

EXPLORATORY WALK AS A METHOD OF STUDYING URBAN TOURISM SPACE: A CASE OF CHARLES BRIDGE IN PRAGUE

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to characterise the concept and discuss the possibilities of applying exploratory walking as a method of research in urban tourism spaces. In the article, the original concept of the method is characterised and discussed based on a pilot study. The place chosen for the pilot study is Charles Bridge in Prague. The conclusions about further work on improving the method and adapting it to the research needs related to the use of urban spaces by tourists are confirmed. Such walks can be a useful research method and a potential tool for recognising and introducing social and spatial changes. The exploratory walks help to obtain more material than sedentary interviews. Despite the positive functions of the walks, the pilot study also showed that the method could not function alone. Other methods and techniques should complement it. The analyses in the article method can contribute to a better understanding of the phenomena and processes observed in urban tourist spaces, as well as to the design and implementation of changes serving improving tourist services.

Keywords: Exploratory Walk Method, Public Space, Interview.

JEL Classification: Z39, B49, Z19

1. INTRODUCTION

How can social researchers contribute to the development of knowledge about the function of urban tourist space? This article proposes a solution based on the adaptation, improvement and dissemination of mobile and participatory research methods (Bates & Rhys Taylor, 2018; Prominski & von Seggern, 2019; O'Neill & Roberts, 2020). One of them is the author's concept of the exploratory walk (Kwiatkowski, 2016). Experts evaluated this idea during a pilot research and study. The conclusions of this pilot can be useful not only for developing the tested concept but also for those researchers and social practitioners who are looking for adequate ways to study and adapt tourism spaces to the diverse and changing needs of their users.

The article's aim is to characterise the concept of the exploratory walk as a method of researching urban tourism space in the light of pilot research carried out in a popular tourist destination. The exploratory walk is a combination of research in motion and social intervention. In some cases, cognitive functions come to the fore; in others, intervention functions (design and implementation of changes). In most cases, practical tasks and cognitive goals balance and reinforce each other.

The described pilot study was organised at Charles Bridge in Prague and followed by conducting an expert assessment of the method by a group of social researchers from several

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countries. The walk was carried out according to a pre-agreed scenario. The bridge was purposely chosen as a place popular among tourists from around the world. The participants of the pilot were experienced researchers who also played the role of experts. They were asked to pay attention to the selected features and phenomena taking place at the bridge. The final phase was a group discussion on the potentials and limitations of exploratory walks as a research method.

The article consists of three parts. In the first, the authors characterise the original concept of exploratory walks and present the assumptions of the pilot study. In the second, the course of the pilot walk was described. The third part is a summary of the discussion that took place after the walk. The final section comprises a conclusion about further work on improving the method and adapting it to the research needs related to the use of urban spaces by tourists.

2. EXPLORATORY WALKS IN URBAN TOURIST SPACE: ASSUMPTIONS OF THE PILOT RESEARCH

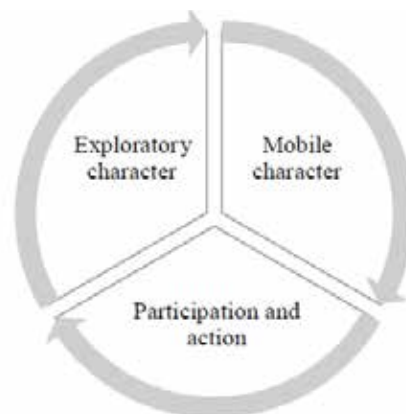
In this part of the article, the theoretical and methodological assumptions of the pilot study are discussed. The authors explain the key term and justify its use in social research. Subsequently, the main objectives of the pilot walk and the principles according to which it was conducted are presented.

The term “exploratory walk”, in a sense similar to the one adopted in this article, was first explained in research on so-called “networking studies” (Kwiatkowski, 2016). It was pointed out that during a deliberately organised walk, it is easier than in other circumstances to create and develop interpersonal and inter-organisational networks working to solve social problems. In other articles, the authors emphasised the educational and integrational functions of this form of research in the context of intercultural relations and the potentials for co-creating local cohesion (Doğan, Bazuń, & Kwiatkowski, 2019; Kwiatkowski, 2019). In this article, theoretical and methodological achievements are related to the assessment and development of urban tourism space.

For this study, the term “exploratory walk” refers to the mobile version of participatory action research. The partakers as co-walkers move together on foot in a selected space, explore the relationship between this space and community life, and conduct conversations regarding observed phenomena, processes and regularities.

