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## **Journal of Geography in Higher Education (JGHE)**

### **Article Title:**

*Participative critical enquiry in graduate field-based learning.*

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### **Abstract:**

This paper explores the role of participative critical enquiry in graduate field-based learning (FBL) in Geography. While fieldwork is central to human geography, in the literature there has been limited focus on fieldwork at graduate level, and critical enquiry in graduate field-based learning in particular. This paper then addresses an interesting niche, outlining a critical pedagogic approach to FBL at graduate level. In drawing on staff and student experience, stemming from the delivery of a dedicated FBL module and as part of an MA programme in Environment, Society and Development (MA ESD), the paper addresses the complexities associated with student-led, participative enquiry during fieldwork in Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH). In exploring student field experiences this paper examines emerging student discourses through a group assessment (the development research proposal) and a series of individual reflective journals. Both assessments are contextualized and discussed in relation to the FBL module learning outcomes. Finally, aspects of fieldwork and related activities influencing the feasibility and effectiveness of participative critical enquiry as a field-based pedagogic endeavour are considered.

**Key Words:** participative critical enquiry; field-based learning (FBL); critical pedagogy; graduate fieldwork

## **Introduction**

In 2009 the MA Environment, Society and Development (MA ESD) was launched by the Discipline of Geography at the National University of Ireland, Galway (NUIG). Interwoven throughout the programme's modular format is a commitment to engaging students in debate and discussion relating to a number of core themes within critical human geography. Morrissey, Clavin and Reilly (2013) reflect on this critical pedagogic agenda, specifically designed to engage students in a critique of the interventionary practice(s) of development and securitization. More broadly this reflects a long-standing commitment from some academics to centrally reposition society's most marginalized groups across and within development discourse (Chambers 1983, 2007, 2008, 2009). This paper focuses on how students negotiate the complexities of participative critical enquiry through the lens of a field based learning (FBL) module, culminating in a one week fieldtrip to post-conflict Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH).

Pedagogically, in defining participative critical enquiry, students engage literature addressing the nexus of participation and development practice. This engagement incorporates concerns relating to subjugated and alternative knowledges (Cooke and Kothari, 2001); the influence of hegemonic state agendas; the politics of donor and NGO agendas; assumed homogeneity across communities; and the problematic of universalism, viability and sustainability across implemented projects (Puri and Sahay, 2007; Baud, Pfeffer, Syndenstricker and Scott, 2011). In the context of the MA ESD critical participatory enquiry is negotiated first through the provision of a range of modules exploring contemporary academic perspectives on geopolitics and security; environment and risk; and the management of development practice. Throughout the year students also develop practical research skills associated with participative critical enquiry, including discourse analysis, interview techniques, critical ethnography, PLA methodologies and critical GIS. The programme's FBL module aims to support this engagement, drawing together classroom perspectives and practical research skills, culminating with fieldwork in Sarajevo, BiH. By extension, in advocating participative critical enquiry, the

field experience aims to nurture an understanding of positionality and reflexivity, to consider questions of humility, relationality and power (Smith, 2010).

The FBL module then goes beyond critique, to practice progressive and participatory forms of geographical knowledge on the ground. In addition to unpacking the power/knowledge couplet (Foucault, 1980) of development practice, students engage concerns of representation and geo-graphing, seeking to scale up localized and contextualized knowledge(s). In Sarajevo students examine community contexts, seeking to identify and bridge disconnect(s) between state, development practitioner and community needs (Morrissey et al., 2013). Using the pedagogic context of an FBL module then, the aim of this paper is to address the complexities associated with student participative critical enquiry. The remainder of this paper addresses the following: a brief discussion of the module context; a focus on the group assessment (development research proposal); an analysis of individual student reflective journals; and a consideration of student discourse in relation to the FBL module outcomes. Finally, critical participatory enquiry as an approach to FBL is reflected on, with the hope of developing both a more critical field pedagogical approach, along with lessons for a more active civic critique in the field of development itself.

### **FBL and participative critical enquiry as pedagogy**

A central tenet of the MA ESD programme has been to transcend academic critique engaged during classroom discussion, to consider participatory forms of development knowledge and practice (Morrissey et al., 2013). This aim is achieved through FBL and its associated module learning outcomes. These include:

- developing and applying critical thinking skills;
- enabling recognition for, and understanding of, the complex and scalar nature of development initiatives;
- extending student understanding through engagement with 'real world' contexts;

- developing students' research capacities through the completion of fieldwork;
- helping students understand the challenges of working in collaboration with development practitioner and local populations on the ground in Sarajevo.

