



The Irish Colonial Landscape Digital StoryMap: an inclusive didactic tool

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Abstract

This paper discusses the plan to create an inclusive didactic tool: the Irish Colonial Landscape Digital StoryMap that focuses on colonial landscapes in Irish visitor attractions. The inclusive StoryMap will be co-created by three groups of students: Italian secondary school, Irish secondary school, and Irish university students. All the students will work together to create the content. The university students will also perform mentoring activities, by observing and providing recommendations on the work of the secondary school students. Thus, the creation of the StoryMap will foster inclusivity between international students, with different age groups. It will be an inclusive educational tool that aims to develop international collaboration, mentoring experience, research skills, and transferable skills. It will also foster inclusivity to the students who will use it by fostering a decolonial attitude in dealing with the geographies of colonisation. This paper explains the theoretical underpinnings of this inclusive Irish Colonial Landscape Digital StoryMap and the planning process. Finally, the paper ends by discussing planned outcomes for both the students involved in the creation of the StoryMap as well as the students who will use it.

Keywords: StoryMap, Landscape, Colonialism, Digital, Inclusion

1. Introduction

In every colonised place, colonialism leaves visible impacts on multiple layers: landscapes, people, language, music, food, culture and identity. Kühne (2018) explored the genesis of social landscapes and interpreted, in the light of power and hegemonic cultures, the co-evolution of landscapes as a construct of aesthetic knowledge (Simmel, 1996), social constructivism (Schütz, 2004) and power. As Kühne (2019, p. 74) wrote “landscapes are part of a process in

which hierarchies are reproduced and challenged”. Thus the co-construction of post-colonial and decolonial landscapes, in which power relations are expressed through urban (Cosgrove, 1989; Withers, 1996) and rural (Alexandra and Riddington, 2007) landscapes, deserve special attention.

The concept of decolonialism (instead of postcolonialism) is used here because, as Borghi (2020) wrote, postcoloniality and decoloniality are not the same thing. Postcolonial studies

arose during postmodernism and were mainly dedicated to studying the effects that colonial representations had on two opposite groups of people: the colonised and the colonisers (Borghi, 2020). Instead, decolonialism no longer questions colonial representations, but the subject producing knowledge is questioned (Césaire, 1955; Anzaldúa, 2000; Borghi, 2020).

This project focuses on the Irish landscape. In Ireland the colonial legacy has left a significant imprint on the historical imagination and representation of the landscape, as well as its communication and conveyance to the outside world (Zappaterra, 2022). One of the legacies of colonialism in Ireland concerns the way past history is understood and narrated. Howe (2002) explored Ireland's past and present in colonial terms. Moving through the controversial interpretations that Unionists and Republicans give of Ireland's history, Howe offers a comprehensive view on these issues without excluding the different points of view that tell the same story. Thus, given the tense and controversial debate on this topic, Howe's (2002) work is cited here as it reveals the aspects and factions related to this field of reflection.

In particular, this paper focuses on narratives unfolding in different places and through different media (Whelan, 2002). It looks at the colonial legacy of the Irish landscape through some Irish tourist attractions.

When colonial places become no-more-colonial places, the urban landscape, including buildings and monuments can become symbols and be interpreted as important landscape elements (Dodge, 2018). As such, urban landscapes can display how a no-more-colonial city has been the result of conflicts between social groups (Jacob, 2006). In addition to the elements of the urban landscape, tourist attractions are also an important source for disclosing the geographies of power or for not disclosing them. In particular, tourist attractions tell stories to tourists that will confirm symbols, stereotypes and imaginaries about the places they visit.

Tourist attractions, indeed, have the power to tell the colonial power or to *destroy* it by not telling it at all. The stories that are told in

museums are the stories that tourists take home with them, which they then tell to other people and become part of people's imagery and perceptions. These stories can be told through edutainment, which is the union of educational and entertainment experiences (Disney, 1954). Edutainment experiences have been studied in the context of dark tourism, such as light dark tourist attractions (Wyatt et al., 2021).

Moreover, while performing tourism, it is easier to be pervaded by the contents offered by tourist attractions through a form of learning by doing (Kolb, 1984, 2014), which is relevant for the construction of a psychological and cultural identity (Alexander et al., 2004). The formative value of travel, and the intrinsic capacity of travel to facilitate and strengthen the structuring of knowledge, skills and abilities is recognised. It is for this reason that the tourist attractions involved in this paper's study will be mainly museums.

