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**Walking and Talking with Volunteers: what does walking offer the study of volunteering, space and place?**

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## Abstract

The walking interview is used to explore the lived experiences and meanings individuals attach to place(s). Despite scholarly interest in place and volunteering, attention to the walking interview is lacking. This article presents an exploratory study, which invited five volunteers to participate in a walking interview. Our aim is to discuss the walking interview to expand the range of methodologies employed in research on volunteering, particularly volunteering and place. The walking interview has novel implications for the conceptualization of volunteers and for the meanings individuals identify in their volunteer experience(s). Volunteers can be conceptualised as mobile subjects to explore the implications of physiological movement in place for the volunteer experience. Walking can unearth the significance of emotions and memories to volunteers' negotiation of the 'everyday politics' of volunteering. The mobility of people *and* objects in sites of volunteering are salient as they reveal embodied aspects of the volunteer experience.

Keywords: walking interview, volunteering, place

The walking interview is used to explore the dynamics of how people feel connected to, engage with, and experience place(s) (O'Neill and Roberts, 2019; Bergeron et al., 2014:109). Research has been carried out in a variety of areas including health in neighbourhood contexts (Carpiano, 2009), urban planning and design (Bergeron et al., 2014), environmental activism (Anderson, 2004) and minority women's experiences of an urban environment (Warren, 2017). Walking is also 'an artistic device' that is used by visual and performance artists (Heddon and Myers, 2017; Phillips, 2005:507). The meanings individuals derive from and associate with places are central to research that involves "walking and talking" with participants (Bergeron et al., 2014). The study of the act of walking informs these studies and the debate that arises about the benefits of walking over other approaches to doing research (May and Lewis, 2019; Merriman, 2014; Trell and VanHoven, 2010; Middleton, 2010; Anderson, 2004).

Despite the interest that scholars of voluntarism have shown in exploring the relationship between place and volunteering (as discussed below), attention to the walking interview is lacking. It features neither as a way to capture the dynamics of how people engage with, and experience place, nor as a means for researchers to 'harness' the significance of volunteers' connections to place (Anderson, 2004). Yet, in research that underlines how volunteering evolves over the course of someone's life, there have been challenges to "static" depictions of volunteers. These are concerned with 'who volunteers, for how much time, for what reasons and with what organisations' (Lancee and Radl, 2014:833; Morrow-Howell, 2010:463). There is also scholarly interest in the 'identity work' that shapes the meaning individuals give to their volunteering in relation to a place (O'Toole and Grey, 2016; Dallimore et al., 2018:33). More broadly, scholars and practitioners use innovative perspectives and participatory or community-driven methodologies to examine the impact of government policies (for example, in the UK) which seek to promote volunteering as part of social action (Reynolds, 2019;

Saloma, Mangaser and Hildago, 2017). Purcell (2012:275) illustrates how the ‘derive’, which entails walking with ‘purpose’ and a ‘critical mindset’, enables community development workers to gain insight into the ‘everyday lives’ of people as they negotiate places and spaces. In this article, “place” is understood as ‘more than just physical space’ (May and Lewis, 2019:3; Massey, 2004:6-7). “Place” encompasses spaces that mean something to individuals. This finds expression in individuals’ emotions, connections and memories, which are underpinned by their experiences (Trell and VanHoven, 2010:91). The concept of “space” encompasses ‘the interior and exterior spatial arrangements that make up our world’. Put simply, it is where individuals do what they do. Through activities and actions, spaces are ‘imbued with cultural and political implications’ (O’Toole and Were, 2008:616-617).

This paper outlines and discusses an exploratory project: we invited five volunteers to walk with us in a place that is significant to why they volunteer and has shaped their experiences of being a volunteer. We understand volunteering as a form of ‘civic engagement’ that spans formal and informal activity; that is, respectively, roles in voluntary and community organisations and helping out friends and people in one’s neighbourhood (Nesteruk and Price, 2011:101). Our overarching aim is to discuss the walking interview as a means of “pluralising” (Merriman, 2014) the range of methodologies we use in research on volunteering, particularly volunteering and place. Drawing upon the engagement of volunteers in a walking interview, first, we consider how walking with volunteers captures their movement in and through spaces criss-crossing boundaries of formal roles and informal encounters. They form friendships and acquaintances that reveal the depth of their connections to places in the process. We make the case for the conceptualisation of volunteers as mobile rather than static subjects. Second, the physiological effects of walking enable us to capture the ‘everyday politics’ of volunteering in a place that has been affected by place-oriented policies and initiatives. ‘Everyday politics’

