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# With the Simpsons as tour guides: how popular culture sources can enhance the student experience in a university tourism unit

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**Title;**

With *The Simpsons* as Tour Guides: How Popular Culture Sources can Enhance the Student Experience in a University Tourism Unit

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**Abstract:**

University education is at times claimed to be overly theoretical and disconnected from the reality for which it is preparing students. The disconnection of theory from practice might have a negative impact on students' learning experiences if it leads to a view of university education as impractical and abstract rather than current and applicable to work-life situations. A pedagogical method aimed at bringing examples from workplaces and society in general, to theory lectures, is to use different media sources, such as magazines, music, television or films. These can highlight how theory contextualises, explains and improves practice.

The aim of this paper is to investigate how the animated TV-series, *The Simpsons*, can be fruitfully used to illuminate tourism practices in a theoretical first-year tourism university unit. The method used in the paper is to present an example illustrated by educational constructivism. The major finding is that by analysing *The Simpsons* as a key to popular culture and how the series is part of the formation of social perceptions of tourism in the public domain, students learn to see why it is important to use theories when managing tourism businesses. Other findings in the paper are that: Popular culture sources can be effective when they put the theories discussed into a humorous context. They are used with pedagogical 'stepping stones'– e.g. subtitles and repetition. To be successful, sources have to be commonly known to the audience and main points explained beforehand.

## Introduction

The claim that university education is overly theoretical and disconnected from the reality for which it is preparing students will be discussed in this paper. The perceived disconnection of theory from practice might have a negative impact on students' learning experiences if it leads to a view of university education as impractical and abstract rather than current and applicable to work life situations. The disconnection from reality has been perceived as a problem by different higher education disciplines. Attempts to alleviate this situation include laboratory work, work practice, or through field visits (Ferreira, 2004), to name some examples. The major obstacles to these approaches are, time, complexity and staffing resources. The time it would take to illustrate in practice different theoretical concepts is often in excess of allocated hours for any one academic. Additionally the type of theories that are expected to be presented in lectures are often complex and at times disconnected from one another – thus making it hard to find suitable practical examples that students could experience.

A pedagogical method aimed at bringing examples from workplaces and society in general to theory lectures is the usage of different media sources, such as magazines, music, television and films. This fits in a constructivist education setting where 'the teacher supplies the "scaffold" for learning, but the learner is expected to be active and to take responsibility for their own learning; a student-centered rather than a teacher-centred learning paradigm' (Bibbings, 2005, p. 425). A major disadvantage with many media sources is that they are relatively expensive if they are planned and produced for an educational environment, additionally they become dated quite easily and thus, students lose interest (Eakin et al., 1998). Additionally,

educational media sources are also forced to create simulated environments where the practice they illustrate takes place. However, in cases, that might be as abstract an environment for students as the theories that are discussed, thus they do not overcome the hurdle between theory and practice. Specific media products for an educational environment might also be aimed at exemplifying only certain aspects of theory (Bibbings, 2005), and thus lose their appeal for educators. One media source that is overcoming most of these hurdles is to use popular culture sources known to students. They do not need an introduction and can be easily understood (Wheeller, 2005). They do not date because new media texts are continuously created, and they are cheap – sometimes even free – to use.

The enormous popularity of *The Simpsons* has been a source of interest for researchers over many years. This paper aims to expand that body of research to the fields of tourism and management education. The paper will give an insight into the diversity in literature available relating to this topic, both on *The Simpsons* in general and also on *The Simpsons* and education. It will also suggest potential gaps in the current research agenda that can be remedied through this research.

The findings in this article will show some examples from *The Simpsons* to highlight the practical tourism and hospitality situations which are presented in the episodes, and how these situations can help to shed light on theories that are discussed in a first year university tourism unit. The final part of the article is a discussion in which the topics alluded to in the findings are brought into focus, highlighting the features that are suggested to be applicable on other units and in other fields.

