Using Academic Travel to Teach Sustainable Economic Development

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Abstract

Sustainable Development has become dominant in policy debates in the last two decades. Standard models in neoclassical economics as taught in undergraduate classes fail to capture the complex relationships between the economy and the environment. This creates a major gap in students' understanding of sustainable development. We make the case that innovative teaching technique will allow students to better grasp this complex relationship. We examine the integration of academic travel into the economics curriculum as a tool to expose students to important aspects of sustainable development and allow them to gain a more meaningful insight into the subject.

Keywords

Sustainable Development · Academic Travel · Economics

1 Context of Origin

Economics' focus on material growth is one of the main reasons for the discipline's inability to incorporate issues related to sustainable development in a meaningful manner in undergraduate classrooms. The next section will examine

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how standard neoclassical economics fails to provide a critical understanding of the complex relationship between the economy and the environment. In the following section, we will examine how academic travel can be incorporated into an undergraduate economics class to fill this gap. Our course titled "Sustainable Economic Development", taught in an American liberal arts university located in Europe, has been designed such that it spreads across an entire semester with a two-week travel component in it. The university describes academic travel as, "… a distinctive element of its curriculum in which travel is used as an experiential learning tool completely integrated into a series of course offerings in disciplines applicable to all majors" (Franklin University Switzerland n. d.). The Academic Travel Programme is integrated into the University's core curriculum. The cost of the travel component is integrated into the fee structure.

Our course specifically focuses on the challenges faced by developing countries with respect to sustainable development and how these countries can also offer insightful solutions to these challenges. In our case, the travel sites are located in India and Bhutan and therefore the journey requires a supplemental fee.[1]

2 Theoretical Background: The Shortcomings of Neoclassical Environmental Economics in Undergraduate Education

We understand sustainable development as defined by the World Commission on Environment and Development (1987): "Sustainable Development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".

In this section, we will examine two important concepts that are used consistently across most undergraduate economics courses – the role of markets in an economy and the importance of growth. And in doing so we also examine how mainstream economics is unable to effectively engage with issues regarding sustainable development.

[1]This supplemental fee varies from USD 1100 to USD 1300.

2.1 The Role of Markets

In mainstream economics students learn about consumers and producers and how these representative agents maximize their utility and profits, respectively. Students also learn that these representative agents meet in the market space to buy and sell goods and services. The laws of demand and supply then determine the equilibrium price and quantity of the good in question. It is also asserted that markets lead to the most efficient and optimal outcome that is possible in the sphere of exchange (Keen 2004; Peet and Hartwick 2015). Another important feature of the market system is that markets operate best when left alone. Any interference (like government intervention) with the operation of the market will lead to a suboptimal outcome.

The topic of "markets as an institution for resource allocation" has been a popular one amongst economists. Cullenberg and Pattanaik (2004) explain this popularity due to "two basic theorems of welfare economics". The first theorem of welfare economics states that market allocations are optimal given that there are no externalities. Externalities are impacts of one participant's action in the market on another that is not passed on via prices. They further explain, "[…] the allocation resulting from the operation of the market will be 'optimal' in the sense that starting from this allocation it will not be possible through reallocation of resources to make anybody better off without making somebody else worse off" (Cullenberg and Pattanaik 2004). The key point here is that while markets can usually achieve 'optimal' outcomes in the absence of externalities, the government may need to intervene to correct for these externalities. However, once these externalities have been corrected for, markets are the most suitable institution for resource allocation and economic welfare.

Pricing of scarce resources and environmental costs falls within a specific subdiscipline in mainstream economics called Environmental and Resource Economics (ERE). This branch of economics is primarily based on neoclassical assumptions of economic rationality and the market clearing condition. As van den Bergh (2000) explains, "The core of ERE is theory of (negative) externalities or external costs". ERE treats negative externalities like pollution as a market failure. This approach argues that environmental costs need to be internalized by the market system so as to reach an optimal equilibrium. ERE suggests solutions like pollution taxes or tariffs, i.e. to make polluting costlier in order to discourage firms from polluting. Beckerman (1972) explains this position: "… the problem of environmental pollution is a simple matter of correcting a minor resource misallocation by means of pollution charges". He further argues that the way

