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Citation for final published version:

Samuel, Anthony , Thomas, Robert J., McGouran, Cathy and White, Gareth R. T. 2022. Experiencing the macromarketing dimensions of sustainability: Lessons learned from field trips to the ultra novel. *Journal of Marketing Education* 44 (3) , pp. 322-336. 10.1177/02734753211049825

Publishers page: <https://doi.org/10.1177/02734753211049825>

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# **Experiencing the Macromarketing Dimensions of Sustainability: Lessons Learned from Field Trips to the Ultra Novel**

## **Abstract**

This paper seeks to determine the value of field trips that help establish macromarketing and sustainability scholarship in mainstream business/marketing education. It explores the experiences of postgraduate marketing and business strategy students undertaking a field trip to the “World’s Greenest Football Club,” Forest Green Rovers. It responds to the call to establish the macromarketing viewpoint within business and management education and provides contemporary insight into the hitherto unexplored use of field trips for postgraduate students. Through student focus groups the study identifies the importance of selecting field trip locations where the complex and interwoven interplay of meso, micro, and macro activities can be critically evaluated through multiple stakeholder interactions. In addition, it points to the value of students experiencing “ultra-novel” organizations and situations to motivate learning, stimulate critical debate, and thereby facilitate cognition of macromarketing systems and sustainability.

## **Keywords**

Macromarketing, field trips, marketing education, sustainability, climate change

## Introduction

Macromarketing's core principle of understanding marketing systems as entire production and consumption systems that both impact and are impacted upon by society (Hunt, 1981) has unquestionable academic and practical profundity in these troubled times (Wooliscroft, 2020). Its quest to examine the interactions among markets, marketing, and society has witnessed the discipline embracing and advancing a broad church of empirical and theoretical sustainability research.

Macromarketing encompasses the study of the systems of marketing, their constituent actors, and their resultant effects upon both those immediate systems and their wider stakeholders (Layton & Grossbart, 2006; Mittelstaedt et al., 2015). Macromarketing has been a lens for the study of sustainability for a considerable length of time (Mittelstaedt et al., 2014). The discipline has adopted two distinct approaches to the study of sustainability (Peterson, 2016), namely the "developmental perspective," envisioning the key role of marketing in delivering "sustainability to society," and the "critical perspective," which views marketing as the prime driver of continued and excessive consumption. Developmental approaches to addressing sustainability issues have included interventions in public health and well-being, as well as education (Klein & Nason, 2001). Mittelstaedt et al. (2015) argued that the developmental school of macromarketing plays a pivotal role with regard to improving people's lives.

Sustainability has been declared a "mega trend" (McDonagh & Prothero, 2014; Naisbitt, 1982); such trends "do not come and go readily...are slow to form, and once in place, they influence us for some time" (Naisbitt & Aburdene, 1990, p. 12). The significance of sustainability as a mega trend is evidenced in the academic attention it has drawn: for example, the *Journal of Macromarketing* has published over 40 articles on sustainability since 1981, together with two special issues (Prothero and McDonagh, 2014a, 2014b).

Macromarketing and sustainability studies include examinations of such issues as gender, climate crisis (Steinfeld & Holt, 2020), Fairtrade (Samuel & Peattie, 2016; White & Samuel, 2016), product use and sustainability impacts (Martin et al., 2019), sustainable consumption (George et al., 2015), identity and materialism (Naderi & Strutton, 2015; Scott et al., 2014), the commercialization of utilities (Patsiaouras et al., 2015), slow food and fashion (Chaudhury & Albinsson, 2015; Ertekin & Atik, 2015), food consumption (Beverland, 2014), and reuse and recycling (Ekstrom & Salomonson, 2014).

Despite such a high-impact investigation of society's "wicked problems" (Kennedy, 2015), and the undoubted successes of programs such as Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME)—which has over 16,000 signatories—the President of the Macromarketing Society has recognized that macromarketing is still very much a minority subject in most business schools (Wooliscroft, 2020). This is despite the discipline's potential to educate and adequately prepare future marketers to critically question marketing systems that reduce well-being and are detrimental to future generations (Repel, 2012; Shapiro et al., 2021). Thus, on a grander scale, research undertaken by Shapiro et al. (2021, p. 107) serves as a reminder to us that "[m]acromarketing pedagogy prepares students to be better citizens and better decision makers in all areas affecting well-being." In line with this thinking and with growing interest in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (Shapiro et al., 2021), Wooliscroft (2020, p. 155) stated that macromarketing's time is "now" and has made a passionate call for its growing legion of scholars to play a role in positioning it as a "core/required subject for business degrees":

Teaching macromarketing courses is a long way off in most business schools. Those schools embrace "social impact" but don't know where to find it in their curriculum. We must step forward and offer our courses and our solutions. (Wooliscroft, 2020, p. 155)

The desire to change learner behavior through environmental education is not new; Hungerford and Volk (1990) provided a taxonomy of “critical educational components” to change learner behavior, with an emphasis on providing “carefully designed and in-depth opportunities for learners to achieve some level of environmental sensitivity” (p. 15). They envisaged an educational system where learners could exhibit profound citizenship behaviors. In line with macromarketing doctrine presented by Wooliscroft (2020) and Shapiro et al. (2021), they also advocated that giving students knowledge of consequences, issues, and attitudes regarding the environment would empower personal and societal change. To facilitate this, they posited that an internal locus of control could not be developed through traditional teaching methods and thus called for a community-bound approach.

