

Critical Tourism Studies Proceedings

Volume 2017

Article 41

2017

Real Junk Food Pop-up Café: Embedding Critical Hospitalities into the Curriculum

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Recommended Citation

Obrador, Pau (2017) "Real Junk Food Pop-up Café: Embedding Critical Hospitalities into the Curriculum," *Critical Tourism Studies Proceedings*: Vol. 2017 , Article 41.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.library.tru.ca/cts-proceedings/vol2017/iss1/41>

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Title: A Real Junk Food Pop-up Café: Embedding Critical Hospitalities into the Curriculum

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Session Type: Presentation

Abstract:

University curriculums have been rather slow in embracing critical approaches to hospitality and events. This is particularly the case of the more practical elements of our degrees. Curriculums are mainly preoccupied with managerial practices and issues of industry importance and do not explore sufficiently the social, cultural, political, and ethical dimension of hospitality. This paper agrees with Lugosi et al. (2009) on the need to create curriculum space for critical management approaches that complements applied vocational aspects of hospitality management education.

This paper presents an undergraduate curriculum innovation that is inspired by critical approaches to hospitality and events. The activity is part of a new experiential learning module that integrates theory and practice to develop viable business solutions. Students gain familiarity with important debates on alternative hospitalities and responsible business, while developing relevant business, hospitality, and event management skills. Central to this project is the symbiotic relation between research, learning, and professional practice. Drawing on Healey and Jenkins (2009), the activity recognises that an effective way of engaging students with research is through research-based teaching, which takes place when students directly undertake research and inquiry.

The project, which is addressed to first-year tourism and events students, involves the organisation of a real junk food event in collaboration with the Magic Hat Café—a non-profit community interest company. The Magic Hat is part of the Real Junk Food movement, which tackles environmental and social injustice by upcycling edible food waste. They intercept food before it goes to waste and serve it in as pay-as-you-feel cafes. Students were asked to create a hospitality drawing on the principles of the Real Food Movement, minimising food waste while fostering a friendlier city. Students were responsible for intercepting food before going to waste, designing and a cooking a menu, marketing the event and evaluating its success. The event addressed a number of key issues in critical hospitality, including environmental sustainability, food waste, and the nature of hospitality encounters. The paper examines the challenges and opportunities of embedding critical hospitalities into an industry-oriented curriculum