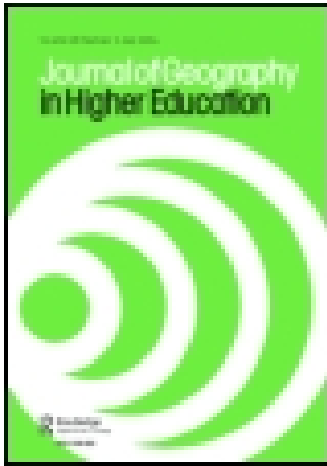


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### Negotiating critical geographies through a “feel-trip”: experiential, affective and critical learning in engaged fieldwork

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## **Negotiating critical geographies through a “feel-trip”: experiential, affective and critical learning in engaged fieldwork**

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The paper proposes the notion of a “critical feel-trip” as a pedagogical narrative to entertain the relationships of experiential, affective and critical learning in field-based studies. It is argued that explicit mobilization of the triadic relations of these three modes of learning is a powerful way to strengthen students’ appreciation of human geography’s concepts and to interrogate their positionality. The paper particularly draws on a fieldcourse taught to UK undergraduates, which explores Moscow as a “field laboratory” for critical geographies. The analysis considers both effectiveness and limitations of such modes of pedagogy.

**Keywords:** student fieldwork; critical pedagogy; cross-cultural education; urban studies; post-socialism; Russia

### **Introduction**

Academic pedagogy increasingly embraces the idea of a shifting role of the lecturer from a transmitter of knowledge to a facilitator of learning and, consequently, a more self-reflective and self-managed role offered to students. However, such a shift may be hypocritical if it does not involve a more fundamental epistemic break with what Giroux (2010) calls “bare pedagogy” – which imposes upon the learner an instrumentalized version of knowledge built on technocratic rationality and efficiency. Such a pedagogy is abstracted from moral empathy, political accountability and civic capacities; it reproduces a culture of conformity and political disengagement, legitimizes the socio-political status quo and thus subsidizes injustices and inequalities. Alternatively, pedagogy can be seen and practiced as intrinsically political and liberating, nurturing a plurality of informed insights, judgements and interpretations and exposing the web of social interests and practices involved in the construction, transmission and operation of knowledge. The founder of critical pedagogy Brazilian educator Freire (1970, 1993) believed that pedagogy ought to engage with the political and moral practice of providing students with the knowledge and intellectual tools that enable them to become self-determined, critical, participatory and responsible citizens, seeking to confront the status quo and complacency. Such a pedagogy, as Giroux (2010, 2011) contends, needs to treat knowledge not as an object of consumption but rather as a matter of transformation by both teachers and students in a dialogue with the broader notions of justice, values, ethics and power. Such aspirations are articulated by “an expanded notion of politics and agency through a language of scepticism, possibility, and a culture of openness, debate, and engagement” (Giroux, 2010, p. 195).

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In some important ways, human geography is well positioned to accommodate this quest for developing responsible and critical citizens and teaching for social change (Wellens et al., 2006; Whalley et al., 2011). Certainly, many causes and implications in relation to, for example, dominant politico-economic orders or social injustice have geographical underpinnings and have long been in the centre of geographical concern and education (Merrett, 2001). Geography has also developed as a non-dogmatic discipline, where a lack of a privileged canon allows for multiple ways to undertake geography, including a plurality of methods and explanations (Sheppard, 2004). But geography also has the power of the *experiential learning* of field-based studies. This allows it to connect different ways of knowing and doing, to go beyond the stylized knowledge of the classroom and explore the complexities, messiness and imperfections of the real world, while constructing important imaginary tools and skills for seeking social and spatial justice.

However, critical and experiential teaching and learning in geography could also benefit from better realizing the importance of *affective learning*. Affect in general becomes an important theme in human geography and social sciences – even if this is a convoluted and multi-interpreted theme (e.g. Pile, 2010; Thrift, 2008; Wetherell, 2012) – while the notion of affective learning has, of course, an established pedagogical tradition (Krathwohl, Bloom, & Masia, 1964). In this paper, I want to introduce the idea of a “feel-trip” as an explicitly more-than-cognitive conception of field-based teaching and learning. Arguably, activating affective learning is important not only for creating more stimulating learning conditions with lasting effects on students’ imaginaries and thinking, but also for triggering reflective and critical skills for potentially a more responsible and ethical operation of knowledge. Of course, each of the three domains – experiential, affective and critical – is well rehearsed in pedagogical literature, but rarely explicitly in their triadic relationships. The notion of “critical feel-trip” invites discussions on the possibilities for activating such explicit interdependencies.

