

Walking together: Understanding young people's experiences of living in neighbourhoods in transition

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Introduction

The 'mobilities turn' in the social sciences has sparked interest in methodological attempts to understand how movement can make social and material realities (Buscher and Urry, 2009). This includes the possibilities for using walking interview methods to understand how neighbourhoods and communities of place are interpreted or experienced on the ground (Carpiano, 2009; Fincham et al., 2010; Hall et al., 2006; Moles, 2008). Although diverse in approach, walking interviews attempt to recreate the interview method while on the move, be it by foot or vehicle. They have been considered a useful way of understanding the social and physical aspects of locally situated daily experience. In doing so, it is claimed that they can better access the 'small details' of neighbourhood life and enable alternative, perhaps more grounded, perspectives to emerge that better resonant with participants' own interpretations of their lives (Fink, 2011; Hogan, 2009). It has also been suggested that walking interviews can illuminate how individuals situate themselves in a localised socio-spatial landscape as well as reveal the ordinary, frequently hidden dimensions of life that may remain unremarked upon in static, room-based interactions (Evans and Jones, 2011, Kusenbach, 2003). So, walking alongside an individual can provide metaphorical insight into what it is like to temporarily 'live the life' of another (Johnson and Jones, 2009, p399) by providing privileged access the geographically situated lived realities that constitute everyday experiences (Pink, 2008a).

While there is a growing literature about conducting one-to-one interviews on the move, there has been little, if any, consideration or discussion of the

possibilities of adopting the approach to group settings (Capriano, 2009). These possibilities underpin discussion in this chapter. I outline how a mobile focus-group method was developed and implemented to assess young people's experiences of living in deprived urban neighbourhoods undergoing regeneration. I consider the challenges and opportunities afforded by the approach, including how the technique produced individual and group insights into the material, social, biographical and embodied production of neighbourhoods and reflect on the implications for knowledge arising from the explicitly collectivist and inter-activist nature of the method. Paying attention to walking provides insight not only into how individuals experience the world, but also come to make it (de Certeau, 1984). This chapter aims to go beyond discussion of the approach as another research 'tool' to consider how encouraging groups of individuals to move through and interact with the environment produces particular versions of neighbourhood experience. Reflexive accounts of how tacit or everyday knowledge is produced in research thus need to be attuned to the ways in which methods actively create versions of the social world through their situated and embodied practice (Law and Urry, 2004).

Research context

The mobile focus group method described here was developed as part of an England-wide mixed-method evaluation of an initiative to promote inclusive activities, primarily targeted at young people living in urban localities undergoing economic, social and physical regeneration and redevelopmentⁱ. Understanding young people's place in the production of neighbourhood life has long been of interest. Research has explored issues of territoriality, safety and risk, social interaction, and identity formation at various scales. Frequently, research has identified how young people may become stigmatised in neighbourhood places (e.g. Brown, 2013; Deuchar, 2009; Pickering et al., 2012). Work has highlighted how an adult majority may label a younger minority as anti-social for misappropriating the street or public spaces as sites for social gathering space, leading to calls for initiatives and schemes that can mark young people out as problematic, or requiring some form of intervention in the guise of neighbourhood regeneration or urban redevelopment (Neary et

al., 2013). Indications are that in such contexts young people are marginalised from urban regeneration and restructuring politics, processes and outputs (Skelton and Gough, 2013). For instance, Watt's (2013) work on the regeneration of parts of East London for the 2012 Olympic Games for example revealed how for many young people, the Olympics, and their associated regeneration neighbourhood-based legacies were 'not for them'.

