Walking & Talking: Probing the Urban Lived Experience

Shenando Stals  
HTI Group, Eindhoven  
University of Technology  
Den Dolech 2, 5600 MB  
Eindhoven, The Netherlands  
s.l.a.stals@alumnus.tue.nl

Michael Smyth  
Centre for Interaction Design,  
Edinburgh Napier University  
10 Colinton Road, EH10 5DT  
Edinburgh, United Kingdom  
m.smyth@napier.ac.uk

Wijnand IJsselsteijn  
HTI Group, Eindhoven  
University of Technology  
Den Dolech 2, 5600 MB  
Eindhoven, The Netherlands  
w.a.ijsselsteijn@tue.nl

ABSTRACT
With ubiquitous mobile computing devices spreading throughout the urban environment of everyday life, there is a growing need to better understand person-place relationships and how technology can play a role in this urban experience. To this end, we propose a mobile methodology called Walking & Talking, an observed walking tour with participants through the city, which makes it easy and motivating for them to discuss their personal relationships with a place. The paper will describe a case study where the method was successfully applied to elicit rich, contextualized and intimate data, making it a useful research tool for the fields of urban interaction design and mobile & location awareness technology.

Author Keywords  
Mobile methodology; walking interview; place attachment; place meaning; person-place relationship; urban interaction design; design fictions.

ACM Classification Keywords  
H.5.m: Human Factors; Measurement

INTRODUCTION
As people go about their everyday lives, they create personally meaningful relationships with public places in the city. Place is in literature often defined as a meaningful location [6] and in the social sciences, research centred on various person-place related concepts like place attachment, characterizing the emotional relationship between individuals and their important places [12], and place meaning, which develops from people’s in-place experiences and emotions and characterizes the person-place relationship [7].

Within computer science and HCI, the person-place relationship has gained increased traction, especially as the vision of ubiquitous computing [14] becomes realized through the embedding of multiple computational devices throughout the urban environment. Urban interaction design is an emergent field that aims to investigate how this new technological layer that is being added to the already existing infrastructure of the city can change the way people individually view, shape, perceive, interact with and experience the urban environment. For example, the Urban Tapestries-study [5] explored the potential costs and benefits of public authoring, that is, the mapping and public sharing of local knowledge, memories, stories, sensed information and experiences. Using an evaluative map technique, a map of London was annotated with post-its containing people’s personal stories related to a place, which informed the design of a mobile application allowing people to digitally annotate and share a personally meaningful map of their city.

Paulos & Goodman [9] investigated people’s relationships with familiar strangers and the influence of familiarity of places and strangers on people’s feelings of anxiety and comfort in their everyday public places. This inspired the design of a mobile device that could identify a person’s familiarity with their current place and the people around them.

The Emotional Cartography study [8] investigated people’s emotional relationship with places in the city by letting participants walk freely through the city while their arousal levels were being measured. Afterwards participants were asked to interpret the arousal levels with the researchers, revealing personal stories and emotions related to places encountered during their walk, creating an “emotion map” of the city.

These studies indicate that a new technological layer of ubiquitous, mobile computing devices have the potential to augment our experience of the urban environment. While location-based smartphone services are becoming increasingly commonplace, our understanding of the triangular relationship between people, place and technology in the urban environment remains underdeveloped. The purpose of this paper is to explore and evaluate a mobile qualitative data gathering methodology.
In order to obtain a more fine-grained level of the personal relationship with places, participants are asked to recollect or imagine approaches that they all provide a high-level experience of places. However, limitations of these techniques are accompanied by an interview, it allows people to elaborate more on their personally significant techniques. When evaluative map techniques allow people to, at a high level, indicate which techniques or in-depth interviews, or both, possibly into person-place relationships typically use evaluative map techniques. In social science studies, methods for qualitative research specifically suited for urban interaction design. Approaches employed by Paulos & Goodman and Nold [9] compared the quantitative and qualitative data generated by the walking interviews and sedentary interviews employed in a pilot study and found that a major advantage of using walking interviews over sedentary interviews is their capacity to access people’s attitudes, feelings and knowledge about the environment in situ and generate richer and more place-specific data. Walking is considered to be a more intimate way to engage with the landscape and offers insights into both the place as well as the self. A spectrum of approaches exist in walking interviews, ranging from the participant being the one familiar with the area and determining the route, to the researcher being the person familiar with the area and determining the route.

