Teaching feminist geographies in the Netherlands. Learning from student-led fieldtrips

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Abstract

In this paper, the authors reflect on the use of student-led fieldtrips as an example of feminist pedagogy in a feminist geography course, a joint course by the universities of Amsterdam and Groningen in The Netherlands. The paper is a co-production of three lecturers and one student of this course and therefore includes teachers' as well as students' views. The authors conclude that student-led fieldtrips are a successful means of bringing in an explicit feminist pedagogy in teaching gender geography. Students were able to help shape the course using their own everyday experiences and interests and were able to contextualize their experiences in relation to theory explored in the classroom. This result is particularly important within the context of geography teaching in Dutch universities in which an empirical and policy oriented focus and a masculine model of teaching and learning dominates.

Key words: student-led field trips, feminist pedagogy, gender geography, universities in The Netherlands.

Resum. *Ensenyant geografies feministes als Països Baixos. Aprenentatge a través del treball de camp conduït per l'alumnat*

En aquest article, les autores reflexionen sobre l'ús dels treballs de camp conduïts per l'alumnat com un exemple de pedagogia feminista en un curs de geografia feminista impartit per les universitats d'Amsterdam i de Groningen, als Països Baixos. L'article és una coproducció entre tres professores titulars i una estudiant d'aquest curs, per tant, inclou la visió del professorat i de l'alumnat. Les autores conclouen que els treballs de camp conduïts per l'alumnat són una forma excel·lent d'introduir explícitament la pedagogia feminista en l'ensenyament de la geografia del gènere. L'alumnat va ser capaç de contribuir a modificar el curs utilitzant les seves experiències quotidianes i els seus interessos, com també de contextualitzar aquestes experiències en relació amb la teoria explorada a classe. Aquest resultat és particularment important en el context de l'ensenyament de la geografia a les uni-

versitats neerlandeses, on predomina una orientació empírica i política i un model masculí d'ensenyament i aprenentatge.

Paraules clau: treball de camp, alumnat, pedagogia feminista, geografia i gènere, universitats dels Països Baixos.

Resumen. *Enseñando geografías feministas en los Países Bajos. Aprendizaje a través del trabajo de campo conducido por el alumnado*

En este artículo, las autoras reflexionan sobre el uso de los trabajos de campo conducidos por el alumnado como un ejemplo de pedagogía feminista en un curso de geografía feminista impartido por las universidades de Amsterdam y de Groningen, en los Países Bajos. El artículo es una coproducción entre tres profesoras titulares y una estudiante de este curso, por lo tanto, incluye la visión del profesorado y del alumnado. Las autoras concluyen que los trabajos de campo conducidos por el alumnado son una forma excelente de introducir explícitamente la pedagogía feminista en la enseñanza de la geografía del género. El alumnado fue capaz de contribuir a modificar el curso utilizando sus experiencias cotidianas y sus intereses, así como de contextualizar estas experiencias en relación con la teoría explorada en clase. Este resultado es particularmente importante en el contexto de la enseñanza de la geografía en las universidades neerlandesas, donde predomina una orientación empírica y política y un modelo masculino de enseñanza y aprendizaje.

Palabras clave: trabajo de campo, alumnado, pedagogía feminista, geografía y género, universidades de los Países Bajos.

Résumé. *Enseignant des géographies féministes aux Pays-Bas. Apprentissage à travers le travail de terrain conduit par des étudiants*

Dans cet article les auteurs réfléchissent autour de l'usage du travail de terrain conduit par les étudiants comme un exemple de pédagogie féministe dans un cours de géographie féministe des Universités d'Amsterdam et de Groningen, aux Pays-Bas. L'article est une co-production parmi trois professeurs titulaires et une étudiante de ce cours, par conséquent, inclut la vision du professorat et des étudiants. Les auteurs déduisent que le travail de terrain conduit par les étudiants est une forme excellente d'introduire explicitement la pédagogie féministe dans l'enseignement de la géographie du genre. Les étudiants ont été capables de contribuer dans la modification du cours en utilisant leurs expériences quotidiennes et intérêts et de mettre en contexte ces expériences par rapport à la théorie explorée en classe. Ce résultat est particulièrement important dans le contexte de l'enseignement de la géographie dans les universités néerlandaises où prédomine une orientation empirique et politique et un modèle masculin d'enseignement et apprentissage.

