CITIES IN A CHANGING WORLD: QUESTIONS OF CULTURE, CLIMATE AND DESIGN

• Paper / Proposal Title:
Virtual Travel: Global Opportunities to Reduce the Carbon Footprint

Theme: Cultures, Communities

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• Abstract (300 words):
Since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, virtual travel experiences have expanded. Internet platforms are used to create live and recorded connections with travelers. Amidst the growing concern about climate change, virtual travel offers alternatives to traditional travel and reduces fossil-fueled transportation and the carbon footprint. In rural and urban environments, virtual travel is an emerging tourism product that has the potential to complement sustainable tourism.

New technologies have supported the creation of virtual walking tours. In New York and other cities, neighborhood virtual walking tours, the lifeblood of art and historical societies, have proliferated in the last year due to restrictions on travel. Architects, scholars, and students have used universally available technologies to create virtual walking tours reflecting cultures and communities. During the pandemic, virtual tours provided “life rafts” for tour guides globally as tourism collapsed.

In Brooklyn, undergraduate students are creating virtual tours as part of their course assignments. Students research the cultural histories, landmarks, and artifacts of their neighborhoods using first-hand observation and mapping tools to develop tour
itineraries. As they research and discover more about their neighborhoods’ cultural heritage, students gain deeper knowledge about the social, environmental and, economic forces, that may affect them; in the process, they may become more meaningfully engaged in their communities.

The experience of place will always be a feature of travel. However, virtual travel products are poised for expansion because they reduce the carbon footprint, address concerns about over-tourism, and involve and benefit local communities.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Susan Phillip is Associate Professor in the Department of Hospitality Management at New York City College of Technology, City University of New York, where she teaches tourism courses. She earned a Master of Science in Tourism Management from New York University. Her background includes museum-sponsored educational travel; her area of expertise is sustainable, cultural, and special-interest tourism. She has written about tourism destinations in Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Caribbean. Her chapter, “Using Monuments to Teach About Racism, Colonialism, and Sexism,” is included in the book, Interdisciplinary Team Teaching: A Collaborative Study of High-Impact Practices. She teaches Geography of Travel and Tourism, Sustainable Tourism, Urban Tourism and Learning Places: Understanding the City, an interdisciplinary course that investigates issues surrounding New York City’s built environment.