

## **Narrative Report – Global Citizenship Education Grant Critical Policy Lab**

### **What was the project about?**

Our world faces complex, interacting and dynamic challenges such as climate change and rising socio-economic inequalities. In order to find solutions to these challenges and work towards more inclusive and diverse societies, it is fundamental to critically deconstruct long-standing truths and create an environment where one can imagine new scenarios and possible futures, beyond the status quo. To really talk about social change and go beyond what is known we need to foster a social environment where we can talk about paradigm shifts, re-evaluate semantic and material power relations, rethink politics and our current structures of governance, revise processes of knowledge generation, and reactivate our senses to imagine alternative realities and futures.

The UNU Critical Policy Lab was born out of the urgency to provide a response to this need, and out of the belief that this process should begin in the university setting - a construction site of ideas, but above all, of social change. Moreover, it also became an opportunity for students to experiment with the possibilities to create environments for discussion, reflection, and collaboration.

### **What was the main objective?**

The main objectives of the Critical Policy Lab were to:

1. Equip students with the necessary tools to create a world which is truly multicultural and diverse in perspectives and realities.
2. Empower students to be aware creators of knowledge.
3. Motivate students to become bold thinkers about the world's problems and its solutions.

### **Did you achieve your objective and how?**

In order to do so, initially the Critical Policy Lab aimed to provide students with spaces for critical dialogue and discussion in the form of a series of lectures, panels, debates, classes and hands-on workshops. Such activities will revolve around the following main topics:

1. Decolonizing International Development
2. Alternative Economic Models - Degrowth
3. Knowledge Production - A Critical Evaluation
4. The role of Imagination for Social Change
5. Alternative Models of Governance
6. Racial Justice - Intercultural and Anti-racism Training

However, given the time constraint of the team graduating by August, we decided to organize a 1-day conference in the beginning of June bringing together 70+ participants and almost 8+ speakers from different backgrounds. The conference was a big success and we received much positive feedback.

## What were your experiences during the execution of the project? Any highlights?

One of our team members summarized the experiences of the conference and the highlight in a blog post that was published on the UNU website here:

<https://www.merit.unu.edu/critical-policy-conference/>

## What are the lessons learned and future outlook?

Through organizing the conference and attempting to organize side activities the team learned a number of lessons:

1. **Always start with confirming the location of the conference or event way in advance.** Last minute, the UNU MERIT was not able to host the conference on their premise, with 10 days left to the conference and almost 70 registrations, the team reached out to all possible locations. Unfortunately, none were available. However, as a last attempt the Masters were able to host the conference and provide the us also with catering and the technical equipment. In the end, we were very lucky as the space reflected our values.
2. **Recruit students from multiple faculties from the beginning.** Initially, the Critical Policy Lab was born within the walk of UNU MERIT. Only at a later stage, we actively recruited students from other faculties. These new team members were a great addition to the team and increased our reach within other faculties within the university.
3. **Finances are stressful.** Planning, planning, and transparent communication. Relying on a third-party for your finances may be cumbersome. Next time, a meeting with the financial person who provides the funds is essential to get all the facts and processes right from the start.
4. **Have fun.** While it may be stressful to organize a big event or conference next to a heavy study workload, I believe that the sense of possibilities and experimentation enabled the team to have fun in the process which was evident during the conference. The team worked well together, respected each other, and aimed to elevate the strength of their other team members.
5. **Does the journey ends once you finish your studies?** No, or at least not for the Critical Policy Lab. The team is planning to continue the project for another year and working on a second conference with the topic Climate Change. All of the 10 team members are still willing to commit to work on the project and make it grow into something beyond the university walls. We look forward further working on this idea and solidifying its values, purpose, and objectives.

We want to thank GCED for their financial support and guidance to make this happen. The team learned a lot and was able to discuss topics that were not part of the curriculum. The grant has been pivotal to allow us to host a number of excellent speakers and have the discussion with our peer on difficult topics that are often not discussed in the classroom.