

# The Journey as a Transcultural Experience for International Students

## Abstract

An international two-year Erasmus Mundus MA, Transcultural European Outdoor Studies (TEOS), uses the journey as a central metaphorical concept, the '*peregrinatio academica*', and experiential pedagogy. Students study human nature interactions through the lens of outdoor education and recreation while travelling for a semester at a time in three European countries: England, Norway and Germany. We argue that the transcultural concept is facilitated by the diverse nationalities of the student cohort and the concept and experience of the journey. Empirical evidence from student feedback, course discussions, and staff reflections is used to explore the ways in which the programme elucidates ideas of expert and Eurocentric knowledge of landscape and learning by valuing individual knowledge constructions and new research. Simultaneously, we argue that the typical European 'gaze' on the 'other' somehow is reversed as 'others' gaze at European cultures, and, to some degree, contribute to destabilising culturally taken-for-granted knowledge. This offers new opportunities for a more nuanced transcultural exploration of human nature interactions in diverse landscapes and cultures. We conclude that the knowledge and skills developed by this programme supports the development of 'transculturalised' students with the enhanced capacity to shift between and discuss diverse positions and ways of viewing and knowing.

**Keywords:** Transcultural; Internationalisation; Higher Education; Landscape; Journey; Experiential Pedagogy; Outdoor Education

## **Introduction**

The Erasmus Mundus joint masters degree Transcultural European Outdoor Studies (TEOS) takes a transcultural approach (Welsch, 1999) to content and process using the journey as a pedagogical device. Outdoor Studies is a growing topic of study for those concerned with the environmental, recreational and educational aspects of human nature interactions. The subject of TEOS is the cultural and physical landscapes of three European countries as seen through the educational outdoor environmental and recreational lens. The pedagogical concept of the journey is central to the design of the programme in six intersecting and distinct ways. This paper considers how the pedagogy of the journey and the ‘student as traveller’ in the physical and cultural landscapes of the three countries concerned, develops a critical knowledge of human nature relations in international cohorts of students. We also discuss how a particular understanding of knowledge through the transcultural lens of an international learning community destabilizes existing knowledges for both staff and students and offers new opportunities for a more nuanced transcultural and critical exploration of human nature interactions in diverse landscapes and cultures. The concept of the journey as a metaphor for transformation from novice to expert student researcher/traveller is developed. A critical transcultural approach to the analysis of these experiences is used in order to reflect on the impacts of this degree on both students and staff and pave the way for new approaches to viewing and understanding.

## **Transcultural European Outdoor Studies**

TEOS is provided by a partnership of three universities in Norway, Germany and the UK. Each cohort consists of approximately twenty international students. The course is full time and two years long requiring the students to peregrinate from Ambleside to Oslo and

Marburg before choosing one university and potentially a fourth country as their base for their dissertation.

The cultural interaction takes many forms including living and studying in an international group in three countries, and studying with the national cohort of postgraduate students in each country. Moreover, the students are taught in English yet learning two other languages, exploring the local cultures and landscapes, experiencing and examining outdoor activities and outdoor educations of each nation and engaging with visiting scholars from other countries as well as the host nations. The central question of the programme is how the different landscapes and cultural contexts of the three nations, whilst influenced by many of the same historical roots, leads to varying forms of human nature relations and outdoor education practices.

In addition, the curriculum explicitly sets out to explore the experience of the journey as a phenomenon in Outdoor Education and an experience in which the students are engaged on a micro scale of excursions and a macro scale of the two-year study programme.

The context of TEOS, as an Erasmus Mundus joint masters degree, is informed by European education policy and especially the internationalisation policy of research and higher education institutions (Keeling, 2006; Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2008; Karlsen, 2015). The overall goal for the European education policy informed by the Bologna and Lisbon charters is to develop a joint and compatible education system of exchange. It also aims at strengthening the cultural understanding among young people and the competitiveness of European institutions. The development may have a particular significance for countries consisting of small populations, such as the Nordic countries, where European collaboration and *internationalisation* means adaptation to English

speaking communities of education, research and discourse, and because Anglo-centric research in particular dominates outdoor education on a global scale.

On the other hand, Caruana (2011) and Ryan (2013) highlight problems that can occur when a large cohort of international students, predominantly from a single cultural background, join a programme that recruits a significant number of UK nationals.

However, an important difference between the TEOS-programme and many 'international' programmes is that the Erasmus Mundus scholarship framework stipulates that each cohort have no more than two students from any one country. So far, the programme, in its sixth year, has had 102 students from 42 countries and, importantly, 6 continents. However, although most students are of European descent, the 'make-up' of the cohorts varies; dominated, for example by native-English speakers, non-native-English speakers, a large group of Asians, and by Eastern Europeans, respectively. Ages range from 22 to 36, a diversity of religions and three quarters being female.

