

Walk and Talks

Overview

Walk and talk sessions can be described as mobile interviews or 'go along' methods, as the technique embodies both walking and talking. Walk and talk sessions are particularly useful for evaluating location based projects/activities e.g. festivals or exhibitions.

The sessions can be conducted with any interested group or individual. The aim is for the group or individual to give a guided tour of how they use and perceive the project (be it an exhibition or festival). This can involve taking photographs and notes of how they see or feel about the space, activity and/or project.

Why use it?

Walking methods can be valuable because they elicit very different information than asking people to sit in a room and answer questions about specific topics or environments. When people are not in a particular space and are asked to describe it, they tend to think of the obvious, rather than having their memories provoked by catching sight of a feature that reminds them of something else (such as a previous event, or forthcoming activity).

Walking methods can be used to gauge:

- any physical changes that have taken place to a site, location or space
- an historical narration of the project
- use of a space or site
- an understanding of the context of the project

By asking an individual or group who knows a project well to guide you around a space, you can capture many aspects that you as an outsider would not know from a site visit. However, by asking a variety of stakeholders to undertake a walk and talk session of the same project, you can build up a multi-dimensional understanding of the project. For example, by asking a member of staff, an audience member and funder to walk and talk sessions of the same exhibition, you will acquire a detailed understanding of the exhibition from a range of perspectives.

Walking methods can be used to empower evaluation participants, as it hands over the focus of the evaluation to them. Unlike questionnaires or interviews, the participants can set the route of the walk and the agenda for the talk.

Instructions for use

Walking methods can be adapted to focus on particular aspects of the project, such as soundwalks (to focus on listening) or night-walks (which have a temporal focus), or can be used with a range of people (groups, individuals, different ages). Whatever approach is adopted there are some general rules for using walk and talks for evaluation:

- Brief the individual or group undertaking the walk, explain that they should be guiding you around the project (e.g. exhibition or festival) and that you are only there to take notes to complement the photographs they take.

- If necessary, because the individual or group really can't engage with the activity, try using prompts including themes such as historical narrative and usage.
- If you feel it would be useful, comments can be annotated on a map of the space for comparison at a later date.
- Ensure that you have considered any health and safety implications of the walk and talk session, and if appropriate undertake a self assessment of risk.

Who to use it with

Walking methods can be used with a range of individuals (e.g. partners, staff, audience members, funders) or groups.

When to use it

As noted earlier, walking methods are suitable for location based projects such as exhibitions or festivals. They can be used before, during and/or after the activity.

Limitations

- Ensure that all parties know what the walk and talk involves, how long it lasts and that they may be asked to take photographs.
- Walk and talk sessions do take time to organise, conduct and analyse. There is a limit to how many walking interviews you can conduct, but if you organise them well you can pack a lot into a short time period.
- It is important to remember that people's perception of a project or activity will change over time. Walking interviews that are held some time after an activity is completed need to be qualified by the term 'with hindsight'. As an aside, it is always interesting and useful to see what people remember and how they remember it, and what is still important to those involved in an activity weeks or months later.
- Walking interviews are unpredictable. Some will be rewarding, providing you with more information than you anticipated and perhaps the opportunity for a new project; however, some might be brief and uninformative.

Considerations

Assure participants that their responses will be confidential: good practice is to ask the participant to sign a consent form.

If you are collating any personal or sensitive information, you may need to assure respondents that their responses will be kept confidential. You may also need to declare the collection and storage of any personal data (i.e. information about a living person by which that person can be identified), under the Data Protection Act. More information on this matter can be obtained from your department's data protection officer and <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/efd/recordsoffice/data-protection/>

Timing

The time needed to undertake a walk and talk sessions depends upon the questions you ask and who you are talking to. In general, you should allow at least half an hour

to undertake each walk and talk session, bearing in mind that the timing of the session can always run over or under. Also, do not forget to build in time to write up notes and observations from the tour.

Link with other methodologies

Interviews can be a useful precursor to a walk and talk on a project. The information collected by a walk and talk session (e.g. photographs, comments on a map) can be used to provoke discussion in a focus group or workshop.

Further Reading

If you are interested in finding out more about walking as a method, below are some references to further information:

- Clark, A. and Emmell, N. (2008) 'Participatory walking interviews: More than walking and talking?' Presented at *Peripatetic Practices: a workshop on walking* (London)
- Westerkamp, H. (2001) *Soundwalking*, Available from: <http://cec.concordia.ca/econtact/Soundwalk/Soundwalking.htm#top>, accessed on 2007, 30 October, INTERNET
- Kusenbach, M. (2003) 'Street Phenomenology: The Go-Along as Ethnographic Research Tool', *Ethnography*, 4, 455-485

Example 01

The walk and talk session log sheet below was used to evaluate a series of engagement activities to regenerate a number of public open spaces. The walks were undertaken in the open spaces with project decision makers and with users of those spaces.

Walk and Talk Log Sheet

Project Name:

Name:

Date:

Time:

Thank you for agreeing to take part in a 'walk and talk' session. We aim, through the use of innovative and exciting visual and aural techniques to obtain an understanding of your experience of this project. We hope you will enjoy this task as it will involve you walking around the area taking photos of everyday sights, something that people don't often do.

We do not want to be too prescriptive in telling you what to photograph, but we would like you to give us a guided tour of the project (which could include aspects of the site and wider local area), following your own route and choosing areas or topics to focus on which you feel are important. For example the following could be looked at:

Historical narration of the project

Positive and negative design features or aspects of the project

Any safety, crime, anti-social behaviour or litter issues

Maintenance and management

Usage of the open space i.e. appropriate or inappropriate

Please bear in mind the project as a whole when taking the photos, i.e. the resources that went into it, the initial aims, the processes undertaken, the outputs delivered and the impacts of this project. These may not only be physical, visual aspects, but could be social, behavioural, economic or decision-making elements. We are interested in capturing and understanding all of these aspects.

Comments	Photograph