I will particularly contextualize the nexus between the three learnings in my experience of teaching a Moscow fieldcourse to undergraduate finalists at a major UK university. This will hopefully additionally raise appreciation of possibilities offered by post-socialist space for critical geographies. Traditionally teaching on Russia has been part of the domain of area studies, prone to idiosyncratic pedagogies, which stress language skills or cultural, political and geographical “otherness” of the nation. Such pedagogies are either depoliticized or, alternatively, bear heavily on Cold War politics and associated binaries of the “democratic” and the “totalitarian”, and are therefore highly stylized and insulated from the idea of educating for growth in learners’ citizenship and critical self-reflections. I encourage unlocking the rather neglected opportunities of exploring post-socialist transition as a “field laboratory” for teaching the very key concepts in critical geography – through students’ alert considerations of radical social transformations, of social inequality and of the role of urban space in the workings of capitalism, social and power relations.

The rest of this paper is structured as follows. I will continue with discussing the three different concepts of experiential learning, affective learning and critical learning and their triadic inter-relationship in the notion of a “feel-trip”. I will then contextualize these discussions in relation to the Moscow fieldcourse and will also provide an empirical analysis that will more specifically review the role of the Moscow “feel-trip” for students’ learning of the following concepts: positionality, post-socialist transition, legacy, politics of space and spatial justice. The concluding section will include some wider advice to guide others in encouraging similar critical engagement.

### A triadic function of a critical feel-trip

In line with critical pedagogy, Wellens et al. (2006) maintain that geography as a higher education discipline can make a significant contribution towards teaching for social transformation, understood by them as promoting knowledge, skills and values that through critical thinking encourages social justice, inclusiveness and addresses inequalities in power relations. They stress that teaching social transformations involves both teaching *about* and *for* social transformation. Both aspects are interlinked and further influenced by the forms of pedagogy that are employed to deliver them. Following Valentine (2005), they contend that students should not be told what to think or value, but rather taught to develop the skills and knowledge to analyse critically their preconceived perception of the economy, society, environment and politics. In this endeavour, the importance of cultivating the sense of positionality and reflexive appreciation of the external world in its diversity has been emphasized (Mezirow, 1990; Rose, 1997).

Further, Whalley et al. (2011, pp. 386–387) also stress the importance of experiential learning in such educational endeavours:

[D]eveloping morally responsible citizens . . . is about nurturing engaged, active, independent and humble students . . . who are able to reflect on their own practices, to understand the influence of these practices on wider social networks and to recognize the limits of their knowledge and understanding. The challenge, though, is in moving this from the thinking to the doing, the knowing to the practice, and it is here that geography curricula, in the way that they draw on real-world examples, immerse students in the world and emphasize experiential and field-based learning, which can equip students with ethical skills rather than merely ethical knowledge.

The relevance of geography's experiential learning for critical learning, as noted by these authors, is also important in light of what Wellens et al. (2006) observes as a rather homogenous cultural background of many geographical departments, both in terms of student cohorts and the faculty. This raises the importance of activities where students can learn about their culture through the perspectives of *other* cultures and groups (also Lee, 1997). There are various relevant learning formats, including experience-based courses, placements, international exchanges, community-based learning, or individual dissertation projects. However, it is field-based learning that can afford a more concerted and guided schedule of activities for learning communities. Fieldtrips and fieldwork also certainly remain an important part in the geographical education that in many respects define its tradition (Gold et al., 1991). However, as Nairn (2005) cautions, fieldtrip encounters with real-life experiences do not automatically connect experiential and critical learning. Nairn argues that, quite the reverse, student fieldtrips may have unintended consequences, reinforcing existing ideological distortions. This caution must be taken seriously, especially if teaching is increasingly subscribed to students' independent learning, in which students are encouraged to develop their own judgement and attitudes. Encouraging students' independent learning should not be equated with a hands-off approach; a strategy should be rather *engaged* fieldwork – which would stimulate and challenge students intellectually and shake their preconceptions, even if occasionally in an uncomfortable way (see Boler, 1999 for “pedagogy of discomfort”).

An important dimension of engaged fieldwork is *affect*. Following pedagogical traditions, affective learning is understood here as the learner's growth by means of, but also within, the learner's system of feelings, values, appreciation, motivations and attitudes (Krathwohl et al., 1964). Thus, following Krathwohl et al., affective learning is seen as a continuum from a short-term (lower level) emotional or motivational response to learning stimuli to long-term (higher level) change in affective dispositions. Albeit affective learning

is still a rather poorly understood phenomenon (Meredith, Fortner, & Mullins, 1997), there seem to be reciprocal relationships between affective and cognitive learnings. Each of them simultaneously mediates and is mediated by the other. Thus, affect *both* creates a subjective context for pursuing cognitive activities *and*, being mediated by these activities, eventuates in internalizing attitudes and beliefs about a particular principle or subject in the learner's value system. This in turn further influences learners' learning dispositions.