Approaches employed by Paulos & Goodman [9] and Nold [7] acknowledge the importance of being in situ in order to provide a more fine-grained experience of the city, allowing cues from the environment to trigger the memory of participants and allowing them to add their own personally significant places that they encounter along the route. However, in the study by Paulos & Goodman [9] the walking route and places to be visited were predetermined by the researcher and were the same for all participants, meaning that some places of interest may not have been taken into account. Nold [8] acknowledged the importance of letting people walk freely around the urban environment, allowing them to visit the personally most significant areas and places in the city, which also made the walking tour a more engaging experience for participants. Although the method did not rely on what people imagine they feel at a place, a limitation of this technique is that the arousal levels are not actual emotions (e.g., they are not indicative of valence), but in retrospect are being interpreted or transformed into emotions by the participant in discussion with the researcher.

From the advantages and limitations of the reviewed methods emerges the need for a new method that allows us to capture fine-grained experiences of the city and allows participants to move freely about the urban environment to ensure the optimal use of environmental cues. The method should make it motivating and easy for participants to share with the researcher emotions and in-place experiences and therefore move away from the traditional distribution of roles where the researcher is in the role of “invading” the participant’s environment to “examine” the participant.

DESIGNING THE WALKING & TALKING METHOD

The Walking & Talking method aims to probe the relationship between people and place, specifically the relationship between a person and their significant places in the urban environment. It is a walking tour through the urban environment with a participant and an observer. It is proposed that this method helps participants to be more relaxed when reporting personal experiences related to a place, has a low threshold for participating, builds up rapport quickly and easily and treats the participant as an equal conversation partner to the researcher. Furthermore, as an in-situ method, exposure to the actual places allows participants to relive emotions and in-place experiences, triggering memory processes that lead to richer and potentially more valid descriptions of place. Although the walking tour with an observer was inspired by the research done by Paulos & Goodman [9] and Nold [8], it is different from these works, in that our method allows participants to be self-directed [9] and does not require retrospective (re)construction of experience [8].

Being in-situ also allows the actual act of approaching, being in and leaving one’s personally significant places, thus encompassing the full extent of the experience of that place, similar to Benford’s concept of trajectory [1]. It includes a warm-up, in-place experience and a cooling down, and participants during the walk actually reported anticipating/looking forward to reaching their personally significant place and would reflect on their in-place experience when physically leaving the place. This full extent of the in-situ experience of a place is designed to work as a catalyst, providing participants with cues from the environment which can prompt memories, stories related to the place, emotions and specific details (e.g., the
Walking to one’s personally significant places in the city was designed to also act as an external stimulus in triangulation. Whyte’s concept of triangulation is defined as the process by which some external stimulus provides a linkage between people and prompts strangers to talk [15]. The city itself can act as a conversation starter, allowing a more natural flow of conversation between the participant and the researcher, leading away from the idea that the participant is being “interrogated” by the researcher.

Finally, the physical act of walking itself is conducive to discussing personal, emotional experiences or stories related to a place. When discussing which places people found meaningful in their life, Manzo [7] found that participants mentioned the importance of movement as a way of thinking and reflecting. Watching the scenery pass by while walking through the city allows a person to get lost in their thoughts and to have a moment of privacy to think and reflect. Periods of silence naturally occur during a walk, whereas, in contrast, they quickly start to feel awkward during sedentary interviews. In addition, participants report that the physical act of walking itself makes the “mental wheels” of the brain turn and provides them with a relaxing experience. The physical act of walking thus helps participants relax, think and reflect [7].