Mots clé: travail de terrain, étudiants, pédagogie féministe, géographie et genre, universités aux Pays-Bas.

Summary

Introduction

In this paper we reflect on our use of fieldtrips, organized by students, in teaching feminist geography in the Netherlands. We contextualize this evaluation with an analysis of the position of feminist perspectives in Dutch geography and a discussion of our joint attempts to offer a course on feminist geographies in the Netherlands. Indeed, despite what some outsiders might expect of a country known as progressive and liberal[1], it has proven extremely difficult to develop feminist approaches in Dutch geographies and to create and sustain such courses on feminist geographies at Dutch Universities. Geography in the Netherlands has a stronger empirical and policy focus and is, in general, less «abstract» and «critical» than geography, in particular, in the UK. In addition, popular perceptions of gender issues and emancipation in the Netherlands suggest that the emancipation question has been largely solved. Students considering taking the Gender, Culture and Space course as part of the bachelor curriculum in geography then are likely to have a more quantitative than qualitative, and a more applied than theoretical orientation. At the same time, they would have been less confronted with issues of exclusion and inequality on the basis of gender, unless they are from an ethnic minority background.

The first section presents a history of gender and feminist geography in the Netherlands. The second section discusses feminist pedagogy. We then introduce the course Gender, Culture and Space that was offered as a joint effort by lecturers at the University of Groningen and the University of Amsterdam in Spring 2008. The fourth section describes the student-led fieldtrips from the perspective of the students. Last but not least, we explore some of the «lessons learned» from this experience in the concluding section.

Desperately seeking feminist geography in The Netherlands

Feminist geography in the Netherlands seems to lag behind the United Kingdom and the United States in terms of researching gender issues and including

1. At least until recently. See Buruma 2006 for the discussion of the two recent political murders (Pim Fortuyn in 2002, Theo Van Gogh in 2004) and the changing political debate about multiculturalism and tolerance.

gender perspectives in teaching geography. In both the UK and the US, feminist geography has moved from making women visible (e.g. «On not excluding the other half» —Monk and Hanson, 1982) to a critical engagement with underlying political structures and a strong theoretical focus. It is hard to imagine any current geography handbook or reader that does not demonstrate an influence by feminist geographers in terms of geographic issues, theories and methods (Mitchell, 2000; Agnew et al., 2003; Anderson et al., 2003; Blunt et al., 2003; Duncan et al., 2003; Flint and Taylor, 2006; Agnew and Mamadouh, 2008; Johnson, 2008). Dutch Geography does embrace a diversity of human experience but is somewhat in denial still in relation to the significance of feminist thinking (and teaching) in Geography. This has not always been the case.

As Linda Peake has demonstrated in an overview of feminist geography teaching in 1989, Dutch geography was one of the forerunners. The University of Amsterdam introduced an elective course «Geographical Women's Studies» as early as 1983. A few years later the departments of geography at the Universities of Utrecht and Nijmegen introduced short courses and lecture series on «women's issues» as it was called at that time. However, feminist geography teaching was initiated by feminist students and by staff with part-time and/or temporary positions and most initiatives disappeared after a few years. The elective course at the geography department of the University of Amsterdam was the only initiative that survived without interruption until 2000, but ceased to exist because of decreasing numbers of students.

The group of feminist geographers at the University of Amsterdam initiated an international network for gender studies in geography as part of the ERASMUS programme of the European Union (Droogleever Fortuijn, 2002). Between 1990 and 1998 this network organised a one week intensive course «Geography and Gender» each year. The network was a joint program of 6 European universities, characterized by varied and innovative teaching methods in a multicultural setting (Garcia-Ramon and Monk, 1997; see also special issues on gender of *Documents d'Anàlisi Geogràfica*, 1995 and 1999). The program ran successfully for several years, but, after its eighth year, capitulated to the lack of financial support.