Since educating learners' value systems and positionality is what critical pedagogies seek to achieve too, there appears a direct strategic importance of the affective for critical learning – at least at a high level of affective learning, which requires a systematic and longitudinal effort of curricula. But even at the level of a particular fieldtrip, important tactical connections could be established. When students are taken away from the comfort of their familiar habitats and are exposed to the shock and “messiness” of the field (cf. Kay & Oldfield, 2011), their emotions are exacerbated: they may feel excited, puzzled or otherwise emotionally charged and engaged. The emotional and sensory engagements as a feature of fieldwork suggest a more-than-cognitive affective mode of experiential learning, giving each fieldtrip an important sensory dimension of a “feel-trip”. These emotions and feelings are heavily influenced by students' positionality – their previous life experiences and classroom and beyond-classroom knowledge. These can be subjected to explicit *critical reflections* and self-reflections. Although it is hardly possible to transform students' embedded positionality through a single occasion of a field trip, scrutinizing their feelings and thoughts on location is a suitable opportunity for interrogating their positionality from a critical perspective.

In short, rather than expunging the affective through its subsumption to the cognitive, critical teaching can make the former explicit and capitalize on its powerful interplay with learners' positionality. Here, the idea of a “critical feel-trip”, which blends the experiential, the affective and the critical through the integrative role of critical reflections and engaged learning activities, provides a useful handle.

But does this rhetorical subversion from a “field-trip” to a “feel-trip” suggest that the affective predominates or at least comes prior in the way the students engage with a place? Although it might be appealing to think about the relationships between the experiential, affective and critical learnings as some form of hierarchy or linearity – so that one or the other is more pronounced at a particular stage – it is hard to meaningfully differentiate them from each other within a holistic system of learning. For example, students' affective sense of place may come before, along, after and beyond their experiencing the place and its conceptual interpretations and, correspondingly, interplays with critical learning at different stages and in different ways. *Learning* from (and within) affect takes place (and time) not in isolation from wider learning contexts and narratives. Here, the notion of a feel-trip, although making the rhetorical subversion in order to make the affective more explicit, is rather suggestive of the power of the triadic relationship between the three modes of learning and potentially new ways of seeing field-based activities in pedagogical practices.

### **A feel-trip for critical learning**

These reflections are particularly situated in my teaching of a Moscow fieldcourse to the final-year geography undergraduates at the University of Birmingham between 2010 and 2013. To borrow from Wellens et al. (2006), teaching post-socialist geographies is probably one of the areas where teaching *about* social transformation may come closely to teaching *for* social transformation. The fieldcourse in Moscow, where students were given an engaged learning opportunity to explore the concrete spatialities of urban change and

reflect on urban and social change more generally, was a powerful way to strengthen their understanding of some key ideas and enthuse them into thinking reflectively about the world around them. While experiential and affective learning could facilitate critical engagements on any fieldtrip, the Moscow fieldtrip particularly involved a cultural “displacement”, which allowed students to better triangulate critical concepts from this new vista. I will discuss further how the experiential and affective modes of learning have facilitated students’ understandings of conceptual ideas. These reflections can hopefully inform the wider pedagogical practice.

The module in question consisted of a number of background lectures, followed by a weeklong fieldtrip to Moscow. In Moscow, there were on-street lectures, guided observations and in-depth discussions, combined with students’ independent group projects and plentiful opportunities for informal engagement with the teachers. Students worked towards assessed group presentations performed upon their return, as well as towards individual essays, which constituted the main part of their assessment. Through the combinations of these methods, students were to develop theoretical and empirical knowledge related to urban social and political geographies more generally and post-socialist transition more specifically.

I inherited this module and taught it alongside the inspiring colleagues who had originally established it; they already provided a detailed account on the practicalities of them organizing it in a previous paper (Moran & Round, 2010). Yet, my own teaching contribution and eventually leadership of the module were based on my interests in critical geography and urban political economy. Here, the Moscow fieldtrip was rethought as a valuable source of wider theoretical connections rather than more narrowly conceived along the spirit of Russia’s otherness and distinctiveness. Thus, while maintaining a general skeleton and a critical and engaged spirit of the course, certain modifications were essential in its content.

More specifically, a set of ideas were emphasized, which may be generalized as five larger conceptual threads: *positionality*, *transition*, *legacy*, *politics of space and spatial justice*. None of these is unfamiliar to the larger undergraduate geography curricula, but in the context of this fieldcourse, the concepts were specified against the particular conditions of post-socialist changes in Moscow and taught as the reciprocity between their more general meanings and their concrete grounding. The very “localization” of these concepts (Yeung & Liu, 2006) may be thought of as “threshold concepts” of this module (Meyer & Land, 2006), crucial for gaining the sense of the urban geographies of post-socialist transition and their relationships with wider societal systems and theories. These conceptual threads were also specified as more particular themes (Table 1).