refers to the informal, private, often passive ways or routines that people use to survive extreme situations (Choi, 2013), and actions that form moderate, subtle acts of resistance in others (Williams, Goodwin and Cloke, 2014). Third, mobility in and around spaces, *henceforth* sites of volunteering may be much more limited than walking in and through a landscape or neighbourhood. Notwithstanding, the opportunity to move is significant as it gives the participant the opportunity to use their senses; to touch, to show and to tell about objects, for example, that are part of the story of why they volunteer and what it is like to be a volunteer (Trell and VanHoven, 2010:101). The ‘sit down’ interview gives participants a chance to talk about why they volunteer and what being a volunteer is like. This may encompass talk about objects. However, by inviting participants to move, for instance, to walk through a space, we gain a particular ‘quality’ of insight into motivation and experience of volunteering as an embodied sensory experience (May and Lewis, 2019:11). Thus, we look at mobility in the context of the micro-geography of the interview site (Elwood and Martin, 2000). We are able to examine how volunteers’ embodied experiences may be shaped and informed by material objects that are located in the organisations or contexts that form the *site* of volunteering.

The paper proceeds as follows. We examine the synergies between the analysis of walking, on the one hand and the literature on volunteering and place, on the other. We then outline how we recruited and carried out walking interviews with five volunteers, before presenting an account of each interview. Finally, we discuss the three points outlined above to consider what attention to the mobility of volunteers and, indeed, material objects and artefacts has to offer to the extant literature and policy initiatives on volunteering, space and place.

## **Perspectives on Walking, Volunteering and Place**

The walking interview can take a number of forms, ranging from a guided, structured undertaking, to ‘bimbling’ or aimless walking (Anderson, 2004), to the ‘go-along’ (Carpiano, 2009:264-265; Kusenbach, 2003). Some research on how people experience places underlines that walking reveals the salience of ‘what participants say and where they say it’, with a role for GPS technology, for example (Jones, Bunce, Evans, Gibbs and Hein, 2008:1). The practice of walking may be an embodied and liberatory experience (Solnit 2001:5). Walking with interview participants creates optimum opportunities and conditions for researchers to garner insights into individuals’ embodied, lived experiences of places (O’Neill and Roberts, 2019; Anderson, 2004; Kusenbach, 2003:465). Scholars contest the extent to which walking can be characterized as a ‘uniform’ practice and experience (Middleton, 2010:579). Scholars underline the gendered (Warren, 2017) and (trans)generational (Murray and Järviluoma, 2019) nuances of individuals’ experiences of walking. Everyday walking practices are increasingly mediated by ‘mundane technologies’; for example, objects that have become part of the embodied experiences of walking in urban areas (Middleton, 2010:591). It is not only people but ‘stuff’ that move in and through spaces and places, and are often subject to reconfiguration in the process (Sheller and Urry, 2006:216).

The physiological practice of walking is intricately bound with thinking and remembering (Solnit, 2001). Anderson (2004:258) asserts that the process of ‘bimbling’ with environmental activists stimulated the recollection of events, emotions and experiences. However, the physiological connections that walking fosters with the environment have social and political dimensions too. Meanings attributed to mobility and mobile practices are ‘highly political’ in terms of what they convey about social structures and norms in societies, which may privilege

the experiences and representations of some individuals over others (Warren, 2017; Cresswell, 2010:21-22). May and Lewis (2019) and Merriman (2014:171-172) challenge assertions that moving with participants, for instance as part of a walking interview, allows researchers to gather more in-depth critical insights into their research subjects or participants than “conventional” methods such as ‘sit-down’ interviews. In particular, Merriman (ibid.) suggests that mobile methods are fruitfully employed for ‘creative, experimental and open-ended reasons’.

These themes resonate in the study of volunteering and place. Place(s) is part of the contextualisation of volunteer motivation and experience along spatial, social, cultural and legal dimensions (Omoto and Snyder, 2002). The meaningfulness of volunteering as an experience may be part of an embodied relationship that a volunteer develops in relation to a place (Warren, 2014). Regarding international volunteering it may be that transient connections between volunteers and places are significant (Impey and Overton, 2013). By becoming a part of a voluntary initiative, the researcher becomes embedded in a research setting too (Mills, 2013). Different types of voluntary organisations provide diverse organisational sites for volunteering that give rise to a variety of experiences (Fyfe and Milligan, 2003). Notwithstanding the mobility of international volunteers, little attention has been paid to how and in what ways volunteers move in and through places *and* sites of volunteering – and the mobile approaches we might use to capture this.

