

**WALKING IN
PURSUIT OF
A CITY AS
SOFT AS A
BODY**

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Walking in Pursuit of a City as Soft as a Body

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*A Society can be so stone-hard
That it fuses into a block
A people can be so bone-hard
That life goes into shock*

*And the heart is all in the shadow
And the heart has almost stopped
Till some begin to build
A city as soft as a body*

Inger Christensen, It, 1969

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ABSTRACT

Urban planners now work within a paradigm that promotes active transport, increased public and green space, and increased density. Walking, being an important part of active transport, seems to be in two tangled binaries: walking as transport vs. walking for leisure and walking in the city vs. walking in nature. Urban planners can be preoccupied with walking in the city as a form of transport and often consider it in relation to commutes or to functional purposes. Walking for leisure is often discussed in the context of nature and health, which is often seen as happening outside of the city (Cronon, 1996; Luka, 2021; Thoreau, 1863). These binaries do not leave much room to consider the walking that occurs for pleasure, within the city and its nature. There is a lack of information regarding the experiential and sensorial aspects of walking within the urban environment and its connection to urban design.

This study explores the importance of walking for urban design and planning in ways that complement the functionalism of active transport. Inspired by work in anthropology, political philosophy, and urban planning and design, this study involves three major sub-topics: the experience of walking and public spaces, autoethnography as a method pertinent to planning, and the professional implications for autoethnography in relation to the processes of participatory planning. I explore how walking, and the sensorial and aesthetic in general terms, can help planners to appreciate place and realise the right to a soft city. Walking and the concept of the soft city is considered in relation to public space, commoning, urban planning and design. The study took place in Montreal where participants were asked to go on three exploratory walks in areas they were familiar with and areas that they did not know well. The main methods of the study were autoethnography and visual ethnography (ethnographic photos). Semi-structured interviews were carried out with select participants.

The autoethnographic recordings and interviews are used both to generate information on walking and softness and to discuss the potential for methodological contributions to participatory planning as a form of deliberative democracy, particularly in terms of how walking is an important way in which many people can appropriate and share public space. Ultimately, the information generated contributes to the urban planning discourse around walking and how to include perceptions that are more haptic and of a qualitative approach. With this, the autoethnographic and visual material is analyzed through a soft city lens to uncover possible design and participatory principles. This is discussed in tandem with how to further incorporate these qualitative methods in the educational and professional contexts of urban planning.

Keywords: walking, experience, materiality, textures, affordances, sensory qualities, haptic space, public space, green space, soft city, autoethnography

RESUMÉ

Les urbanistes sont dans un paradigme actuel qui promeut le transport actif, l'augmentation des espaces publics et verts, et l'augmentation de la densité. La marche, qui est une partie importante du transport actif, semble se trouver dans deux binaires enchevêtrés : la marche en ville versus à la marche dans la nature et la marche comme transport versus à la marche pour le loisir. Les urbanistes peuvent être préoccupés par la marche en ville en tant que moyen de transport et la considèrent souvent en relation avec les trajets domicile-travail ou à des fins fonctionnelles. La marche pour le loisir est souvent discutée dans le contexte de la nature et de la santé, qui est souvent considérée comme se produisant en dehors de la ville (Cronon, 1996 ; Luka, 2021 ; Thoreau, 1863). Ces binaires ne laissent pas beaucoup de place à la prise en compte de la marche qui se fait en ville, et dans sa nature, pour le plaisir. Il y a un manque d'informations concernant les aspects expérientiels et sensoriels de la marche dans l'environnement urbain et son lien avec le design urbain.

Cette étude explore l'importance de la marche pour le design et la planification urbaine, en complément du fonctionnalisme du "transport actif". Inspirée par des travaux d'anthropologie, de philosophie politique, d'urbanisme et de design urbain, cette étude comporte trois sous-thèmes majeurs : l'expérience de la marche et des espaces publics, l'auto-ethnographie en tant que méthode pertinente pour la planification, et les implications professionnelles de l'auto-ethnographie en relation avec les processus de planification participative. J'explore comment la marche, et plus généralement la sensorialité et l'esthétique, peuvent aider les urbanistes à apprécier les espaces urbains et à réaliser le droit à une ville douce. La marche et le concept de "ville douce" sont considérés en relation avec l'espace public, le partage, la planification et le design urbain. L'étude a eu lieu à Montréal où les participants ont été invités à faire trois promenades exploratoires dans des zones qu'ils connaissent bien et d'autres qu'ils ne connaissent pas bien. Lors de ces promenades, les méthodes principales de l'étude sont l'auto-ethnographie et l'ethnographie visuelle (photos ethnographiques). Des entretiens semi-structurés ont été réalisés avec des participant.e.s sélectionnés. Les enregistrements auto-ethnographiques et les entretiens sont utilisés à la fois pour générer des informations sur la marche et la douceur et pour discuter de la contribution potentielle des méthodes à la planification participative en tant que forme de démocratie délibérative, en particulier en ce qui concerne la façon dont la marche est un moyen important par lequel de nombreuses personnes peuvent s'approprier et partager l'espace public.