There are multiple challenges involved on the pedagogical side in delivering these learning objectives. The cohort of the students represented a rather homogenous group – white, British, predominantly of middle-class background. The module takes them out of their “comfort zone” of familiar social and political contexts. The distinctive non-English sociocultural and linguistic context of Russia is felt to be alien by UK students (Moran & Round, 2010). It requires additional *in situ* contextualization and in-depth explanations. Teachers also have to explicitly encourage students to deconstruct and re-assemble many of their cultural expectations, understandings and meanings of the observed urban processes based on the learners’ home experience, previous knowledge and positionality, often in a way that is not comfortable for students, such as when their worldviews and stereotypes are shaken (and there are of course many stereotypes in relation to Russia more specifically!). This tends to be a challenging task, as apart from grounded knowledge, it involves critical reflections about the social structures and institutions back home. But it is

Table 1. Examples of fieldwork sites and corresponding modes of learning.

Places visited	Experiential	Affective	Critical
Sites of historical significance, including Central Moscow, the Kremlin, the Christ the Saviour Cathedral, Moscow University, VDNKh Exhibition Centre, Moscow Metro, Victory Park	The historical and modern use; the everyday life in and around public and private spaces	Excitement and shocks over the unusual aesthetics of sites; feelings of awe, surprise and unpredictability; sense of place lost and found; exposed cultural stereotypes and distorted meanings	Ideology, spaces of representation, hybrid spatialities of transition, geopolitics
The most expensive residential neighbourhood in Moscow (Ostozhenka)	The built environment and luxury property markets, the flow of local life	Sensations over observed lifestyles and wealth; discomfort over being watched by the security; sensing exclusion	Gentrification, urban conflict, class transformation
Moskva City International Business Centre	The site of Europe's tallest skyscrapers; office and construction workers, including migrant labour	Feeling overwhelmed/small by the scale and the "globalist" design; exposed complicity with neoliberal imaginaries	Urban entrepreneurialism, globalization, neoliberalism, social inequality
Moscow inner peripheries	Soviet-era housing estates and neighbourhoods and their transformation	Feelings of unfamiliarity and puzzlement, exposed prejudices and concerns linked to cultural perception of different housing types	Housing policies and planning and their implications for social reproduction and inequality
The New Tretyakov Modern Art Gallery	Visualizing Russia's history and identity change via twentieth century paintings	Visual sensations and sentiments, making emotional connections with different stages and representations of history	Identity change, discourse, propaganda, the hegemonic role of the mass media
Modern shopping malls and plazas (e.g. GUM, Okhotny Ryad, Evropeyskiy)	Consuming places, bodies and practices	Enjoying comfort and familiarity with design and brands, but "feeling poor as students"	Spaces of consumption and consumerism, exclusion and inclusion
Red October and VinZavod cultural brownfields	"Creative spaces" in converted industrial areas	Familiarities with the meaning of the place; alignment with their users' identities	Culture-led urban regeneration and gentrification, critique of "creative class"
Informal and semi-formal trading sites around Moscow	Everyday life of the "ordinary" Muscovites, migrants and the marginalized	Sympathy, fear, prejudices, exposed stereotypes with regard to minorities	Social alienation and coping strategies; everyday life
Train trip to a suburban town Istra and the New Jerusalem Monastery; glimpses of suburban villages such as Manikhimo	A spectrum of Moscow's peripheries; observing informal trade and other everyday activities on the train	Contrasting sense of place: feeling relaxed over differences with Moscow in terms of scale and pace	The political economy of suburbanization and regional development



particularly this element that is productive in nourishing critical thinking, especially if the students' instinct of cultural superiority of their home context over the observed differences is explicitly problematized (Moran & Round, 2010).

The adoption of the three learnings discussed in this paper was found helpful in these endeavours, as it has required an expanded emphasis on learners' agency. There was a wealth of locations where students were taken to in order to give them relevant conceptual material, but also to stimulate their learning in the affective domain. Table 1 provides a few examples of such sites and their contributions to the three modes of learning discussed. However, this table needs to be put in perspective. Although its representation of the three modes may appear to be linear and focused on the short-term conditions of the site, the actual learning process is more complex, multidimensional and cumulative. First, as already suggested earlier, there is inter-constitution of the three "modes" of learning in the notion of a critical feel-trip, so that dividing them into separate "boxes" is a little artificial. Second, when experiencing a particular site, students would already be armed with a prior cognitive understanding (based on their previous studies, lectures and readings, as well as cumulative knowledge from the fieldtrip itself) and affective dispositions (based on their knowledge, experience, interests and value systems). These would already make each location a meaningful experience in a wider learning context. These prior knowledge and attitudes were then further mediated by lecturers' contextualization and by encouraging reflections on learners' thoughts and feelings (sense of place). The reflections could be prompted by the lecturers' questions or anecdotes or guided by pre-assigned instructions for group work activities and end-of-day debriefings. The reflections drew on the learners' personal experiences, values and stereotypes and often encouraged revisiting or decentering those. It is these critical reflections that particularly knit together the experiential, affective and critical modes as an integrated whole (cf. Mezirow, 1990), while each learning incidence turns out to be just another layer in a cumulative and reciprocal relationship between the three modes of learning.

