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Caring for the Travelling Other: Student Experiences of Migration on a Field Trip

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This paper examines student experiences of a learning activity based on a visit to a migrant processing centre on the outskirts of Valetta, the capital of the Mediterranean island of Malta. Field trips to tourism destinations are an important part of the internationalisation of a tourism curriculum, allowing students to see the industry in practice. However, it is also important to ensure that students embed critical thinking in their reflections on the industry. As noted by Cooper et al., “tourism is (only) one dimension of our ‘connections’ with the world ranging across many different localities” (2008, p. 12), and students should be aware of the multiplicities of global mobilities. As one of the most southerly members of the European Union, Malta has been subject to significant numbers of arrivals of asylum seekers since accession in 2004. Although actual numbers of migrants are small in comparison to the huge influx of refugees further east seen in 2015 as a result of the Syrian conflict, the small size of Malta has made the arrival of migrants a controversial issue. Whilst an uncomfortable visit for many students, we have found this a useful discussion exercise against a backdrop of increasing migration controls, and an important contrast in relation to the exposure to the traditional tourism industry. Student reflections are examined through debrief sessions and material from reflective journals. Journals are a useful tool for students to engage in critical reflection, both on theoretical material covered in lectures and readings, but also on individual experiences such as these. Students reported discomfort but valuable learning outcomes, particularly in the degree of caring about others forced into alternative forms of mobility.

References

Cooper, C., Fletcher, J., Gilbert, D., & Wanhill, S. (2008). *Tourism: Principles and practice* (4th ed.). New York, NY: Pearson education.