Interviews that are informed by ethnography and biography, or those that draw upon a ‘life history’ approach which is combined with participant and non-participant observation have unearthed people’s memories and their sense of ‘emotional and subjective attachment’ to a



place (Dallimore, Davis, Eichsteller and Mann 2018; O'Toole and Grey, 2016:99-100). O'Toole and Grey (2016:87) underline the 'recursive' character of volunteering. To take account of the dynamics of time, space and the wider web of social relations in which the voluntary practice occurs; 'recursiveness is not a static 'encounter' between agency and structure in the abstract but a historically and geographically located process' (op cit.:88). This perspective is complemented by a broader scholarly interest in the meaning(s) volunteers give to their roles (Author, 2018); how a volunteer's 'lived experience' may be central to this (McAllum, 2014); and how meanings manifest in emotional, physical and social aspects of volunteers' roles (Warren, 2014; Dienno and Thompson, 2013). A potential line of inquiry is the extent to which walking enables the researcher to explore the significance of memories and emotions connected to places to an individual's motivation for, and experience of volunteering.

Finally, politics and place are intertwined in the study of volunteering, *and* policy agendas in the UK, which provides the empirical context for this paper. These include Place Based Social Action and other funder driven initiatives (Renaissi/DCMS, 2018). Citizens who 'give back' to society should have the power to decide what "place" means, rather than funders or government actors telling people what place "is" (ibid.:5-6). A focus on place and social context by geographers includes an appreciation of the 'highly uneven spatial and social impact' of nationwide initiatives to encourage volunteering (Fyfe and Milligan, 2003:406). What it means to be a volunteer and the importance it holds in people's lives is connected to the socio-economic status of where they live (Dallimore et al., 2018; Hardill and Baines, 2009). We lack an appreciation of how volunteers physically or literally negotiate the political and social context and the ambiguities this presents (Reynolds, 2019). Yet, Purcell (2012:279) underlines the social inequalities and injustice(s) that underpin individuals' everyday experiences of spaces and places. These are subject to the 'often subtle use of power and control' by government

and/or private actors. How does movement in a place affect how individuals come to interpret what it means to be a volunteer in a particular place, and what place means to them?

We bring together these bodies of work on place and volunteering *and* walking interviews and practice in a way that unearths common themes. In this way, we can begin to explore synergies that have the potential to diversify the methodologies we use to explore the dynamics of place and volunteering. We proceed to explore how we have begun to take on this challenge, followed by a discussion of what we have learnt.

### **Walking with Volunteers**

Similar to Anderson (2004), rapport was a factor in recruiting participants. We had met three of the participants before as part of guided walks we ran on a previous project and two through our own experiences as volunteers and professional practice. Our approach to sampling was purposive. We invited volunteers engaged in formal roles, who have a story to tell that is connected to particular areas and/or are part of organisations where connections with the environment or landscape is pertinent. All of our participants are women. Four out of the five women are of retirement age. Other research has found that retired females' 'lived experiences' of volunteering informs the meaning of volunteering in retirement (Nestereuk and Price, 2011). Our fifth volunteer is aged between 40-50. We have anonymised the names of the participants. The interviews took place between June and September 2018.<sup>i</sup>

We provided each participant with an information sheet, which invited them to participate in a walking interview. Participants were asked to think in advance of a place or site that was

significant to their voluntary action, with a view to taking the researcher(s) on a “walking tour” of this area. Similar to the aimless walks used by Anderson (2004) we let the participants decide the location and route of the interview. We advised of our intention to conduct the interview by “walking and talking”, but specified that the focus of the conversation would be on the participants’ volunteering. The interviews were audio-recorded. Participants were also informed that photographs of places or objects would be taken by one of the authors throughout the interview, at the latter’s discretion to maintain the flow of conversation.<sup>ii</sup> The purpose of the photographs was to elicit conversation and reflection in an event to follow the completion of the interviews (Hanson, Guell and Jones, 2016).