However, despite this polemic, Rundle-Thiele and Wymer (2010) suggested that sustainability education has been overlooked and underdeveloped. Consequently, developing the “environmental literacy” of students (Lee et al., 2020) has been viewed as a “key challenge” (Collins & Kearins, 2007). According to Bradfield (2009), the issue is that universities have acknowledged the green marketplace but have failed to explore this in the context of meaningful student immersion. They have, therefore, arguably failed both in achieving their perceived moral responsibility for educating new generations about the benefits of sustainability (Stern, 2000) and in developing a green agenda (Piasentin & Roberts, 2018). Indeed, Shapiro et al. (2021), arguing from a developmental macromarketing position, posited that marketing education is falling short of teaching students firstly to embrace the growing importance and “unified force” of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and secondly to understand the challenges of facing a more sustainable future. Macromarketing is suggested as a means to address the shortcomings of a “sustainability gap” in marketing education, given that it has the ability to “equip our students

to deal with the messy and dynamic complexity that is inherent in all markets” (Shapiro et al., 2021, p. 113).

Some institutions have embraced the need for changes within their respective learning models (Martinez-Buján et al., 2020). By connecting students to macrosocietal and environmental change (Mandikonza & Lotz-Sisitka, 2016), institutions have managed to improve students’ understanding of “economic prosperity, resource equity, energy uses, and environmental health and concerns” (Sengupta et al., 2020, p. 3). A key element in enabling this has been the utilization of field trips (Boeve-de Pauw et al., 2019). Compared with the traditional classroom environment, field trips increase student engagement and awareness of the issues under investigation (Thomas et al., 2018). They offer students greater opportunity to observe and therefore comprehend complex macro-level sustainability issues and solutions (Dillon et al., 2006; Sturm & Bogner, 2010).

This paper seeks to determine the value of field trips with postgraduate students in an endeavor to help establish macromarketing scholarship in mainstream business/marketing education. A “critical interpretive” approach is taken to the literature review (McDougall, 2015), drawing on materials from the field of macromarketing, marketing, and sustainability education. The initial literature review searched for articles containing the phrases “focus group” or “field trip” in Business Source Complete, ProQuest, and ScienceDirect academic repositories between 2005 and 2020 and resulted in the identification of 40 studies. Snowballing to include pertinent articles that predated 2005 expanded the literature review and produced the final body of 55 publications that are reviewed in this study. These 55 publications were located across 34 different journals. The main journals in which the pertinent literature was identified (outside the *Journal of Macromarketing*) were *Marketing Education Review* (five), *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education* (five),

*Environmental Education Research* (five), *Journal of Research in Science Teaching* (four), and *Journal of Marketing Education* (three).

This study explored the introduction of macromarketing and sustainability into the curriculum by taking 96 postgraduate students on a research-led (reference withheld for review) field trip to an environment that is recognized for its sustainability credentials. Forest Green Rovers (FGR) is accepted by the sport's governing body (FIFA) to be the World's Greenest Football Club (Newsroom, 2019), and by the United Nations to be the world's first carbon-neutral football club (Morris, 2018). The significance of the research site being a football club is one that should not be dismissed, as football is more than a game: it is a cultural phenomenon that supersedes its purpose as a game, or merely entertainment (McDonagh, 2015). Importantly, these environments are sites of individual and collective action (Bale, 1993), where participation is demanded and witnessed by those with indistinguishable zeal (Numerato, 2015). Much like society, sport is not benign (Blumrod et al., 2012), and football is under duress to produce social value (Kolyperas et al., 2015; Thomas, 2020).

Through several post-field-trip focus groups, this paper identifies three contributions that field trips make to embedding the macromarketing lens in business and management education. These include selecting field trip locations where students can witness not only the complex and interwoven interplay of meso, micro, and macro stakeholders and their actions, but also the value of experiences of "ultra-novel" organizations and situations in stimulating cognition of complex and abstract ideas.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Field Trips***

“To understand the complexity and multidisciplinary nature of sustainability issues students have to live the experience and this is possible only by incorporating pedagogical tools that take students closer to reality” (Menon & Suresh, 2020, p. 1029). At the heart of this ability to “understand” has been the field trip (Mintz & Tal, 2018). A field trip has been defined historically as “any journey taken under the auspices of the school for educational purposes” (Sorrentino & Bell 1970, p. 233), with there having been being little or no alteration in this fundamental understanding that concrete experiences are needed to facilitate learning (Aboytes & Barth, 2020; Orion, 1993).

Gonzalez et al. (2004) highlighted the historical consensus that students benefit exponentially from field trips, given the ability of such trips to immerse the student in a real-life environment (Larsen et al., 2017). They provide the student with a rare opportunity for exploration and discovery (DeWitt & Storksdieck, 2008; Hoggan, 2016; Krakowka, 2012).

This facilitates their ability to question (Hunt & Laverie, 2004), absorb, and critique (Ramocki, 2007) a given organization, and better prepares them for life beyond the lecture theater (Carroll, 2006; Van Doren & Corrigan, 2008). Field trips are emancipatory learning experiences that stimulate students to consider their futures (Alvarez & Rogers, 2006; Holdsworth et al., 2008; Mezirow, 1978) and introduce them to macro levels of analysis (Shapiro et al., 2021).

According to Behrendt and Franklin (2014), field trips are traditionally designed for five purposes. Firstly, they must provide first-hand experience; secondly, they must generate interest; thirdly, they add relevance to learning criteria; fourthly, they strengthen skills; and finally, they must promote personal development. Given this, field trips are said to provide opportunities to motivate students and offer rare opportunities for experiential learning. Trips halt deductive learning approaches and the one-way transfer of knowledge and provide the catalyst for a differentiated world-view (Rundle-Thiele & Wymer, 2010; Sotomayor, 2020).

