

FIELD WALKS

Field walks involve the use of walking as a way to gather insights on the embodied experience of a place. They entail conversations while moving along a path, which are documented as instances that are connected to a particular place. While walking and talking, creative ideas are exchanged and discussed.



INSPIRATION

Estimated Timescale: 1-2 Hours (depending on the length of the walk)

Materials: Audio / Video Recorder, Pens & Paper

Who should be involved?

Anyone who you're designing with / for - cultural heritage professionals, designers, technologists etc.

Why should you use this method?

Field walks are a good way to learn about the people and environment that you are designing for. Doing a field walk will reveal not just the physical details of the participant's environment, but also the values, routines and habits that are connected to it.

STEP 1 (ADVANCE PREPARATION)

- Arrange with the person that you're designing for to do a field walk of the specific environment that you are interested in learning about. This could be the museum galleries or their workplace.
- When organising the field walk, allow for one participant and two facilitators, (one to ask questions and the other to record / take notes.)
- Survey the space where the walk will take place to familiarise yourself with it. Prepare the conversation guide and/or questions to be followed during the walk. In the case of having a pre-determined path, prepare the trajectory of the walk to be followed.

STEP 2

- Have the facilitator ask the participant to lead a walk around the chosen environment, following whatever path he or she prefers. Or in the case of having decided that all participants should follow the same trajectory, gently guide them along the pre-determined route.

STEP 3

- During the walk, have the facilitator structure the conversation along the conversation guide, or (if a more structured approach is preferred) ask the participant a range of questions relating to the environment, for example, asking them to describe their working routines in the environment, their opinions on visitors and what their favourite places are.
- Have a second facilitator document the walk using video or audio recordings in order to link the conversation to the physical location. Alternatively, they could also take notes and sketch out the locations on a map.

WHAT NEXT?

- Following the field walks, review the notes and recordings in order to gain an understanding of the concerns and needs of the participant. This can be used as input into the user requirements of the intended design.
- In the weeks after using the method, give feedback to the participants to show how input has been used (so the dialogue continues.)

Tips for successfully carrying out this method

- This method works best in a one-on-one situation i.e. with one participant and one facilitator. Ideally a second facilitator will be available to document the walk using note takings and video/audio recordings.
- Ensure to get permission to take photos / video recordings, before the field walk begins.
- As a facilitator, pay close attention to the environment as you walk through it, the behaviours you see there, what's on the walls, who uses it, and where it's located. All are key pieces of information.