The paper does not aim to focus on the relationship between tourism and colonialism. Instead, it discusses how this field of (de)colonial studies can be approached through the use of an inclusive didactic tool: the Inclusive Irish Landscape Digital StoryMap. This paper is intended to present the conceptual framework and the structure of the ongoing project of the StoryMap. Some examples of digital StoryMaps can be found on the Italian Geographical Society's website (2023) based on the experience of ArcGIS Living Atlas (<https://livingatlas.arcgis.com/en/home/>). They cover different topics but not Irish tourist attractions and colonial landscapes. Digital StoryMaps have been previously analysed as tools to promote digital storytelling (Marta and Osso, 2015), cultural heritage (Mauro et al., 2021), and technology education (Zamperlin and Azzari, 2017). This paper contributes to the current debate in exploring how StoryMaps can be planned as inclusive didactic tools.

Instructional design is an articulated process that must attempt to manage many dimensions including, in particular, the dimension of principles, methods, content, context, instructional mediation and technologies (Hall et al., 2012). For this reason, the use of the Tpack model, i.e. Technology, Pedagogy, Content Knowledge

(Mishra and Koehler, 2006; Mishra, 2019) is certainly important here. The intersection of these three dimensions (Technology, Pedagogy, and Content Knowledge) creates the flexible knowledge to embed technologies in dynamic classroom contexts which created the idea of the Inclusive Irish Landscape Digital StoryMap, cooperatively constructed by Italian secondary school scholars and Irish university scholars. Here, competences are vertically (different ages) and horizontally (different places of origin) integrated. The Inclusive Irish Landscape Digital StoryMap will be a digital didactic tool that enables the use and/or enhancement of students' skills. As such, online technologies and learning environments enable in their design purposes and have the potential to expand the capabilities of those who use them (Tseng et al., 2020). The Inclusive Irish Landscape Digital StoryMap, moreover, has the aim of providing an inclusive learning environment and promoting a welcoming attitude to the otherness: it will create occasions to meet the *others* (international students) in the design phase, and will be freely consulted in an open format on the web. The final aim to be pursued is to build an inclusive tool, based on Irish landscapes, that contributes to the construction of a decolonial attitude in students.

2. Conceptual framework

Inclusion in education concerns the participation of all students. However, there is still confusion on how to best define and operationalise inclusive education (Qvortrup and Qvortrup, 2018) and “more research needs to adopt collaborative approaches” (Messiou, 2017, p. 146). There can be three dimensions of inclusion: *levels*, *types*, and *degrees* of inclusion (Qvortrup and Qvortrup, 2018). The former refers to the *level* of inclusion in a particular group. The *types* of inclusion refer to different social groups, even outside school. While the latter refers to the *degrees* of how the student is included/excluded from some communities.

So, understanding group dynamics and factors that generate social exclusion is crucial for teachers in order to advance inclusion (Juvonen et al., 2019). Also, open dialog

between educators and students promotes social inclusion (Ainscow and Messiou, 2018).

Inclusion can be promoted via experiential learning (Wilson et al., 2021). For example, experiential learning activities can foster “a successful inclusive environment in the community” (Kuntsler et al., 2013, p. 122). Experiential learning refers to the educational situation when students learn by actively doing the activity (Kolb, 1984, 2014). Experiential learning activities can also involve students from different countries. The benefits of creating international experiential learning opportunities are several. They include the development of cultural sensitivity (Gilin and Young, 2009) and/or language learning (Boyle and Nackerud, 1999). Studies also show that creating intercultural educational opportunities for students can help them to cultivate “intercultural, global citizenship, intercultural communicative competence, and a broader, more balanced, sense of self” (Jackson, 2011, p. 80).

Furthermore, social inclusion and global citizenship can be promoted by engaging in particular activities and subjects. For example, Landscapes of Memory have been considered educational spaces (Alderman and Inwood, 2013). They can contribute to the education of young generations, by facilitating critical thinking, critical curiosity, and global citizenship. As such, “while memory is ostensibly about the past, it is shaped to serve ideological interests in the present and to carry certain cultural beliefs into the future” (Alderman and Inwood, 2013, p. 187). This is related to the concept of edutainment (Disney, 1954), which, as mentioned earlier, has been used to study dark tourism experiences (Wyatt et al., 2021). Moreover, the geo-visualisation offered by maps and digital media is a multifaceted information base comprising interactive spatial images that aim to provide visual spatial learning using different visual vocabularies (Rossetto, 2019). This is what Rossetto (2019) called Learning from Cartifact.

