

Walking as a participatory, performative and mobile method

Maggie O'Neill and Tracey Reynolds

WALKING AS A PARTICIPATORY, PERFORMATIVE AND MOBILE METHOD

Professor Maggie O'Neill, University of York
Professor Tracey Reynolds, University of Greenwich
Dr Umut Erel and Erene Kaptani, Open University



The Open
University



RESEARCH CONTEXT

- ‘Participatory Arts and Social Action Research (PASAR)’. This is a two-year research project
 - funded by the Economic and Social Research Council/ National Centre for Research Methods, is led by Umut Erel and Erene Kaptani Open University, Maggie O’Neill University of York, Tracey Reynolds University of Greenwich (2016-2018)
- Focus of the study is the use of PAR to generate new knowledge and insights into the social exclusion encountered by marginalised and ‘hard to reach’ communities
- *Reach broader audiences and develop a research toolkit for National Centre for Research Methods*



PASAR - METHODS

- The research combines walking methods and participatory theatre –*working with migrant mothers, girls and migrant women with no recourse to public funds* - to understand the lives, experiences and sense of belonging and place making – involved in enacting citizenship.
- We also worked with a school and two support organisations to do the research, and in strand 2 with Praxis and Runnymede Trust as well as Counterpoints Arts & film maker Marcia Chandra.



IN THIS PRESENTATION AND VIDEO WE WILL DISCUSS

1. walking as a participatory, performative and mobile method: what the method is, and how it has been used in research and how we used these methods as part of our project with migrant communities.
2. How we integrated walking methods with participatory theatre methods.
3. We will then share our thoughts on the benefits and challenges of the methods and the possible impact on policy and practice.



1.WALKING METHODS IN SOCIAL RESEARCH

- There is a long tradition of walking in ethnographic and anthropological research but until recently not as a focused method for conducting sociological research in participatory and performative ways (Ingold and Lee 2006, Edensor 2010, Clark and Emmel 2010)
- We used arts based walking methods. Taking a walk with someone can open a space for dialogue and communication in reciprocal ways. Walking is performative, relational and reflective (O'Neill and Hubbard 2010, O'Neill and Roberts 2018) Heddon 2007).



VISUALISING, MAPPING & WALKING

- We invited migrant mothers and girls to visualise and then map their everyday routes on paper (in the form of a map) and we walked with them, following their maps either in pairs (mothers with no recourse to public funds) or collectively (migrant mothers and migrant girls).
- Everyone was invited to visualize/imagine these everyday routes. Walking together in the workshop we visualised and shared our walks with each other.
- We then shared and talked about our maps and walks and what walking means to us.







Walking -

Sense of peace a quiet
like walking because it's
free + can exercise - most of
US can't afford the gym
can clear my mind / + plan
for the day ~ ^{week} ^{head}
walk to run for the bus

I walk to take my children
to the library

Walk to school with son + just
chat about school, instead of
talking bus; find out about
each other more.

Clear clutter from mind

Good for body -

If feeling emotionally down, if

THE WALKS



WHAT DID WE LEARN?

- We learnt that walking enabled us to connect to the everyday lives of the women and girls in neighbourhood spaces, and a shared viewpoint and also empathic, embodied learning emerged. The walks helped us to access the way citizenship is enacted, and performed
- The young girls shared and reflected on the ways that they use public space and at the same time attuned to those spaces in new ways that enhanced their learning and awareness about the areas they live in and go to school.



2. HOW WE INTEGRATED WALKING METHODS WITH PARTICIPATORY THEATRE METHODS.

- After we had taken the walks together we shared the photographs and maps in the workshop space. The girls and mothers curated the images placing them around the maps to make sense of and share the knowledge produced .
- We also explored the spaces and landmarks on their maps using theatre based methods, creating images individually, in pairs and collectively, taking the stories from their everyday experiences, routes and mobilities into the theatre space.





- In the workshop setting we asked mothers and girls what feelings they associated with each place and we asked them to also add these to maps eg feels of belonging/unbelonging; safety etc. In fact we found that the same place might hold multiple meanings for them. In one workshop the mothers produced soundscapes of the walks, the noises associated with the walk and their everyday lives.
- Working in partnership with a theatre practitioner really helped us to think through how we were going to integrate the two methods of walking and participatory theatre.



PLAYBACK



3.BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF THE METHODS AND THE POSSIBLE IMPACT ON POLICY AND PRACTICE.

- We were able to build empathic relationships with the mothers and girls.
- Having the opportunity to walk alongside them enabled us to gain a real understanding of their everyday lives.
- Walking opened up dialogue and conversation with the mothers and girls about their lives and neighbourhoods, also memories of home and families living in another country.
- Walking together and sharing experiences built a reciprocal relationship – the process of walking, talking and sharing aspects of our lives broke down some barriers



CHALLENGES

- Walking together is enriching experience but it can also be emotionally and physically tiring.
- The practicalities of walking and recording need to be addressed. It was sometimes difficult to get good audio sound with noise of London traffic. Working with a film maker really helped the process and practice.
- The revelatory possibilities of walking as a method means that unanticipated encounters or experiences along the route may trigger painful memories and needs to be considered in the process of doing research ethically
- The researcher and research team need to 'hold' the research and ensure as much as is possible that this is a safe space by building in reflective sessions and ensuring ethics and reflexivity are a central aspect of the research process.
- PAR is not a panacea-it is challenging



IMPACT

- 1) - Such as:
- Use up things
- Loss of dignity / feel degraded
- Shame/humiliation of having to ask for help
- Depression
- Not being able to look after children
- Caring and look in relationships
- Impact on other people (you let who depend on you)
- Can get with feedback from other carers
- Effects on other children in system why not try
2) - How will it be shared with who?
- How far are people ever educated by informal ways
- Can this method go far for the to find what needs to change
- Very good at pointing it out
- What is it proposed - not just a point to discuss
- Performance - "it makes me feel strong" "it's not only my"
- for others to have education to see up to

- sharing story about various parts of the world
- 3+4). Community organizing - sharing the how and why of a project
- to build solidarity between different groups
- simplify the fact of democracy
- bringing different perspectives together
- "nothing is too good to share" - something not appreciated but better than most things
- Bringing this to HOL + HOC
- might be interesting to do this theme with social workers at meeting
- how to engage wider groups - extend towards daybreak of the play
- small changes add up / ideas

IMPACT

- We would like our participatory research with and alongside the women to bring about changes in the NRPF policy.
- We are working with Migrant Rights Network and Runnymede Trust, a race equality agency, so that our project will influence policy decisions
- In February 2017 we hosted a policy day which brought together a range of policymakers and practitioners in dialogue with the mothers and ourselves
- A policy briefing report has been developed reflecting on the added value these methods for marginalised communities.
- For the mothers we worked with experiencing the no recourse to public funds policy the project helped to break their isolation.



Policy day – decolonising research



'The difference is the emotion part of it, because if you're talking, it's just talking, isn't it? They just listen, they don't see the emotional part of it; but the acting, it's just like something that is life – that's how it feels. So people just feel the emotional part of it, and feel what you're feeling. And we did the acting, like we see, and then gave us a chance to talk as well'.