They afford a window onto the world outside the classroom and this encourages students to critically explore the views, goals, and effects of various stakeholders' behaviors (Shapiro et al., 2021). The field trip facilitator can present a myriad of different business models (Rundle-Thiele & Wymer, 2010) that can assist the student to make the transition from a “traditional academic setting to a field setting upon graduation” (Gorman, 2010, p. 432).

### ***Field Trip Environments***

The literature has long recognized the importance of the novelty of the field trip setting and how it might influence learning and the long-term impact of the experience (Falk & Balling, 1982; Falk et al., 1978). Succinctly, it is not sufficient simply to take students “somewhere” (Xie & Garner, 2009). Falk et al. (1978/1982) suggested that the “novelty factor” should be evaluated by (1) student familiarity with what is being presented to them; (2) the methods applied during the field trip; and (3) the physical environment in which they found themselves during the field trip. This notion of “novelty factor” was further qualified by Orion and Hofstein (1994), who suggested that the educational effectiveness of a field trip comes down to two simple factors, namely (1) field trip quality, and (2) “novelty space” rather than “novelty factor”. They further suggested that the novelty space should consist of three dimensions: (1) the cognitive (what skills and concepts are under investigation?); (2) the geographic (how well do participants know their environment?); and (3) the psychological (novelty of the individuals involved and the experience provided). From their work with geology students in the USA, Elkins and Elkins (2007) added the dimension of “social novelty” to the above framework, where the nature of the relationships gained from the field trip might influence perception.

Boeve-de Pauw et al. (2019) rather intriguingly indicated that “moderate novelty” is the requisite goal, given that too little novelty will induce boredom and too much will result in distraction and can inhibit learning. Martin et al. (1981) also suggested that field trips may

be a poor strategy if there is over-stimulus. However, Martin et al.'s study exclusively used data gathered from children for its research; the notion of novelty has yet to be fully explored among older students.

### ***Field Trip Benefits***

Building upon seminal works by Sorrentino and Bell (1970), Martin et al. (1981), DeWitt and Storksdieck (2008) and Stronck (1983), several papers within the literature have forensically explored student benefits of field trips and revealed several major themes. These benefits invariably fall into three distinct categories—academic, professional, and personal—all of which encompass the cognitive and affective paradigms (Sotomayor, 2020).

Goh and Ritchie (2011) suggested that field trips provide students with a number of benefits: students gain an enhanced understanding of course materials, they develop their ability to facilitate group work, their interest in specific areas is stimulated, and they gain practical insight into industries and network building. Fullerton et al. (2018) similarly identified an extensive range of benefits, comprising the acquisition of industrial insight, entertainment, enhanced job prospects, and networking. Schaller (2020) noted the ability of field trips to reinforce key educational concepts, increase the motivation to learn, increase understanding of real markets, and provide real-world examples of core concepts. These findings demonstrate the potential of field trips to facilitate macromarketing studies, given their capacity to immerse students in a lived experience; their engagement with different places, groups, leaders, and other stakeholders encourages critical enquiry that moves beyond the “buyer-seller dyadic” normally explored in the marketing classroom (Shapiro et al., 2021).

### ***Field Trips and Environmental Learning***

While Shapiro et al. (2021) recognized the importance of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and that more organizations are embracing sustainability

practices in advancing macromarketing pedagogy, much of the empirical work exploring this is classroom-based. For example, Radford et al.'s (2015) work on experiential learning while immersing students in live case-study work with non-profit organizations and Shapiro et al.'s (2021) four mini-macromarketing case studies all proved able to develop students' critical thinking skills and deeper understandings of marketing systems.

Farmer et al. (2007) explored the benefits of field trips for environmental and sustainable development education, drawing on the earlier works of Falk (1983) and Storksdieck (2006). In addition to the generic benefits of field trip education, there is a declaration that it should lead toward biophilia, comprising not only raised environmental awareness (Dale et al., 2020) but also an increased perception of the individual's connection and role within nature (Boeve-de Pauw et al., 2019; Heras et al., 2020; Jose et al., 2017; Otto & Pensini, 2017) and improved transmission of environmental knowledge (Farmer et al., 2007). Collectively, this should result in a heightened sense of well-being and a change in orientation (Edwards & Larson, 2020). However, these studies were based on school-age children, and there is little research that examines postgraduate students.

Putz et al. (2018) studied field trips in the context of instigating behavioral change in a study of 104 students and sustainable transport. They found that environmental field trips can positively impact knowledge, attitude, and behavioral intention, but they failed to explore what behaviors were manifestly changed over either the short or long term. Piasentin and Roberts (2018) identified "action-orientated behaviors" that were manifest after a successful field trip. Their work indicated that a well-planned field trip could persuade postgraduate students to reconsider their own assumptions, act in a more sustainable fashion, and consider how they might influence others to make similar changes. Importantly, these action-based changes have been witnessed more recently in younger age groups and now present a normative behavior within the field trip literature (Olsson et al., 2020).

## Research Context

### *Situating the Field Trip*

FGR Football Club was chosen for a macromarketing field trip for postgraduate marketing students in order to provide experience of real-world environmental and sustainability practices.