In 2004, a new attempt at reviving gender studies in geography was initiated at the University of Groningen where a course was organized as a result of a temporary Chair in Gender and Geography: Gender, Culture and Space (see van Hoven, 2009). The British/American feminist geographer Janet Momsen was appointed at this chair in 2004/5. The course initially took the shape of a one-week English-spoken intensive course with a variety of (international) guest lecturers and teaching styles. In spite of positive evaluations by students and a considerable number of student registrations for the course at first, the course struggled in its second year, retaining only five Master students. In 2006, therefore, the last gender course in geography in the Netherlands was at the verge to disappear.

The transformation in feminist geography in the Netherlands from forerunner to lagging behind can be understood in relation to the specific char-

acteristics of Dutch academic geography at the one hand and the Dutch policy context at the other hand. First, Musterd and de Pater (2003) characterised human geography in the Netherlands as an applied and practical science, historically strongly imprinted by spatial planning and regional-economic policy rather than an interest in socio-cultural processes. Even though a key objective guiding research in Dutch human geography has been «the effort to eradicate poverty in underprivileged areas» (p. 549), poverty was analysed from an economic rather than social perspective. Indeed, Musterd and de Pater reiterate the lack of social and cultural issues in Dutch human geography by revisiting its historical roots and by pointing to H.J. Keuning, who was appointed professor of Human Geography at the University of Groningen in 1949. Keuning emphasised that «social and cultural patterns that could not be associated with the actual object of human geography —the quest for affluence of the human group populating a region- were of no interest to human geographers» (p. 550). Although critiqued by some, this view has been influential in the development of Dutch geography. Overall, Musterd and de Pater characterise Dutch geography as «wary of the post-modern slant» and «cling[ing] to the practical, social relevance of their discipline» (p. 555). They note that it is receptive to new ideas but «also sufficiently established to uphold its own style of scholarship» and that «refusal to get carried away with new trends may very well lead to an interesting course in the end» (p. 555). Although Musterd and de Pater give a positive twist to their conclusion, it could equally be argued that research and teaching in Dutch geography has perhaps remained rather static. In this context, it must also be noted that the relevance of the discipline and style of scholarship has largely been defined by male geographers. Only 19% of all human geography faculty are women and most women are in the lower echelons of the academic hierarchy (Droogleever Fortuijn, 2004). A few Dutch geographers are engaged in feminist geography, however, the total number of feminist geographers is very low, some of them work part-time and all are engaged in other issues as well. As a result, there is little space for courses that are labelled as «gender and geography» courses, although some geography lecturers do include gender issues in regular courses and introduce a more critical and personal(ised) approach to research and teaching enabling the discipline to become more self-reflexive, politically engaged and diverse.

Second, gender issues are not very prominent in social and political debates and the overall discourse is that the emancipation question is more or less solved. The most recent Nota Emancipation by the Dutch government (2007) addresses four emancipation issues: gender division of paid and unpaid work, the position of girls and women in ethnic minority groups, violence against girls and women, and gender discrimination worldwide. With respect to education, young women in the Netherlands are performing better than young men: more women than men complete higher education. The division of paid and unpaid work is still highly gendered, although men are becoming more involved in child care and housework and work more often part-time than they used to do. The labour market participation rate of Dutch women is

somewhat higher than the average participation rate in the European Union, but in contrast with all other countries of the EU, the majority (two third) of Dutch women works part-time. The Dutch government aims to stimulate women to work more hours, but primarily for economic, not for emancipation reasons. Emancipation is primarily targeted at ethnic minority women and women in developing countries: at «other» women.

As a result, students who are considering taking elective courses are not very inclined to elect a course on gender and geography. The applied and practical character of Dutch geography prevents students to elect a critical, reflexive conceptual course. And the lack of attention for emancipation and gender issues in the public debate and the lack of personal experiences with gender discrimination discourage participation in a gender course. Students who replied to an email requesting information on why they decided not to take the course after all felt that a specific focus on gender (which in their view equals «women») in geography was thought to be overstated. One student (in 2004) commented: «the Netherlands, and definitely my generation, is in a special position regarding gender. This position is, according to me, one of equality» (see van Hoven, 2009).

