

## **Walking as a participatory, performative and mobile method**

Hello my name is Professor Maggie O'Neill, I'm a co-investigator on the participatory arts and social action research project and I'm based at the University of York. Hello my name is Professor Tracy Reynolds and I'm also a co-investigator on a project, I'm sociologist by background and I'm interested in looking at the ways in which participatory methods can be used to explore sociological concepts.

Today we will be talking to you about walking as a participatory performative and mobile method. I will describe what the method is and how we use the method in our research project with migrant communities. I will then describe how we integrate the methods particularly Maggie's walking methods with participatory theatre methods. We will then share some of our thoughts and experiences on the benefits and challenges of the methods, and then we explore the possible impact on policy and practice.

There is a long tradition of walking in ethnographic and anthropological research but until recently not as a focused method for conducting social research in participatory ways. For example anthropologists Tim Ingold and Jo Lee talked about the importance of walking in ethnographic research to understand people's roots and mobilities. They say that social relations are not enacted insitu but are paced out along the ground. Sociologists Andrew Clark and Nick Emmel reflect upon how walking interviews can help researchers to understand how participants create and maintain their neighbourhoods and communities, and of course John Urry's research on mobilities is also very important here too. I came to walking as a method and practice influenced by performance and walking artists. Artists Misha Myers, Claire Qualmann and also D Headen, and have been using walking as a method of doing participatory arts based research as well as biographical research for many years. Together with Brian Roberts we describe in our forthcoming book on mobile methods, the biographical walking interview method. I call the combination of arts and ethnographic research or arts and biographical research ethno-mimesis. Walking is a deeply engaged relational way of attuning to the life of another person that evokes knowing, as well as understanding. For when we're walking side by side with another person we can engage in an embodied incorporeal way and attune to the narratives and lived experiences of our research participants of our co-walkers. So taking a walk with someone can open a space for dialogue and communication in reciprocal ways. In this sense walking is performative, it's relational, but it's also reflective, and importantly it's sensory and multiple modalities of experience can be

shared. Such methods constitute what Les Back and Nirmal Puwar call live methods. Creative public novel methods of doing imaginative and critical sociological research.

In our project we invited migrant mothers and young girls to map their everyday routes on paper in the form of a map or a route and then we walked with them, following their maps either in pairs or collectively. We also explored the spaces and landmarks on their maps using theatre based methods, creating images individually, in pairs and collectively integrating their stories, their everyday experiences of walking, into theatre workshops. So how did we use these methods. Well first the women and girls were invited to create a map from a place they call home, or from their school to a place that's special to them, marking landmarks along the way that are important to them for whatever reason. The girls and mothers made maps of their everyday routes and journeys, their everyday lives. Second Erene our Research Fellow and drama theatre practitioner on the project, engaged everyone in visualization exercises, where we were asked to imagine these everyday routes, these walks, in our minds eye, and then working together in pairs in the workshop, we visualized and shared our walks with a partner. Third before moving out into the streets to walk the routes together, we asked participants to share and talk about their walks and what walking means to them, what walking means to us.

In the workshop, in the workshop setting the women in girls shared their maps with the group describing the places and spaces on their maps. Fourth we then agreed together a schedule for the walks and also the routes we would take and the maps we use to plan the walks. We then undertook the walks, we undertook collective walks walking in small groups with the girls and then with the mothers. We recorded the conversations and the photographs that people took along the way. Filmmaker Marsha Chandra filmed one group walk with the girls and one group walk with the mothers group too. In strand two we walk together with mothers with no recourse to public funds, and we walked in pairs during this part of the project. The conversations were recorded and the mothers took photographs and two of these walks were filmed. We experienced that walking enabled us to connect to the everyday lives of the women and the young girls in neighbourhood spaces, eliciting a shared viewpoint and also empathic embodied learning.

In this clip we're about to see a mother talks about the importance of the park to her, and the place where she had a birthday party for her son. This

is where I did his party, we did it down there. I made a cake and I had the son of my friend. My daughter's classmate, she's got a baby girl, she had to bring.. her name is Janie, so I cooked a little bit of rice and chicken and then we sat down here and bought ice-cream, juice and water. Oh fabulous, oh gosh, Marcia see if you can get this. They went down running and playing, me and the mother we're here, I just took some photos for memory. So the park has really helped me a lot because I can do a party. I can't host anybody in my mums place, and I want him to have a cake for his fourth birthday.

The walks also helped us to access the way citizenship is enacted and performed. Citizenship not just something that we have or hold but something that we do, we perform. In this scene we see another mother take us on a walk to the park, she shows us where she goes with her daughter to play and her daughter counts the ducks learning to count. Sometimes I don't have to count all of them. Yeah. A great way of learning your number to count the ducks and geese. It is very calm isn't it. It does feel very calm by the water and when you see them. I wonder if they don't get cold. Because half of it is ice already. Oh this is nice, I guess this is where your daughter likes to come. Yes. Oh she's gorgeous. Shall I take a photograph of you with your camera, of you showing us that lovely photograph of her. Actually I'll just get the park in. So you can enter through the gate and you can then sit down. During the walks with the young girls they shared and reflected on the ways that they use public spaces and at the same time how they attuned to those spaces in new ways that enhanced their learning and their awareness about the areas they live in and go to school. What have I liked best about what we just did. That and the weather and the fact that we saw a lot of places, like I didn't really, I don't really come to the canal that often because I've got a bad memory of it. But the more I come it's nice, cause it's like water you get a breeze, and it's, instead of being boiling hot you're kind of mid, not that much and not that little. So this is week four and we've done quite a few things, what are your thoughts about the project. It's that I'm really learning a lot because at first I didn't really take the detail of my street but after Erene told us to like make clays and statues of them, I kind of realise how little I know and how that I take no notice about what people are and who's around it, but now like when I'm walking I just look around to see who's doing what, what kind of people are there, at what shops are near and stuff like that, Following the walks we shared the photographs and the maps and the stories together in the workshop space. The girls and the mothers curated the images placing them around the maps to make sense of, and share their knowledge

they're learning.