The football club represents a novel marketing system that seeks to influence the behavior of its stakeholders by adopting a holistic, environmentally conscious approach to the production and consumption of football. As the FGR Footprint Report (2019, p. 1) states:

Forest Green Rovers (FGR) is dedicated to becoming a truly sustainable football club, a world first. We aim to make it a place where we can demonstrate eco-thinking and technology to a new audience, football fans. Indeed, we believe that we have the opportunity to introduce sustainability to the wider world of sport, not just football.

FGR ensures that every facet of its stadium operations is ecologically and socially sustainable. This includes the utilization of widely used technologies and practices such as solar-panel-charged floodlights, recycled water systems, energy-saving heating systems, locally sourced products and materials, and charging points for electric cars. It also includes unique elements such as an organic seaweed-fed pitch, robotic mowing machines, vegan diets and menus for all staff, players, and visitors, an eco-meadow at the entrance to the ground, and player kits that are made from bamboo (Caulkin, 2017; FGR Sustainability, 2017). It provides substantial eco-educational materials in the form of an “Eco-Trail” and information boards around the ground.

FGR’s holistic approach to sustainability is evident for all to witness on match day. The club is the world’s first accredited vegan football club (Vegan Society, 2017), while FIFA, the sport’s governing body, has labeled it “the World’s Greenest Football Club” (Newsroom, 2019). Additionally, in July 2018 the United Nations officially certified FGR as

“the world’s first carbon-neutral football club” and has recruited Dale Vince (FGR Chairman) as a UN Climate Change ambassador (Morris, 2018). Collectively, this reinforces the suitability of FGR for a field trip.

This study draws upon Layton’s (2007) working definition of marketing systems, Peterson’s (2016) “macromarketing cross” and its call to develop a better understanding of meso-level actions, and Halpen’s (2005) interpretation of micro-, meso-, and macro-level activity to build a suitable conceptual framework that is able to capture the operational practices of FGR, thus conceptualizing its practices through the lens of macromarketing. Layton’s (2007, p. 230) accepted definition of a marketing system is “a network of individuals, groups, and/or entities linked directly or indirectly through sequential or shared participation in an economic exchange that creates, assembles, transforms, and makes available assortments of products, both tangible and intangible, provided in response to customer demand.”

Layton’s (2007), Peterson’s (2016), and Halpen’s (2005) work suggests there are three systemically connected layers of activity evident in a macromarketing system:

1. micro-level activities that are the individual’s opinions, responses, actions, and behavior;
2. meso-level activities that consist of the operations and behaviors of groups and institutions (such as businesses and public sector organizations);
3. macro-level activities that embody societal thinking, impacts, and processes.

By viewing FGR as an entire production and consumption system, where its core product—football—and all of its associated operations and services are positioned and practiced based on the principles of social and ecological sustainability, FGR offers itself as a meso-level organization whose practices also influence the micro and the macro. Thus, for this study we conceptualize FGR as a macromarketing system, depicted in Figure 1.

FGR was deemed a field trip location (meso) where students could witness the concrete actions of sustainable production and consumption while understanding their abstract contribution to individual behavior change (micro), climate change, and CO<sub>2</sub> reduction (macro) (Hunt, 1981).

Figure 1: The Micro/Meso/Macro of Forest Green Rovers

| Level | Description         | Context to Study  |
|-------|---------------------|---|
| Micro | Individual          | Individual thought and behaviors following Interaction with Forest Green Rovers Football Club |
| Meso  | Group / Institution | Forest Green Rovers Football Club and its stakeholders  |
| Macro | Society             | Sustainability impact of operations and behaviors on wider society                            |

## Methodology

Prior to the field trip, students went through a two-fold practice and theory familiarization process. From a practice perspective, they were asked to review FGR's website ([www.fgr.co.uk](http://www.fgr.co.uk)) and guided to view both written reports from *The Guardian* (Burnton, 2017; McLaughlin, 2019; Morris, 2018), *The Times* (Caulkin, 2017), and *The Telegraph* (Tweedale, 2018) and video media of the club from several youtube sources.

From a theoretical perspective, students were given a brief lesson on Hunt's (1981) conceptualization of macromarketing, comprising the study of (1) marketing systems, (2) the

impact and consequences of marketing systems on society, and (3) the impact and consequences of society on the marketing system, along with Layton’s (2007) concept of macromarketing systems.

In order to develop their understanding of macromarkets and macromarketing (Mittelstaedt et al., 2015; Peterson, 2016; Repel, 2012), students were asked to consider “the relationships between organizations and sustainable practices” and “FGR’s real and symbolic role in delivering environmental and social sustainability to society,” and also to reflect on how their field trip experience may have influenced their personal sustainability habits.

This research utilized three focus groups to collect rich data consisting of the experiences and insights of 96 postgraduate business school students who participated in the field trip. The students were drawn from a cohort that were studying the module Innovation Management and Entrepreneurial Marketing and comprised of three focus groups. A breakdown of group participants in each of the focus groups is detailed in Table 1.

| <b>Programme of study</b>  | <b>Number of focus group participants</b> | <b>Breakdown of participants</b>  |
|--|---|---|
| MSc Business Strategy and Entrepreneurship<br><br>Studying Innovation Management | 37 students                               | 88% international students from India and China<br><br>12% UK domestic students |
| MSc Business Strategy and Entrepreneurship                                       | 31 students                               | 94% international students from China, the EU and the Far East                  |

|  |             |   |
|--|-------------|---|
| Studying Innovation Management             |             | 6% UK domestic students   |
| MSc Business Strategy and Entrepreneurship | 28 students | 92% international students from China, India, the EU and the Far East |
| Studying Entrepreneurial Marketing         |             | 8% UK domestic students   |

**Table 1: Focus Group and Student Overview**

During the visit, students experienced a match day at FGR and were given the following: a bespoke sustainability tour of FGR’s football ground delivered by FGR community development staff, a briefing from FGR’s former CEO, a short briefing from the head groundsperson and catering staff, integration with FGR supporters, and a sample of vegan food.

