

Learning with others about neurodiverse spatial practice

*Original*

Learning with others about neurodiverse spatial practice / Rispoli, Micol; Sánchez Criado, Tomás; Bieler, Patrick. - (2023), pp. 28-29.

*Availability:*

This version is available at: 11583/2993298 since: 2024-10-11T16:00:17Z

*Publisher:*

*Published*

DOI:

*Terms of use:*

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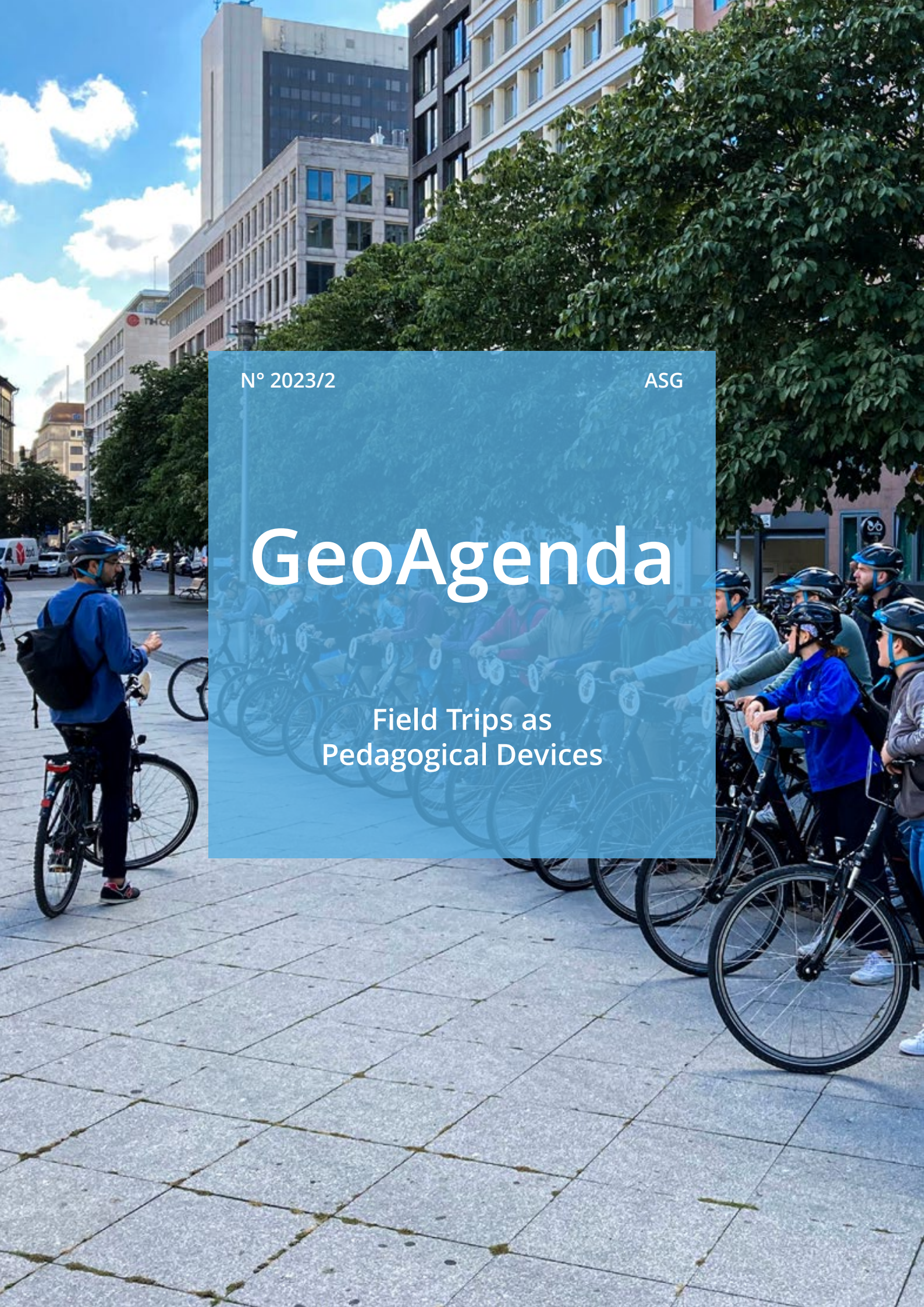