The module learning outcomes are engaged through a programme of class seminars involving academic and practitioner guest speakers; independent student engagement with academic, policy and practitioner perspectives is supported through group tutorials prior to the fieldtrip. The module includes two assessments; a group component comprising of a development research proposal and an individual reflective journal (developed in the field but both submitted after fieldwork). In its entirety, the FBL module prompts critical thinking on how practices of development are framed in scalar<sup>1</sup>, conflicting, and often contested ways.

In undertaking fieldwork academic ideas and concepts discussed in class are examined in relation to 'real world' contexts (Dummer, Cook, Parker, Barrett, & Hull, 2008). In theory, fieldwork encourages 'deep learning' (Ramsden, 1992), enabling students to better understand abstract concepts through making connections between field experiences and classroom discussion. Therefore the nexus where students encounter, negotiate and make-meaning while in Sarajevo, in and of itself, represents a form of 'deep learning' (ibid). The city becomes a contextual platform for students to situate and operationalise concepts discussed in the classroom. This critical pedagogy is iterative and dynamic, facilitating, contextualising and situating student FBL within the frame of post-conflict Sarajevo. In facilitating movement from conceptualising to experiencing the post-conflict city, the FBL module invites students to critically

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<sup>1</sup> In the context of the authors' FBL pedagogy, scale reflects on the hegemony of knowledge and practices as differentiated across multiple scaled agendas (for example: community, donor, NGO, state). For further discussion on the importance of scale as part of an FBL agenda please see Morrissey et al. (2013).

reflect on ideas of social capital (Bourdieu, 1996), space (e.g. Smith 1990; 2006), and identity (e.g. Sandercock, 1998) considering the politics of practising participatory knowledges while in Sarajevo, yet recognising the inherent scale of their work.

Pedagogically, active forms of participative critical enquiry facilitates learning by doing (Gibbs, 1988). This practice of 'doing' can be contextualised within Kolb's (1984) learning cycle, exploring student engagement with specific field contexts through to the conceptualization of experience through critical reflection. FBL has the added outcome of promoting active and critical engagement in the learning process. If successful, students contextualise, frame and make connections between field experiences, classroom discussion, and academic literature. In negotiating these three elements students interpret and make-meaning within the learning context to facilitate understanding, knowledge production, and 'practise' what they have learned in class. However, simply taking students into the field may not necessarily result in effective student learning (Fuller, Edmondson, France, Higgitt, & Ratinen, 2006). Effective learning may be more likely when the FBL activity is fully integrated into a specific module, allowing students to utilise and reflect upon ideas arising both in the field and during the academic module itself (ibid). With this pedagogic approach FBL culminated in one-week of fieldwork in Sarajevo, with the specific remit of engaging students to operationalise critical participative enquiry, considering the (dis)connections between classroom discussion and 'real world' contexts, to explicitly deepen student learning. This deepened experience is iterative, whereby students experience and reflect in an on-going and reciprocal basis. There is, of course, a continuum between staff-led and autonomous student work, but FBL activities are principally student-led. As part of the FBL module students work in groups, choose their own topics for

research, and contact research participants directly in order to develop a research proposal for participative critical enquiry in Sarajevo<sup>2</sup>.

### **FBL: Development research proposal**

The development research proposal is a group assignment where students engage one of the following arenas of critical enquiry: civil society and social inclusion; environment and governmentality; and local development in post-conflict society. In this section we explore the 2011/12 series of development research proposals, associated with the individual field journals discussed later in this paper. Work from the 2011/12 student cohort holds the paper's focus as all students consented to both their respective group project and individual reflective journals being incorporated for analysis.

#### *Civil Society and Social Inclusion:*

The tutorial readings for this group centre broadly around children and young people in post-conflict BiH. Since 2009 students have engaged research focusing on educational spaces, citizenship, identity and reconciliation. In 2011/12 student research explored the role of sport and sport focused civil society organizations in building-capacity and social capital across segregated communities in BiH. Considering policy documents published by the UNDP (2008a; 2008b; 2008c), students examined the role of sport as a mechanism for enhancing social inclusion, specifically examining cross-cultural sporting activities and the potential for these events to lead to the construction and development of new social networks. Students encountered a disparate NGO and CSO landscape. Findings point toward a scalar disconnect; representatives of global institutions appeared unaware of local initiatives promoting sport as part of an active post-conflict development agenda.

