrate virtual collaboration, BIPs involve higher education institutions from a minimum of three countries, aiming to extend and diversify participation in international mobility, offering inclusive and structured opportunities for cross-border exchange, while contributing to the development of intercultural, digital, linguistic, and transversal competences.

Overall, BIPs are perceived as being beneficial for participants and institutions, as they support student mobility, providing more inclusive and flexible learning experiences. In addition, by engaging in intercultural activities, BIP participants have the unique opportunity to broaden their cultural understanding, develop their language skills and establish international contacts and networks. Within the scope of Hospitality and Tourism, BIPs are also considered to boost regional tourism and encourage innovation, through co-creation and stakeholder collaboration.

This study examines the design and outcomes of two BIP centred on wine as both a tourism asset and a component of cultural heritage, drawing on experiential, participatory, and intercultural learning strategies. After framing the context for the programmes, the authors will provide a comprehensive report of the programmes' design and implementation, while describing the tools and methods used by participants. Reflecting on potential benefits, the authors put forward key takeaways, focussing both on student and program-level outcomes, hoping to inform future initiatives and inspire other practitioners.

2. Context and Methodology

This paper describes two different BIPs organized by the School of Hospitality and Tourism (ESHT, Portugal): “Generation Wine: Blending Flavours and Culture” and “WineX: Wine Experiences for Tomorrow”, adopting a

a Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) perspective. Regarding methodology, it is consistent with a qualitative case study, focusing on teaching and learning strategies and tools (Deale, 2019; de Prada et al., 2025).

Framed under the Erasmus+ 2021–2027 Programme, BIPs are “short, intensive programmes that use innovative ways of learning and teaching, including the use of online cooperation” (European Commission, 2021, p.52). Considered to play a significant role in diversifying international mobility, fostering inclusivity and enhancing intercultural, digital and language skills (Laine et al., 2024), BIPs must involve a minimum of three institutions from different countries, acting as design and implementation partners.

In Tourism and Hospitality literature, you can find studies focussing on this kind of programme, with researchers reflecting on their affordances and perceived benefits, specifically the fact that they enhance student mobility, making it possible for students to have more enriching learning experiences, through exposure to new cultures and perspectives, thus supporting the development of communication and intercultural skills. In addition, the virtual component of BIPs, the fact they encompass short physical mobility periods, creates more flexible learning opportunities and settings, paving the way for broader participation and the strengthening of international partnerships and cooperation (Laine et al., 2024, Muller, 2023). Prior research also suggests that these programmes hold substantial potential for boosting regional tourism, as they increase the visibility of local attractions and enhance cultural awareness among host communities and in generating tangible advantages for local tourism industries. Other benefits include the enhancement of students’ participation and engagement, with recent studies highlighting the role played by participants in coming up with innovative proposals, underlining the benefits of interdisciplinarity and experiential learning within this scope, as well as the multi-faceted pedagogical approaches which help bridge the gap between theory and practice. (Cobelli, 2025. De Prada et al., 2025, Jing & Loang, 2024).

Drawing on this premise and examining how collaborative and immersive design-thinking pedagogies support student learning in international contexts, this paper focuses on the implementation and achievement of learning outcomes, drawing on previous research regarding BIP and tourism education, as well as on the analysis of students work and observation, to inform future programmes and other practitioners. The findings are also expected to lead to adjustments in future iterations of the programmes, as well as to provide a starting point for other initiatives, creating a dialogue between research and theory.

As mentioned earlier, this paper describes two different BIPs organized by the School of Hospitality and Tourism (ESHT, Portugal) in June 2025: “Generation Wine: Blending Flavours and Culture” and “WineX: Wine Experiences for Tomorrow”. Despite having foreseen different outcomes, focussing on distinct perspectives, both projects shared the same core principles, having relied on similar approaches to engage students and foster their creativity, teamwork and communication skills. As a result, both programmes dealt with issues pertaining to hospitality and tourism and comprised a virtual component (with an estimated 20-hour workload to be completed before the onsite activities) and a physical component, which took place in Portugal. In addition, the programmes addressed the topic of wine, not merely as a product, but as a multidimensional cultural resource, having challenged participants to actively co-create meaningful wine-related experiences by placing a strong emphasis on storytelling and sensory engagement. As a result, to facilitate implementation and cost management, the onsite activities were held in parallel, sharing facilities and resources, albeit with different tasks and outputs (see Table 1). Similarly, the materials also differed, having been adapted to each course’s specific objectives and expected outcomes.

