

Volume 33 Issue 1

cjsae

the canadian journal for the study of adult education

la revue canadienne pour l'étude de l'éducation des adultes

rcééa

THE SUSTAINABILITY TOUR EFFECT: A CASE
FOR TOURS AS AN ESSENTIAL COMPONENT OF
EDUCATING FOR SUSTAINABILITY

Spring Gillard and Rob VanWynsberghe

*The Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education/
La revue canadienne pour l'étude de l'éducation des adultes*
Editor-in-Chief: Robert Mizzi
French Language Editor: Jean-Pierre Mercier
www.cjsae-rceea.ca

33,1 March/mars 2021, 51–68
ISSN1925-993X (online)

© Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education/
L'Association canadienne pour l'étude de l'éducation des adultes
www.casae-aceea.ca

THE SUSTAINABILITY TOUR EFFECT: A CASE FOR TOURS AS AN ESSENTIAL COMPONENT OF EDUCATING FOR SUSTAINABILITY

Spring Gillard

University of British Columbia

Rob VanWynsberghe

University of British Columbia

Abstract

This research paper is based on a broader exploratory case study of a sustainability tour that the authors undertook. The larger study explored “the concept of learning application through the case of a sustainability tour” (Gillard, 2016, p. 226). The tour was part of a certificate program for sustainable community development offered to mid-career professionals through a continuing education unit at a large Canadian academic institution. Employing qualitative methods, the authors conducted semi-structured interviews, then analyzed the data, including course documents, to garner participants’ perceptions of what they learned “on tour” as well as how their learning had subsequently been applied. The study also identified salient features of the tour and the ways in which the tour format (or other contextual factors) may have inhibited learning and its subsequent application. This research paper presents some relevant findings, practical implications, and lessons learned regarding the sustainability tour pedagogy.

Résumé

Cet article de recherche s'appuie sur une étude de cas exploratoire plus large d'une excursion durable entreprise par l'équipe de recherche. L'étude plus large a exploré « le concept de l'application pédagogique par le cas d'une excursion durable » (Gillard, 2016, p. 226). L'excursion faisait partie d'un programme de certificat en développement communautaire durable offert aux personnes professionnelles de mi-carrière par l'unité de formation continue au sein d'un grand établissement universitaire canadien. À l'aide de méthodes qualitatives, l'équipe de recherche a mené des entrevues semi-dirigées, puis a analysé les données, y compris les documents de cours, pour observer à la fois les perceptions des personnes participantes de ce qu'elles avaient appris pendant l'excursion et l'application subséquente de ces apprentissages. L'étude a aussi relevé les principales caractéristiques de l'excursion et en quoi le format

*The Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education/
La revue canadienne pour l'étude de l'éducation des adultes
33,1 March/mars 2021, 51–68
ISSN1925-993X (online)*

© Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education/
L'Association canadienne pour l'étude de l'éducation des adultes

(ou d'autres facteurs contextuels) de celle-ci auraient pu empêcher l'apprentissage et son application subséquente. Cet article de recherche présente plusieurs résultats pertinents, implications pratiques et leçons tirées relatifs à la pédagogie de l'excursion durable.

This paper is based on an exploratory case study that the authors undertook. The study examined "the concept of learning application through the case of a sustainability tour" (Gillard, 2016, p. 226). Together, the focus on learning application and sustainability tours is meant to offer an example of what Seatter and Ceulemans (2017) called "pedagogical approaches that challenge students to participate actively, think critically, and reflect" (p. 52). Inquiry-based and constructive pedagogies such as these are termed *learner-led*, and the traditional teacher role is replaced by that of a facilitator (Seatter & Ceulemans, 2017). The facilitator draws out the learners, co-creating the content and the experience, which subsequently impacts the learning that occurs. Sustainability tours are learner-led pedagogies because the instructor designs experiences and facilitates spaces where learning can be co-created. For example, learners are often skilled sustainability practitioners themselves within a certain sector and bring that knowledge into the tour. In light of today's multifaceted sustainability problems, this active approach to teaching and learning is more likely to give rise to self-motivated change agents who apply their learning to create change.

The sustainability tour in this case was part of a larger certificate in sustainable community development, designed for mid-career professionals and offered through a continuing education unit of a large Canadian academic institution from 2008 to 2013.¹ We define sustainability and sustainability tours below. The case study explored participants' perceptions with respect to what they learned through the educative tour experience and how their learning may have been applied² at home, in the work place, or in the community. The study also identified ways in which the tour format (or other contextual factors) and its specific features may have contributed to or inhibited application of learning.³

The goal of the certificate program was to create "a multi-disciplinary network of sustainability leaders throughout the province who would initiate projects and implement new policies that would contribute to sustainable community development" (Gillard, 2016, p. 16). The sustainability tour course was the only course in the certificate program to provide an immersive field experience; all other core offerings were primarily classroom-based. The tour course was offered following the foundational course, so participants had some grounding in sustainability theory before the deeper, embodied learning (Butterwick & Lawrence, 2009; Freiler, 2008; Tyler, 2009) took place. Freiler (2008) defined embodied learning "as a way to construct knowledge through direct engagement in bodily experiences and inhabiting one's body through a felt sense of being in-the-world"

1 The first author co-facilitated the sustainability tour course for six years (2008–2013).

2 Learning application is "putting learning...into *practical contact* in intended application settings, such as work, home or community contexts" (Ottoson, 1997, p. 94).

