

Teacher Special Issue**Protected: Walking in Paris: locating hidden sights in the city**

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Abstract

Paris has long been associated with leisure walking. This research draws inspiration from the groups and figures who played an important role in the history of urban walking, such as the Flâneur, the Surrealist movement and the Situationist International, and focuses on the experiences of people walking in modern-day Paris. This study involved ten participants undertaking walks in Paris without pre-planning their route and allowing the sights and their emotions to dictate the route. The aim was to remove the focus on an end destination and encourage participants to purely focus on their surroundings and the experience of walking. Through the research it became evident that this method of encountering the city was very different to the participants usual encounters with the city. Furthermore, the issue of access and the effect of sights on emotions also became evident throughout this research.

1. Introduction

This research aims to explore how different people's experiences of Paris differ when walking in Paris without a planned route. Paris has long been associated with leisure walking. The figure of the flâneur, often describing an individual who 'wanders aimlessly' (Elkin 2016), was coined by French poet Charles Baudelaire in the early nineteenth century and is often associated with Paris. More recently, throughout the twentieth century, Paris became associated with groups such as the Surrealist movement and the Situationist International, who both undertook walks throughout the city, either to gain a greater understanding of their environment or to disrupt everyday life through challenging everyday encounters with the city. Each of these concepts has become associated more generally with the term psychogeography, which involves the study of the impact that one's surroundings have on feelings and emotions (Knabb 1981).

This study builds on work relating to the Flâneur and Situationist International, as well as the more general concept of psychogeography to explore how people's experiences of walking around and discovering hidden sights within Paris differ. This study focussed on the more hidden sights within Paris and the larger, or more famous, attractions were purposefully avoided. In the context of this research, 'hidden sights', have been defined as any smaller, less obvious or often overlooked sights. Focussing on these aspects of the city enabled people to engage more with the city and to pay more attention to their surroundings by encouraging them to look around, rather than simply take the surroundings for granted, which is common in the fast pace of modern urban living.

2. Place

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Place is considered one of the most important concepts in Human Geography and plays an important role in forming identity (Anderson 2004). The most basic definition of place is 'a meaningful location' (Agnew 1987). This definition is significant to this research as the walks focused on individual experiences of place, therefore making each encounter meaningful to the participant. Research suggests that people can develop a sense of place through walking (Wunderlich 2009) and that for a place to be created, meaning needs to be invested in it through movement (Tuan 1977).

2.1 Walking

There is an increasing amount of literature related to walking, both as a research method and practice. Walking enables you to explore and encounter the city (Forgione 2005) and makes the city more familiar through 'mapping with your feet' (Elkin 2016). Walking is also seen as a way to locate spaces which usually go unnoticed (de Certeau 1984). The Surrealists explored this idea further through their interest in exploring 'out of the way places' and 'obsolete spaces' whilst walking in Paris throughout the 1920's (Pinder 2000). The Situationists also used *dérive*'s as a way of exploring, and opening up the city. Through *dérive*'s the Situationists aimed to make new routes through the city and create new possibilities for everyday life (Pinder 2000). Furthermore, walking is also seen as a way to change ourselves and be free (Gros 2014), therefore opening up a variety of possibilities for walkers (de Certeau 1984). Similarly, a Flâneur is described as 'one who wanders aimlessly' (Elkin 2016) and finds new experiences within the city. This literature suggests that walking is a positive activity, allowing people to actively engage with their surroundings whilst opening up new possibilities.

2.2 Psychogeography

This work also draws inspiration from the concept of psychogeography which involves looking at the effects the environment has on one's behaviour (Knabb 1981) and is often seen as a way to explore and alter the city (Pinder 1996). The term was initially coined by Guy Debord, the leader of the Situationist International in the 1960's. He felt that psychogeography involved investigating the 'specific effects' that surroundings have on someone's emotions or behaviour (Situationist International 1981).

3. Methods

The methods used during this research were largely inspired by the work of the Situationist International and the Flâneur and involved a mix of walking, psychogeographical mapping and photography.