The experience of international students visiting another country to study for a degree has largely been considered through the lenses of multicultural, cross-cultural and/or intercultural exchange and experience, thus highlighting the differences between people as a challenge (Portera, 2008). The unusual makeup of TEOS for an international course has contributed significantly to the ways in which the journey, both as metaphor and multi-level experience, has developed as a tool for exploring and comparing human nature interactions through comparative and transcultural lenses. In so doing, the programme led to the situation in which European cultures, normally used to gazing at 'others', became the subject of the gaze of those 'others' and can be understood as the social construction of multiple geographies (Castree, 2013). Whilst, at the same time, the approach has created a

liminal space that has highlighted the similarities amongst educated young people worldwide.

The concept of transculturality, as developed by Welsch (1999), inspired the programme. Welsch imagined cultural relations as a river consisting of many currents. Some he considered to be stronger, some more stable and coherent. At the boundary of each current, cultures interact, mingle and even blend. As the river continues some currents maintain their integrity, others merge, some divide and yet more disappear as new strands emerge as if from nowhere. This dynamic approach to cultural relations differs from intercultural and multicultural concepts in that mixing, adoption and adaptation are understood as common and on going processes especially in those spaces and times distanced from the cultural 'centre' where the norms of a culture are weaker, spaces such as the outdoors. The TEOS programme draws from these ideas using the concepts of boundaries, thresholds and crossings on the one hand and liminal space and time on the other to capture some of the processes involved when a student traveller is, as Becker (2016) proposes, 'on the way' and in transition.

### **The Journey and the Traveller as Pedagogy**

The journey has been understood as an informal educational experience with transformative outcomes ever since the first Greek myths were told (Ogilvie, 2013). Anthropologists claim that the journey, both in reality and as metaphor, underlies many myths throughout human history and across many cultures (Campbell, 1991). These journeys place the protagonists in a 'strange' place where they as visitors and 'others' could gain 'treasures' or lessons. Additionally, their estrangement from their 'homes' may lead to critical distant views but also problematic returns despite the 'treasures' they hold.

This model was (in)formally adopted in the European medieval period as a central aspect of the emerging university system. The prospective students were expected to go on educational journeys—the *peregrinatio academica*—to study at renowned universities across Europe. Thus, exposing them to the ‘best knowledge’ in their field. In this way, European transcultural models of development and dissemination of knowledge were created, combining elements from a diversity of contexts (cf. Welsch, 1999).

A similar model was developed by the medieval craft guilds leading to the journeyman idea. In this case the apprentice studied away from home and could not return until his (it was largely men) trade was perfected. An important difference between the academic model, in which the student acquired knowledge from the expert, and the experiential approach of the journeymen was that the knowledge and skill involved in craftwork could not be taught. Instead, it was understood as being acquired by copying the master until the apprentice found the craft within and also his own personal expression of and ways of developing that craft. Like the student, the apprentice then returned ‘home’ to share his craft and spreading new ideas, designs and technologies (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The journeyman concept remains active today, especially in Outdoor Education Higher Education.

The concept of the journey as an educational experience re-emerged in England as the Grand Tour, travelling to the ancient seats of learning, Greece and Italy, for the sons (and sometimes daughters) of the ruling elite as a form of education prior to inheriting or taking on offices in politics, business, the military or the church (Black, 2003). This approach also developed among the upper classes of other European nations, such as Germany and Norway and initially became known by the concepts of *Bildungsreisen* and

*dannelsesreiser*, and inspired the German philosophy of *Bildung* and the Norwegian/Scandinavian *dannelse* (Slagstad, Korsgaard, & Løvlie, 2003).

In the early 20th century, movements such as Scouting in England and Norway and the *Wandervogel* in Germany introduced the journey in different forms to young people as youth movements designed to be educative. Inspired by the developing reform pedagogy German and Norwegian schools began to take children on *Ausfluchte/utflukter* in the nearby environments to study the natural worlds and wonders hands-on and to enjoy the beauty and pleasures of nature (Becker, 2016; Gurholt, 2008). The practice of the ‘expedition’ as a form of transformative education was further developed in the UK in 1932 with the British Schools Exploring Society (BSES, now the British Exploring Society) (Loynes, 2010). Expeditions, inspired by the Antarctic expeditions of Scott, included adventurous, scientific and, later, community service themes (Grey, 1998). After the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War the practice of UK-school expeditions going abroad blossomed. Additionally, the journey became embedded in the Scout Movement and the Duke of Edinburgh’s Award Scheme as well as being an integral part of an Outward Bound course (Allison, 2000; Beames, 2010; Loynes, 2008). In Norway, week-long camp schools were developed and became popular underpinning a general state policy to promote *friluftsliv for all* (Gurholt, 2008).

The field trip for, typically, Geography and Biology students in higher education add to the repertoire. Since the 1950s, the doing of fieldwork was recognised as central for studying the complexity of geographical problems and for students becoming amenable to comprehension. Across continents, academics agreed that there is a number of common themes making fieldwork effective (on the undergraduate level). The strongest of which is the hands-on experience of the real world. In addition, both academics and students find it

to be an extremely enjoyable learning and teaching method (Fuller et al., 2011). However, there is not so much research concerning the effectiveness or impacts of fieldwork used at master's level.