En fin de compte, les informations générées contribueront au discours de la planification urbaine sur la marche et sur la manière d'inclure des perceptions plus haptiques et d'une approche qualitative. Dans cette optique, le matériel auto-ethnographique et visuel sera analysé à travers le prisme de la ville douce afin de découvrir d'éventuels principes de participation et de conception. Ces résultats seront discutés en même temps que la manière d'incorporer les méthodes qualitatives dans les contextes éducatifs et professionnels de l'urbanisme.

Mots-clés : marche, expérience, matérialité, textures, affordances, qualités sensorielles, espace haptique, espace public, espace vert, ville douce, auto-ethnographie

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INTRODUCTION

PROBLEM STATEMENT

In Le Corbusier's (1925) *The City of To-morrow and Its Planning*, he states that the four basic principles behind his Radiant City must: "...de-congest the centres of our cities, augment their density, increase the means for getting about, and increase parks and open space" (p. 170)." Although contemporary urban planning has moved on from modernism towards a more human or "soft" approach, I think that these four issues are still very relevant today (Gehl, 2006 ; Sim, 2019). The solutions being put forward today are not as rigid and geometric as Le Corbusier's (1925) Radiant City, where his design process is calculated and repetitive with uniformity as a central feature which does not leave room for spontaneity, organic growth, or the soft organization of a city. Although Le Corbusier (1925) admits, a bit begrudgingly, that straight roads are boring for walking and that "picturesque" curved roads are better for strolling, he explains that this should not be done too frequently because it is "a pleasure that quickly becomes boring if too frequently gratified" (p. 210). If too many picturesque roads can become boring, then what about the repetition of identical skyscrapers? Today, planners are aware that people like a certain amount of ambiguity in urban landscapes as it allows for spontaneity and personal appropriation of space (Stevens, 2006). When thinking of efficiency and order, it is important to identify the desired outcomes and the reasons behind them. Of course, there are contexts where efficiency and order should be prioritized in planning, but this should not be mutually exclusive to a human-first approach. Perhaps by considering people first, particularly those that will be most affected by a project through a democratic process, and planning for ambiguity, then cities might experience softness.

Texturally, modernism could be described as hard, whereas the current tendencies in urban planning are concerned with what is happening at the ground level from people's everyday perspectives – this is considered to be soft (Sim, 2019). Soft is "about ease, comfort and care in everyday life", and ultimately connecting people to improve quality of life (Sim, 2019). I have recently become increasingly interested in public spaces and walking both personally and academically in relation to the link between walking and softness. Walking has been part of my daily life since moving to Montreal over a decade ago, either for transit or leisure. In the winter of 2021, I began to take longer walks that would span a few hours and might cover several neighbourhoods. With the COVID-19 pandemic, walking became a way for me to connect to the city. This led to reflections about the relationship between urban planning and design, and walking. If the current urban planning paradigm is interested in bettering the everyday quality of life for people on the local level, then walking in order to understand place and rights to a soft city seems

to be an obvious approach. Walking offers so much more than a mode of transit, de Certeau (1980) adequately describes how it can provide an almost poetic experience and type of embodied knowledge:

Walking affirms, suspects, tries out, transgresses, respects, etc., the trajectories it "speaks." All the modalities sing a part in this chorus, changing from step to step, stepping in through proportions, sequences, and intensities which vary according to the time, the path taken and the walker. These enunciatory operations are of an unlimited diversity. They therefore cannot be reduced to their graphic trail. (p. 99)

This description goes hand in hand with the idea of needing to go beyond the medicalization of walking. Brown (2017) and Luka (2021) underline how there is a lack of qualitative understanding behind walking that does not fulfill a functional obligation, also known as discretionary walking. In conducting a study through autoethnographic walks in a variety of areas in Montreal, my aim is to respond to this need and to provide rich information regarding discretionary walking that will propel discussion outside of the realm of medicalization and walkability. I consider what soft means in relation to urban planning and design in the city through walking. Studies related to walking are often either confined to the city landscape or to specific leisure terrains, and I would like to add an important layer of thought to the inequalities and gaps in access to walking and softness in Montreal.