3 We thank an anonymous reviewer who usefully connected sustainability tours to workplace integrated learning (cf. McManus & Rook, 2019), which refers to educational activities, like sustainability tours, that integrate academic and workplace learning through their practical application. For readers interested in workplace integrated learning generally, Patrick et al. (2008) provide a thorough grounding in the area.

(p. 40). To give participants the opportunity to see sustainability projects up close, the course designers also deliberately provided both insider access to sites and guest tour guides who were sustainability experts and project leads. Course facilitators, representing various sustainability sectors, were responsible for developing their respective courses, while a curriculum coordinator ensured “that the courses intersected, reinforced and scaffolded one another within a systems theory framework” (Gillard, 2016, p. 16). We will address systems theory in the next section.

For six consecutive years, approximately 20 mid-career professionals participated in and graduated from the certificate program. The participants formed a cohort, taking six courses together and collaborating on a final studio project. Besides the applied sustainability tour, five other core courses were required, including an introductory foundational course on sustainability, green economics, sustainability leadership, social sustainability, and a design studio. Participants could also take up to three electives from the broader offerings in the continuing education unit, such as urban transportation and affordable housing. Each course comprised guest speakers/panellists, discussions, small group problem-solving activities, and a final assignment, generally a reflective essay. Supplementary materials included books, articles, and handouts. Participants were to complete the certificate within a 10-month period.

As mentioned, program designers included a tour course as an appealing and meaningful addition to a program meant for mid-career professionals interested in taking action in their local contexts. Over 2 days, the cohort toured the region looking at living models of sustainability across a range of sectors from waste to food security. Participants explored rural farms in the valley beyond the city, considering the best possible pathways to the simultaneous preservation of farmland and the meeting of burgeoning housing demands. Employing a municipal policy lens, another tour segment had participants walking the vulnerable areas of some inner-city neighbourhoods with a former city planner. Participants also tested the validity of green buildings and so-called sustainable developments using established criteria. At the landfill, amid mountains of refuse, the participants were shown how methane was captured from the composting site to fuel adjacent greenhouses. Participants learned directly from urban farmers, gaining an understanding of the tenuous viability of their food-growing endeavours through an economic and supply system lens. Finally, participants were exposed to various traffic calming and storm water management solutions and were able to appraise their value in several neighbourhoods.

The purpose of this research paper, then, is to offer practitioners, teachers, and program planners some educational considerations for incorporating the immersive, embodied learning experience of a tour into a course (or other programming) on sustainability. To that end, we present some relevant findings, practical implications, and lessons learned regarding the sustainability tour pedagogy. By clearly defining sustainability tours for formal and informal educational settings, we help to fill a gap in the pedagogical field trip literature. The findings we discuss here present a strong argument for a tour effect that may contribute to embodied learning, an essential component when educating for sustainability.



Methods

The research is an exploratory case study into the links between sustainability tours and applied learning. Complexity is a key element of the exploratory version of case studies (Yin, 2014), and we accentuate this complexity in adopting a working definition of case studies that also emphasizes the process of circumscribing the unit of analysis. This is the essence of case study, stated VanWynsberghe and Khan (2007), who argued that case study is a paradigmatic consideration, like epistemology, and not a method, methodology, or research design. Researchers in novel or complex settings turn to case study to acknowledge the exploratory nature of their research.

We employed qualitative methods to collect the study data, including semi-structured in-person interviews. We conducted interviews with nine tour course participants and three certificate program facilitators. From both rural and urban settings in a Canadian province, the study participants ranged in age from 31 to 64. Occupations included urban, environmental, and social planners, engineers, a biologist, an urban farmer, and a technical writer. We also analyzed course documents (i.e., participant profiles, evaluation forms, assignments). We used NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software program, to code segments and identify themes regarding participants' perceptions of what they learned on tour and how their learning may have been subsequently applied. The evidence provided an inside view into sustainability tours, identifying the practical implications arising from the

aforementioned research.⁴ This was valuable because it enabled us to take advantage of the serendipitous opportunities to learn about a discipline like sustainability.

Theoretical Framework

As mentioned above, the sustainability certificate program was grounded in a systems theory framework. Positioned in relation to the field of sustainability, systems thinking is “thinking in terms of relationships, patterns, and context” (Capra & Luisi, 2014b, p. 1). Systems theory is more properly represented as a family of theories (C. Blackmore, personal communication, November 16, 2015), including complexity theory. In the systems view, sustainability is not considered to be an individual entity operating on its own, but rather “a property of an entire web of relationships” (Capra, 2010, p. 1). The individual and the environment—the context—are assigned equal importance (Capra & Luisi, 2014a; Fenwick, 2000). In this holistic view, everything is interconnected, systems within systems. A sustainable community, for example, is a complex system that “must be designed in such a way that its ways of life, businesses, economy, physical structures, and technologies do not interfere with nature’s inherent ability to sustain life” (Capra & Luisi, 2014a, p. ix). Systems thinking is considered a key competency for sustainability practitioners (Ferdig, 2009; Sterling, 2003; Strandberg, 2015; Wals & Corcoran, 2012; Wiek et al., 2011).

A systems approach to the field of sustainability helps one recognize its multiparadigmatic and interdisciplinary orientation. A systems-oriented theoretical framework for the research on sustainability tours takes advantage of multiple disciplines that can inform its understanding. For this paper, the disciplines include adult education programming, the sociology of tourism, cognitive science as it relates to knowledge acquisition, and the evaluation of applied learning.

