

Teaching and learning in multi-cultural classrooms: Host report for consortium visit to the University of Stavanger during 2-4 February 2022 to observe and engage with teaching on the MEE210 course – Siddharth Sareen, Bérénice Girard, Pattamawan Zilli | 21.04.2022

The visit was centred on the first module of the second semester Master level course MEE210, entitled ‘Governing energy transitions’, as part of an interdisciplinary Master in Energy Environment and Society. The course was offered for the first time and consortium members observed and engaged with it for two days. Course coordinator Siddharth Sareen and lecturer Bérénice Girard as well as pedagogical expert Pattamawan Zilli served as hosts. Registered visitors included Larissa Curi, Meena Gaikwad, Nellija Titova, Irina Sennikova, Lina Zirnele, Vaiva Chockeviciute, L. Paraukiene, Christa Tigerstedt, Susanna Fabricius, Jesper Boesen, Tobias Samuelsson, Anneli Rumm, Mare Kurvits, Karin Kuimet and the project coordinator Katrin Eha, of whom most were able to visit despite the challenging pandemic circumstances.

Course MEE210, 'Governing energy transitions', uses the ‘solar turn’ in energy transition as an entry point to understand the conjuncture of institutional, relational and material change. Varying spatial and scalar configurations of solar uptake are unpacked and analysed in relation to (a) the diverse effects they imply within particular political economic contexts, and (b) the insights they provide about these contexts. Students discuss different conceptual and analytical approaches to apprehend the relationship between energy and society, and problematise the nature of participation, engagement and decision-making in energy transitions. Course deliverables include a 30 minute oral presentation and a 3,000 word conceptual essay on accountability as a lens onto the governance of energy transitions.

The visit commenced with this agenda for Wednesday 2nd February:

9-12 observation of teaching
12-15 lunch meeting
18-21 networking dinner

Module 1 covered the ‘solar turn’, focused on key concepts and methodology. Proceedings began with a tour de table, with course faculty introducing themselves and the elective course, which is intended to enable a small group of students working intensively. Classroom observers introduced themselves as visitors from several Baltic states as part of the Nordplus project. Introductions included main individual interest for the day and on a lighter note one unexpected thing about oneself.

The first hour covered several key concepts for the course. An overview is included here to give a sense of substantive content:

- Low-carbon transitions – decarbonisation
- Equity, justice, exclusion, dispossession – societal impact
- Energy geographies – scales, places, situatedness
- Governance – levels, frameworks, relationships
- Ontologies – smart, digitalisation, interconnectedness
- Institutions – formal, informal, local, diffused, values

- Markets – forms, ideologies, commodification
- Individuals, collectives – complex, differentiated, evolving
- Speed – rapidity, acceleration, path dependence, urgency

This was followed by a discussion of assigned module readings, followed by a logistical overview of the course setup throughout the semester. This was aimed at providing students with a clear sense of the structure and underlying purpose and to ensure aligned expectations from the outset. Headline course deliverables were also introduced and explained. Slides for both are included below. This background, also available in the course description in a summary manner, enabled the students and observers to get a firm grasp of the pedagogical approach and rationale to be followed throughout the course.

Logistical overview

- Module I
 - 2.2 - 9-12: key concepts, logistical overview, how to build an argument
 - 3.2 - 9-14: outlining exercise, deconstruction, classroom observation feedback
 - 4.2 - 12-14: idea pitching and discussion
- Module II
 - 21.3 - 9-12: oral presentations based on 1,000 word argument outline
 - 23.3 - 9-12: questions and discussion based on peer review exercise
- Module III
 - 4.4 - 9-12: discussion of work in progress in relation to course curriculum
 - 6.4 - 9-12: final reflections on governing energy transitions before submission

Course deliverables

- 1,000 word argument outline: due 28.2 (not evaluated, but required)
- Peer review: 20% (two sets of feedback of 500 words each on the 1,000 word argument outlines of peers on their chosen topics)
 - Due 14.3 via Canvas
- Oral presentation: 30% (15-minute presentation followed by a discussion in plenary based on your submitted argument outline)
 - During sessions on 21.3 and 23.3
- 3,000 word long-form essay: 50% (on your chosen topic, engaging with course curriculum and based on own additional reading)
 - Due 12.4 (one week after the final classroom session scheduled for 6.4)

This was followed by a session on how to build an argument, which talked through the principles of essay writing, focusing on the main competence that the course aims to develop with a broadly defined theme.