It is in this context that lecturers of the Faculty of Spatial Sciences in Groningen and the Department of Geography, Planning and International Development Studies of the University of Amsterdam took the initiative to organize a feminist geography course as a joint program. By pooling students and staff, we were able to realize a course with a focus on critical, reflexive and conceptual issues and with a participatory pedagogy that characterizes feminist teaching. «Student-led fieldtrips» was an important method that proved to be an interesting and important opportunity for us to reflect on the desired and actual approach to teaching gender issues in geography. In this article, we discuss the role of student-led fieldtrips, and specifically opportunities and limitations, in enacting feminist pedagogy in the course Gender, Culture and Space. It is important to emphasize that this article is a co-production of three lecturers and one student of this course. The article thus echoes calls to include student voices in published research as a «logical extension of feminist pedagogical practices» (Coate Bignell, 1996: 316).

Feminist pedagogy and the entrepreneurial model of education

Feminist pedagogy is understood to be concerned with gaining an insight into gender relations and making these visible (Webber, 2006). There is an explicit mission of stimulating social change in society at large but also in the classroom. Therefore, an important aspect of feminist pedagogy is to actively involve students, and experiences grounded in their own life worlds, in the teaching programme as such experiences are perceived as a learning resource for all. Using students' own experiences as learning resources highlights the role of positionality in producing knowledge and helps illustrate ways in which the personal is political. By linking experiences of individual students and, in

turn, linking these to the literature, underlying mechanisms can be identified which may effect gender-differentiated experiences in different places (around the world) in similar ways. Last but not least, using personal experiences is beneficial in attempting to raise consciousness and ultimately «transform [students] from passive recipients of knowledge to active knowers who see themselves as agents of social change» (Webber, 2006: 455). Several authors have pointed at difficulties in achieving this aim of empowerment and mobilisation. Large classes make it challenging to involve students actively and invite them to discuss their own experiences. Even in small classes, students may resist speaking freely, for example, due to underlying expectations that their lecturers are the experts or the fact that they will receive a mark for their course which they do not wish to jeopardize by being confrontational. Webber (2006) also maintains that «there is a learning process that needs to happen [first] for the students to learn how to theorize their own experiences» (p. 462). Furthermore, some students are more inclined to become social agents of change than others. Marchbank et al.'s article (2003) based on a conference paper titled «I don't want to be empowered, just give me a reading pack» is a good illustration of this.

In the discussion of barriers to implementing feminist pedagogy, the masculine model of teaching and learning receives much criticism. In this model, students are judged based on the degree to which they understand and reproduce the lecturer's (or course handbook's) definition of truth. Although independent thinking is encouraged, it is encouraged once the «official interpretation» is thoroughly understood (Marchbank et al., 2003: 79). This masculine model is appropriate in the context of developments which force higher education «into the entrepreneurial spirit of the market». Students invest in their education and expect this to be successful. In order to be successful, they need to receive a degree which is given on the basis of a number of passed assignments and examinations. Lambert and Parker (2006) note that this «banking concept of education» reduces teaching and learning «to the act of teachers depositing knowledge *in* or *upon* students for them to store and reproduce, leaving no opportunity for dialogue, critical exploration, reflexivity and praxis» (p. 471). Ultimately, they claim, students are reduced to consumers and teachers as providers of a service (see also Parker and Jary (1995) on the «McUniversity»).

The Gender, Culture and Space course therefore aims to combine a feminist geography content with a feminist pedagogy, focussing on participatory learning and teaching and relating personal experiences with theoretical knowledge.

Course approach and organisation

The course was a joint program of the University of Groningen and the University of Amsterdam and was taught partly in Groningen and partly in Amsterdam, by lecturers of these universities and guest lecturers from abroad. Given

that the course was organized by two Faculties with broad thematic orientations[2], it was conceived as an interdisciplinary course on the concept of gender, the gendered nature of social, cultural, political, economic and demographic features and developments. The relations between gender, space and society were to be discussed from a geographical perspective. Specifically, the course aimed to explore ways in which gender roles, gender relations and gender identities are defined differently in different societies and how women and men are put in different places in different societies. In addition to a general introduction to gender in geography, the course included cases based on ongoing research at both universities. Themes include home and work, cities, urban public spaces, demography, mobility, masculinities, representation, war, nations and empire (see appendix 1 for the complete programme).