Yet rather than the passive or receptive agents of the neighbourhoods they inhabit, young people draw on social and spatial resources to get on with their ordinary, everyday lives, even amidst significant neighbourhood change (Neary, 2015). That young people are active participants in the production of neighbourhood life is becoming recognised in both research and practice around neighbourhood development and regeneration (Goodwin and Young, 2013). Greater involvement of young people in processes of involuntary household relocation can enable empowerment (Lawson and Kearns, 2016), and listening to young people has been considered beneficial not only as a means of democratic involvement, but also for understanding more about community development including neighbourhood regeneration processes (Greene et al., 2016). Thus young people occupy a somewhat paradoxical position in urban restructuring and redevelopment processes, particularly as they operate at the neighbourhood scale. In part, they are caught up in discourses of disorder and deviance, presented as a risk requiring intervention to ensure appropriate behaviour in public. At the same time, their role as neighbourhood actors and active place-makers means that their inclusion in redevelopment programmes is vital in order to shape and achieve the aspirations afforded by particular schemes and projects.

It is this context that the initiative that was the subject of the wider evaluation was developed. The initiative promoted a number of out-of-school schemes and activities for young people (typically aged 12-18) living in deprived urban areas. While the wider evaluation assessed various measures and outcomes, the mobile focus groups intended to elicit participants views about the initiative, how it was experienced in varying local contexts, and its position in the everyday experiences of life for young people in changing neighbourhoods.

The mobile focus group approach was developed as a means of prioritising young people's voices and was based on established rationale for undertaking both mobile interviews outlined above, and conventional focus groups. The later included the potential to obtain a variety of opinions within a relatively short space of time and provide insight into how groups of individuals come to make collective sense of phenomena (Caretta and Vacchelli, 2015; Kitziinger, 1994). More pragmatically, the evaluation funding organisation was also keen that the team obtained as much insight from as many different young people in the most effective way. It is also relevant to acknowledge that those whose views we wanted to gather are frequently 'over-researched' and can be wary of outside-researchers and more formal data-collection techniques that may bear similarity to those used by individuals in positions of authority (Bagnoli and Clark, 2010; Baker and Weller, 2003; Clark, 2008). In developing a technique that could be differentiated from more established, possibly more formal, approaches, we aspired to encourage participants to engage more authentically in the evaluation process, or failing that, at least consider their involvement to be less onerous than other approaches.

The mobile focus groups were completed in a range of English towns and cities. These included large urban metropolises, industrial towns and coastal resorts. The specific neighbourhoods that were the focus of the visits were heterogeneous; ranging from high-density Victorian terraced housing, to post-war edge of city public housing estates, and mixed low and high-rise apartment blocks. Some had transitioned to housing association management while others were a mix of privately-owned and privately-rented properties. Most were undergoing physical regeneration (or were due to do so), variously comprising retro-fitting existing properties, large-scale demolition, and the construction of new-build properties. Common to all the neighbourhoods were high indicators of multi-deprivation and economic instability.

Eight focus groups with 55 participants were undertaken. All members of the groups were recruited from already-existing youth clubs and organisations being funded by the wider initiative. The smallest group comprised three members and the largest twelve. With the exception of the smallest groups, two researchers attended all the walks. The walks were conducted at the

same times the groups met, typically on weekday evenings. On arrival, the researchers were introduced to the groups and requested a 'small group of volunteers to show the researchers around the neighbourhood and talk about what it was like to live there. The request was always well received. The walks were audio and visually recorded and a collection of disposable cameras were shared among members of the group with the suggestion that individuals also photograph aspects of their neighbourhood.

Each walk began by asking participants to show the researchers around the neighbourhood' (see Clark and Emmel, 2010). Rather than ask participants to lead me on a predetermined route, participants were encouraged between themselves where to go, with the only provisos being that the group stayed together and within walking distance of the youth centre where we initially met. As we ventured forth, the groups were asked about what the spaces being walked through, along with the life in the neighbourhood more generally. Discussions covered what they liked and disliked about where they live; where they went and do not go; everyday routines and activities that were locally situated; how the neighbourhoods had changed over; and how they perceived and experienced local facilities and infrastructures. The walks lasted between 60 and 75 minutes and usually took in the paraphernalia of neighbourhood life: shops, youth or community centres, schools, playgrounds, food takeaway establishments, houses where participants, their friends or family currently or had previously lived.