The research involved ten participants undertaking walks in an area of Paris. Each participant was required to select a starting location for their walk and allow themselves to be drawn towards sights that attracted their attention. These sights then formed the course of each walk.

The participants chosen were all English-speaking adult expatriates living in Paris. This was partly to allow easier communication between myself and the participants thereby

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reducing any misunderstandings. Furthermore, I felt that expatriates fall within an interesting category between tourists, who are only in an area for a short period of time, and locals who live there permanently, therefore ensuring a more uniform comparison between walks. All participants were made fully aware that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time if they no longer wished to participate. Each participant was also fully briefed as to what the research entailed and why they were chosen. Snowball sampling was used to identify participants because I was looking primarily for English-speaking expatriates, and the simplest way to identify suitable participants was through word of mouth. Despite the potential negatives of snowball sampling, I do not feel that this method in any way hindered this research due to the nature of the project and the potential downfall of other sampling strategies when requiring only English-speaking participants.

The starting locations for the walks included Corvisart Station in the 13th arrondissement, Passy in the 16th, Étienne Marcel in the 1st, Shakespeare and Co bookshop in the 5th, Place Saint-Pierre in the 18th, Place des Vosges in the 4th, University Paris Descartes on Boulevard Saint-Germain in the 6th, Les Halles in the 1st, Place Victor-Hugo in the 16th, Opéra in the 9th, Belleville in the 20th and Cluny-La Sorbonne in the 5th arrondissement (Figure 1).

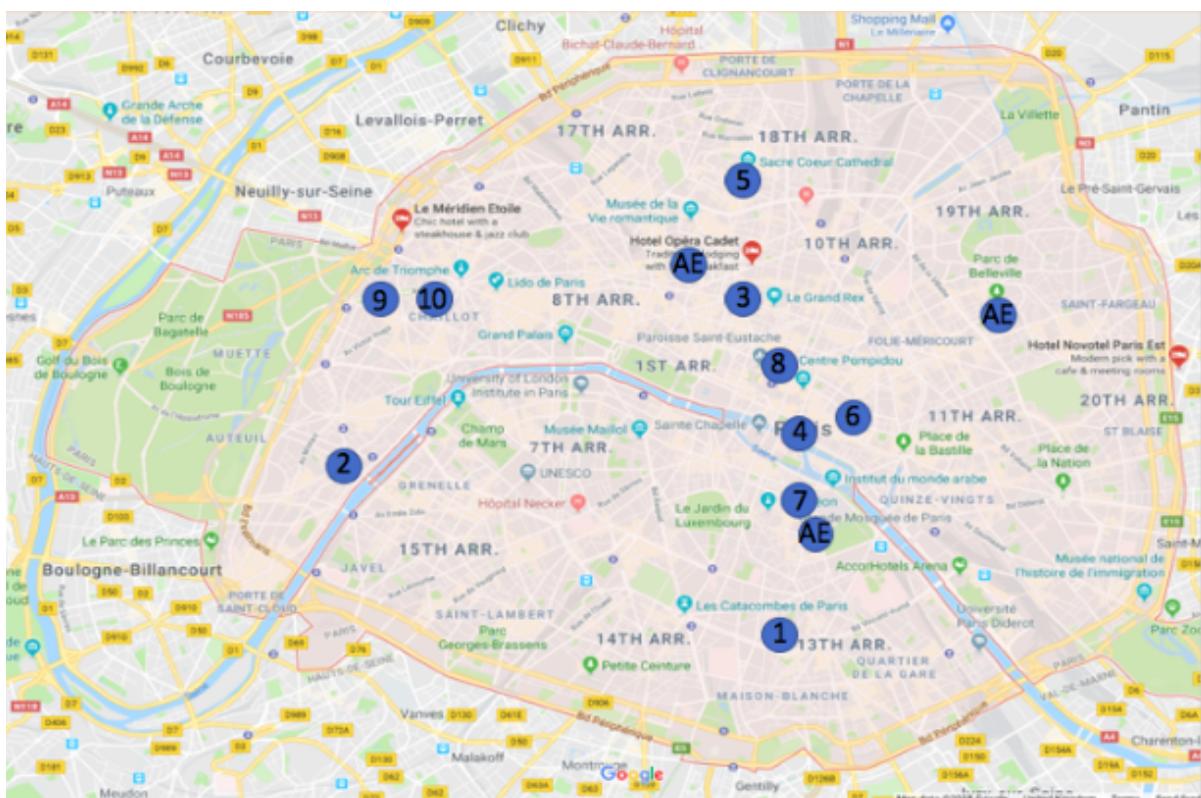


Figure 1. Starting locations of the walks. (Base map from Google Maps)