Table 1: Activities Outline – BIPs 1 and 2

	BIP 1		BIP 2	
	Activities	Tasks	Activities	Tasks
Online	Ice-Breaker Programme presentation Seminar	Portfolio: Task 1 – Research Activity – good practices (wine tourism)	Ice-Breaker Programme presentation Seminar	Portfolio: Task 1 – Research Activity - Profiling national tourists
Onsite – Day 1	Welcome Session	Portfolio: Task 2 –	Welcome Session	Portfolio: Task 2 – Immersive Field

	BIP 1		BIP 2	
	Activities	Tasks	Activities	Tasks
	Group Presentation (Virtual Mobility Assignment) Seminars: Introduction to wine tourism: concepts and principles History and growth of wine tourism; Key wine-producing regions and global wine routes Economic and cultural impact of wine tourism Typologies, motivations and demographic and psychographic profiling Customer journey mapping techniques Cultural Activities	Immersive Field Activity “Sensing Traditions – A Sensory Journey Through Wine Tourism & Festive Culture”	Group Presentation (Virtual Mobility Assignment) Seminars: Introduction to wine tourism: concepts and principles History and growth of wine tourism; Key wine-producing regions and global wine routes Economic and cultural impact of wine tourism Typologies, motivations and demographic and psychographic profiling Customer journey mapping techniques Cultural Activities	Activity “Sensing Traditions – A Sensory Journey Through Wine Tourism & Festive Culture”
Onsite – Days 2 &3	Field Trips (Vineyard and Museum)	Portfolio: Task 3 – Customer Journey map Portfolio: Task 4 – Photo & Sensorial log	Field Trips (Vineyard and Museum)	Portfolio: Task 3 – Customer Journey map Portfolio: Task 4 – Photo & Sensorial log
Onsite – Day 4	Seminar: Design-thinking principles and methods Workshops: Design thinking Creating an effective pitch Wine-based cocktails	Final Pitch: Marketing Wine Tourism to Gen Z tourists	Seminar: Design-thinking principles and methods Workshops: Design thinking Creating an effective pitch Wine-based cocktails	Final Pitch: Designing tailored tourist experiences focussing on wine as a tourism product
Onsite – Day 5	Mentoring session Final Pitch		Mentoring session Final Pitch	

In addition to contributing to the programmes’ sustainability, this combined approach also facilitated expert involvement (as experts could hold simultaneous sessions and/or concentrate activities, making it easier to manage their time and availability) and intercultural exchange, as the different groups had contact with each other, as well as a common social program, thus enhancing their experience. Additionally, the assessment methods used were also similar, with both groups of participants being assessed based on: 1) a Portfolio of Activities compiling outputs from each module making up the programme – 40% and 2) a final pitch – 60%.

These assessment methods were designed to align constructively with the stated learning outcomes. The portfolio assessed students’ ability to gather, curate and critically analyse information, demonstrate technical knowledge of wine and its cultural context, and apply storytelling and experiential design principles. Evaluation criteria for the portfolio included depth of research, integration of theory and practice, creativity and originality, intercultural collaboration, and clarity of written and visual communication. The final pitch, on the other hand, assessed higher-order competences, particularly the ability to synthesize information, apply experiential tourism principles, prototype innovative concepts, and communicate clearly and effectively in a diverse (and international) setting. This pitch was assessed based on coherence and feasibility, as well as storytelling effectiveness, teamwork dynamics, and delivery.

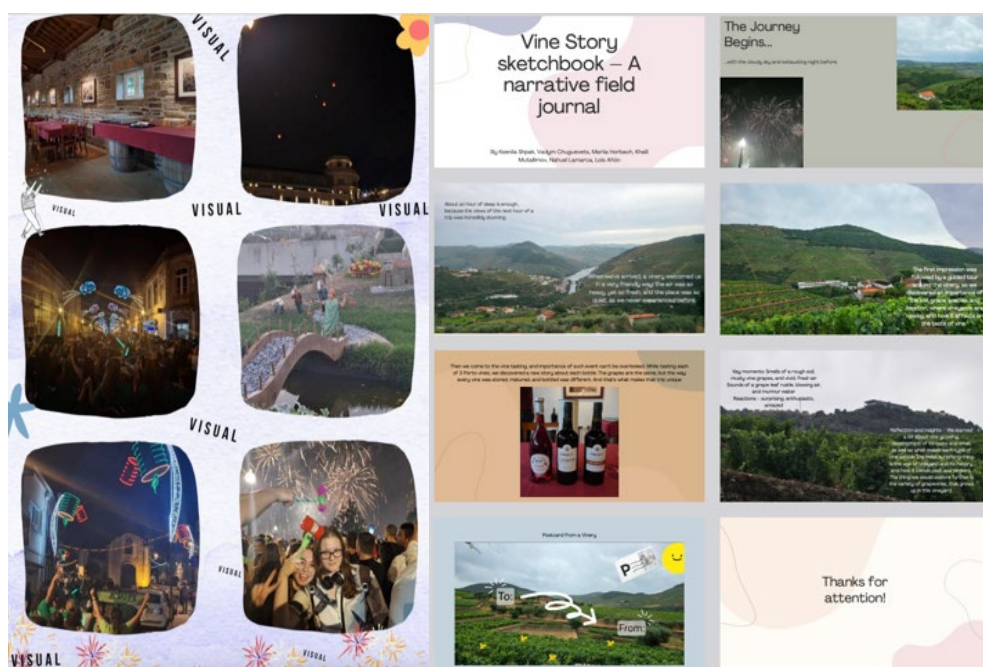
2.1 Generation Wine: Blending Flavours and Culture