### **Theoretical context for pedagogical method**

This section will outline a pedagogical background to the article's case study. It will show the relevance of considering the student experience in tourism higher education as an issue of importance, by highlighting how learning takes place.

The student experience in tourism higher education has been the focus of several studies recently, and a continuing theme in them seems to be the challenges posed by the heterogeneous and 'non-traditional' student body attracted to the field (Bibbings, 2005; Tribe, 2005; Wickens & Forbes, 2005). This non-traditional student body is learning in a different manner compared to, so called, 'traditional' higher education students, namely school leavers from middle- to higher socio-economic groups (Brookes, 2003; Wickens & Forbes, 2005). Direct instructions, clear assessable items, and explanations of what to read and study is expected – something tutors and academics who have finished their own studies in a different environment might have problems empathising with (Bibbings, 2005; Wickens & Forbes, 2005).

The explicit investigation of teaching practices by using a combination of peer evaluation by colleagues and industry experts, self-evaluation, as well as student evaluations, is an important way of improving students' learning experiences, and also the efficacy of a lecturer's practice (Ramsden & Dodds, 1989). Many researchers show that traditional lectures is a favoured method amongst lecturers for the transfer of information to students, but the efficiency of this practice is not always guaranteed (Gibbs, Habeshaw, & Habeshaw, 1992; Newstead & Hoskins, 2003). Research shows that students usually only learn from the ten first minutes of lectures, and the final points of the lecture. The issues presented in the middle of

the average 50 minutes lectures, are fast forgotten, if ever learned (Horgan, 2003). A way of extending the attention rate amongst students, or to revive lectures is by using humour in some way. Powell and Andresen found that students attending classes where lecturers were using humour maintained their interest for longer, felt more included in the social environment and had better retention of points presented (1985, p. 80-82). If student learning is the outcome aimed for, then it is important that lecturers are aware of how that learning takes place (Stergiou, 2005).

A common theme in research about tourism higher education is the need to offer a balance between vocational skills on the one hand, and academic knowledge on the other (Stergiou, 2005). Many students studying tourism at a higher education level are expecting the studies to prepare them for the work situations, and might be surprised, and even disappointed to find how theoretical their studies are at universities (Wickens & Forbes, 2005). Tribe suggests that this unfortunate dualism should and could be bridged by preparing future graduates to become '*philosophic practitioners*' (2005, p. 57), who can reflect on their practice and improve it by taking advantage of the theoretical underpinnings of their university education. Therefore, in order to encourage students to move beyond a short-term learning perspective simply focused on assessments and even their degree, and rather to learn how education can inform and improve their understanding of their own 'reality', education needs to contextualise theories in a reality with which students are familiar (Wheeller, 2005).

One popular theory describing student learning is constructivism, which is defined as the 'continuous building and amending of previous structures ... as new experiences, actions and knowledge is assimilated and accommodated' (Fry,

Ketteridge, & Marshall, 2003, p. 10). Lecturers are seldom teaching students that are *tabula rasa* on any one issue, and this leads teaching to be more the process of 'extending and supplementing old understanding and knowledge' (Fry et al., 2003, p. 10), rather than of processing entirely new knowledge. It would be a mistake not to take advantage of the knowledge and understanding students have, if all of that could be used to illuminate theoretical concepts. The introduction of popular media sources, such as films and television, to explain tourism theories has been done before (Croy, 2004; Wheeler, 2005), but the emphasis has then been on explicit media and image theories. This article will expand on that research and show how episodes from one TV-series can be effectively used to add to and alter the understanding constructed about tourism in a first-year university unit.

