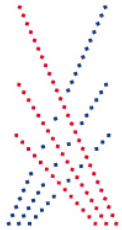

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The Use of Walking Interviews in Serious Leisure and Adventure Tourism Research

Developmental paper for Research Methodology track.

Summary:

Walking interviews have occasionally been used in the fields of urban ethnography, rescue geography, health, criminology and environmental studies, but not, curiously, in any major research into leisure and tourism. This paper explores the applicability and suitability of such a methodological approach to the study of walkers themselves – in this case, female hillwalkers. By focusing on a population which has often been marginalised and experienced barriers to participation, the approach is intended to be emancipatory in arming participants with a reflexive tool with which to challenge hegemony, but also archaeological in eliciting buried meanings and unconscious understandings of liminality, socio-spatial power relations, and the embodied nature of their pursuits.

The Use of Walking Interviews in Serious Leisure and Adventure Tourism Research

Abstract:

This article proposes the use of walking interviews to investigate participation in serious leisure and adventure tourism pursuits. Walking interviews have hitherto been largely confined to studies of health, urban ethnography and 'rescue geography'. However, the politicised nature of space and place, and leisure participants' embodied interactions with their environments, suggests manifold benefits of the strategy in that context. In a larger project exploring the experiences of an underrepresented group – female mountaineers and hillwalkers – the technique helped to uncover hidden barriers to participation, stimulate participant reflexivity and promote the production of counter-narratives. This paper discusses the congruence between the participants, environment, movement, and the philosophical tenets of serious leisure and tourism, and the role which walking interviews can play in weaving them together.

Introduction and Research Population Context:

The purpose of this paper is to explore the benefits and limitations of using walking interviews to explore the experiences of serious leisure participants – and in particular female hillwalkers. The research is located within the tradition of serious leisure and adventure tourism research. Adventure tourism is generally regarded as outdoor pursuits which are undertaken in a potentially hostile and demanding environment, and which entail real or perceived risk (Buckley, 2007). Serious leisure (Stebbins, 1982; 2012), though the subject of sustained and vigorous debate, is considered an umbrella term for non-compulsory activities which demand a significant level of physical effort, training and/or skill, and from which the participant derives pleasure and satisfaction. The dichotomy between 'serious' and 'casual' leisure (Stebbins, 1982) has long been contested by feminist researchers, who consider the distinction unhelpfully masculinised (e.g. – Green, 1998).

Serious leisure yields many potential benefits to female participants, including the following: empowerment and the opportunity for self-expression; liberation and self-reliance; the development of one's adventure identities around risk-taking, adventure and exercise (Harris & Wilson, 2007); freedom from inscribed gender roles (Whittington et al, 2011); education and self-awareness; the opportunity to value what one's body can achieve, rather than how it appears to others (Dilley & Scraton, 2010); belonging, support, passion and motivation (Jordan & Gibson, 2005; Doran, 2016); spiritual and personal freedom (Doran, 2016); a safe space away from androcentric expectations and competition in which to grow and learn (Hornibrook et al, 1997); confidence and self-esteem (Mitten, 1992); and belongingness to a personally meaningful place (Dilley & Scraton, 2010).

However, women face multiple potential constraints to serious leisure participation, including perceptions arising from androcentric portrayals of expeditions (Elsrud, 2005; Fendt & Wilson, 2012), the fear of being in predominantly male spaces (Myers & Hannam, 2008) such as bunkhouses and climbing huts, lower average disposable incomes, society's disproportionately high expectations of women around domesticity and family duties (Henderson, Bedini, Hecht & Schuler, 1995), and media focus on female appearance above

female achievement (Vodden-McKay & Schnell, 2010). Furthermore, women have been underrepresented in narratives of serious leisure and adventure. Therefore, there appears a need to arm female participants with a methodology which facilitates the construction of counter-narratives and feminisation of the field by excavating "cultural fragments of differences" (Aitchison, 2003, p.33) to be found in gender-leisure relationships and their relations of power.

Representations of walking have been imbued with androcentrism since Rousseau's (1782) meditative act, Thoreau's (1862) itinerant, knightly travellers, Debord's (1958) heroic, epic adventurers and Deleuze's (1980) romantic wanderers. The valorised elevation of walking from mundane to meaningful and 'serious' appears in stark contrast to the trivialisation of the local, domestic and miniature (Heddon & Turner, 2012), and the canonical tradition of walking is largely devoid of a female presence.

Philosophical Congruence with the Proposed Methodology:

The key underpinning philosophy of serious leisure studies is perhaps the New Mobilities Paradigm (Sheller & Urry, 2006). This draws partially upon the Heideggerian concept of Dasein or 'being there', and Casey's (2001) theory of constitutive co-ingredience, which asserts that self and place are interwoven and inseparable, therefore linking a person's words to their geographical context (Evans & Jones, 2011; Holton & Riley, 2014). Places extend identity (Anderson, 2004), suggesting the benefits to ethnography of exploring links between place and identity (Kinney, 2017) through an understanding of the human-place dialectic. To excavate meanings from places, which are co-constructed or co-inhabited, observation of interactions between actor and landscape are desirable (Weiss, 1994). If one is to consider landscape as a site of accommodated and embodied human movement rather than a static and passive entity (Ingold, 1993), there is a need to explore how it unfolds through human-environment interaction (Doughty, 2013). The New Mobilities Paradigm (Sheller & Urry, 2005) considers people and places joined through performativity – a notion building upon Lefebvre's (1991) imagined and perceived space, and Giddens' (1984) distanciation, in which actors overcome the friction of space through interaction. Space may therefore be considered as not merely the host of social context and culturally embedded meanings, but of production, experience and consumption (Moles, 2008). Actors' understandings of their locatedness are facilitated by their mobile gaze and the alignment of actors, symbols, materials and their performed differences (Sheller & Urry, 2006) – or, adopting a poststructuralist stance, 'differance' (Derrida, 1977).

hooks (1990) and other key feminist commentators have conceptualised space as the place of marginality, choice, intervention, creation, self-discovery and power – and of resistance to hegemony. The exclusionary processes of invariably gendered spaces demand adept negotiation of time-space (Hodgson, 2012) by female actors, and its radicalised liminality between self and Other produces an in-betweenness (Moles, 2008) of ambiguity and contradiction.

