

Walking methods in practice – two international case studies

Michael B Duignan

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Video 2 of 3 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oZy_eJRPkXc

So welcome to part 2 of my 3 part video series on walking and participating digital methods. Building on part 1 where I briefly outline walking methods, in part 2 I will illustrate theory and practice using case study and urban environments at the 2016 Rio Olympics, with some reflections on recent work I've done in Tokyo for 2020. |So to start off the study was informed by the following research question, which is, in what way can an amalgam of embodied and digital practices be utilised to better deeply interrogate and understand the socio spatial processes and implications of hosting the Olympics on urban space and those affected, as reflected in the kind of discussions I've had in part one video. I make the case regarding why walking methods and data collected is key for generating insights of extreme environments, like Olympic cities.

I'm going to detail the intense spatial interactional demands the Olympics places on urban environments and those who engage with said space. So this piece is grounded by arguments that there's little systematic and empirical evidence that looks at the ways the Olympics territorialises and takes over host cities, particularly before and during live staging periods, and how this produces the inclusion of some, and the exclusion of others interests in the melee of Olympic organising. The basic assumption that's been empirically validated is that for the Olympics to exist, sustain themselves, survive and deliver on organisational objectives, they must depend on a host city or even a whole nation abundant in physical infrastructure and symbolic cultural resources. Whether that be tourist

attractions, streets, train lines, to people themselves. So therefore they territorialise urban space, they must reshape it, reconfigure it. The reconfigure existing geographies and the lead up and live staging. Our Rio 2016 case illustrates the live staging effects of territorialisation and our reflections on Tokyo 2020 reflect some of the lead-up stages. So studies have called for a deeper interrogation into these processes and implications of change and we respond to that call. But why can the Olympics take over so easily. So this is just a little bit of background here. So the International Olympic Committee forces the hosts to sign a host city contract, empowering the city to take over swades of public space and assets. Parks, squares, streets, rivers, beaches, popular tourist attractions, might be Copacabana beach or the Royal Greenwich Park for London 2012. So spatial implications and social interactions with reconfigured existing space and the creation of new venues and event spaces like the live screen areas are far-reaching. They extend across the host city into the heart of community spaces impacting on everyday lives, especially the livelihoods of small businesses. Okay, so this doesn't happen by chance and the event draws on the state's apparatus.

Human and non-human actors like security agents, police, military, barriers, gunships, invoked social control that determine how residents, businesses, tourists engage with hosts spaces, across a range of urban environments. These are the kind of things that we want to look at whilst walking these spaces and can only be accessed through walking these particular spaces, hence the reason why this is such a valuable method. So in other words, there are lots of things to observe on the ground. Indeed there are less visible forces at play too. Around these Olympic zones you have invisible regulatory bubbles, think advertising, trading, security regulations, that constrain certain behaviours. From airport style security prohibiting over 100 mil liquids, to cracking down on ambush marketing and rogue traders. So many of these regulations are vital, others less

so. Local businesses promise opportunities to leverage, cannot access spectator crowds as public spaces, usually owned by the people, normally, become privatised and commodified spaces for global corporations to capture tourist crowds and consumption. The walking method not only helps understand how these events shape physical space, but what are the socio spatial implications are like, some of the things that we've just discussed, and critically whose interests are included versus those excluded across temporary urban arrangements. So this is a key question for this field of research, in particular this applied field of research, but also generally for why walking methods are useful, and I could go on. Not only is this a pitch for walking methods themselves, but as a way of generating and locking multi-dimensional insights for anyone looking at extreme and complex settings, like those presented by the coming of hosting the Olympics. Whether you're a sociology, anthropologist, critical theorist, there's lots going on and actually I argue that events, particularly mega events, are an untapped context but all of these different fields, there's lots more to be looked at, and walking methods are just one way in which this could be done. |Walking methods previously discussed, offer a way to interrogate in real time some of these questions. They offer highly localised idiosyncratic insights that may not be revealed by other methods like survey interviewing and only using static imagery like photos when interpreting the data. They to offer a new way of thinking and understanding beyond entrenched traditional methodological choices and evaluative approaches generally, and specific to this field of analysis, that typically offer limited qualitative insight into highly complex situational and contextual scenarios. So increasingly post positivistic and epistemological positions are taken generally and specifically here promoting lines of inquiry that seek to avoid reductionism, accepting messy, complex, contested, contradictory and even paradoxical processes and implications. |So how specifically did we apply

walking methods and the RioZones approach. Well we took an action focus research approach, physical, immersive, sensory, effective methods were chosen and walking methods are increasingly used, yet there is significant room to integrate, as part of either a single method, or as part of a wider approach with other methods as well.

So we complete a data collection for the RioZones project over three phases. Phase one, we did the walking methods, immediately before the opening ceremony and during the live staging of the project, and that was between the 31st of July to the 8th of August 2016, and then we had two more approaches, which I won't be talking about in too much detail but we had phase two and phase three phase. Phase two was immediately after the live staging. We conducted some interviews the month afterwards between August and September, to triangulate some of the things that we found, and then in phase three we continued the analysis to keep on the scrutiny on these particular spaces, but I won't go into detail about phase two and phase three. But in this talk I will focus on phase one, as this is where we did the walking methods. Then we followed them up with these interviews.