TEOS is unusual in that, whilst the masters programme contains numerous excursions, the whole two-year degree is also understood as one experiential journey. The programme rationale places the student 'traveller' as the core of experiencing an explorative journey through three different cultural landscapes both formally and informally, in the classroom and in academic literature, in social life and on excursions. The journey has the dual impact of providing hands-on experience and reflective understanding of human nature relationships as a way of gaining an 'insider's' view of that culture whilst, at the same time, keeping a critical 'outsider's' distant perspective. This structure had the explicit intent of disrupting established views of human nature relations in these landscapes in order to encourage the development of a critical gaze that informs the transcultural construction of new knowledges by each student traveller. The approach intends to raise questions and gain contextual understanding for the students' own research and as a preparation for qualifying the students for a transcultural workplace.

### **The Six Journey Concepts of TEOS**

The TEOS partners describe their application of the pedagogical concept of the journey in six intersecting but distinct ways. The first identifies the journey as a subject for study.

This aspect will not be addressed in this paper. The second to fifth concepts model different understandings of the particular experiences of the TEOS programme. These five concepts are outlined below. The sixth idea of the journey as a metaphor for the transition



from novice to expert is the focus of the discussion contributing to the understanding of the formative and transformative processes of knowledge and student development.

Firstly, outdoor journeys in and across landscapes have been part of formal and informal approaches to personal development, geographical education and intercultural exchange in Europe for over a century (Beames, 2010; Becker, 2016; Gurholt, 2008). They are therefore ‘core curriculum’ in Outdoor Studies. For TEOS, the topic has been a central focus as staff and students have identified, through experience and study, distinct cultural differences in the understanding and purpose of the journey between the three partner countries. The British idea of a ‘journey with a purpose’, often overseas (Loynes, 2010), is contrasted with the aesthetic value placed on the experience by the German *Bildung* approach (Becker et al., 2016). Both cultures value landscapes that are ‘strange’ places in contrast to Norwegian ideas of journeying in and across Norway’s remote forests, mountains and coastlines to become familiar with and able to handle the demands of the landscapes as living conditions with a highly significant role in cultural identity (Goksøyr, 1994; Pedersen & Viken, 1996).

Secondly, as previously identified, the cohorts of international students make one long physical, cultural and social journey over two years through the three host countries, spending a semester studying with the national programmes of each host. This provides an understanding of the practices of outdoor education (England), *Erlebnispädagogik* (Germany) and *friluftsliv* (Norway), experientially and academically.

Thirdly, the journey is understood as a metaphor and theoretical framing for the masters programme, drawing on the 12<sup>th</sup> century idea of students going on ‘peregrinations’ to foreign universities combined with the experiential idea of journeymen. This binary

approach informs the programme ethos, design and substance, and resonates with the transcultural aspects of the course title.

Fourthly, staff members of the collaborating universities also travel. Each semester they meet at one of the three universities to develop a joint community of learning and research of students and staff. The purpose is to explore distinct aspects of each national culture and develop comparative perspectives and analysis. It is on these occasions that the gaze of the ‘outsider versus insider’ becomes dominant, knowledge is questioned and new interpretations are co-constructed and, for the students as well as staff, provisional transcultural understandings emerge.

The fifth context is the shorter (self-reliant) journeys undertaken by students in the landscapes and cultures of each of the three host countries. These experiential and physical ‘peregrinations’ are central to the pedagogy of the programme, intending to broaden the students experience and to stimulate a shift to comparative and nuanced understandings of both cultural and professional knowledge within the higher education process.

All records the students bring back are interpreted carefully in order to develop the sensitivities to transcultural processes of knowledge co-production (Becker, 2008), employing methodologies such as ethnography, narrative analysis and visual images.

### **A Collaborative and Ethnographic Methodological Approach**

The authors took an ethnographic approach to this study using a collaborative enquiry method with all the participants. It was considered that an enquiry on this topic was of direct interest to all the participants and relevant to the aims of the programme.

To explore the experiences of staff and student throughout the programme, data was drawn from the aural and written formal applications, evaluations of the modules, semesters and the overall programme undertaken by students, staff and external examiners from the university and Erasmus Mundus institutions between 2011 and 2016. Additionally, data has been drawn from relevant assignments and dissertations undertaken by TEOS students together with the records and products of academic seminars, tutorials and publications and presentations by staff. The authors included their own field notes gathered from the experiential elements of their immersion in much of the formal and some of the informal aspects of the programme. Metrics were extracted from registry data and anonymised.

Students and staff were also asked for their reflections on the impact on them of the pedagogic approaches adopted by and emerging from TEOS. In addition, the authors have drawn on empirical examples of the participants' expressions of their journey-experiences and experiential learning outcomes to bring in their voices and to ground the claims made in concrete examples that represent the emerging themes identified by the collaboration between all involved. Nevertheless, we realize that the focus of the article emphasizes the reflective voices of the course facilitators rather than those represented by the students.