The style of teaching was open and friendly, encouraging collaborative co-learning and candid exchange of ideas, often facilitated by humour. It is also important to note that in line with critical pedagogy, making explicit the positionality of the teachers themselves contributed to the spirit of openness, dialogue and debate. In the 3 years of my teaching this fieldcourse, it was a joint undertaking with a colleague John Round. While both of us share expertise in post-socialist geographies, we have different research interests, life experience, as well as, of course, different political agency. Thus, while our knowledge and perspectives proved to be complementary, they were not identical and were occasionally in conflict – and, as such, demanded certain debates and clarifications.

Recognizing the positionality of the lecturers is particularly important in a cross-cultural overseas fieldtrip. Given the linguistic and cultural barriers involved in the understanding of the non-English-speaking contexts and the limited time the students are exposed to the field, the teacher's position as a gatekeeper authority is exacerbated. Since students lack the possibility to fully "triangulate" the lecturers' (inevitably reductionist and partial) explanations and their own observations with the polyphony of other voices and insights, the potential alignment of the teacher's authority with the narratives of cultural or class consciousness and stereotypes could damage the very idea of critical pedagogy. It is therefore, once again, important to explicitly problematize the collective positionality of both the teachers and the students, provide different points of views on a given narrative or observation, to encourage finding alternative and sometimes counter-intuitive meanings of the observed phenomena and also to persistently relate those reflections, via critical discussions, to parallel affairs back home and more widely.

The style of delivery, certainly, contributed to a frank and engaged learning environment and left its marks on students' understandings. Many student comments in the assessment of the module reflected on that, such as in 2013:

"The stories [the lecturers] told us . . . made it the most personal and emotional," "Really liked the differing opinions and the different perspectives. I enjoyed the opportunities to talk to each lecturer about interesting everyday life," "[the lecturer] offered many opinions/ideas that I hadn't thought about due to origin," "[the lecturer] helped us see opinions from Russian point of view and compare to ours . . . raised awareness to positionality".

Overall, students thoroughly enjoy this experience, as reflected in their continuously strong feedback on the module and enthusiastic and emotional commentaries with the adjectives such as "enjoyable", "interesting", "exciting", "amazing", "fantastic" or "my favourite module this year", "best module I've taken at the University", "best trip ever". Many explicitly appreciate the opportunity to see the life through a different lens: "An amazing life experience, it gave me the chance to see another way of life!"

### **Sense of place and experiential learning**

In order to better understand the implications of the adoption of experiential and affective modes in teaching critical geography, I conducted a study about the effects of the Moscow fieldcourse on students' developing a professional sense of place – that is, the ability to interpret empirical observations through the lens of wider geographical conceptualizations and patterns as expected in this module. A particular focus was on understanding the extent to which the students' (informed) preconceptions of place have changed due to the experiences of the fieldtrip, especially with regard to the five conceptual threads identified above.

Alongside analysing this module across a number of years, the study involved a qualitative analysis of reflective essays of the group of 21 students enrolled on the fieldcourse in the 2012/2013 year (with a field study visit in February 2013). The students were instructed to submit two rounds of reflective essays of up to 1000 words, before and after the fieldtrip, which discussed, correspondingly, their pre- and post-conception of Moscow. These two sets of essays were non-assessed and were primarily intended to contribute to an individual portfolio of materials (alongside field diaries, photos and videos, and group work) that the students used as an evidence base for their assessed essays (of 5000 words) and group presentations. Thus, shortly after the fieldtrip, the students submitted a reflective essay discussing "In which ways has my imaginary of Moscow changed as a result of the fieldtrip?" The essay was open-ended and the students were not instructed which particular themes to discuss or what material to include.

This set of essays was used for a more detailed analysis, based on the assumption that being non-assessed, the reflective essays demonstrate what the students are immediately able to draw on as their experiential learning – probably also indicating deeper learning outcomes, which would be then reinforced by their consequent work towards assessed assignments. Since the reflective essays were non-assessed, they were assumed to be relatively unattended and rapid work akin to a brainstorming. Thus, whilst these essays were not as sophisticated as *assessed* essays, they were thought to be a good way to distil the active effects of the fieldtrip. The content of the essays was not affected by this research project beforehand; it is only upon students' submitting their second set of reflective essays that they were asked for their permission to include their anonymized reflective essays in a

teaching research project's analysis and consequent publications from it (all students gave their consent for the use of their reflective essays as part of the research).

The essays were analysed using an interpretive content analysis, particularly focused on identifying the use of the intended learning concepts – positionality, transition, legacy, politics of space and spatial justice (the extracts from the reflective essays I will use below are coded as RE followed by the number of a particular essay).

Overall, the benefits of this module are that it not only encourages students to acquire additional knowledge about the subject, but also to co-create knowledge and judgement, including forming personal values and attitudes (as “high-level” affective learning). This constructivist practice is valued by students themselves. In their reflective essays, most students explicitly or implicitly acknowledge the benefits of experiential learning and its effects on their familiarity of the place, knowledge and understanding. They also provided commentaries about how their pre-constructed knowledge was negotiated and transformed, especially with regard to their stereotypical expectations:

RE9: I found Moscow to be a hugely diverse and interesting city, and far removed from the stereotypical ex-Soviet Bloc settlement that I was expecting to encounter.