So phase one consisted of a 10-day observational period across host event zones and these are the particular concepts that we use to show the demarcated areas that we used to host the actual activity, both the sporting activity, the cultural and the commercial activity as well. We also looked at something called the 'last mile' and these last miles are arteries to and from these zones, and usually they're transport hubs. So if you were to arrive via train, you'd walk a particular route toward the main venue and they're often referred to as the last mile.

We selected key venue sites, Olympic Stadium, Maracana Stadium, both of which were in the American Art District, the Copacabana Stadium, which was in

Copacabana and the Life Site at the Porto Maravilha, which was also known as the Olympic Boulevard that hosted a various live screening sponsor activations, food vendors. This is part the strategic spatial extension of the Olympics in recent years. But the sites chose us. These were specifically demarcated by the Olympics projects to host and these spaces were home to a significant amount of sporting and cultural and commercial activity. Therefore considerable phenomena to observe, like those I've previously mentioned. |We sought to approximate the gaze of a tourist, following prescribed paths and promoter space. Again these main urban zones and the routes to and from them are all chosen and organised by the Olympics project. They almost invite critical analysis, interpretation and evaluative research. By embedding ourselves in the research context brought us closer to the phenomena in question, that according to Adams and Guy 2007, exposed researchers to multi-dimensional and multi-sensory experiences of a particular event, especially intensely impacted extreme environments like Olympic host cities.

So we took routes planned by organisers before and during Rio 2016, to experience the flows and circulations of visitors and residents across specific spaces, clearly demarcated and thus enabling us to experience importantly, the way marking, the barriers, the security checks, the uses of sounds and sensors to attract visitors to fixed spaces like the venues and these particular live screening sites, for example. |So data also intended to collect soundscapes like music, the general vibe, smells like street food vendors, collective gatherings, to understand the atmosphere, and it's really important to do preparation work. Prior to arriving in Rio for phase one, we examined official Olympic and public documents, the tourist board, web sites, right through to the official maps on the Olympics websites to familiarize ourselves with the host geographical context.

Specifically we wanted to look at the context of the spaces we wanted to look at, affected by the organisation at the Olympics, like we mentioned before, and really who is planned to occupy these spaces. Is it global corporations only, or is it local vendors, local entrepreneurs, or is it a mixture of both. So in terms of the specific data that we actually collected, we had observational data gathered through walking these planned routes. Geotagged photos, over 2000. Audio techniques, hours of audio narration just looking at what the spaces were telling us and try to understand them and understanding them as we go to activate the problems and also build the themes as we went along.

We had geotagged pictures and video, we had over 400 videos captured to really get a sense of the site and also look at it, look at these sites afterwards to do some extra analysis. We looked at the analysis of archival and media reports to also look at whether that was triangulating and supporting our arguments, and see anything that we might have missed, and that might be media articles, documentary analysis, that sort of thing.

Then we conducted interviews like we mention in phase two. Then there's a whole range of different digital techniques that we used as well, but I'll talk about them in part three. |So when we were walking these spaces, we guide the study with a few key analytical questions, linked to the overarching research problem and question to be addressed. So I'll mention a couple of those now. The first, what kind of public spaces were sequestered and territorialised and why. How were these urban spaces specially organized and zoned and what human, for example, security personnel, gains volunteers and non-human actors, like signage, barriers, were responsible for organising and affording such conditions.

And subsequently what would

the associated spatial impacts on visitor flow, circulations and the creation of festival atmospheres across the Olympic city. Significant evidence points to the fact that the way in which these spaces are organised, means that tourists don't actually go into the wider city, they just stay within these largely corporate areas, which is not very good for economic benefits, particularly for local people. |So what kind of specific insights do walking methods provide us. What problems or opportunities were activated, real time or on reflection. So contrary to previous evidence we observed, actually, how individuals subverted social controls and spatial arrangements, exhibiting localised micro resistances. Micro entrepreneurs peddling unofficial goods, local food and drinks snacks rivalling bland corporate McDonald's slop. We saw this because we're live there. At that time there were others criticising from a distance, but they did not see what we saw, because they weren't there necessarily live on the ground. Then the question of why. We identified firsthand how spaces were less controlled and why they were less controlled. Well it was due to less regulation, less enforcement, cracks in the barriers and why findings that allowed tourists to almost bleed out of typically tightly controlled zones and micro-entrepreneurs subsequently to get in those zones, to leverage the spectator crowd to make a buck or two. Safe to say we had interesting insights in the story to tell, but we needed appropriate participating digital methods and communication platforms to do so, which I discuss in the final part 3 video. So this is the end of the second part, go to part three, the final of the videos in this three-part video series on walking and participatory digital methods.