A brief summary of findings: Roots, belonging and boredom

Neighbourhoods are simultaneously material or physical phenomena, locations for social exchange and interaction, as well as being uniquely personal, subjective experiences. They are locations intimately tied to identity, memory, biography and social relationships, which mean that individuals neighbourhood experiences vary from the mundane, seemingly ordinary to at times the exceptional and unique (Rogaly and Taylor, 2009). All these features emerged on the group walks. Where we walked, and just as importantly, where we did not walk, revealed how different individuals and group construct different micro-geographies of the neighbourhood. Resonating with Lewis' (1985)

autobiographical description of London as a checkerboard of safe and dangerous places, the walks revealed the relatively familiar places of comfort and security, as well as those to be avoided; not all the time, but certainly at particular times of the day or night, or depending on the presence or absence of other people. Participants spoke about how they engaged in the social life of the neighbourhoods, offered partial histories of what had changed and remained the same, and provided insight into the intricate geographies of belonging and not belonging that were tied to time as well as space. They also narrated locally well-known stories about historical events, gossip and hearsay about different parts of the neighbourhood or groups within it. So, the mobile focus groups begin to unearth something of how young people's territoriality comes into being not just in geographical contexts, but also through historical, diurnal and seasonal rhythms;

Participant 1: I wouldn't feel safe walking on the [park] at night or the alley way between [supermarket] and the reservoir. People used to go up on the hill and smoke and drink. A homeless person lived there at one point

*Participant 2: ...If you go through [the park] and there are people here, then you don't stay. It depends on who is here. There's less hassle in the summer because people will just chill out... People hang out here straight after school until midnight. This is where we used to... to skate. It's a criminal offence now. People drink alcohol and smoke drugs here so not many people come here now.... A lot of the skaters have moved to the recreation ground where they have a skateboard ramp
(Walk in Northamptonshire)ⁱⁱ*

Showing me where they lived permitted participants to reveal the intricate micro temporal and spatial bases of their neighbourhood practices. They took me to specific streets and parks they considered more or less safe to be in, and explained, in detail knowable only to those intimate with the locations we were passing through, when, where and how they assessed the relative safety of those places. The walks revealed the importance of boundary-makers such as fences, walls or particular streets that signified differences in where participants felt they could and could not go, or that enabled a sense of

security, and contributed to their sense of ease in the area. These were nuanced articulations that often needed to be understood in their situational contexts and which may have evaded adequate description through room-based focus groups. For instance, a walk in London took me across a main road that dissected the neighbourhood group members were drawn from. For one young person this meant venturing into a place she had never visited despite living in close proximity:

Researcher: Did you say this bit scares you?

Female: Yeah 'cos I'm not used to this side, I'm only used to that side. All my life I've never gone over that side. Not even to the shop...

Male: It's like rivals groups, there's two sides.

Female: ...where this lot [male participants] live is on that side. That's why we don't get along. We live on different sides... We still have a bit of hatred.

(Walk in London)

In encouraging participants to move within and between places of comfort and discomfort, the walks were thus both familiar and disruptive to routines and habitual movements. As the comment above suggests, participants constructed a sense of belonging through the intricacies of location but that such belonging was frequently ambiguous. On the one hand, they demonstrated a 'sense of pride' in what they revealed, highlighting particular phenomena that they liked, were proud of, or considered worth showing to a stranger. Some walks took on some of the qualities of a visitors' tour (though without the hyperbole or romanticism), with participants keen to indicate how they felt they belonged to where they lived and how they participate in localised spaces. Yet participants also spoke of the difficulties of life for themselves, their parents and their neighbours living in an environment in need of economic as well as physical improvement. They talked candidly about their embarrassment of being from an area considered somehow less good than other places in their towns and cities, and expressed anxiety at being in some way stigmatised on account of where they lived. This externally

imposed stigma became evident in their questioning their own sense of local belonging:

Male: It's is much better that what its reputation is. It's got a very bad reputation. Certain individuals give it a bad name and the whole place gets labelled
(walk in London).