Prior to beginning this research, we envisaged that the volunteers would take us to a variety of places and sites of past and present volunteering. Apart from one instance where the walk was from an ‘old’ site of volunteering to a ‘new’ site due to a building move, the participants chose to meet in one location. We spent 2-3 hours with all participants, with the exception of Prudence (discussed below). The distances of the walks varied too; from a half-mile walk, to strolls around a park, to within the archives and library of a museum. Yet, we still gained a reflective sense of how participants move in and out of sites of volunteering. Moreover, we were able to discern how emotionally, physiologically and politically, they shape and are shaped by places and sites of volunteering. This has informed the presentation of our findings. Similar to Purcell (2012), we chose not to disaggregate findings into themes initially but to present and reflect on the process of conducting each interview in detail. When all of the interviews were complete, we brought the interviewees together to share in an informal setting over lunch some photographs that we had taken in the course of the walking interviews. We provided each participant with a summary of their recorded interview for discussion and comment. Using the photos as prompts, we asked for their reflections on the walking process. We discussed the

memories, emotions and thoughts that walking and talking about volunteering had stirred, which we present here.

Janet

Seated initially in Janet's office, we learn about her 'pathway' through volunteering (Brodie, Hughes, Jochum, Miller, Ockenden and Warburton, 2011:34-50). Over thirty years, Janet has oscillated between voluntary and funded roles for a natural history society. The lines between voluntary and paid work often appear blurred, but they are complementary and symbiotic to Janet. Indeed, when her children were young, she tells of paying a childminder on occasion so that she could perform her volunteer role. The range of learnt and felt resources she brings to the society are rooted in her passion for the natural environment and the need to protect its social and cultural heritage. We move into the archives. In this change to the site of the interview, the embodied nature of Janet's experience of volunteering becomes clear. This is not captured by the account of her pathway through volunteering. Janet attributes meaning and develops narratives about objects that are rooted in the roles she plays in relation to these objects (Trell and VanHoven, 2010). For example, Janet puts on white gloves to show us some original wood engravings by a well-known natural historian and engraver. As she handles the artefacts delicately, she shares the knowledge she has amassed by researching and caring for the engravings. There are also details about the role of a society donor and volunteer in acquiring the engravings; their "journey" from the United States in a padded envelope and the volunteer who made the velvet-lined case, which protects the engravings. Janet talks of how she loves to show these to people and that by doing so, 'they start to understand what you are talking about'. Janet speaks of her concerns for the future of the society given a dearth of younger volunteers. She questions whether the commitment of museum staff, which houses the society's archives and library, matches that of volunteers. Her engagement with objects as we moved through the archives formed a stimulus for the issues she raises. While handling, showing and talking about objects connected to one of her favourite items in the archives and

the society's collections, she told us of her anger about how the item was displayed by museum staff:

'I walked past and saw it and really had a fit and said you cannot do that. That's part of the provenance, that's what it is.... So they had to take the whole glass plate back off again and put the budgie [the object] back on his perch.'

Moving with Janet in the archives, we gained an understanding of how the objects and artefacts she cares for are a means through which she manages and expresses her concerns as she moves about the museum.

## Lucy

Lucy is part of a volunteer-collective cinema and event space, which has moved to a new location in the past two years. Lucy's interview begins at the original site. The walk is through a residential area to the new location of the cinema and venue space on a busy road overlooking a green area. Walking this route prompts Lucy to reminisce about her pathway to volunteering. As a young mother, living in proximity to the old site, she found the venue welcoming and supportive. Being within proximity to the old site of the cinema, Lucy talks of the community relations that were important to the cinema ('the Catholic Church next door') and remain important to her as a volunteer at the new site. The construction of the new cinema was the most literal of embodied volunteer experiences for Lucy and her fellow volunteers. This echoes the physical, embodied labour of volunteers in Warren's (2014) study of Yorkshire Sculpture Park. Arriving at the new site of the cinema, relaxed on the grass opposite the building, the value and significance of the space to Lucy becomes the focal point of the conversation. She talks with passion about the feelings the space evokes amongst the volunteers:

‘Even inside, if you don’t watch a film, you can have a coffee, you have this very filmic scene of the [area] ... Everyone stands there with their cup of coffee ... staring out of the window. [...].’