### **From Novice to Expert**

The sixth concept of a journey refers, in part, to the students' individual transformative processes of learning and development throughout the programme and, in part, to the collective journeys of reflection. This paper explores the apprenticeship and maturation of the 'traveller' from novice to expert. We argue that this process concerns both the academic construction of knowledge and the acquisition of skills combined with the *Bildung* of the informal educational processes. Whilst the 'peregrination' begins

informally, well before arrival in Ambleside, and persists long after the graduation ceremony in Marburg, we use these ‘thresholds’ as the formal borders of the journey at which a crossing into another world takes place.

The Anglophone idea of character building, the German *Bildung* and the Norwegian *dannelse* share the understanding of personal development taking the form of a self-transformation at certain critical times in life and precipitated by certain kinds of events (Slagstad, Korsgaard, & Løvlie, 2003). Transformation is understood to be the outcome of coping with powerful experiences in new situations. The liminal nature of these events creates the possibility for personal growth. People find new responses in noticeably new circumstances. The events during the transition from youth to adult, still relevant to many TEOS students, is one such time of life that may benefit from being supported formally or informally by outdoor interventions (Loynes, 2008). A masters education can also provide such situations.

Three interrelated themes emerge strongly, co-construction, the iterative process, and the dialectic lens of the other and the reversal of the gaze. They loosely follow a time line that reflects the maturation of the student traveller from novice to expert.

### ***Co-construction***

The power of explorative journeys to destabilise presumed, established and expert knowledges could have been silenced by the formal programme but, instead, was supported by the opportunities students have to share and discuss their narratives of experiences. In addition, they were allowed to develop and transform these narratives in the context of the formal activities such as lectures and seminars at the university.

For example, the first excursion visited a remote Lakeland valley. Its purpose is given as ‘to establish a learning community and to begin the processes of co-constructing knowledge about a place and about professional practices of outdoor education’. Students were asked what did they ‘know’ and what else did they need to ‘know’ in order to be an outdoor educator in this place. The result was a destabilizing of the hegemonic norms around UK outdoor practice. Students inhabited the ‘role’ (Quay & Seaman, 2013) of outdoor educator in a specific English landscape but from their own cultural lens. This manifested itself in the transcultural catering experiments, the explorations of the valley on foot and by canoe, the lens through which the valley was observed and the forms of expression, especially aesthetic approaches, used to share their understandings of and feelings for the place.

For example using the wood found in the valley for various purposes such as making bowls and spoons, lighting fires and cooking, are all forms of activity until only recently discouraged in England as unsafe. Some students, informed by their own cultural backgrounds have, commonly introduced the use of knives and the lighting of fire, generally considered too risky and of limited educational value. Another strong feature has been socialising around an outdoor fire each evening sharing stories and songs, something again currently less common in England and for which the musical skills and knowledge have atrophied.

Interestingly, given the scope to choose the sources of their knowledge about the valley or about outdoor education pedagogy, students from every cohort chose to reject opportunities to learn solely from the ‘experts’ – staff and local residents alike. Instead, they privileged the experiences gained from their own activities and travels mediated through the lens of their own creativity and cultural backgrounds and the reflections and

discussions that arose amongst the wider learning community, including inputs of academic knowledge.

Not all students found the early problematizing of the expert's knowledge so easy. During the joint modules, the academic staff from three countries would often examine the emerging co-constructed ideas in front of the students. Lectures and presentations were understood amongst the staff as provisional knowledges that both staff and students were constructing, sharing and debating. Feedback from some students repeatedly asked that we stop doing this as they wanted to know the 'facts' and the 'truth'. For them a degree remained a transfer of established knowledge from expert to novice.

The independent journeys continued the co-constructed approach to the enquiry into culture and landscape. Undertaken later in the semester, students explored all manner of landscapes and many forms of travel. Hitchhiking became popular especially amongst female students,

I wanted to travel alone and meet real people, you know, so I hitchhiked. I wanted to see if I could and here the country is so safe. I was anxious but I met amazing people, stayed in their homes, was taken on tours. I ended up doing something else than I'd planned, something I never do.

In this case the activity, hitchhiking, was unfamiliar to the student and no longer familiar in the host culture, a (re)emerging current in the transcultural stream. At the host university, hitchhiking is discouraged and this TEOS-practice challenged staff to undertake unexpected risk assessments and management plans. Sometimes the contrasts among the students became indeed visible, as an Asian female student commented on her approach; "When I came I couldn't walk to the bank in Ambleside unaccompanied. So now I go to London on my own." In other cases students readily entered UK 'currents in the stream'

that were not available in their own culture. Yet other ‘currents’ were resisted and challenged,

I don’t understand why you make people climb these mountains. It is much more beautiful here (in the valley) and you experience so much more if you go slowly and meet people. And why do you need the maps? You just have to ask where you are and people help you.