APPLICATION OF THE WALKING & TALKING METHOD

In this section, a case study will be described in which the Walking & Talking method has been applied. This case study was conducted in Edinburgh (United Kingdom) with eleven residents of the city. The aim of the case study was to identify people’s personal relationships with the city, including the way in which people capture and share their personally significant places and their associated experiences with other people. The study enabled both the evaluation of the Walking & Talking method as an urban experience probe, as well as informing a number of design propositions of mobile and contextualised devices and services that could potentially change and enrich the way people interact with, experience, and share the city.

The design of this case study was two-phased. The first phase consisted of an interview including evaluative map techniques, during which a person’s general relationship with the city was identified, like which part of the city a participant was most familiar with and where their home and workplace were located. In addition, participants were asked to indicate five personally significant places on a map of the city and to answer a series of open-ended questions for each place regarding place meaning, their in-place experience, and emotions related to that place. To help them identify emotions related to a place, a sheet of smiley stickers depicting a wide range of emotions allowed them to tag a place with emotion stickers on the map. The remainder of the paper will focus on the second phase of the research, during which the Walking & Talking method was used to elicit people’s in-place experiences and emotions related to their own personally significant places and how they would like to capture and share their personal connection to each of those places.

Participant Recruitment

The participant recruitment procedure and eligibility criteria were based on the procedure and eligibility criteria employed in Manzo’s study of people’s personally significant places throughout their lifetime [7]. Participants were recruited through a networking procedure, beginning with referrals of potential participants from acquaintances. Potential participants were initially contacted by phone or email (depending on the contact information provided) to request participation and to screen them for eligibility. Based on the recommendations and eligibility criteria provided by Manzo [7], the following eligibility criteria were formulated for the case study: Participants were considered eligible if (1) they were currently residents of the same city (i.e. Edinburgh), (2) had been residents of this city for at least a year and (3) were not directly known by the researchers. Ensuring that participants were all residents of the same city was not only done because of accessibility, but it also would make it possible to examine the kind of places that are important to people living in the same city. Participants had to be residents of the city for at least a year to ensure that there was a base of experiences in their current hometown. Only participants not directly known by
the researchers were allowed to participate, because this could otherwise influence the responses of the participants or compromise the researchers’ objectivity. If the potential participants were eligible, they were asked to select a quiet place that would be close to one of their personally significant places to meet up and conduct the first phase of the case study (i.e. interviews with evaluative map techniques). This was done to make sure that at least a subset of the participant’s personally significant places would be within walking distance for the second phase of the case study (i.e. the walking tour with the observer), which would start after the interview with evaluative map techniques had been completed.

**Walking Tour: Based on Participant’s Everyday Rituals and Habits**

Prior to starting the walking tour, participants identified their personally significant places to be visited using the map on which they previously had indicated their personally significant places in the first phase of the case study. The final selection for the walking tour was based on their importance to the participant and the ability to walk to those places from the location of the interview within reasonable time. Participants were encouraged to add new personally significant places to the list during the walking tour as well. The Walking & Talking tour was fully recorded by the researcher using a portable audio recorder, pen & paper for quick notes and a camera to take pictures of all the personally significant places, which allowed for subsequent transcription and analysis.

**Measuring Emotions during the Walking Tour**

Inspired by the research method used by Nold [8], during the walking tour, the participant’s emotions were measured by having participants indicate their experienced emotions on the Plutchik Emotion Wheel [10] (see Figure 2).

At the beginning of the walking tour, the basics of the emotion wheel were explained and the participants were asked to indicate on the emotion wheel which emotions they felt at a specific place. However, participants were informed that they were allowed to describe emotions in their own words.

The participants were instructed to verbally alert the researcher as soon as an emotion occurred at any point during the observed walking tour and to indicate the experienced emotions on the emotion wheel by marking the emotions with the number ID related to that place. Participants were asked to elaborate why this emotion occurred, that is, how it was related to their in-place experience, revealing their connection to that place and what that place meant to them in terms of their experience of the city. Subsequently, participants were asked if and how they would like to capture and share their personal connection to the place. The observed walking tour ended when the significant places that the participants wanted to visit had all been visited. In the case study, the duration of one Walking & Talking sessions ranged between forty-five minutes and three hours, although a typical session would take between one and two hours to complete.