When lecturers step into lecture theatres to give lectures, they probably doubt the possibility that everything they say will be 'learned' by everybody attending the lecture. This is not because they doubt their abilities as lecturers, but rather because they know that every individual in that room has a unique and separate reality in which they live (Newstead & Hoskins, 2003). The issues lecturers discuss, and care for immensely, might be of a very vague interest to the students, and that is not their 'fault' in any way, all human beings act in the same ways to issues for which they cannot see any relevance (Brookes, 2003). The fact that students learn an enormous amount of issues whilst in lecture theatres has been proven in many studies, but that the issues they have learned only to a minor extent relate to the topic of the lecture, is probably something most lecturers would not like to know (Bergenhengouwen, 1987). Students learn about fashion statements, they learn about public gossip, they learn about how their friends spent their last weekend and how they plan to spend the next one, and intermingled in that 'cocktail', they might

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also learn how they are expected to behave in society. Lecturers try at times to illustrate some concepts more practically, to bring lectures 'alive' by using a 'dead' medium – the television (Horgan, 2003), but the question is, how much more do students learn from that compared to the rest of the lecture? At times even less because of the media used, but at other times much more when the topic is of interest to the students, or when a popular movie or TV program is used as the medium.

Is it then that students always will learn more just by watching popular cultural sources? Naturally not, this is again an individual construct – that is “to learn” (Fry et al., 2003). This article does not in any way suggest that everything viewed on the TV is accepted as truths and acted upon by viewers –students are accustomed media consumers and can read the explicit and the implicit messages in the texts (During, 2005). Moral critics who are screaming out their disgust over TV-programs are fighting shadows in an eternal battle over matters of taste and political correctness (Lowney, 2003). The suggestion here is rather that popular culture should be perceived as a skewed mirror of society. The producers of *The Simpsons* are constantly making intertextual jokes on the debate that rages because of the series itself (Savage, 2004), showing a worldview that seems to be more inclusive than the criticism of 'moral guardians'. The images on the TV represent, to some extent the society they portray, but the fact that they are humorous and dramatised media productions will eternally be more important than the actions they are supposed to depict. This is the reason why short and simple examples of different issues that are so exaggerated that they become comical are used in the examples of this article; the examples entertain whilst simultaneously allowing the lecturer to build on theoretical points made in the lecture.

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To claim that viewers learn matters from the content of TV-series would be as naïve as claiming that everything said in lectures to undergraduate students is accepted and acted upon without question. Only a certain portion of what has been said is recalled afterwards by the class (Ramsden & Dodds, 1989) – and additionally, only a portion of the class have listened to what was said in the first place (Horgan, 2003). Grossberg criticises (in an article 1987) media and cultural studies scholars for concentrating on specific programs in their analyses and thus reading in too much importance in the messages and cultural discourses those programs contain. What the examples in this article aims to do is rather to use *The Simpsons* as that earlier mentioned skewed mirror of society, and show students how the theories presented might look in practice.

### ***The Simpsons***

The animated TV-series, *The Simpsons*, produced by the FOX network is now in its 20<sup>th</sup> season. The FOX network aired the 400<sup>th</sup> episode of *The Simpsons* in May 2007, and its 19<sup>th</sup> season commenced in September 2007 in the USA (Hellgren, 2007). The series has an average 10 million US citizens tune into each new episode every week (Moss, 1999). In Australia the TEN network has been trying out several different time-slots in which to air the series, but, based on viewer ratings, it has mostly changed back to the initial successful time-slots after drops in audience numbers (Stepanas, 2003). Currently old episodes of *The Simpsons* screen on weekends at 18:00 and new episodes are shown once a week on Tuesdays to an average of 1.1 million viewers (Australian Film Commission, 2007). The viewing audience is varied with three distinct viewing audiences; children 6-10 years of age,

young adults 18-22 years of age, and middle-aged adults 35-45 years of age (Facenda, 2003).

One of the reasons the series has been able to maintain its popularity over the years has been the fact that it is an animated series. The characters are not aging. The characters can be involved in impossible stunts that would render them injured or dead in reality (Todd, 2002). It would be impossible to present these stunts in a TV-series involving 'live' actors. This allows the creators to keep up a post-modern narrative where the setting remains fairly static whilst mainly non-linear episodes present a range of inter-textual jokes to the viewers.