This also echoes student feedback on the module:

The visit to Moscow was fascinating. Building on knowledge developed prior to the trip, visiting Moscow allowed this to be developed further, at a deeper level... The ability to develop over own opinion and ideas on concepts after visiting it first hand was extremely beneficial.

Really enjoyed the trip – seeing it all in person was the *best* way to learn... Something never learnt about before so fascinating and stimulating.

In what follows, I discuss students' reflections on each of the five conceptual threads. While doing so, I also briefly introduce the concepts themselves in their articulation within critical geography and their “localization” in relation to post-socialist transformations.

### **Positionality and situated knowledge**

As indicated by Wellens et al. (2006), positionality is one of the most important elements of pedagogy for social transformation. Positionality refers to a negotiation of the cultural meanings of the observations in a dialogue with the self. This is also to acknowledge that all knowledge and learning experiences are partial, never fully complete and embedded in a particular cultural background of the observer (Rose, 1997). On the one hand, explicit reflections on ones' positionality were a key intended outcome of the Moscow fieldcourse; on the other hand, positionality as affective and cognitive learning dispositions was also *itself* a means for addressing the other learning outcomes.

In the specific context of post-socialist transition, students' positionality implies thinking critically about their outsidersness and what this means for their learning experiences while forming judgements or establishing conceptual relationships with the field. Thus, on each location, students were asked to reflect on their feelings and thoughts to interpret the experienced phenomenon and how these were linked to, for example, their cultural and normative attitudes, worldviews, expectations and values. Students were cautioned against a linear transposing of the meanings of the phenomena carried out from their home contexts, as well as stereotypes, into the observed practices and encouraged to deconstruct and re-assemble their cultural expectations.

From some essays, the effects of reflective thinking about one's' positionality were clear:

RE1: Moscow has made me appreciate the value of my positionality and the care which we must take in forming our opinions. It was far too easy for us to pass judgement without fully understanding the greater picture.

RE20: Different isn't always wrong, it's only different. So I tried come at it with an open mind, to see and to enquire – not judge... What I feel that I have learnt from Moscow is to keep an open mind... I became resolute on keeping my opinion open and not to be clouded by my... positionality.

And yet this is not to say that positionality is easy to reach. It is interesting that while a far greater number of these students later discussed positionality in their assessed essays, few felt it necessary to include it in the reflective essays. This possibly suggests a certain discrepancy between active knowledge that students can instantly operate, and formalized academic knowledge that requires attention and concentration. But this may also indicate an element of hypocrisy. Indeed, while by the end of their degree students are accustomed with the scholarly protocol of essay writing to achieve good marks (Anderson, 2013), are they serious enough about their positionality and do they operate it responsibly outside this formalized protocol?

### **The political economy of transition**

This theme in essence relates to the deeply ideological process of the establishment of capitalist institutional regimes over the previous egalitarian regimes of state socialism and to associated social, economic and political transformation and their problematic nature (Pickles & Smith, 1998; Williams, Round, & Rodgers, 2013). The Moscow fieldcourse particularly explored the role of urban space in these transformations, including the rapid production of uneven, contested and hybrid spatialities of capitalism and globalization (Badyina & Golubchikov, 2005; Golubchikov, Badyina, & Makhrova, 2014; Golubchikov & Phelps, 2011). Teaching about transition from a critical perspective was also rolled out in its wider relevance, beyond the context of Russia or Moscow, as it is important not only for understanding the processes of global transformations and globalization, but also for understanding the dominant politico-economic regimes of neoliberal capitalism, its mutation, variegated forms and spatial implications (Brenner & Theodore, 2002; Harvey, 2007). In this regard, students' thoughts and feelings in different local contexts were scrutinized to raise connections between the visual/experiential and their wider meanings and significance.

Indeed, some students were articulate about their learning about transition as an ideological and politico-economic process:

RE6: Overall Moscow has provided a city that is intriguing from an academic point of view. Its transition to capitalist society has exposed many of the universal problems faced by all capitalist societies and as such can highlight issues that are very well hidden in the older nation states.

Yet, students were more comfortable to communicate their learning of important but specific elements, such as those signifying the workings of globalization upon Moscow's built environment, including the speed of urban change:

RE1: Scenic landscapes were constantly ruined by tall cranes and building work. This accurately reflects the sheer speed at which Moscow (and Russia as a whole) has developed. This is definitely an aspect that became far easier to appreciate when visualizing it.