So how did we integrate the walking and theatre methods? Following the walks the conversation, sound files, photographs and reflections on the walk were brought back into the workshop space and we recreated these experiences in images through body sculptures and theatre scenes. In a workshop setting we asked the mothers and girls what feelings they associated with each place and we asked them to also add these to the maps, for example feelings of belonging or unbelonging, fear and safety and we found that the same place might also hold multiple meanings for them. In one workshop the mothers produced soundscapes of the walks, the noises associated with the walks and their everyday lives. Working in partnership with the theatre practitioner really helped us in thinking through how we were going to integrate the two methods of walking and participatory theatre. The walks and the photographs taken on the walks and reflections on their walking in a space and place can really inform the theatre scenes. This can really deepen our understanding of how space and place shape our understanding and an accent of a social world. Starting with the theatre scenes and the reflections and visualization around certain places also fed into the walks and we did these with the young girls to. They took us on walks in pairs and recreated images of places they visited, their neighbourhoods, friendly hood and scary hood, public and also statutory surfaces, parks, shops, libraries, schools, community and family centres. We focused on the workshops and how they feel about living in London, in their neighbourhoods and what they do and with whom they'd spend their time with and where they go with their children or friends where they can relax.

So integrating the methods may start with either walking or theatre, but the important thing to note is their integration facilitate space for experiences to be shared, knowledge produced and learning to take place. The integration of performative mobile and live methods supported the emergence of rich textual research data that are visual, performative and dialogical. We also conducted more orthodox qualitative social research methods of interviews and focus groups towards the end of each of the research phases with our participants. So let's look at some of the benefits and challenges of bringing the research together. Well for me it was really useful to experience first-hand that empathetic witnessing that Maggie mentioned earlier. I was able to build an empathetic relationship with the mothers and the girls. Having the opportunity to walk in their shoes really allowed me to gain a real understanding of their everyday lives and one of the mothers cases always

sticks in my mind because we had to go on multiple bus journeys at peak time of rush hour, traveling from home to her son's school and work, and this was because it was really expensive to travel by trains and tubes which would have been quicker and easier, and this experience really gave me an appreciation of navigating London on a limited income. Another benefit was that it really opened up dialogue and conversation with the mothers and girls about their everyday lives and their neighbourhoods, also about their memories of homes and families living in another country and I believe this would not have happened through conventional interviews or in a workshop setting. I felt walking together and sharing their experiences really built a two-way reciprocal relationship. The process of walking and talking and both sharing aspects of our lives was able to break down some of those barriers between the participant and a researcher which is found in more conventional research methods. It's also important to point out some of the challenges. For me although I found the walks to be an enriching experience I also found that they could be emotionally and physically tiring. It took me a few days to recover from each of the walks. I also underestimated the practicalities of walking and recording. It was sometimes difficult to get good audio sound with a noise of London traffic. However working with a filmmaker who has the technical knowledge and equipment made all the difference.

Yes those issues resonate really well with me Tracey. The combination of methods, visualization, walking and theatre forms is a powerful and live way of doing research. It involves all of the senses. The methods also highlight the relational aspects of doing research together. The method can sometimes help to flatten the power relationships apparent in an Orthodox interview because you are walking side by side and the co-worker is leading you. What Mischa Myers calls situational authority? Walking with another can foster mutual recognition and develop trust between co-workers in helpful multimodal and sensory ways that is different to, and harder to attain in a standard interview. All of this facilitates richer data and the potential for in-depth reflexive embodied in sensory analysis. However there are also risks with this method. For instance the connection, attachment and sharing that takes place in the trusting encounters may lead participants to disclose more than they would ordinarily do under different circumstances. And the revelatory possibilities of walking as a method means that unanticipated encounters or experiences along the route may trigger painful memories. The researcher and the research team need to hold the research and ensure as much as 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. Working in partnership with experienced walking community artists and in our case the drama therapist and the theatre practitioner was very helpful. Having a process and mechanism to refer people on to helping agencies is also important and in our case we work with fantastic support agencies with praxis and migrant rights Network. Building in time for reflection is also really important as a research team. So there are lots of benefits integrating these two methods, but we also need to think about is that how we establish impact.

So a key impact has been the transformative potential of creativity in research sparked by re-intersecting methods we used and also the partnerships that we developed in our case with praxis filmmaker Marcia Chandra and counterpoint arts and other groups too. We are taking a play developed with the mother's with no recourse to public funds to the House of Commons and this event will be hosted by Kate Green who's a member of parliament and also chair of all parliamentary group on migration. The impact of performative and arts based work is significant and is not to be underestimated. Another impact has been for advocating work with and alongside the women to bring about changes in a no recourse to public fund policy. We have been lucky to work with migrant rights network and also running me trust, a race equality organization, so that our project will influence policy decisions and hopefully bring about policy change on this piece of legislation. In February earlier this year we've hosted a policy event which brought together a range of policymakers and practitioners and what was really good about this event was that the mothers performed a short theatre piece based on their experiences and were able to directly speak with a range of agencies about their everyday lived experiences. A policy briefing report has been produced which reflects on the importance of bringing these methods together and the added value these bring for marginalised communities. This report will be launched at the House of Commons event and these methods are really important if we want to create change.