Participant: I heard people at school say, [the estate] is like, for little scruffs, but I just says, 'yeah, shut up' [laughs].
(walk in South Yorkshire)

In doing so, paradoxical perspectives emerge of young people wanting to be simultaneously proud of where they live, suggesting for example that these places are 'not as bad' as others may make out, while pointing out environmental, economic and social challenges that required attention.

In spite of much commentary about the decline of local geographies in the construction of social networks it is clear that young people still continue to rely on spatial propinquity to form and maintain relations with others. This includes neighbourhood infrastructures that have become taken for granted in their routines and activities. Shops, parks, schools and friends and relatives' houses were all presented to me on the walks (see image 1). Outside of home and school, the neighbourhood continues to be an important place where young people choose to spend time away from parents and adult surveillance, and engage in the seemingly mundane but socially relevant act of 'hanging around' and 'being bored':

Male 1: This is a rough estate. There's a lot of violence. And there was something like an attempted murder few years ago, and if you go straight down there, there was a murder there last year I think. An old man got murdered.

Female: It's not dangerous. It's just the people that are on it.

Researcher: What's good about it?

Male 2: It's got parks and it's close to [food takeaway] where you can get burgers

Female: I don't see anything bad, apart from the fighting. But it gets boring sometimes

(Walk in Lancashire)

Male: Everyone used to go outside the shops, having a beer [laughs]. But you don't really see them anymore. People used to just hang outside the shop and ask me to get them cigs and stuff... I get cans [of beer from the shop] and sit with my mates. We go on the streets. That's what everyone does.

(Walk in Greater Manchester)

'Hanging around', or to be more precise given that such activity relies on maintaining momentum, 'ambling around' is a key part of young people's lives. Participants identified where they gather with friends to 'do nothing' indicates an intricate 'geography of boredom' that is essential to young people's daily experiences that inform where, when, with whom, and how they belong in place. The mobile focus groups thus offer a way of understanding how identities and belonging are locally situated and the importance of 'being there' to appreciate what this means in practice.

Places are made through the gathering together of bodies, things, time and space rather than static sites (Tuan, 1977). The mobile focus groups, like other mobile methods, offer insight into the dynamic and fluid ways in which neighbourhoods are constructed by the movement of bodies through space (Lee and Ingold, 2006; Pink, 2008a). However, the walks offer more than an empirically observable exploration in the form of a whistle-stop tour of key sites, or an overly-romanticised trail through neighbourhood life (Kusenbach, 2012). Rather, they reveal the interpretive, multi-sensory dimensions of neighbourhood life, and, crucially, how neighbourhoods are the product of such experiences (Degan and Rose, 2012). Experiencing the dampness and cold of an autumnal evening congregating on a playground, the uneasiness of gathering winter darkness waiting outside a takeaway for it to open, and the moving at pace through parkland to keep up with friends on bicycles all reveal

the sensorial nature of neighbourhood life. Likewise, wandering around an edge-of-town housing estate on a wet afternoon in late summer can better reveal the sense of boredom and frustration over the lack of things to do and places to go than any number of words (however well-articulated) in a room based focus group. This is not just because life ‘feels’ different when on the move (Moles, 2008), but because young people experience neighbourhood life peripatetically. That it is through movement that they produce neighbourhood places means it is necessary to equal attention to both the *walking* and the *talking* as simultaneously product (or data) and practice.

