

## WESE©: A Teaching and Learning Experience on Sustainability

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*Abstract:* Walk, Experience, Share, and Enjoy. WESE is the acronym of an experimental teaching method. Over six days, twelve students and I walk the *Via degli Dei* ("Way of the Gods"), crossing the Apennines with our backpacks. This is a course about sustainability, but confined to neither development nor institutional decisions: sustainability, in WESE, also refers to personal choices in everyday life. The goals, therefore, are numerous: introducing students to environmental law (by showing them the environment and its scars), discussing and living sustainability (through group dynamics), rethinking academic relationships and goals (forgetting roles and forming a little, open, community). The article does not aim at providing a short "how-to" guide, even though it shows the path that led to the creation of the method and to its first implementation. It aims at sharing an academic experience that can help in understanding sustainability through a different route, involving not just "skills" but also the ability to connect with others, to live in the territory, and to "feel".

*Keywords:* Sustainability; teaching; learning; walking; method.

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## 1. *Introduction: An Open Invitation\*\**

A few years ago, I decided to experiment with a new type of class to introduce students to the study of environmental law. I wanted my course to be different. Since this paper derives from that experience, I want it to be different as well, both in style and contents, conveying the spirit of the initiative. This is why the reader will find very few, if any, references. This is a paper about building a teaching method first, a law course afterwards, and testing both "on the road". Please read it with an open mind, imagining yourself walking with my students and me. I hope this will help the reader perceive what my students and I share, experience and enjoy.

I have taught this elective, called "Sustainability on the Road", for the last three years at the Faculty of Law of the University of Trento. I created this course following my (hopefully educated) intuition on what teaching might be, trying to step out of my comfort zone. My main focus was, of course, on teaching. At the same time, however, I focused on walking (and sweating) together and on group interaction while living environmental, academic and personal sustainability.

This paper is, and is not, a "how-to" guide. It is not, as the method requires a very personal approach, based on passion, attitude, and a pinch of madness – anyone has their own. Since, however, the course requires steps, efforts and choices, this paper may help you in saving time and avoiding mistakes that I have made, should you decide to try something similar. I hope my experience will inspire you to find your "way". Believe me, it will be rewarding – and fun.

As you will see, the article includes a paragraph written by three students who took part in the first edition of the course. Their contribution is essential, for four reasons. Firstly, the entire course is based on "us", not "me and them": leaving students' voices out would

have betrayed the spirit of the initiative, and I wanted to share with them not only the trek and the course but also what would follow. Secondly, as objective as I may be, I could not express what they have really grasped from the experience. Thirdly, I needed feedbacks: going beyond traditional academic evaluation systems allowed me to understand how much of what I wanted to convey was really absorbed by them. Lastly, I thought that contributions by students would have substantially enriched the paper: they could have perceived something that I had missed and they could have expressed it with a freshness – spontaneity, not naivety – that I may have lost. That turned out to be the case.

## 2. *WESE, and a Different Course*

When I decided to organize a course on sustainable development, I wanted it to be participative and joyful, outdoor and diverse, based on sensations and feelings. Moreover, being rather skeptical about the enduring value of the concept of sustainable development<sup>1</sup>, I was looking for a different teaching perspective. Hence the method, and its four strictly intertwined elements: walking, experiencing, sharing, and enjoying it all.

Firstly, I wanted the course to involve walking, which is good for your body and spirit. It allows you to see things at the right pace, immersing yourself in the environment. If a picture is worth a thousand words, a walking immersion is worth a thousand pictures. In this environment, walking helps to create a close group of people. My goal was to have my group, myself included, not just strolling, but trekking, sweating; effort and fatigue add to the experience.

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\*\* This article stems from an oral presentation at the annual workshop of the IUCN Academy of Environmental Law's Teaching and Capacity Building Committee (University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, July 3, 2018). Nicola Lugaresi wrote paragraphs 1–5 and 7; Laura Barbasetti di Prun wrote subparagraph 6.1; Gaia Lentini wrote subparagraph 6.2; Emanuele Sartori wrote subparagraph 6.3.