*The Simpsons* is overtly portraying the 'ideal' American family (a Caucasian heterosexual couple with 2.3 kids), and is equally overtly acting as a satirical commentary on American society (Facenda, 2003). Beyond layers of satire and intertextual jokes lies another reality – *The Simpsons* act as a piece in the hegemonic social construction of the Western society – conservative and Christian (Brook, 2004; Brooks, 2005).

The literature reviewed for this paper can be categorised into three separate types. *Firstly*, there is a large volume of research and papers written on *The Simpsons* that take as their topic of analysis the series itself (Bianculli, 2000; Billen, 2000; Diamond, 1996; Finnigan, 2001; Moss, 1999). These papers are interested in success factors behind USA's longest running animated TV series (Rousseve, 2001), which is dubbed and sub-titled into numerous languages, and broadcasted in over 100 countries around the world. The papers analyse the characters of the series (Miller, 2001), the narrative structure of the series (Noonan, 1997) and the

mechanics of the series (Schorr, 1997), such as the fact that an animated series can do things 'live' actors would not be able to do.

The *second* category of papers has taken as their focus certain aspects of the series. These papers analyse how, for example, religion (Bowler, 2006; Guida, 2004; J. L. Hall, 2000; Kalman & Belkin, 2001; Lewis, 2002), politics (Frost, 2001; Gordon, 2004; Lefebvre, 2005), or medicine (Byrd-Bredbenner, 2004; Patterson & Weijer, 1998) are portrayed in the series, and then discussing these findings in the context of that field of research.

The *final* category of papers utilises aspects of *The Simpsons* episodes to explain and highlight matters in their own fields of research. Examples of this are books that are explaining Philosophy (Irwin, Conrad, & Skolbe, 2001), Psychology (Brown & Logan, 2005), Science (Keslowitz, 2006) and Cultural Studies theories (Alberti, 2004) based on how *The Simpsons* act in the series. A similar theme of articles analyse feminism (Henry, 2007; Waltonen, 2000), race (Parisi, 1993), linguistics (Hellgren, 2007; Plourde, 2000), sociology (Scanlan & Feinberg, 2000), and economics (J. Hall, 2005, 2006), by showing how theories from these fields are illustrated in the series. Interestingly, no examples of *The Simpsons* being used in educational research were found. The examples were always themed on a specific field that was being taught, not concentrated on teaching on its own.

This last category is where this article also fits; it uses *The Simpsons* to illustrate theoretical points of tourism to students in a higher education unit. Also included in this category is a range of papers that have investigated how popular culture sources in general and *The Simpsons* in specific, can be used in classrooms to invigorate theory lessons. Hall (2005; 2006) has for example written about

Simpsons and lecturing Economics and Social policy; Considine (2006) and also Scanlan and Feinberg (2000) look at *The Simpsons* for examples in lecturing Sociology; Bybee and Overbeck (2001) and also Gray (2005) use *The Simpsons* as examples for studies in Media Literacy

It is interesting to note that there is an evident gap in the literature in regards to tourism, hospitality and leisure research. With the multitude of research conducted about *The Simpsons*, and the very commonly occurring links to leisure / tourism activities in the series, the absence of research seems, to an extent, surprising. It should be noted that this seems to be a fertile ground for further research. Wheeler notes, however, that tourism education seems to utilise popular culture sources sparsely and that it does not seem to be encouraged either (2005, p. 316), even though they could be used to contextualise tourism in the “real” world. This is overtly what this article aims to do, to investigate how *The Simpsons* can be used to illuminate tourism practices in a theoretical higher education unit, and thereby to show an example of how students’ learning experiences can be enhanced.