Moreover, we acquire insight into how she envisages the building as a mediator of her hopes and aspirations for the cinema *and* how it has become a mediator of the meaning she derives from her volunteering. This reflects the values of community participation that resonate throughout the conversation. Similar to Janet, there is a tension between the need to recruit new volunteers to manage the operational side of things and the need for the existing collective, who were involved in the building work, to step back:

‘[A]t the top of [old location], we were tucked away and the building itself was like a labyrinth inside. [By contrast] the new building ... you can see the whole of the front, it’s like a big advert, it’s very public ... [T]here is a realisation that we need to get it [the building] open a bit more so that people can pop in, maybe have someone at the front desk, but they’re all volunteer roles. Who on earth has a day to sit on the front desk?’ [...]

What I really hope is that we get a lot more community, I mean locality community involved in it.’

### Pauline

We have both been volunteers and/or paid workers at the women’s centre where Pauline has volunteered for over thirty years. The women’s centre is located on the edge of a public park. We meet here and have a cup of tea, while Pauline tells us about growing up in the area. We decide to take a walk around the adjacent park as the location of our interview. On our way out of the building, we meet a group of women who greet Pauline warmly and stop to chat. Pauline

tells us of her connections with these women, forged initially in a paid family liaison role; then as part of a group ('we did lots of knitting and chatting') and how this evolved into informal helping out and eventually friendship. As we walk and Pauline tells us of her links with these women, which she often returns to in the interview, we gain a sense of the volunteer negotiating formal and informal volunteer roles (Nestereuk and Price, 2011:100-101). In a physiological sense, there is a politics to her movements: the volunteer moving from groups to people's homes and even social occasions. This is underpinned by her wish to enable others to negotiate spaces in a way that empowers them too. It provides a fuller appreciation of the *meaningfull* connection that Pauline has as a volunteer to the area:

'Working in the west end, I feel like I'm at home. These are my people. I feel I can connect with them ... it makes me feel, I don't know safe.' [...]

'[I]t's [volunteering] about helping women to make their own lives better. It's about empowerment.'

More than any of the other interviews, as we walk into and around the park, pointing and looking are part of the interview (Phillips, 2005). This, in turn, prompts memories of the area for Pauline:

'See that used to be a paddling pool and there used to be a big building here and when we were kids, we used to race down there to the paddling pool.... It was very different to what it is now'.

However, Pauline also conveys a sense of loss and anger about what is happening to the area.

'The west end is my home really. It makes me sad that all the services are closing ...

[W]hen you look around, there are no services here, no good shops whereas in [other area of the city where she lives] I've got everything.'



Walking as part of the interview process is revealing of how Pauline's physiological movement in and out of formal and informal volunteering roles becomes a way for her to negotiate the social and political dynamics of what is happening to her locality.

## Holly

Holly has experience of a number of formal volunteer roles but her interview takes place in the park where she volunteers as part of a "Friends of x Park" group. As the walk begins, unlike Pauline, Holly points less to places or areas of significance, but makes observations about flowerbeds and things that catch her eye. As Holly is asked to speak about her volunteering in the park, she begins to reflect on the significance of volunteering throughout her life, beginning with her schooldays. Her mother volunteered weekly with the Brownies but – 'it occurred to me that in those days, people didn't use this word 'volunteer', you just helped out.' What it means to be a volunteer is a theme that resonates throughout Holly's interview. It is clear that for her, enjoyment is salient. For example, as she reflects on another formal volunteer role she plays outside of the park, she states:

'I never think of that as volunteering because it's all about me. I am getting so much from that. I don't think of it as volunteering.'

Being in the park and walking through it gives this perspective particular significance as her thoughts on what volunteering means appear integrally shaped by her voluntary connections to the park. She is very conscious of the broader politics of volunteering; not being the one who 'picks up the slack' and the need to ensure that volunteering is about enjoyment:

'The Park... this idea that volunteers will take over the park, I still really question it.'

Reflecting further on how minutes from the Board of Trustees suggest how ‘complicated’ things are becoming, she says: ‘This is getting like education or a full-time job. I don’t want to be doing this.’

### Prudence

We invited Prudence to participate in the research as we were aware of how her volunteering spanned the city centre and her home village in the suburbs. We hoped to join her on the journey that she makes to and from the library where she volunteers, which involves a bus ride and travel on the underground. We saw this as an opportunity to capture what mundane practices of mobility tell us about the motivation and commitment of individuals. Though willing to be interviewed, when we meet, she did not wish to participate in a walking/mobility exercise. Mindful of the unequal and potentially exclusionary nature of walking as a methodology (Warren 2017; Sheller and Urry 2006:211), we conduct the interview in the library where Prudence volunteers. Prudence reflects on her love of books and conservation, and how special the library is to her:

‘I think it’s a super place, my spiritual home. I love it. I just like books. I’ve got a house that looks like a miniature version of this [place].’