Having been designed in collaboration with the University of Vigo (Spain) and the Bucharest University of Economic Studies (Romania) this BIP's main goal was to introduce Gen Z tourism and hospitality students to the world of wine and wine culture through an interactive, design-thinking approach that fostered creativity, curiosity, and experiential learning. As a result, working in international groups, participants (17 students, ages 19-26, stemming from Romania –7, Poland – 5, Germany –3, and Spain – 2) were challenged to come up with innovative strategies to promote wine tourism and culture, drawing from their experiences and exchanges with their peers and with industry partners. Participants were selected based on their interest in tourism, having been enrolled in tourism and management courses. Each partner university was responsible for selecting participants, according to their specific regulations, based on the previously defined programme.

Considering this premise, throughout the program, participants had the opportunity to explore the history, production, and sensory aspects of wine, while engaging in hands-on activities, which resulted in them being able to : 1) analyse the context of current wine consumption patterns and the importance of wine culture from the perspective of generation Z consumers; 2) assess opportunities offered by the existing media to promote wine culture and wine tourism in creative ways and identify areas for innovation relevant to solving a real challenge within this scope; 3) understand the concept of storytelling and its importance with regards to wine tourism and culture; 4) demonstrate technical knowledge of wine and its cultural significance; and 5) gather, select and analyse information, integrating it into a final pitch.

Considering the activities planned, following an online session, students were asked to carry out a research task focussing on local/national good practices within the scope of wine tourism, gastronomy and tourism promotion. The results of their work would then be shared onsite, during the physical mobility component of the programme, as well as integrated into the final portfolio.

After arriving in Portugal and attending introductory seminars that framed the ensuing activities, participants took part in three immersive field activities. First, taking advantage of the local festivals taking place that week, participants were challenged to engage in real-time observation and participation, while exploring how the five senses shape authentic experiences in wine tourism and cultural festivities, collecting data towards a collective sensory board (Figure 1). Following that, based on two field trips to a wine-making region, they also had to work on "Wine Stories Sketchbook" – A multimodal Narrative Field Journal reflecting their experience (Figure 2).



Figures 1 and 2: Examples of students' outputs: sensory board and digital sketchbook

The examples showcase students' participation and the creative approaches used to complete the tasks.

2.2 WineX

This BIP was designed in collaboration with the University of Vigo (Spain), Bialystok University of Technology and Warsaw School of Tourism and Hospitality Management (Poland), and IST-Hochschule für Management (Germany) and involved 16 participants and 6 facilitators. With ages between 19-28, the participants were enrolled in Tourism, Management and Hotel Management programmes with 5 stemming from Germany, 5 from Poland, 5 from Romania and 1 from Spain.

The programme's main goal was to challenge participants to co-create wine-themed travel itineraries that incorporated original concepts and events. The program was designed based on interdisciplinary principles, crosscutting different perspectives, having included multiple tasks, such as design-thinking workshops, sensory tastings and field work, leading up to a final presentation, based on a model developed by the students (Figure 3).



Figure 3: Examples of students' outputs: collaborative lego model (experience prototyping)

Acting as storytellers and experience designers, participants explored tools such as empathy and digital journey maps (Figure 4), having collaborated on prototyping activities that reviewed the narratives and multiple layers of winemaking traditions.