In light of this definition, the exploratory walk is distinguished by its (1) exploratory and (2) mobile character, (3) and its focus on participation and action.

Figure 1. The Main Features of the Exploratory Walk



Source: Own Elaboration

As an exploratory study, it combines cognitive and practical functions. To explore means to think about something thoroughly before deciding what should be done and what is specific of the space. The authors assumed that joint exploration gives one a chance to understand social phenomena better and to formulate recommendations on solving perceived problems more accurately than traditional research.

The supposition of cognitive walking functions is confirmed in many studies on history, philosophy and theory of walking (Solnit, 2000; Gross, 2014), as well as in reports from empirical research conducted by those using this method. The authors emphasising the cognitive potential of walks noticed a strong connection between movement, perception and thinking. In one study on walking as a source of inspiration for designers and urban planners, the feature in question was recognised as an attribute of walking:

In my research, I define walking as a steady, physically challenging and rhythmic way to move by foot. The act of walking is characterised by exertion, rhythm and intensive perception. Walkers make use of their senses, are involved with the whole body and are sometimes exposed to exhaustion. The rhythm that characterises the act of walking enables a complex interplay of body and mind (Schultz, 2018: 72).

As a mobile method, it involves joint movement on foot (or a wheelchair) and the exchange of perceptions and opinions about the phenomena, processes, and regularities observed in the cognised space. The authors assume that talking while walking creates different research conditions that are more conducive to exploration than during a sedentary interview.

This approach is related to the “mobility turn” initiated by John Urry, who justified his position as follows: “Especially significant is the observing how people effect face-to-face relationships with places, with events and with people” (Urry, 2007: 40). The recognition of walking as an adequate research method also in relation to tourist traffic succinctly and accurately expresses the following sentence formulated by a team of researchers associated with the field of mobile research: “People do not stay in one place. Hence research methods need also to be on the move, to simulate this intermittent mobility” (Bærenholdt et al., 2004: 148).

As a participatory action research study, it focuses on the relationship between public space and the community. Joint exploration during a walk focused on the issues of the common area and helped strengthen the collaborative potential of participants as “co-walkers.” It can also contribute to expected social change in the given neighbourhood or community.

By definition, research walks are participatory because they involve the informants. As research on this method indicates, the mere fact of being in public spaces and motion together leads to greater involvement:

It is argued that walking interviews generate richer data because interviewees are prompted by meanings and connections to the surrounding environment and are less likely to try and give the “right” answer (...) There are, of course, limitations: to be relevant, research questions need to be framed by a “place” that can be walked, and the act of walking will exclude certain types of participants and interviewing techniques (Evans & Jones, 2011: 849).

These limitations, as increasingly discussed in the literature, are not higher than in the case of “sedentary methods”. What distinguishes the research walk in the context of its participatory values is the greater unpredictability noticed by some researchers (Jones, Bunce, Evans, & Gibbs, 2008: 8). Due to the open space and its users, the research may lead to impulses and meetings that are surprising for all parties. It seems, however, to be an

advantage that allows the researcher to observe more natural and spontaneous behaviour of participants.

Figure 2. The Charles Bridge during the Pilot Study



Source: Photo taken by Dorota Bazuń

The decision to conduct the pilot study on Charles Bridge in Prague with the participation of experts resulted from the following premises:

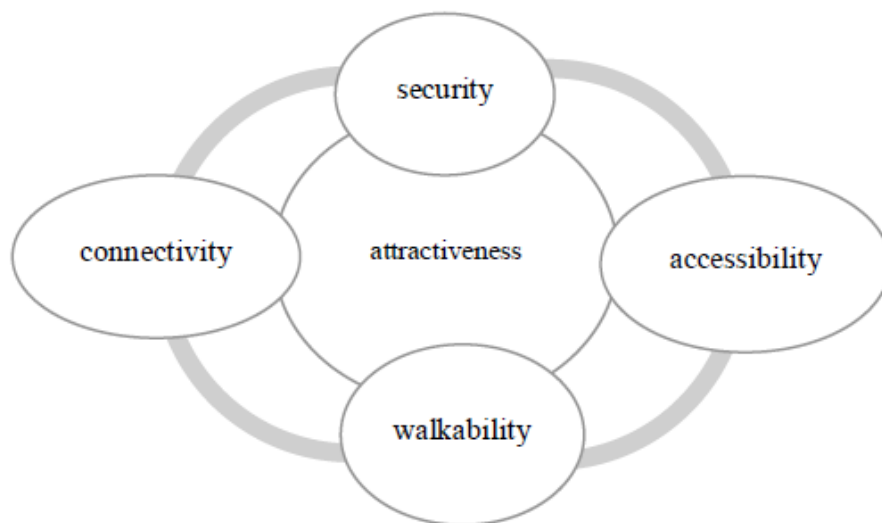
Firstly, the concept of an “exploratory walk” as a method of mobile participatory research is only in the development phase and should be subject to expert assessment.