We also focus on the physical or kinesthetic⁵ nature of the tour here, because it contributes to learning and, in particular, embodied learning in significant ways. We define embodied learning “as a way to construct knowledge through direct engagement in bodily experiences and inhabiting one’s body through a felt sense of being-in-the-world” (Freiler, 2008, p. 40). While the tour is definitely experiential in its format (following Kolb, 1984), we apply embodied learning theory here to emphasize the deeper emotionally charged learning that occurs during the tour experience, setting it apart from other experiential learning activities such as pair work and group discussions.

We return to the systems theory and embodied learning frameworks in the discussion. Before leaving these, however, it is important to posit the merit of their integration. Following Capra (2005, 2010) and others (Sterling, 2001, 2003; Wals & Corcoran, 2012), sustainability is understood in relation to the formation of networks and the mobilization of resources, such as those necessary in building a social movement. To educate for

4 This paragraph implies the possibility of generalization. Generalizing from single cases has been persuasively argued (see Donmoyer, 1990; Ruddin, 2006). However, following Andres (2012) and others (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009; Tracy, 2010), we prefer the term *transferability*. The researcher is responsible only for proving their case within their own context. Understanding case study in the way we employ it in this paper allows for concepts to emerge as the focus of case studies, thus acknowledging that case study is an important means to learning about concepts and theories.

5 The term *kinesthetic* describes an embodied learning experience.

sustainability, it is essential to combine systems thinking and embodied learning in our classrooms (Sterling, 2003; Wals & Corcoran, 2012; Wiek et al., 2011). The sustainability movement, comprising diverse organizations globally, seeks to develop a counternarrative to current notions of progress that are responsible for externalizing and wasting our natural resources (VanWynsberghe & Moore, 2015). In doing so, educational program designers look to facilitate the development of sustainability leaders through learning and contributing to systems thinking and embodied learning using the features of real-world application, community engagement, and non-traditional rewards, such as social movement participation (VanWynsberghe & Herman, 2015).

As a result of the exploratory case study, we are convinced that a tour is a tour is a tour. Whether vacational or educational, many of the same benefits are accrued. We will now present and justify our definition of sustainability tours and discuss some of the study findings related to specific tour features. Combining features and findings creates the basis for what we are calling the tour effect and the practical implications for designing tours for sustainability programs—what we might call a sustainability tour pedagogy.

Review of Literature⁶

There is a dearth of research on sustainability tours (Gillard, 2016; Trahan et al., 2017). Moreover, a thorough search of the literature reveals that the term *tour* is never properly defined (Gillard, 2016). Instead, there are an excessive and confusing number of terms combined with adjectives in an effort to describe and differentiate seemingly more elevated “educational” tours from the mundane “vacational” tours. Some common terms for the former are *field trip*, *educational study tour*, and the *environmental* or *ecological tour*. In addition, despite the plethora of university campus green tours, there is little to no published research available (Trahan et al., 2017). That said, we acknowledge that we aim to add to the plethora of terms with the notion of a *sustainability tour*. We nevertheless justify its use by stating that our adjective, *sustainability*, is significant because it adds the topic of study. We therefore define sustainability tour here as “an educational program in which the curriculum is constructed as a direct and immersive learning experience outside of the classroom, consisting of a series of exemplary and multivocal sites that represent sustainability in practice” (Gillard, 2016, p. 88).

Scholars began to critique tourism in the 1970s in response to “the elitist dismissal of tourism as a shallow, degraded form of travel” (Kelner & Sanders, 2009, p. 138). While many of us consider ourselves travellers rather than tourists, we often follow the same routes and partake of the same activities (Werry, 2008). As it turns out, educational tours and the like (including sustainability) have much in common with touristic tours (Alvarez & Rogers, 2006; Gillard, 2016; Kelner & Sanders, 2009; Werry, 2008), especially in terms of the guides (instructors, facilitators). The similarities go beyond the guides’ tricks of the trade, such as walking backward or telling cheesy jokes, and include the more performative aspects of the tourists’ tour that you might expect at holiday hot spots. For example, skilled tour guides are also gifted storytellers, weaving together facts and myths, and quite probably some of their personal biases. If you have experienced a guided tour in any of the tourist meccas such as Hawaii, you will have met a performative storyteller. Following Tyler (2009),

6 For a thorough discussion and critique of tour definitions and the subsequent arrival at our current definition of sustainability tours, see Gillard, 2016.

we define story as “a narration of personal experience” that is “conveyed orally and directly, face-to-face by a teller to listeners in a facilitated forum” (p. 138). Tours are designed to both entertain and educate, immersing us in an environment that affects us, much the same way that embarking on an ethnographic study of a new culture would affect us (Werry, 2008). As Tyler (2009) pointed out, stories are co-created in communities; they are both inherent element and by-product. She believed, as do we, that storytelling is the “starting point for critical discourse” (p. 137). As we will demonstrate, tours are a multi-dimensional form of storytelling.

Many participants described themselves in physical terms. They were “excited,” “energized,” “refreshed,” and “uplifted” on the tour. Certainly, they were inspired by the passionate speakers and their projects, but there is another tour feature that helps at the energetic level: physical movement. Other participants spoke of the physicality of the tour, the foot travel and use of various forms of public transit. Megan liked how “we moved around a lot” and “didn’t really linger too long.”