## **Methods**

This paper discusses the use of popular culture sources, mainly the animated TV-series, *The Simpsons*, in illuminating theories presented in a first-year tourism unit. The unit’s name is ‘*Tourism Theories and Practices*’, and it is one of the degree structure’s core first year, first semester units. The unit is specifically written to open students’ critical minds, to expose them to theories surrounding tourism practices, and to understand how the usage of theories allows for a more structured way of understanding tourism. The students are exposed to the practices of tourism in different ways, for example with a field-visit to a tourist destination. However, there

are still many abstract concepts that benefit from short and fun examples and may thus be better understood.

The unit *Tourism Theories and Practices* is divided into 11 sub-topics, for example: People, Places and Organisations; A History of Tourism; Studying Tourism: Ways of Knowing & Understanding; Whole Tourism Systems & Environments; Tourism Patterns and Trends; and Tourist Attractions. Over the three years this article's author has been lecturing the unit an increasing range of popular culture sources have been included to exemplify the theories associated with the mentioned topics. A favourite amongst students is a sequence from Arnold Schwarzenegger's movie '*Total Recall*' where the hero goes to a futuristic travel agency and is sold a memory of a holiday, to be implanted in his brain – as a perfect illustration of travel motivation. But the source that is used the most in the unit is *The Simpsons* due to the immense material on offer in the series. There is a large selection of suitable episodes that can be shown to the students. Due to the familiarity most students have with the series, characters need no further introduction. Their traits and persona are known to the viewers.

The general method for using this illustrative material is by leading the students into the topic with regular power point slides presenting the topic of the day. There is the potential to use other material, such as newspaper articles about topical issues. These can be examined with the help of an overhead camera projector. Lights are then dimmed when an important point in the theoretical section is reached and a chosen section from a media file or from a DVD is played. The type of media is chosen so that the picture and the sound are clear and sharp, and so that subtitles can be used in order for students to easily follow the chosen scene. After the scene

is played lights are again brightened and the projector reverts to the power point presentation where the theoretical issue illustrated is presented. Whereas many students are familiar with the series from earlier times, it is fair to assume that few have regarded it as a source of factual information. It is therefore important to explain what the episode is supposed to clarify in practice from a theoretical perspective (Powell & Andresen, 1985). It is also important to allow students to follow the example with pedagogical aids such as subtitles which elucidates the spoken text, and by repetition which permits finer details to be understood.

## Findings

### Example one:

Witt and Wright (1992) examined research on tourist motivation and one of their major findings was that most writing on motivation can be divided into two separate categories; *Content* versus *Process* theories. *Content theories* are listing different attractor attributes for tourists to choose from, and the result drawn from the responses are supposed to highlight the needs and wants those tourism selection attributes relates to – essentially psychologising a quantitative content analysis set. *Process theories*, on the other hand, looks at needs and wants that tourists are reporting to have before they choose their holiday destinations, and then match those needs with different destinations where the needs can be satisfied. The latter type of theories are much more complex but at the same time also much more accurate in providing quality experiences for tourists (Witt & Wright, 1992). In order to illuminate these two types of theories an episode, called '*Itchy and Scratchy Land*' from Season Eight (Archer, 1994), is shown. The whole episode is filled with useful

references to tourism practices; it is therefore played in full, and referred back to when other aspects in different topics, such as tourist segmentation, are presented.

*Synopsis:* Bart and Lisa learn about a special offer at a theme park called 'Itchy and Scratchy Land'. They convince their parents to go on vacation to the park, after explaining how the park offers attractions suitable to all family members. Marge demands the family to promise to behave well after reminding the others of what has gone wrong on earlier vacations. The visit goes horribly wrong after both Bart and Homer are arrested for different offences and the robots at the park starts attacking the visitors. At the end, when *The Simpsons* have overcome the threat from the robots, Marge alludes to the vacation being the worst they have ever experienced. Bart reminds her, however, of all the motivators she had for going on holiday, and proves that each were fulfilled.

