

weather walks: situating climate change

We used walking interviews as part of a British Academy-funded project to explore local understanding of the relationship between local weather, place and climate change, and how this might inform place-specific climate change communication and engagement.



Why weather walks?

Our review of the literature gave us several reasons to consider walking interviews to be a suitable method, with advantages over seated, face-to-face discussions:

- Rhythmic relaxation¹: the motion of walking, and being surrounded by nature, creates a more relaxed interview setting allowing freer conversation²
- Collage of collaboration²: talking while walking produces an unstructured dialogue where all actors participate in generating knowledge
- Embodied knowing³: walking, being a multisensory activity, gives rise to different insights and richer data⁴ than a conventional interview approach that favours 'head over heels'⁵
- Placing weather⁶: weather is integral to the meaning of a place, and connecting weather to place attunes us to consequences of weather events
- Experiential learning⁷: personal experience of weather events increases engagement with climate change discussions

What we did

We worked with two community environmental groups, teaming up with the engagement team from the combined authority for the city region and a community interest company specialising in participatory arts events.

With each group, we co-designed a weather walk through a local green space they had a connection to. Together, we agreed dates, times, routes and leaders for the walks. Routes were designed to take in areas where the effects of weather events could be observed and experienced, e.g. storm damage, flooding, changes to flora and fauna.

The walks were held on two weekday mornings in March 2022. Each was around one hour long and attended by between 15 and 25 people.

They were in part 'walkshops'⁸, bringing a group of people together to reflect upon a shared topic of concern while engaging with the landscape as a stimulus for discussion, but incorporated semi-structured 'walking interviews'⁴ between a researcher and either one or two participants.



How it worked

Practical considerations included:

- Communication: the groups helped promote the walks to their members and more widely
- Health and safety: a risk assessment was carried out; participants were reminded to wear suitable clothing and keep dogs on leads
- Group size: the risk assessment considered group size and how to manage it; we asked participants to sign up in advance, but there were both drop-outs and extras on the day
- Informed consent: our information sheets and consent forms were not well suited to the outdoor setting or to our participants, who had varying literacy levels; we'll develop a better process for future similar projects
- Recording: hand-held audio recorders were used; it was a challenge to position the recorder so that it was effective without being intrusive, and sound quality was poor in places
- Alternatives: postcards offered another way of participating, and ending a walk at a community café enabled non-walkers to be interviewed; a weekend walk would have increased the options

What we learned

We found the method had both benefits and limitations, for example:

- Nature of sample

Working with existing groups had pros and cons in terms of inclusivity. Co-designing for accessibility, promoting to the public and offering alternative methods and locations helped widen participation.

"Events like this, it's the usual suspects."

- Quality of information

Researchers and participants enjoyed the walks and discussions were relaxed and wide-ranging, although practical difficulties with recording meant some information was lost. Connections were made between surroundings, weather, and climate change.

"The complete root ball of the tree being up-ended and unearthed, it's indicative of a different type of strong wind."

"Hasn't cost me a penny to come here, and we've had a nice walk and I've had a nice chat with you."

Scan QR code for more information about the project:



1. Long in Jarvis, *Romantic writing and pedestrian travel*.
2. Anderson, 'Talking whilst walking'.
3. Pink et al., 'Walking across disciplines'.
4. Evans and Jones, 'The walking interview'.
5. Ingold, 'Culture on the ground: the world perceived through the feet'.
6. Vannini and Austin 'Weather and place'.
7. Myers et al., 'The relationship between personal experience and belief in the reality of global warming'.
8. Wickson et al., 'The walkshop approach to science and technology ethics'.