

Transcript: Mobile Methods in Social Research



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Ruth Bartlett: So I'm based in the School of Health Sciences, University of Southampton, and I just wanted to kick off with a quote, and this is about 'the world is not what I think but that which I live,' and I was going to ask you to tell me if anyone knows who it's by but you may well have seen the quote reference. It is of course Merleau-Ponty, Merleau-Ponty, who wrote about phenomenology with his colleague back in 1956.

And I'm starting with this because I feel and think the route of mobile methods is very much within phenomenological research and the idea of needing and wanting to understand human experience. So it's about how we live and experience the world as opposed to what we think about it, which obviously with sit-down interviews it's very much about how and what we're thinking, whereas with mobile methods I'll be arguing and suggesting in this talk, it's much more phenomenological and about how we're living and experiencing our world.

So just a bit more about me and the basis of this talk. I'm a social researcher, I've got a PhD in sociology from Oxford Brookes over 20 years ago now. A mental health nurse who likes to be active, so I like building in mobile methods to my projects where possible. I design studies based on a disability rights approach with a focus on people with dementia, and here's an example of one of the studies that I ran which was about location technologies and how people with dementia use those, so it made sense to us to use walking interviews in that particular project.

So, yeah, there's a bit more about me on that slide and just some of the context for this talk. So, yeah, with my colleagues in Oslo I co-led a project with

Professor Inger-Marie Lid who's a leading disability scholar, on a project called Cit-Pro which was about collaborative disability research on everyday citizenship.

And as part of that project back in 2021 I initiated and led a review of go-along methods with four members of the team and that's been published in the International Journal of Qualitative Methods and this is the article that's been published. And hopefully you can see that article and there's a QR code to it. It is open access so you should all be able to access that without any problems. Perhaps after the seminar if you want to read any more details about any of the work that we did.

So essentially this talk is the findings of this review work that we completed and, yeah, it's the first time I've had the chance to actually share it verbally like this with other researchers so I'm really pleased to have that opportunity.

So just in terms of this talk, I'm just going to give a very brief overview of walking/go-along interviews and the aim of the review. Just talk briefly about the origin, development and use of walking/go-along interviews and then I'll highlight three critical matters with mobile methods, particularly walking/go-along interviews.

I'll just explain why we focused on vulnerable populations. I'll just show you the slide about the review process but I don't think that's the most interesting thing here so I'll move on swiftly to talk about the findings from the review, five key themes. I'll then highlight one unexpected difference we found in the studies. I'll touch on some ethical considerations and concluding remarks.

So in terms of an overview of walking/go-along interviews, these typically involve a researcher walking or travelling alongside a participant in some way in their local neighbourhood or surroundings and asking questions along the way.

During the review we discovered there's quite a lot of other terms used for walking and go-along interviews, and they include narrative walk in real time,

walking fieldwork approach, wheeling interviews, ride-alongs, swim-alongs I think we'll hear about later in this session, and also bimbbling which this is when the route is not necessarily known to either the researcher or the participant, so there's lots of different terms for walking/go-along interviews that are being used.

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The method is known to pose some risks and challenges to both the researcher and participant, and I'll highlight those in a moment. And our review question was about how and why are walking/go-along interviews used with persons with disabilities?

So just to say a bit more about the origin and development of this particular method. Ethnographers and human geographers started to use it about 20 years ago now to extend the parameters of fieldwork and examine social spatial relations. And they've since become an integral part of the wider mobility turn within social sciences, which I'm sure many of you will be aware of in that work by John Urry and his colleague on that mobility turn and the importance of movement within our lives and within research.

So it's a method that prioritises participation in research projects and I'll be highlighting that in our findings, and also any work that is focused on a place-based approach, so any researchers that are interested in someone's neighbourhood or place.

It's used in a wide range of disciplines since it was first used 20 years ago, including critical disability studies, gerontology, leisure studies, queer studies, health sciences, public health and human geography, as I've already mentioned.

So it's becoming a very popular method within the social sciences and within qualitative research. There are, as I say, three critical matters we think it's important to highlight in relation to any kind of go-along method. And the first one is that walking interviews, and this is a term that's still very often used in

studies, it does take for granted the ability to walk of course, and as one physical disability researcher notes, unlike wheeling a wheelchair, walking is seen as a very valued activity and it's assumed that everyone can walk.

So the conceptualisation of walking is based on the ideal of able-bodiedness, and I would add able-mindedness as well because someone with quite a severe cognitive disability may not be able to walk, so a kind of highlight if you like about using that term 'walking interviews' can be very exclusionary.

A second critical matter is the visibility of the method. Participants can be seen during these interviews and this can be problematic for participants who are perhaps marginalised or stigmatised in some way, including for example people with dementia.

In our study I remember Tula Brannelly telling me about an interview that she did with an older man with dementia and they were walking back to his house. And they bumped into one of his neighbours who wondered who Tula was because, you know, they knew he was married, so there was a bit of an awkward exchange with the neighbour.