**Data Analysis**

Given the explorative nature of the case study, the fact that the data had been collected using different methods and that the Walking & Talking method lead to large volumes of rich, complex data, we choose to analyze the gathered data using a bottom-up, thematic analysis typical of a grounded theory approach.

Initially, for each participant, the audio recordings were transcribed and, together with the notes and data from the evaluative map technique and emotion wheel, coded to mark key points of interest. This was done directly after the participant had completed both phases of the research.

After the data collection phase of the case study had ended, a content analysis was done on all the data of each Walking & Talking session to identify codes, categories and themes within each Walking & Talking session. A classification system was then developed that organized codes (linked to specific instances in the data) into categories and themes. Next, using this classification system, responses across all Walking & Talking sessions were analyzed. Finally, the hierarchy of codes, categories and themes was analyzed again, resulting in a new conceptualization of the data.

**Results Case Study**

The interviews with evaluative map techniques indicated that personally significant places typically are mundane, everyday public places like a pub, park or bridge, are located in the city centre and had become personally significant through a wide range of positive and negative in-places experiences and multiple related emotions.
The Walking & Talking method elicited that rich, contextualized and intimate data regarding person-place relationships, as illustrated by a quote from participant “Carmen”.

*Carmen (female, 24 years old, Spanish, Spanish teacher)*:

“Every time I walk on the bridge now I cannot help smiling. I always stop on the bridge and try to stay there as much time as I can and try to spot couples, people who are in love. I want to be them! I often come back here on purpose even if it is not on my route, because being here makes me feel loved again. [...] I always want to go there when I am in the neighbourhood and I try to stay on the bridge as long as I can.”

This quote of participant Carmen describes the relationship she has with a personally significant place, namely that the place offers an in-place experience that has a positive effect on her affective state (i.e. making her feel loved). It also shows the desire and need to revisit that personally significant place in order to relive or recreate the in-place experience and the behaviour of going for walks and out of one’s way to achieve this. Because the thematic analysis of the data uncovered people’s underlying needs, desires, rituals and behaviours regarding their personal relationships with places in the city, the main findings can be assumed to remain stable over time. Carmen’s quote illustrates one of the main findings of the case study: People actively regulate the way they feel by going for walks to revisit personally significant places that potentially have a positive impact on their affective state.

Subsequently, a “design approach” was taken in order to identify how the main findings regarding people’s personal relationship with places in the city could potentially inform the design of future technological devices and services. To this end, each of the main findings was translated into concept for a new, hypothetical technological device or service in the form of design fictions. Design fictions is a method developed by Bleeker & Nova [2] which, grounded in science fact, projects these scientific findings into possible future scenarios. These hypothetical scenarios are not final design solutions, but conversation pieces, intended to provoke thought and reflection. They enable discussion to further identify potential for, and inform the design of, future technological devices and services. [2, 13]

The main finding illustrated by Carmen’s quote suggests that there could be potential for technology that supports people in regulating their own emotions in a place-based way by making use of the emotional experience that places evoke in people. This led to the development of a concept for an “Emotion Route Planner” (ERP). This design fiction describes the hypothetical future scenario of people using a route planner app on their smartphone to determine a route through the city based on the predominant emotional experiences associated with different places (see Figure 4).

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A person can use the ERP to select a desired emotion, for example “relaxed” while feeling stressed at work, and the ERP will calculate the optimal walking route from work to home based on personal and shared emotional experiences that places evoke in people. One of the main motivations mentioned by participants in the case study for wanting to share their connection to a personally significant place, is to enable others to feel the same emotion or have the same in-place experience in that specific place, as mentioned by participant Sara.

*Sara (female, 21 years old, Argentinean, veterinary student)*

“I would like to leave a poem on Calton Hill because it links to the way I feel when I am there. [...] I want people to somehow see the poem when they are there, so that when they read it, they can feel the same way there as I do.”

