

Diversifying the Curriculum: Peace and Conflict Walking Tour

POLI30262 Dimensions of Peace and Conflict is a third-year course that centres on various aspects of peace efforts that aim to address both the direct violence seen in armed conflicts, and the less visible structural violence that relates to social justice issues. The course also introduces students to the interdisciplinary aspects of peace and conflict studies by looking into how disciplines such as geography, political economy, anthropology and art approach peace. I used the Diversifying the Curriculum fund to give students in this course an opportunity to briefly explore some of these disciplinary approaches in various sites in Manchester city centre that connect to the themes of this course. While it may not be the most obvious place for addressing these topics, Manchester has notable locations in the city centre that engage with them.

To put this idea into action, I connected with 'Invisible Cities', a social enterprise that provides job opportunities for individuals facing homelessness. Together, we developed a walking tour called the 'Peace and Conflict Tour', carefully choosing sites to explore with students that relate to the module material. A variety of memorials, statues, plaques, streets, alleyways, and buildings related to themes of peace and conflict were included in the tour itinerary. Exploring these sites provided students with an opportunity to conduct a brief ethnographic study of their environment, encouraging a more critical perspective on how spaces are shaped through struggle against different types of violence and how some of them were reconfigured through artistic interventions.

The first impressions of the students were notably positive, and the survey feedback for this course highlighted the tour as an example of innovative teaching which helped illuminate their understanding of the world around them. Most of the students were aware of Manchester's history in terms of broader social justice issues, but they were surprised to discover that Manchester has many sites linked to various global conflicts. They knew that the struggle of the workers in the region influenced some of the most important writings of Marx and Engels, but were surprised to learn that the workers also endured considerable hardship in their support of the fight against slavery during the American Civil War. The students were also glad to hear more about the struggle for women's rights and the women whose efforts preceded those of the famous Suffragette movement. Furthermore, they were pleased to find about the city's pioneering role in the forming of nuclear-free zones across the globe, as well as the way in which the city coped with the repercussions of terrorist attacks, which left an indelible mark on the history of the city.

They found it intriguing to observe how some of these events and the individuals associated with them were represented through statues and other artistic interventions. This exploration allowed them to enhance their understanding of these themes through the exploration of the spaces where they are located and the changing environment around them. Finally, the students expressed enthusiasm for joining the tour co-organised with a social enterprise that aims to combat issues stemming from structural violence. The overall impression was that this tour has significantly enhanced their critical perspective on the main themes covered in the module.

In terms of challenges, despite our efforts to limit the number of sites visited to fit the available time, it was difficult to visit all of them in the time allocated. Therefore, it will be necessary to reduce the number of locations visited on the tour to facilitate a more thorough examination of those that are most relevant for this module.

In the future, the plan is to organise the tour every year for the students taking this module. Now that its first iteration was arranged and carried out, in the coming years the process will be more streamlined, which will allow for the integration of the tour earlier in the semester. This will also allow to set up an assessment in the form of critical reflection based on this tour. The information about the tour will additionally be shared with colleagues who may consider it useful for their courses, and the tour will be offered to participants attending the Manchester peace conferences organised by our department.