Indeed, inherent to the pedagogy and a tour trade practice is to keep tourists moving. The physicality of the tour, including the increased oxygen intake, is a dimension of the tour choreography that actually “stimulates cognitive functions, which may result in a more memorable experience” (Gillard, 2016, p. 230). Physical movement immerses participants in the experience, engaging them on a deep, emotional, and embodied level.

Doing things on foot for me was extremely meaningful, because I often think when people think of tours they hop on a bus and inevitably we fall asleep because it’s too comfortable and the engine lulls us to sleep. You really do have to walk and smell the smells and see the sights. (Sonya, 2009 course)

Not all participants were enthusiastic about the physical nature of the tour. One participant reported finding “mobility an issue.” Another participant found that “the walking tours were physically challenging, as was the distance tour [visit to the valley farm and landfill], due to air conditioning issues” (2009 participant). Organizers admitted that a better plan for mobility issues should have been in place. However, unexpected occurrences such as lack of air conditioning cannot be anticipated. Sometimes the surprises can lead to deeper group bonding, which we will discuss in more detail below.

Findings and Lessons Learned

A number of practical implications, what we will call themes, emerged from the case study. These themes will guide practitioners who are considering adopting the sustainability tour pedagogy. In the remainder of this article, we offer an inside view into sustainability tours and argue for their place in curriculum planning for sustainability programs.

Theme 1: Framing the Tour

For anyone who has been on a guided tour, you will recall how guides choreograph every movement. They direct our attention to noteworthy sights, give us the background on monuments, fill in historical facts, and tell us when to stop or move. The very structure of the tour is designed to tell a specific story, thus bracketing other narratives. The tour guide directs our bodies and our gaze, assigning meaning to place (Kelner & Sanders, 2009).

Trahan et al. (2017) found that students preferred guided tours over both lectures and self-guided tours because the learning was hands-on and they were better able "to connect learning with a place" (p. 918).

According to Kelner and Sanders (2009), the notion of gaze refers to how sites are represented or framed, and is an inherent dimension of touristic practice. Such meanings are usually ascribed before arriving at the site itself, through pre-course readings or other social cues, such as gesticulations consistent with wonder or mystery. This semiotic practice is also true for educational tours. For example, sustainability tour participants were each given a "Green Guide" (Design Centre for Sustainability at UBC, 2006) in advance of the course with a list of recommended excerpts to provide and mediate some context for each site. As Werry (2008) cautioned, we must enter these touristic realms with a critical stance, aware of the scripting and intent upon employing multiple, or at least alternative, viewpoints. Despite the efforts to frame events mentioned earlier, the tour lends itself well to a multivocal story, as we will soon see, and this should aid in our efforts to read between the lines.

The framing of the sustainability story starts well before the tour with the selection of sites and speakers and the way both are described on the itinerary. Other perspectives are added when guest speakers enter the scene, providing insider information. Tour designers acknowledged their biases arose frequently during the planning and delivery of the program. Sometimes their perspectives clashed with the academic unit's priorities, a unit funded partially by a real estate foundation. For example, Heritage Village, a unique community redevelopment in a large urban centre, was deemed too old to feature in the tour. Tour designers insisted on keeping it, however, as it told a larger story of how to make change happen and served as an excellent comparison for newer, grander, more sustainable developments. Participants from rural areas and small towns also found the scale of this development more relatable.

The tour format is by nature an informal learning setting, and one in which speakers tend to move off script; tour participants benefit from hearing a more authentic version of the story. As one participant said, "At these conferences you go to, it's like, 'It [the sustainability project] was a perfect process and everything was great.' But what about all the other processes before that that didn't work, or failed?" Anna, a course facilitator, believes there is a unique tour effect on speakers that allows them to step out of the case study, granting participants access to the human face behind the group sustainability project. Hearing these real-world stories without omitting the trials, tribulations, and failures helps us all to learn from the mistakes and better understand the messy, non-linear process of sustainability.

Facilitators/guides shape the sustainability story too, by animating the tour sites, underlining certain points made by guest speakers, surfacing other perspectives (and gaps) in the story, and drawing connections throughout the day. They are weaving the story that is emerging from the sites and the perspectives of the speakers. Cohort members are often sustainability experts in a specific field too, and may also provide information, shifting the framing at a site and evolving the sustainability story. In one example, two participants, Drew and Mark, both added perspective as the group walked a greenway, an active transportation route. Mark, a structural engineer, had been very involved in its design and development. Years later, Drew, a transportation planner who was planning new greenways, used the older model as a reference point, explaining that city planners considered the greenway as out of date.



The sites themselves have a voice too. While the speakers may be sharing their side of the story, sometimes what we observe at the site can present a contradictory view, as was the case during our landfill visit. Sonya, a biologist, witnessed people throwing cardboard into the bulk recycling bins at the same time as our guest speaker, a landfill staff member, was explaining that the material had been banned. Participants clearly noticed and commented on the inconsistencies they saw, and this partially anticipates an earlier point; namely, that because a tour is multivocal, one or more of the voices can challenge the initial framing by tour designers/course facilitators. When speakers are on a script, as was the case at the landfill, participants can judge the authenticity of a frame through their own observations. The elements of the frame under scrutiny are numerous, especially in the context of sustainability. For example, on one tour, facilitators were forced to make a last-minute change on a lunch venue and then were criticized on evaluation forms for not using a local business. In fact, the venue was locally owned and used locally sourced ingredients, but in the chaos, facilitators simply had not taken the time to properly frame it.