Another researcher noted while conducting a walking interview with a patient on the grounds of a psychiatric hospital that they didn't want to be seen crossing the boundary of the hospital, so there are some critical concerns there in terms of how visible people are with this particular method.

And thirdly, it can be quite an emotional experience for both the researcher and the participant, perhaps more emotional and intense than other methods because travelling to and through a place that a participant finds meaningful can be perhaps upsetting or distracting for the researcher. For example, we came across one study that involved survivors of an earthquake in Italy. Participants revisited the ruins of the place where they were when the earthquake struck and understandably became very upset and distressed during the interview,

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So the researchers of this project concluded that walking interviews have advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, they got a sense of the intensity of the emotions, particularly the anger that people felt towards the authorities but also interviewers themselves were quite upset by the information they were hearing from people, so they needed more time for fieldwork, they needed more time for supervision. Yeah, so the emotional element of go-along walking interviews is important to consider.

Of course all qualitative research can be emotional, but I think when you're out and about with people there's perhaps a bit more unpredictability or uncertainty about what could happen in that situation.

So with that in mind, we decided to do this review of studies that have used this method and we focused on vulnerable populations and we used the definition of those at risk of discrimination, harm or abuse due to grounds specified by the European Charter of Human Rights.

And we recognise that at risk is a contentious notion but it's nonetheless quite a useful tool for focusing when doing a review. And given our interests within the Cit-Pro team, we were most interested in older people and persons with disabilities including mental health challenges and dementia and intellectual disabilities. So we focused on those studies that involved those people as opposed to people with other possible grounds for or reasons that people might be discriminated against such as sexuality or religious beliefs, so that was our focus for the review.

Here's just an overview of the review process. We followed a qualitative systematic review process combining qualitative studies, screened five databases using these terms, these were our inclusion criteria. Every study had to have some methodological statement about why they use this method and then we extracted data and analysed it using thematic synthesis approach.

And there were five of us on the team conducting the review, so we divvied up the articles and each of us extracted data from about five or six and any discrepancies or disagreements we talked about and sorted out.

So in terms of the studies we've looked at and on which this talk is based, we found 23 articles published between 2010 and 2021, so it's a relatively new method. Eight studies were conducted in Canada, five in England, two in Sweden, the US and Denmark and one in Australia, New Zealand, Norway and Malaysia. A total sample of almost 500 people in these studies with participants ranging in age from 18 to 90 years old.

So eleven of the studies were with people with a physical disability, five were with people with dementia and one study was with people with mental health challenges, six with people in other kinds of vulnerable situations, either older people or women who were homeless.

And in eighteen of the studies this method was the main or the only source of data for researchers and in five of the studies it was used alongside other methods.

So in terms of our findings, we identified five key themes which I'm going to just run through now, and these were about shifts in power dynamics, making things known and knowable, revealing barriers to inclusion, embodied knowledge of place and being one. I'm just going to explain each of these themes now in a bit more detail with examples.

So in terms of shifts in power dynamics, we found that 11, so almost half of the studies, actually contained a statement on how walking interviews involved a shift in power dynamics between the researcher and participant, and that was why the method was used, so it was intentionally chosen in order to have that shift in power dynamics that we often see in qualitative research.

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At the same time, micro/situational shifts of power occurred during the actual process of conducting a walking/go-along interview. Participants usually led the way for example. In a walking interview I conducted as part of our location technology study I remember one older man with dementia, I was walking on the outside of him so I was near the road, he was walking inside but he wanted us to switch places so that he was walking on the outside and I was on the inside, which I thought was very gentlemanly of him, so those kind of micro shifts in power dynamics can happen with this particular method.

The second theme was about how walking/go-along interviews can make things known and knowable, so people with dementia were able to act more purposefully some researchers felt in a walking/go-along interview than in a sit-down interview, making their capacities and skills such as navigation skills and communication skills, much more knowable to the researcher.

And also the process of walking or going along with the researcher can also highlight disabling processes and the able-bodied privilege that's in situ, so Castrodale mentioned that in relation to a project involving people with physical disabilities.

The third thing was about revealing barriers in the environment, some studies aim to explore barriers in the environment, and again the method was intentionally used to reveal these and for people with... particularly people with physical disabilities, these barriers were often material, physical in nature and culturally specific, such as tramlines in Norway for example.

A fourth theme was about embodied knowledge of place, so this is thinking about all of our senses; sight, touch, smell, taste, hearing as well as the forgotten sixth sense of kinaesthesia which is about our body's sense of space, and a particularly important one for people with dementia, that sense of where you are in space can be impaired, so that was an important theme that we identified.

And there's an example there in the middle from one study where someone was recovering from a back injury and they found the process of smelling the gardens and grass during the interviews very restorative and it enriched the experience.

And as other researchers have noticed, the person-environment interaction, which obviously is a very important interaction in the context of disability, it can be quite difficult to capture that within a sit-down interview but a mobile method where you are out and about in the environment can support understanding of that.