Here, it was direct experiential observations and affective "feel" associations that were prioritized in the students' geographical imagination. Like in the case of positionality discussed earlier, the assessed essays, submitted later, were more effective and explicit

about discussing the narrative of transition – possibly indicating the time and effort required to articulate the larger theoretical links, beyond the directly observed experiences. Of course, certain meta-narratives are harder to convey via affective and experiential learning than some more specific elements that may be experienced more directly in the social and built fabric of the city. Nevertheless, if the students are able to demonstrate their knowledge about the meta-narratives through their further work, this may be seen as a satisfactory outcome, signifying the complex cognitive pathways in negotiating difficult concepts with the observations and reflections from the field.

### **Legacy and the production of identities**

Teaching post-socialist transformation requires much contextualization in relation to the previous ideologies and their effects on society and space – both historically and in relation to the contemporary period. Moran and Round (2010) indicate that undergraduates today do not relate the turbulent period preceding and following the dismantling of the state socialist system in Eastern Europe to their personal life histories, since most of them were born after the period of 1989–1991. Nevertheless, as an important element characterizing Russia's past and present, legacy attracts much interest and affective attentiveness of the students. This is reflected in the widespread use of this theme to support the reflective discussions. In the course of the fieldtrip, there were different examples and discussions about legacy as material and symbolic practices and the subsumption and consumption of socialist legacy by the new regimes in the production and representation of post-socialist identities. This process involves multiple actors and scales and, as already reflected in relation to the concept of transition, is not linear but is rather contested. Observations in the field and, actually, the very positionality of the students and their accelerated senses with regard to “exotic” legacies allow them to rather well apprehend these issues:

RE11: History is such a large part of the future, a history that I have not experienced, [but] I feel that the [impacts of] legacies on everyday practices are still visible.

RE5: I believed that the socialist past of Moscow and Russia as a whole was one that was deeply ingrained in contemporary psyche, yet hidden from the tourist gaze. However, my visit to Moscow and assessment of the various memorials in place has suggested that this understanding was limited, and the relationship between socialism and memorialization is much more complex.

However, some students still fail to achieve a culturally sensitive appreciation of the varied pathways of development and the role of legacy in it. The modernization theory, which suggests teleological pathways towards uniform Westernization and which has produced the very conceptions of “transition” (as epitomized by the “end of history” thesis of Fukuyama, 1992), has left a clear mark on many students and is hard to deconstruct despite students' continuous exposure both to its problematic character and to the appreciation of the varied pathways of development and history. The differences in the levels of reflections can be exemplified by these commentaries:

RE7: I think it is important to question whether Moscow has to follow in the footsteps of other global/western cities. Or can it create its own way of doing things, which much of Moscow already does.

RE10: I think Moscow is trying very hard to become more Westernized (e.g. Moscow City) but then looking at others areas it's clear to see that it is still way behind and almost looks Eastern European.

### **Politics of space**

Urban space is simultaneously the driver, playground and reflection of politics, ideology and power. The ideas are well rehearsed in the literature and inform a large body of the critical geographical debates such as, for example, related to the analysis of the (social) production of space (Lefebvre, 1991 [1974]). In Moscow, walking lectures and group projects encouraged students to explore, “feel” and reflect on these topics too.

Various observations related to this thread were consequently used in the essays, although more effective observations refer to a particular group of associations, such as Moscow’s architecture or securitization on the streets of Moscow. To some extent, this was a result of particular sites attended, but this is perhaps the evidence in support of bringing the elements of experiential, affective and critical learning closely to each other to produce synergies. Here are some commentaries in relation to the built environment more specifically:

RE11: The politics of space is evident within the built environment. The city is like a jigsaw puzzle, made up of the different legacies. Looking around you can easily see remnants of past regimes in the built environment. Particular messages from the past are left behind to create a particular feeling . . . Reading this landscape and the histories and philosophies within it has enabled me to slowly “get” Moscow.

RE6: The architecture still strikes me. I love the Stalinist style, despite the western connotations put on it. These buildings, along with other major ones . . . have the ability to inspire me. They provide a great example of the power of architecture in influencing people and acting as lieux de memoires.

### **Spatial justice**

Inequality and spatial justice is a generic conceptual thread, which is nevertheless always localized (Harvey, 1973; Soja, 2010). Indeed, post-socialist process as neoliberalization is leading to the production of social inequalities, exclusion and uneven development at varied scale and spatialities. This was relatively well sensed by the students in experiential and affective modes, leading to a wealth of examples such as:

RE3: The inequality within Moscow also changed my perception of Moscow quite dramatically . . . It wasn’t until I got to Moscow that it struck me just how expensive every day goods were . . . the disparities of wage and expenses results in people struggling to survive.

RE4: Despite the fact that social inequality is a major issue within the city, it was often difficult to differentiate between the middle class areas and those in which poverty is major problem. However, poverty is evident on the streets and especially around the metro where many people, especially the elderly beg for food and money. This is a sign that the new capitalist system is failing Moscow’s aging population whose pensions are not sufficient to support their daily needs.