Taken as a whole, the research signalled the need for significant learning about how to effectively frame sustainability messages. On this point, one participant, a small-town city planner, said she avoided the term *sustainability* altogether and instead spoke of healthy communities. Mark Connelly, a structural engineer, had an epiphany in a film studio, which represents his questioning and ultimately countering his original impression of what it means to be sustainable:

I thought to myself, “What the hell are we doing going to a film studio?” And I came away thinking, “Oh, this is interesting.” These guys are actually marketing their products on the basis that they had an environmental framework behind it...there’s a marketing value exercise going on here, in terms of, how do you take sustainability and find its market value?...

Because if it doesn't actually make money for somebody, it won't happen. You have to find that angle. That really struck me in the film industry.

The film tour was a significant moment for Mark, triggering connections throughout his network that resulted in a new sustainable building concept and accomplished his goal of reframing himself in the marketplace. Interestingly, this site was not well reviewed on course evaluations, yet it stirred discussion in debriefs and reflection in the final written assignment. Even one of the course designers felt the site was an example of greenwashing. An important lesson learned, then, in terms of designing a tour (or any adult education program for that matter) is that it is impossible to predict which stops will be relevant for a participant and what will impact their learning. The learning depends on their prior experiences, their dispositions, and their motivation for enrolling in a course. Content matters, but only in terms of staying on topic—which is sustainability. This statement is reinforced by the fact that participant experiences at even the same sites can vary from year to year and the different ordering of the sites had little impact.

As tour course facilitators and planners, we must expect counterframing. In fact, the framing by the facilitators/guides on what is unfolding in plain view may in fact "force an encounter" (Kelner & Sanders, 2009, p. 141) with the way the facilitator or speaker is interpreting the site. All of these voices, including that of the land, contribute to the sustainability story that is created while on tour. In sum, the tour is a framing exercise for both the program and its participants. The study findings suggest that framing is both aided and disrupted by awareness and serendipity.

Theme 2: Group, Culture, and Identity

Kelner and Sanders (2009) explained tourism "as a cultural field constituted as much by its materials and learned behaviors as by any actual travel or sight-seeing" (p. 138). The authors asserted that tourists understand the general, but porous, parameters of efforts to isolate a culture in order for us to experience it. It is obvious how the cultural experience is carefully constructed when we look at large tourist centres, such as Waikiki Beach in Hawaii. Nevertheless, tourists do wander off the beach strips into the real towns and encounter local residents. These chance meetings with "the other" often expose "starkly visible difference in power and privilege" (Werry, 2008, p. 20). A kind of protective clustering, called enclaving, is provoked when "tourist spaces and activities are structured in such a way as to limit spontaneous interactions with locals or uncontrolled encounters with quotidian local life" (Edensor, 1998, as cited in Werry, 2008, p. 22). The main point is that enclaving can be beneficial to group formation processes in terms of building an identity among participants who are "physically and emotionally removed from everyday responsibilities" (Day & Petrick, 2006, p. 1). Despite the support for cloistering participants that is implicit in touristic practice, we believe that these chance encounters are valuable educational moments that help to cultivate a collective identity, culture, or network.

Building a sustainability network was one of the main goals of the certificate program. Following a systems view (Capra, 2005, 2010), the network organizational pattern is predicated on communication and interaction. The first step in building a network, including a tour group, is to carefully set a welcoming, inclusive tone from the start (Wlodkowski, 1997). The cohort design of the certificate program also helps to foster a cohesive community of learners. By the time they reach the tour course, participants have

already gotten to know each other and the group identity is emerging. The tour format also helps to connect the group members. As they travel together, walk, or sit side by side on a bus, they have “unstructured open time...to bond” with each other, guest speakers, and facilitators, as Sandra, the curriculum coordinator, said. While travelling and over lunch, there is time for debate and discussion with peers, adding additional perspective in the process. According to Kelner and Sanders (2009), this group dimension of touring describes the “interactional practices that form the context for tourist encounters and that mediate other dimensions of the tourism experience” (p. 138). Within tourism’s structure, intense relationships can be formed (recall the shipboard romance)—referred to as *communitas* (Kelner & Sanders, 2009; Werry, 2008). Facilitators can enhance *communitas* by setting up a buddy system (which also helps to keep track of the tour members) and other interactive activities. However, there can be a downside to the friendships that form too. One year, two young women who met in the tour course inhibited learning for the rest of the class with their problematic behaviour.

Several participants found that by broadening their network, they were able to launch their projects. For example, Evan, the sustainability manager at The Bottle Depot at the time of the course, credits the inner-city tour with connecting him to a network that led to his founding an urban farm. The farm employs marginalized workers to grow and sell local produce to nearby restaurants and farmers’ markets. Evan explained the exponential effects the tour had on his sustainability network:

We met Bob Prince [from a business improvement association]...and I met James Walter from the Green Business Centre. We went to that farm.... Eventually Bob and James each became instrumental in the initial planning, and finding the land for the first farm.... That course helped me tap into this network that existed in the neighbourhood.