N° 2023/2

ASG

# GeoAgenda

Field Trips as  
Pedagogical Devices





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Verband Geographie Schweiz  
Association Suisse de Géographie  
Associazione Svizzera di Geografia



Chère lectrice, cher lecteur

Le deuxième GeoAgenda de 2023 est intitulé « Field Trips as Pedagogical Devices ». Il cherche à répondre à la question « Quels sont les bénéfices éducatifs des excursions en milieu urbain ? » à travers 10 contributions originales, sous forme de récits d'expériences et de réflexions d'expert.e.s de la géographie urbaine. D'abord, les Guest Editors Julio Paulos et Sven Daniel Wolfe introduisent le numéro sur les sorties de terrain comme dispositifs éducatifs. Puis les articles, un à un, apportent des perspectives et des exemples à travers une multitude de formes d'excursions, des espaces urbains hétéroclites parcourus par différents moyens de transports, sur des temporalités diverses, pour en tirer une large palette d'apprentissages et de leçons de vie.

Gabriela Debrunner nous emmène dans la région de la Ruhr avec les étudiant.e.s de l'Université de Berne. Coups de pédales au programme : avec Karine Duplan et Armelle Choplin nous partons en voyage d'étude à vélo le long du Rhône, avec les étudiant.e.s de l'Université de Genève. Sylvana Jahre et Laura Kemmer nous emmènent au Brésil, en ajoutant une perspective nord-sud à la question. Pas à pas, Tatiana Debroux et Stefan De Corte, nous guident dans une marche à travers Bruxelles. Avec Geetika Anand, cap vers le sud, pour six semaines en Afrique du Sud avec l'Université de Bâle. Issues de ce même terrain, Laura Nkula-Wenz, Geetika Anand et Anna Selmeczi nous offrent leurs réflexions pour développer des pédagogies collaboratives. Retour en Suisse : l'interview réalisé par Sven Daniel Wolfe avec Hanna Hilbrandt, nous présente Züri Urban, un projet pédagogique combinant l'apprentissage basé sur la recherche et l'enseignement collaboratif. Changement de perspective : avec Micol Rispoli, Tomás Criado et Patrick Bieler nous nous immergeons dans la ville de Berlin pour comprendre l'espace urbain au prisme de la neurodiversité. Finalement, Sven Daniel Wolfe et Julio Paulos concluent ce riche numéro, qui met en lumière la diversité des approches pour interagir avec les étudiant.e.s en géographie en dehors de la salle de classe.

Trois « Autres Contributions » complètent ce numéro. Regula Grob et Brigitte Kürsteiner proposent une réflexion autour d'un outil pédagogique permettant une approche critique des stéréotypes dans l'enseignement de la géographie. Yvonne Riaño présente le documentaire « Weaving Threads Across Borders » qu'elle a réalisé dans le cadre d'un projet de recherche sur la frontière entre la Colombie et le Venezuela. Elle y discute le potentiel d'empouvoirement et de transfert de connaissances des documentaires. Finalement, Jonathan Bussard propose une interview avec le climatologue Jean-Michel Fallot. Jean-Michel était le délégué de l'Université de Lausanne pour l'ASG depuis 2006 et nous lui souhaitons un bon départ à la retraite !