Post-field-trip focus groups were used for this study in recognition of their ability to effectively capture a large number of interpretive responses (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008). This approach enabled participants to call upon each other for individual views and opinions and, as such, provide rich insights into the complex macromarketing issues and field trip experiences to which they were exposed (Krueger & Casey, 2020; Morgan, 1996).

Typically, focus groups tend to be conducted using relatively low numbers of between 6 and 12 participants (Byers & Wilcox, 1991; Fern, 1982; Krueger, 1988; Sink, 1991; Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). Utilizing larger groups can be problematic: it constrains the input of some members, although this can be ameliorated by employing experienced facilitators (Asquith, 1994; Ledingham & Bruning, 1998).

Group size is also less problematic when the discussions are centered upon topics that are not emotionally laden (Agan et al., 2008; Morgan, 1996). Furthermore, larger focus groups, of 30–40 participants, are not unusual and facilitate the generation of far more insightful information than smaller groupings (Dell’Olio et al., 2018). Larger focus groups are particularly appropriate for the investigation of large-scale social phenomena (Stanley, 2008), such as sustainability and macromarketing studies (Prothero & McDonagh, 2014a).

While it is suggested that larger focus groups may result in less input from individuals, many believe this problem can be addressed by good facilitation (Asquith, 1994; Ledingham & Bruning, 1998). Morgan (1996) also posited that focus group size is not really a problem when the topic of discussion is not particularly emotive or controversial. Thus, a pragmatic approach to focus group selection was taken, one that adopted group sizes that were manageable without incurring unnecessary administration and delay to data collection and analysis (Samuel et al., 2018).

The initiating questions were formulated to explore participants’ macromarketing experiences and what they had learned from the field trip. The question formats followed the recommendations of Samuel and Peattie (2015) and were designed as open-ended macromarketing guidelines for the enquiry (Charmaz, 2006). Data were captured using a dictaphone and later transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis, as shown in Table 2 (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Prompting questions were operationalized from previous academic macromarketing research at FGR that had been conducted by the lead author (Samuel, 2018). These questions took the form of “What was your most significant experience?,” “How has your thinking of traditional and macromarketing changed?,” and “How has this experience shaped your macrosocietal thinking and therefore your future actions as a manager?”

The lead researcher facilitated the focus group discussions, providing prompting questions, recording salient points, and developing new questions to probe emergent topics

(Vinten, 1994). The cyclical identification and pursuit of emergent lines of enquiry is one of the key strengths of interpretive inquiry (Miles, 1979; Sanday, 1979). In the first phase of data analysis, each researcher independently reviewed the focus group transcripts to identify key topics and discussions. Following this, the researchers cross-compared their analyses to derive the pedagogical benefits of macromarketing/sustainability field trips that emerged from within and across the focus groups.

Ethical approval for the study was granted through the lead author’s institution. Participation in the trip and the focus groups was voluntary and all participants were anonymized in the analyses (Babbie, 2009; Duclos, 2019).

| <b>Stage</b>                     | <b>Actions</b>  |
|----------------------------------|---|
| 1. Familiarisation with the data | Three researchers reviewed the data separately, extracting relevant data through the production of line-by-line coding.   |
| 2. Generating initial codes      | Three researchers independently coded the line-by-line data sets into emerging themes that were broadly guided by the macromarketing and field trip literature review.  |
| 3. Searching for themes          | <p>Three researchers independently grouped their initial codes into logical themes. This process resulted in a total of 15 focused codes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Understanding the macro from interaction</li> <li>2. Meeting different people</li> <li>3. It’s not just a football club</li> <li>4. Reflection and changing behaviour</li> <li>5. It’s all connected</li> <li>6. Interaction with stakeholders</li> <li>7. Holistic action</li> <li>8. Systemic sustainability in action</li> <li>9. From pitch to support</li> <li>10. Different voices</li> <li>11. Everything counts in large amounts</li> <li>12. Novel place</li> <li>13. Local responsibility to global responsibility</li> <li>14. Edutainment</li> <li>15. People and places</li> </ol> |
| 4. Reviewing themes              | Three researchers compared and contrasted their interpretations of the dominant themes.   |

|                                      |   |
|--------------------------------------|---|
|                                      | <p>Discussions continued until concordance was achieved. This resulted in agreement on three core themes:</p> <p><b>Core Theme 1: From Meso to Macro</b></p> <p>Built from focused codes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding the macro from interaction</li> <li>• Reflection and changing behaviour</li> <li>• It's all connected</li> <li>• Holistic action</li> <li>• Systemic sustainability in action</li> <li>• From pitch to support</li> <li>• Everything counts in large amounts</li> <li>• Local responsibility to global responsibility</li> <li>• People and places</li> </ul> <p><b>Core Theme 2: Stakeholder Interaction</b></p> <p>Built from focused codes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meeting different people</li> <li>• Interaction with stakeholders</li> <li>• From pitch to support</li> <li>• Different voices</li> <li>• People and places</li> </ul> <p><b>Core Theme 3: The Ultra Novel</b></p> <p>Built from focused codes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It's not just a football club</li> <li>• Systemic sustainability in action</li> <li>• From pitch to support</li> <li>• Different voices</li> <li>• Everything counts in large amounts</li> <li>• Novel place</li> <li>• Local responsibility to global responsibility</li> <li>• Edutainment</li> <li>• People and places</li> </ul> |
| <p>5. Defining and naming themes</p> | <p>Three researchers collectively agreed on the naming convention for the three core themes, in line with their pedagogical contribution.</p> <p>This was carried out via further conceptualization and identification of relationship patterns of the data to the field trip, macromarketing/sustainability pedagogy. Subsequently,</p>  |