During each walk, participants were asked to point out sights that attracted their attention and these were then photographed. The routes were tracked using the Strava

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mobile application to provide an accurate representation. Following the walks, maps of the routes were hand drawn, showing only the roads walked and main roads, and photographs were added (see figure 2). The maps were created drawing inspiration from the psychogeographical maps created by Guy Debord.



Figure 2. Example of map from Participant walk in the 13th arrondissement

4. Discussion

4.1 Encountering the City

In daily life, the majority of people living and working in cities often rush between places or towards a set destination. Consequently, people do not always look around or pay attention to the sights around them. Arguably this issue has been exacerbated by increased mobile phone use, resulting in people focussing on their phone rather than their surroundings (Nasar and Troyer 2013, and Stavrinos *et al.* 2011). The use of mobile phones has also led to people following the most direct route on a map to the destination rather than actually experiencing their surroundings.

All participants said these walks were different from their normal experiences of the city, stating they were usually in a rush to reach their destination. Participant 4 chose to walk in an area they were familiar with, the 5th arrondissement, but commented they noticed sights they had not seen before, such as the comic-themed shops. She also stated that she usually only walks when friends or relatives visit, therefore often focusing on the main tourist attractions. This links to the contrast Walter Benjamin makes between the tourist gaze and the Flâneur, where the Flâneur's understanding of the surroundings are seen as 'indigenous and local' (Benjamin 2002), whereas a tourist has an 'inauthentic' understanding of the history of the city (Plate 2006).

Some participants found it harder to notice the more hidden sights than others. However, as the walks progressed, awareness increased and they began to notice the more hidden sights throughout the city. For example, Participant 2's walk began by pointing out sights such as the view from the station (Figure 3) whereas, as the walk progressed, the sights pointed out were less obvious, such as hose pipes in apartments and plaques on buildings (Figure 3).