RESEARCH QUESTION

The overarching question that guides this study is: **how can walking, and the sensorial and aesthetic in general terms, help planners to appreciate place and realise the right to a soft city?** Embedded within this question are two themes that run throughout this project, the first is how walking can be framed as a sensory practice and why this is important for urban planners to keep in mind. Related to this, is the discussion of how to shift the discourse around walking from medicalization and quantitative transport to a more haptic and qualitative approach. In shifting the discourse towards the more phenomenological appreciation of walking, the concept of the soft city is relevant for considering how this might be related to design principles in the context of the city of Montreal. The second theme is that once understood as a sensory practice, walking and the use of ethnographic methods can be used to explore the operationalization of implementing these methods in urban planning. In adopting more qualitative methods to understand the experiences and connections between people and their urban environments in a quotidian way such as through walking, what might planners gain and how does this influence the inclusivity of perspectives in participatory planning.

METHODS

This study is based on methods of qualitative ethnographic research, which involves writing about, being with, and theorizing about people (Madden, 2017). Within qualitative research, personal reflexivity plays an important role, meaning that my position as a researcher is inherently part of the research (Cousin, 2010). This is not a weakness, but it is important to explicitly explore positionality and personal background in relation to the research conducted (Cousin, 2010). As Cousin (2010) explains, “the self is the research tool, and thus intimately connected to the methods we deploy” (p. 10). I cannot completely detach myself from the material generated, and so throughout this process my positionality has been considered. As I instructed the participants to engage in autoethnographic work, I asked them to explicitly reflect on their positionality as well and to incorporate their subjective thoughts and remarks into their participatory process.

The practice of acknowledging the researcher’s positionality and integrating it throughout the research process is one aspect of autoethnography that can either be a benefit or disadvantage to the research. Chang (2016) notes that it is imperative for the researcher to find a balance between integrating their positionality without it becoming a self-indulgent exercise with a first-person narrative that lacks valid analysis. In the field instructions provided to the participants, there was an effort in the writing of the text to strike a balance between leaving room for personalized interpretation within the bounds of a structured research project. I chose to explore the method of autoethnography because of its subjective leanings, its generation of thick qualitative information, and because it can be self-conducted. Choosing the topic of walking and pairing it with autoethnographic methods was deliberate to generate information related to the two themes of this project. This was done to address walking ontologically and how this is related to urban space. Employing ethnography can help to understand this relationship, which in turn can be considered operationally within the urban planning discipline to discuss the potential benefits of incorporating it into the participatory planning process. The explicit subjectivity of autoethnography is what is most interesting, especially when it comes to researching topics that are related to perception and experience such as walking. It is compelling both for planners and for everyday citizens. Planners should experience the places they are planning first-hand because this provides different types of information that is not accessible through second-hand descriptions or computer-generated environments. Non-professionals can provide unique insights as part of the participatory process, where autoethnography might lead to embodied knowledge that could contribute information about certain types of environments or urban planning and design interventions.

STRUCTURE OF THE DOCUMENT

The participatory process of this project was conducted between February to April 2022. A poster describing the project and inviting those interested to sign up was posted in a variety of community groups on Facebook to invite inhabitants of Montreal in various neighbourhoods to participate in the study. Those who expressed interest were then contacted and given more details about the project and what was required of them should they decide to participate. A document of detailed field instructions was created that was emailed to all who were interested; these were guidelines for participants where they were asked to conduct three self-guided exploratory walks and to take autoethnographic recordings. The location and trajectory of the walks were decided by the participants. While on the walks participants were asked to record their geographic trail, record reflections in the form of notes and photos, as another way to communicate the sensorial aspects of the study sites and their unique environments. All participatory material was developed in both French and English, and participants were communicated with in their preferred language. Participants were given the option to participate in an interview following their exploratory walks.

