

Enhancing Fieldwork Futures: race and inclusion in Geography fieldtrips

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Introduction

Fieldwork is integral to studying Geography. It is recognized in the QAA Subject Benchmark (2022) and in the requirements for accreditation by the professional body (RGS-IBG, no date). Fieldwork has pedagogical and social benefits (Marvell and Sim 2018; Stokes *et al.* 2011; Wheeler *et al.* 2011). Maximising out-of-class academic experiences increases informal interactions among students and staff, enabling the development of 'field-based learning communities' (Skop, 2014). However, recent research has exposed counter-narratives to this, in terms of **inclusivity and accessibility** for participants, particularly in relation to 'protected characteristics' (UK Equality Act, 2010) such as race (Foster, 2021; Hughes, 2016), disability (Lawrence and Dowey, 2022) and sexuality (Sou, 2021).

This project draws upon interviews with students to explore **how Geography fieldwork can be made more accessible and inclusive to Global Ethnic Majority students.**

Geography education within the UK has been dominated by the interests of white, heterosexual, cis-gender, middle-class men, "creating disproportionately white spaces in classrooms and universities" (Black Geographers, 2021, n.p.). It is important to decolonise the discipline and make it more diverse and inclusive (Black Geographers, 2020, 2021; Stern *et al.*, 2022).

Methodology

Online **semi-structured interviews** were carried out with seven current or recent Geography undergraduate students who self-identified as Global Ethnic Majority.

They were recruited through an advert shared via social media (LinkedIn, Instagram, Twitter).

Most had studied at the University of Northampton, so had had similar fieldwork experiences. All had taken part in day trips in the UK; some had been on residential trips within the UK or overseas.

Thematic analysis of the interviews was conducted.

Table 1 Characteristics of participants

| | Ethnic Background | Religious Background | Gender |
|---|-------------------------|----------------------|--------|
| 1 | Asian - Afghanistan | Not Religious | Male |
| 2 | Asian - Chinese | Not Religious | Female |
| 3 | Asian - Pakistani | Muslim | Female |
| 4 | Black Caribbean | Christian | Male |
| 5 | Asian - Pakistani | Muslim | Male |
| 6 | Black Caribbean | Christian | Female |
| 7 | White and Black African | Not Religious | Female |



Most undergraduate Geography programmes in the UK include fieldtrips to natural environments. However, there is much evidence that Global Ethnic Majority populations feel excluded in such spaces (Foster, 2021; Black Geographers, 2021). Undergraduate Geography fieldtrips tend to involve group projects, and residential trips may involve working, living and eating with others in unfamiliar spaces (sometimes overseas) for a week or two at a time. Whilst some trips may be optional, there will be compulsory fieldtrips in every UK Geography degree.

Findings and Recommendations

1. Religion and Culture

Dietary Considerations:

- Muslim students may have requirements that they may fear will not be met while on field trips.
- Halal food can be hard to find in some fieldwork locations, so students may need to prepare food and snacks or only eat vegetarian options. (Although some participants indicated that they do not always trust the vegetarian option to be kept fully separate.)
- Participants negotiated these issues in different ways:
 - "It is something I have to consider, I wouldn't say it necessarily puts me off, I just have to do extra preparation... thinking of places I can eat before, there is usually something to eat, but not always a whole meal" (P3)
 - "I may have cheated a few times" (P5)

Religious Events:

- The timing of fieldtrips may coincide with religious events. For example: Participant 5 mentioned that his family members discouraged him from attending an international fieldtrip occurring over the first two weeks of Ramadan.

Recommendations:

- Ask students if there are religious or cultural considerations that staff should be aware of.
- Consider the **timing** of fieldtrips around religious holidays and festivals.
- Research the **dietary options** available in advance to help ensure they meet the needs of the students or provide students with information that may help them to prepare in advance.
- Make sure there is separate space available for a **prayer** room.
- Ensure separate **accommodation** is provided for different gender identities.

2. Groupwork

- Having a group that you work well with can often determine how enjoyable a field trip is.
- A common theme was the importance of being able to choose who is in your group.
 - "I think your group is a big factor... you need a group that supports you and you feel comfortable with, which will give you confidence and you will feel more safe" (P2).
- Being able to choose who to room with was also important, with Participant 6 wanting to share with other Global Ethnic Majority students because she felt she had commonalities with them:
 - "we were put into rooms with random students, that some of us did not socialise with... this made me want to ask to be put into a room with a specific person in the future because it would make me feel more comfortable. This is due to having more commonalities with fellow black women" (P6)
- Increased staff awareness of how Global Ethnic Majority students may experience things differently was also seen to be important:
 - "Being aware of the difference in the experiences we have to our white peers and the issues that come along with it, understanding the subliminal messages that strangers may say, being more aware of that would be helpful" (P7).

Recommendations:

- Improve staff and Global Ethnic Minority student knowledge to **enhance understanding** of discriminatory behaviour and microaggressions: "Being open to having that discussion about the experiences of ethnic minorities with other students is the biggest step" (P4).
- Foster staff and student **dialogue with representatives from diverse communities** (e.g. through speaking with representatives of religious societies and Global Ethnic Majority students who have taken part in previous fieldtrips).

3. Student Voice

- Participants felt that students should have more input when it comes to planning field trips to help people feel comfortable:
 - "If students could have more of an input as to what the field trips were about, or where we were going, and how long for, and the time of year, because the field trips that were residential were more difficult to enjoy, because we had other assignments and lectures that we would be missing and have to catch up on" (P7)
 - "when it is student-led, it brings that social inclusion aspect into it" (P4)

Recommendations:

- Include students in the fieldtrip planning process.
- Staff could be open to suggestions about places to go. It was suggested that staff and/or students could propose a selection of destinations and then put these to a vote amongst the student body.

4. Financial Considerations

- Students are often expected to contribute financially to cover the costs of fieldtrips.
- Race and/or cultural background can intersect with financial considerations to impact the accessibility of fieldtrips.
 - "Ethnic minorities are told that the trips may be expensive or dangerous, so they may say they cannot afford it as the reason by their parents... parents often do not understand the value of field trips" (P4).

Recommendations:

- Explore the possibility of financial schemes to provide **subsidies** to reduce costs.
- Participant 4 suggested that students who are consistently getting good grades and working hard throughout the year could be offered **grants or bursaries** that can assist with the cost of field trips.

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