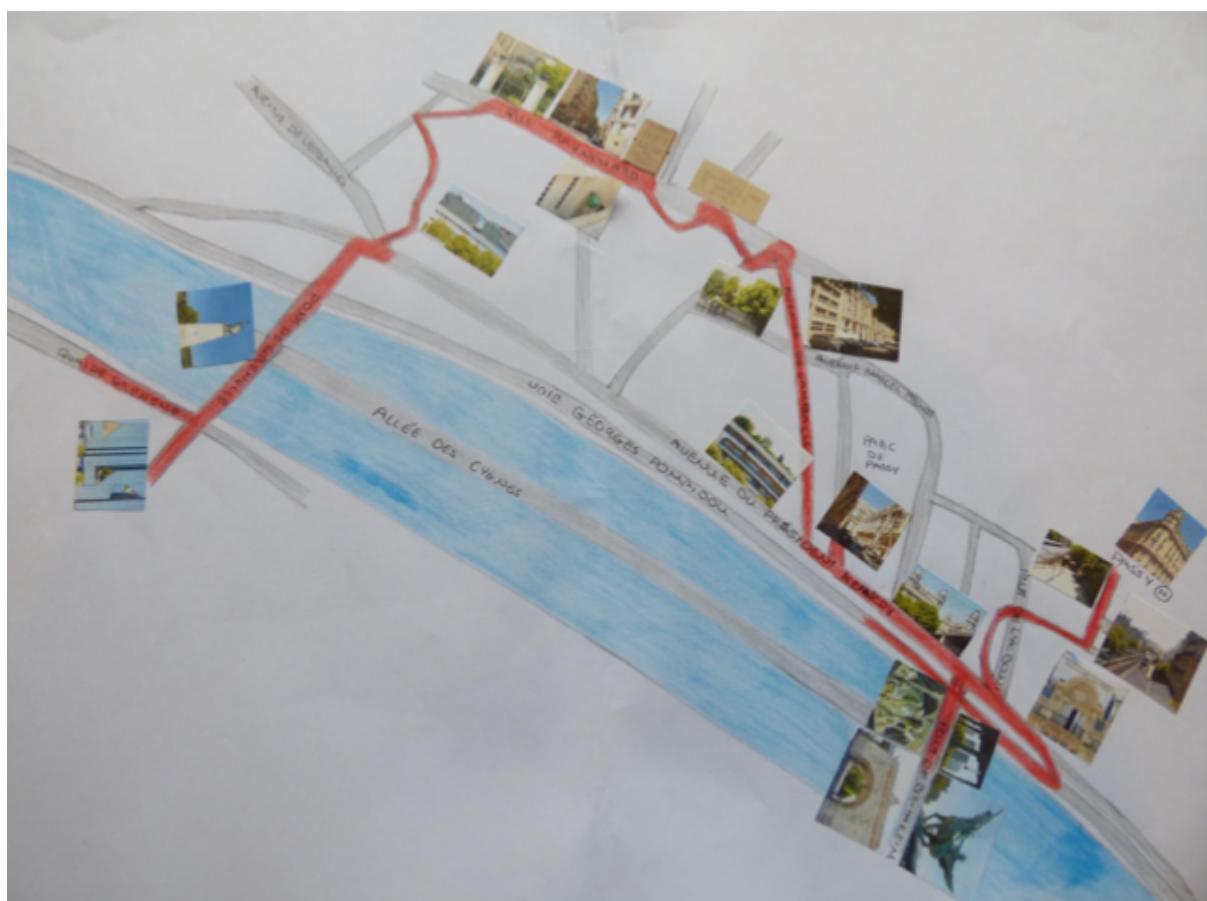


Figure 3. Map of participant 2's walk in Passy

4.2 The effect on emotions

During the 1960's, the Situationist International were particularly interested in the effect that the city had on emotions. During interviews participants overwhelmingly responded with positive emotions about noticing hidden sights, such as 'happy', 'exciting' and 'special' (figure 4). Furthermore, during the walks the emotions of each participant became apparent. Participant 1 used the expression "oh wow" upon seeing Mary Poppins unexpectedly painted on the wall. Similarly, when Participant 2 suddenly saw the Statue of Liberty, expressions such as "that is cool", and "that's bizarre" were used, because he had not expected to come across it.

