



Inspiring students in International Land and Water Management: a field course in Spain

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Even though students work more and more in an individual and virtual environment where they sometimes can do courses on physical processes in earth science from behind their computer screen at home, field courses are a component of curricula that cannot be replaced. Field courses, it being excursions or fieldwork courses, are of vital importance to bring the real world to life in the heads of the students. The GIS map needs to become a real world; a discharge measurement needs have tried to push you over in the river.

At Wageningen University, the 1st year MSc students of the curriculum International Land and Water Management have a special kind of field course to conclude their course work year (the second year is largely allocated for internship and thesis work). During a four week intensive course the students get to choose a mini-thesis with a group of 4 to 5 students. The topics of the cases differ from year to year and are chosen on the basis of interest of the lecturers and/or interest of contacts we have in the fieldwork area in the Valencia region in Spain.

In the first week of the course, when we are still in Wageningen, the student write a proposal for the work they intend to do. Some experts are flown in from Spain, and literature is searched for. A lot of literature gathered in previous years is available in an interactive GIS database, where the students can also look into research of student groups of earlier years. In cooperation with the supervisor the proposal is made into a feasible workload for the remaining 3 weeks of the course. In the second week the students are introduced to the larger area during several excursions and to their specific research area and finalize their proposal in the first days in Spain and start the data collection and data analysis period. In the third week they finish the data collection and write their report. The reports are reviewed by the supervisors and finalized with using the feedback given by the supervisors.

This pressure cooker course submerges the students in their research in a way that can only be accomplished when they are away from home, surrounded by their field area. In my opinion these kind of experiences cannot be replaced by on-line/self-study/virtual reality studies, as also senses other than sight and hearing are exposed to the learning environment.