Secondly, due to its popularity, as well as its historical and artistic values, Prague’s Charles Bridge is a suitable place for analysing relations between people and space.

Thirdly, the confrontation of impressions and opinions formulated by the participants and researchers representing various disciplines and appearing in a dual role (tourists and experts) can be a valuable contribution to the development of the analysed method and its application in research on the functions of urban tourist spaces.

The participants were asked to pay attention to several features in the space, presented in Figure 3. The key element of such space is its attractiveness, and that is why tourists want to be there.

Figure 3. The Features taken into Consideration during the Exploratory Walk



Source: Own Elaboration

2.1 Attractiveness

A specific space can be considered attractive if users want to stay there, and due to its pleasant look, they feel comfortable there.

The assessment of the attractiveness of public space is exposed to the subjectivity of different tastes and needs. However, there are at least a few indicators that are not controversial. During walks, opinions on the following topics can be determined quite easily: (a) the shape and condition of buildings, (b) the state of roads, pavements and squares, (c) the presence and condition of trees, shrubs and other greenery and related elements, (d) the presence and condition of distinctive features of the space (e.g. fountains, sculptures, murals, a view to observe), (e) air purity and perceived smell, and (f) acoustic sensations. Walks are an excellent opportunity to establish and compare ways of perceiving the aspects of the attractiveness or unattractiveness of space, as well as discussing the directions of the intervention, collecting ideas for introducing changes.

2.2 Security

A secure space is one in which we are not afraid to be and which is conducive to our health.

As a feature of a specific space, safety can also be assessed and designed during joint walks. In this case, however, we must consider two variables. First, correctly choose the day of the week and the time of day/night. Walks that are supposed to show a possible emergency in the evening should be organised at this time. Consequently, it is possible to identify how the lighting works and, for example, where there are clusters of people who threaten the safety of other users. Secondly, it is necessary to determine which categories of people are most exposed to danger in the area. Usually, they are the weakest (children, women) or recognised as strange or different (tourists, immigrants). The selection of participants and the choice of time will, therefore, affect the effects of the walk. When assessing the state of safety, we take into account the same set of indicators that we listed in connection with the assessment of attractiveness. Degraded buildings, leaky roads, noise, and polluted air pose a serious threat to safety and health. Additionally, it is possible to indicate lighting conditions, video surveillance, organisation of traffic flow and road markings, information signs (or lack of it), and premises gathering people who threaten safety (e.g. night shops with alcohol).

2.3 Accessibility

Accessible space is one which can be used by everyone, including persons with disabilities or special needs. Accessibility applies to any areas (streets, pavements, parks) and buildings. When assessing a specific space in terms of its accessibility, we take into account the various problems and limitations of its users. Limitations can be related to such features as age, psychophysical condition, social status, nationality, and ethnicity. There are many sets of available space indicators. Here it is possible only to indicate them in a general way. Spaces that are available to everyone should stand out as follows: (1) pavement and terrain facilitating the movement of people with reduced mobility, (2) technical assistance systems in places where independent movement is difficult (elevators, lifts, ramps), (3) contrast markings for the visually impaired, and (4) easy-to-read and accessible information for people with intellectual disabilities.

Particular attention should be paid to those places where there is a higher likelihood of the appearance of people with mobility difficulties (health clinics, offices serving the elderly) and those that may pose the greatest threat (pedestrian crossings, busy streets).

2.4 Walkability

A walkable space is one in which we can easily walk, ride a bike, or travel in a wheelchair.

Walkability, as a feature of shared space, is associated with accessibility and is about increasing the possibility of independent movement around the city or the countryside. According to Jeff Speck (2013), to make residents choose to walk instead of driving a car, four simultaneous conditions should be fulfilled. Walking must be (1) *useful* and it means that it is possible to realise most aspects of everyday life without using a car; (2) *safe*, so pedestrians feel secure in the public space (especially crossing the streets); (3) *comfortable*, that is, buildings and the landscape encourage people to stay in it, and (4) *interesting*, meaning that “sidewalks are lined by unique buildings with friendly faces that signs of humanity abound” (Speck, 2013: 11).