A total of ten participants completed the walks and note-taking and six of the participants were interviewed in a semi-structured format either in person or over Zoom. The interview served as a way to reflect on the process where participants were asked to respond to questions about walking and about the process of recording their experiences. Autoethnography was chosen as the main method because it actively incorporates personal and subjective experience into the research. In addition to the participants conducting their autoethnographic work, I also took part in carrying out this exercise myself.

The subjective quality of this study is inherent to the discussion of this text, one of the main research aims is to explore the benefits of such a highly personalized approach to urban planning and design questions. I do not claim that the sample of participants is representative of a larger population or that generalizations can be extrapolated from this group. Rather, with the information generated I hope to contribute to the conversation of how to better the democratic participatory process and the potential benefits of ethnographic methods in an urban planning context. The topics of walking and ethnographic methods allows for understanding mobility in urban space beyond the functional and how this is beneficial for the discipline of urban planning.

This document is structured into two main parts, accompanied by a conclusion: Walking as Sensory, and Softness and (Auto) ethnography. The first part discusses walking as a sensory practice and how this text goes beyond the realm of functional active transport and considers the phenomenological aspects of walking. Framing walking in this way leads to the consideration of how this translates in urban environments both materially and socially. The second part addresses the concept of the soft city and how this might translate to the Montreal context and how it is related to the types of methods employed by planning practitioners. Reflection on the processes of this study is integrated in the discussion of the use of ethnographic methods in urban planning and how they align with the accredited educational planning programs and how they could be taught through a professional development workshop. The conclusion summarizes the main points of this text and outlines the recommendations for going forward.

WALKING AS SENSORY PRACTICE

Within the context of urban planning, walking is often discussed in relation to the walkability of neighbourhoods or active transportation. This chapter aims to move away from the dominant transport view of walking and to add phenomenological perspectives on walking to the analytical mix. I would like to consider walking beyond walkability and transportation and to address it as a sensory practice. Through discussing walking phenomenologically, it becomes clear that it is important to introduce more subjective understandings of the experience of walking through different environments. This brings about concerns related to the social implications of walking and public or shared spaces and the role of urban planners.

GOING BEYOND WALKABILITY & FUNCTIONAL TRANSPORTATION

When examining the discourse around the concept of walkability, it is obvious that there is not one overarching definition. Walkability means different things depending on the context, even within the discipline of urban planning. However, it is not only urban planners who use the concept of walkability, as it is also being used by various disciplines. Throughout this text, I aim to go beyond the notion of whether a place is walkable and to instead consider the ground-level experiences of walking and what insights that might provide. In connection with this, it is necessary to also go beyond the functionalist view that is sometimes present in transportation planning. The discourse that is present around walkability and functional transport points towards the potential benefits of a more qualitative understanding of walking and pedestrian environments.

The concept of walkability can be understood and applied in many ways within urban planning and across various disciplines. Two texts, one by Forsyth (2015) and the other by Jensen et al. (2017), illustrate that there is no overarching definition to this concept. Forsyth (2015) explicitly explores the detailed variations of the definitions of walkability and what this might mean for urban design and Jensen et al. (2017) discuss walkability and safety in relation to gender in simple terms within the context of health. Both texts offer their own insights, Forsyth's (2015) exploration of definitions allows for a nuanced understanding of how broad walkability really is as a term. Whereas Jensen et al. (2017)'s discussion addresses how walkability coincides with the feeling of safety for women. Forsyth's (2015) main point is that walkability encompasses so many different things even within one context, while Jensen et al. (2017) simply correlate

walkable streets with increased feelings of safety for women without further defining the concepts involved.

Jensen et al.'s piece (2017) makes it evident that when considering design for walkability, both the questions of desired outcomes and for whom the design is for need to be defined. The authors point out that safety and walkability mean something different for women than for men, and it is the same for various other populations. Particularly of interest could be the elderly and children, who are often walking through spaces in different ways than the average adult. The concept of walkability in design is complex and will shift depending on who is the focus of the design. Because there are so many different understandings of walkability, even within the same discipline, as Forsyth (2015) makes clear, and perhaps maybe even more so across different disciplines, it is interesting to consider whether it would be advantageous to have a universal definition of walkability. Perhaps it is necessary to keep a multitude of definitions because walkability encompasses so much – it cannot be narrowed down to just one set of criteria. Rather than coming up with one definition, what is maybe more important is to be aware that it can be used in so many different ways and that subjective experiences are valid. When considering the concept of walkability, it might be just as important to define the desired outcomes and the population in question.