economists look at the problem of pollution is not with the lens of eliminating pollution completely, but to find the "optimum amount of pollution, allowing for the costs, as well as the benefits of pollution abatement" (Beckerman 1972). The idea is that all that needs to be done is to make polluting more expensive, i. e. make it part of the cost structure of the firm producing the pollution. This market failure may be corrected by government intervention. Once this externality is internalized into the market, prices will reflect the *true* (societal) cost of creating goods (including pollution). One important point that is to be noted here is that while this approach does make creating pollution more expensive, the inherent inequality embedded in this model cannot be ignored. This approach does not stop firms from internalizing these costs and passing them on consumers. These models also do not offer any insight into the power differences between the parties involved in the exchange process.

Another important prerequisite for markets to work efficiently is private property. Neoclassical economists believe that the institution of private property allows individuals to use economic resources more efficiently (Tietenberg and Lewis 2012; Todaro and Smith 2015). In fact, the importance of private property is reasserted in the neoclassical approach particularly when it comes to the ownership of scarce natural resources. The rationale is that privatizing scarce resources will ensure greater protection of such resources.[2] However, Liodakis (2010) criticizes this approach and argues that private property actually incentivizes greater exploitation and overuse of scarce resources. He further argues that private property ownership is often associated with ‚absentee ownership'. In such cases, the incentive to take care of the private property to promote the sustainable use of the property may not exist. The institution of markets therefore has often failed to incorporate the true cost of environmental degradation.

2.2 Growth in Economics

Like markets, economic growth also finds a prominent position in most economics classes. An economy is said to be doing well if its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is growing steadily. The GDP of a country is measured by

[2]See Todaro and Smith (2015) as an example for the treatment of private property within the context of scarce natural resources in standard textbooks.

aggregating the market value of all goods and services produced in a year. Most economic policies like fiscal or monetary policy are geared towards increasing GDP (Peet and Hartwick 2015). However, the GDP of a country does not accurately represent its actual welfare. In particular, environmental damage and scarcity of resources are not reflected in this measure.

A number of economists in the 1940s and 50s have tried to model growth where growth becomes a function of economic variables like the savings rate, capital-output ratio or labour-capital ratio. Theorizing and modelling meant that certain assumptions had to be made. Solow (1956) stated in his seminal paper "A Contribution to the Theory of Economic Growth": "All theory depends on assumptions which are not quite true. That is what makes it theory. The art of successful theorizing is to make the inevitable simplifying assumptions in such a way that the final results are not very sensitive" (Solow 1956). One of the assumptions that he made to develop his growth model was that there "is no scarce nonaugmentable resource like land" (ibid.).

In fact, there are many mainstream economists who advocate the position that growth is a prerequisite to reduce environmental degradation. These assertions have been 'proved' by econometric models that show the relationship between growth and environmental degradation. The Environmental Kuznet's curve (ECK)[3] shows that initially there is a positive relationship between economic growth and certain kinds of pollutants. However, after a certain level of growth is achieved, this relationship becomes negative. As the economy continues to grow, environmental degradation starts to decline. Grossman and Krueger (1995) found that four types of indicators initially increased with growth, but decreased steadily with further growth after a certain threshold of GDP was crossed. Such empirical evidence is then reflected in policies regarding environmental sustainability[4] where growth is given priority over environmental sustainability. Beckerman (1972) for example has also argued against environmental conservation over growth. He states:

> "It is perfectly true that, if there is an exponential growth in the demand for some resource, such as land, the supply of which is finite, then one day we shall run out of supplies of that resource. But this proposition has been true since the beginning of time; it was just as true in Ancient Greece, for example, as it is today. This did not prevent economic growth from taking place in the age of Pericles" (ibid., p. 332).

[3]See Grossman and Krueger (1995).

[4]See World Commission on Environment and Development (1987) and World Bank (1992).

This idea of growth as endless and without limits is also supported by the ever growing influence of technology in the sphere of production. Costanza (2001) explains this influence on supporters of growth in the following manner: "The 'technological optimist' worldview assumes that technical progress can solve *all* future problems. It is a vision of continued expansion of humans and their dominion over nature." (ibid., p. 464). However, Hickel and Kallis (2019) argue that such neoclassical concepts of technology based 'green economic growth' are very doubtful because of theoretical as well as empirical reasons.