The ERP therefore also allows citizens to tag and “collect” personally significant places while going about their everyday lives. These tags can be shared with others and can be used to enhance a desired emotion at a place (see Figure 5). Not only could an app like this have the potential to change the way citizens experience (places in) the city itself at an individual level, it could also be useful for example in mental health care. People suffering from stress, anxiety or depression could use it as a tool to plan walking routes and visit places in their own city that will help them alter their mood and positively influence the way they feel.

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**Figure 3.** Personally significant places are typically mundane, everyday public places, like for example this phone booth.

**Figure 4.** Emotion Route Planner (ERP): Green zones on the map of the city indicate places evoking a relaxing experience.
EVALUATION OF THE WALKING & TALKING METHOD

Richer Descriptions of In-place Experiences & Emotions

Compared to evaluative map techniques and retrospective techniques, the Walking & Talking method provided a more fine-grained view of the city. Being in-situ in the everyday urban environment and walking along participants’ typical walking routes worked as a catalyst. Cues from the environment prompted memories, specific stories and details from participants’ in-place experiences, which would have been difficult to recall by just imagining being in a place of personal significance. In addition, it helped people remember special events that took place there and other people that had played a significant role in their connection to and experience of a place. This was illustrated by the participant Carmen who, during the interview with evaluative map techniques, indicated that a specific bridge (represented by the lipstick kiss print on the map in Figure 6) was important to her because her partner at the time had always referred to it as “their bridge”. Although this indicated why the bridge had initially become important to her, actually visiting the bridge and encountering a couple kissing on the bridge made clear that the reason the bridge is important to her and she keeps returning there, is that being there makes her feel loved again.

Helps Participants Relax and Open Up Regarding Personal Topics & Emotions

The relaxing physical act of walking together and the urban environment itself, including the participant’s personally significant places, drew the attention away from the fact that the participant was being interviewed about personally significant places which in some cases had very personal stories and strong emotions related to it, making some participants quite emotional. The act of walking & talking made it easier for participants to relax and talk in more detail about their personal in-place experiences and the
related emotions. Like art student Pierce, who found it difficult to talk about his strong personal connection with the shopping centre using the evaluative map technique (indicated by the dark painting in Figure 6), due to the negative emotions related to that place. He did not open up until we started walking away from the location. He even reported feeling relieved at that point, because revisiting the shopping centre had made him realize he was now not “at rock bottom” anymore, making it easier for him to open up and tell his story.

Pierce (male, 20 years old, Scottish, art student):

“I like the general strangeness of this place at night time. Although the place itself looks detached or sterile, I have a strong closeness to it. I was in a dark place at the time, spent too much money, drank too much for six months and hit rock bottom. I did not even have money for food. I could only find comfort in the darkness. I was disoriented, broken, could not get a grasp on anything. I was not able to deal with things. I liked the industrial structure, the controlled environment of this place. It provided me with an anchor from going ape shit. Being there at that point in my life made me feel safe and secure, I came back to reality. I have only been there once, but it made me realize I had to make some serious changes in my life otherwise I was not going to make it. Literally not going to survive. It was an intimate experience, it made me feel things again.”

Participating is an Engaging Experience

An additional benefit of the Walking & Talking method was that participants genuinely enjoyed participating as it offered an engaging experience. Being outside and having a task to do made it a more enjoyable experience as compared to the traditional interview setting, as described by participant Jordi.

Jordi (male, 33 years old, Italian, hotel receptionist):

“I was expecting a boring questionnaire were I just had to give some answers, but it is really nice to be outside and walk through the city and actually be doing something.”

More importantly however was that many participants indicated that they really enjoyed showing their personally significant places and “their city” to someone else and telling their personal stories related to those places to someone who showed a genuine interest in their life in the city and their personal stories attached to a place, as reported by participant Francois.

Francois (male, 22 years old, French, works in hospitality):

“It was really fun to show you around my important places in the city. It is actually very nice experience to have someone interested in what my life in Edinburgh actually looks like and what the city means to me. Edinburgh means much more to me than just the castle and the Royal Mile (i.e. two iconic landmarks in Edinburgh that are very popular among tourists). I mean, my friends want to see the places I just showed you when they visit, but most people, especially tourists, do not want to see that, they just come here for the castle, but Edinburgh is so much more than that. At least to me it is.”