Bonne lecture !  
Isabelle Schoepfer

Liebe Leserin, lieber Leser

Die zweite GeoAgenda von 2023 trägt den Titel "Field Trips as Pedagogical Devices". und widmet sich der Fragestellung: "Welchen Bildungsnutzen haben Ausflüge in städtische Gebiete?". In zehn Originalbeiträge, die Erfahrungsberichte und Überlegungen von Expert:Innen der Stadtgeographie enthalten, wird versucht, diese Frage zu beantworten. Die Guest Editors Julio Paulos und Sven Daniel Wolfe führen uns zunächst in die Ausgabe ein und beleuchten die Bedeutung von Feldausflüge als Bildungsmaßnahmen. In den folgenden Artikeln werden verschiedene Perspektiven und Beispiele für Exkursionsformen in heterogenen städtischen Räumen präsentiert. Dabei werden verschiedene Verkehrsmittel genutzt und unterschiedliche Zeiten berücksichtigt, um eine breite Palette an Lern- und Lebenserfahrungen zu ermöglichen.

Gabriela Debrunner nimmt uns mit Studierenden der Universität Bern mit ins Ruhrgebiet, während Karine Duplan und Armelle Choplin uns auf eine Fahrradstudienreise entlang der Rhône begleiten, zusammen mit Studierenden der Universität Genf. Sylvana Jahre und Laura Kemmer entführen uns nach Brasilien und bieten eine Nord-Süd-Perspektive auf das Thema. Schritt für Schritt führen uns Tatiana Debroux und Stefan De Corte in einem Spaziergang durch Brüssel, und Geetika Anand nimmt uns mit in den Süden, wo sie sechs Wochen lang mit der Universität Basel in Südafrika verbringt. Laura Nkula-Wenz, Geetika Anand und Anna Selmeczi stellen uns ihre Überlegungen zur Entwicklung von kollaborativen Pädagogien auf Grundlage derselben Feldarbeit in Kapstadt vor. Zurück in die Schweiz: Das Interview von Sven Daniel Wolfe mit Hanna Hilbrandt stellt uns das pädagogische Projekt Züri Urban vor, das forschungsbasiertes Lernen mit kollaborativem Unterricht verbindet. Mit Micol Rispoli, Tomás Criado und Patrick Bieler tauchen wir in die Stadt Berlin ein, um den urbanen Raum im Licht der Neurodiversität zu betrachten. Abschließend beleuchten Sven Daniel Wolfe und Julio Paulos die Vielfalt der Ansätze zur Interaktion mit Geographiestudierenden außerhalb des Klassenzimmers und runden damit diese reichhaltige Ausgabe ab.

Drei "Andere Beiträge" ergänzen den spannenden "Fokus". Regula Grob und Brigitte Kürsteiner präsentieren Überlegungen zu einer digitalen Lehrkooperation, die einen kritischen Umgang mit Stereotypen im Geographieunterricht ermöglicht. Yvonne Riaño stellt den Dokumentarfilm "Weaving Threads Across Borders" vor, den sie im Rahmen eines Forschungsprojekts über die Grenze zwischen Kolumbien und Venezuela gedreht hat. In diesem Film wird das Potenzial von Dokumentarfilmen für Empowerment und Wissenstransfer diskutiert. Schließlich schlägt Jonathan Bussard ein Interview mit dem Klimaforscher Jean-Michel Fallot vor, der seit 2006 als Delegierter der Universität Lausanne für die ASG tätig war. Wir möchten Jean-Michel an dieser Stelle für seine herausragende Arbeit danken und ihm einen guten Start in den wohlverdienten Ruhestand wünschen!

Viel Spaß beim Lesen  
Isabelle Schoepfer



# Field trips as pedagogical devices



Input talk on urban natures, Görlitzer Park, Berlin (2022) © Julio Paulos

Written by  
Dr. Julio Paulos  
Dr. Sven Daniel Wolfe

**What are the educational benefits of urban field trips? This special issue of GeoAgenda aims to answer this question through a series of stories, experiences and reflections.**

## Explorations, Encounters, Engagements

Field trips are a common unit of study in geography curricula, and they are widely valued for the valuable hands-on learning experiences they provide. Nevertheless, they remain peripheral to most geography curricula. We don't mean to suggest that field trips should be at the centre of teaching, but that a rethinking of teaching formats outside the classroom, and even within the classroom, is necessary to prepare students for the realities they will encounter once they graduate or leave academia.