Another way to engage students and promote students' critical curiosity is to link teaching and research (Mali and Lim, 2022). There are different forms to do so. They include research-led, research-based, research-oriented, and

research-informed teaching (Griffiths, 2004). The former refers to when the educator explains the research in a traditional way, the second happens when the students are included in the research activity but the focus is not on learning the content, the third refers to when the focus is on teaching research methods and skills, and the latter is when research is included in the learning curriculum (Gresty and Edwards-Jones, 2012). Research-informed teaching therefore happens when educators bring relevant research into their lectures and generate reflection. Bringing research into teaching has been recognised to be a valuable educational method. Academic studies show that it is valuable and well-perceived by students (Mali and Lim, 2022). Students appreciate hands-on research activities and a research-based curriculum (Gresty and Edwards-Jones, 2012).

Additionally, online materials have been deemed to be valuable when planning research-informed teaching, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic (Higgins et al., 2021). They are good ways to create social inclusion. For example, some digital educational tools and courses can be culturally inclusive and promote intercultural communication (Germain-Rutherford and Barbara, 2008). Inclusion and online teaching is not new as a subject of research. For instance, Kerski (2022) investigated the value of using geographic information systems in creating engaged instruction in Geography. Pavia et al. (2017) explored more generally how teaching geography can be inclusive. However, online learning can sometimes create exclusion of some students, who do not have accessibility to the materials (Dube, 2020). This can cause social injustice and social exclusion (Dube, 2020). As mentioned previously, the use of the Tpack model, i.e. Technology, Pedagogy, Content Knowledge (Mishra and Koehler, 2006; Mishra, 2019) will be used in this research project. This is also linked to previous studies, which explored the use of StoryMaps to promote digital storytelling and cultural heritage (Marta and Osso, 2015; Mauro et al., 2021).

Thus, drawing from inclusive theories, research-informed teaching, digital educational tools, experiential learning, storytelling, edutainment,

cartifacts and educational landscapes of memory, this paper suggests a conceptual framework that links all these educational techniques (Figure 1). These theories create the conceptual underpinnings of our inclusive didactic tool: the Inclusive Irish Landscape Digital StoryMap, which is discussed in the following section.

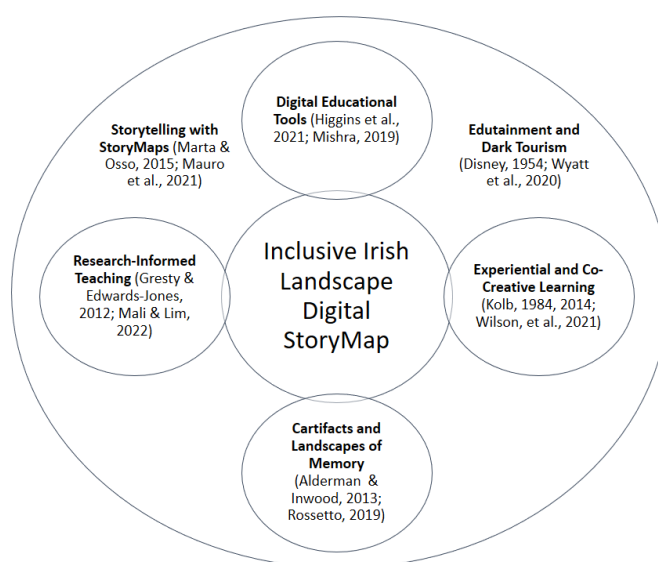


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the Inclusive Irish Landscape Digital StoryMap. Authors' elaboration.

3. The Case Study

Following Azzari and Zamperlin (2013), in the light of the *Geospatial Revolution*, it is very useful to use geographic information systems in geography because of its ability to offer visual geographic information that is also effective for educational purposes. Geographic information systems, as they wrote, are effective in teaching how to organise thought and research and how to understand space and place. These considerations, combined with the didactic power of storytelling (Marta and Osso, 2015), lead to the digital tool of StoryMaps as an educational tool useful for representing the perception of territories with multiple contents (visual, textual, auditory).

The project focuses on Ireland as this is part of the wider research project: *Representations of*

Colonial Landscapes in Irish Tourist Attractions. Thus, the theme for the StoryMap (Irish Colonial Landscape) draws on this research project, which is funded by the Italian Geographical Society and Insubria University.