2.5 Connectivity

A connecting space is one where we can meet and interact with other residents and users of public or semipublic places. Connectivity as a feature of common space can be treated as a synthesis of all previously discussed features. It can be assumed that people are more likely to contact each other in an environment that they find attractive, safe, accessible, and walkable. When examining a specific area of a city or village in terms of connectivity, attention can be paid to the following phenomena: (1) places that favour spontaneous contact with others (silence, greenery, shade, a body of water); (2) devices that allow a longer, more comfortable stay and conversation (e.g. benches); (3) spaces that enable the purposeful organisation of meetings with friends, families, and neighbours (yards, squares, roofing); and (4) the tendency of residents and other users to use the common space to establish and develop contacts.

3. THE COURSE OF THE EXPLORATORY WALK ON THE CHARLES BRIDGE

Before presenting the course of the pilot research walk, some information about the Charles Bridge as a tourist attraction will be introduced.

The Charles Bridge (in Czech language Karlův Most) is an unusual space in every respect. The location is important for historical reasons. It was founded on the initiative of Emperor Charles IV in the fourteenth century and has survived almost unchanged to this day. The bridge witnessed many important events, including ceremonies with the participation of the king, but also executions (e.g. John of Nepomuk, 1393).

It is one of the most recognisable and famous places in Prague. The popularity of the bridge is, among others, due to its location and beautiful view. The bridge connects two historical parts of the city. Its length is 516 meters, and there are over thirty Baroque figures of high artistic value, some of which are very popular among tourists and pilgrims. As one researcher notes, there is a strong connection between the symbolism of the bridge and the figures on it and the waking up of Czech identity.

Of all the structures that were built in this period, none may be more representative and insightful than the famous Charles Bridge and its flanking rows of statuary. The aesthetic strands of an emerging Czech identity that were first articulated in the early seventeenth century would come together and reach a high point in what may be the most recognisable of Bohemia's landmarks (Louthan, 2003: 4).

The figure of John Nepomuk (1683) is of particular importance. It appeared first and became a model for hundreds of similar figures placed at the bridges in many regions of the Czech Republic and Central Europe. The creation of this figure initiated a process that can

be considered to be a spontaneous attempt by residents to express their beliefs, religious feelings, and artistic preferences. The researcher of this process interprets it as follows:

Equally important to note is the broad representation of the church. There was no master plan for the bridge, no centralised design of the archdiocese, no secret scheme of the Jesuits. In fact, quite the opposite occurred. Though the city council exercised some regulatory power, there was a certain entrepreneurial spirit to the entire enterprise (Louthan, 2003: 7).

As a result of the aforementioned process, a kind of religious theatre in the open space was created. This space has been appreciated by tourists from around the world who visit the bridge in crowds throughout the year. An additional attraction is souvenir stalls, stands run by cartoonists and painters, as well as soloists and music bands using the flow of numerous visitors and their financial resources. There are also people encouraging the use of such services as a cruise on the Vltava or participation in some entertainment event. In addition to these, there are also the characteristic figures of beggars, buskers, or street artists. It is difficult to find a time of year and day when the bridge is not crowded. On the one hand, this is a hindrance to the romantic approach to this place, but on the other, it allows social researchers to observe collective life, the behaviour of individual groups and members of the public, their ways of responding to observed objects, and interactions between individual categories of users. Participants of the pilot study took advantage of this opportunity