1. See Nicola Lugaresi, *The Unbearable Tiredness of Sustainable Development (At Different Levels, Lately)* in Robert V. Percival, Jolene Lin, and William Piermattei (eds.), *Global Environmental Law at a Crossroads* 195–210 (Edward Elgar 2014).

Secondly, I wanted the course to involve experience, which helps not only to understand and to remember what sustainability really is, but also to practice it in everyday and professional life. I wanted my students to experience a different way to learn, study, and consider environmental issues; to be in a class, even outside of a classroom; to interact with companions and people along the road. I wanted my group to sense sustainable tourism, empathy, feelings, sensations, and emotions; to live it all, saving memories.

Thirdly, I wanted my students to share, which is the key to create a group and have it become a community. Sharing trails and words, thoughts and sweat, food and ideas, knowledge and doubts, moods and laughs. Sharing not among "colleagues"<sup>2</sup> anymore, but among friends, buddies. Sharing among ourselves, knocking down barriers between professors and students, making us realize that, despite our different roles, duties and responsibilities, we are not on opposite sides within the educational process. In fact, hierarchy should have no citizenship in academia. Sharing instead of often-toxic competition in the pursuit of often deceiving, empty, unproven "excellence". In short, supportive, collaborative, sustainable academia.

Lastly, I wanted the course to be enjoyable. Enjoyment improves not only mood, but teaching and learning as well. An unwritten rule says that if the professors enjoy themselves, the students enjoy themselves too, remembering and absorbing more. Also, spending six "formal" days together, 24/7, would have been absurd and gloomily tough. I was looking for a different, light, enjoyable toughness.

I also felt that I needed a name for the course and an acronym for the teaching method that I was going to empirically create. I wanted them to be striking and evocative, in order to make the course attractive to the students and acceptable to the faculty where I teach. I chose the name "Sustainability on the Road"<sup>3</sup> and the acronym WESE<sup>4</sup> (Walk, Experience, Share, and Enjoy). Both worked just fine.

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2. The word *collega* ("colleague") can be used in Italian to refer to a university student in relation to his or her peers. It could be argued that this word should not be used in the context of student relationships.

3. The Italian course name is actually "Sostenibilità in cammino", a more literal translation of which could have been either "Sustainability on the Way" or "Walking Sustainability". I found a touch of Kerouac to be nice, even though we were going to walk through woods and hills and not to drive on highways and backroads.

4. I later found out that, in Afrikaans, *wese* means "being", "creature", "essence" (see <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/wese>; last visited October 31, 2019). I liked that.

### 3. *How, Where, and Why*

The idea for the course dawned on me while walking on my own the *Via degli Dei* ("Way of the Gods")<sup>5</sup>, a five-day (on average), eighty-mile hiking trail from Bologna to Florence, across the Apennines. Not an epiphany, maybe, but sudden awareness that the land I was walking through for my personal enjoyment could have been a great stage for a teaching project.

I have stated above the importance of seeing, walking, feeling. One needs, however, a suitable environment to interact with, full of visual sparks, stories, issues, and people. The Way of the Gods delivered, and still delivers these elements. Under an environmental perspective, food for thought is everywhere along the way. The route connects two rich cities in northern-central Italy. It crosses their outskirts, presenting urban environmental issues where social factors are evident and relevant. From Bologna, the starting point, the outskirts merge with the Apennines through porticoes and a big park: sixty miles of trails, woods, hills, fields, and villages. The path then enters Florence, more abruptly, again with streets and outskirts.