The use of Walking Interviews:

Whilst walking interviews respect historicity, spatiality and culture (Moles, 2008), very few studies have used them. Variations of this niche strategy have included Reed's (2002) touring, Kusenbach's (2003) go-alongs, Anderson's (2004) 'bimbling', Emmel & Clark's (2010) 'walk throughs' and Chang's (2017) docent method. Hybridising interviews and participant observation (Kusenbach, 2003; Carpiano, 2009), they resemble the shadowing of organisational research (McDonald, 2005), giving a naturalistic and inobtrusive sense of progression through a place. Under certain circumstances, such as accompanying participants in a potentially violent environment, the visibility of the researcher within the community of study may be problematic, but it nonetheless enables uninhibited real-time observation and, if required, participant selection of the location and route (Kinney, 2017).

Walking interviews have been recognised for exploring biographies which are located within places, the social architecture of place, participants' social realms, inhabitants' perceptions of their environments, and people's spatial practices (Kusenbach, 2003). Their visual prompts stimulate memories (Hein, Evans & Jones, 2008), tracing the appropriation, living and experiencing of space and place (Emmel & Clark, 2009). Researcher immersion compels her to participate rather than observing from a distance (Anderson, 2004), taking a relational perspective (Carpiano, 2009) and being awake to perceptions, memories, practices, emotions, thoughts (Trell & Van Hoven, 2010), habits and routines (Anderson, 2004). In a third space between theory and praxis (Moles, 2008), walking interviewers test the liminality of movement (Sheller & Urry, 2006) and observe the ways in which the landscape contributes to the inhabitant (Ingold, 1993).

Application of the Methodology:

In this research, ten female hillwalkers and long-distance walkers were interviewed whilst hiking. All considered themselves serious leisure participants and adventure tourists (though not in those exact terms). The first four, 'seed', participants were known to the researcher and selected for their appropriate experience. Two 'snowball' participants were recruited through the initial four, and a further four participants were recruited in a bunkhouse. The women represented a diverse population in terms of age, marital status, home location (Scotland, Northern England, Wales, Scandinavia and the Netherlands), sexual orientation and preferred type of hillwalking activity in terms of distance walked and companions taken. In all cases, participants selected their own routes and led the walks. Most walks were ascents of Munros (mountains of over 3,000 feet / 914 metres altitude in the Scottish Highlands) or comparable English and Welsh mountains, but some were lower level valley walks. Recording was via dictation machine and lapel microphones with windshields.

Participants were asked to reflect upon their appreciation of their hobby and environment, emotions, opinions, challenges and memories. Some participants chose to take photographs and record GPS locations, but these were incidental to the approach. Debrief sessions were undertaken after each walk, a researcher journal maintained, and transcribed recordings were subjected to an analysis technique which combined elements of Mauthner & Doucet's (1998) Voice-Centred Relational Method (VCRM) with Kusenbach's (2003) five themes for exploration in walking interviews. VCRM scrutinises plot, the voice of 'I', relationships and wider contexts over four readings, whilst the five themes are participant perceptions of

experience, spatial practices in which they interact with environment, participant-place linkages, social structures and social realms.

Emerging Benefits and Limitations of Walk-Along Interviews:

The empirical findings of the research – and especially those appertaining to women's experiences of serious leisure - are explored outside this paper. Consistent with Anderson's (2004) belief that walking interviews could excavate an 'archaeology of knowledge', one of the participants, Josie, even referred to a 'buried identity'. Moles' (2008) 'emergent' or 'subaltern' voices were dusted down, revealing themselves gradually, not simply framed within the landscape (Evans & Jones, 2010), but expressive and breaking free of their confines (Hein et al, 2008) and gaining validation from nature (Carpiano, 2009). Unearthed realities were re-layered in a non-linear fashion (Holton & Riley, 2014). An unexpected success of the walk along interview technique was its ability to capture liminality and 'in-betweenness' – or "those places on the way to somewhere else", according to participant Steph. These 'transfer points' (Sheller & Urry, 2005), came to the fore. Visual signifiers helped make the boundaries of the research sites porous (Emmel & Clark, 2009) and extrude buried insights. At times – head down and spectacles steamed up or rain-streamed – the field of vision was a few yards. At others, atop summits, it could extend from one coast to another. This produced a 'pulsing' effect which seemed to mirror the alternating periods of introspection and elation, of suffering and joy, felt by participants on the hill, depending on their immediate embodied experiences.

The recording process was hindered by periods of breathlessness, wind noise and the rustling of waterproof clothing, and the relative lack of data density – fewer words of a longer time span than in sit-down interviews – lengthened the transcription process. Although Biomapping was not used, some participants chose to compare heart rate data from their Fitbit wristband monitors to their mood and comments at those points in interviews. Several participants commented that it was refreshing to be interviewed without an implicit requirement speak at all times, and all made comments which spoke of a democratised, consensual and friendly approach to data collection which avoided many of the traditional power imbalances associated with the interview room. Perhaps most tellingly, three participants commented that they had understood more fully aspects of themselves and their relationships to their hobby by being in a reflexive situation which demands a focus both on the walker and the environment, and several participants stated (in their own words) that they believed they had asserted or reasserted their place in the tradition of hillwalking.

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