|                        |  |
|------------------------|--|
|                        | <p>the final core themes developed for the findings and discussion of this study emerged as:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Linking academic, professional and personal learning</li> <li>2. Advancing critical evaluation</li> <li>3. Motivation to learn</li> </ol> |
| 6. Producing the paper | <p>The paper was crafted following the three core themes (identified in the findings and discussion as pedagogical benefits) in order of importance. All four researchers were involved in this process.</p>   |

**Table 2: Six-Stage Thematic Analysis**

## **Findings and Discussion**

This section presents and discusses the findings from the data analysis and is structured according to the pedagogical benefits of macromarketing/sustainability field trips. Pedagogical benefits are represented in order of importance and consist of “linking academic, professional, and personal learning,” “advancing critical evaluation,” and “motivation to learn.”

### ***Linking Academic, Professional, and Personal Learning***

Given that the abstract and contested nature of sustainability and climate change can be challenging for business students to grasp (Collins & Kearins, 2007; Lee et al., 2020; Rundle-Thiele & Wymer, 2010), it was encouraging to see that a considerable number of participants referred to a wide array of meso- and micro-level actions that they believed were positive responses to this “wicked problem” (Kennedy, 2015). These ranged from the meso-level actions taken by FGR and the daily/match day operations of its sporting arena, to the personal micro experiences of having to practice aspects of “sustainability behavior” for the duration of their visit.

Meso-level operational examples such as the vegan/organic playing surface (the pitch), heating systems, water recycling, electric car charging ports, clean energy, and in particular the exclusive vegan-only menu were always referred to in the context of their wider macro contribution to reducing carbon emissions and thus helping to “save the planet.” Participants additionally identified that their personal, micro-level behaviors occurred as a result of being fully immersed in FGR’s meso-level ecological sustainable operations. Discussions around personal diet and meat consumption, transport choice, and the reduction in the use of plastics were linked to the wider macro and abstract debates surrounding sustainability and climate change:

It was really interesting to see so many different examples of sustainability in action. This made me think the football club is a credible sustainability champion.

You don’t really think about how much meat you eat or plastic you use until somebody points it out to you.

The data indicate the soft power of this field trip and show that by allowing students to personally experience organizations first-hand they are able to learn and link concrete meso-level examples (in this case, the sustainability practices of FGR) and their micro-level actions (in this case, their commitment to sustainable consumption) to their abstract macro-level conclusion (that is, reducing carbon emissions and assisting the fight against climate change). The outcomes of this field trip clearly demonstrate that through a greater student connectedness to sustainable business practices (Heras et al., 2020; Otto & Pensini, 2017) it is possible to transmit environmental knowledge (Farmer et al., 2007) that will lead to an increase in an individual’s understanding of their role in sustainability and climate change (Boeve-de Pauw et al., 2019; Jose et al., 2017; Piasentin & Roberts, 2018):

The trip to Forest Green Rovers was an excellent chance to see different kinds of technologies and people supporting an eco-friendly way of life. The kind of social

innovation they do in daily life is worth trying to carry out in our life and organizations.

I decided to try and reduce my carbon footprint. FGR showed me it's possible...but it is hard! Less meat is obviously a good start.

We also posit that the field trip offered the students the ability to witness a macromarketing system unfolding before them. Through meso-level interaction with FGR, they appear to have been prompted to critically evaluate not just the practices of the organization but also their own personal micro-level behavior in the context of the abstract macro level of sustainability and climate change. Thus, their interpretation and learning experience of the field trip was the emergence of an understanding of the impact of marketing systems on society and of society on macromarketing systems (Hunt, 1981).

In line with the developmental school of macromarketing, the field trip to FGR demonstrated macromarketing pedagogical value akin to that outlined in the work of both Shapiro et al. (2021) and Radford et al. (2015). The field trip provided students with a deeply immersive experiential learning opportunity (Radford et al., 2015) that assisted them in unpacking the systemic consequence (positive and negative) of an organization's actions (Shapiro et al., 2021). In particular, the students' experience of vegan food and their reflection on how this "helps the environment" adds to Beverland's (2014) work on sustainable eating.

The field trip helped students to understand the systemic links between their diet and the environment while also showing FGR's capacity as an agentic organization that operates as an influential marketer of sustainable food practices that contribute to the "widespread diffusion of plant-based diets" (Beverland, 2014, p. 378). Thus, we argue that the FGR field trip demonstrated its value as a participatory macromarketing teaching tool that expands a student's experiential learning beyond the classroom and into the real world. Its ability to

encourage students to critically evaluate their position and the role of an organization (FGR) in a marketing system dedicated to sustainable innovation and societal transformation (Shapiro et al., 2021) further cements its pedagogical value in Mittelstaedt et al.'s (2014) development school of macromarketing thinking.