While students recognize the patterns of injustices, there remains a question to what extent these accounts generate wider critical reflections on capitalist spatialities as opposed to mere observations and conformist attitudes. For example, from the students’ reflective essays, like indeed from their other assignments, it was obvious that thinking about the “difference” of the Russian spatialities involved only limited reflections of what this means for the order back home. Comparisons were often more of a superficial nature, suggesting an uncritical acceptance of the disciplining role of urban space in class reproduction, such as the following:

RE2: It was hard to decipher whether these buildings were expensive or home to the wealthy as they reminded me of the council estates we see in England. However, I was informed that these were very good places to live and not like these places in England.

Perhaps this is due to how students understood the nature of their assignments – as rather focused on the visited location – but the educators should remember that students are predisposed to reflect on their experiences acquired in a cross-cultural and overseas field as pertinent to and essentially remaining in that context. The awareness about inequalities and injustices does not automatically result in “more just worldviews”. The connections of both experiential and conceptual learnings to what these imply for students’ home habitats and their responsibilities as citizens in these habitats require particular attention and further scrutiny – both in literature and in practice.

In short, while teaching through a post-socialist fieldtrip has provided much opportunity to teach dense theories in a relatively short period of time, it also exposes the limits of critical pedagogy with respect to how soon and how far it can reach the genuine positionality of students and, particularly, make them think about the institutions back home and possibilities to change them. Nevertheless, there is certainly another layer of reflective knowledge brought to students, which can reinforce the larger agenda of the geographical curricula to enable students to become self-determined and responsible citizens.

### **Conclusions: how to re-imagine a field-trip as a feel-trip?**

Blending affective, experiential and critical learning (as combined in my notion of a feel-trip) seems to be a good way to develop an active understanding and relevance of some critical geographical concepts. Students are able to relate emotionally these concepts to the real-life practices and more vividly negotiate them in their memory with concrete observations. Affect is of course always present on any fieldtrip, as much as it is in our everyday life. The onus of a feel-trip is a more explicit recognition that affect is closely linked to experiential field-based activities.

But what could be the wider practical lessons from this? The educational practitioners in human geography could (re)consider the structure of educational field study visits from the perspective of critical engagement with the field, while recognizing more explicitly the importance of the affective dimensions. The focus should not be simply on places to visit and their experiential potential for students’ learning about particular processes or phenomena, but also on the value of these experiences for students’ political, ethical and emancipatory imaginaries. Building on Freire, Giroux (2010, p. 192) argues that critical thinking is not simply diagnostic: it is

not about the task of simply reproducing the past and understanding the present. On the contrary, it offers a way of thinking beyond the present, soaring beyond the immediate confines of one’s experiences, entering into a critical dialogue with history and imagining a future that does not merely reproduce the present.

The role of the affective dimension of “a feel-trip” can also be more explicit in provoking such imaginaries. The sites and places that are (planned to be) visited, whether “mundane” or “extraordinary”, can be thought through their possible registry in the affective domain including, for example, how they can invoke or provoke particular feelings and emotions (i.e. surprise, compassion, fear and prejudices) and sensitivities (i.e. being in place or out of place, inclusion or exclusion, aesthetic or disharmony, comfort or discomfort) and, more importantly, how these affective connections can matter for critical imaginaries. Here, a particular attention needs to be paid to specific pedagogical channels by which the affective context could be articulated with the critical and could reverberate on the higher level learning dispositions, positionality and value systems. In the Moscow fieldcourse, such “channel” was provided by students’ reflections on their sense of place visited and on its interplay with their positionalities. Encouraged and gradually

accustomed to do such reflective work, students become more conscious of themselves as social and political agents (who play their part in varied social processes) “rather than merely disengaged spectators” (Giroux, 2010, p. 189).

Of course not all students are comfortable in expressing what they feel; representing their feelings in words may be an awkward and reductionist exercise, while some students do not simply want to expose feelings that they know would not be welcomed by their peers and teachers (e.g. attitudes demarcating prejudices, racism, etc.). This is why prompting discussions around “sense of place” in the first approximation may be a good proxy for feelings, while lecturers can still predict prejudices and be provoking in pushing to discuss such views by depersonalizing them and inviting students to discuss the social groundings of these, while also providing a counter-narrative to challenge them.

Reflecting on feelings, thoughts and positionality is, of course, not the end result, but rather a means of provoking and nurturing wider progressive imaginaries, a culture of debates and capacities to interrogate the dominant politico-economic orders – especially from *de-centered* perspectives, be those political (e.g. of the marginalized, alienated and disenfranchised) or cultural (e.g. non-Western, non-white, non-masculine).

Furthermore, critical should not be seen as simply/always oppositional; it would also mean identifying positive elements that could provide seeds for transformative insights and practices. This is particularly important in cross-cultural fieldwork: learning about differences should seek to help students not only to appreciate variegated articulations of larger and generalized patterns or processes, but also to develop tolerance and compassion towards difference as such and, furthermore, be able to see through it inspirations for social transformation back home.

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