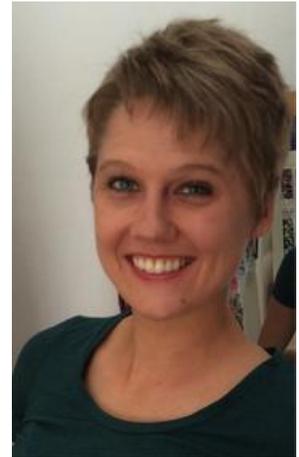




Member in profile

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Dr Laura Hammersley



I am currently an Online Learning and Teaching Coordinator and Honorary Associate Fellow within the School of Geography and Sustainable Communities at the University of Wollongong. My research interests include Indigenous geographies, community engagement and development pedagogies, tourism studies and postcolonial and feminist research methodologies.

I fell unexpectedly in love with human geography in High School thanks to the infectious passion of my geography teacher, Ms Taylor. She taught me that geography was about much more than maps and boundaries; that it was a means to connect the world, rather than to control it. Because of Ms Taylor, I became the first person in my family to attend university, and spent 12 years studying, teaching and researching at Macquarie University under the supervision of Kate Lloyd, Sandie Suchet-Pearson and Richie Howitt, who taught me to go beyond the confines of my own ways of seeing, knowing, and doing.

My research journey was inspired by an overseas volunteer experience immediately after my undergraduate studies. As a 'volunteer tourist', I spent three months living, learning, and working in a remote village in Northern Vanuatu. I wanted to experience international 'development' beyond the walls of the university and the confines of a textbook. It was an exciting but increasingly disillusioning experience, as I found myself purporting to teach life skills to local youth with whose culture and language I had no prior knowledge or experience. To my horror, I realised I was an active participant in a form of neo-colonialism being enacted around the world. The volunteer tourism industry is now worth an estimated \$173 billion and continues to grow.

This experience inspired honours, PhD and subsequent research into this industry, its problems, and how enthusiastic civilians and undergraduate students might participate in community development and poverty alleviation efforts in ways that are more ethical and reciprocal. In doing so, I have spent the past 5 years working with Indigenous community-based organisations that strategically engage non-Indigenous peoples through tourism as a way to contest and resist ongoing colonial processes, and bring about respect and understanding. These initiatives place Indigenous knowledges at the centre of discourse and pedagogy, and facilitate a 'here to listen and learn' rather than a 'here to help and make a difference' approach.

For example, I work closely with an Indigenous community-based organisation run by KadazunDusun women in Sabah, Borneo who advocate for traditional land practices, livelihoods, and culture under threat from palm oil plantations, dams, and national parks. These women taught me to place value on people's lived experiences, to embrace the unpredictable and complex reality of fieldwork, and to attend not only to what I hear, but also to what I see and feel.

These teachings were put into practice in an Office for Learning and Teaching Project, Classroom of Many Cultures. Here academics from Human Geography and Anthropology met and collaborated at Macquarie University with eleven partner organisations from seven different countries to co-create an online curriculum that better prepares participants for international community-based engagement programs. This work centres the knowledge of community-based partners within academic teaching, learning and research.

I draw strength and fulfilment from collaborations within and outside the academy: with students, colleagues, research partners and friends. In teaching, I strive to convey the same enthusiasm for a geographical understanding of the world that Ms Taylor instilled in me. In research, I emphasise building relationships on the basis of care and reciprocity, outputs that are rarely formally evaluated by the academy, but of which I am particularly proud.