Tonje Fjågesund (Natural Sciences), Jagriti Yatra, India, December 2017

In December 2017 I was given the opportunity to participate in Jagriti Yatra, a national train journey across India, by the aid of Rewati Prabhu and the Kartik Prabhu Memorial Sponsorship. Accompanied with roughly 500 Indian youth, I spent 15 days traversing 8000 km of Indian railways in what is referred to as the world’s largest entrepreneurial train journey.

Jagriti Yatra means ‘awakening journey’, and as I see it, the aim of this social venture is to inspire and teach youth their potential to build India through enterprise. The Yatra is unlike anything else. It started off as an ambitious idea in which people had little faith due to the sheer logistical challenges of organising a journey of these dimensions. However, in 2017 Jagriti Yatra celebrated its 10th anniversary and continues to enrich youth and offer learnings I believe can be found nowhere else.

My experiences in India far exceed what can be described in an A4 page, but in short they involved the observation of transforming landscapes and cultures, improved understanding of “doing development” from a grassroots level in an Indian context and innumerable encounters with fascinating people. It was truly inspiring to share this journey with hundreds of engaged youth, most of them with a burning passion to make positive changes to their local communities, their country or to the world. To me, India presented itself as a changemaker hub.

The journey also had its challenges, in terms of the daily life on the train, language barriers and being thrown in and fully immersed in a culture which was completely foreign to me. However, with an open mind and a good tolerance for spontaneity, we all supported each other through the problems that arose along the way. I think all 500 of us staggered of the train on the platform in Mumbai, having come full circle, feeling both physically and mentally exhausted, but so many experiences richer. Most of all will I remember the other Yatris (participants) for their passion, openness and willingness to both listen and share.

A big thanks to Kartik and Rewati Prabhu, to the JY team, all participants and to Pembroke College, making my participation in Jagriti Yatra 2017 possible.