

Title of assignment: Identifying barriers and opportunities for sustainable academic mobility based on researcher experiences (Short title: Sustainable academic mobility)

The summer project will recruit one master student to review and analyse barriers and opportunities for more sustainable travel practices in academia. The candidate will analyse reported data on travels undertaken by researchers in Include – Research centre for socially inclusive energy transition, which have been systematically recorded since 2021. The data consist of calculated emissions from, and justifications for, researchers' work-related travel. The candidate will also conduct qualitative interviews with involved researchers and administrative staff and bring in relevant scientific literatures on the topic.

BACKGROUND

One of the biggest sources of emission from academic activity is mobility¹. Academics travel for many purposes, including conferences, fieldwork, and meetings². Much of academic mobility occurs in the form of air-travel and is thus highly unsustainable³. Currently, much attention is being geared towards finding solutions for this issue. Particularly after the Covid-19 pandemic, the academic 'flyout culture' has been criticised⁴. Important questions have been raised around if, when, and how much academics ought to travel and what 'manoeuvring room' there is for universities to accommodate for a transition towards sustainable academic mobility⁵. Still, the experience of academics themselves has received little attention, especially related to using alternative modes of travel.

As part of various commitments to more sustainable practices, many universities have adopted travel policies. For instance, at the University of Oslo, researchers are asked to consider the necessity for travel and how to make travel as sustainable as possible. Include is a leading institution in this regard, having implemented a strategy for travelling sustainably⁶ and a system for accounting emissions and tracking researchers' motivations and dilemmas when planning their travel. However, research has demonstrated that shifting modes of travel – and transitioning from air-travel to alternative modes in particular – is far from straight-forward for consumers⁷ and academics⁸.

This summer project will leverage the data gathered by Include to consider what can be done to make academic travel more sustainable, answering the following questions: What are the researchers' experiences of travel? What are their justifications for travel, and travel modes? Which factors are involved in motivating researchers to travel the way that they do? Which barriers to and opportunities for travelling more sustainably can be identified from their accounts and experiences? How do researchers' life circumstances affect their experience of travel? What measures, institutional arrangements (e.g., travel agency services) or policies can be put in place to promote more sustainable travel practices in academia?

AIMS

This summer project is divided into three tasks, outlined below:

1. **Literature review on academic mobility.** Write a brief and concise review of the existing literatures on academic mobility and measures to make it more sustainable. The scope of the review is to be discussed with the supervisors.
2. **Reviewing and analysing existing data.** Review, summarize, and analyse the data gathered through Include's travel registration between 2021 and 2024.
3. **Conducting and analysing follow-up interviews.** Conduct interviews with a selection of Include researchers (exact number to be decided) based on the already gathered data. The interviews should focus on barriers and opportunities for engaging in sustainable travel practices as well as their experience with travelling and accounting for their travels. It might also be relevant to interview representatives of other institutions which have adopted Include's principles for work travel. An interview guide will be developed together with the supervisors.

Most of the time should be devoted to the two latter aims. The result will be relevant to research activities in, and ongoing efforts to limit the environmental impact of academic mobility in Include as well as the wider academic community.

SCOPE OF WORK

The student will work principally under supervision of PhD fellows Johannes Volden and Øyvind Sundet, with oversight from Professor Tanja Winther, all at SUM. The student will be offered a desk (shared student office) at SUM and can benefit from contact with other researchers at SUM. The work is to take place in the summer 2024 and the report is to be submitted by September 1st to Volden/Sundet (unless otherwise agreed). The scope corresponds to six weeks' fulltime work, but the work can also be spread over a longer period according to the applicant's suited timeframe. Given that the student will interview researchers, it will be necessary to set aside sufficient time before and/or after the joint holiday (*fellesferie*).

OUTCOME

The outcome is to be a report situating the study within the literature (aim 1) and summarizing the empirical findings (aims 2 and 3). We also encourage the candidate to publish a popular article (e.g., newspaper article) based on the work. This latter is seen as important both for the student's own development, and to bring the role of academic mobility out to public awareness. In addition, there is a possibility that the data can be used as empirical basis for a co-authored research article (to be discussed between supervisors and the student).

APPLICATION

Preferred applicants are students enrolled in master's programmes at departments at the University of Oslo. The assignment is open to all candidates with at least one year of studies at the master's level. Candidates must be proficient in a Scandinavian language. Interested candidates must submit a statement of purpose/motivation and an overview of academic records and background. Number of available projects: 1.

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- ¹ Tseng, Sherry H. Y., Craig Lee, and James Higham. 2022. "Managing Academic Air Travel Emissions: Towards System-Wide Practice Change." *Transportation Research Part D: Transport and Environment* 113 (December): 103504.
- ² Storme, T., J.R. Faulconbridge, J.V. Beaverstock, B. Derudder, and F. Witlox. 2017. "Mobility and Professional Networks in Academia: An Exploration of the Obligations of Presence." *Mobilities* 12 (3): 405–24.
- ³ Bjørkdahl, Kristian, and Adrian Santiago Franco Duharte, eds. 2022. *Academic Flying and the Means of Communication*. Singapore: Springer Singapore.
- ⁴ Poggioli, N.A., Hoffman, A.J. (2022). Decarbonising Academia's Flyout Culture. In: Bjørkdahl, K., Franco Duharte, A.S. (eds) *Academic Flying and the Means of Communication*. Palgrave Macmillan, Singapore.
- ⁵ Schreuer, Anna, Annina Elisa Thaller, and Alfred Posch. 2023. "Reducing Air Travel Emissions in Academia: An Exploration of Universities' Manoeuvring Room." *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education* 24 (9): 102–17.
- ⁶ [Environmental strategy – Include - Include – Forskningscenter for sosialt inkluderende energiomstilling \(uio.no\)](#)
- ⁷ Volden, Johannes, and Arve Hansen. 2022. "Practical Aeromobilities: Making Sense of Environmentalist Air-Travel." *Mobilities* 17 (3): 349–65.
- ⁸ Eriksson, E., Söderberg, M.W., Wormbs, N. (2022). Exceptionalism and Evasion: How Scholars Reason About Air Travel. In: Bjørkdahl, K., Franco Duharte, A.S. (eds) *Academic Flying and the Means of Communication*. Palgrave Macmillan, Singapore.