Number of participants for each emotion

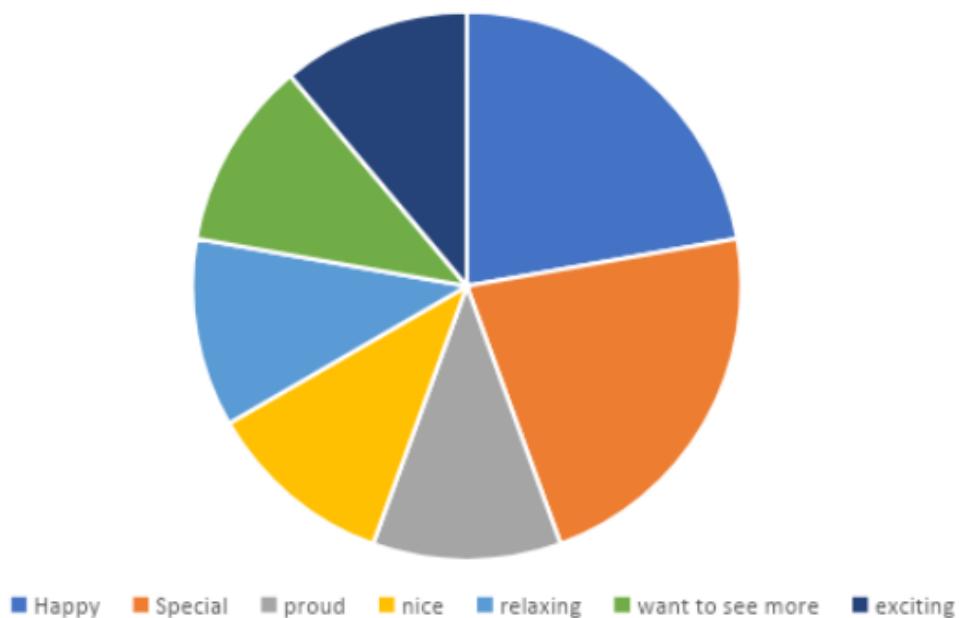


Figure 4. Pie chart of emotions expressed by participants

The state of the buildings also affected emotions. Participant 4 came across an abandoned restaurant and stated that it made them feel "nostalgic" (Figure 5). In other cases, some sights looked appealing from a distance, however up close, participants were disappointed. For example, Participant 5 was attracted to the green carousel (Figure 6) at the end of a street in Montmartre, however once close, the participant was disappointed at how it looked in proximity.



Figure 5. Le Petit Zinc photographed in Participant 4's walk



Figure 6. Carousel photographed in participant 5's walk

4.3 Access

Access is undoubtedly a major issue and consideration within urban design. In Europe, over 10% of the population suffers from limited mobility (Lavery *et al.* 1996), consequently, designing urban areas that are accessible is vital. Furthermore, Rob Imrie suggests that within urban areas in the West a "design apartheid" is present, with urban planning focussing on the values of able-bodied people, rather than those with disabilities (Imrie 1996). Since 1996, many developments have taken place, such as an increase in accessible stations and transport, although many restrictions still exist.

This theme repeatedly appeared within the walks and interviews. Participant 7, participated with her child in a pushchair and remained mostly in pedestrianised areas along the riverbank (Figure 7) which consequently constrained the directions that the walk could take and resulted in returning the same way that we walked initially. Furthermore, many access points to the road from the riverbank involve stairs, therefore she often found herself walking much further than intended to be able to access certain sites.



Figure 7. Map of participant 7's walk

Throughout the walks many participants also stated that they felt unsure entering certain places despite knowing it was allowed. However, those who walked regularly or went on walking tours were less concerned. This was particularly noticeable during Participant 3's walk where several courtyards were noticed (Figure 8) and entered to explore the interior. Despite courtyards often containing many businesses or restaurants, some participants stated they felt out of place inside. This idea was summed up interestingly during the interview with Participant 3 who stated that the notion of what is acceptable depends on where you are and it is 'very English' to not enter these areas, whereas in Paris it is considered the norm.



Figure 8. Courtyard photographs

5. Conclusions

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This research aimed to draw inspiration from the work of the Situationist International and the Flâneur to explore experiences and emotions of walking in Paris and encountering the city through locating hidden sights. The research showed that this was a very different way of encountering the city for participants. It took time for some to adapt to this new method but all did eventually understand and gain enjoyment from the chance to focus and observe their surroundings by actively searching for the less obvious sights. The Flâneur and the Situationist International had their own aims for their method of exploring the city but this research has shown that it is still relevant in modern life, allowing one to engage with the city's authenticity and gain a deeper understanding and enjoyment of the city.

Throughout this research the theme of access became increasingly prominent, with many participants stating they considered certain areas inaccessible for people with reduced mobility. This was particularly apparent during Participant 7's walk which was undertaken with a pushchair. It was evident she wanted to avoid walking near roads as much as possible, for fear of her young child's safety. Other aspects of the built environment, such as stairs, restricted areas they could access further bringing the issue of access to the forefront. This compromised the aimless nature of the walk and her ability to access the right to the city.

Overall, all participants stated that this was a very different experience to the normal way in which people encounter the city. Participants said they were usually in a rush, heading to a particular destination, walking with friends or looking at their phones and therefore did not look around at their surroundings. Many participants stated they really enjoyed this method and would ideally like to spend more time exploring the city in this way in the future.

6. References

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