ENLIGHT Teaching and Learning Award 2024 – Cover Sheet
Nominee, University of Groningen

Course summary:

The Critical Tourism Studies course is a Master's level course that is driven by critical conversations regarding the social, cultural, environmental, health and well-being, economic, and political impacts of global tourism in the 21st century. The course focuses particularly on the impacts of tourism in the Global South and the movement of tourists from the North to the South. The central feature of the course is a Virtual Township Tour, in which the students 'tour' a township in South Africa. The tour is guided by a resident and community activist in the township and is facilitated by himself and a fellow community activist and entrepreneur. Following the tour, the students are given ample opportunity to debrief with the facilitators and ask questions about tourism's impacts in the township and how the tourists are perceived by local residents. Critically, the tour is focused on the locally-initiated improvements in the community that include day care centers, youth after-school programming, and housing for low or no income residents. The students are able to learn about the impacts of apartheid from people who lived through it and continue to live in its shadows. Ultimately, the course is focused on learning about how people in the Global South are empowered to make changes for themselves and the students come away feeling inspired by the township residents, where initially they had anticipated feeling pity for them.

Educators involved:

Meghan Muldoon (she/her) is the primary instructor of the course, located at Campus Fryslân, University of Groningen. Her research interests include decolonialism, the intersections of tourism and poverty, tourism and representations, arts-based methodologies, and feminisms. Her Ph.D. research took place, in part, in the township where the tour takes place, and she was also a resident of the township during her research.

Monde Myataza (he/him) is a community activist, artist, and the son of the first mayor of Kayamandi township, where he resides. He is the tour guide for the virtual tour, and each year he takes the students on a new route, explaining the history of the township and how it has developed over the course of its 100 year history. Monde's pride in his community radiates throughout the tour, and he also stops frequently to introduce the students to residents he encounters throughout the tour.

Anga Bonongo (he/him) is the CEO and Founder of Bonsolo Trading, a local delivery service located in Kayamandi township. Through his small business he creates employment for local people – primarily youth – in a community where the unemployment rate is in the region of 40%. He also redirects a portion of his profits towards community support programmes, primarily supporting child and youth development.

ENLIGHT Teaching and Learning Award 2024 – Portfolio

Structure of the course:

The course is founded in the philosophy of Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, wherein people are considered to be experts in their own lives, and education is understood to be a transformative and ongoing process in the quest for freedom. As Freire wrote, "Teachers and students (leadership and people), co-intent on reality, are both Subjects, not only in the task of unveiling that reality, and thereby coming to know it critically, but in the task of re-creating that knowledge. As they attain this knowledge of reality through common reflection and action, they discover themselves as its permanent re-creators" (Freire, 1970, p. 69). To that end, the course is divided in three parts: theory, the township tour, and community-based research. In the theory part, the course is focused on works which explore the theoretical explorations of tourism in the world, including works by Friere, Mowforth and Munt (tourism and poverty), Pritchard and Morgan (tourism and gender), Veijola and Jokinen (tourism and the body), Urry (the Tourist Gaze), Sharpley (dark tourism), and MacCannell (tourism and authenticity).

In the second part of the course, students participate in a virtual tour of a South African township guided by a local resident. Through the tour, we visit local businesses, nurseries, youth centers, and schools. The tour is preceded and followed-up with discussions regarding global poverty, tourism in spaces of poverty, virtual tourism, and empowerment. Students report a changed perspective regarding township residents, having expected to feel sorry for them, but come away from the tour feeling inspired by the work that they are doing to improve their community. In addition, the tour creates income for the community that is reinvested in community improvement projects. The teaching practice thus achieves its threefold aim to 1) challenge colonized/ing notions of what it means to live in poverty in the Global South, 2) critically engage with the implications and impacts of tourism in spaces of poverty, and 3) interrogate the role of VR technology in tourism practice and education.

The virtual township tour provides a unique opportunity for a 'fieldtrip' to a space that is not physically accessible. By shifting the focus away from poverty, it allows students to celebrate innovation and progress and develop relationships with the community. The practice is contextualized and connects the global with the local; it fits the concept of Education for Sustainable Development as it is both inter -and transdisciplinary (ethics, economics, socio-cultural impacts, (post)colonial foundations, Othering, tourism etc.) and has a strong focus on community participation; the practice is an example of blended onsite and online learning which also makes it scalable to other courses and classes. Importantly, the tour is also an income-generating activity for the township-based facilitators, which is then reinvested in community programming, allowing students to feel a part of actual transformative change in the township.

This part of the course is preceded by an in-class discussion to talk about our expectations of the tour, and possible areas of discomfort. We discuss the role of tourism in spaces of poverty and

racial exclusion and what potential impacts of the tour may include. Invariably, conversations emerge regarding Othering, global mobilities, injustice, exploitation, and colonialism. This is an opportunity for the students to voice their uncertainties regarding their participation in the virtual tour and whether or not tourists belong in these spaces. Following the tour, we also take time to debrief regarding what was felt and experienced during the tour. This step is a critical reflection point for the students to think about which of their expectations regarding the tour were met, and what assumptions they may have had about the township and the tour were challenged or transformed.