A commonly rejected practice was the British approach to adventure in the outdoors, searching for risks. Students from cultures unfamiliar with these activities found them hard to engage with or to value. For them ‘outdoors’ came to be re-expressed as ‘nature’ or ‘environment’, including urban environments. The landscape was perceived as a subject to interact with and care for, rather than an instrumental setting for an activity. However, the idea of a journey, and even a challenging journey such as the solo trip to London mentioned above was widely embraced. These students took a critical stance to the ideas of adventure, adventure activities, the journey and the outdoors choosing to enter the experiential current of the journey, redefining adventure and abandoning the once established currents of adventure activities and the outdoors.

Co-construction, whilst being problematic for some students, persisted as the programme’s approach to understanding. Multiple reflections on diverse experiences and explored practices were openly voiced and contested in seminars and formalised in lectures and papers. Initially, the established knowledge of ‘experts’ was avoided in favour of first hand and personally constructed knowledge in a critical discourse with established ideas from the host culture and from the culture of each student and member of staff.

### ***The Iterative Process***

The iterative process has proved a key component in developing the confidence with which the students develop a critical and dialectic view, as both ‘insiders’ in relation to their own cultures, landscapes and personal experiences; and ‘outsiders’ in relation to their views of TEOS staff, other TEOS students and students from the national programmes. Having learned something of co-construction of knowledge and a critical gaze in England they were readier for the task of applying a differentiated gaze to Norwegian cultures of *friluftsliv* (Pedersen, 2003; Gåsdaal, 2007). It also underpinned them beginning to understand the inherent complexities and transformations of human nature interactions and the role of societal change and of formal and informal processes of *dannelse* (equivalent to German *Bildung*) in- and outside of school (Humberstone & Pedersen, 2001; Gurholt, 2008; 2014). Through intimate explorations of boreal-forested winter landscapes and exposed mountain plateaus, for example by using knives and making fire as part of backcountry skiing and by building snow-caves for safety and overnight stays, the students gained important existential and cultural insights. A female student expressed it as follows: “I saw snow and the cold as an enemy, now I know it can be my friend. I can sleep warm and comfy below its blankets even though I know it can also kill me.”

This comment underlines the critical focus of semester two in which the quality of human nature connections are explored through the very different lens of outdoor winter life, a view that understands the necessity of recognizing nature as a familiar ‘home-ground’ and a part of (many) residents’ identities (Gurholt, 2014). The approach contrasts seeing nature as the ‘other’ as it has been presented from the English cultural view.

The third iteration of the process in Germany continues the destabilising of the emerging knowledges about landscape, nature and human interactions. Instead of mountain landscapes visited as ‘other’ or snowy landscapes inhabited as ‘homes’, the German



semester begins with a rowing trip on the river Neckar through a densely cultivated landscape rich in symbols with historical and cultural meaning. The students are invited to interact once again aesthetically with the landscape and its atmospheres but in qualitatively different ways. The approach involves detailed observation, commitment to creative processes, expression of emotions and thoughts, and in general fostering an open attitude and a perception in an unconditional, contemplative sense.

Later in the semester, the students are also asked to undertake a self-reliant journey during which they explore typical German landscapes. They are invited to bring back the story of a situation, which they found irritating from a cultural perspective. One example is the experience of a Finnish student who visited a German Sauna. As he expected a Finnish experience but the German version gave him a cultural surprise challenging both embodied, affective and cognitive domains. The experience illustrated to him a cultural stereotype or feature of German culture:

In Finnish sauna, there is always the water bucket from where anyone in the sauna can throw water on the stove. And it is perfect as it is. (...) In Germany you are not allowed to use the water as you want. Members of staff take this responsibility. Sauna life is much more regulated.

The iterative process of journeys in landscapes with apparently shared underlying physical and cultural structures persistently offers unexpected experiences. As these are brought into the narratives unfolding in the learning community, the skills of the student traveller are enhanced by the ongoing refusal of the experiences to settle into an established knowledge. The abilities of the students to co-construct provisional knowledges are honed.

Likewise, the staff are constantly challenged to reach for new insights and understandings of the interplay of human and nature interactions with cultural values. Nature as 'other' or

nature as ‘a familiar home-place’ has provided an ongoing discourse that is informing the understanding and development of outdoor activities as devises for outdoor education in all three host-countries.

### ***The Lens of the Other and the Reversal of the Gaze***

Whilst the student is understood as an ‘insider’ in relation to their own culture and to their own experiences of the programme and their journeys in each landscape, they are ‘outsiders’, the ‘other’, in relation to the cultural landscapes of the three host countries and the experiences of the staff and other students. From the first semester, some students applied the gaze of the other to challenge culturally established knowledge and experiences. A female Russian student challenged the English story of the origins of sea kayaking in Europe with an empirically researched alternative highlighting the Russian influences of the *baidarka*. One male African commented: “We don’t encourage people to go into nature. It’s dangerous. It will eat you!” Another African student wrote about his culture’s recent ‘separation’ from nature as his society embraced modernity:

When I came here, I could not believe that you have asked me to sleep outdoors and cook on an open fire. My parents lived this way, saved everything they had to send me to university to escape the peasant life only for you to tell me this is a good thing to experience and offer as education.

