

Science on The Walk: for an Aesthetic Approach to Landscapes

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In this presentation I investigate the relations between sciences and walking from the angle of human geography. A case study in the French Alps illustrates my findings. My study shall contribute to enlarge the scientific community in order to find much needed responses to current global climatic and ecological changes and their detrimental effects on societies and ecosystems.

Walking and sciences have been intrinsically linked to each since the beginning of human life. Walking is one of the first human activities. The motivations have been ranging from finding food and shelter to establishing social relations or leisure. By walking human appropriate new spaces and extend their knowledge and comprehension on them. Humans had to understand and gradually define these spaces of transit and travel in order to inhabit them. Humans appropriated these spaces by symbolic approaches (menhirs, dolmens, etc.) and attempts of objectification (cartography, naming places, etc.)(Careri, 2018). Thus, walking can be seen and understood as one of the first methodological approaches for the production of scientific knowledge. Sciences describes here the formal or informal processes that lead to scientific knowledge production and its transfer among different people.

Landscapes in a more than human setting (such as mountain areas or other less human dominated areas) are composed of a set of different material elements from a specific perspective (Berque, 2016, 2000). Thus, they combine both objective (*What one sees*) and subjective (*Who sees*) information. This information gradually evolves by the process of walking. Humans of modern societies walk in these areas to live moments of introspections, contemplation and reflection. However, in light of the accelerating current global changes (climate change, biodiversity loss, land use change) these landscapes evolve, change and alter rapidly. Scientific approaches that integrate different societal actors are needed to comprehend these changes and to facilitate the process of finding solutions adapted to the needs of all.

Landscape walks present the interface where sciences and society meet. We investigate the reciprocity between knowledge and aesthetics. The aesthetic is here understood as a personal and subjective approach of what refers to the beautiful. We believe that the sensual experience of walking leads to the desire of understanding the aesthetic setting. This comprehension in turn renders landscapes even more appealing I build my research on three hypothesis. First, scientific knowledge allows a better understanding of the landscapes and consequently it creates a bond of intimacy and place attachment to this environment. Second, scientific knowledge stimulates curiosity and it contributes positively to the walking experience. Third, scientific knowledge renders what we find aesthetically appealing even more beautiful. Summed up, landscape walks are not only a mere aesthetic experience, moreover they can help to raise awareness and interest among more members of societies to environmental issues.

A case study in the French Alps will illustrate the interactions of landscape walks and sciences in detail. The project RefLab¹ attempts to link scientific research activities with existing walking paths and

¹ <https://refuges-sentinelles.org/>

mountain huts to engage with different members of society. Based on a conceptual framework (see Figure 1) I will detail how walking as a multifunctional activity plays a crucial role for scientific knowledge among and outside the scientific community. In this respect walking is not a physical practice that consists of physically moving from a point A to point B. It is a complex activity that encompasses (1) temporal (2) spatial (3) emotional (4) intellectual dimensions. This framework can help to refine how new approaches such as transdisciplinary research, citizen science or participatory actions can include walking as a research technique in their work.

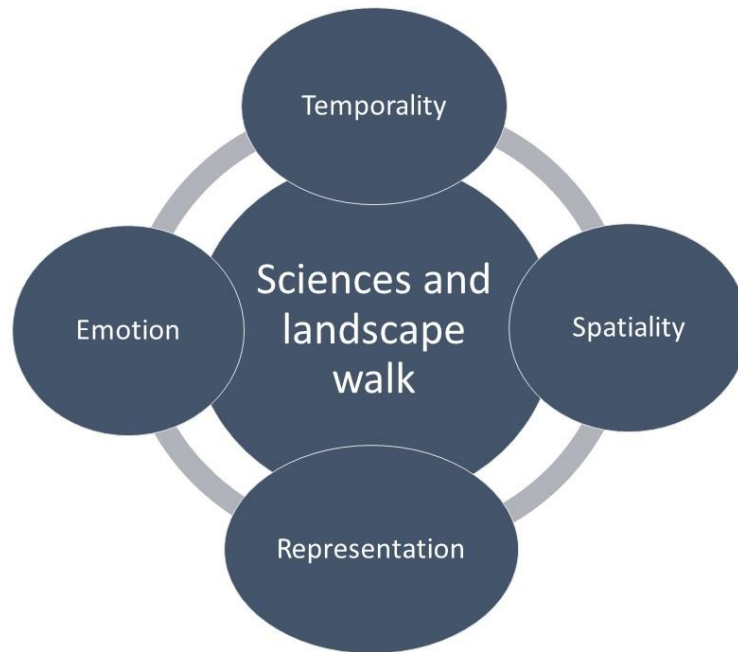


Figure 1 - dimensions of the interaction between science and walking - Source: The author, 2022

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