The level of enjoyment experienced by the participants was evident as they were motivated to show all their significant places, even if that meant the observed walking tour would take more time than intended. Although the walking tour was estimated to take about thirty minutes, participants often took more time to be able to show all their personally significant places, which could lead up to walking tours of two to six times the estimated time. This was more rule than exception.

Low Threshold to Participate

In general, participants genuinely considered participating to be a fun and engaging experience, which was reflected by the positive effect on participant recruitment. After a few interviews and walking tours, participants had told family and friends about the research and their positive experience of participating, leading to people taking initiative and actively starting to approach the researchers, asking if they could participate in the study. This solved the initial recruitment problems and continued to the point that more people wanted to participate than could be handled.

Comparative Advantages of Walking & Talking Method

When comparing the Walking & Talking method to other already existing research methods, it can be concluded that this method provided richer and more precise descriptions of in-place experiences and emotions related to a place by being in situ. It made better use of environmental cues compared to evaluative map techniques or interviews with pictures, because it did not rely on participants’ imagination regarding how a place makes them feel, but actually being at the place enabled them to relive or recreate the in-place experience that made a place personally meaningful. This led to a richer description of the in-place experience, which immediately and easily could be shared with the researcher. The Walking & Talking method allowed participants to pick their own significant places and walk through the city based on their own everyday walking routes. This approach provided more useful environmental cues compared to, for example, the walking tours with an observer done by Paulos & Goodman [9]. The Walking & Talking method was also found to be more engaging as it enabled participants to show and talk to the researcher about places that matter to them. The fact that the participant can immediately share the information with the researcher and that no extra meeting with the researcher was required meant the method required less investment of time on the part of the participant compared to the walking tours without observer done by Nold [8]. Critically the in-situ, face-to-face sharing of in-place experiences and emotions with the researcher led to the production of richer and more precise descriptions of in-place experiences and emotions.

Costs and Limitations of the Walking & Talking Method

However, all these advantages do come at a price. Initially it had been estimated that the Walking & Talking method
would take about thirty minutes per participant, but because participants enjoyed participating and were motivated to show all their significant places, the observed walking tour in general took between one and two hours. Although it is a relaxing experience for the participant, it is intensive for the researcher who has to keep the conversation and interview going, record responses and walk in an urban environment all at the same time.

Although the Walking & Talking method enabled discussion about the usage of personal technological devices in the city, their usage in situ could only be observed to a limited extent. Because participants were engaged in a conversation with the researcher, they did not use their music player or mobile phone during the walking tour in the same way they had indicated they typically would do when going into the city alone. In addition, the physical act of walking played an important role in relaxing participants and enabling discussion of personal emotions and experiences related to a place. Therefore, this method is suited for environments that can be traversed on foot and is potentially less suitable for environments that need to be traversed by other means of transportation.

Using the method also leads to large volumes of rich data, which might make data analysis a challenging task. Because it is difficult to make notes of the participant’s responses while walking and talking, the main way of recording the data is by using an audio recording. This implies that first the audio data has to be transcribed and those transcriptions subsequently have to be analyzed, which requires a lot of time and effort. Because of the richness and complexity of the data, it is advisable to use a data analysis method that takes a bottom-up approach and uncovers themes in the data like a grounded theory method. However, in return for the time and effort needed to analyse the data, the method provides rich and detailed descriptions of people’s personal relationships with places in the urban environment.