The methodological potential of talking and walking in together

It is challenging and frustrating to attempt to adequately capture in written form the complex, nuanced, multi-sensual dimensions and embodied practices that make up people’s experiences of place (Tuan, 1975). Paying attention to the process of moving, as well as the spaces we are moving through and between, is central to realising both the substantive and the methodological potential of mobile focus groups. To be explicit, the mobile focus group method thus conjures up neighbourhoods that are not just based on representation, or even empathetic understanding, but are also real, experiential entities located in the moment of interaction between researcher, participants and which are productive of place itself.

The interactional, inductive, and situated practices of mobile focus groups afford bring many of the benefits of other walking methods. This includes enabling knowledge to emerge in situ with the environment structuring as well as informing the unfolding narrative (Fink, 2010; Anderson and Jones, 2009). This includes enabling knowledge to emerge in situ with the environment structuring as well as informing the unfolding narrative (Anderson and Jones, 2009; Fink, 2012). So, rather than being the detached, objective focus of discussion, the environment directs and affects dialogue by prompting and interjecting in “three-way-conversations, with interviewee, interviewer and locality [all] engaged in an exchange of ideas” (Hall et al., 2006: 3). The

emergent knowledge is thus grounded in lived experience. Just as important as those experiences that are revealed on the walks are those that are not. For instance, young people living in the two coastal towns offered no discussion of the trappings of the local tourist economy such as amusement parks or beaches. Those living in larger cities rarely ventured into city centres or beyond the confines of the geographies afforded to their daily activities-spaces of school, home, friends' houses, a local shop, and the places in-between.

As an interaction, the technique also provides telling insight into how knowledge about place is co-created. The young people I spoke to were frequently disengaged with more conventional research techniques. Placing young people in charge of the walks; determining where to go and what to discuss (Albeit guided by my own research objectives) offered a clearer message that they were the experts on their local environments. I am not claiming here that the approach should be considered part of a participatory research repertoire (though it could be used as such), but rather suggest that it does seek to unbalance the researcher-researched relationship. . While the technique did not affect change in a participatory or action research vain, but it did provide opportunity for participants to individually and collectively present, negotiate, and as I suggest shortly, reject, more dominant perspectives on their local experiences. Granted, the technique did not erase power differences between me and the participants. After all, I still had a job to do as a researcher, but it did offer, at least at some level, a more engaging way of getting that job done while producing grounded insights into young peoples' lives. Similarly, the use of existing groups did not eliminate power-relations between young people. Their own personalities and relationships remained evident; those who were more vocal and/or confident remain so; and the routes which were selected and followed, as well as the stories told, were in part the outcomes of how participants mediated their relationships with each other as much as through place. The neighbourhoods we walked through are thus the product of power-laden collective decision-making process that consequently offers some reflexive insight into how groups of young people situate themselves within a neighbourhood social milieu.

Where the mobile focus group diverges from either individual walks, or conventional focus group techniques can be seen in the ways in which the walks and narratives come into being. A common concern of static or room-based focus groups is that discussion may shutdown opposing perspectives, either through overpowering personalities or the general tenure of debate, that may encourage less vocal or interested individuals to withdraw into reserved contemplation. In contrast, the mobile focus groups enables those not involved directly in discussion to continue to participate as well as opening up spaces for alternative perspectives to be expressed in more private ways. The walks operated as a series of smaller or subgroups that would drop into and out of conversation as we moved. As one of these subgroups held the conversation with me, others would often talking to the second researcher, be taking photographs, or deciding among themselves where next to direct the walk. This certainly creates difficulties for creating and recording a linear or chronologically coherent 'narrative' that lasts the duration of the walk, and means that not all young people participated in all of the discussions, but these are only slight challenges. As I discuss shortly, this process of 'groups walking in groups' opened up moments when participants to offer alternative interpretations and experiences away from the (potentially) charged atmosphere of direct confrontation.