The co-creation of the Inclusive Irish Landscape Digital StoryMap is splitted into two phases, a strategic and an operational one. The strategic phase involved the recruitment of school teachers from Italy and Ireland. They will collaborate with the research team, the *Italian Association of Geography Teachers* and the *Italian Geographical Society* (both part of the secondary team of this research project). The teachers will choose the students who will work on the Inclusive Irish Landscape Digital StoryMap project. The choice of students will depend solely on their willingness to be involved in the project. It is, in both cases, voluntary. Three groups of students have been recruited: one group consists of 13-year-old Italian students (so far 8 people signed up), a second group consists of 13-year-old Irish students (so far 10 people signed up), the third group consists of a group of Irish first-year university students (so far 7 people signed up). In this way, two different types of collaborative relationships are achieved: there is a peer exchange (middle school/middle school) and a mentoring exchange (middle school/university). In particular, the university Irish students will be masters students in Tourism at the Technological University of Dublin, while the Italian and Irish students are selected from two secondary schools linked by a proximity relationship to the project's primary team. The Inclusive Irish Landscape Digital StoryMap will be therefore co-created with students from different higher education institutions and countries. In the light of educational and co-creative learning, this phase will aim to provide digital educational tools, as outlined in the previous section, throughout the co-creation of the StoryMap. As such, the StoryMap will improve intergenerational, international, and interinstitutional collaboration. All this will be supported by experiential and co-creative learning theories (Kolb, 1984, 2014; Wilson et al., 2021) (see Figure 1).

The operational phase of the project will be the actual co-creation of the Inclusive Irish

Landscape Digital StoryMap. The StoryMap design will draw from the knowledge and insights gleaned from the analysis phase which deepen the concept of colonial Irish landscape narratives in Irish tourist attractions. The Italian and Irish secondary school students will produce a map of their perception of Irish tourist attractions and produce an initial geo-visualisation of their mental map. These first drafts of the StoryMap will therefore include the perceptions of both international (Italian) and domestic (Irish) potential tourists. The students will share their first drafts of the map and refine their digital projects together. The university Irish students, acting as mentors, will observe the work of the Italian and Irish secondary students and provide guidance and suggestions on the development of the project, offering mainly narrative cues for the description of places on the map. This will create an edutainment activity for students, who will learn about light dark Irish tourism while having fun (Disney, 1954; Wyatt et al., 2021). It will also provide the students an opportunity to be engaged in research-informed teaching (Gresty and Edwards-Jones, 2012; Mali and Lim, 2022).

Concrete expectations of the researchers are to work according to a decolonial rather than a postcolonial approach. In this way, the aim is to get young students used to deconstructing the representations of places in order to extract their essence through dialogue with the locals. This serves to learn to respect territorial identity, and to question the dynamics of building a landscape and its representation. All this will be achieved through co-creation and mentoring activities during the StoryMap creation as well as considering past similar projects (Marta and Osso, 2015; Mauro et al., 2021; Zamperlin and Azzari, 2017).

The template, structure, and materials included in the StoryMap have not yet been finalised as they will depend on the interactions between the students. The StoryMap will probably include a visual geographical map of the Republic of Ireland with the locations and the descriptions of decolonial tourist attractions. There will also be further resources, activities and readings that teachers will be able to use in class.

The use of the Inclusive Irish Landscape Digital StoryMap will be explained in a guide/pamphlet and will be useful for students, teachers and landscape educators. The StoryMap will be a didactic tool that will support students' digital literacy and transferable skills, such as critical observation, team work, time management, and communication. This relates to the importance of digital education (Higgins et al., 2021; Mishra, 2019). The Inclusive Irish Landscape Digital StoryMap will also enhance students' knowledge of colonial landscape by using cartifacts and *landscapes of memory* as didactic tools (Alderman and Inwood, 2013; Rossetto, 2019).

Thus, the *Representations of Colonial Landscapes in Irish Tourist Attractions* research will generate a StoryMap which will be available online, free access, via the website of the Italian Geographical Society. The Map will be made of:

1. the Inclusive Irish Landscape Digital StoryMap: Researchers and students will co-create the StoryMap;
2. guide/pamphlet for teachers and educators: a short and accessible description of the research, the pedagogical meaning of the Inclusive Irish Landscape Digital StoryMap and how to use it.