Considering the travel requirements for the students (the train ride between Amsterdam and Groningen takes approximately 2 hours and a half) the course was organized in four full days, rather than two hours per session per week: two days in Groningen and two days in Amsterdam so that students had to travel only twice. This facilitated a variety of teaching methods including lectures; discussion initiated by viewing a documentary, and by analyzing gender aspects of army websites and body counts websites and war pictures awarded in the World Press Photo contest; out-of-classroom observation exercises; and the student-led fieldtrips.

The group of students was diverse, with third-year bachelor students and master students, geography students and students from other disciplines and Dutch students and exchange students from other countries (see table 1). This diversity provided the opportunity to include issues of cultural, national and academic diversity in the discussions.

Assignments

Students received several assignments throughout their course ranging from an ungraded «ice-breaker» assignment (see below) and reading assignments to a graded essay and take-home exam. Master students were required to conduct a project on gender-differentiated experiences in the workplace «university» as well.

In addition to developing an understanding of relations between gender, space and society and being able to explain concepts addressed during the course, our aim was to involve the students' personal life-worlds and experi-

2. The Faculty of Spatial Sciences at the University of Groningen includes the departments of economic geography, cultural geography, environment and infrastructure planning and populations studies. The Department of Geography, Planning and International Development Studies is part of the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences of the University of Amsterdam and includes urban geography, political and cultural geography, economic geography, environmental geography, demography, urban and regional planning, transport and infrastructure planning and international development studies.

Table 1. Students population in the Gender, Culture and Space course 2006-2007 and 2007-2008

	Total number of students
Female	9
Male	5
Bachelor	9
Master	5
Geography	11
Non-geography*	3
Dutch	11
Foreign**	3

*Students with a major in heritage studies (1), planning (1) and urban design architecture (1).
** Exchange students from Italy (1), Norway (1) and the United States (1).

ences. Opportunities for this were given in the ungraded assignments. For example, students were asked to share responses to the following questions (as part of the «ice-breaker assignment») during the first class:

1. What is your academic and personal background? Try to relate your background from a gender perspective. What is the meaning of space and place in your background?
2. What do you expect from the course in relation to your major?
3. Could you give an example of gender bias or neglecting gender in an academic book, article or lecture?
4. Could you give an example of gender bias, neglecting gender or gender discrimination in your personal experiences?

In addition, every meeting involved a literature assignment that allowed students to use their own experiences in making sense of the literature. Students were asked to read at least one of the articles on the course list per meeting and formulate in no more than 200 words:

1. One of the core arguments in the chapters.
2. One relevant and critical question in relation with this argument.
3. One example that illustrates this argument.

The above assignments offered students an entry point to sharing some of their own experiences and left it up to the student whether this would be an example/ observation (as student 1 noted) or an opinion/ disagreement (as student 2 shows). The fact that the assignments did not receive a mark contributed perhaps to creating a space for personal opinions.

Student 1 observed: «I still see a difference between [parents] when it comes to the kind of activities they conduct with their children. My own experiences

is […] usually fathers spend much more time with the kids in physical activities outdoors […] The mothers seem to be more carers, watcher, more associated with indoor interaction with children».

Another student (2) critically discussed some of the literature on masculinities. He wrote: «In my opinion a man is not better off leaving his male role. Why would it be wrong? If it is a form of self-alienation, like Hartley argues, then wouldn't it be more unhealthy to leave your male role? Some things are decided, no matter how, and following those patterns should bring you only good».

A third type of unmarked assignment was the «student-led fieldtrip». In the remainder of this article, we focus on the content and evaluation of these fieldtrips.