And the final theme was about being one, so many of the researchers in studies spoke about the importance of the researcher being at one with the participant, sharing the same practice or experience while walking or going along, maintaining togetherness is what one researcher described it as, intercorporeality.

So, you know, sharing that sense of shared bodily experience and barriers being erased because two people were together and in tune with each other, so this was a very important theme we felt and it involved a form of whole-body listening and, yeah, more data could be collected. It's more than data collection but sharing an experience, so those were the five themes.

We did find one unexpected difference in our studies as you'll recall, many of them involved people with physical disabilities and others involved people with dementia, and what we found is that those studies involving participants with a physical disability they typically highlighted how the method led to an increased understanding of disablement, whereas studies involving people with dementia emphasise how the method allowed for an appreciation of ablement.

So we're not quite sure why there is this difference, it might be a disciplinary difference coming from different backgrounds of the researchers conducting

these studies, or, you know, the nature of barriers are quite different for someone with a cognitive disability, so that was another interesting finding.

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So just moving on now to some ethical considerations with mobile methods and walking/go-along interviews in particular. So disabled participants did report concerns about a heightened exposure to surveillance whilst out talking to a researcher, so that aligns with that critical matter about visibility, so people being seen during data collection.

And also going out in public and talking on the move can be quite challenging for people to do, you know, it involves a lot of cognitive work and physical work in terms of moving, so just sometimes asking people to do that can be quite demanding. And certainly dementia activists who kind of advise researchers on ethnical codes of conduct they do ask us to consider a person's physical and emotional safety when involving people with dementia in empirical research, and I think that's really important with mobile methods.

And then finally, just to say about the ISA Code of Conduct does remind us all of course about the security, anonymity and privacy of research participants and informants should obviously be paramount, so that's obviously very important in the context of moving around and mobility methods.

So some concluding remarks. Walking/go-along interviews provide researchers with an empirical tool to investigate the whole gamut of human experience which as I've already mentioned, I think aligns very much with a phenomenological approach to research. And it also allows for researchers to engage with participants on more equal terms than perhaps a standard sit-down interview allows, and this because it brings about a natural reversal of roles in certain situations, and as such, I think that aligns this particular method with a disability rights/social justice approach.

But I guess whenever we're moving and movement, it's important that we are careful with how we move around and minding the gap might be something

that we need to consider and think about, and those gaps might be experiential gaps. Maybe we've never, you know, experienced what the person we're with has experienced so there's a gap in our experiential knowledge. There might be conceptual gaps, we just don't understand what it's like for someone with dementia for example to perhaps not know where they are or who they are or, you know, why they are with you, so there might be some conceptual gaps.

And also material gaps, so that might be about the equipment, you know, think about the equipment that's required for your recording your interviews and how good it will record the data, so, yeah, just a kind of word of caution if you like whenever using any kind of mobile methods and moving around generally, is to think about that.

And finally just to end with another quote, and this is from the field of aesthetics actually and mobility and came across this work during this review project, and this is a professor of aesthetics in Finland I think and I think it's quite a fascinating perspective on mobility and how 'our bodily experiences of the world are typically movement experiences.' We talk in terms of up and down, in and out and, yeah, that kind of language typifies very often the way we describe human experience, and it's on that which our conceptual thinking is built, so another reason for ensuring we think about mobility and movement within our work.

So thank you very much for listening and thank you for your patience at the start of this talk with those technical issues. All the references can be found in the article, do contact me if you have any questions.

Sadie Rockcliffe: My name is Sadie Rockcliffe. I'm a second year PhD researcher based at the University of Brighton and under the South Coast Doctoral Training Partnership. Just so you know, I popped in the chat a Word document that has text of each slide and an image description, so if anyone is listening that has a visual impairment use the screen reader, you can look at that document and then you can refer to it really easily.

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So like I said, I'm a second year PhD researcher, my undergrad was 20 plus years ago in biological science, randomly, and I then went into destination management. So my background for the last 20 years has been working with community groups, community social justice, making sure everyone's voices are heard at the table when we're putting together towns and ensuring towns and fundraising opportunities and various aspects are as inclusive and accessible as possible.

I then came back to do my master's during COVID to procrastinate away from my children who were driving me insane, and then I was very kindly invited back to teach, and then this wonderful opportunity came up with South Coast to do this PhD which is what I'm now doing.

So the title of the work, the research that I'm working on, is Sensory Inequalities and Access to Blue Space, so by blue space I mean natural service water like oceans, rivers and seas, and the aim is to explore how people with visual impairments engage and make meaning through different mobile and sensory methods.

So we have swimming as a relational practice and it really helps to sort of support and be able to understand where I'm coming from with this, but to be able to rethink the idea of being in the water if you have a visual impairment you have to basically understand sort of the aims of this research and why we've come across it.

So there's lots of blue space public prescribing at the moment, it's very well socially prescribed, get into nature, it's really good for your wellbeing, it's hugely beneficial and it really helps with the day to day lives and has therapeutic feelings.