Once the two phases (strategic and operational), which are useful for the co-creation of the StoryMap, will be completed, the didactic dissemination of the StoryMap will be as follows:

- a. a mid-term virtual meeting will be planned with the educators involved in the design phase (researchers and teachers) to discuss the Inclusive Irish Landscape Digital StoryMap progress. The discussion will focus on how to better create an inclusive and interactive didactic tool that promotes cultural heritage via digital storytelling (Marta and Osso, 2015; Mauro et al., 2021);
- b. a final didactic workshop will be then planned, where the value and use of the co-created Inclusive Irish Landscape Digital StoryMap will be explained to secondary school educators.

The dissemination of the StoryMap will be freely shared with teachers and students. The values of the Inclusive Irish Landscape Digital StoryMap are multiple. First, it will provide inclusivity for students. Second, it will further the understanding of the heritage-landscape relationship in the context of colonial histories as well as the exclusionary and inclusionary approaches at visitor attractions.

4. Conclusions

This contribution discussed the plan to create an inclusive didactic tool: the Inclusive Irish Landscape Digital StoryMap. The project is ongoing. So, this paper explained the conceptual framework and the planning process of the StoryMap. It also discussed the potential outputs and expectations that the StoryMap could produce. The Inclusive Irish Landscape Digital StoryMap will be co-created by university Irish students and secondary school Irish and Italian students. The students will need to co-create content for the StoryMap, being engaged in mentors-mentees relationships and peer relationships. All this aims to promote international inclusion, didactic exchanges between students, scholars and teachers, multiculturalism and understandings of a foreign culture. The theoretical underpinnings of the Inclusive Irish Landscape Digital StoryMap will include: digital storytelling with StoryMaps (Marta and Osso, 2015; Mauro et al., 2021); edutainment and dark tourism (Disney, 1954; Wyatt et al., 2021); digital educational tools (Higgins et al., 2021; Mishra, 2019); experiential and co-creative learning (Kolb, 1984, 2014; Wilson et al., 2021); cartifacts and landscapes of memory (Alderman and Inwood, 2013; Rossetto, 2019); and research-informed teaching (Gresty and Edwards-Jones, 2012; Mali and Lim, 2022).

The planned outputs for the students involved in the creation of the Inclusive Irish Landscape Digital StoryMap will include: 1) promotion of international collaboration that can foster cultural awareness and English language learning; 2) getting and receiving mentoring experience; 3) development of research skills, using secondary data; 4) development of digital

literacy and other transferable skills, such as critical observation, team work, time management, and communication. They can be portable skills that the students can apply in future different situations; 5) acquisition of knowledge of colonial landscapes and develop a decolonial attitude in dealing with the geographies of colonisation.

Moreover, other possible results will include education and sensibilization outputs for a wider student population. As a matter of fact, this project aims to generate inclusive education for students who will use the Inclusive Irish Landscape Digital StoryMap in the future. They will be able to learn more about colonial landscapes in Irish visitor attractions, and think critically about colonisation. The Inclusive Irish Landscape Digital StoryMap will therefore promote social inclusion and help to generate a decolonial attitude in students. It aims to promote all three dimensions of inclusion: levels, types, and degrees of inclusion (Qvortrup and Qvortrup, 2018). The StoryMap will be shared with the higher education system in different countries via the Italian Geographical Society website. The StoryMap will also foster open dialog between educators and students, promoting social inclusion (Ainscow and Messiou, 2018).

This research has some limitations. First, the recruitment of the Italian secondary schools teachers has been done in collaboration with the Italian Association of Geography Teachers. While the Irish teachers recruitment will involve the informal involvement of school actors who volunteer to help, as a geography teachers' association was not found. This was overcome by recruiting people from schools that were in contact with the project's primary team. Future studies might consider more schools, located in more countries, even outside Europe.

Second, the international students will collaborate only virtually, which is a good starting point. However, the construction of an emotional imaginary (which has a high didactic value) requires the live experience of meeting spaces of *otherness*. Therefore, in the future, it would be desirable to replicate this project by arranging face-to-face meetings between students of different nationalities.

To conclude, from a strictly educational technology point of view, this project aims to emphasise how new technologies can be inclusive and provide valuable support in all learning situations that tend to give centrality to teaching methods for students of different ages and from different countries. Instead, from a point of view more closely related to the subject of the work (Irish colonial landscape), this research project aims to broaden the knowledge of the colonial imprinting and the traces that the phenomenon can leave both in the landscape and in the people who are part of the landscape. It is about giving a voice to underlying, yet strongly present, elements in Ireland's culture, aesthetics, narrative and identity.

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