Playing the field: evaluating practice

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Aims

– auditing digital, mobile and map-based research methods and skills in the field;

– assessing the potential of playful, experiential and participatory learning in this context;

– reflecting on student feelings and feedback about the innovation;

– evaluating impacts and benefits vis a vis HE quality improvement.
Rules of the processual game?
Introducing the playful field

• The field and play

• Playful intervention

• Threads and reflections and conclusions
The Field

Fieldwork at the heart of Geography

Different style and contexts

skills

landscape

placed

experienced
The Changing Field

Dynamism

New approaches to learning (Higgitt, 1996)

– Deep and active learning
– Research led, skills-oriented, tutored field courses (Healey et al., 2010)?

Demand-led in era of NSS?
Recent renewal of the fieldwork tradition best seen as relational, situated cultural practices.

Local configurations and practice impact on disciplinary identity and the place.

Material and experiential come together in field encounters that enact interplay of novelty and tradition.

Field 'work' needs to be historicized + placed: played.
a socio-cultural involvement in activities give participants *pleasure* (Starbuck and Webster, 1991)

Play may stretch over longer or shorter periods of time but is *not* characterised by boredom or anxiety (Csikszentmihalyi and Bennett, 1971)

play “is brought by people to the complex interrelations with and between things that form daily life” (Sicart, 2014: 2)
Playful practice is unspoken and under theorized

- Ubiquitous and cultural *practice*
- Enacted temporalities called into play
- Mobile fluid and multi-vocal
- Often ambiguous and contested meanings
  - Game play
  - Ludic activities
  - Being playful
Play learning and creativity

- Playful field work can enable learning and encounters with place

- A playful attitude in life fosters creative ingenuity and learning (cf. Csikszentmihalyi 1997, Gardner 1993)

- A processual performative reflexive approach to learning and research
GoGoGozo

GO GO GOZO
2015

Manchester / Warwick / Olomouc / Utrecht / Malta
The GoGoGozo Field course

Erasmus+ funded strategic partnership

3 years field course for 35 students + 10 staff

Theme: multinational and interdisciplinary encounters with playful and mobile mapping
The GoGoGozo Field course

5 institutions:
- University of Manchester
- Warwick
- Olomouc, CZ
- Utrecht, NL
- Malta

7 disciplines:
- Human Geography,
- Interdisciplinary Studies
- New Media Studies
- GIS
- Development Studies
- Game Studies
- Island Studies
Aims of the course

To introduce the contested worlds of island studies

To explore the impacts of isolation, peripherality, boundedness and size

To appreciate the ambiguous and hybrid nature and practice of ‘islandness’

To investigate the potential of playful ways of approaching particular aspects of island geography

To carry out field investigation to reinforce the above aims
Activities in the field

- Lectures, and workshops
- Feedback sessions
- ‘Big’ games
  - Encounter: hybrid game
  - Experience: sensory game
  - Enact: derive
- ‘Small’ games and playful contexts
  - Board games
  - Urban games
  - Quiz
- Other play

Methods
- Individual Reflexive diaries
- Video
- Photography
- Digital mapping
- Playful group presentations
The Games

• **Encounter game**: 82 different locations tailored to groups on Wherigo – a mobile ‘location-based game’ platform.

• Non-linear, multi-entry, pins as tool for reflection

• Provided a framework for *orientating, interrogating* thematic fields, *unfolding* of knowledges

• Other games: **Experience (smell walk) and Enactment (dérive)**
Encountering surveillance in the seminar room

A 15-minute field course
Playful field encounters

Playful encounters? Research insights?

• Different way of engaging with place and knowledge-making: practice
• Emphasises field as series of performed encounters
• Potential for dialectic approaches to research / un-learning
• Need to frame playful exploration: moments of stillness, re-play, memory, reflection
Technology

Which technology did you enrol? Was is useful?

- Complex assemblage of mediation – digital and non-digital
- Ambiguous role of technology – possibilities but are they enabled?
- Field encounter includes analysis
- Ethics! (filming)
Temporality

Which rhythms of 'learning'? Did they match up for everyone?

• Very important: not just steady progression of tasks that build upon another

• Learning journeys: have their own rhythm, not linear, points of confusions, frustration, excitement, understanding

• Importance of before-during-after – the field extends beyond the time “away”

• This rhythm / fluidity matters for structure, assessment, evaluation of course
1st lecture: island imaginations

What do you expect to get out of the field course?

"Get to know the island of Gozo and to explore it through play"

(pre-course questionnaire)

Learning about a new place and a new culture is great but islandness? We could be in Spain, we could be anywhere.” (in-course reflection)

An autoethnographic reflection of playful-performative interdisciplinary fieldwork on Islandness and Surveillance in Gozo, Malta explored through Adolfo Bioy Casares’ heterotopic novel La Invención de Morel.
Research / pedagogy

Observations from experiment?

- Tension: final year course but also research project about
- Ethics of enrolling students in research
  “For me the entire field course was set up in the formation of a complex game, which as students we had to decipher” (student reflection)
- Playful research and playful pedagogy?
Conclusions: mess, ambiguity and situated knowledge
Learning from Law: the messiness of social-scientific research and pedagogy
Field encounters: sociality matters
Situated practiced mobile field knowledge

**Mobilities**
- The reccy
- The journey
- The border crossing
- Moving the social body in the field
- The individual exploration
- The navigational encounters

**Spaces**
- The private
- The public
- The ‘front’
- The lecture space
- The bar
- The rooms
- The appartment

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**Emotions**
- Tie your legs together as you would in a 3 legged race, do this for 7 minutes as you travel to your next location.
- Get a tourist to take a photograph of the bath of you. Then get a photograph with this tourist.
- Use the needle to select. For the act a make a barrier.
- Observe tourists until you encounter one facing a barrier.
Ambiguities and tensions: multiple registers enrolled in the field

- The academic
- The technical
- The poetic
- The creative
- The political
- The economic

A ludic approach to research questions, empowers and enrolls
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