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<sup>2</sup> One-year taught MA programmes at the National University of Ireland Galway are not required to engage the ethical review process at an institutional level. As a result students are briefed on ethical research practice during the opening seminars of the FBL module, in addition to classes prior to fieldtrip travel.

### *Environment and Governmentality:*

Across contemporary BiH, local and national government representatives are struggling to develop environmental policies and collect accurate environmental data. This lack of information has led to poor management of environmental issues, compounded further by a complex political system struggling to cope and cater for post-conflict populations. Students engaging this theme often find it difficult to focus on one specific concern; in the past research has focused on de-mining, security and illegal environmental practice (for example logging). In 2011/12 students specifically focused on the policy arena, considering public attitudes toward environmental practices (e.g. waste and recycling). In particular this group's work centred on the development of local food-growing initiatives, exploring existing programmes and the potential for extension. The absence of policy at a national scale played an important role in this group's research, with existing programmes and initiatives led by grassroots groups operating in a disparate public sphere. A key outcome of student work highlighted the less-than-prominent position of environmental policy within the national (political) consciousness and donor funding agendas.

### *Local Development:*

The local development theme represents the most diverse group in relation to the issues it is designed to engage. Topics in this area include: social entrepreneurship, dark tourism, and festival spaces. In 2011/12 student research explored the contribution of festival events to the local economy, reflecting on the politics of who participates and who funds these initiatives. Students examined the emerging festival culture in Sarajevo, considering a nascent politics of organization and participation. Findings from this research included the desire by local populations to 're-brand' Sarajevo as a city of culture, not as a city enduring the legacy of war. In conversation with students, grassroots representatives outlined how they felt powerless, with tokenistic participation in decision-making processes relating to the internal micro-politics of their city.



Across the 2011/12 FBL development research proposals, students highlight a number of recurring challenges. Such challenges are not mutually exclusive and include:

- Snapshot Syndrome: As our fieldtrip is based in Bosnia's capital, group proposals draw attention to the fact that completed research is '*limited*' to Sarajevo's urban context, with potentially little relevance to the fringe, rural, and other urban centres across BiH. In particular the *Environment and Governmentality* group outlined that the context of their data collection '*hindered the ability to investigate environmental issues in a rural context*'. Unfortunately in the context of a one-week fieldtrip this is very difficult to address, particularly given limited financial resources to either extend the trip (see issue of time discussed below) or facilitate travel beyond the city centre and sub-urban context.
- Political Complexities: Student proposals outline the difficulty of identifying stakeholders and key informants, particularly local political representatives. This is symptomatic of a complex system of governance, a legacy of the Dayton Accord<sup>3</sup>, but also due to multiple scalar representatives for some ministries and an absence of representatives in others (e.g. there is no ministry for the environment). Students stated: '*Given the fact that the BiH state system does not possess a separate environmental institution with which to manage environmental concerns, the country lacks a unified national environmental approach*'. The group proposals provided excellent discussion on the frustration students felt toward local politicians' lack of engagement with their communications. Many government representatives

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<sup>3</sup> Bosnia-Herzegovina is administratively divided into two entities (Republica Srpska and the Bosnian Federation). These entities are further divided into cantons and municipalities, each represent an administrative unit of governance in their own right. For greater depth of explanation and context of post-Dayton accord BiH see Toal, G. & Dahlman, C. (2011). *Bosnia Remade: Ethnic cleansing and its reversal*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

and their offices failed to acknowledge any communication with student groups.

- Lack of Contextual Data: Since the signing of the Dayton Accord there has been no official census conducted across BiH. This is due to the highly politicized nature of the data potentially collected (including the ability to construct enclavic discourses). As a result students often work from contextual material generated by the UNDP, EU Delegation to BiH and other global institutions operational across the country; knowledge produced by the same interventionist institutions critiqued by students.
- Time: Student development research proposals often recognized the 'time poor' nature of their fieldtrip engagement; visiting Sarajevo for a one-week time period was deemed by students as insufficient to engage with stakeholders. At times this led to some despondency with frequent statements such as '*it is imperative to acknowledge that no truly insightful analysis can be derived from a week long engagement within BiH*' (*Civil Society and Social Inclusion Group*). This time constraint was also considered in relation to ethical practice by some students who felt uncomfortable with the development of what they perceived as 'fake friendships'.
- Language: The MA ESD students do not speak Bosnian nor do they have access to an interpreter. Implicitly then, participation in the work by Bosnian people was limited to those who spoke English and were willing to speak to the group. Students recognized this as a particular limitation to their research activity. This was particularly pertinent for the *Local Development Group* who indicated that '*language was an issue especially when working at grassroot level as many were unable to converse or understand the project*'.