Along the path, a number of environmental topics can be considered while walking, seeing the places, and interacting with local people. The "itinerant class" can discuss sustainable tourism, gasoline-free ways of enjoying the environment (such as trekking and mountain biking), and the so-called right to roam. They can discuss the sharing economy and its sustainability: B&Bs and Airbnbs, farm holidays, family restaurants, associations and co-ops, and how they impact local welfare. They can discuss social sustainability, considering history and traditions, how the little towns that went through difficult times in the last decades of the past century have found new nourishment from the Way of the Gods itself. They can discuss transportation and communication routes, be they environment-friendly (for example, trekking trails and country cart tracks) or not (for instance, high-speed rails and highways), and their relationship with the economic and social dimension of sustainability. They can discuss water, as the path follows or crosses rivers, artificial lakes, sluice gates

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5. More on the Way of the Gods at [www.infosasso.it/it/ita-via-degli-dei](http://www.infosasso.it/it/ita-via-degli-dei) (last visited October 31, 2019).

and creeks (some of them dried up). They can discuss energy as they see solar farms, solar panels on roofs, little wind turbines, wind farms atop mountains, and other mountains where wind farm projects have been withdrawn due to residents' protests. They can discuss mining activities and their impact on the landscape, running into quarries and the results of their environmental restoration. They can discuss waste as they come upon landfills, illegal dumps, and recycling sites, observing how (or whether) the trekking trail is respected and maintained. They can discuss the landscape, the woods, the protected areas and the agricultural fields they walk on, as well as the identities of the territories and their communities. Most importantly, they can talk with, and listen to, the residents they meet, trying to understand what sustainable development means for them, what are their needs, hopes and dreams, eventually rethinking the concepts of NIMBY, NIABY, BANANA, YIOBY<sup>6</sup> and other smart acronyms.

This is a perfect location for a law course. The environment crossed by the Way of the Gods is neither the Grand Canyon nor the Dolomites; it is not unspoiled, but a harsher beauty to sense and enjoy, and as such it offers plenty of sustainability issues.

There is more, however: timespan, hardship, people. On average, the Way of the Gods is a five-day trekking. Considering the expenses, teaching and time needed to create a group, five to seven days is the right duration: the group has enough time to detox from the daily routine and attitudes, and fully live a different experience. Walking only a section of a longer trail would not give the same feeling of "wholeness". The Way of the Gods is not exceedingly hard to complete (about 10,000 people walk it every year), but it is tough (not everyone succeeds). It requires preparation and some physical effort, through which the group learns that working hard is the right way to achieve things of value ("No pain, no gain"). Lastly, people living in the Apennines are great workers, welcoming to guests and custodians of interesting stories and traditions. The walking microcosm bowl that often

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6. NIMBY ("Not in My Back Yard"), NIABY ("Not in Anybody's Back Yard") and BANANA ("Build Absolutely Nothing Anywhere Near Anything") are common. YIOBY can have two different, diametrically opposed, meanings: "Yes, In Our Back Yard" or "Yes, In Others' Back Yard".

keeps trekkers prisoners of themselves, and separated from the local communities along the way, is likely to collapse – as it did for us.

In these terms, the difference between a WESE course and a traditional classroom course is huge. There are fewer words, cases, and laws. The theoretical part is reduced, due to time constraints and tiredness, and divided into sections matching what the group sees along the trail. However, according to my perception and my students' feedback over three years, the essence of both environmental law and sustainability is more deeply grasped and assimilated. The difference in learning emerges not only while walking together. In fact, we do have two traditional lectures: an introductory lesson before the departure, and a final lesson once back in Trento. I have found that both these lectures acquire strength because of this experience. The former not only provides a framework, but also helps students enter the appropriate learning mood. The latter not only wraps up the course, but also reconnects notions and memories. In both, group dynamics add to the teaching and learning results.

Let us take wind energy as an example. On the second day of class, I and my students walk through a wind farm on Mount Galletto. We hear the sound of the turbines and see how the landscape is affected. On the third day, we climb Mount of Cucchi, and on the following day, Mount Gazzaro. Differently from Mount Galletto, there are no wind farms there; yet, there could have been, had local communities not challenged administrative decisions authorizing their construction. Students will consult the relevant legal documents, but, before and/or after that, they can see the untouched, wooded summits. They can easily imagine what could have happened and how the landscape, the territory, and the *Via degli Dei* itself could have changed. They can talk with the residents of those areas. They can see other small turbines here and there. They can think about wind power under a different perspective, considering all the public interests concerned, beyond abstract principles. They can challenge mainstream thinking. As a consequence, they can discuss this all from the inside.