What stands out immediately in this networking example is the impact of the broader context seen in relation to systems theorizing in sustainability. Evan entered the certificate program at a time when green entrepreneurship was being prioritized. For example, the municipality there was relaxing some of its more restrictive bylaws, and the regional government waived cost-prohibitive permitting policies to support the creation of urban farms. Urban farming was topical and therefore considered important enough to include in the sustainability tour. In this supportive climate, Evan co-founded Harmony Urban Farms and his efforts and voice eventually became a part of the tour. As Evan explained it, prior to the course, he had immersed himself in the subject of the green economy, which he judged as important to learning and the ultimate implementation of his project. In systems theory, both the individual and the environment mutually specify one another (Capra & Luisi, 2014a). Fenwick (2000) referred to this change process as the “intentional tinkering of one with the other” (p. 261). Through the course, participants repeatedly embodied the message that for change to happen, the environment or context must also be willing.

It is also necessary to remind ourselves that sustainability will be achieved only through collaboration, and programs claiming to focus on sustainability have to demonstrate this commitment, including an identification with the larger social movement. The program itself must reflect a systems orientation to solving major problems, which is connected to a global movement seeking to redefine progress.



Theme 3: Responsive Choreography

From the perspective of formal education, a tour is an out-of-the-ordinary experience, one that is markedly different from the familiar classroom-based course. We hop on a bus or subway and are transported into foreign vistas. The different rhythm, if you will, contributes to the out-of-time, out-of-space feeling. Unlike classroom learning, which is generally seen as more labour and discipline than leisure and liberation (Werry, 2008), tours tend to be regarded in a positive, fun-filled light (Alvarez & Rogers, 2006; Kelner & Sanders, 2009; Werry, 2008). In fact, fun is a key determinant of successful touristic experiences. Among participants, fun rates above other success factors such as “service, value, ease and predictability” (Werry, 2008, p. 15). Tour planners must take care to balance the educational and the pleasurable (Werry, 2008).

Arguably, timing and pacing are very critical on tour and must allow for travel from site to site and to meet guest speakers there in a timely fashion (Gillard, 2016). However, it is impossible to prohibit the flow of unintended and serendipitous exchanges. In fact, it is advisable to plan for the unexpected occurrences and interactions by building in buffer time. By staying open to the element of surprise, it is possible to leverage the tour’s potential for learning and fun. It is important, then, to hold your well-planned route lightly so that you can quickly detour if someone spots a community orchard or, as one cohort did, comes upon a solar-powered bike tree, a functional piece of public art that is also a bike rack. Even poor weather can be used to advantage; when everyone crowds into a coffee shop to avoid a rainstorm, *communitas* is also stirred. While these unexpected delays may mean one of the stops on the itinerary must be dropped, they also open up teaching moments. In this way, our findings corroborate what Davis and Sumara (1997) found in their own teaching practice, that learning was more occasioned than caused. In this way and especially on tour,



the course facilitator takes on the role of choreographer more than educator or program planner (Davis & Sumara, 1997). “The choreography lies in the planning, but also in how the planning comes to life, and then takes on a life of its own once the tour ‘goes live’” (Gillard, 2016, p. 135).

A tour still needs to be carefully designed, planned, and framed, but the choreographer must do so with the understanding and acceptance that learning may occur not so much by the brilliant stories told by a speaker, or the sites that were included, or the way in which they were ordered, but by stumbling into surprises. In this way, the tour is a travelling system, with a life of its own (Gillard, 2016). The tour has an open relationship to a larger program and learning outcomes because of the unique ways that learning happens. Embodied learning, then, occurs within a broad framing effort, yes, but also among a combination of the lines of the speaker’s script, the ways life interjects itself into schedules, the layering of experiences into preparatory materials, and the unexpected teaching moments that occur.

Theme 4: Liminality and the Fear Factor

Study participants commented on many of the serendipitous aspects of touring—meeting new people, stopping to sample local delights. Not all of the surprises were welcomed, however; in fact, some encounters with the other produced anxiety and fear, and it is recommended that course designers and facilitators attempt to anticipate such emotional impacts. According to Jensen (2005), emotions can play a significant role in learning and they can be triggered by being immersed in a new environment. Moreover, in a quote that builds on Freiler’s (2008) suggestion that embodied learning is direct, bodily engagement, Kelner and Sanders (2009) suggested that tourism “has the potential to create a liminal space by physically removing people from their home environments and placing them in a travelling community” (p. 138). The tour takes place on unfamiliar ground, it is out of the ordinary, outside the classroom and the lecture hall. When participants are placed in such liminal space, when the boundaries of the enclave are pierced, the experience can be more intense, which helps to generate *communitas*, but also potentially anxiety.

Scholars have turned to the concept of liminality to describe the unexpectedly direct and palpable energy of the tours. We define liminality here as “moments or periods of transition during which the normal limits to thought, self-understanding and behaviour are relaxed, opening the way to novelty and imagination, construction and destruction” (Thomassen, 2014, p. 1). As stated above, the experience of being on tour has a starkly physical feeling of being out of time and in an entirely new space. These are welcome qualities in a classroom seeking to assist in the work of the sustainability movement. As Gillard (2016) explained, “The spatial, temporal and social boundaries are dramatically altered from the classroom environment” (p. 80). Tour participants may find themselves interacting with people they have never talked to before, exploring places they have never visited, altering their worldviews and plans. In this way, the tour becomes a “liminal interactional context” (Kelner & Sanders, 2009, p. 143). In liminal space, we can break free of structure, not only in the physical sense, but also in terms of how we can imagine the future.