In spite of (and, of course, because of) these challenges, students engage in a reflexive process of positioning themselves as both learners and researchers in an alien, abstracted and somewhat constrained field-based context for a limited one week period. Such engagement reflects a politics of fieldwork (Rose, 1993) that is temporally situated, inherently scalar, and fraught with

positional tension. Therefore the experience is potentially overwhelming, with students positioning themselves as both learners and researchers within situations and discourses; always contending with a recognition for the partiality of knowledges encountered and ultimately produced through their interpretations of fieldwork.

This raises questions concerning the value of FBL to participative critical enquiry and the pedagogical ethics of placing students in vulnerable situations whereby they struggle to negotiate the immersive and unfamiliar landscape of data collection, and their positionality within this process. To meet this challenge, MA ESD staff members encourage students to develop, and be cognisant of, their own way of 'seeing' the fieldwork context. This practice represents a politics of position that remains sensitive to the researcher/researched dichotomy, and an associated 'Othering' sometimes characteristic of field-based experiences. For Monk (2000), such sensitivity is principally underscored by the importance of teaching about the 'Other' to inculcate feelings of empathy, rather than sympathy prior to FBL experiences. Nairn's (2005) critique of field-based experiences that engage students with the 'Other' argues that such encounters are typically problematic and potentially serve to reinforce existing beliefs and prejudices. Conversely, while recognising this critique, Hope (2009) defends fieldwork and engagement with the 'Other' as both a challenging and a valuable pedagogic method. Moreover, for Dummer et al (2008) it is not sufficient to simply reflect in this manner, indeed reflection may simply allow students to reinforce pre-existing ideas, as some have argued (Schon, 1987). Therefore, to encourage deep learning, FBL assessments must provide a conceptual space to enable and encourage students to challenge existing (and constantly changing) assumptions, beliefs and ideas. Moon (2005) advocates a number of pedagogic methods to facilitate reflective learning as an integral and explicit part of the curriculum. One suggested vehicle is the use of reflective journals, the second element of fieldwork assessment for the FBL module.

### **The critical FBL reflective journal**

From a pedagogical perspective the manner in which students engage and negotiate FBL contexts can be quite strategic, particularly when such engagements become reduced to a series of assessment motivated practices. This critique reflects the challenge to student learners in perceiving field experiences as something more than knowledge acquisition, motivated by a desire to 'do well' in assessments. Indeed, when FBL experiences are assessment driven, danger exists that deep learning may not be achieved (Hill & Woodland, 2002; Scott, Fuller & Gaskin, 2006). To address these concerns individual reflective journals have been incorporated as part of the FBL module assessment. These practices include: a recording of student observations and encounters; a reflection on these observations and encounters contextualised by the research process; contextualising and connecting ideas with wider theory and concepts (discussed in class); and subsequently generating new knowledge and understanding - thus supporting a reciprocal and multifaceted process of 'critical reflection' (Nairn, Higgitt & Vanneste, 2000).

The ambiguous terrain of journaling in undergraduate and graduate programmes has been well documented (Haigh, 2001; Park, 2003; Dummer et al., 2008; Heller, Christensen, Long, Mackenzie, Osano, Rucker, Kagan & Turner, 2011). As a learning tool journaling is discussed as a rigour building exercise, enriching field experience(s) and providing a space to reflect on these experience(s) (Harrison, Short & Roberts, 2003; Park, 2003; Heller et al, 2011), considering the ethical and political dimensions of long-haul fieldwork (McGuinness & Simm, 2005). Furthermore, Haigh (2001) states that the dominant rationale for using reflective journals is to ensure the self-conscious development of student learning, encouraging the learner to consider how content and experience are interpreted. Students then become 'expert learners', understanding how to use self-knowledge to select the strategies needed to achieve learning goals, demonstrating understanding of learning processes, and considering how these shape and self-regulate their progress (Ertmer & Newby, 1996 in Haigh, 2001). Such self-regulation involves clarifying purpose, understanding meanings, drawing inferences, looking for