Finding opportunities to bring these challenges into the cohort discussions had a number of impacts. The critical voices of students and their responses to English landscapes and practices were validated and understood as relevant. These challenges provided concrete questions that others could explore from their own perspectives. The knowledge and skills

of the academics quickly became localised and sometimes lost their expert status in concrete ways both in intellectual discussions and practical activities.

Dilemmas and ambivalences became visible. This became especially visible in Oslo where the TEOS students share much of their teaching with students of the national masters programme and have many opportunities to interact socially. The curious gaze and questions of the foreign students began challenging the Norwegian students, ‘forcing’ them to begin questioning their own experiences of interactions with and meanings of nature and *friluftsliv* as a topic of cultural heritage and identity formation (Gurholt, 2016a). When Norwegian-speaking students are taught in English about Norwegian culture at a Norwegian university, they find the situation ambivalent. Doing it in English, moreover, evokes feelings of alienation and of being ‘objectified’ and ‘the subject of a gaze’. They feel ‘forced’ to expound their (personal) knowledge and opinions about their home culture and they feel ‘forced’ to make their tacit knowledge explicit and open to communication, reflection and discussion with the TEOS-students. In addition, the TEOS students introduced new interpretations to them.

These ambivalent feelings are strengthened by the international students’ presuppositions of tending to see Norwegians as a green alternative and Europe’s last ‘noble savages’ (cf. Henderson & Vikander, 2007), though wealthy because of the oil economy. The transcultural setting makes Norwegian students, in their own words, feel like “visitors on their own ground”.

International students are ready for communication, exchange of knowledge and explorations across languages and culture. These are challenges they have sought out for themselves knowing that it is demanding but building their competence for the present and future. Norwegian students may look at it differently. They are brought into multi-cultural

study groups because the university has made the choice for them through the way in which they organise their study programmes and academic resources as one way of responding to national and European policies of internationalisation.

To find a way forward, arrangements and events that demand active transcultural collaboration and communication among the students have been introduced. For example, skiing to and living in a cabin, whilst working in field groups as if they were teams of transcultural teachers or researchers, are examples that gave Norwegian students meaningful roles as peer-teachers using their strengths whilst developing knowledge of the dominating Anglo-centric discourses related to their studies.

By de-stabilising knowledge, the gaze of the others are given a role in the co-construction of knowledges about human nature interactions with the three host landscapes. As the TEOS students became 'expert' travellers, the TEOS approach had the unexpected and unusual consequence of reversing the gaze and reversing the normal power relations between the residents in a landscape and their visitors. In turn, students of national programmes were forced to reflect on their established knowledge of their cultural landscape. Care was needed to prepare all participants to become apprentice travellers, especially for those travelling in their own land.

### **Impacts on Students and Staff**

The discussion above shows that, in the context of building a transcultural learning and research community, including students and staff, the co-construction of new understandings and knowledges, impact the TEOS students, students from the national programmes, especially those most integrated with the teaching, staff and visiting scholars.

Historically, during the last four centuries, Europeans have been the travellers, the strangers in strange lands, frequently accompanied by issues of superiority and colonialism, an approach that has mired some of the attitudes of youth expeditions, especially from the UK, during the last half of the twentieth century (Grey, 1984; Loynes, 2010). For example, according to Brookes (2002), and Wattchow and Brown (2011), UK and US outdoor practices have been a neo-colonial aspect of outdoor education and recreation in Australia that has only recently undergone a critical local gaze. On the other hand, researchers from the Anglo-centric contexts have looked to Scandinavia and *friluftsliv* in search for more environmental friendly approaches in outdoor education (Henderson & Vikander, 2007).

The TEOS programme is developing a critique from a different angle. As 'strangers' to the established practices of outdoor education in the host countries, the student travellers are encouraged by the pedagogy of the journey to apply a critical and distanced gaze as 'innocent' third parties. Assumptions about indigenous practices are questioned as vigorously as the possibilities of imported ones with concomitant impacts on staff and students from the host countries. At the same time, the transcultural lens offers a means by which co-constructed, knowledge and practice drawn from both local and 'strange' cultures could legitimately be valued and situated in a place, a culture and a time for the purposes of the moment. The impacts on the TEOS students of both the process and the outcomes are the core product of the programme.

This has also allowed outdoor cultures other than Anglo-centric ones to become visible including the complexities of Norwegian *friluftsliv* and the students' own cultural and transcultural experiences. This added transcultural value allows minority voices to be heard as the journey pedagogy captures "more adequately the sense of movement and complex

mixedness of cultures in close contact, and better describes the *embodied situation of cultural plurality* lived by many individuals and communities of mixed heritage and/or experience” (Benessaieh, 2010, p. 16; italics in the original text).