3 Incorporating Travel: An Innovative Solution

As discussed above, it is quite difficult to incorporate ideas of sustainable development into undergraduate economics classes. The standard modelling technique is often insufficient to capture the nuances of the real-world economy and its interactions with the society at large.

Structured visits to specific destinations can be one way in which ideas related to sustainable development are incorporated into economics classes. Our case will explore how academic travel has been used to expose students to the complex interaction between economic growth and sustainable development.

Our course has been divided into three distinct parts. The first part of the course deals with the history of sustainability and theories in economics that deal with issues of sustainability. The second part of the course is the travel component that allows students to connect the theories taught in class and the observations made by them during the travel period. And the third part of the course is a topics-based part that includes different economic issues like unemployment, property rights and agriculture.

Important student learning outcomes of this course are to help students develop critical and analytical skills, make connections between class reading and observations during site visits and help students gain a deeper understanding of the interdisciplinary nature of sustainable development. This course has been offered three times (Spring 2017, 2018 and 2019) and has been taken by 60 students in these three years.

The first part of the course starts with students reading "Our common future" (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987). This publication is particularly useful for students to understand how the discourse on sustainable development started. To begin with, this reading defines sustainable development for us. This definition sets the stage for how students should think about development and sustainability. In addition to defining sustainable development for us,

the report also provides our students with a solid foundation for understanding the interlinkages between economics and the environment. This part then continues with a literature review on different theories of sustainable development within the discipline of economics. These theories include both mainstream and non-mainstream theories. Within the realm of mainstream theories, the main focus is on the concept of externalities and on the role of private property as discussed in detail in the previous section. Within the non-mainstream approaches, the readings in the class expose students to different theories including theories from ecological economics, industrial ecology and eco-development (Vivien 2008; Costanza 2001).

As mentioned above, the travel component of the course includes a two-week visit to sites that offer students an opportunity to understand key issues in sustainable development, especially sustainable agriculture, conservation efforts and resource rights, unemployment, and sustainable tourism. In our case, the two sites for this travel are India and Bhutan.

3.1 India

In India, the common theme of the travel has been visits to national parks and organic farms and/or organic tea plantations. In this subsection, we will examine the travel sites and the role these travel sites played in highlighting some of the pressing issues within the field of sustainable development. India is the second most populated country in the world with an estimated population of 1.3 billion in 2018. The country is surrounded by the Bay of Bengal in the East, Arabian Sea in the West and the Indian Ocean in the South. The Himalayan Range in the north of the country forms a geographical barrier between China and India. According to the Economic Survey of India (Government of India 2019), India grew at 6.8 % in 2018–2019 and has been one of the fastest growing economies in the world. Despite this high growth rate, it has a current HDI (Human Development Index) ranking of 130 (UNDP 2019). While the share of agriculture in Gross Value added (GVA) has decreased in the recent years to 14.4 % in 2018, agriculture continues to be an important sector in generating employment and livelihoods (Government of India 2019).

3.1.1 Visits to National Parks

In the last three years different groups of students have had an opportunity to visit different national parks in India. The two national parks that have been visited

are the Kaziranga National Park situated in the eastern state of Assam and Rajaji National Park located in the northern state of Uttarakhand.

Kaziranga is a UNESCO world heritage site which is home to several endangered species of animals including one horned rhinos and Asian elephants. Rajaji National Park, located on the outskirts of the holy city of Haridwar in the Northern state of Uttarakhand, offers visitors a unique opportunity to observe wildlife including panthers, different species of deer and Asian elephants. Its location right next to one of the major religious towns of India also makes it a unique space to explore the interactions between wildlife and human settlements. The underlying theme of the visits to these national parks is conflicts between human settlements and conservation efforts by the government.