#### 4. *Preparation and Choices*

The course requires not only the preparation required by any academic lesson, but also additional and potentially challenging administrative work and choices.

Bureaucracy includes requests for authorizations, funding, insurance and the search for lodging. Regarding funding, I ask the students for a sum covering only about forty percent of their expenses (train, lodging, food). I do this for two reasons: on the one side, I do not want to exclude anyone for financial reasons; on the other side, I consider fair that students who benefit from this experience cover a reasonable percentage of the costs.

Lessons are divided into four phases: an opening, traditional lesson before leaving; short references provided while walking in front of "cues" (such as a dried-up creek, a wind farm, or a protected area); a daily wrap-up before dinner; a final lesson when back to the classroom. The introductory lesson has two goals: discussing sustainability, public interests, and environmental law principles and structure; preparing students on what to look for on the trail, in order to make them active participants. Teachings along the trail are based on what we see and experience, starting from students' thoughts and knowledge. Naturally, in case we move slower than planned, we may have to cut short, so as not to arrive at our destination after dark. Similarly, the wrap-up at the end of each hiking stage may be shortened due to hunger (twelve students can be quite ravenous). The final lesson is aimed at combining the inputs gathered during the trail, answering questions and savoring memories of the experience that we shared.

The "diversity criterion" also applies to the choice of study materials. No textbooks nor legal articles; the only book I have chosen to employ in the course is *Il sentiero degli dei* ("The Path of the Gods") by Wu Ming 2<sup>7</sup>. This book tells the story of a man walking the Way of the Gods, meeting people, listening to their stories, learning about the history of the territory. It is not a legal textbook; however, it reports

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7. Wu Ming 2, *Il sentiero degli dei* (Ediciclo 2010). Wu Ming 2 is the pseudonym of a member of Wu Ming, a collective of writers based in Bologna (see <https://www.wumingfoundation.com/giap/what-is-the-wu-ming-foundation/>); last visited October 31, 2019). *Wu ming* (无名) means "anonymous" in Chinese.



various events with environmental, social and legal implications, pointing out the role of politics, residents, and local committees. In my opinion, *Il sentiero degli dei* is a really well-written and thought-provoking text which can help readers to see the trail and the territory under a different light. In the first edition of the course, I had the opportunity to invite the author to meet us. He joined our group for dinner on the first day; he told us more and answered our questions, turning his non-legal book into a real experience.

Maybe unsurprisingly, the most difficult choices concern students, especially what number of students may apply to enrol and how they are to be selected. I think that, for a course like this, the most suitable number of participants is between six and twelve. Considering the preparatory work, the administrative aspects, and also the hardship of rejecting very motivated students, I chose twelve, the highest end.

Regarding the students' selection, I do not rely on quantitative criteria such as the GPA, the number of exams taken or the date of application. While this makes the selection process a bit harder, I want to give all applicants a chance on the basis of more sensible and qualitative requirements. Accordingly, I have decided to base the selection of students upon their motivation, subject to a twofold evaluation. Firstly, I ask each applicant to write a motivation letter answering two questions ("Why did you apply?"; "What do you expect from the group and what do you intend to contribute to the group?"). The motivation letters are assessed by two students who have attended the course in previous years. Secondly, I consider the behaviour of each applicant "before" the motivation letter; even before students formally apply by sending their motivation letters, I take into consideration my correspondence with them, starting from the very first emails in which they ask for information. In this way I can assess the students' care in writing (and reading my emails), attitude, curiosity, and initiative. From the first call of interest, I look for attention, care and proactivity. Assessing motivation when it is explicitly asked for can be tricky; doing so when motivation is not explicitly asked for is more likely to lead to genuine results.