Field trips give students (and teachers) a vivid, first-hand understanding of (urban) environments. They allow for an exploration of the complexity, diversity, and multiplicities of urban life in a way that cannot be conveyed by classroom instruction alone. This issue highlights these benefits, but also delves deeper into the issues of reflecting the standards of classroom teaching. In doing so, it calls for a more situated and experimental rethinking of university education.

## Exploring everything urban, reconsidering field trips

We would like to discuss the concept of exploration, particularly in urban settings. While the term has historically been associated with colonisation and

negative connotations, here we think of exploration as being associated with the underground practice known as 'urbex' (an acronym that stands for urban exploration). This is a subculture inspired by the hacker scene, often mixed with an activist message, that promotes discovering the hidden aspects of cities and seeing them as places of adventure.

Urbex enthusiasts explore forgotten tunnels and abandoned buildings. They test the boundaries of urban formality and safety. This idea is well documented in Bradley L. Garrett's book "Explore Everything: Place Hacking the City" (2013). For us, exploring isn't so much a manifesto, but rather a means of engaging students to come to their senses and immerse themselves in learning experiences directly from and with the field.

Rethinking field trips involves applying course learning while becoming more attuned to their surroundings -

*capturing the vibrancy of an area through both visible elements and hidden sensory experiences.*

The key to rethinking field trips, then, is to balance conventional classroom learning with personal sensory discovery and the critical realisation that there is not one city, but many ways to inhabit the ur-



Cycling at an intersection, Berlin traffic. (2022) © Julio Paulos

ban, to make it obdurate, common or aesthetic. It's also a recognition that there is no ready-made teaching format for how to comprehend moving urban environments, and that this calls for a broad, inventive and situated range of pedagogical formats and diversified learning experiences.

Theorising about field trips can help thus promote education beyond the classroom and encourage reflection on our teaching conventions and methods more broadly. In our view as early career researchers, if university is to remain attractive to younger generations, then the aim should be to develop pedagogical formats that allow for more exploratory, multi-modal, critical and applied education in (urban) geography and cognate disciplines. This impulse gives rise to the diverse contributors in this collection.

## Diversifying Teaching Strategies Outside/Beyond Classrooms

Acquiring knowledge, developing skills and understanding how they influence our behaviour and values is largely dependent on our experiences. It is important to recognise that traditional classroom teaching is only one format of acquiring knowledge. Learning can also occur through observation, practice, experience, activities, events and situations that contribute to individual and collective growth.

This is nothing new, and yet we feel it is necessary to remind ourselves of it, as most university policies seem to have the pedagogical figure of the lecture as their main cursor, and many restructuring efforts are often caught up in the replication of old classical teaching conventions, while innovation is often only marginally welcomed as a fancy discourse.

Although classrooms may attempt to inject real-life situations by inviting professional experts, they often lack the authenticity found in actual field experiences. This doesn't mean that learning from the field is the only valuable approach; rather, it encourages us to rethink what is often pigeonholed as either formal or unconventional teaching methods.

Ultimately, a richer educational experience can be achieved by diversifying our teaching strategies beyond the classic figure of 'The Lecture'. We can relearn existing formats by incorporating or devising approaches inspired by hackathons, studios, maker's fairs and so on, all of which allow learning processes to be re-examined and re-imagined<sup>1</sup>.

## Advocating for Situated Learning Inside-Out: collaboration, experiments, and interventions

We are advocates of situated learning, following the pragmatist philosopher John Dewey's (1897) pedagogical credo that effective learning takes place



Sunset at Tempelhof Airport (2022) © Timm Rogenmoser

through active participation in real-life situations. Students should engage in meaningful and authentic activities. Ideally, they should work with others to gain different perspectives.

This approach goes beyond the simple format of the student project or the ritual phase of the internship, which is now often compulsory in many curricula. This situated approach involves changing expressions and reflecting on situations encountered. Situated learning allows for team building and collective engagement that occurs best in specific contexts. It emphasises the importance of context and experience and suggests that knowledge and skills develop through active engagement with the world.