Kaziranga National Park, which was declared as a game reserve in 1908, has witnessed an increasing pressure from development projects in the region (Saikia 2009). The park itself is surrounded by river Brahmaputra on one side and multiple tea gardens on the other. In addition to this, a major national highway runs parallel to the southern border of the park. There are a large number of villages surrounding the park as well. A visit to this area included tours inside the park area where students got a chance to observe the natural flora and fauna of this region. They were also introduced to the conservation efforts made by the government in this region. For example, during their visit they were able to observe the efforts taken by the forest officials to keep the animals in the park safe during annual flooding[5], census of wild elephants and tigers and burning of older bushes to clear the land for new vegetation. The park area has also seen an increase in the number of hotels and resorts to cater to the needs of tourists. Students were able to observe this dilemma between economic development and conservation efforts. Similar to Kaziranga, the case of Rajaji National park has also helped students to examine the interrelationships between the right to livelihood and conservation. In this particular site, students were exposed to the plight of Van Gujjars, a nomadic tribe living within the park for generations. Under the Forest Rights Act of 2006, communities that depend on forest land for subsistence were provided specific rights, which allowed them to access resources from forests. According to Agrawal (2014), Van Gujjars have not been able to claim their rights under this Act due to various bureaucratic hindrances. This has led to many of these people to be relocated to areas outside of the national park.

[5]Kaziranga National Park is prone to annual flooding during the monsoon season due to its proximity to River Brahmaputra.

Being part of the traditional grazing community, the Van Gujjars are aware of the delicate balance between pasture lands and over-grazing.

3.1.2 Visits to Organic Farms and Tea Plantations

In the past three years as a part of this course, students have also visited organic tea gardens and farms. In the specific year that the students visited Kaziranga National Park, they also had the opportunity to visit an organic tea garden in the vicinity of the park. This particular tea company took the initiative to transition from inorganic to organic farming due to its proximity to the park. Students had the opportunity to visit the tea gardens where they were shown the different ways in which the tea garden commits itself to organic farming, like vermicomposting, use of specific plants that act as pest repellent etc. They also had a chance to talk to the manager of the tea estate who explained to them the economic challenges faced by the estate during this transition.

In yet another year, another set of students visited an organic tea estate in the area of Darjeeling, which is world famous for its fine tea. During their visit, they had an informal conversation with the manager of the tea estate who explained to them the cultural and historical significance of tea plantations in the region. This particular tea estate had successfully recognized the importance of the tea industry in this region and consequently the importance of protecting soil health and water quality for future use.

In addition to visits to tea plantations, we have also organized a visit to an organic farm that is located close to the city of Haridwar. A visit to this organic farm, which was founded by famous environmental activist Dr. Vandana Shiva, gave students a unique opportunity to explore the different ways in which one can carry out organic farming with students being introduced to different farming techniques that do not require use of insecticides, pesticides or chemical fertilizers. They were also given a talk by the soil scientists in this facility who explained to them the importance of soil health and how organic farming ensures that. In addition to maintaining their own farm, this organization is also involved in teaching farmers organic ways of agriculture. The organization also operates seed banks across the country through which farmers can borrow seeds for farming. Such initiatives are aimed at reducing the input costs for small to medium sized farmers. The students also visited this seed bank and the small dairy section that is operated by this farm.

Visits to commercial tea plantations and smaller organic farms offer students an opportunity to re-examine the standard notion of the neoclassical profit maximizing firm. They also develop a better understanding of how businesses

are not necessarily motivated by pure financial profits, but can also be driven by environmental and cultural impetus.

3.1.3 Other Activities

Apart from visits to national parks and organic farms, each year students also observe traditional economies through village walks. We have organized a village walk every year during our travel period. When the travel took place in the Darjeeling region, a village walk in Rampuria village was organized in collaboration with a local research organization. Students were able to explore the various initiatives undertaken by the village administration to generate additional income sources for villagers. Community leaders along with members of the research organization also introduced the students to the different projects that had been undertaken in the village. These projects included forest restoration, use of biomass for energy, community-based tourism etc.

During our visit to the Kaziranga region, a visit was organized to the local weavers' organization to understand the importance of weaving and its role in the local economy. A visit was also organized to the national orchid and biodiversity park which is involved in maintaining and promoting knowledge about indigenous flora, including local medicinal herbs. When visiting Darjeeling area, students explored the city of Darjeeling on their own to observe the pressures of tourism on a small town located in the Sub-Himalayan Ranges.

These visits are designed in a way that helps students to understand how local economies are embedded within the society at large.