Physical suitability is a prerequisite. I ask applicants to send me an email stating that they have contacted their doctor and that they have no significant health issues (particularly cardiocirculatory and respiratory ones). I provide students with a checklist of what to bring and

what not to bring, as well as some advice aimed at preventing problems (for example on training and on the choice of backpack; shoes and socks). I tell them about the trail and its difficulties (stages of sixteen miles on average, with an elevation difference of more than half a mile in both ascent and descent). I trust their judgment regarding their own fitness. Nonetheless, issues such as tiredness, blisters and muscle pain can naturally arise. On shorter stages, this is usually not a problem, and we strive not to leave anyone behind. On two, longer, stages, we may however find ourselves in a crucial situation as we may not want to risk arriving at our destination in the dark. While no particular issues arise if the concerned student concludes that it is better for himself or herself to skip that stage (with the potential for a growing opportunity should the rest of the group not mind and decide to support him or her anyway), the same is not true in case the concerned student has no intention to skip that stage but the group is worried about the likely delay in arriving at the destination. The easiest way out would be a decision of mine – which, however, I prefer not to make. Students are adults, they are in a group, and they know the values that inspired the course; they have to find a way out by discussing among themselves. In fact there is no right or wrong choice, and they have to learn to understand others' motives and practice empathy.

This kind of situation happened once, and was not easy to resolve. Indeed, the discussion was rather harsh. I was about to take a decision for the students, but I eventually chose not to. In the end, a solution was found, even though for some time afterwards there was some bad blood in the group. I later asked myself whether I should have intervened. I am convinced I should not have. I realized this had been a chance to grow, facing difficulties instead of relying on an "authority" instructing on what to do. It had been a test of the cohesion of the group, a mean to understand more about ourselves and what we were really doing there. I still think it enriched our experience.

On a final note, I should consider the grading system. At the University of Trento, courses are classified by the number of credits awarded upon successful completion. While courses awarding six credits or more involve a grading, "Sustainability on the Road" is a two-credit course and therefore is non-graded. Credits are awarded not on the basis of a final test, but by a general evaluation of the students' approach, dedication, behavior, and attitude. In a way, however, upon

departure I already know that the awarding of credits will be approved for all students. In fact, from the very first mile I want concerns about credits, grades, or assessments to be out of the way. What my students are going to do must be motivated by their interest, curiosity, desire to learn, will to interact. I want a course free from utilitarian considerations.

## 5. *Students*

The "diversity rule" also applies to participants. I look for "different students". I expect a lot from them, and I try to give them a lot. I look neither for the best ones under traditional academic criteria, nor for athletes. It is immaterial that they have previously attended environmental law courses or other courses that I teach. My ideal student is curious, empathetic, open-minded, unselfish, joyful and a bit of a dreamer. I ask them to have a positive attitude, to consider the needs of the other members of the group, and to help me in building the course.

Once the selection is over, I look for some volunteers for administrative work, such as collecting deposits from companions, contacting and paying lodgings, and requesting university offices for authorizations, insurance schedules or refunds. I then divide the students in six pairs, entrusting each pair with responsibility for one stage of the trek, providing for both hiking logistics and references to *Il sentiero degli dei*. I want to promote the students' independence, so as to prevent any possible laziness, sloppiness or opportunistic behavior and to form a team of (part-time) leaders, involving and engaging everyone. A further goal is their self-sufficiency. Even if something happens to me on the trail, I want the group to safely complete the trekking and go on with the course, building together a common knowledge.

Just before starting the course, I provide participants with a set of ten guidelines:

1. Stay safe on the trail: form a single file facing cars while on the road; drink often; avoid stupid things (no "killfies", please). Goal: to survive.