*Relevance to theory:* Witt and Wright's (1992) content and process theories are exemplified several times in the episode. Firstly, pre-vacation motivators fitting a process theory are described in great detail both in a television commercial viewed by Bart and Lisa; in attempts by the children to convince their parents; in Marge's explanation of why the family should go to a bird sanctuary instead of the theme park, and finally in a brochure describing attractions in the park. Post-vacation rationalisation by the family exemplifies a content theory when the earlier mentioned motivators are repeated but shown to exist in very different circumstances compared to the family's intentions. Students are shown that a content theory does not, by necessity, have a direct connection with vacation satisfaction, and simultaneously that a process theory is hard to manage because vacation experiences seldom meet pre-conceived expectations directly.



**Example two:**

The second section illustrates the systematic construction of tourist attractions. Leiper (2004), defined tourist attractions as consisting of three elements: a tourist (because without tourists there is no tourism); a nucleus (the central element of the attraction that people are attracted to) and a marker (an informative element, constituting of written or spoken text in any form, that tells the tourist about the attraction). A marker can either be on site, a so called contiguous marker, or off-site, which can be a generating marker in the tourist's home region, or a transit marker that is encountered on the way to the destination (Leiper, 2004). An episode that illuminates this theory is '*Bart on the road*' from season seven (Scott, 1996).

*Synopsis:* All the kids at school are sent on a 'Go to work with your parents day' just before the Spring Break starts. Bart does his at Marge's sisters' workplace, the DMV (Department of Motor Vehicles), and creates a driver's licence for himself there. With the help of the licence and money that Martin, one of his classmates, earned from the stock market on his practice, Bart and three friends (Martin, Milhouse and Nelson) rent a car and set off on Spring Break. After reading an AAA-tourist guide found in the car the boys decide to attend the World's Fair in Knoxville, Tennessee. It turns out that the fair was over a long time ago. The guidebook was out of date by 14 years, and the boys find themselves stranded after their car is destroyed in Knoxville.

*Relevance to theory:* The boys become tourists as a combination of several factors; they have time off from school, they have resources (money and car) that allows them to travel, and they travel away from their normal domicile in order to take part of a leisure experience – thus fulfilling the first element of Leiper's attraction theory.

The boys vote on where to go after departing their homes based on a made up 'Grammar Rodeo' in Canada. After suggestions from the boys to 'tour the bridges of Madison County', visit Macon; Georgia or Disney World, the boys are convinced to go to Knoxville. The main attractor of their choice at the World's Fair is a 'Sun Sphere, which sits atop a 266 foot tall steel shaft', and inside it is a, somewhat anti-climactic, 'information desk' (Scott, 1996). A nucleus is therefore established within the attraction. The final part of the theory; markers, feature prominently both as generating markers when the boys read different guidebooks and road maps to decide on where to go. Milhouse's classic line whilst reading a guidebook: '*Hey, who has better vacation ideas than AAA? According to the publisher of this AAA guidebook, no one*' (Scott, 1996) sums up in a sarcastic way, the power and influence guidebooks have over travellers. There are also transit markers available in the episode, such as a road sign the boys pass with the text: 'Tennessee is Tennesseelin is Tennessebelievin'.

### **Discussion**

Educational constructivism takes as its starting point the assumption that learners already know a lot when attending classes, teaching should therefore concentrate on the process of extending knowledge students already possess by contextualising (Fry et al., 2003). Tribe suggests that students need to be philosophic practitioners who know how to supplement their old understanding of practical matters with improved practices based on theoretical underpinnings (2005). Wheeler proposes that students should be shown the practical relevance of theories by using popular culture sources as practical examples because this is already a context with which the students are familiar (2005).