Figure 4. The Charles Bridge during the Preparation to the Exploratory Walk



Source: Photo taken by Dorota Bazuń

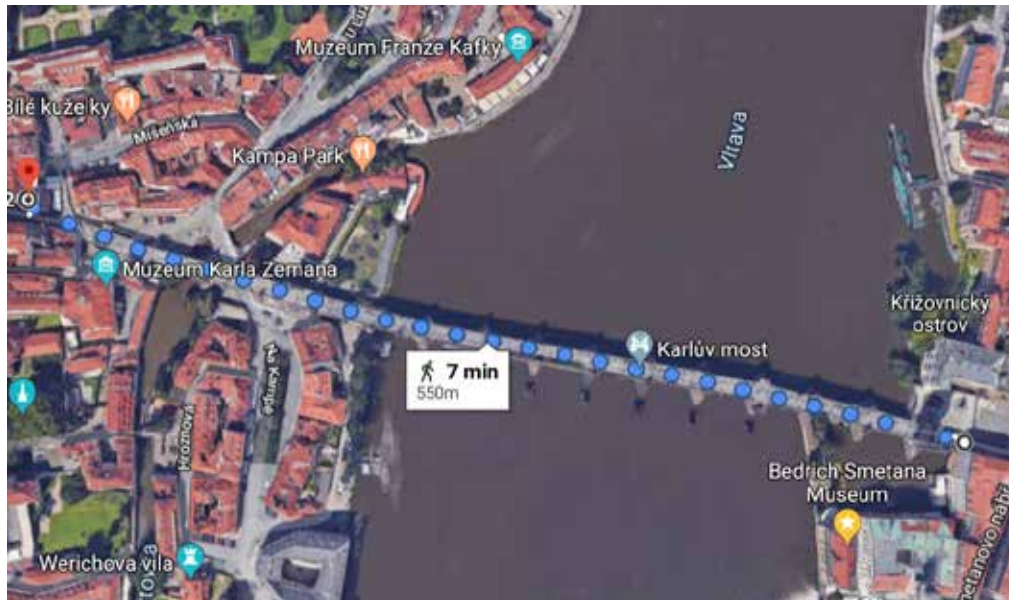
The pilot study was carried out in accordance with the following stages:

1. Participants met at a specific point (Charles IV. Monument, 1, Staré Město, 110 00 Prague). They were asked to pay attention to the following dimensions of phenomena occurring on the Charles Bridge: attractiveness, accessibility, walkability, connectivity, and security. The meaning of the five aspects was explained to everybody.
2. The second part was a joint walk along the Charles Bridge from the Old Town towards Mala Strana. During the walk, participants spontaneously expressed their

opinions about the explored space, referring to its five aspects (attractiveness, security, accessibility, walkability, and connectivity).

3. The third part had a stationary character, and this was a group discussion involving all participants. The discussion was moderated and participants shared their impressions and opinions, considering the five potentials of exploratory walks: cognitive, emotional, participatory, collaborative, and transformative.

Figure 5. Charles Bridge during the Preparation to the Exploratory Walk



Source: Google Maps (full link in the list of references)

The walk proceeded at a slow pace, meaning the distance, marked on Google Maps as a 7-minute walk, took much longer in the case of the exploratory walk, and the group met at the end of the bridge after 35 minutes. A group of six participants spontaneously divided into two subgroups. Five points were marked on the walking route where the contributors were stopping and shared insights. The staging points were: Charles IV Monument, Old Town Bridge Tower, Holy Crucifix and Calvary, Statue of John Nepomuk, and Mala Strana Bridge Tower. The final destination was located nearby the bridge café, which was a place of a discussion.

3.1 The Group Discussion after the Walk

The purpose of the group discussion organised after a joint walk was to compare the impressions and opinions of the participants regarding the features of the tourist space visited, as well as the potentials and limitations of the exploratory walk as a research method. Participants referred to those aspects which were, from their point of view, the most significant and the most interesting. Their findings, discussed in the subsequent section, were presented together with illustrations with selected quotes from participants' statements.

3.2 Comments and Impressions Regarding the Charles Bridge as an Urban Tourism Space

Participants of the walk conducted observations, considering the listed issues and questions. They had been aware of these before the walk because the list had been sent a few days earlier. Participants were

also reminded just before starting the walk, and these mentioned features such as attractiveness, security, accessibility, walkability, and connectivity.

At the staging points, they shared their insights. There were five stops planned but spontaneous ones were also possible. The course of the walk was not recorded, but the discussion which was held afterwards was recorded and transcribed.

1. The moderated discussion started with the issue of the attractiveness of the bridge. The examined space was unanimously found to be very attractive, firstly because of the unique location of the bridge over the wide river, between the two historical districts of the city, and secondly because of the richness of the artistic experience (numerous sacred sculptures) and the sense of connection with the rich historical past of Prague and the Czech Republic. Thirdly, because of the amazing views that visitors can admire by walking on the bridge.