Altogether, we gain a clear sense of her pathway through volunteering. Rooted in a desire to “give back” for very personal reasons, we discern a range of learnt and felt resources that she brings to the roles she fulfils as a volunteer (Brodie et al., 2011). Being in the library surrounded by books, we do gain similar insights to the other interviews into the embodied connections individuals have to their sites of volunteering. However, *contra* May and Lewis (2019) it is much more typical of the “static” interpretations prevalent in the literature (Lancee and Radl,

2014:833). The interview illustrates some of the unpredictable consequences of interviewee-led processes. It underlines the need for researchers to be ready with alternative means of capturing participants' experiences of mobility (Warren, 2017). Notwithstanding, our experience of carrying out the interviews described above led us to identify some of the different ways in which the walking interview has the potential to advance the study of volunteering and place, which we now discuss.

### **What does walking offer the study of volunteering and place?**

This paper underlines how mobile methods such as walking create the potential for future research to explore the experiences of volunteers as mobile subjects. The findings from the interviews tell of people's pathways through volunteering (Brodie et al., 2011). Moreover, it is possible to discern how aspects of individuals' biographies that could be captured "sitting down" via a life history approach or biographical interviews have influenced decisions to volunteer (Dallimore et al. 2018; O'Toole and Grey 2016). However, moving with participants adds another layer of investigation that opens up research to chance encounters. In the case of Pauline, for example, these can provide insights into other, often informal aspects of being a volunteer that are meaningful to the participant, and formed through movement around an area (Trell and VanHoven, 2010).

Future research might consider how mobilities research, including the walking interview captures the significance that volunteers derive from daily routines and practices. Unlike Warren (2017), the interviews did not suggest that gender was significant to the opportunities and challenges posed by the negotiation of place. As evident in the interviews, gender was not

central to individuals' descriptions of their experiences and roles. However, the gendered dynamics of volunteers as mobile subjects and the roles they perform deserves attention in future studies. Using mobile methods like walking to articulate a volunteer as a mobile subject creates novel opportunities to examine meaning(s) and motivation(s) that are associated with being a volunteer. Moreover, articulating volunteers as mobile subjects allows us to appreciate space(s) of volunteering in a more dynamic way. It calls attention to how volunteering as an activity, even when associated with the performance of a role, does not render the volunteer "static". Rather our study suggests that volunteers weave in and out of multiple spaces – buildings that house organisations, neighbourhoods, people's houses, other organisations – as part of what they do, and why they volunteer.

Our experiences of conducting walking interviews underlines the physiological ways in which pointing, looking and moving through a place captures the 'everyday politics' of the place and volunteering dynamic. In the cases of Pauline and Holly, for example, walking stimulates memories and emotions that prompt them to reflect on their volunteering experience(s). Remembrances and feelings that range from nostalgia to loss, anger and frustration emerge to the fore. These are both personal *and* political. Walking in a place prompts individuals to reflect critically on the impact of politics on the physical environment, but also metaphorically on *their* role(s) in the prevalent political environment. An alternative approach such as a focus group or sit-down interview could also provide a forum for individuals to reminisce and express their frustrations about what is happening to places that are important to them. However, we agree with Kusenbach (2003) that being *in situ* with participants brings a specificity and insight to the emotions they express. In the case of Pauline, for instance, walking, talking and following her gaze as she points and reminisces about the park, stimulates an intricate understanding of the tensions that underpin Pauline's volunteering. The range of memories and love she has for

the area have to be reconciled with the sense of loss and anger that also shape her volunteering in place amidst austerity. Walking through the park, Holly reflects on the increasing responsibilities of volunteers in the park, which are anathema to what volunteering means to her. The stimulation of memories and emotions amongst participants prompts a broader reflection on, and questioning of the wider political context. In these ways, the interviews show us how volunteering takes on a form of subtle, private resistance that is typical of ‘everyday politics’ (Choi, 2013).