2. Consider the different levels the course is dealing with: teaching sustainability; living sustainability; revisiting academic relationships; interacting with people; reflecting on life. Goal: to expand perspectives and horizons.
3. Think as a group first: help each other; do not leave anyone behind; find solutions together. Goal: to avoid toxic selfishness.
4. Be a leader when needed: take the lead on the trail; lift the mood of the group in moments of crisis; be proactive. Goal: to reach "shared leadership" in the group.
5. Open yourself: talk and smile to companions, residents and other people we meet; watch, listen and smell. Goal: to discover.
6. Express yourself: let your thoughts out; make proposals; if you feel bad, if there is something wrong, let it out; if you feel good or if you are having a nice thought, say it. Goal: to share.
7. Detox: limit the use of the Internet (stimuli are in the woods), social networks (your network is the group), selfies (your "yourself" is you), pictures (your eyes are the ones with pupils and corneas) Goal: to enjoy the moment.
8. Step out of your comfort zone: challenge yourself; try new things; do not confine yourself; do not be afraid to be original and bizarre; think out of the box; escape conformism; be yourself. Goal: feel free to live fully.
9. Enjoy yourself: savor the places, the people, the feelings; be generous with others and with yourself and enjoy that too. Goal: to feel good.
10. Find your tenth rule by yourself.

While I realize that this list could look like a tourist booklet or a mindfulness seminar guide, and make me seem like some sort of guru rather than a university professor, it has actually proven to be very useful for my students. I am not a guru; I think that professors, even university professors, even law professors can go beyond laws, credits, and methodologies. We deal with young adults; they can relate with passions and feelings, and so should we. Stepping out of the comfort zone applies to us as well.

## 6. *Students' Views*

### 6.1. *Living the WESE Method: Empowered Relationship between Students*

When I decided to enrol in this course, I assumed that my personal motivations were different from those of anyone else.

Eventually, however, I realized with great surprise that the companions I had just met shared the same reasons which had pushed me to take this path. In fact, we all felt the lack of interpersonal relationships between students, as well as between students and professors, which in my opinion is a loss compared to an effective learning method involving discussing topics from different points of view.

This feeling arises from the way courses are organized in our university; many are attended by hundreds of students, only some by small groups, and among them only few include group work.

Moreover, some complain about competition between students, based more on rote learning than on the ability to contextualize and re-elaborate the study contents.

It was this perceived need for sharing and necessity of a more practical approach in our studies to lead our group on this adventure.

The group was made up of different people with different attitudes and different prior knowledge.

Some members of the group had attended environmental law classes, whereas others had not. Some of us had better organizational skills, while others stronger leadership abilities. Some students were experts at hiking, on plants and nature, while for others this was the first time they had worn a pair of hiking boots, let alone being able to distinguish rosemary from sage.

The professor was definitely a member of the group and did not impose his decisions over ours only by virtue of his institutional role. We ended up respecting one another for what we are as individuals.

These conditions gave us a chance to analyze everything we encountered from different points of view, and allowed us to develop new solutions that we would most likely never had been able to reach individually.

This experience changed the group from the first day we started walking, turning it into a unique, living organism which took care of

every single part, leaving no one behind as it usually happens at university, but, on the contrary, encouraging everyone to have confidence in their own abilities.

### *6.2. Studying Environmental Issues Firsthand: Revisiting the Professor-Student Relationship*

This was an unusual experience. I had spent five years of university life sitting on a chair, reading and underlining words in a textbook. Standing in the middle of a green WESE classroom was a little confusing. However, it did not take long to get used to it and it soon became clear how being there was fundamental for a better, shared understanding of each environmental issue we came across on our journey. A mere reading of textbooks and judgements, or even just a quick look at a picture, would not have been enough to let us focus on every single detail of each issue. Sustainability is a concept which needs to be lived and felt to be understood. The simple written description of the damages brought by by a twenty-two-minute-gain railway running through the basement of Mount Adone did not help. Directly seeing the damages was way more impactful. Eighty-one watercourses, thirty-seven water sources, thirty wells and five aqueducts dried up; all of this for a twenty-two-minute gain on the way between Bologna and Florence. What did those numbers mean? Nothing, when written on paper. Only in a WESE "classroom" was it possible to understand if this gain had been sustainable or not (and it turned out not to have been).

Regarding the effects of the WESE method on a sustainable relationship between students, enough has been said in the previous paragraph.