However, it assumes ease of access, it assumes that idea of independence. It takes a bit of an ableist framing and it puts all the responsibility on individuals to be able to access that blue space. So that's why we need to start rethinking

how we access, and to be able to understand that we need to look at individual lived experience to be able to understand how they get to these environments, how we enjoy these environments and this idea of this embodiment once you're in the water.

So as you can see here on the slide we've got this wonderful press that are really sort of pushing for this access to nature, but for people with visual impairments there's lots of safety signs or directional signs that either don't have braille or don't have audio, so immediately there are issues with being able to access that environment and then being able to get into the water as well from there.

So for me to be able to do this work we are going to be doing swim-along interviews. It's about getting in to the water, it starts from before the water as well and it is a fleeting and embodied sensory experience. It allows this idea to be able to unfold emotion, you can capture participants' feelings and these methods are shaped through reflexivity and attunement. It really, really focuses on interdependence.

The swimming method initially sort of firstly came into fruition in 2019 and since then it's sort of gained traction with some wonderful emerging research just looking at getting into the water, what it means for you, the therapeutic benefits and also the challenges that can come from that.

For me and for this research it is particularly well suited when you're exploring blue space encounters among disabled swimmers because it really focuses on those dimensions of sensory, relational and non-verbal ideas and meanings, it really puts them central and it really creates this copresence and reflexivity, your attunement to nature basically as it's unfolding.

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So for this research it's definitely a layered research design, it's a wet ethnography taking place through the summer, there's going to be over 20

swim-alongs, lots of sit-down as well and walking interviews in both familiar and unfamiliar places for people.

It's not just about talking to people, it's about moving with as well, which is really, really important, and it pays particular close attention to how people navigate and feel and sense these spaces especially in water or around water, but it's also about how we do this together. As was mentioned previously, you know, you are experiencing and navigating these environments together and that's what's unfolding at the same time.

Land interviews definitely help of course, they're great for revisiting things that you can't necessarily verbalise at the time and then finally after that we're going to have some co-reflection as well as a group.

So it's very much a layered iterative relational design and it's sort of inspired by this oral history, this sensory ethnography and this participatory practice.

So for me doing this research I'm not visually impaired and I did not at the time have any safety qualifications for getting into water. When you are going to take part in swim-along interviews I think it's really, really important to be as equipped as possible. As Harroway said, it's about your responsibility when you're in the field, so it's about being able to appreciate especially in something like a blue space when they're so dynamic that you can have that opportunity to react to different situations.

So to do that I took part in a number of activities ahead of swim-along interviews and lots of people do that in their different environments when they are taking part in fieldwork, but I think it's really, really important that people recognise the amount of effort that people actually do within themselves when they're preparing themselves for research.

So lots of these were co-learning activities. I trained as a sighted guide and volunteer regularly with various sight support organisations. It allows me to build sort of and embody trust and attunement between movement and pause, shared rhythm, differing power dynamics. It's working alongside people.

And we can better understand the diversity. It's not about trying to predict any results, predict what participants and your co-participants are going to be able to say and do within the field, it's not that at all, it's about actually putting yourself in a vulnerable position and understanding that it's okay to be vulnerable, it's okay to feel a sense of risk when you're going into an unknown and to be able to organically experience these embodied sensations and react accordingly.

So, yes, apart from the guide training, sighted guide training and the volunteering, I also did an open water safety management course just to be able to look after myself and people around me to the best of my abilities.

And that helps to understand that this type of method isn't fixed, it's going to be reshaped, it's going to be stretched and it's going to be formulated sort of as we go and do it together.

The next stage ahead of getting into the fieldwork was to build this research website called accesiblewaters.co.uk. The reason I'm listing it here is the importance of something like this, getting into the water for participants is a very vulnerable position to be in especially if they're not regular swimmers or you're going to a new site, it can make people feel very unsure and if they're unsure, as much as they want to get involved, they're much less likely to get involved.

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So by having a researcher website which clearly sort of... it's almost like a bit - excuse the pun - like a walk through if you like, it's sort of giving people the opportunity to let information sit with them, to see how processes work, to learn more about your research methods and what it will entail in a really accessible format, whether it be through videos, audio. There's lots of accessible features on that site as well so that people can then make more informed decisions about whether they want to get involved.

And actually it might also spear on some thoughts and reflections even prior to beginning the research prior to them contacting you, which is always really nice to be able to do that to inform as much as possible.

Another thing that I thought would help with a swim method, especially one that's working with people with vision impairment which hasn't been done before, is to be able to understand logistically how is this going to work? How do people want to be in the water with someone else? The diverse range of either requirements or technology or other people or other guides or different types of open water that people will feel comfortable going in.

So to be able to do that we needed to get into the water together, so we hosted this public swim event. Initially it was done just to be able to have a wonderful space, to be able to get in an enclosed environment, so it was an open water swimming pool, it's actually in a national open water swimming pool which is based in Brighton on the beach but it's enclosed, and in terms of the dynamics of a natural outdoor space it is less so.