Finally, some of the stories I was told appeared to be rehearsed narratives of seemingly well-known or often repeated tales involving key individuals, locations and events that have become part of the common currency of neighbourhood life. As the young people offered these stories, so they presented knowledge that marked their sense of belonging or not belonging, revealing their status as 'insiders' both to me, and to their peers. In doing so, the walks should be considered performances of which participants were also actively aware. In telling these neighbourhood tales participants implied that they were also conscious that they were delivering a type of particular performance. This was most clear at times when individuals assumed the role of guide, presenting the walk as a series of 'points of interest' interspersed with narrative about why they are worth showing, frequently mimicking the gestures and tones of tourist guides. Others took fuller charge of proceedings by taking hold of the microphones and recording devices to engage in mock

‘fly-on-the-wall’ documentary style reporting, questioning each other as well as passers-by. In doing so they displayed their awareness of a visual and audio-documentary culture. Having grown up with an environment of ‘reality’ media and investigative journalism, the mobile focus groups with their accompanying equipment did not appear overly strange or out of place to them. Notably, this cultural familiarity enabled some to more fully embrace the method than perhaps they would other, formal modes of data collection. It also indicates that they were reflexively aware that they were performing particular roles in a constructed interaction that was creating particular realities.

From representing to producing neighbourhoods

Reflexive consideration of the active or productive capabilities of the method requires appreciation of the ‘social life’ of the walks (Law, 2004). The interactive qualities of the mobile focus group allows for collective insight to emerge through negotiation. In this way, the neighbourhoods I was presented with are the products of the method rather than any ‘naturally occurring’ phenomena and I now consider productive properties of, first talking, and then walking, in this process.

The importance of talk became most apparent when there was disagreement about where to go or which stories to tell. At times, these differences were due to age, levels of independence, and parental expectations and demands about where young people could and could not go. Of course, and as we might expect, they were also due to differences in experience. In a midlands city young people debated how their neighbourhood might be perceived by non-residents:

Researcher: And what’s [place] like?

Male 1. It’s alright

Male 2. I think it’s a dump.

Male 3. You do get people with knives and stuff and you do get fights. And drugs.

Male 2. It’s a dump. Everyone says it’s a dump

Male 3. ...You do get gangs and stuff and people hanging around
Male 1. It's alright but after about nine o' clock you have to stay off the streets
(Walk in Staffordshire town)

This interaction neatly reveals how the method provides opportunity for participants to question and clarify as well as influence other opinion through a reframing of experiences (Kitzinger, 1994). As Participant 1 re-appraises his views in response to being challenged, we see how participants questioned and clarified their views and reframed their experiences. A second, more troubling, example of the productive capacity of the approach emerged during a walk in a large northern city. This walk took place around a large central housing estate undergoing considerable physical regeneration. Many the properties were vacant, abandoned and boarded up with the remaining residents (which included some participants and their families) in the process of being relocated. During the walk some participants expressed an awareness of local tensions and anxieties:

Researcher: What do people think about kids round here?

Male 1: The elderly don't like the noise. Some of the kids are quite loud at night so the elderly do reports about noise at night [for the police]. Some adults if they hear a ball bounce on the street they come out and moan at the kids. But at the end of the day, kids will be kids, and that's more or less it, isn't it? Kids need somewhere to play. All they've got round here, when the youth groups aren't on, you've got the primary school when it's open, you've got a little five-a-side-football pitch. You've got a park, but no-one really goes in the park because it's not that good.

Researcher: Why's that?

Male 2: Basically, we've heard that people got raped here at night time, so people get scared of going through it, but in day time it's a normal park, people go through it. It's a good place to go for chillin' [relaxing] but at night you've got to be careful because it's dangerous.

Male 1: Alcoholics and that.

Male 2: Yeah. So like, when we come home, everyone has to walk past here to come home, so [adults] tell us to, come home in like a group of people or with like two at least, so that nothing happens to us.

Male 1: Nothing bad's really happened here, not that we know of...

Male 3: Ands there's lots of er, like... crazy people who live round here.

Male 1: They're always drinking. Drinking and smoking [cannabis].