This point is made in each of the contributions to this special issue, whether by emphasising activities such as impromptu walking or cycling, or by empha-

<sup>1</sup> One way forward could be to think of educational figurations as specific and provisional arrangements, or in John Law and Evelyn Rupert's terms, as 'teloological arrangements' (2013, 230). That is, as formats that have a purpose to serve and shape the social world and urban life that is taught and learned relationally.



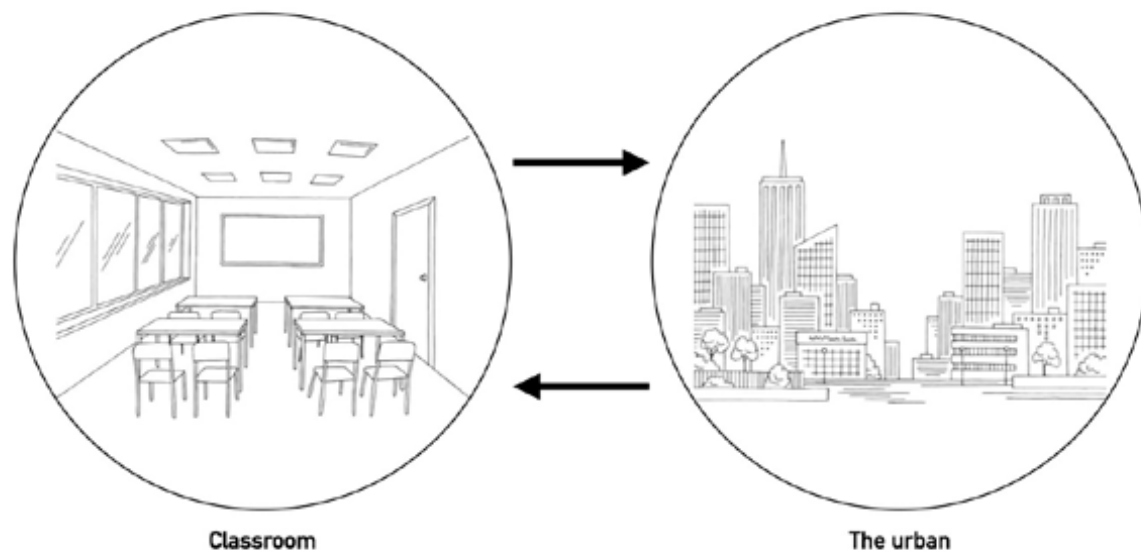


Students discuss their group project in a parklet, in the middle of the street, Bergmannstraße, Berlin (2022) © Julio Paulos

sisting the fact that group cohesion is based on shared experiences, or by simply being outside of one's comfort zone. Collaboration is crucial as it enables students not only to work together but also to learn how to involve teachers, stakeholders, politicians, activists or professionals in their education, to become 'epistemic partners' (Estalella & Criado, 2018) so to speak. Such an approach is beneficial in conveying the importance of framing problems in a collective and/or dialogic way in order to have the basis for achieving common goals. It helps students develop essential interpersonal social and communication skills, such as

effective listening, negotiation and conflict resolution, while witnessing and working in partnership with urban and environmental realities.

Experimentation and intervention are important aspects of situated learning as they allow students to test different avenues through thought experiments or simulations. By participating in these activities, students improve their problem-posing/problem-solving and critical thinking skills – all while applying knowledge in practical situations.



How to relate two realms? Turning the classroom inside out (2023) © Julio Paulos

Advocating situated learning requires recognising the importance of context, collaboration and active engagement in the learning process. It is crucial to move beyond dualisms and categories such as conventional and unconventional, traditional and innovative. It is also crucial to re-evaluate existing modes of teaching and their associated figures such as 'The Lecture', 'The Seminar', 'The Workshop', which can prevent students from engaging in meaningful activities if they are merely replicated and not authentically run.