Another aspect of liminality deserves attention, and it is in the realm of cognition. When we are outside of our comfort zone, our brain goes into high-alert mode, bringing us fully into the present, at the ready to fight or flee (Jensen, 2005). When we change emotional states, our heart rate and blood pressure increase and our skin may flush; these and other symptoms can all be scientifically measured (Jensen, 2005). As deeper emotions such as fear arise, the learning also happens at a greater depth. Participants talked at length about their feelings and emotions during the tour. The findings revealed that the more outside their own reality they were—that is, the more liminal the space that participants occupied—the more embodied and emotional their learning appears to be. This level of emotional engagement and a site’s capacity to provoke emotion was demonstrated repeatedly on the inner-city tour.

I've always heard about the crime, and the drugs, and the substance abuse, addictions....I knew there were clinics available to help people in that area. But never seen it, always driven by, but never walked the streets and smelled the smells, hear and see people around me....Yeah, so that was really powerful. (Meixi, 2011 course)

On tour, we also receive sensory signals from our surroundings that focus our attention on the moment (Jensen, 2005). For some, merely standing in The Bottle Depot and hearing the noises of the recycling work going on was linked to the rise of emotions. Others had significant changes in their perception of the inner city; they spoke about their "fear turning into compassion" as they learned more about the area's residents and their lives.

Meixi, an engineer in a large urban centre who was already well versed in technical solutions to sustainability, was surprised to be learning the soft skills (such as empathy) and acknowledged how essential they were, especially when conducting community consultations.

One participant's eyes were opened to social sustainability issues through the inner city tour:

By the time I was walking the streets of the [inner city] with a group of reasonably affluent peers...my sense of embarrassment and frustration peaked. How could I have missed this? How could I have driven through this so many times and not felt anything? With an engineering background, how can I fix this? As a human being, wtf?

Clearly, learning has both a physical and an emotional component, and as Jensen (2005) posited, should be considered "an important learning variable" (p. 68). He went on to say that the "affective side of learning is the critical interplay between how we feel, act, and think" (p. 68). Our study on sustainability tours highlights the effect that the body and its emotions have on learning. This is why embodied learning is key.

Through a pedagogical lens, the opportunity represented by sustainability tours is learning about and confronting the contradiction of employing real-world examples while simultaneously deepening the liminal effects through suspending regular duties, sites, and interactions to the point of eliciting some emotionally charged responses to a site and context. In short, sustainability tours may facilitate deep embodied learning. In this way, we are positioned to reflect on the ways in which we live with one another (Werry, 2008). Sustainability, too, encourages reflecting upon one's preferred futures in ways that should engage all our capacities, but especially those related to taking actions.

Further to our definition of tour, we acknowledge that there are differences between the various forms of tours, such as field trips, educational tours, etc., but we purport that those differences could be measured in degrees of liminality. "That is, the more removed the location of a tour is from its quotidian environment (including time, location, culture), the deeper the liminal effects" (Gillard, 2016, p. 79). The more emotionally charged a site is, the more potential there is for engagement and deep embodied learning.

Conclusion

Immersion into group and community is at the heart of the sustainability tour effect. The tour aspect of the term combines choreography, performance, voices, *communitas*, liminality,

and storytelling. Sustainability integrates social movement and systems thinking to define the classroom broadly and as a source of social change. Put simply, the sustainability tour has the capacity to provoke the rich and deeply embodied learning that many sustainability scholars laud (see Capra & Luisi, 2014a; Gonzalez, 2015; Sterling, 2003; Wals & Corcoran, 2012).

The research findings also demonstrate the ways in which program participants appreciated the tour format because sustainability theories appear to come to life. Sounding every bit the seasoned ethnographer, one participant, for example, lauded the tour as "by far the best model to see, feel and learn from the experience(s) of the projects showcased." The learning, then, is also about the participant's prior knowledge and ability to engage all their senses and emotions.

Exemplified by Mark and Meixi, we saw that the tours allowed participants to enter a setting with one opinion (film studios are not sustainable) or expectation (I will be learning hard skills) and exit with different learning outcomes, especially upon application. In Mark's case, his business pursuits changed in ways that were consistent with the tour experience and, based on our interviews 6 years later, demonstrated the ability to re-evaluate his experiences over time. Such is the power of ongoing learning and, we would argue, the sustainability tour.

Course facilitators are an obvious factor in the immersion process, but they also appear to play an important role in building learner-led opportunities for connecting to the sustainability movement. The facilitators provide insider access to sites and speakers but, just as critically, offer the space for participants to cultivate their own learning and interpersonal connections in social change. In this paper were numerous quotes outlining the surprising connections to sustainability that were implied in particular settings, and it was clear that participants appreciated and learned from these.

References

- Alvarez, A., & Rogers, J. (2006). Going "out there": Learning about sustainability in place. *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*, 7(2), 176–188.
- Andres, L. (2012). *Designing & doing survey research*. Sage.
- Butterwick, S., & Lawrence, R. L. (2009). Creating alternative realities: Arts-based approaches to transformative learning. In J. Mezirow & E. Taylor & Associates (Eds.), *Transformative learning in practice: Insights from community, workplace and higher education* (pp. 35–45). John Wiley & Sons.
- Capra, F. (2005). Speaking nature's language: Principles for sustainability. In M. K. Stone & Z. Barlow (Eds.), *Ecological literacy: Educating our children for a sustainable world* (pp. xiii–xiv). Sierra Club.
- Capra, F. (2010). *Life and leadership. Ecoliteracy*. Retrieved April 23, 2015, from <http://www.ecoliteracy.org/article/life-and-leadership-sustainable-community-0>
- Capra, F., & Luisi, P. L. (2014a). *The systems view of life: A unifying vision*. Cambridge University Press.
- Capra, F., & Luisi, P. L. (2014b). The systems view of life: Fritjof Capra and Pier Luigi Luisi explain how their new book captures a different understanding of how life works. *Resurgence*, 284(May–June). Retrieved November 11, 2014, from <http://www.resurgence.org/magazine/article4162-the-systems-view-of-life.html>