Reynolds (2019) argues that initiatives to encourage place-based volunteering are often rooted in ‘unrealistic’ expectations and even a misunderstanding of the communities they seek to help. Our findings illustrate that a sense of attachment to a place is less of a straightforward impetus for volunteering. Rather it is something that must be negotiated, contemplated and even challenged by individuals emotionally *and* physically as they circumnavigate their surroundings. This enables individuals to define their volunteer roles on their own terms and provides an “everyday” way of reclaiming a sense of control over the influence public policy has on the place(s) that matter to them (Williams et al., 2014; Purcell, 2012). By walking with participants we create *in situ* opportunities to surface the mix of routines, practices, emotions and memories that shape volunteering. We appreciate volunteering in places and spaces as part of a range of everyday lived present and past experiences. We garner insights into how their volunteering is rooted in complexities of loss, anger and frustration whereby they volunteer in places *in spite of* rather than because of government-led incentives (Williams et al., 2014). Politically-focused emotional critiques become part of the everyday ‘tactics’ individuals employ to counter the place-oriented strategies of political actors (Purcell, 2012:274). Our use of walking interviews strengthens the case for practitioners and researchers to explore

individuals' everyday experiences of places and spaces in order to build understanding and, arguably informed critique of how policy initiatives affect people's lives.

Walking and talking captures the mutually complementary dynamic of site and place for volunteers. The interviews suggest that the organisational locations that form sites of volunteering are a way for volunteers to mediate the significance of what they do in place(s), for example in Lucy's interview. Thinking about site/organisational context and place(s) in this way suggests that when considering mobile methods for volunteering research, we need to temper our enthusiasm to move in and through a particular terrain with volunteers. Being 'creative and open-ended', as Merriman (2014) suggests, means being open to moving in and through sites of volunteering. However, in Janet's interview, for example, there were less extensive opportunities for mobility. We may question the relevance of the walking interview per se and focus on the 'microgeography' of the interview site, including how the lines between participant observation and the semi-structured interview may become blurred in doing so (Elwood and Martin, 2000:656). Our concern becomes 'how interview participants relate to the space of the interview and [how they are] situated within the multifaceted dynamics of a particular site' (ibid.:652). Depending on the nature of the volunteer's work, engaging with material things (objects, artefacts) – moving, preserving, cataloguing, storing, - becomes central to how a volunteer conveys the richness of what being a volunteer in an organisation means to them, but equally what frustrates them too. Thus, the nature of the embodied experiences that may arise in the course of being a volunteer are revealed. We see the creation of the opportunity to move in and around a site as integral to capturing this aspect of volunteering. With an emphasis on the micro-geography of the interview site, it is possible to explore the ways in which objects, artefacts and buildings may be in motion. They may, in turn,

shape the volunteers' embodied experiences including the opportunities and tensions that need to be negotiated as they move in and through spaces.

## **Conclusion**

Our study suggests that the walking interview is an opportunity for researchers to consider the pluralisation of methods for exploring space, place and volunteering. This needs to be framed by a consideration of the extent and nature of the relevance of mobility – of people and things – to volunteering and place. Walking interviews have the potential to reveal insights about volunteering that are rich in terms of detail and depth of meaning(s) about volunteers' connections to place and space. They open up the research process to enable volunteers to convey their motivations and experiences in a novel but critically insightful way. As other authors suggest (May and Lewis, 2019; Carpiano, 2009:271) walking interviews can be used to complement other ways of carrying out qualitative research such as the sit down interview or focus groups. Our study suggests that walking interviews are particularly suited to small-scale studies where opportunities for generalisation are limited. We echo the reflections of Bergeron et al (2014:120) regarding the need to be prepared for the unexpected in carrying out walking interviews and to plan thoroughly to guarantee the inclusivity of the study in terms of participation. Although it was not an issue in our study, there is also a need to consider the management of trivial things like background noise and distractions.

Further, these interviews are complex as having a prior rapport with a research participant, or developing one as part of the research process is also an important part of a successful walking interview. This also adds to the time that needs to be invested in the whole process. However,

overall, the benefits outweigh the potential risks or drawbacks. For future research, theoretically, framing questions about volunteering in terms of places that can be walked or where the mobility of material things is relevant has the potential to advance the scholarly analysis that prioritizes rich description and *meaningfull* analysis of place, space and volunteering. This needs to be underpinned by a clear conceptualisation of volunteers as mobile rather than static subjects, physiologically, emotionally and politically negotiating the places and sites that are salient to them.



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<sup>i</sup> We carried out three of the interviews together (Janet, Pauline and Prudence). The second author carried out the interviews with Holly and Lucy.

<sup>ii</sup> The information sheet advised participants of their prerogative to object to a photograph being taken and/or used in the research.