So you might have a change in water if it's windy, obviously you've got the weather and the temperature can change but apart from that they're enclosed sides, you've got lanes, it's a very safe space, you've got a set depth and there's nothing on the floor apart from the pool floor.

So it would enable us to work together with some equipment and just sort of get a feel about what can work, what doesn't in this messy mobile method fieldwork approach, and it was really a wonderful experience to be able to take part in.

It was picked up by the press, which wasn't my intention, this was not an extractive event, this was an event where we were co-creating, collaborating, working with messy equipment and everything else to try and put something together but actually it was very well received and some press wanted to come down. They were local press and initially I was a bit unsure, I've grown up with

press so I sort of know what they're like, they're in the family, but it was a wonderful experience.

And actually this space created a space to move together, we listened differently, and it was wonderful to be able to observe interdependence together and inaction.

Lots of the guests that came down spoke about using equipment or using infrastructure that hadn't even occurred to them that they were using at the time, and it also enabled them to be able to share the experiences as you can see Linda doing, they were desperate to talk about it.

I even had one lady say, "Is it my turn yet?" It was wonderful that they were able to share their appreciation for blue space, what they get out of it, why they might go in the water and how they feel about being in a swimming pool. Lots preferred swimming in a swimming pool, they liked the idea of having a lane by themselves whereas others preferred open water like lakes and seas where they usually swim, so again it was a wonderful idea and experience that we worked through together to be able to understand what works for these methods.

What also was particularly important was looking at the equipment that worked and the equipment that didn't. We ended up having... I had a GoPro on my head and we also had some recording equipment at the side and we discussed the power dynamics and whether they were comfortable with that being used, whether they wanted to swim and then stop and chat or whether they were comfortable swimming together, and again we had a mixture of both which goes to show how reflexive you need to be with this type of mobile method.

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We worked through ideas and cues about when we do these interviews in lakes and seas about how we can then navigate the idea of them going away to swim and to be able to come back and have a conversation, to be able to enjoy their moments.

But it was a wonderful experience like I said, it was a live method moment is what I called it, it brought together the participants, guides, there were public observing who were VI, visual impaired guides, and then want to be swim guides so they were seeing how it would work. And as I said, there were lots of press there but what was important with the press that I noticed afterwards and during, was actually the questions that they were asking and where they were coming from when they were approaching this sort of event, so the media then became a methodological encounter.

It wasn't just about disseminating the event that was going on, it was a live methodological moment, you got to understand like I said the questions that they were asking, it mirrored their focus where they were coming from and it helped really to identify the different ways it was being shaped and framed which as well changed depending on who was doing the asking, so depending on maybe what channel it was or whether it was a disability organisation, whatever it might be, the questions are slightly different.

And it really helped to understand sort of the stance that we were taking, you had different responses from different participants as well to those questions so that was really useful. And afterwards we sat together in a wonderful room, we had a little wellbeing session, some hot drinks and some pastries and we just sort of chatted and reflected on that whole experience from the swimming to the chats with the press to everything else in between, to swimming with each other and just sort of spoke about what worked, what didn't, what they loved, what they want to do next, and it really helps to inform where this method is going to go.

So moving forward, actually getting into the water and taking part in swim-along interviews as a methodology, there are of course logistics that have to be looked at and identified and put into place. So you have to choose sites, so we've chosen sites that the participants, the people I'm going to be working with, have chosen specifically, they're inviting me to their shared spaces and their loved blue spaces so that we can then experience those together.

Some have also asked to then go on to experience some unfamiliar locations or areas that they would like to try but have been unable to do so for either a lack of a swim guide or time or something similar, so we're going to go and experience those together.

It's also really important to make sure you have the correct safety equipment with you, so we're each having a tow float, if they want to swim with their own swim guide of course they can and some people choose to have swim tethers as well.

When you're in this sort of environment as well you're working with the water, you're working with, the weather, the different temperatures, there's lots of different variables, and for me this is very much a relational approach. It's about this interdependence and you're sharing this experience with so many different aspects that it's not just for me phenomenology which is your embodied approach, it's also this connection with new materialism where it's just you're shaping the water and the water is shaping you and sort of how you're sharing this space, in particular with orientation, time, risk, relational depth, so there's lots of things to it but it becomes a really fascinating area even at the point where you're setting up your method and then being able to take part.

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You have to also remember as well it needs to be very flexible, so sometimes you'll get into a site and then somebody chooses not to go swimming, that is the power of choice, and that is part of your findings, you know, why was that happening? What was uncomfortable? Was it just... you know, was it the environment? Was it a change? A lack of infrastructure maybe? There's lots of different things, so there is a constant shift of power, a constant directing, observing, sensing, navigating and importantly, adapting.

But this method is really, really valuable. Once you're in the water together you have that sense of rhythm, you have that sense of feeling, you are doing

it together, you are sharing these experiences together. It could be you're sharing a sense of disorientation together and these things sometimes are hard to express from the shoreline or from the land.

