

## **Experiencing Urban Sustainability in Five Field Trips: Using experiential learning theory to study “actual existing sustainabilities”**

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### **Abstract**

Geographers contend that field trips and other forms of fieldwork provide a variety of pedagogical benefits. However, the design of field trip exercises plays an important role in shaping the extent to which deep learning occurs. Experiential learning theory indicates that concrete field observations should be paired with active experimentation, reflection, and abstract conceptualization to transform experience into knowledge (Kolb, 1984). More pre-field trip preparation and follow-up reflection is required for students to have the tools for interpreting how to connect theory with their observations. Five field trips designed for exposing students to local efforts promoting urban sustainability are presented. Exercises include providing interpretation tools for evaluating both the subject-specific knowledge acquired during field trips and students' affective responses to the experiences. Students evaluate the extent to which sustainability efforts reflect the triple bottom line of environmental protection, economic development, and social justice. Reflection writing and debriefing discussions enable students to process their personal development and connections to the communities visited. Feedback from student evaluations illustrates the strengths and challenges of field trips as pedagogy and as effective means for teaching sustainability concepts.

**Keywords:** Field trips, active learning, urban sustainability, education

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