3.2 Bhutan

The second site for our travel is Bhutan. Bhutan is a small landlocked country surrounded by China in the north and India in the east, west and south. The country is mainly mountainous with severe connectivity issues. According to Asian Development Outlook (Asian Development Bank 2019), the growth rate of Bhutan was 5.5 % in 2018. Bhutan's HDI (Human Development Index) ranking was 134 in 2018. According to the eleventh five-year plan of Bhutan (2013–2018), the poverty rate is 12 % (Royal Government of Bhutan 2013). The country is primarily agricultural with 62.2 % of its workforce being employed in agriculture and related activities. Hydroelectric power generation has been a large source of revenue for Bhutan and currently contributes to around 20 % of the GDP (according to the 11th Five-Year Plan 2013).

In case of Bhutan, each year our travel sites include the city of Paro and the capital city of Thimphu. As opposed to India, where different regions or cities are explored in different years, in Bhutan's case our student groups have been travelling to these two cities every year. Given Bhutan's image as a green country, a visit to Paro and Thimphu provides a fair opportunity to observe the country's commitment to sustainable development.

In the context of Bhutan, sustainable tourism has been a focus of our site visits, where sustainable tourism refers to "Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities" (World Tourism Organization 2005).

Bhutan is well-known for its green image in the world. The country also has a unique perspective on development, because the country uses the idea of Gross National Happiness as a measure of its well-being. This measurement broadens the scope of development to include equitable and sustainable development, preserving cultural values, environmental preservation and good governance (Overseas Development Institute 2011).

In this sub section, we will describe some of the important sites visited during our travel to Bhutan. One of the sites visited is the Royal Botanical Park in Lampelri. This site offers visitors a glimpse into the conservation efforts made by the Government of Bhutan. This park was founded to introduce both domestic and international tourists to the region's local flora and fauna and emphasizes how a country's true wealth not only includes material wealth, but also its natural wealth.

Students also visited different religious sites in these two cities including the famous Taktsang Monastery, one of the holiest Buddhist sites in the country. Visits to these sites are instrumental in helping students understand how influential Buddhism is in the daily lives of Bhutanese people. Students also visited a paper manufacturing factory where local resources are used for the production of handmade paper[6]. Moreover, they paid visits to the local farmers' market in Thimphu, where they were able to interact with farmers from the area. Other site visits included tours to local organic farms, vocational training schools, and the National Textile Museum. All these sites were included in the travel component to help students gain a better understanding of Bhutanese

[6]This particular paper factory uses bark from the local Daphne plant to produce handmade paper.

society and economy. The final segment of the course takes place once students have completed the travel phase of the seminar and are back in classroom setting. In this part of the course, students learn about a variety of economic issues like unemployment, resource rights, and measurement of alternative indicators of development like the Human Development Index (HDI) and the Gross National Happiness Index. We will discuss this final part of the course in the following section.

4 Consequences and Effects

This section of the chapter will explore if this teaching innovation has been able to fill in the gap between mainstream economic theory and the real-world complexities when it comes to understanding sustainable development. We will also evaluate the impact of the travel phase on student learning.

We observe that the inclusion of the travel component has allowed students to think critically about the standard models of growth and development. In order to evaluate the impact of our exercise, we draw from assignments that were given to students after the travel period and the course evaluations. We recognize that both these tools measure only the short-term learning impact of the travel period.

As discussed above, one of the main themes of our course is understanding unemployment in the context of sustainable development. The reading that is assigned to students is "Public Sector Employment and Environmental Sustainability" by Mathew Forstater (2006). In this article, he explains that the 'jobs versus environment' debate needs to be challenged. In order to establish this point, he gives us multiple examples of green jobs within a Modern Monetary Theoretical framework (MMT). In our class, this reading is further accompanied by an assignment for the students where they had to identify the possibility of creating green jobs in the sites that they had visited (Darjeeling) that particular year. This assignment was based on what Kisiel (2006) refers to as "unstructured student engagement strategies" (as cited in DeWitt and Storksdieck 2008), which provides students an opportunity for 'free exploration'. As mentioned in the previous section, students were given time to explore the city of Darjeeling on their own. The responses in this assignment were well thought out with suggestions that included job creation in the recycling sector, forestry sector, permaculture and environmental education. In explaining their answers, students not only used their observations during the 'unstructured' part of the visit, but also the 'structured' visits. Students used their visit to the tea plantation sites to critically analyze the role of big tea plantations in this area and its impact on soil

fertility, water pollution and soil erosion. Some of them also pointed out why government sponsored green jobs are particularly important in this area due to the problematic position of tea plantations and the employment they generate, thereby challenging the role of markets in the creation of green jobs.