(Walk in Greater Manchester)

There is much of interest in this extract about how young people navigate and make sense of local spaces, from issues of intergenerational tension, to belonging and safety, and the workings of a localized moral panic stemming from the sorts of people who might live locally. Of relevance for my discussion here though is how interaction prompted an alternative perspective to be offered. Following this episode, majority of the group moved away to photograph and discuss where else they could take me. As I made my way towards where the main group was waiting, one participant lingered behind for an opportunity to contribute her own perspective on the streets we were walking through:

Female: It was a bit awkward growing up 'cos like I was the only black kid here. And everybody used to pick on me. I had friends but they were other that side (in another part of the estate)... Round here is more of a white based community. It is mainly white. Like you don't see many black people. And some white people, especially the older generation, they still haven't got in contact with like other ethnic people. And so some of them are still like that... I don't like how they are, because they can be drunk at times. And like they can talk to you and like say stuff to you. Like nasty stuff. Racist stuff. ..There was more like Asian and black people over there and more white people over here so you couldn't like merge. You felt it a bit hard. We didn't like interact with each other... we didn't really mix with the others that were here, we sort of went like we won't associate with them... Our area is more like a black area, it's like more African and round here basically it's the dominance of white people. It's like territory. We didn't really, we rarely went, on the other side [of the estate].

Researcher: Why was that?

Female: Because of racial issues. And because it was white people.

(Walk in Greater Manchester)

Such experiences resonate with the politics and morality of community (Back, 2009), and as well provide a stark reminder of everyday racism and discrimination. Emerging here then, is a very different, more sinister perspective that stands at odds to the more popular view offered by the bulk of the wider (all white) group. This participant offered away from the main group, but in direct response to what had been articulated moments earlier. It may of course be possible to obtain such views in static focus groups, and of course they emerge frequently in one-to-one interviews, but I contend that method itself works to enable this perspective to emerge so quickly, and so starkly. The dynamic and fluid nature of the method thus provides opportunity for participants to respond indirectly but just as forcibly about alternative, experiences. That this discussion took place outside the boarded up properties where the protagonists in these narratives lived, in the very setting that gave rise to these experiences, also adds further weight to the claims made for situating data collection in the locations that give rise to the phenomena under consideration.

Moving beyond talk to attend to the importance of walking, I now consider the ways in which the neighbourhoods are produced through movement along, and creation of, routes and pathways (Degan and Rose, 2012; Ingold, 2007; Pink, 2008b). Walking is another way in which neighbourhoods vary for different individuals. The pace, gestures, gait and physical effort that, when done by several individuals over time, or by individuals in groups, generates a particular (walking) rhythm of the neighbourhood (Vergunst, 2010). The result are particular experiences and forms of place that are created by the practice of walking. On a different research project I am engaging in walking interviews with people living with dementiaⁱⁱⁱ. Although with individuals rather than groups, those walks follow a similar process to that detailed here in so far as people with dementia are asked to lead a walk around the neighbourhood where they live. In doing so, they point out the range of activities and features of neighbourhood life they find supportive, and less supportive as they live

with the condition. Relevant here are the differences in the pace of movement and the distances travelled. Although mindful of stereotyping or stretching the limits of generalisability, walking with people who are living with dementia, who are older, and at times less physically-able, is at a more hesitant, stuttering, and slower rate of progress compared to the group-walks with young people. As a result, the neighbourhood experiences that emerge differ in form and process. This is not simply because, at an empirical level, we are unable to walk far and as a result see less when accompanying people living with dementia, but because movement produces an experientially and sensorially different type of place. Older people living with dementia may thus exist in the same physical and material space as others, but they live in very different places in part because those places are produced through different rhythms of walking (Degan and Rose, 2012; Vergunst, 2010). Learning to walk together thus requires me to abandon my own rhythm and fall into step with these different neighbourhood rhythms through which people actively make, their neighbourhood places.

