Limitations of walking methods and integrating digital methods for disseminating results

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Welcome to part three, the final part of my three-part video series on Walking and Participatory Digital Methods. Building on part two where I illustrate walking methods in practice, using case study and urban environments in the Rio 2016 Olympics, in part three I will reflect on the limitations of this approach, generally and specifically with regards to the Olympic cities as an extreme case or extreme environment, that serves as a container for complex forms of interaction and organisation. I will then close by crystallising how my co-author Professor David McGillivray at the University West of Scotland and I brought this together in a research project coupled with a digital research dissemination strategy, which we call the RioZones Approach. |So there are some limitations to this particular approach. There's a limited length of time immersed in the context which is problematic in and of itself, coupled with the vagaries of urban life that change so quickly and the individuals and the social groups that inhabit it. But it could be overcome if longitudinal approaches are taken. If one's embedded for longer and triangulates against other sources, so there are ways to get around these particular limitations. Of course Geotagging and time stamping pictures can really help build an idea of changes over time. Crowdsourcing publicly available images, videos and other commentary and datasets can be useful to triangulate with your own snapshot to offer longitudinal and wider geographical views to improve both the internal and the external validity of findings. |But walking methods is not just about being armed with photo, video and recording devices. It requires a clear analytical focus, like the questions that we use to frame our case study, but you must also have flexibility to activate and understand the research problems and

opportunities in the moment too, depending on the nature of the in phenomena under investigation of course. Full benefits are realised if the researchers activate interested stakeholders to partake in dialogue. Thus people should put in the ground work or have preformed networks that are fundamentally required to enliven debate and draw people into your insights and conversation as you do them. This includes with key researchers in the fields as well as policymakers and managers, and indeed including these stakeholders are critical if you wish to use your insights to help generate real-life change and move toward a research impact agenda. As part of the RioZones project, although we don't deal with detail here, we explicitly target key gatekeepers across these phases and especially mobilise them for Phase two interviews, that I haven't gone into in detail, but I mentioned earlier. But one must be really aware of the cross-cultural differences between context and stakeholders involved, of course, from Beijing to London to the Rio 2016 Olympics and now Tokyo, they are wildly different, the governance structures, the local cultural responses to organising, through to the likelihood key stakeholders will engage, or not in some of my cases in Tokyo. Fundamentally unless you have a large research team it is difficult to cover all the spaces and time phases that you'd like to, if you wanted to do a large study that is, but triangulating others content is key, but not a golden bullet and it does not come without its limitations. But raw footage and images can be very useful to capture objective facts like how the spaces are designed, who's in them, what's going on. |So to recap be aware of these three big limitations, but ones that can be overcome with good planning. Limited temporal engagement, limited cultural awareness and access and having mostly non-local perspectives, and based on that point I'm certainly reflecting on all three. Let's position ourselves in the research. Our prism as researchers affecting what we see, collect, interpret, chooses evidence, write up as a story, one must recognise the inherent bias and the dominant logic that comes with having that particular position.

Therefore it's a good idea to work with local researchers of course. |Going back to earlier, contrary to popular thought and existing empirical evidence we had an important story and angle to tell, like I mentioned at the end of Part two. Less doom and gloom, more spaces of opportunity as a result of seeing these micro level processes and interactions at play. We took a traditional approach, papers, conversation articles, journal articles, participatory digital approaches like Twitter, people have been doing that, and we've written several papers on it and we'll provide the links of these at the end. However recently we've witnessed a digital ethnographic turn, whereby ethnographic ethos has adapted to a fit the affordances of digital culture. Pink et al 2015 suggests we live and act in a context that is, today, almost always co-constituted and entangled with digital tech, content, presence and communication. So the Olympics and the Fifa World Cup, as well as other major events like the Super Bowl, Wimbledon, are media-tised events, they're ideal for generating digital content, digital data sets in and of themselves, and by many who commentate and produce these spaces for the dissemination of ideas across digital platforms, will that be Twitter with hashtags, handles and other associated identities like vloggers, for example. |So what did we do in terms of our participatory digital methods. Well it was effectively split down into two. We had vlogging and we had the official RioZones WordPress site, of course other sites are available, and then we had micro vlogging, or micro blogging via the RioZones Twitter hashtag, again other platforms are available too. These digital tools help network and build conversations to reach a wider public, particularly important in the era of research impact. Encouraging a more open approach, where digital sharing and collaboration become ways of being and relating to others, according to Pink et al 2015, whether that be scholars, policymakers, managers or practitioners. This is invoked by posting hashtags of immediate and reflected findings, showing videos, photos, writing and recording vlogs and putting out there