Student-led fieldtrips[3]

Two kinds of fieldtrips were part of the study program of the course «Gender, Culture & Space»: a fieldtrip to a department store and student-led fieldtrips. The first fieldtrip took place during the first day in Amsterdam. It served as an introduction to how everyday situations can be observed and analyzed from a gender perspective. Furthermore it made the students familiar with feminist teaching methods, something they do not encounter often within geography in Dutch universities. During the fieldtrips, the students went to one of the biggest department stores of Amsterdam together with the lecturers (Joos Droogleever Fortuijn and guest lecturer Tovi Fenster). The students were asked to analyze gendered spaces within the building, paying attention to a female biased place, a male biased place and a gender neutral place. Within the setting of the department store, the students were able to link their personal observations about gendered spaces to the general concepts of gender and consumption. One student thus observed:

> We are unconsciously manipulated by our surroundings: gender plays a very important role in the Western consumption oriented societies (Sanne, female, Amsterdam.[4, 5]

During this first fieldtrip students were encouraged to add their personal observations and experiences to the theories learned in class. This approach was reiterated through the assignment to organize student led fieldtrips.

3. Wike wrote this section discussing and reflecting on the student-led fieldtrips. She did this with the help of other course participants who communicated their experiences to Wike by email.
4. The names used are fictional.
5. Students were asked to answer some open questions about the student led fieldtrips by email. Quotes found in this section originate from replies to this email.

In the second half of the course, the students were asked to develop a fieldtrip in their university town (Amsterdam or Groningen) taking gendered aspects of the city into account. They were asked to pay special attention to the intersection of gender with other characteristics that impact on processes of inclusion and exclusion such as age, sexuality, race and ethnicity, ability, social class, etc. The students formed three groups: one in Amsterdam and two in Groningen (of which one was comprised of third-year bachelor students and one of master students). The students had a considerable amount of freedom to shape the fieldtrips according to their own thoughts and wishes: they could determine the route, themes and way to discuss these themes as long as they were related to gender and the total length of the fieldtrip did not exceed one hour. This format allowed the students to include their own experiences and thoughts related to gender.

The way in which the students developed their fieldtrips shows that the format of the assignment indeed encouraged the students to include their own experiences and preferences. The students indicated that they started to develop their fieldtrips by brainstorming about which specific neighbourhood to pick and about the gendered spaces located in this specific neighbourhood. Students often came up with locations which represented a gendered space to them, because they were personally familiar with the location. John, for example, explains:

> The pool centre is a place I often visit myself. Therefore I know from my own experiences that more men than women visit the place (John, male, Groningen)[6].

The students felt that leisure locations in general are often gendered because the public using the location is either biased towards males or females. The quote above about the pool centre emphasizes this experience. Interestingly, the representation of the location in the media also led to its inclusion in the route, even though students did not have personal experiences at the location. This was the case, for example, for the selection of the neighbourhood in which the Amsterdam fieldtrip would take place, i.e. the Bijlmer (in Amsterdam Southeast). Anne notes:

> We came up with the Bijlmer, because of its reputation as a dangerous, woman-unfriendly Area (Anne, female, Amsterdam).

The Bijlmer, a high rise extension neighbourhood constructed in the 1970s, has a negative reputation that reaches beyond the city, as is illustrated by the national press and television (Paulle, 2005). The neighbourhood is well known because a plane crashed in the middle of it in October 1992. Because of the

6. Original quote in Dutch: «Het poolcentrum is een café waar ik zelf regelmatig kom en ik weet dus uit ervaring dat er meer mannen dan vrouwen komen».

extensive media attention until long after the plane crash, even students from Groningen would have some expectations about the place. This distinguished the fieldtrip in Amsterdam from the fieldtrips in Groningen; the students from Groningen taking part in the fieldtrip to the Bijlmer had some expectations beforehand, while the students from Amsterdam probably did not have such expectations in relation to Groningen.