**DISCUSSION**

The role and presence of the researcher are important aspects of the Walking & Talking method, as the in-situ, face-to-face sharing of in-place experiences and emotions with the researcher and treating participants as equal conversation partners led to the production of richer and more accurate descriptions of in-place experiences and emotions and made participating an engaging experience. However, the presence of the researcher might also affect the quality of the results in a less desirable way. Kusenbach [4] has assessed *ethnographic go-alongs* (i.e. ethnographic interviews) where the researcher accompanied participants on their everyday journeys in order to observe their everyday activities and access their experiences and interpretations at the same time. Kusenbach argues that, in walking interviews and ethnographic go-alongs, the presence of the researcher is a “contrived” social situation that disrupts the normally private stream of perceptions, emotions and interpretations related to a place that the research is trying to capture [4]. The presence of the researcher could indeed influence the participant’s emotions and experience of a place, making it more difficult to recreate or relive the in-place experience and emotions related to a place. This could potentially taint the emotion measurement taken in-situ using the emotion wheel. In order to minimise the disruption of the stream of perceptions, emotions and interpretations of a place using the Walking & Talking method, the researcher should initially stay silent when arriving at a place to allow the participant to indicate the emotions related to a place on the emotion wheel without disruption. The cue for discussing the experiences and emotions related to a place was given by the participant when they indicated that they had finished identifying the emotions on the emotion wheel. Only when certain topics of interest to the researcher regarding a participant’s relationship to their personally significant place had not yet been answered by the participant’s own story, a set of open ended questions were asked. The questions were discussed using the emotion wheel and the personally significant place itself as intermediate conversation pieces to help prompt the associated emotions and experiences. In combination with the relaxing effect of walking and talking together, this helped participants to open up. It is however important to be aware of the fact that the emotions which are in general related to a place and experienced in a place by a participant, might not necessarily all be experienced by the participant (or be experienced in the same intensity levels) when visiting the place with the researcher.

Kusenbach argues that, in ethnographic go-alongs the social situation might seem awkward or artificial because of the distribution of roles between the researcher and the participants [4]. In ethnographic go-alongs the researcher is shadowing the participants while they go about their everyday routines, like walking the dog or going to the supermarket, and the places being visited are typically everyday places that are not necessarily personally significant. Although the participants are in control, the researcher is “invading” the participant’s environment and highlighting the fact that they are being examined while going about their everyday life. This is even more the case in an interview setting, because then the researcher is in control of the situation and the environment and the focus is on the interview. We would argue that with Walking & Talking method, the social situation is less contrived. Participants are asked to show their significant places during a walking tour and are not observed while going about their everyday lives, making the method less intrusive for participants. In addition, participants are asked to show places that actually matter to them instead of mundane, everyday places that have no personal significance, making the method more engaging for participants than ethnographic go-alongs and potentially less awkward. Furthermore, the Walking & Talking method aims to move
towards a distribution of roles where the researcher and the participant are equal conversation partners, creating a more “normal” social situation. When discussing the experiences and emotions related to a place, these interviews were largely unstructured to maintain a natural flow of the conversation, maintain momentum in a narrative and maximise the space for stories that emerge related to a place. Moments of silence during this conversation occur more naturally during walks, which also allowed the participants time to think and reflect or deal with intense emotions related to a place. Although Evans & Jones [3] advocate a “hands-off” approach to walking interviews with minimal questioning to maximize the space for narratives related to a place to emerge, we argue that asking questions is not only helpful to make sure all topics of interest for the researcher are covered that might not naturally occur in the conversation (like questions in the case study regarding the capturing and sharing of experiences and emotions related to a place to explore the potential role for technology). They can also help balance the conversation, making it easier to mimic a normal conversation and establish rapport. Since the participants are sharing experiences and emotions related to a place and the researcher is not, there is an imbalance that would naturally not occur in a normal conversation. We argue that the conversational approach in which the researcher and participant are equal conversation partners can make it easier for participants to open up regarding stories and emotions related to places in the urban environment.

