

## 2. We, co-walkers in the urban space

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Session format: pilot study and open panel debate

According to literature, more and more social researchers are engaged in walking research. Excellent examples of this trend are the extensive collections published in recent years containing theoretical and methodological analyses and research reports (Bates, Rhys Taylor 2018; Prominski, von Seggern 2019; O'Neill, Roberts 2020). These studies were carried out by representatives of various disciplines and served multiple purposes. Their common element is that the researchers not only conduct research in motion, but they also take on the role of a co-walker. This unique experience of being a researcher and co-walker in an urban space is going to be a subject of reflection during the session.

The purpose of the session is to create a platform for the exchange of opinions and experiences regarding conducting research walks in urban space and the role of social researchers in such activities. We invite to participation in two interrelated parts of the session.

1. "Exploratory walks in urban space" is going to be practising exploratory walk in an urban space. We want to conduct a short exploratory walk (30 minutes) for volunteers in a purposefully selected area in Bologna as a pilot study. The aim of it is to familiarise participants with the author's concept of the exploratory walk as a method of researching and co-creating local cohesion. The experience may be a reference point during the second part of the session.

2. "Social researchers as co-walkers" (The open panel debate). This part of the session would be presenting the participants' papers about their studies with the "walking methodology". During the panel, taking into account presented papers and conclusions from the pilot study, we will jointly seek answers to the questions: What are cognitive benefits and risks associated with the researcher as a cowalker in the process of learning about social life in urban space? Which research goals can be achieved using the walking method? What forms of research walks can be considered the most beneficial from the perspective of specific research goals? How can people from vulnerable environments be included in the walks? What mistakes should be avoided during research walks?

We invite to the session both people who already deal with the issues of walks and those who are interested in expanding their knowledge and research experience.

Proposing the indicated topic and form of the session, we took into account our experience and developed a research approach. That is why we assume that the term “exploratory walks” (Kwiatkowski 2016) reflects the nature of the fieldwork research in the urban space the best. However, as researchers, we go beyond the walking interview only. The role of the participants is broader than just answering researcher questions, paying attention to the participation of people from marginalised environments. The term exploratory walk refers to the mobile version of participatory action research. According to this method participants as the “co-walkers” moving together on foot in a selected space, explore the relationship between this space and community life, conduct conversations regarding observed phenomena, processes and regularities.

#### References

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- Kwiatkowski Mariusz (2016), Exploratory walks as an example of networking research, “Rocznik Lubuski” n. 42, part 2, pp. 137-148.
- O’Neill Maggie, Roberts Brian (2020), *Walking Methods. Research on the Move*, Routledge: London and New York.
- Prominski Martin, von Seggern Hille (ed.), 2018, *Design Research for Urban Landscapes. Theories and Methods*, London and New York: Routledge.