- Davis, B., & Sumara, D. (1997). Cognition, complexity, and teacher education. *Harvard Educational Review* 67(1), 105–125.
- Day, M., & Petrick, E. M. (2006). *Designing residential wilderness programs for adults*. Krieger Publishing.
- Design Centre for Sustainability at UBC (2006). *The Greater Vancouver green guide: Seeding sustainability*. Author.
- Donmoyer, R. (1990). Curriculum evaluation and the negotiation of meaning. *Language Arts*, 67(3), 274–286.
- Fenwick, T. (2000) Expanding conceptions of experiential learning: A review of five contemporary perspectives on cognition. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 50(4), 243–272.
- Ferdig, M. A. (2009). *Sustainability leadership relational model and practices*. Sustainability Leadership Institute. Retrieved January 13, 2014, from <http://www.sustainabilityleadershipinstitute.org/>
- Freiler, T. (2008). Learning through the body. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 119, 37–47. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ace.304>
- Gillard, S. (2016). Moving force: Case study of a sustainability tour as a potential vehicle to enhance application of learning [Unpublished master's thesis]. University of British Columbia. <https://open.library.ubc.ca/cIRcle/collections/ubctheses/24/items/1.0224469>
- Gonzalez, J. (2015). Transformative education for sustainability leadership: Identifying and addressing the challenges of mobilizing change [Doctoral dissertation]. University of British Columbia. <https://open.library.ubc.ca/cIRcle/collections/ubctheses/24/items/1.0166396>
- Jensen, E. (2005). *Teaching with the brain in mind*. Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development.
- Kelner, S., & Sanders, G. (2009). Beyond the field trip: Teaching tourism through tours. *Teaching Sociology*, 37(2), 136–150.
- Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential learning*. Prentice Hall.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage.
- McManus, L., & Rook, L. (2019). Mixed views in the academy: Academic and student perspectives about the utility of developing work-ready skills through WIL. *Studies in Higher Education*, 46(2), 1–15.
- Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. Jossey-Bass.
- Ottoson, J. M. (1997). Beyond transfer of training: Using multiple lenses to assess community education program. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 75, 87–96.
- Patrick, C.-J., Peach, D., Pocknee, C., Webb, F., Fletcher, M., & Pretto, G. (2008). *The WIL [Work Integrated Learning] report: A national scoping study*. Queensland University of Technology.
- Ruddin, L. P. (2006). You can generalize stupid! Social scientists, Bent Flyvbjerg, and case study methodology. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 12(4), 797–812.
- Seatter, C. S., & Ceulemans, K. (2017). Teaching sustainability in higher education: Pedagogical styles that make a difference. *Canadian Journal of Higher Education*, 47(2), 47–70.
- Sterling, S. (2001). *Sustainable education: Re-visioning learning and change*. Green Books for the Schumacher Society.

- Sterling, S. (2003). Whole systems thinking as a basis for paradigm change in education: Explorations in the context of sustainability [Doctoral dissertation]. University of Bath. <http://www.bath.ac.uk/cee/sterling/sterlingthesis.pdf>
- Strandberg, C. (2015). Sustainability talent management: The new business imperative. Retrieved April 23, 2015, from <https://corostrandberg.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/sustainability-competencies-feb-17-final-draft.pdf>
- Thomassen, B. (2014). *Liminality and the modern: Living through the in-between*. Ashgate.
- Tracy, S. J. (2010). Qualitative inquiry: Eight "big tent" criteria for excellent qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16(10), 837–851. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1077800410383121>
- Trahan, E., North, L. A., Gripshover, M., & Huss, J. M. (2017). Campus sustainability tours: Exploring an uncharted tool. *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*, 18(6), 908–922. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSHE-12-2015-0200>
- Tyler, J. (2009). Charting the course: How storytelling can foster communicative learning in the workplace. In J. Mezirow & E. Taylor & Associates (Eds.), *Transformative learning in practice: Insights from community, workplace and higher education* (pp. 136–147). John Wiley & Sons.
- VanWynsberghe, R., & Herman, A. (2015). Education for social change and pragmatist theory: Five features of educative environments designed for social change? *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 34(3), 268–283.
- VanWynsberghe, R., & Khan, S. (2007). Redefining case study. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 6(2), 89–94.
- VanWynsberghe, R., & Moore, J. (2015). Enabling sustainability: Five key features of the learning city classroom. *Environment, Development and Sustainability*, 17(2), 315–330.
- Wals, A. E. J., & Corcoran, P. B. (Eds.). (2012). *Learning for sustainability in times of accelerating change*. Wageningen Academic.
- Werry, M. (2008). Pedagogy of/as/and tourism: Or, shameful lessons. *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, 20, 14–42.
- Wiek, A., Withycombe, L., & Redman, C. L. (2011). Key competencies in sustainability: A reference framework for academic program development. *Sustain Sci*, 6, 203–218.
- Wlodkowski, R. J. (1997). Motivation with a mission. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 76, 19–31.
- Yin, R. (2014). *Case study research: Design and methods* (5th ed.). Sage.