relationships, and understanding concepts by reformulating and documenting this process in personal terms, through the reflective journal (Gourgey, 1998). Journaling allows students to be more aware of the impact of the research process on themselves and their positionality. This 'self-checking' improves transparency (Heller et al., 2011) throughout the research process, and in charting the trajectory and conceptual development of students' thinking as they negotiate the politics of FBL. Moreover, as a reflexive tool the journal has been central to painting a more complete picture of the dialogical processes of research, one structured by both researcher and participants (England, 1994; Fine, 1994). In writing everything down and evaluating the research process, all the while being cognisant of the influence of prior knowledge and the assumptions upon which this is premised, we access those spaces in-between; the spaces of dialogue between researcher and specific field research contexts.

For the reflective journals submitted by the MA ESD students of 2011/12 staff members conducted a thematic analysis on the content of each individual journal (14 in total). The journals were first disaggregated and split into different categories relating to FBL group activities (reflecting group themes discussed previously). Each fieldtrip staff member coded their own group's journals, with analysis aimed at clustering data, examining regularities, and identifying variations and singularities (Miles and Huberman, 1994). This process produced a series of more succinct and meaningful themes stemming from student participative critical enquiry. Once this initial coding was complete, staff collaborated to discuss similarities and differences with a view to developing a standardised coding schemata. Through the repetition of this process a series of nine themes emerged from the fieldwork journals. These are presented and defined in Table 1. It is important to acknowledge that the themes are not mutually exclusive but remain interconnected in dynamic, fluid and iterative ways. In evaluating the module learning outcomes against these themes, the various ways in which scalar and situated participatory knowledges are realised emerge. These are considered below. [Table 1 should be inserted here]

**Table 1. Coded Student Reflective Themes**

<b>Reflective Theme</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Student positionality	This encompassed sensibilities relating to gender and the student's role as researcher. Students also identified cultural barriers associated with research practice (for example: language barriers led to a collective sense of frustration and alienation).
Challenging research environments	This was characterised by a crisis of confidence; students questioned the relevance of their research, searching at times for legitimacy and validation. This was an identified problematic from the readings engaged prior to the fieldtrip, which variously critiqued a foreign interventionist agenda that has been in place since the end of the war in BiH.
(Dis)Connect between policy and practice	This category reflects students' ability to identify discrepancies between academic literature and policy documents (engaged prior to the field) when compared to actual practices of development.
Perceived versus actual experience	Students identified stark contrasts between their perceptions of what Sarajevo would be like and how they actually experienced the city.
Interpersonal and intrapersonal experiences	Students identified the affective and highly subjective journey attached to the fieldtrip, outlining a plethora of emotions ranging from shock and frustration to empathy and recognition.
Cognitive and critical capacity	Students reflected on their enhanced ability to critically evaluate the rhetoric of speakers during interviews and meetings. Many journal entries point toward moving beyond 'face-value' to explore the possibilities for operationalising critique in FBL contexts.
Self-efficacy	Students identified a series of skills and competencies attained during the course of the field trip. These included: methodological abilities, communication skills, team-building activities and networking capacities.
Context & preparation	Upon return from the field, students recognised the importance of preparation prior to the fieldtrip, with some explicitly stating that they wished they had spent more time familiarising themselves with context-specific material and readings prior to the trip.
Future (career) opportunities	The fieldtrip was viewed as a vehicle through which students could explore the work of development practitioners ranging from global to grassroots organisations. Many expressed a desire to return and work both in Sarajevo and BiH as a whole.

## **Making sense of FBL reflections**

In analysing the emerging reflective discourses it is possible to situate the students' FBL experience in relation to the overall module learning outcomes. More importantly, in exploring these discourses it is possible to consider the challenge of negotiating field experiences as a critical and participative graduate FBL pedagogic approach. The student journals demonstrate multiple engagements with participative critical enquiry in that they (the students) developed practical research skills (interviewing, networking, understanding discourse), in addition to an enhanced understanding of how classroom concepts become operationalised in a particular context. In this case students communicated empathy and humility through their journals as they reflected on the importance of listening to community voices, while struggling to connect broader classroom concepts to the reality of peoples' everyday lives in BiH. The complex political system, operational at entity and state level, then added a further layer of complexity with students beginning to think critically about alternatives to processes of development and interventionism. Therefore, drawing on the student voice, the remainder of this paper contextualises participative critical enquiry as an innovative pedagogic practice in relation to the FBL module outcomes.