De Certeau (1984) argued that walking is central to place-making, in part due to a walker's contact and interaction with other walkers, as well as through the embodied production and maintenance of routes. Walking also enables the appropriation of spaces through the tactical resistance of the less powerful to hegemonic strategies (in de Certeau's case, urban planners and architects). So, Walking with young people offers a glimpse of how they engage in such resistance in the making of their own localised worlds. As I have noted, moving around at times at pace rushing from one place to the next, other times more lazily, meandering in a seemingly haphazard way to speed time interacting with or avoiding others are all ways in which young people make sense of, but also shape, their neighbourhoods.

The constructivist properties of the mobile focus group enable neighbourhoods to be actualised not just in front of our eyes, but also at our feet. These neighbourhoods exist as a form of 'collateral reality' (Law, 2012). Such realities are not those that are explicitly described in the verbal exchanges that I have reported earlier and are relatively easy to hear and report on. Rather, collateral realities are those "versions of the social that are being done quietly,

incidentally, and along the way” (Law, 2012, p165). It is a glimpse into the making of these realities that, I think, differentiates mobile focus groups from static methods. The collateral realities being done by walking the neighbourhood emerge from the interplay of the conversation between environment, participants and researcher, and participants and each other, all enacted while moving along, and so remaking, habitual and familiar (as well as uncommon and strange) routes. Recalling discussion of ‘doing’ of boredom, even this implies a restlessness that requires attention to be paid to movement; from the unremarked upon fragmented movements of fidgeting to keep warm, to the purposeful between locations in search of company of amusement, to the ambling around familiar places as a way of passing the time. All these movements are part of the way that neighbourhoods that ‘come into being’ (O’Neill and Hubbard, 2010) as collective constructions, experienced at pace, multi-sensed, re-told and re-negotiated on the move.

Given neighbourhoods are constantly being reshaped in this way, then we need research encounters that can access these fluid experiences. The neighbourhoods that emerge from the mobile focus groups may thus be the product of the method, but they are more than a methodological construct. For if young people produce neighbourhood experiences through movement and interaction, then focus group method is not too far removed from that same process. The method should thus be considered as more than an artificially imposed attempt to obtain the empirical measures of neighbourhood life. Rather, they are a way of accessing the practices that are already producing grounded experiences

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the possibilities for a mobile focus group method to understand young people’s experiences of neighbourhood change. In common with other mobile methods, the focus groups have the potential to gain insight into grounded realities of everyday in neighbourhoods undergoing transition, including the embodied and sensorial practices that go into the production of such places. While the chapter has presented discussion of the

opportunities and challenges of the method, it should be considered as more than just another useful tool for gathering perspectives on locally lived experiences. Walking together enables a grounded insight into the histories, experiences, interactions, and movements, that collectively produce neighbourhood places. Paying attention to the movement, as well as the talk, that comprise the method reveals how neighbourhood life is experienced on the move. So, the mobile focus group method allows for the pace of this activity to be experienced firsthand. Although the routes we follow are methodological constructs the practices that produce them are very much part of young people's repertoire of neighbourhood life.

Regardless of the social and economic difficulties that made up their environments, the stories young people told me are not pessimistic. They were just as proud to show us around where they live as they were to lament at what could make life better for them. More than this, I was offered a glimpse of the collective acts of resistance of how young people come to negotiate and actively contest other (adult) narratives. As such, the method provides grounded insight into how people experience place, as well as the nuanced ways in which they are produced through movement.

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Image 1: Shelter in a park (photograph taken on walk in town in Devon)



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ⁱⁱ Where possible the gender of speakers is provided alongside quotations unless this is unclear on the audio-recording.

ⁱⁱⁱ This project is being conducted with Richard Ward, Sarah Campbell, John Keady and Agneta Kullburg as part of the ESRC/NIHR funded Neighbourhoods and Dementia research programme. John Keady is the Principal Investigator. More information is available at <http://www.neighbourhoodsanddementia.org/>.