The multifaceted diversity of outdoor studies are becoming more visible due to the global make-up of the cohorts and the visiting scholars. At the same time sociocultural factors equalising the lives of young people from different parts of the world, has been strongly influential and expressed by TEOS students as “We feel like being a family”.

### ***Impact on TEOS Students***

An Asian student now living and working in Europe wrote:

TEOS life is still connected and I am thinking of it a lot. I believe it is the most important experience in my lifetime and it is still influencing continually. I keep asking myself important questions all the time and sometimes it brings struggle by facing the reality but I believe all these struggles are good. I talked to ... and we all agree. TEOS as a program bring us to think how to be a better person and that is what a masters program should be. Thank you so much for bringing us in this inspiring journey.

They understand themselves as ‘being on the way’ in their cultures, professions and, sometimes, geographically as they continue to exchange knowledge through new opportunities that arise in the transcultural ‘stream’. The networks and friendships within and across TEOS cohorts, and amongst TEOS and native students of the three host countries support ideas of first hand-explorations and experience to be a key in raising mutual respect, understanding and knowledge among people.

The ‘expert’ travellers continue journeys that apply the skills of questioning knowledge of cultures and professional practices. The understanding the students have after graduation is of remaining ‘on the way’ rather than a return to a taken-for-granted ‘pre-defined’ culture,

profession or community. The ‘treasure’ they perceive themselves as carrying is new knowledge, the transcultural possibilities of knowledge exchange and co-construction.

This, in turn, facilitates the transcultural processes and supports the aims of internationalization. For non-native English speakers in the TEOS programme, as well as native students of the host country, internationalisation implies a double qualification regarding academic language, discourse and style of writing, and multiple qualifications regarding transcultural knowledge and insight.

### ***Impact on Other Students***

An unexpected finding is that, for those who are at ‘home’ in what was experienced as a strange place by the ‘others’ during their stay, through the ‘enforced’ critical reflection instigated by the TEOS programme, became ‘others’ in their own ‘homes’. This reversal of the gaze was not at first appreciated in the classroom. However, whilst on campus it is perceived as a challenge for foreign students to establish contact with native students, it felt different on the ski trails. Here international and national students alike experienced that to ‘come from outside’ becomes a key to contact and communication.

Snowshoeing in the forest surrounding Oslo is regarded as strange and attracts attention from a native perspective, sometimes indignation. However, this way of travelling makes moving more easily for TEOS students who experience snow for the first time. Foreigners who want to learn cross-country skiing turn many native skiers into enthusiastic narrators of place names and skiing techniques, ‘*blank-vanns-bråt-en*’, ‘*fis-ke-bein*’ (meaning ‘herring-bone’) are repeated as rhythmic tropes for a ‘trip-trap’ and a diagonal gliding skiing movement and tempo changes on the trails topographical profile. These kinds of concepts and interaction points create departure steps into Norwegian language and ways

of living. The foreign students claim “Norwegians are proud of their culture. People out skiing are open, like to talk and give lots of advice.”

The de-stabilising of cultural knowledge in an international student cohort needs careful handling. We suggest an equitable sharing of power in the co-construction of knowledge in liminal spaces such as the outdoors that allow for new possibilities of social relations that include all participants in the learning community is one solution.

### ***Impact on Staff***

As the programme has developed, the initial idea of a group of students and staff setting out to explore their collective knowledge, experiences and responses to three European outdoor cultures has expanded. The approach has embraced students from widely different cultural backgrounds to varying degrees and at different rates. As the programme has evolved, it has been important, as academic institutions, to offer different cultural approaches to the understanding of landscapes and outdoor professions, and of field-journeys as the foil for considering the worldviews of others whilst learning to analyse the contents of one’s own cultural ‘rucksacks’. Over time, we have learned to be more explicit about European cultural differences and to approach them analytically with curiosity and openness, even when they are challenging. Many elements have only become visible through the struggle by staff and students to make sense of the different experiences of each other and the landscapes and cultures in which we live. Getting to know about physical and cultural aspects of the world is directly linked with a transformation of our various relations to these aspects of the world and so to a transformation of self. As Segbers and Kanwischer (2016) claim, provoked by the unknown, we ‘do’ and ‘make’ our own geographies.



## **Implications for Geographical Teaching and Learning**

The TEOS programme adjusts the ideas of the ‘*peregrinatio academica*’ into cohorts of students travelling and studying together in three countries. The design blends with a more experiential and student centred approach akin to the apprenticeship model of the journeymen in which the students not only learned from the academics but also from each other. The design allows the student to develop their critical appraisal, transcultural sensitivity and to raise research questions from their explorative journeys and hands-on field-experiences.

Indeed, in the practice that has emerged as TEOS pedagogy, the academics learn from the students and, often, both work together to co-construct new knowledge related to the programme themes of human nature interactions, relations and education through the lens of transcultural negotiation. What emerges from this pedagogy are provisional, co-constructed landscapes of practice and meaning rather different from the established, Anglo-centric landscapes reproduced by other pedagogies embedded more deeply in a single culture.