There's plenty of times where we'd sat on the side and actually forgotten about the things that we've mentioned in the water until one of us reminds the other just because it was so fleeting and so immediate and such a survival response that it's not something that we necessarily would have spoken about afterwards, so it's one of the many important opportunities of being in that space together.

It's also knowledge that it's cocreated emotion, it's not only using language, you're sharing these embodied sensory experiences from cues like I said, the water, the temperature, the wave rhythm, a sudden breath shift, it's all shared and is all acted as in in-situ with these place triggers.

But of course there are challenges, there are tensions, there are various areas that are going to be uncomfortable. Like I said, they bring feelings of disorientation. It can become very difficult when you're in environments as well that change repeatedly with the weather, they change repeatedly with the change in terrain due to our increased extreme weather conditions.

You have also this open space can be a real problem for some people with visual impairment when there is no way of being able to wayfind and see where you are, and sometimes that becomes too much and others it's what they love, so it's really about constantly checking in, constantly understanding. You can go from having a still water to a stormy water very, very quickly and you can go from these enclosed spaces to these open spaces very quickly as well.

You also have... audio can fail and if that happens you miss moments. You might not always recognise moments and meaning from those moments as well and very importantly, which I have certainly felt, is the vulnerability as a researcher. Sometimes you're so busy just trying to literally keep your head above water that you're unable to be responsive or to fully take into account

what your participant is, the person that you're swimming alongside with, is able to either go through or be able to share with you.

And sometimes they're the ones helping me in different situations, so the guidance and the power definitely flows both ways, we're constantly supporting each other whilst in this motion.

And that's why it really challenges these access gaps. Once participants are in the water they speak about this freedom. If you think about when you might go into the sea or a lake or a swimming pool you go on your back and you shut your eyes so you can soak it in with your other senses. And I think that seems to be something that is resonating with a lot of people at the moment when we're getting into the water together, so it challenges these gaps, it challenges those ableist assumptions about who belongs into water and it really helps to sort of bring everything together and in particular, to tell individual stories.

Ruth Bartlett: We need to finish up, Sadie, if you can wind up, thank you.

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Sadie Rockcliffe: Yes, of course, yeah, thank you. So ethics and motion, so for me it absolutely contributes to inclusive research, it's about sharing vulnerability, it's about methods and ethics coming together, we're not separate, it's all part of one larger thing and it's about reclaiming these blue spaces.

So I would highly recommend more people trying swim-along methods, just be reflexive, have this idea that, you know, it's reshaping this understanding of what's capable and what's possible and these different things that we can share together, so thank you very much.

If anyone has any questions about sighted guiding or anything else then feel free to send me a message.

Gabrielle Lynch: This paper draws on an article that was published last year in qualitative research which is informed by over 20 years of research in Kenya and by a few years of work in Ghana and Uganda. It's worth noting that my research has never actually focused on mobilities, I've done research on things like ethnic politics, transitional justice, elections, and also that mobile methods have never been a principle research method for me, so for example for my work on elections and campaigns I used a wide range of methods including archival work, nationally and targeted surveys, interviews, participant observation of meetings and campaign rallies and so on.

But today I want to focus on the research conducted whilst driving around with able bodied people in private cars, more specifically my focus is primarily on driving together with a single other, either as driver or front seat passenger meaning adjacent seating and a partially shared visual field.

And the basic argument is that the differences between walking and driving have sometimes been exaggerated, that there are nevertheless very important differences between them and that these differences can actually be productive for research in certain contexts.

That the full range of walking methods that are now widely recognised can be adapted to driving and that whether driving together is an approach worth considering is determined by research context and focus, also the preferences of research participants and last but definitely not least, ethical and security considerations.

So first a very brief note on the existing literature because this was covered very well by the first speaker, but it's now, you know, widely recognised that mobile methods can be useful because of how the act and pauseful rhythm of moving together through land and sense-scapes first of all provides prompts and insights but also secondly, how it can facilitate conversation rapport.

And as a result, it's now widely recognised that mobile methods can be used to research things that have little or nothing to do with mobilities or the spaces

and locations move through, it can for example also be used for things like personal biographies or discussing traumatic memories.

It's also widely acknowledged that the coverage of larger distances at greater speeds in a car and the car's existence as a private space, separate from the scenes and places passed through, ensures that driving is qualitatively different to walking together. However, it's often assumed, especially in the western-centric methods literature, that walking together is preferable to driving. So to give just a few examples, Lee & Ingold have argued that it's walkers who seem to have a real mobility in terms of the ability to see in different directions and to discover the little things in his or her surroundings as compared to drivers who must remain focused on the middle distance of the road ahead.

Similarly, Evans & Hones posit that researcher and participant are more exposed to the multisensory stimulation of the surrounding environment when walking whilst drives are 'cocooned in a filtered blandscape,' encasement and speed in turn affecting sociability with John Urry arguing how 'driving leads communities of people to become anonymised flows of faceless ghostly machines.'