Our primary focus as educators, teachers, lecturers and professors should not be merely to reproduce inherited structures. Instead, in a world replete with uncertainties, wars, pandemics, and climate crises, we should strive to build pedagogical interactions based on authentic support and guidance. And as we enter into the age of dematerialized classrooms, digital learning, and artificial intelligence (with all its promises and pitfalls),

*field trips offer an alternative pedagogy based on authentic, in-person interactions.*

All of the contributors to this volume have engaged this potential in order to help future generations develop the skills they need to become educated professionals and compassionate individuals. We hope you find their contributions here as inspiring as we do.

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**Julio Paulos** is an interdisciplinary urban scholar working at ETH Zurich's Future Cities Lab Global, where he's responsible for all research-related matters. Julio's own research interests are shaped by his curiosity for how cities are governed and thought, which he seeks to share with students through collaborative and experimental methods.



The circle, central figure of communication and interaction during field trips (2022) © Timm R.



**Sven Daniel Wolfe** is a political and urban geographer at the University of Zurich, Swiss National Science Foundation Ambizione Fellow in the Spatial Development and Urban Policy group at the ETH Zurich, and a vice president of the Association Suisse de géographie. He works on the socio-spatial impacts of mega-events, urban sustainable development, and everyday geopolitics. He has a history of non-traditional and collaborative teaching approaches that span music, storytelling, video games, and urban exploration.



# Learning with others about neurodiverse spatial practice

Written by  
Dr. Micol Rispoli,  
Prof. Dr. Tomás Criado,  
Dr. Patrick Bieler

In early 2020 Micol Rispoli (architect) and Tomás Criado (anthropologist) were working on a design experiment exploring how neurodiverse spatial practice might put architectural design practice in crisis. In previous months they had been engaging with a neurodivergent person and his family. They also had been revising standard architectural approaches to accessible design, in particular with neurodivergent people. But they felt they needed to discuss their predicaments with someone more experienced in these issues. Tomás, then, engaged his colleague Patrick Bieler (anthropologist), an experienced researcher on these matters, to join the conversation.



Rather than simply talk about these issues, the three of us agreed that a more embodied and site-specific approach was needed. Hence the idea: why not taking a guided walk in a neighbourhood of Berlin where Patrick had done numerous go-alongs with 'people with mental health problems' to understand how they relate to their everyday social and material urban environments? The relevance of this trip had to do with understanding field exposure as a way of "learning with others", in Tim Ingold's terms.

Traveling to 'Patrick's field', so we thought, might allow Micol and Tomás to situate themselves before a wider palette of spatial and architectural challenges when trying to come to terms with the atmospheric, lived and singular spatial dimensions of neurodiverse people (not easily apprehensible or translatable to a Euclidian understanding of space). This was also an attempt at overcoming the barriers of our disciplinary fields and creating a space to inquire together.

In this one-day expedition, Patrick re-enacted on site different stories of how his ethnographic counterparts singularly experienced space. To stage a contrast between the lived experiences captured in ethnographic vignettes and architectural approaches to visual documentation, Micol was to act that day like a regular architect who approaches the documentation of a problem: carrying out a map of the area, sketching and taking pictures of the places Patrick referred to. Tomás's role was to document the walk, acting as an external observer of their encounter, posing questions so as to reflect on our respective disciplinary perspectives.

The walk brought about a very productive frictional moment: whereas Patrick wanted to expound on the manifold singular ways in which his counterparts lived and used those spaces, Micol struggled to inscribe them visually.

*Each story was different from one another, displaying singular feelings, sensations and peculiar atmospheric perceptions.*

Taken together, they composed a complex patchwork: different from Euclidean dimensions of space that architects are used to working with. For instance, some of Patrick's informants "walk as close as possible to the buildings...because they feel more protected from the street noise and the traffic"; one of them "carries her bicycle with her at all times, she drags it by hand as a protective shield in the crowded streets", and "another one prefers to walk in the crowded streets to feel more protected from the noise of the cars".