In addition to personal familiarity and media representation, students selected locations because of the public interest they believed particular places are serving, for example the public library or the market place. Students experienced these locations as gendered, because the public and/or the people offering the service (at certain times of the day and at certain days of the week) were biased towards either male or female. A format the students used to discuss this male/female bias were small, «on the spot» investigations of how many men and women were seen at the particular location performing a certain activity. By asking these questions, the environment was directly part of the topic under study. The focus on the visibility of certain characteristics, like gender, shows that the students mainly think about the actual, physical occurrence of men and women at specific locations when they think about «gendered spaces» in their own environment. Students also focused on the «physical», or embodied aspects when discussing the intersection of gender with other characteristics. For example, during the fieldtrip in Amsterdam, students pointed to the ethnic composition of inhabitants and visitors in certain space. This could be observed by the presence of people on the streets but also «special purposes» buildings such as cultural institutions or the Hindu primary school *Shri Laksmi* we stopped by.

An explanation for the focus by students on visible (gender) biases in the use of places, is that these immediately visible issues distinguish fieldtrips from the discussions inside the classroom. The situation of physically being there, added elements to the analysis: the participants were able to smell, hear and see the topic they were discussing. For example, by visiting the Bijlmer in Amsterdam the participants could see and feel/ sense themselves what the environment was like. Therefore, they could draw conclusions from a broader spectrum of observations, than if the same discussion would have taken place in the classroom. The experiential/«sensorial» dimension was an important input in the discussion whilst, at the same time, the «rational» dimension remained significant since theories learned in class could directly be applied to the environment.

More general discussions about gender emerged when the students took the history of places into account, for example at the public library in Groningen. The public library is located in the city centre. However, until 1990 the building used to be occupied by squatters, then a women's café and a women's library. After 1990 the building was transformed into the public library and the women's café and library were moved to another location, subsidized by the municipality. Recently, the financial support from the municipality stopped because the municipality believed that the emancipation question is solved.

Without financial support, the women's library had to close. By re-telling this story, the students initiated a discussion about whether or not the emancipation question really is solved and whether facilities as a women's library are still needed in today's society.

More recent social developments were also mentioned in the discussions, for example the phenomenon of the «Ladies Night». The term «Ladies Night» is used in the Netherlands by companies to promote certain activities. It is used both for activities were only women are allowed and for activities were women have "for example" free entrance while men have to pay. Discussion about this phenomenon came up during the student-led fieldtrip in Groningen while visiting the cinema and the casino.

> A widely promoted gender discrimination, started at the Holland Casino in the Netherlands […] and is now also used at the cinema's, in disco's and even soccer-clubs, and there are probably more companies willing to apply it: the Ladies Night (John, male, Groningen).

Not everybody agreed to this view. Whilst some students regarded the Ladies Night as a form of gender discrimination, others regarded it to be a clever marketing trick: once you attract the girls to come to your place, the boys will follow. In the discussion, the Ladies Night symbolised broader processes in society, such as sexualisation and commercialization and the way gender plays a role in these processes. Students had the feeling, like they already had during the fieldtrip in the department store, that gender is used as a marketing strategy. After the fieldtrip to the department store and the three student-led fieldtrips, the students came to the conclusion that gender plays a role in many domains of the society.

The combination of observations, personal experiences and abstract thinking within both types of fieldtrips, enabled the students to link their own experiences to more abstract processes, like migration and globalization and place these in a gender perspective. The two types of fieldtrips were complementary to each other. The first fieldtrip showed the students how they can analyze their direct environment from a gender perspective. Because of the detailed questions to be answered during this fieldtrip, the students realized how gender can be analyzed in relation to the (physical) environment in which «it occurs». This knowledge could be used again during the student-led fieldtrips students had to develop themselves. The student-led fieldtrip added to the experience of the first fieldtrip, that while developing the fieldtrip themselves students were encouraged to think about how gender (and other differentiating characteristics) plays a role in their own city. This also somewhat removed the pressure to give «the right» answers. Because it is your own environment and interpretation, there simply is no «wrong», which allowed for more free association and thinking, as well as discussion. On the other hand, because there was no central guidance in developing the student-led fieldtrips, the fieldtrips were often less theory driven and therefore lacked some depth. This was clear

in the discussions which often failed to reach a higher level than the (simple) discussion of visible aspects. More time for discussion between the students and among students and staff during and after the fieldtrips would help to overcome this problem.