for people to see. Capturing, and then considering how one shares content and

reflects in vlogs, in itself, is a knowledge-making practice through

editing and creative re-imagining of the content. Yet how research is disseminated

is an important consideration. Not to promote the power relation between the

researcher and the researched, we don't want to do that, but to involve them in

conversation, where possible, but the devil is in the detail. How can this

really be afforded, it's difficult. Does the researcher have confidence and the

ability to invite key stakeholders into the knowledge production, dissemination,

and application phases, it's a very difficult task. |It's this longitudinal,

embedded approach to walking itself and of the wider RioZones

project which appear to have significant value. Bringing along stakeholders across

the Phases are not just extending reach but extending the time of the scrutiny

on big projects as well. It's a key criticism of similar studies and of

capturing just one moment in time, event case study series according to Yin 2013.

As once the curtain closes on this closing ceremony, policymakers, scholars,

pay less attention to the after-effects, so therefore keeping these longer-term

effects in view is really really important and digital participatory

methods like vlogging etc, can help do that and keep the scrutiny on. Yet these

so called legacies are the reason why host cities bid for them in the first

place, that's why we need to do that, so having a longitudinal embedded

approach, helps to overcome these inherent problems and maintain

scrutiny over public policy. This is what we do as

researchers, we critique the effectiveness and sustainability,

inclusivity of public policy, many of us do that anyway, important for

all scholars, particularly in the era of research impact. So alongside the

RioZones vlog, Twitter, the conversation articles, journal publications,

conferencing etc. We mobilise the number of media outlets as well, regional,

national and international news outlets, the BBC right through to the ABC news

network in Australia, to provide a window, a public window, into insights that would

rarely feature in traditional media stories. |So in terms of the conclusions

of this particular video series. The first one, the RioZones Approach

illustrates the multifaceted, traditional and creative ways

researchers can interrogate processes and implications of organising in

extreme environment like the Olympics. We believe that you can actually

link and apply many of these particular approaches and focus to other extreme

environments as well. The second point, is that this approach can disrupt

linear, sometimes entrenched epistemological

and methodological positions. The third point illustrates how physical-embodied

methods can quite nicely be integrated alongside digital platforms

participatory digital methods for dissemination and interaction. The fourth

point illustrates how, in real-time and throughout the life of a project,

observational, photographic, video, narrative analysis, Twitter commentary,

all that can be engaged with stakeholders and help share raw data and

reflective findings periodically to extend access to knowledge beyond the

Academy, as well as within the Academy of course, as well. The fifth point, the

RioZones approach helped to promote a longitudinal scrutiny, an inherent

challenge for event case study approaches generally, but also a

recognised challenge in this particular applied field.

The sixth conclusion, it helped us illustrate generally how

complex environments, such as Olympic cities, are fertile grounds for

collecting very interesting data sets and data sets that you might not

traditionally have seen if you weren't there. The seventh point, utilising a

network public, via social media, can lead to critical issues around the processes

and these implications into the public domain faster enabling affected group

and supporters to mobilise at a faster rate. Additionally in the era of

fact-checking, competing claims about the truth, what

happened, can be aired and fact chat with those actually on the ground witnessing,

like we did. Our final point number seven, offers a deeper interrogation to

the socio-spatial relations, whatever they may be, in extreme environments, important for those undertaking descriptive, interpretive and critical approaches. Walking and a whole host of mobile methods can help find things often left under the radar. |So thank you for listening, I hope this was of interest and use. For our paper that this is based on, there is a link on the National Centre for Research Methods page and for extended information on walking methods and our Olympic City Casework visit michaelduignan.uk or follow me on Twitter @michaelbduignan. Thanks.

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