The second theme of the travel component is conservation efforts and resource rights. Students are assigned reading by Elinor Ostrom (2008) titled "Challenges of Common Pool Resources". In this article, Ostrom examines the different types of resource systems or 'commons' that exist in the world. She discusses various ways in which fisheries and forests are managed in different parts of the world and how a holistic approach is necessary to ensure that these commons are preserved for future generations. She explains, "Further, policies also have to fit with the local culture and institutional environments of those who depend on ecosystems for their livelihood" (Ostrom 2008, p. 8.). Based on this reading and their visits to national parks in India, students have been given question prompts, where they have been asked to reflect on who should have access to forest resources. The responses to this question were nuanced and students recognized the importance of the rights of the indigenous population living in national parks. Some students explained that through their own observations they found that these indigenous settlements hardly impacted the conservation efforts of the forest officials. We believe that the on-site visits and the readings like those by Ostrom (2008) and Costanza (2001) in the class helped students to contextualize the problems of resource rights and also to develop a critical point of view about the standard neoclassical model of private property.

Yet another theme of our course is sustainable agriculture. As mentioned in the previous section, our site visits also included commercial establishments like tea plantations and small and medium sized enterprises. Visits to such sites also helped students to dispel the myth of the profit maximizing firms and to understand how firms in many cases try to establish a positive relationship with their surrounding eco-systems instead. In addition to commercial establishments like tea plantations, visits to organic farms also helped students better understand the economic and physical constraints of organic farming. In another question prompt, students were asked to reflect on the structure of the organic farm we visited and if such a structure could be replicated on a large scale. The responses in this prompt were meaningful with students acknowledging the difficulties associated with organic farming but at the same time recognizing the need for such initiatives to solve problems of food security and farmers' distress in a country like India.

The setting for sustainable tourism was achieved via readings on the sustainable development goals (SDG). Before the travel period, students were

instructed to read about SDG and identify ways in which tourism can be an option to attain sustainable development. Bhutan's commitment to a 'high value, low impact' model (Tourism Council of Bhutan, n. d.) fits well with the overall objective of sustainable tourism. Students were also instructed to study the SDG carefully and identify those goals that were directly related to sustainable tourism. During their visit to Bhutan students were exposed to how Bhutan maintains its commitment to addressing the needs of the environment and local communities. In an assignment given to students after the travel, students were asked to identify the site visits that met with the definition of sustainable tourism. Most students were able to recollect how local Bhutanese art, culture and religious beliefs were integrated into our site visits. However, they also noted the increasing number of newly constructed hotels, which lead them to critically question increasing tourism and its impact on the environment. They were able to articulate the importance of local industry (like weaving, handmade paper etc.) and its role in tourism.

In addition to the reading on SDG, students were also assigned chapters from Schumacher's "Small is Beautiful" (1973) after the travel period. Based on this reading, yet another question prompt was given to them where they were asked to reflect on the role of Buddhism and Buddhist economics in Bhutan. Their responses indicated that they were able to find links between Buddhist economics and their own observations in Bhutan. They specifically wrote about the handmade paper factory as an example of "Appropriate Technology" and "Small Scale Applicability" (Schumacher 1973). Another question for the students asked them to write about how Bhutan envisions the idea of development and focuses on the Gross National Happiness Index (GNHI). To aid students in this assignment, they were given readings on measurement of GNHI and the capability approach (Robeyns 2005, Center for Bhutan Studies n. d.). Their responses to this prompt question included a succinct analysis of how Bhutan's development model took into consideration economic, cultural and human aspects of development.

All these assignments and prompt questions were designed to encourage students to engage in post-travel reflections. These assignments were evaluated based not only on how well students understood class readings, but also how much they have been able to absorb during their visits. This exercise of post-travel reflections is in line with what DeWitt and Storksdieck (2008) call "post-visit" activities. They argue that the effectiveness of field trips can be enhanced by planned "post-visit" activities. We noted that most of these assignments had an average score between B- and A-, indicating good to very good responses.