Conclusion

Reflecting on the student-led fieldtrips in the context of feminist pedagogy as outlined above, we feel that the fieldtrips have been a successful means of bringing in a more explicit feminist pedagogy in teaching gender geography. As the student view illustrates, students were able to help shape the course using their own everyday experiences and interests. To a certain degree, the course included students' voices, approached students as active knowers and stimulated students' consciousness of their own gendered positionality (Coate Bignell, 1996; Webber, 2006). Students were able to contextualize these experiences, at least to some degree, in relation to theories explored in the classroom and in the course handbook. They found that gender does play an important role in their everyday lives in particular and in Dutch society in general. Having said that, the course overall remained largely influenced by what the lecturers considered to be important which was determined by their research- and perhaps personal backgrounds. In addition, the course still complied with standard assessment methods through essay writing and an exam at the end of the course. This may be an area for experimentation in the next academic year whereby students may, for example, have a greater influence on the themes central to the course and/ or help shape the course assessments.

Writing this article from Amsterdam and Groningen we discovered more than the benefit of student-led excursions to our course. We discovered that in thinking about and teaching gender, more separated us than the geographical distance. Despite a longer collaboration on these common courses we did not realize before how different the two geographical departments were regarding both gender issues and teaching practices. The four authors of this article (born 1951, 1963, 1972 and 1983) also have different perceptions of women's studies, gender geographies and feminist geographies, different association with these practices, positioning themselves closer to a more critical reflexive and conceptual Anglo-American tradition or to a more descriptive quantitative and pragmatic continental tradition. The transmission of past experiences among the national geographers' community appears to be poor. Knowledge of the past experiences of the department in Amsterdam was taken for granted by the older lecturers from Amsterdam, but unknown to the younger geographers from Groningen. Opportunities to address gender issues and feminist perspectives in «mainstream» courses seem also greatly to differ: these issues are addressed in urban geography courses (especially through the lenses of time space geography and the study of public space) and in political and cultural geography (both at the Bachelor and Master level) in Amsterdam but not in Groningen. Less obvious were the different teaching practices between

the two Geography departments. While the student led fieldtrips were special in the Groningen curriculum, such activities are more common in Amsterdam, especially in urban geography and planning classes where Amsterdam provides an excellent playfield[7]. This is only upon writing this article that the lecturers realized that, because we gave advise and feedback only to our own students and attend only the fieldtrips in our own city. In any case, as was noted above, this form of active engagement has been particularly suited to help students to track down, disclose, and reflect upon gender issues in their own environment, especially in the Dutch context where students' first reaction is to see gender issues as unrelated to their own daily lives.

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7. But then again an Italian participant found that these opportunities were less used than in her hometown Milan where students at her school of architecture and planning engage with a specific neighbourhood on a regular basis over a long period of time.

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Appendix 1. The Course programme

Meeting	Time	Teacher	Theme	Teaching method
1 AMS	11-13	Joos Droogleever Fortuijn and Virginie Mamadouh	Introduction	Lecture
1 GRO	13-15	Bettina van Hoven	Introduction	Lecture
2 AMS	11-17	Joos Droogleever Fortuijn	Gender and paid and unpaid work	Lecture
		Tovi Fenster (Tel Aviv University)	Gender, space and everyday life	Lecture
		Joos Droogleever Fortuijn	Gender, space and everyday life	Fieldwork
3 GRO	11-17	Linda McDowell (Oxford University)	Masculinities	Lecture
		Bettina van Hoven	Masculinities	Reading seminar
		Bettina van Hoven	Masculinities	Video-based seminar
4 GRO	11-17	Katie Willis (University of London, Royal Holloway)	Gender and skilled international migration	Lecture
		Janke Klok (University of Groningen, Faculty of Arts)	Gender and the city	Lecture
		Students Groningen	Student-led fieldtrip	Fieldtrip
5 AMS	11-17	Virginie Mamadouh	Gender and the geography of war	Lecture
		Ana Miškovska Kajevska (ASSR, University of Amsterdam)	Nationalism and feminism in the former Yugoslavia	Lecture
		Virginie Mamadouh	Gender and the geography of war	Workshop
		Students Amsterdam	Student-led fieldtrip	Fieldtrip