All of the participants were agreeable that this was an unusual and magnificent place: *"actually I found the bridge almost cathartic let's say"* (No 6). However, some of our co-walkers did not like being in a crowd. *"That bridge is super over-crowded for me. So I think it is better to appreciate it, that experience the tourists' experience like seeing the river seeing the views. I don't like too many people and the vendors there. No. That's too much"* (No 3). Even though being surrounded by so many people was not comfortable, the participants were very into being at this area. *"I like the bridge and it's not only the bridge but what we see from the bridge. We see the city from the bridge and the old history of the old theatre and city and so on"* (No 4). One of the reasons for the attractiveness was feeling the long history of this place and in a way being able to move in between the past and the present, combining fresh memories with thinking about a long and complicated history. *"I like history. I want to know it because for me humanity is history and this bridge is the history, and I feel the history when I am walking there. (...) . I've always loved that bridge because of the connections with people on this bridge. I was there with my family (...) and my friends and the people from the other conferences so for me it reminds me always happiness"* (No 4). Exploring history by being in a place that remembers centuries was an exciting experience for those who are not interested in history: *"I don't like history, sorry. However, I do like it when I got to some place"* (No 3).

The participants had some ideas about assessing this space in terms of its attractiveness. The most attractive feature of this space was its aesthetic value and location between the two historical parts of the city, which could be seen in beautiful viewpoints. A broader perspective of the river and floating ships, the presence of perhaps too many but equally delighted tourists made up the uniqueness of this moment. All the participants of the exploratory walk wanted to come back and revisit the bridge and if it is possible at a different time of day when there are fewer people.

2. The sense of security was rated quite high. During the walk, Charles Bridge was a very crowded place, which for some participants aroused a sense of some discomfort. However, no serious sources of danger were spotted. Participants admitted that if there were even more people, which happens in the tourist season, they would prefer to come to the bridge at another time. *"It felt very safe but thinking about it now I think it is strange that the bridge is safe because usually historically bridges were unsafe areas"* (No 5).
3. The space of the bridge is generally accessible to people with mobility difficulties, but with numerous limitations. During the walk, only one person using a wheelchair was spotted, but it was a person with a slightly reduced efficiency. For people with severe

dysfunctions, the bridge is not so easily accessible due to the uneven cobblestones and the piston that dominates most of the day “*I don't think it is very accessible for the people with impairments*” (No 5). All agreed that it would be challenging to prepare facilities in such a way that they did not change the appearance of this historic place.

4. Walkability is the strength of Charles Bridge. It is a space that encourages people to take a slow walk, stop by at viewpoints and numerous artistic attractions and commercial places. The sounds of live music played by musicians and enjoying the wide surface of the bridge may also encourage people to walk, but it was considered to be walkable only for tourist. People who want only to move between these parts of the city need to choose other bridges because it is difficult to move faster on Charles Bridge. Trade stands and street artists, on the one hand, make this place more attractive and liven it up, but their improper arrangement can sometimes make it difficult to go on the bridge in the highest tourist season (No 1).
5. Connectivity, understood as encouraging, establishing, and developing contacts, was assessed ambiguously. On the one hand, a large number of people moving slowly and often stopping over a short distance (516 m) should be conducive to establishing numerous interactions. The tourist destination chosen for the pilot study was not considered to be a good location for interactions with other pedestrians. “*I didn't feel like (...) it was very connected. I felt like disconnected. (...) It feels like that space allows parallel worlds to be parallel and not interact but just share. I mean the only thing that they share is just the view. But there is not really much to interact about unless you count the street merchants [and] street vendors. But that's the only... economic interaction that you have*” (No 5).

It was noted that there were mainly interactions between participants who went on a walk together. If there were interactions between strangers, they are of a commercial nature (buying souvenirs, donations for musicians or beggars). Sometimes tourists asked someone for help in taking a picture, but this was sporadic contact between strangers. However, people mainly avoided contact with others, although visitors had something in common because they were “*more connected with the beauty and with history and with this amazing landscape. And obviously with a little bit of history. You know some interesting facts. It is always very nice when you experience something. But I was impressed by the fact that many people are looking at the same thing and are feeling the same*” (No 6).

If we compare this space with other open tourist spaces in Prague (Old Town Square, Wenceslas Square), Charles Bridge turns out to be the most favourable space from the point of view of meeting “strangers”.

4. POTENTIALS AND LIMITATIONS OF EXPLORATORY WALKS IN LIGHT OF STATEMENTS FROM PARTICIPANTS/EXPERTS

The second goal of the group discussion was to assess exploratory walks as a method of exploring common space. It was an exchange of reflections about potentials, challenges, and limitations of the research made in motion. Since the participants were in a double role of visitors to Charles Bridge and social researchers and experts, their opinions about the experience were valuable. All of them described it as very interesting. There was also a strong effect of influencing each other during the walk and the discussion. One of the participants who had not been visiting the bridge for the first time mentioned that due to contact with other members, the group started to look at the bridge from a different angle: “*but since her*

special interests in sculpture, she was looking at the faces of the sculptures. And then it was something new to me. I was at the bridge many times before, and I have never looked at these sculptures and monuments in this way” (No 1).