Based on the case studies above the following findings were made: Popular culture sources can be effective teaching aids because they make the theories discussed light and put them into a humoristic context. Several studies have highlighted this as an important teaching aid (Bryant, Comisky, Crane, & Zillmann, 1980; Powell & Andresen, 1985). There is, however, a limit to what kind of humour and how much humour students appreciate in a lecture. The humorous theme should not become the main focus, and irreverent nonsense humour is the most appreciated kind in classes (Powell & Andresen, 1985).

Because the point of the episodes played is not always evident in their non-linear story lines it is important that students are shown how they illustrate current themes in the field of study (Stergiou, 2005). Current newspaper articles with a similar content can first be shown, and after that related to the episode. The language and dialogues of the chosen episodes are therefore important to capture. Subtitles and repetition are good ways of scaffolding the events in the episode to the theory it is aimed at illuminating.

Wheeller emphasises that teachers need to select material that is familiar to, and appreciated by the audience (Wheeller, 2005). If the source is not commonly known by the audience it might even undermine the lecturer's intention as it is seen as a waste of time by the students. The use of *The Simpsons* in theory lectures interrupts the flow of apparently new information and students are given a chance to contextualise the theories in the light of understandings they already possess from previous learning experiences and their world-view (Bibbings, 2005). This means that the focus on the material is processed within a context with which students are familiar.

## Conclusion

This paper's aim was to investigate how the TV-series *The Simpsons* could be used to explain in practical terms, theories presented in a higher education tourism unit. A literature review was conducted showing the diversity of research available on *The Simpsons* in general and after that also more specifically on *The Simpsons* and education. There appears to be a gap in terms of tourism, hospitality and leisure research, which seems somewhat surprising in the light of the frequent examples of the fields in the series.

With the intention to enhance students' experiences in higher education by providing relevant and appropriate instruction, an investigation was done into how students learn, and what challenges regular university teaching hold. It was shown that students learn in a constructive mindset where earlier information is amended and transformed into new knowledge. However, the most popular method of transmitting information in universities, regular lectures, were deemed ineffective because students lost their concentration after a short while, and could in general, not recollect information afterwards. A suggestion was made that humour could be used as a tool to break lecture monotony and act as examples of theoretical principles explained, thereby improving information retention. The findings in this article showed how two examples from *The Simpsons* series highlights practice in tourism, and how these situations can help to contextualise and explain theories that have been presented as the core of the lecture.

The major rationales for using popular culture sources and suggestions for how to use practical examples when lecturing theory in higher education are therefore:

**A)** Popular culture sources are effective because they make the theories discussed light and put them into a humorous context. Like pointed out in the paper, humour is a potent teaching tool, and an educator should not be afraid of using it if it enhances the learning experience. Humour for its own sake should be avoided, it is the pedagogical message that it is intended to carry that should be the main point;

**B)** The sources need to be played with as many pedagogical 'stepping stones' as possible – e.g. subtitles and repetition. This is important for all students, not only for students from a non-English speaking background. Due to audiovisual sources not always being clear enough there should be a structure that can be easily followed, subtitles allow text to be transmitted in two formats, and repetition allow theories that have been explained to be applied on a familiar setting;

**C)** The educator must make sure that the source is commonly known by the audience, examples that are not known to the audience are abstractions in themselves;

**D)** Make sure that the main points the sequence is supposed to illuminate are clearly explained beforehand. Following on from the earlier points, the media sequence should not be seen as an event on its own, it is there to highlight a specific feature. By initially explaining a theory and how that theory can be used, the audience is prepared to 'deconstruct' the episode later shown following that guidelines given;

**E)** Do not allow the sequence played to 'stand on its own' – no source, regardless of how illuminating it seems to the lecturer, will have the same meaning to students. This leads to the main contribution of both the pedagogical method described, and also the main contribution of this article generally. By analysing *The Simpsons* as a

key to popular culture and how the series is part of the formation of social perceptions of tourism in the public domain, students learn to see why it is important to use theories when managing tourism businesses. And, by using this connection between tourism theories and popular culture, educators can enhance the efficacy of their lectures.

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