### ***Advancing Critical Evaluation***

The students' experience and learning while on the field trip was augmented by their interaction with an array of FGR's stakeholders. It appears that affording students the ability to meet, discuss, and interact with as diverse set of stakeholders as possible provided them with two distinct learning opportunities. Firstly, these interactions enabled the students to understand the operational efforts and values attributed to the sustainable operations from a number of viewpoints. This helped them to develop a holistic picture of the marketing system they were visiting; by drawing on different stakeholder views, the students were "removed from a focus on their individual agency" (Shapiro et al., 2021, p. 112) and were stimulated to critically evaluate the responses of diverse others while also being reassured of the authenticity of the organization's intention:

It was a brilliant day out and I learned a lot from the different people I met. The groundsman gave me some really interesting insights into how to create a vegan pitch and I really felt like the fans I met were friendly and proud and happy to talk about the fact that they were a green club.

When you hear everybody talking about the changes they're making it really does motivate you to rethink your own buying habits.

Secondly, stakeholder engagement appeared to add some excitement and surprise to the field trip, thus assisting the learning experience and encouraging student-led enquiry that fostered their interest and gave them an appetite to keep learning throughout the day:

It was really cool to have an opportunity to speak to some of the fans. They seemed genuinely interested in why so many of us had come so far to see a game.

It's so rare to meet someone with such passion, and the chance to listen and reflect on that was the highlight of the day for me and I think others as well.

Before we went, we were told we may meet the previous CEO who helped develop the club's sustainability. I was surprised when we met her that it was a woman.

It appears that stakeholder involvement had a positive impact on students' learning and their capacity to critically evaluate and theoretically contextualize their surroundings. Developing Mezirow's (1978) work—which identified that field trips can help students build new relationships, aid criticality, and recognize change in others—this study attributed considerable value to the opportunity to interact with a diverse set of stakeholders. We therefore posit that field trips where students can interact with a multitude of organizational stakeholders will afford students the ability to advance their critical evaluation skills to help probe “marketing system factors that reduce wellbeing” (Shapiro et al., 2021, p. 107) and thus consider sustainability from different perspectives. This approach appears to complement both Radford et al.'s (2015) and Shapiro et al.'s (2021) calls for macromarketing pedagogy to be experience-based work that encourages critical thinking.

### ***Motivation to Learn***

The findings of this study appear to contradict the work of Boeve-de Pauw et al. (2019) and Martin et al. (1981), whose work on researching children's field trip experiences indicated that too much novelty and stimulus can be a distraction to learning. However, the data from this study indicate that the more novelty to which postgraduate students were exposed on the field trip, the better their learning experience and their motivation to engage in independent enquiry. Novelty of the physical environment and the personal interactions

(with people, products, and processes) appears to have aided students' abilities to "Think Macro" by critically evaluating the consequences of organizations' and individuals' actions on the environment (Peterson, 2016; Shapiro et al., 2021):

They make sustainability look easy and possible for everyone to do something about it.

It's the way they have connected everything up that really makes an impression...and a difference.

Sustainability is a responsibility. This is what I have learned from my visit.

We're so used to seeing football in such a mundane way on TV, but to go there and experience these significant changes has been really special as a diehard football fan myself.

Novelty in this study is primarily related to four key areas. Firstly, the industry—a football club—was perceived as an unusual place to visit to learn about sustainability and climate change. Secondly, students were fascinated by the opportunity to observe the integration of many layers of sustainability that FGR incorporates in the production and consumption of football for the benefit of society:

When I found out our field trip was to a football club, I was a little disappointed and questioned how such a place could teach us about climate change and the environment. But as soon as our tour began, I was blown away that such radical actions to do with climate change are taking place in such a place. I left thinking that if these actions can work here they can work in other larger businesses and larger football clubs. Scaling up Forest Green Rovers is possible.

I can't believe the hard work this club is doing to ensure all aspects of the ground and the football take into account the environment. Even the beer was local, the coffee was Fairtrade, and I had a vegan pie. All this at a football ground. It's mad when you think about it.

When you go there, you're suddenly aware that society can benefit so much from these small incremental changes. You don't think a club of this size can do that, but it is staggering what they're achieving.

Loads of organizations claim to be "environmental" but the "social" seems to be forgotten about. Not at Forest Green Rovers.

This wasn't a football stadium, it's a place of crazy, mad change and I've not seen anything like it.

Thirdly, the experience of only being able to consume vegan food and drinks for the duration of the visit allowed some students to identify the links between sustainability and what they eat (Beverland, 2014). In some cases this also provided a practical and deeply personal instantiation of sustainable behavioral change and suggests that FGR is helping promote sustainability and well-being via plant-based diets (Beverland, 2014). As participants state:

I can't believe if you're at the club all you can eat is vegan food. This is really odd but enjoyable as it gave me the opportunity to try some food I would not normally think about eating. I also felt I learned something about plant-based diets and them being more positive for the environment.

Would I actively choose vegan products? Maybe not. But would I eat vegan food if it was provided? After this experience, yes!

Lastly, novelty was considered from the perspective of FGR's sustainability practices being globally recognized by FIFA, the Vegan Society and the United Nations:

The fact that all these green practices can exist in a football club and they are recognized around the world for it is fascinating. Having the United Nations and FIFA recognize your contributions to sustainability and climate change is incredible and it really added to my desire to learn more about sustainability in sport and Forest Green Rovers.

The value attributed to the recognition of FGR's sustainability initiatives supports the work of Samuel and Peattie (2016) and White and Samuel (2016). Both these papers attributed external validation and labeling to the development of consumer knowledge and the successful mainstreaming of Fairtrade products across the globe. In a similar vein, students also appeared to identify with the external validation and labeling awarded to FGR, suggesting that it added validity to the field trip.