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But from experience of driving around with people, walking isn't always preferable to driving and driving is not always so different to walking, at least not in the ways that people like Lee & Ingold and Urry have suggested.

So walking is definitely my preferred mode of getting around in the UK, and I walk whenever I can but in the countries in which I conduct research, equatorial weather, a frequent lack of pavements, the reality of being an obvious outsider, security concerns, wildlife, etc., etc. means that walking can sometimes be quite difficult and even stressful.

Moreover, walking is not generally the preferred mode of movement for my research participants, who for the most part, with the exception of my transitional justice work, have been middle or upper class elites, so politicians, civil society activists, religious leaders, journalists and the like.

So as one civil servant explained to me, you know, when he was poor as a child he had to walk miles to and from school every day but he'd worked hard, he'd got into university, he'd secured a government job and bought himself a car. And for him this car was a symbol of his success, a source of pride and in his words, "I no longer walk." Moreover, driving in Kenya doesn't generally lead one to feel cocooned in a filtered landscape, so few of the cars I drive around in have air con, so you drive windows down. Given the traffic in towns and the predominance of untarmacked roads in rural areas, it's rare to drive particularly fast.

Everyday life is also concentrated along the roads from markets and hawkers to billboards and car stickers, and the state of the roads and the amount that's going on around you means that you really do need to focus on your surroundings.

Driving is also not devoid of social interactions, it's common to be stopped at police checkpoints and especially in rural areas people often recognise cars or request lifts rendering it relatively common to be waved at or flagged down by a pedestrian or to stop side by side with another car, windows down, to chat to another driver on a quiet, rural road.

Finally, driving, like walking, engenders a sociability with those that one rides with, the fact that driving takes less energy and involves higher speeds than walking means that travel times and distances can be extended, which can expand the range of experienced events from scenes passed to breakdowns and as a result, car journeys can be a particularly good space in which to develop a sense of companionship and rapport.

So the implication is twofold, the differences between walking and driving have been exaggerated I think and the differences that do exist can sometimes be beneficial to the research process. And with this background in mind, I want to turn to the main argument which is how the wide range of walking interviews or walking methods that are now widely recognised can be adapted to driving.

So firstly walking interviews, so in a walking interview a researcher and research participant walk along a route, often preplanned, and discuss the spaces and places that they move through. And in my experience walking interviews can be productively adapted to driving if much is visible from the road, if research participants tend to travel the route in question by car, if the route covers quite a large area and/or the selected sites are quite spread out.

So for example, following Kenya's post-election violence of 2007/08, I conducted several driving interviews with civil society leaders to discuss programmes that they were putting in place in different parts of the country, and these routes were preplanned by research participants so that we could pass areas with civil society resettlement and rehabilitation programmes and these interviews couldn't have been conducted on foot, you know, the sites were spread out, set deep into rural areas.

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The interviews were also highly productive, you know, the physical scars of past violence on the land and the physicality of projects that these organisations were conducting raised questions that didn't arise in earlier static interviews while my kind of interest in travelling around and actually seeing things was clearly welcomed by these civil society actors who are often facing an inundation of requests for interviews.

Second, from participant observation to driving around and walk-alongs to ride-alongs, so participant observation is often associated with static activities such as attending a meeting or a political rally, however, if one's research participants move as part of the activity observed then participant observation

will ideally involve moving with them and if their movement is by private car, then participant observation will involve driving around with them for short or extended periods, depending on their programme.

However, and as Kusenbach makes clear in her work, when the focus of the research and of the observations and discussions shift away from a general observation of activities to a more focused attempt to I quote, 'actively explore a subject's stream of experiences and practices as a move through and interact with their physical and social environment,' then the research method adopted shifts from participant observation to what's called a go-along.

And as Kusenbach explains, for authenticity, it's crucial to conduct natural go-alongs and to follow informants into their familiar environments and track outings they would go on anyway as close as possible. In turn, if the research participants' normal routine is to travel by car, then a go-along becomes a ride-along.

Now obviously in practice the boundary between driving around and a ride-along is blurry, both participant observation and go-alongs combine observation and discussions, they both require that the mode of mobility be determined by the research participant's routine. However, in participant observation the researcher tries to interfere as little as possible, so for example during participant observation of Kenya's Truth Justice and Reconciliation Commission I occasionally caught a lift with a commissioner or commission staff member in between public hearings and during these drives we sometimes sat in silence as my travelling companion caught up with the news but when discussions did arise they usually focused on their work and on the public hearing just held rather than anything to do with the kind of, you know, landscapes or places that we were moving through.

In contrast on a drive-along, the researcher seeks to actively capture the stream of perceptions, motions and interpretations that informants usually keep to themselves about their environments, which requires an ongoing semi

structured interview, largely focused on the research participants' experiences of and interactions with the physical and social environment passed through.