The Walking & Talking method has been successfully applied in the case study to elicit rich, contextualized and intimate data regarding people’s personal connection to places in the urban environment, but the method might not be suitable for all places and all participants. The fact that the researcher has to be present could potentially limit the ability to visit certain places in the urban environment. This could potentially exclude places located in restricted areas like certain workplaces or private property. However, Evans & Jones [3] found that for walking interviews, when visiting a place, it is crucial that the place is visible. Although even this might not always be possible, for our case study we visited over forty different places in the urban environment and did not encounter a place that could not be visited by the researcher and participant together. This does however pose a problem when places simply do not exist anymore, like for example an old church that has been torn down and has been replaced by a modern flat. In this case, the Walking & Talking method could use pictures of the old building while visiting the location where it had been. In addition, the Walking & Talking method, as the name implies, involves walking, which might make it less suitable not only for environments that cannot be traversed on foot, but also for participants who experience difficulties walking, like for example disabled people or elderly people. It would be possible to get those people in situ using other modes of transportation, like cycling or driving by car, but we would argue that these are different scales of movement that also would be experienced differently than walking and would offer a different experience of the urban environment. When the relaxing experience of walking and talking is lost, it would in our opinion make it more difficult for participants to open up regarding personal stories and emotions and potentially make participating less engaging. Therefore, if places cannot be visited with the researcher, simply do not exist anymore or participants are not mobile enough to participate in suitable mobile methodologies, more traditional methods like sedentary interviews with pictures or evaluative map techniques might be a better option in these cases.

We found the Walking & Talking method to be complementary to other research methods. In our case study, the output of the interview with evaluative map techniques provided a good starting point for the Walking & Talking method and was used to determine the walking route and to select the places to be visited. When combined, they can provide a high-level view and fine-grained view of people’s personal relationships with the urban environment. The Walking & Talking method could also be used as a standalone method without the input from the interviews with evaluative map techniques. For their walking interviews, Evans & Jones [3] simply asked participants to give them a guided tour of a certain area. However, we do feel that it is important for the participants to have the opportunity to think about which places in the city are personally significant to them prior to starting the walking tour, in order to ensure that the most important personally significant places are actually included.

We argue that the Walking & Talking method could be a useful research tool in urban planning and in the early stages of the design cycle to uncover potential for mobile apps and location aware computing. The Walking & Talking method provides a productive way of accessing a local community’s connection to their surrounding environment by uncovering the personal stories and emotions related to places in the urban environment, which could inform the creation of sustainable communities and neighbourhoods. The output of the Walking & Talking method could also be used to uncover potential for mobile apps and location aware computing. In our opinion, the method of design fictions is particularly suited for this, as it allows for each of the main findings to be translated into multiple concepts or scenarios for a new technological devices or services. These design fictions could subsequently be used as conversation pieces to validate the concepts and enable discussion in order to further identify potential for and inform the design of future technological devices and services.

**CONCLUSION**

The research method of Walking & Talking provided a means to uncover personal stories and emotions related to places. The approach encouraged the sharing and discussing
of those emotions and stories with the researcher in place and in real time. The Walking & Talking method achieved this by offering a relaxed experience for the participants through using the city and the activity of indicating emotions on the emotion wheel as intermediate conversation pieces, by using the relaxing physical activity of walking through the city together and by treating the participants as equal conversation partners. The successful application of the Walking & Talking method as a mobile qualitative data gathering technique as discussed in this paper, suggests that we should rethink the traditional distribution of roles between the researcher and participant where the researcher is the expert who “examines” the participant. A distribution of roles where the researcher and the participant are equal conversation partners could be more successful in eliciting rich and personal, intimate data regarding participant's personal relationship with places in the city.

In addition, the Walking & Talking method was engaging for participants, had a low threshold for participating, and enabled the use of contextual cues by placing the participant and researcher in-situ. By doing so, the method enabled the participants to in place relate the emotions and in-place experiences to personally significant places and share these with the researcher in real time. This allowed participants to relive and recreate the in-place experiences and emotions, leading to more accurate and rich, intimate descriptions of their personal experience of the urban environment.

The Walking & Talking method we propose aims to probe the urban lived experience to elicit people’s rich and intimate personal stories and emotions related to a place. In doing so, the method can be a useful research tool in the fields of urban interaction design and urban planning and could be used to uncover potential for new mobile apps and location aware computing. We are looking forward to working with other researchers in these fields to further develop and refine the Walking & Talking method and validate its results. The Walking & Talking method presented in this paper and the design fiction are not aiming to offer a final design solution, but are part of an ongoing dialogue in urban interaction design to develop a better understanding of the triangular relationship between people, place and technology in the urban environment and how this relationship might be in the future.

REFERENCES