After several hours, we took shelter from the Berlin cold in a café in the neighbourhood. There, a long conversation ensued, which we recorded with our phone. The initial spark were Micol's difficulties in trying to relate to the singular spatialities of these stories. This particularly revealed the problems her background as an architect created: "I didn't know how to represent this information. My tools, the way I am used to doing surveys, just doesn't work for this. What is the spatial information here? There are too many stories, they're all different stories, and then they are all about feelings, sensations...peculiar perceptions of individual people. You know, in general architecture is obsessed with the material dimension... And then what you told us are singular stories, particular trajectories that cannot be compiled one on top of the other...I mean, all of them were incredibly fascinating...but how do I choose one out of many? Which story should I choose to design something?"

This launched a very long conversation on what it might mean to compose these multiple spatial practices, diverse experiences and singular needs, so different and contrasting. What choices should be made when designing an urban space? A one-size-fits-all approach, what architects tend to take, seemed rather problematic, in the sense that these multiple singularities would be erased. What our walk and the frictions it revealed led us to discuss was that perhaps a different approach might need to emerge: bringing together the different knowledges present in our walk (not only those of us three, but those of all of Patrick's ethnographic counterparts) in a different way.

How would this need to be done? As we sipped our coffee, looked into our notes and got sometimes lost in the vague atmosphere of the café, our embodied trip led us to discuss whether we would need to partake in middle-ground approaches, like the not-so-standard guidelines that populate the literature on neurodiverse-friendly design. That is, techniques or policies bridging the very different ways people relate to the urban and, thus, make the city habitable. The virtue of guidelines, we discussed, is that rather than proposing one-size-fits-all solutions, they are suggestions accommodating the untranslatable singularities of experiences that are not so easy to communicate. This might enable architectural explorations trying to make diverse bodies converge in peculiar spatial designs.



**Patrick Bieler** is a Postdoc in the DFG-funded research project "Mind the City!" at the Institute of European Ethnology, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. He is interested in developing and refining an interdisciplinary approach for urban mental health research informed by an ethnographic thought style. Particularly, drawing on a social scientific problematization of psychiatric research, he develops an ecological analytical perspective as a complementary framework for the study of neighbourhood effects.



Whilst architectural standards tend to imply an exclusionary rigidity, the looser nature of guidelines and their need for constant adaptations offer the possibility of composing singularities without treating them as given, or assuming their coherence in a functional whole. As Tomás said, they seem to be "something that always remains open, on an appropriate and productive level of generalisation, which at the same time shows different singular situations, specific material interventions, which make it possible to compare, enrich, revise...". Indeed, what emerged from that conversation was that perhaps when adapted to and enriched with singular, situated and material experiences, guidelines might be a generative approach to try to find a common territory, precisely what is needed in arenas where singularities don't afford ready-made solutions.

Indeed, nothing like a good field trip to learn with others...



**Tomás Criado** is Ramón y Cajal Senior Research Fellow at the Open University of Catalonia's CareNet-IN3 group. His ethnographic and public engagement work focuses on different instances of relational, knowledge and material politics in a wide variety of settings where care is invoked as a mode of intervention: be it as a practice of articulating more or less enduring ecologies of support; or as a particular mode of technoscientific activism democratising knowledges, design practice and infrastructures.

[www.tscriado.org](http://www.tscriado.org), @tscriado



**Micol Rispoli** is an architect and Ph.D. in Philosophical Sciences (Federico II University of Napoli). She also obtained a master's degree in Museum Curation from the Istituto Europeo di Design (IED) in Rome. Between 2019 and 2020 she undertook a doctoral research visit at the Stadtlabor for Multimodal Anthropology, a research platform at the Institute for European Ethnology of Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. Working at the crossroads of architecture and science and technology studies (STS), she has been investigating the impact that the material-semiotic lines of insight of actor-network theory, feminist technoscience, and approaches to technical democracy can have for the transformation of architectural practice and its pedagogy. She currently teaches at BAU Arts and Design College of Barcelona.