### *Linking Reflective Discourse with FBL Learning Outcomes:*

- *To demonstrate and apply critical thinking skills and recognise the scalar nature of development initiatives:* The sensitive and inherently scalar positionality of speakers representing different organisations was recognised by students. For example one states: '*...the changes that our NGOs were able to bring about with local communities were small scale and possibly difficult to sustain, since local problems appeared to be embedded within wider structures such as the intricate political system and the segregated educational system*'. In particular, students reflected on diverging discourses among representatives from global institutions and those representing grassroots initiatives. Across a number of journal entries students reflect on a sense that some speakers they encountered simply regurgitated discourses that 'toed the party line'. For example one student

noted: '*Some of the questions directed to the EU [representatives] were neatly deflected and there was evidence that a 'party line' was being adhered to*'. Although some of the reflective journals demonstrated more surface learning (i.e. descriptive accounts loosely applying theoretical ideas), students reported an improvement in their own thinking and critical capacity over the course of the week's FBL activities, and began to critically reflect on what they had learned while in the field. Of note here is an evolution across student perceptions of BiH prior to the FBL experience and at the conclusion of their time in the field.

- *Linking theory, policy and practice*: Students recognised the importance of engaging both academic and policy literature focusing specifically on the Bosnian context prior to their fieldwork. A common lament across student journals reflected a need to '*carry out more intense desk-based research before departure*'. Many journals also refer to an emerging series of disconnects and discrepancies between what is reported across academic and policy literature and the real world experiences of people whom students engaged during data collection. This brought to the fore the emotional challenges of negotiating and understanding the hardship of war, the realities of everyday life for citizens of the city, and the importance of social capital and family ties. The discourse of reconciliation in post-Dayton BiH was identified as problematic and potentially meaningless without a sustained series of actions that move toward unifying post-conflict society. Students recognised how the literature only shows a '*narrow picture*' (student Civil Society and Social Inclusion group) of the everyday reality of post-conflict livelihoods. Perceived versus actual experience was temporally evident as student impressions changed over the course of the week-long fieldtrip. Some students identified a feeling of surprise when they first arrived, followed by a realisation that perhaps they were not fully prepared to engage with this specific context. As a result some reported working late nights while in the field to prepare for interviews and follow-up on potential meetings with organisations identified during the previous day's work (snowballing methodology).



- *Self-directed research and learning*: Students communicated the difficulty in negotiating the temporality of self-directed research, transitioning from a dependent, research-led platform to operationalising independent, research-oriented processes. This also reflected a distinct movement from student as audience to student as participant researcher. There was an evident search for legitimacy and validation in much of the student journals (indeed one student positioned themselves as '*an imposter*'). This manifested itself in a desire to 'make a difference'. Some recognised that this desire was essentially problematic in that it could be perceived to represent a foreign interventionist agenda, the very practice of which is critiqued as part of the FBL module. The iterative and reflexive nature of this work enhances the development of ideas and methodological processes, which were affirmed and refined throughout the week's fieldwork. Debriefing sessions, held at the end of each day, ensured feedback to students from staff and peers, aiding the refining of research questions and methods for the following day. In this way, students developed confidence and a sense of self-efficacy flourished as the week progressed.
- *To engage effective participatory and collaborative action research and develop practical skills in-doing-so*: Students recognised that they had developed skills for engaging research contexts, including a particular awareness for researcher positionality and the need for researcher reflexivity ('*I write this journal from my own historical, intellectual and biographical location as an Irish mother, mature student and feminist researcher*'; *Civil Society and Social Inclusion student*). Effective collaborative action research involves the identification of one's own positionality. The 'Othering' of participants was recognised by the students who at times felt that they were failing to connect with whom they spoke. This struggle continued as the week progressed, with students grappling with both the interpersonal and intrapersonal boundaries of 'doing' research. The development of reflexivity and reflective practice happened, of course, in the challenging fieldwork environment of post-conflict BiH. This sensibility developed with an acknowledgement of the complexities associated with both negotiating a divided society and overcoming barriers (as researchers)

on the ground. Students identified their success in gaining and improving practical skills for networking and improved communication. This sense of self-efficacy and recognition for the skills gained was acknowledged as potentially assisting students in their future careers. Some students expressed an interest in returning to Bosnia in a professional capacity. In this way, in terms of field context and preparation, a well prepared one-week field excursion was sufficient to develop feelings of self-efficacy and facilitate the grounded research process which the programme aimed to achieve.