In addition to written assignments, we have also designed "post visit" activities by having students do group presentations on specific sites and use a

theoretical approach to explain sustainability efforts in these sites. Examples of this include a presentation on Bhutan's development model using a degrowth model and the use of the Eco-development model to analyze Kaziranga National Park's development model. These presentations were satisfactory with average grades ranging from C- to B+.

In addition to these planned activities, students during class discussions also noted how many of the smaller communities are not motivated by the sole objective of increasing the size of their economies but rather by establishing a harmonious relationship with their surrounding eco-systems.

We recognize that two weeks is not a sufficient time to immerse oneself into a new country and its specific economic and social character. We make the argument that since the travel component is integrated with a regular undergraduate course, the semester long contact hours can make up for the limited time spent at the actual sites. When students are not travelling, the design of the course allows them to go deeper into the relevant topics, do their own research both before and after the travel period and also prepare themselves for the travel. This is done via assignments and class readings. In our case, before the travel period students are given readings on the travel sites. They also receive assignments wherein they are instructed to explore the websites of the establishments that we travel to, so that they have some knowledge about these institutions and are able to engage more meaningfully with the hosts. An example of this would be when students were instructed to explore the website of the organic farm in Haridwar and answer specific questions on the institution. In preparation for the trip, the instructor pays special attention to explaining to students the social and cultural backgrounds of the sites that are to be visited.

We also believe that an important lesson of this teaching technique is to give students of economics in educational institutions in the developed world an opportunity to learn about alternate models of development that exist in the developing world. In an attempt to evaluate this aspect, we examine specific questions from the course evaluations that are completed by students every semester. We identified two questions that we believe will help us analyze this point better. These statements are "The travel experience contributed to my intellectual development" and "The travel experience motivated me to continue studying the country visited". Students were given a 5-point scale to respond to these statements where they could choose from "very strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". In the years under consideration, a significant majority (between 75 % and 90 %) of the students chose "very strongly agree" and "strongly agree" to both these statements. This gives us an indication that students have found the travel component of the course useful for their intellectual development. We

acknowledge that our course represents a small sample of approximately 60 students to date and therefore comes with some limitations. However, we believe that future data on such parameters will help us make a much stronger case about the efficacy of the travel component.

As a result of the travel period students also recognize that the challenges faced by these two countries are quite different, though both these countries are considered to be developing countries and are located on the Indian sub-continent. This allows them to be critical of standardized, one-size-fits-all models.

Based on a detailed study on the impact of field study on cognitive and affective learning of school children, DeWitt and Storksdieck (2008) recommend that in order to improve the efficacy of out-of-school field trips, the following steps could be taken: supporting integration of class curriculum into the field trips, providing unique experiences during field trips that cannot be done in the classrooms, allow time for both structured and unstructured visits, using field trips as a way to help students collect their own data and examine this data in the classroom, giving students access to engage with experts from the field, allowing students some power over their learning and to improve the structure of the programme with feedback from students. We believe that the structure of our course fits these recommendations well. The travel component is integrated in the curriculum of our course. Many of the activities that are undertaken during the travel cannot be reproduced in class and therefore provide students with a unique experience to observe and absorb new data and information. During the travel period, students are exposed to structured and some unstructured visits, which allows them to interact with experts on the one hand, but also provides them with freedom to explore these sites on their own to collect data and experiences.

We recognize that there are drawbacks to our approach. In our case, we have the opportunity to travel to developing countries to explore sustainability and economic development due to the curricular requirements of our university. This may not be an option for many due to financial, geographical and curricular constraints. However, a scaled down version of our model can be used to bring in relevant topics of sustainability with weekend travel to sites around one's own educational institution. This could take the form of visits to local farmers' markets, organic farms or organic stores.

We also acknowledge that there are a number of environmental costs associated with such travels like additional carbon footprints due to air travel, use of scarce local resources during travel (water in particular) and pollution created during national park visits. As our programme is developing, we aim to work with local eco-tourism companies to reduce such wastes. In a post-travel debriefing, students were explicitly asked for feedback on how such travel can be made more

sustainable. This was yet another way in which students were encouraged to reflect on their behaviour as consumers of such tours.

In conclusion, we believe that adding a travel component to regular economics classes is a practical, interesting and innovative way to introduce and explore the complexities of the real economy.

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