	Journey Steps	Awareness	Consideration	Decision	Service	Loyalty
Actions <small>Always done by customer</small>	Initial exposure to event; arrival at venue.	Engage in welcome activities, receive orientation.	Participate in wine tasting and sensory activities.	Engage with cultural elements (music, decor), interact with products.	Take photographs, upload to Padlet, reflect in group discussion.	
Touchpoints <small>Website, Social Media, Email</small>	Website, email alerts, social media prompts, visual branding (signage).	Staff introductions, visual setup, event of the venue.	Wine samples, aroma cards, touch-based tools.	Live music, local artifacts, food & wine kits.	Padlet app, mobile phone usage, storytelling platforms.	
Emotions <small>Feelings</small>	Curiosity, mild confusion due to unclear signage.	Interest, anticipation.	Surprise, delight, growing engagement.	Joy, cultural connection, sight (indoor/outdoor setting).	Satisfaction, shared reflection, emotional fulfillment.	
Pain Points <small>Not well managed in the customer in search phase</small>	Lack of clear orientation materials/signage.	Slight uncertainty about event flow.	Unclear when to document experiences.	Limited shade/cooling outside.	Minor delay in Padlet coordination.	
Solutions <small>What can be done?</small>	Add branded signage, provide welcome instructions via email or onsite.	Clear welcome script and schedule display for guests.	Prompt guests with verbal or visual cues to record reflections.	Provide shaded areas, comfortable seating.	Assign tech facilitator, test upload flow in advance.	

Figure 4: Examples of students' outputs: digital customer journey map

With a structure similar to that of the previously described BIP, this programme was, however, more focussed on capacitating students to: 1) recognize emerging tourism trends and generational shifts to design wine tourism experiences; 2) understand techniques and methods that facilitated the assessment of wine-related visitor experiences; 3) apply principles of experiential tourism to develop immersive, story-driven wine-related offerings that enhance emotional connection, cultural engagement, and destination appeal; 4) evaluate the role of wine tourism in shaping destination identity and local economies, with a focus on innovation, authenticity, and co-creation in response to evolving travel motivations and trends; 5) understand and apply the power of storytelling to craft meaningful, memorable tourism experiences that resonate with contemporary travellers and enrich destination branding; 6) demonstrate a working knowledge of wine and its cultural context, enabling thoughtful interpretation and 7) collect, curate, and synthesize information to ideate and prototype new wine tourism concepts.

Predominantly, participants tackled the concept of tourist experience by collaborating on designing innovative experiences focussing on wine culture and heritage. The activities integrated digital collaboration – resorting to

multimodal activities and outputs that were uploaded into Padlet (making up a digital portfolio) – with field-based methodologies, such as multisensory observation diaries, as a way of supporting experiential learning.

Drawing from the programmes' outputs, i.e., student-generated artefacts, including good practices reports (9), tourist profiles (6), sensory journals (5), sketchbooks (5), empathy and customer journey maps (9) and final presentations (9) and instructor reflections and field notes (6), authors resorted to qualitative content analysis approach (using ATLAS.ti) to examine how co-creation-oriented pedagogies support learning in wine tourism education. The qualitative content analysis followed a systematic and iterative procedure, with the authors having identified recurring themes that emerged from the data. As a result, two key tiers were identified: student learning outcomes and programme-level outcomes, with the latter being less prominent and stemming essentially from the facilitators' observations.

The initial open coding phase was conducted independently by two members of the research team, who collaboratively developed a preliminary codebook. This codebook was then refined through iterative discussion, clustering related codes into higher-order tiers. Although a formal intercoder agreement coefficient was not calculated due to the exploratory and interpretive nature of the study, coding discrepancies were reviewed and reconciled through peer discussion until consensus was reached. The identified tiers were also crosscut with existing literature on tourism education, co-creation pedagogies and experiential tourism, as well as the programmes' framing documents. Considering that the authors and members of the research team acted as facilitators in the BIPs, reflexivity was an integral component of the research process. The dual role of facilitator-researcher may have influenced participant engagement, data production, and interpretation. To mitigate potential bias, student outputs were anonymised prior to coding, with the analysis having been conducted after programme completion. Peer debriefing among all members of the research team acted as an internal audit mechanism. Furthermore, emerging themes were reviewed by two researchers who were not directly involved in the day-to-day facilitation of each of the programmes. This aspect was instrumental in enhancing the study's transparency and assuring methodological rigor.

3. Key Takeaways

3.1 Student Learning Outcomes

Considering the learning outcomes, the examined BIPs were expected to support the development of creative, collaborative and reflective skills relevant to wine tourism and tourist experience design, while promoting and exploring the product's multiple layers.

The tentative analysis showed that most outputs showcased creativity, in that students built on the provided templates, often augmenting the information provided by incorporating additional multimedia elements. Overall, a total of 30 student-generated artefacts were analysed, with 26 featuring some kind of multimedia element (video, image and/or image), being that 22 featured images captured and/or generated/altered by the students. Despite having had access to the same guidelines regarding the tasks, participants' artefacts also revealed a wide range of creative approaches, with the outputs taking on different designs and layouts (including videos, memes and collages). Overall, the most prominent theme throughout the different outputs pertained to the sensory and emotional dimensions of tourist experience.