Let us focus here on a sustainable professor-student relationship. Students are used to see their teacher come into a traditional classroom talking for ninety minutes or two hours and leaving once the lesson has finished. We only meet him or her at the end of the course, when the exam comes. We usually do not relate with teachers, unless for guidance with our theses. The WESE method, instead, made it possible for us to see a professor in a completely different way: he was one of us, he saw our efforts and struggles and shared his with us. The professor-student relationship was revisited under every aspect.

Last but not least, this particular course on the Way of the Gods motivated us to keep on studying to reach our life goals. Finding motivation in what we do every single day – waking up, attending lectures, studying, going to bed – is hard. Our daily routine is tiring, it dries out our souls. Sometimes our future seems anything but bright. This trail was able to give us an opportunity to recharge and to feel free from the burden of our textbooks for a week. Most importantly, the professor had the chance to teach us a life lesson. Some signs that can be found on the Way were words of wisdom: "Never give up when you are tired, give up only when you are done"; "When your legs are tired, walk with your heart"; keep on working hard, because "[t]he best view comes after the hardest climb".

### *6.3. To Walk for the Walking's Sake*

The climb; is not this the way life is represented and imposed on us today? Climbing toward professional success, social stability, a better grade, a better job, a "better us".

The Way of the Gods gave twelve young different individuals the intriguing and refreshing feeling of struggling and working hard for no reason at all but the climb itself.

Walking ten hours a day uphill and downhill, under the scorching sun or at the mercy of the storm, not to get a result, but for the sake of walking, made us appreciate the authenticity and the joy of the relationship with nature – not only with the splendid nature surrounding us, but also our own nature.

If the shadow of the thicker vegetation and the coolness of the damp soil relieved us of our fatigue and invited us to conversation and exchanges of ideas, the steep climbs and the majesty of the highest views caught us off guard and aroused spontaneous and religious silences.

Meditation and sharing, introspection and communication; this is exactly what the Way of the Gods, and its protagonist, nature, meant to all of us.

At the time when we decided to enroll in Prof. Lugaresi's course, our student life was divided into semesters, study sessions, exams; our learning activity was based on books and evaluated through grades.

Innovative classes, such as "Sustainability on the Road", in which students learn not only from books, but also from shared experiences; where people, not numbers, make the difference; where the rhythm is not given by the school bell but by the sound of boots stepping on the ground, could be the revolution that today's school system needs in order to produce not just better, but also happier individuals.

In fact, it is when the fragility and the rush of today's life confront the ineluctability of nature that we truly understand how useless the climb is: that there is no victory, only existence.

## 7. *Conclusion*

To be honest, when I first proposed this course I was not sure of its possible outcome; this made things far more interesting. The method itself, WESE, was just outlined: it has been refined over the past three years.

To be brutally honest, I did not mind much, and was not afraid, to put forward a proposal that was only sketched. I did not know of anything similar (though maybe there is), and anyway I wanted to create, not just replicate, something. I knew I would have found a balance through experience.

The teaching part about environmental law and sustainability is relevant, but not my main concern. For sure, I want to show through shared experience what "real sustainability" ("living sustainability" or "civic sustainability") is, beyond rhetoric and worn-out statements. I want students to feel sustainability and live sustainability, more than reading about it.

My main focus is beyond teaching sustainability: there are two different, main aspects I want to explore with my students.

The first aspect concerns "sustainable" academic relationships: among students, and between professors and students; the value of cooperation, instead of competition; the importance of the group; the satisfaction, and – why not – the happiness of doing something with others and for others. A safe zone free of numbers, credits, grades, bell curves, where every student can get to the top (literally on the top too); help others, and be helped, getting there.



The second aspect concerns students as human beings. Seeing them smiling, being happy, forming a group, becoming leaders, discovering other values, interacting with residents was a great reward. Should any problems have arisen, we would have collaborated to overcome them.

I personally find this quote, attributed to William Arthur Ward, very inspiring: "The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher inspires". I wanted to give my students something to remember and reflect on; to inspire them and to be inspired by them.