To successfully engage the learning outcomes of the FBL module a considerable degree of pre-field preparation by both staff and students was required. The value of such preparation was retro-actively recognised by students. This preparatory engagement enhanced student thinking (as evidenced through the emergent reflective themes), and by extension consolidated and augmented the learning outcomes for the module. A central critique of the module stemming from student journals has been that their work 'in the field' remains too constrained due to a limited timeframe. What the reflective journals highlight however (perhaps with varying degrees of success) is that it is possible to consolidate FBL module outcomes during a one-week fieldtrip programme, provided detailed pre-field preparation is engaged. Deeper (and sometimes differing) forms of learning are evident in the field each year, although some post-trip assessment for the 2011/12 cohort provided evidence of more surface learning outcomes. This may also reflect a confession from some students of limited personal engagement and preparation with material prior to the trip.

Overall, this critical and participative pedagogic approach provides students a conceptual, practical and self-reflexive space, considering the politics of scale, researcher/learner positionality, and the shifting power dynamics permeating research focused on post-conflict development interventionist agendas in Sarajevo, BiH. Central to the success of this pedagogy and student negotiation of FBL experiences, is a structured approach to pre-field preparation, in-field

reflection and post-field feedback (Wesche, 2010). This structured approach runs contrapuntal to the fluidity and dynamism of an ever evolving research context, requiring students to be flexible in their negotiation of uncertain contexts, particularly as they grapple with development practitioner discourses, representative of multiple scalar agendas.

### **Conclusion: Advocating for a critical FBL methodology**

Using the example of the MA ESD and in particular a graduate FBL module, this paper considers the complexities associated with graduate participative critical enquiry as a pedagogic approach. Analysis of the development research proposals and reflective journals (2011/12) demonstrate the manner in which students coalesce pre-fieldtrip engagement with critical geographic themes, participative enquiry, and independent FBL experiences in post-conflict Sarajevo. Emerging student discourses are contextualised in relation to the module learning outcomes, seeking to engender participative critical enquiry in the field in Sarajevo. These discourses demonstrate a variety of complex challenges experienced by students (both in groups and individually). These challenges also engage students in a reflexive process of positioning themselves as both learners and researchers. Journaling allows students then to continuously reflect on and negotiate further the unfamiliar landscape of data collection with empathy and humility.

In this instance an important reciprocal balance has emerged between structured activities facilitated by staff throughout various stages of the course and the relational uncertainty characteristic of every (field) research engagement. How students negotiate the tenuous connections between these two elements impacts on their overall performance (for example preparation prior to fieldwork is identified as paramount). Success in this negotiation is partially supported through staff guidance; but further enhanced with resources (literature on BiH in this instance), peer-supported learning and the development of confidence for independent student-led research. The reflective journal then represents an opportunity for students to reflect on their ideas, observations and field-encounters; an in-between space where meaning is negotiated and produced, a messy space where students struggle to make-

meaning. More importantly the chaotic nature of this reflexive practice (negotiating and making-meaning), in and of itself reflects the complexity of the post-conflict FBL context; with multiple voices striving for prioritisation at the expense of others, and students attempting to position themselves as researchers and learners within an already crowded practitioner landscape.

It is, therefore crucial for students understand that it is okay to feel uncertain, that it is ok to feel over-whelmed. These sensibilities have been documented across academic research (England 1994; Katz 1994) but remain under-represented as a central trope of graduate research (in)experience. If students do not realise that it is acceptable, indeed perfectly legitimate, to feel this way, the field experience potentially becomes stressful and anxiety ridden. Through the module assessments participative and critical field based pedagogies implicitly validate and legitimise the negotiation of uncertainty, ambiguity and vagueness to support emerging student research frameworks. Such frameworks create opportunities for generating new evidence to supplement, challenge and extend knowledge bases from which new initiatives and policy directions can be developed.

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