One of the key findings that can be drawn from this study is that, in order to achieve integrative or inclusive transcultural exchange, understanding, and communication across language and cultural barriers of students, journeys and fieldtrips in cross-cultural groups are a productive way of introducing active and meaningful ‘real-life’ arrangements. They develop ‘host’ students’ as well as ‘visiting’ students’ knowledge of each other, of local cultures of human nature relations and the dominating Anglo-centric discourses related to their disciplines. By using liminal spaces such as excursions and by valuing the ‘voice of the stranger’, a critical discourse emerges of value to all.

Geographers tend to take an interest in diverse constructions of a landscape. We argue that the transcultural journey requires the lecturer to turn facilitator in order to accompany the student whilst they are 'on the way'. By providing or suggesting new understandings that might be of value to the learner, by making the unspoken spoken and available for discussion, communication and negotiation the facilitator may support them as they make sense of the 'crisis' and challenges they meet. The TEOS programme intensifies this process with a range of new intellectual, social, cultural and physical experiences.

Simultaneously, the role of the lecturer turned facilitator is further destabilised as, through the lens of their students, they also become 'students' of the same experiences and staff and students become co-facilitators in the process of constructing new knowledge and meaning. This has resulted in transformative approaches to teaching and learning and, also, new democratised processes of knowledge construction through the jointly acquired skills of travelling in emerging, provisional landscapes.

The exchange of knowledge and building up networks across languages and cultures does not occur as a matter of course in multi-cultural study groups (Perry & Sothwell, 2011; Portera, 2008). There is a need for facilitation, guidance and time. Mutual respect and transcultural understanding, communication and integration are time-consuming processes. Parts of the teaching are allocated to venues like the students' cabin and small-scale research accomplishments. Exercises that hold a practical dimension, in which solutions require cooperation across languages and cultural and academic backgrounds, have been found to be effective. Additionally, working together in transcultural groups through a whole term yields better rewards than shorter courses. It takes time to get to know people and to create social relations.

Several challenges remain. Some staff and some students, though not all, would like to see staff in front giving lectures less often. English as a second language remains a challenge for seminar work, especially in the earlier semesters for TEOS and native non-English speaking host-students. In most years, sub-groups develop around other languages, both native and from elsewhere. Field trips, excursions and practicals have been invaluable as contexts for less formal discussion unbounded by the walls and clocks of a classroom yet are threatened on cost grounds by university administrations.

Knowledge does become mutable, provisional and constructed with all participants involved. To support this, the programme has added strategies to support and sustain the development of each cohort as a learning community introducing small-scale research projects as pedagogy throughout the programme. The opportunity for the journey pedagogy to act as a research tool is only just being explored but also seems rich with potential.

## **Conclusions**

Treating the programme as a journey and the student as traveller creates a pedagogical device of a literal and metaphorical form that supports the questioning and destabilizing of established knowledges and the co-construction of new understandings. Beames (2010) considers educational expeditions through the lens of interactionism, “in which humans are influenced by the people, places, and ideas that they encounter during expeditions” (p. 25). This implies a one-way interaction from the host culture to the traveller. It should not be a surprise that transcultural travel experiences as initiated by the TEOS programme are interactive and iterative.

The iterative process repeatedly reinforces the critical gaze as the student ‘travels’ from novice and a ‘stranger’ to becoming ‘familiar’ and more of an expert in their construction of their understanding of human’s interactions with places and landscapes. The diversity of the international TEOS cohorts adds a further layer of richness to the experiential learning and research community as students and staff apply their knowledge and skills to a range of cultural contexts beyond the host countries.

We have been fortunate that the field of study, outdoor recreation and education, *friluftsliv*, *Bildung* and *Erlebnispädagogik*, places a high value on learning from ethnographic field experience, something shared by the staff and employed in their pedagogic and research practices in both their national and the TEOS programmes (Pedersen, 2003). This approach has made a significant contribution to supporting learning and research in an international cohort. Simultaneously, the epistemology of experiential education has enabled the constructed, provisional, local and mutable nature of knowledge to emerge as a central theme for staff and students, European and non-Europeans alike. The rather naïve concept that the visiting students would be the only people subject to transformative experiences during the two years of each cohort has been roundly challenged. The gaze of these ‘others’ has had a profound impact on the understanding of the ‘local’ students and staff and the three cultural currents of English, Norwegian and German human nature relations.

The concept of ‘*peregrinatio academica*’ inspired the design of the Erasmus Mundus MA TEOS in particular. It can be argued that this medieval system for the dispersal of knowledge and skills adapted by the TEOS programme is an example of the concept of transcultural experience, communication and negotiation. One critique of the concept of transculturality, as it is outlined by Welsch, is a lack of concepts for power and cultural conflicts over values, identities and complexities. Although Welsch lacks a perspective of

potential cultural conflicts to occur, the TEOS programme itself goes beyond just Welsch and does aim to address cultural complexities, power relations and conflicting cultural values by interaction, communication and negotiation.

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