After this observation component, visitors met a larger set of colleagues at the host institution over a lunch meeting at the Department of Media and Social Sciences, featuring faculty members associated with the Master degree programme. A lively exchange ensued, enabling reflections on how courses on the programme are set up and giving visitors a fuller sense of how MEE210 is situated within a broader portfolio available to students as an elective, and its purpose in relation to other offerings. A networking dinner in the evening allowed for more informal exchange among seminar participants in a convivial setting, which was key for ensuring frank and constructive exchanges the following day, key for the visit.

On Thursday 3rd February, we followed this agenda:

9-11 parallel group work

- students on course
- visitors preparing feedback

12-13 multimedia activity for all

13-14 feedback from visitors to the students

14-16 public bus from campus to city and walk along Pedersgata

16-17:30 – Vindmøllebakken study tour on multicultural living

17:30-19:30 debrief on pedagogical observations to feed into MEE210 over dinner

The students spent the second morning on a hands-on exercise, with the course faculty introducing topics, followed by students developing an outline of a thematic argument. This outline was then discussed critically with brief feedback offered, following which the exercise

was reiterated. This included student-led presentations and feedback, modelling at a micro-scale the logic of the whole course.

In parallel, the visitors spent the morning digesting and reflecting upon the previous day's observation and discussion, in order to learn and also to prepare feedback. Thereafter, both groups merged, and watched a short multimedia talk in a cinematic setting booked specifically for this purpose: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L1dOAgfcZk8>. Ahead of this screening, students were provided these questions to guide deconstruction of the argumentation in the video:

- What were the main points of the argument?
- Sum up the overarching argument in a couple of sentences
- Is there a particularly strong visual that helped emphasize it?
- Was the use of rhetoric effective and why?
- Could you identify flaws and/or gaps in the argument?
- If you were to give this talk, how would you improve the argument?

The students came up on stage to address these questions individually after the exercise, and then the classroom flipped to listen to the visitors reflect on takeaways from their observation. These reflections were especially useful for a course running for the first time, and overwhelmingly positive, yet with many useful pointers from pedagogical practices of others in their institutional settings and on diverse topics. Subsequently, the course faculty and students held a discussion session where the students pitched initial ideas for their course essay, based on this guidance:

- What is the real-world relevance of the question?
- How will you approach outlining a good argument?
- What sort of scholarship will you look for and how?
- What data are important for a powerful argument?
- Is it a feasible task within the course timeline?
- What do you hope to get from the writing process?

The remainder of the visit involved a study tour for the visitors to gain a sense of the local context, visiting an innovative sustainable housing collective for a guided tour of a mode of multicultural living. Subsequent to this, it became natural to have a debrief in a convivial setting, so this was advanced to the same evening although originally planned for the next morning, also with a view to practical arrangement as some participants were departing early on the third day.

Overall, the visit was generative on several counts. The course offered a mode of convening our collective attention to discuss pedagogical aspects (including quite practical and logistical ones that are part of the framing conditions of multicultural classrooms). Having relatively specialised material brought out in a relatable way through a focus on argument construction also enabled wider engagement, drawing visitors into the discussions during their observation. For the course faculty and pedagogical expert as the hosts, organising the visit merged with the experience of planning and reflecting on course implementation, making this a highly reflexive process. In addition, an in-person visit with many friendly participants engendered collaborative relationships. This bodes well for the rest of the Nordplus project for the whole consortium.