The experts taking part in the exploratory walk noticed that the method could be useful in case of particular participants such as vulnerable groups, urban activists, dog owners, and street artists:

“that the type of methodology could also be useful when one wants to get started with the vulnerable groups of persons. Like persons with disabilities, refugees, homeless persons, etc. Especially important and useful it could be in case of persons who are somehow new in the area. Newcomers who are looking at the place and inhabitants differently having a fresh perspective and sometimes being afraid of something. That type of interview is more opening for them and can help us to look at the world in a much more deeper way than when we talk about [in the] the same sitting in front of each other. It can also give much more practical examples and observations in the field. It’s not only talking, but it is more involving emotionally” (No 4).

The walk on Charles Bridge inspired participants about possible changes in their research projects and interests: *“I have had the idea during our discussion that my research about Pokémon could be done in that walking way. Instead of doing interviews in chairs, we were going to the field and see[ing] the situation in a more detailed way, and then we could get more information” (No 6).*

4.1 Potentials of the Exploratory Walk as a Method

There are a few cognitive potentials of the exploratory walk because it focuses attention and helps to combine some aspects such as spatial, social, cultural, and economic. This type of field research engages several senses and allows participants to experience events more deeply than during just sedentary interviews. The illustration can be the statement:

“I had overlapped images of it when I was on it. I imagined very poor people in previous centuries just roaming the bridge having to find a place there. Because who wants to come on the bridge. The wealthier people didn’t want to be there, right? And that all is actually a symbol of a change. Only the people who can afford the trips go there and then the beggars and poor people can’t be there because it’s tourists. And I think you can see just to wrap up. This bridge has really huge cognitive potential, right?” (No 5).

The participants appreciated the experience, feeling like it was a more natural way of conducting research: *“I think it gives me more, and I learn more about this. I like that” (No 3).*

Another potential was connected to the engagement of emotions. Being in the space observing, talking, and experiencing all together helped to encourage conversations with people who had not known each other before. The social researchers noticed that it could be helpful to open and look for solutions together while being in the area they want to know better:

“for people, it is easier to do to put it when they are in connections when they are in collaboration” (No 4). Walking together helps to build ties between persons engaged in collective initiatives. The participants of the pilot study pointed out their impressions: *“for me, the emotional potential of the place is huge and I am pretty sure that for locals it has enormous emotional charge” (No 5).*

The exploratory walk changes a classical division between interviewer and interviewee. The researcher is playing an important role, but the shape of the interaction strongly depends on the other participants. This can happen when they are experts experienced in dealing with particular aspects, for example, history, transportation, dealing with disabilities, and

commerce. Not only can a researcher learn from them, but they can also learn and teach each other. Such an interview in motion enhances natural talk. In this way, it weakens the power relation between the researcher and the informant. If the participants of the research walk are representatives of vulnerable groups, the method can also contribute to the process of inclusion, recognition, and emancipation. However, the most important element is its participatory character, which means the deeper involvement of the participants. Such a method is also supporting a collaborative way of working with other participants. An added value can be strengthening trust ties and creating conditions for the development of interpersonal, intergroup, and cross-sectoral collaboration.

The transformation potential of the exploratory walk lies in its purpose. In many cases, such a walk with experts or inhabitants can inspire programming changes. It also has the potential of contributing to changing attitudes of participants and the community. Visiting a public space together can help to generate ideas, recommendations, and innovative activities. It can help to know the space better, taking into consideration different perspectives. It also has a networking potential because it can help the stakeholders to get to know each other.

Nevertheless, the transformation potential of the exploratory walk was not present in the case of Charles Bridge due to the nature of the location, which is attractive in itself. Protecting the bridge's historical value prevents many changes. In this situation, the goal is to preserve the shape of the place and its proper maintenance.

4.2 Limitations of the Exploratory Walk as a Method

The exploratory walk is a qualitative method. As with other methods of this type, there is a problem with the representativeness of the data received. In some cases, it is worth considering supplementing this method by using quantitative methods. Therefore, for this type of research, its purpose must be defined very accurately. If it is practical and is to be the basis for future interventions, it also requires a precise definition of the recipients of potential actions and changes. The informants must be carefully chosen because an improperly selected sample can affect the data strongly and result in receiving only fragmentary information.