In summary, macromarketing/sustainability field trips address three key areas of the literature, namely linking academic, professional, and personal knowledge; advancing critical evaluation skills; and increasing motivation to learn. The study also identifies several pedagogical imperatives for conducting successful macromarketing/sustainability field trips (detailed in Table 3).

|   |  |   |  |
|---|--|---|--|
| <p><b>Pedagogical benefits</b></p>                                  | <p><b>Salient literature</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Field trip pedagogy (FT)</b></li> <li>• <b>Macromarketing/sustainability pedagogy (M/S)</b></li> </ul>  | <p><b>Pedagogical imperatives for organizing macromarketing and sustainability field trips</b></p>  | <p><b>Potential macromarketing and sustainability learning outcomes from field trips</b></p>   |
| <p><b>Linking academic, professional, and personal learning</b></p> | <p>Field trip benefits invariably fall into three distinct categories comprising academic, professional, and personal (Sotomayor, 2020). <b>FT</b></p> <p>The benefits of field trips comprise the acquisition of industrial insight, entertainment, enhanced job prospects,</p> | <p>Ensure the organization visited has a holistic and systemic approach to sustainability.</p> <p>Allow students time and space to freely engage with as many facets, symbols, practices, and people related to the organization as possible.</p> | <p>Field trips can offer students the ability to <b>witness and explore a macromarketing system</b> unfolding before them.</p> <p>Meso-level interaction with an organization committed to sustainability can <b>advance students’ ability to critically evaluate meso- and micro-</b></p> |

|   |  |  |   |
|---|--|--|---|
|   | <p>and networking (Fullerton et al., 2018).</p> <p><b>FT</b></p> <p>Giving students knowledge of consequences, issues, and attitudes regarding the environment can empower personal and societal change (Wooliscroft, 2020; Shapiro et al., 2021).</p> <p><b>M/S</b></p>                       |  | <p><b>level practices in the context of sustainability.</b></p>   |
| <p><b>Advancing critical evaluation</b></p> | <p>Field trips halt deductive learning approaches and the one-way transfer of knowledge, and provide the catalyst for a differentiated world-view (Rundle-Thiele &amp; Wymer, 2010; Sotomayor, 2020). <b>FT</b></p> <p>Field trips provide students with a number of benefits: an enhanced</p> | <p>Structure field trips so they afford students the ability to meet, discuss, and interact with as diverse a set of stakeholders as possible.</p> | <p>By interacting with a wide range of stakeholders and drawing upon their different views, students are stimulated to <b>critically evaluate the responses of diverse “others”</b> while also being reassured of the authenticity of the</p> |

|                                   |   |   |   |
|-----------------------------------|---|---|---|
|                                   | <p>understanding of course materials, an ability to facilitate groupwork, stimulated interest in specific areas, practical insight into industries, and network building (Goh &amp; Ritchie, 2011). <b>FT</b></p> <p>Macromarketing education can “equip our students to deal with the messy and dynamic complexity that is inherent in all markets” (Shapiro et al., 2021, p. 113). <b>M/S</b></p> |   | <p>organization’s commitments toward sustainability.</p>  |
| <p><b>Motivation to learn</b></p> | <p>Field trips can reinforce key educational concepts, increase the motivation to learn, increase understanding of real markets, and provide real-world</p>   | <p>Seek out novel organizations or industries, i.e. those organizations or sectors that would normally have no recognized association</p> | <p>Novelty of the physical environment can aid students’ engagement while motivating their <b>critical enquiry into the consequences of organizations’ actions.</b></p> |

|  |   |   |  |
|--|---|---|--|
|  | examples of core concepts (Schaller, 2020). <b>FT</b> | with the principles and practice of sustainability. |  |
|--|---|---|--|

**Table 3: Pedagogical benefits and imperatives of field trips**

## **Conclusion**

This study sought to investigate the impact of field trips as a learning vehicle for facilitating postgraduate students' understanding of sustainability issues and practices. In doing this, it achieved the two objectives of responding to the call for establishing the macromarketing viewpoint within business and management education, and providing contemporary insight into the hitherto unexplored use of field trips for postgraduate students.

The findings complement much of the literature by observing that field trips offer students the opportunity to engage in valuable critical examination of real-world applications. Furthermore, that physical and emotional connection with the research site stimulated a rich vein of critical debate about the self, the organization, and the abstract notions of sustainability that are encountered in the classroom. These internal and external dialogs were prompted by and focused on the interfaces between the meso, micro, and macro operations, behaviors, and outcomes of the practices that were not just observed but were also physically experienced. Collectively, these endorse the viewpoint that a developmental macro (marketing) lens is particularly effective at enabling students to comprehend the complex interplay of individuals, businesses, and society. In particular, the opportunity to experience a "novel theater" where these exchanges take place appeared particularly valuable. This study echoes McDonagh's (1998) work on the theory of sustainable communication by suggesting that, among postgraduate students at least, exposure to ultra-novel environments is to be encouraged because they further stimulate critical debate and thereby facilitate cognition of the interconnectedness of meso, micro, and macro (marketing) systems.

Future research should explore the role of place through the lens of the theory of sustainable communication, by not only considering the messages of sustainability but also empirically exploring shared sustainable practices. Studies in marketing education should also seek to understand the perdurability of such messages and practices, and how those are

transferred beyond the learning environment and into general management practice. We suggest that good use could be made of alumni connections to map the journey beyond the field trip and classroom.

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