Crosscutting the data with the expected learning outcomes, the incorporation of different media stands out as a key aspect, with participants having assessed and tested different formats and means of expression. In addition to creativity, these findings can also be linked to the development of communication skills, something that is highlighted in the literature (Simonova, 2018, Tritter et al. 2026). As for emotional connection and cultural engagement, they also emerged as key topics in students' outputs, with the models proposed having focussed on the use of technology, innovation and authenticity (supported by storytelling elements).

When it comes to reflexive skills, the most noticeable themes emerged from the analysis of the final pitches, with the uploaded artefacts and notes highlighting the fact that participants succeeded in conceptualising wine as a cultural and experiential resource, having critically assessed and reinterpreted it, based on their personal experiences and expectations. In the final pitches, technology, sustainability and the integration of sensory and storytelling elements into experience design arose as the key topics.

3.2 Program Level Outcomes

Drawing from the facilitators' observations and notes from the field, the most emergent themes within this scope related to the pedagogical value of BIPs for experiential learning, with a frequency analysis also suggesting that the pedagogical model and course design supported creativity and engagement. Overall, the programmes are believed to have supported student agency, at the same time they provided a deeper understanding of the affordances of combining the use of digital platforms and field-based methods, as an effective way of collecting meaningful data and monitor students' progress and learning.

From the facilitators' perspectives, the activities fostered the development of transferable skills, particularly intercultural communication, cultural awareness and reflective thinking, having a positive impact on students learning experiences.

4. Final Remarks

This paper aimed to provide a comprehensive analysis of two BIPs dealing with the topic of wine as a tourism product and cultural heritage resource, which relied on interactive methods and a strong connection to the territory. Focussing on the enhancement of tourism and wine education, the activities and tasks included in these programmes combined digital collaboration with fieldwork, positioning wine and wine culture as more than just an economic driver, showcasing its role in expressing cultural identity and intangible heritage. By challenging students to become experienced designers and storytellers, the learning experience and ensuing analysis aimed to connect pedagogical practices with key concepts in tourism education, including the potential of co-creation and sensory engagement within this scope.

The preliminary analysis generated context-sensitive insights suggesting that intercultural and co-creative learning strategies can enhance students' understanding of wine tourism and foster their creativity and reflexive competences. In addition, the data also points towards the relevance of culturally significant experiences as a way of promoting engagement.

From a pedagogical point of view, the blended structure of the programme fostered dynamic forms of communication, with online activities paving the way for multisensory activities taking place onsite. Together, these experiences demonstrated how heritage can become as a catalyst for intercultural competence, offering models for integrating content, task-based pedagogy and co-creation into higher education curricula.

Having relied on limited data and interpretive analysis, the findings, albeit tentative and not easily transferable, are in line with the literature, making a case for further research that can inform similar activities. Overall, key programme components – such as design-thinking methodologies, experiential fieldwork, portfolio development, and co-creation-based assessment – are pedagogically transferable and adaptable to other contexts. Notwithstanding, the programmes were implemented in a Portuguese wine tourism destination, partly coinciding with local festivals, which, even though enriched sensory immersion and real-time observation, may be difficult to replicate in another setting.

In general, the key takeaways emphasize the role of digital technologies in supporting not only creativity and learning, but also heritage awareness and communication, showcasing how these elements can be combined in curating authentic and innovative educational experiences.

Ethics Declaration

This study did not involve sensitive personal data. As such, ethical approval was not required in accordance with the relevant institutional and national guidelines. Nevertheless, participants were informed, both verbally and in writing, that their learning artefacts (e.g., portfolios, visual outputs, prototypes and presentations) could be used for research purposes. Written consent was obtained prior to data analysis, and students were given the option to decline participation without academic penalty. All artefacts were anonymised prior to coding.

AI Declaration

Artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used during the preparation of this manuscript for language editing and content analysis purposes. Specifically, tools such as ChatGPT and ATLAS.ti's integration with OpenAI were employed. ATLAS.ti's AI-assisted features were employed at an exploratory stage to help identify potential patterns and semantic clusters. All codes, category refinements, and thematic interpretations were subsequently reviewed, validated, and refined manually by the research team. ChatGPT was used exclusively for

language refinement and structural editing of the manuscript, not for data analysis, coding, or interpretation. No student-identifiable information was uploaded to public AI platforms at any stage of the research process. All substantive intellectual contributions are the original work of the authors.

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