In the case of exploratory walks carried out in terms of understanding the needs of tourists, researchers must also be aware of the perception of the needs of residents. These needs are not always convergent and what is attractive for tourists may be unbearable for the inhabitants. Different categories of space users therefore have to be taken into consideration.

In the case of group walks, the presence of dominant persons may be difficult. As a result, other participants' opinions can potentially be underrepresented. This method requires extensive experience in moderating the course of the study. The problems are similar as in the case of research carried out in focus groups.

As in the case of the exploratory walk on Charles Bridge in Prague, similarly to in other places where there are many people, it is difficult to record the course of the study. One way to deal with this difficulty can be the realisation of the study by two or three people and the division of tasks between them. One person will then film the walk and record statements of the participants in the context of specific places.

Another difficulty is similar to other qualitative methods because many researchers may find it challenging to present the data collected during the exploratory walk synthetically.

During the pilot study, the need to equip the participants of the walk with small notes was mentioned. The notes should point out the most important aspects to be observed in the space. Attention was also drawn to the fact that, if possible, it would be useful to record the course of the walk, or at least make notes during it.

Based on the group discussion, the following conclusions can be made:

1. Despite the difficulties and possible limitations of traversing the common space, combined with a spontaneous exchange of opinions and impressions, the walk increases the chance of obtaining rich research material.
2. The walking situation strengthens the emotional involvement of the participants.
3. By including persons with different perspectives or representing various professions in the exploratory walk, it is possible to widen the cognitive horizons of the researcher(s). Thanks to this, the interdisciplinary approach can be strengthened.
4. During a group walk, the will to cooperate with other participants is released, which in turn results in a synergy effect.
5. Exploratory walks in an adequately selected space can have transformational power. First, it changes the researcher's perspective. Secondly, it changes the relationships between participants. Thirdly, it can contribute to the creation of new ideas and projects.

5. CONCLUSION

In the article, we sought the answer to the following question: How can social researchers contribute to the development of knowledge about the function of urban tourism spaces? Our answer to this question is the author's concept of the exploratory walk as an adequate mobile and participatory research method. Experts evaluated this concept during the pilot study. Detailed conclusions regarding the assessment of the features of the space under study and the exploratory walk potentials are presented in the last part of the article. Here we formulate the most general comments regarding the application of the tested method and its development prospects.

1. Distinguishing between and characterising five aspects of the analysed space (attractiveness, security, accessibility, walkability, connectivity) opens the perspective for researchers to develop comparative analyses of selected locations. Participants of the pilot described in the article decided that the indicated analytical categories can be successfully used in social research, including the study of tourist functions of urban spaces, although the list can be modified depending on the needs and specificity of the place in question.
2. The indicated potentials of the exploratory walk (cognitive, emotional, participatory, collaborative, transformative) contribute to a better understanding of the studied issues. It is a promising research method and a potential tool for recognising and introducing social and spatial changes. One particularly beneficial feature of walks is the possibility of obtaining much richer research material than in classical, stationary research (sedentary research). Therefore, it can be an advantageous method of research on the function of urban tourism spaces. Participants of such research may notice and point out more aspects of the studied space. They can also feel more involved and ready to exchange opinions with other participants, and due to cooperating with others can formulate more ideas on introducing possible changes.
3. The pilot study also showed that the exploratory walk could not function as an independent research method; other methods and techniques should complement it. In the case of the described pilot, it was a group discussion in comfortable conditions. Therefore, as Peter Merriman stated, mobile methods should not be treated as an alternative to traditional methods of research (Merriman, 2004). The exploratory walk is a proposal to enrich the valuable repertoire of methods and techniques with one that increases the cognitive abilities of the research.

4. The pilot described in the article took place in one of the most popular sites in Europe. Prague attracts many tourists from around the world; most of them visit Charles Bridge. The pilot walk confirmed that this place is attractive in its artistic, historical, and scenic terms. Besides, it is a location where numerous interactions occur. The pilot study showed that these are mostly interactions between friends who jointly visit this place or commercial contacts. Observations and joint conclusions made in such a short time indicate that the method analysed in the article used systematically can contribute to a better understanding of the phenomena and processes observed in urban tourist spaces, as well as to the design and implementation of changes to improve tourist services.

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Map Source:

Charles Bridge map: <https://www.google.com/maps/dir/50.0861294,14.4139358/50.0873233,14.4067508/@50.0866474,14.4089862,465m/data=!3m1!1e3!4m2!4m1!3e2?hl=en>
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