Finally, in the third part of the course, the students are tasked with conducting an empirical research project in their own communities. The students are introduced to a range of qualitative methodologies and encouraged to experiment with a research approach that they have not used in the past. Importantly, the students are also encouraged to think about this assignment (in the first term of the year) as a foundational stepping stone to their thesis research, and thus allows them to begin thinking about how they will undertake this critical piece of their Master's degree.

How Critical Tourism Studies and the Virtual Township Tour fosters creativity and innovation:

Interviews were conducted with students from the first cohort to participate in the virtual township tour. What stood out to them was the pride that the facilitators felt in their community, the work that they were doing to improve the township. One student stated, "*I'm almost thinking like, whoa, they have the power and the strength to start something of their own. I think that's very beautiful, actually. And I'm looking up to those people. So, it almost inverted.*" The students felt that township residents were empowered to tell their stories through the tours, and that the virtual tour represented a less invasive way to learn about people and their lives. The students felt that through the tour, preconceived notions of people living in urban poverty were being challenged.

Therefore, while an important objective of the township tour is to initiate conversations around encounters with poverty through tourism, and role of virtual technologies in mediating those conversations, the more important and transformative impact is the change that occurs in the students' minds regarding residents of the Global South. The students go into the tours expecting to feel a certain kind of sadness for people living in townships, and come away feeling inspired and connected.

Students appreciate the unique opportunity to learn about the community in a way that empowers residents to tell their stories, be heard, show how decisions are made, and show what life is for the community. Students report that it challenges their preconceived notions of people who live in urban poverty: *"it does give an honest look into their lives. And, yes, we could basically stop projecting them like it's all bad."*

Therefore, the most important—and truly creative aspect of this course—is that is encourages the students to decolonize their thinking about residents of the Global South. Rather than conceiving of them exclusively as victims of historical forces beyond their control, the students come to see people in the Global South as inspiring and as empowered forces for change within their own lives and their communities.

How this course meets the awards criteria:

1. *Developing ENLIGHT competencies that support innovation and creativity*

This course is well embedded within ENLIGHT's competence framework. It is based in a praxis of <u>challenge-based education</u>, in which students engage critically with theory, confront their own assumptions and colonized ways of thinking about residents of the Global South, and then take what they have learned to undertake critical and transformative research in their own communities. A <u>transdisciplinary approach</u> is applied, as the students and primary instructor all emerged from different disciplinary traditions and bring our perspectives into our classroom discussions. In addition, the township tour facilitators are not engaged in academia, and provide students with an opportunity to come to understand that learning and education can also come in engagement with those without formal educations. The township tour involves extensive engagement with <u>external stakeholders</u>, as the township-based facilitators are at the heart of this transformative learning experience. <u>International and intercultural learning</u> is central to the course, and the most transformative learning comes from outside the classroom in the virtual space of the township in South Africa. The course is <u>versatile</u>, in that it can be adopted in any number of classroom settings and always takes a different form. The slightly chaotic nature of the tour, in that it often takes time to get the technology aligned, the weather doesn't always cooperate, and this year the guide was nearly struck by a car, can be jarring, but the students also reflect that it gives a real sense of 'being there' in the township. Finally, the course is based in <u>research-oriented teaching</u>, in that it is founded in the transformative teaching philosophies of Paulo Freire, but also that students are supported in this early part of the Master's journey to become critical researchers and agents for change in their own communities.

2. *Replicability in the ENLIGHT community*

The Critical Tourism Studies course, and in particular the Virtual Township Tour, are endlessly replicable in the ENLIGHT community. Discussions emergent from the township tour relate to fields as diverse as history, geographies, migration and mobility, decolonial studies, tourism studies, economics, climate change and adaptation, community development, urban studies, poverty studies, political science, international development, and policy development, among many others. Further, thanks to the COVID-19 pandemic, many of our classrooms are now equipped with the technology that makes this a simple undertaking.

3. *Reflection on learning and teaching is embedded in the learning process*

Most of us will have the opportunity to engage in tourism at some point in our lives. However, as Caton (2012) reminds us, tourism is an activity which "at once speaks of light-hearted pleasure and heavy social consequences" (p. 1907), while Hollinshead (1998) calls it "the industry of difference par excellence" (p. 49). Critical approaches to tourism, and creating a space in which those discussions can take place safely and creatively, are ultimately a critique of ourselves and our ways of being and engaging in the world. Processes of Othering are deeply embedded in our worldviews, and the tourist gaze (Urry, 1990) re-creates and re-inscribes that lens on the world. Through this course, we are not only engaged in the development of more critically engaged scholars, but also of more critically reflective people-in-the-world.

4. *Innovative approaches to student involvement*

This approach to student involvement is innovative in that is allows the students, for a brief moment in time, to travel outside of the classroom to a space that they may never otherwise have an opportunity to engage with. The virtual engagement with the township creates a safe space in which to ask questions about the role that there should (or should not) be for tourists' bodies in spaces of poverty. Finally, and most importantly, the course transforms the students' perspectives of people living in the Global South, people living in spaces of poverty, people oppressed by racist structures that persist 30 years after the end of apartheid, and how people with little formal education can be inspirational teachers and leaders in their communities and in our classroom.

References:

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