So in this vein, and as part of a project on elections, I accompanied several politicians in their private car on the campaign trail ahead of the elections in Ghana and Uganda in 2016 and in Kenya in 2017.

And as we drove around, I was able to observe their strategies and interactions about where and when to stop, with whom to speak, also how they were greeted by local communities. And they were very visible because they're usually in these kind of big party branded vehicles with like stickers of themselves on the side, and I was also able to engage in extended interviews about their campaign strategy as it related to the areas that we move through and the sections of society that we interacted with.

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So while mobile interviews and go-alongs are now fairly commonly used in the social sciences, less frequently discussed, although it was mentioned earlier, is bimbbling. So what is bimbbling? In sum, while walking interviews are focused on local environments and mobile participation, and walk-alongs focus on routines or practices, bimbbling isn't primarily concerned with either. Instead, it's simply the process of walking and talking that's deemed to be important. The idea is that walking allows talking to flow naturally because the pressure of a face to face interview has been removed and because the kind of rhythmic relaxation of walking frees the imagination.

So the common association of walking as a more natural and enjoyable experience helps to explain why there's no clearly articulated driving equivalent to bimbbling, or at least not one that I've come across. However, the fact that driving can be as enjoyable and relaxing as walking while I think the privacy and pausefulness of driving can encourage conversations on a wide range of topics, ensures that bimbbling is clearly adaptable to driving, what I call motoring.

So motoring captures some of my drives, for example with research participants, to conduct interviews or attend meetings. So there are a handful of research assistants that I readily work with in Kenya who with backgrounds in civil society or the media or with lived experience of research topics, are people that I first met as interviewees and who are incredibly well informed about local histories and politics.

And as a result, I found that on our drives around research locations the informal setting of the car, you know, the hours spent together, the pausefulness of conversation, have helped to bring new insights to light.

And critically, while our car conversations have sometimes been shaped by prompts from inside or outside of the car, for me a billboards passed, things spoken about on the radio, they've ranged much more broadly from aspects of my companion's personal biography to the current political context in ways akin to the kind of very free flow conversation held by bimbings' proponents.

So next, and this very quickly, technology on the road. So I've not used technology on the road but I think you clearly can, I can come back to that in the Q&A, but finally I think one's movement around research areas as part of a qualitative research project can provide invaluable opportunities that accidental ethnography defined by Lee Ann Fujii as the paying of 'systematic attention to the unplanned moments that take place outside structured methods.' So for example, a trip to a marketplace to buy vegetables can provide an opportunity to observe local political economy activities at work and to have short conversations around the same.

And accidentalist ethnography is also possible when driving, indeed from experience, you know, drives that one undertakes with others, for example with taxi drivers from an airport to a hotel or between meetings, can provide a really valuable opportunity to benefit from such systematic attention to unplanned moments. The reason is simple I think, if one has a travelling companion with whom one can discuss the people, scenes, places and sense-scapes passed through.

So for example, during trips around elections the physical campaign paraphernalia which you frequently passed on the road often prompted really interesting conversations with taxi drivers about the candidates, their campaigns, their electoral chances, all things that often kind of prompted things that I hadn't really been thinking about that then kind of I used for example as kind of fed in to subsequent interviews with other people.

But to conclude, I think the fact that driving together as a research space... so I think the fact that driving together can involve such varied research methods and can also encourage accidental ethnography ensures that it's best considered not as a method but as a research space in which different methods can be conducted.

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And I think understanding driving together as a research space is important as it allows for the possibility that research methods first of all might shift during a car journey, so for example a drive-along can shift into kind of participant observation when the person that you're driving with just becomes tired and wants a break and doesn't want to be constantly quizzed, but it's also possible for a method to move in and out of the car, so for example on a go-along, you know, part of that might be a drive-along but then you might stop and walk around for a bit.

Similarly with a driving interview, you know, depending on where you are, can be quite easy to pull the car over, stop and spend a little bit of time walking around.

And I think, you know, the range and fluidity of driving methods also means that driving has a much wider utility in terms of disciplinary approach and research focus than is commonly recognised. Indeed, I'd argue that driving together can potentially be incorporated into any project that is focused on or can glean useful insights from the social settings or scenes and wider locations and places that cars can move through and for any project that would benefit

from the narrative storytelling or pauseful conversations that driving in certain contexts can facilitate.

But the ability to adapt I think walking methods to driving and the wide range of topics for which driving together might be useful, raises an important question about when to drive around, especially given, you know, environmental concerns, risk of accidents and so forth.

And I think the answer lies first of all in the intersections between research focus and context, so what are you studying? Is this something that, you know, for example may be seen along a road such as the civil society programmes on rehabilitation of internally displaced people that I spoke about earlier? What are the preferences of research participants? So for example, you know, working on election campaigns and wanting to study how politicians were conducting their campaigns, it makes sense for that to be by car because the politicians aren't moving around by foot in between their rallies and political meetings, but also by whether driving together can be conducted ethically and safely.

[End of Transcript]