Emphasizing the importance of subjective experience in regard to walking, Benediktsson (2017) and Hess (2019) showcase how beneficial qualitative information can be for pedestrians and transportation more generally. Though qualitative methods both Benediktsson (2017) and Hess (2019) examine social norms and behaviours that are embedded within a landscape and illustrate this relationship in the area of mobility and safety. Benediktsson's (2017) text explores pedestrian risk in 20th century suburbs in the U.S. using a mixed-method social epidemiology and finds a positive correlation between sprawl and high poverty rates. This research explores the "mismatch" between the suburban built environment that is car-centric and the needs of residents that do not own cars and rely on walking or public transit for mobility. The author finds that risk of accidental injury coincides with the relationship between the needs of users and the landscape which is accompanied by behavioural norms (Benediktsson, 2017). In this case, the behavioural norms embedded in a car-centric landscape do not account for pedestrians crossing large busy roads. Overall Benediktsson (2017) finds there is a conditional correlation, where an increase in poverty rates is related to increase in risk of injury in places where the built environment does not accommodate pedestrians. This points to how connectivity is crucial for quality of life and safety, particularly in the suburban context. Benediktsson's research (2017) strongly highlights the importance of a qualitative understanding

in the realm of mobility in suburbs; the lived reality of pedestrians navigating the built environment is complex and nuanced.

Similarly, Hess (2019) has conducted research that explicitly considers the social realities of pedestrians in a suburban landscape near Toronto where the design of the area lacks connectivity. The author describes deliberate physical infrastructures that make it not only incredibly difficult for pedestrians to be mobile in safe and efficient ways, but also removes potential public spaces on the street. Hess (2019) hints at the social justice aspect of the lack of accessible pedestrian space, mentioning how residents may take a trajectory that crosses on private properties rather than “claiming their rights to the city.” If the street is considered the most basic form of free public space, then is increased risk of injury and complicating pedestrian access also a form of obstructing the right to the city? Again, this emphasizes the importance of mobility and connectivity for users beyond the built environment.

The issue that then arises is how professionals can ensure that redesigns or interventions are planned in way that will benefit users, increase quality of life, and ultimately realize rights to the city. Throughout this text I argue that one strategy is to understand walking beyond walkability and functional transport and to consider it as a phenomenological experience. Framing walking as an experience and sensory practice while simultaneously considering the integration of qualitative methods like autoethnography in urban planning and design could contribute to ground-level efforts to improve quality of life.

WALKING AS AN EXPERIENCE

Walking is of course a way of moving through space from one area to another, but it can also be an experience that goes beyond functional purposes. Understanding the phenomenological aspect of walking requires the examination of walking as an everyday practice that has sensorial and social significance. Cronon (1996), de Certeau (2011[1980]), and Wunderlich (2008) discuss how walking and space have more than utilitarian functions, they go beyond simply serving a purpose and can be perceived as practices that contribute to the everyday human experience. Inherent to this experience are sensory and social implications. Both Wunderlich (2008) and de Certeau (2011 [1980]) make clear that walking is an opportunity for embodied knowledge or knowing of an environment. These three authors all discuss walking as a practice that occurs in space and place and through this action individuals are capable of forming connections to the city and form personal narratives and memories which contribute to defining meaning and belonging. This is highly person-

al and subjective, which underlines the importance of more qualitative methods in the practice of planning. Although there may not be generalizable objective criteria that would apply to entire populations, qualitative methods such as autoethnography could aid in understanding the process of embodied knowledge through walking. Participatory planning can sometimes function in a symbolic or performative way and so autoethnography could possibly have a supportive role in generating more authentic participation.

Framing walking as a practice of embodied knowing through space, then provokes the question of how design can consider or incorporate pleasure and joy through aspects that are more than functional, for example the sensorial and the leisurely or exploratory reasons for walking. This question leads to the discussion of the role of the planner, and how to balance the roles of expert and facilitator and how that may function in practice. A main issue related to this is incorporating plurality into design. On an everyday basis most people are most likely experiencing their environments on a subconscious level. To make them aware of the “textuologies” around them, would it be beneficial or interesting to disrupt the environment through design in some way? This is particularly tricky when people’s engagement and reactions to their environment is so highly subjective. Again, this points to the importance of autoethnography and qualitative methods as this would be a way to gain direct insight into different ways of experiencing the world from a first-person narrative perspective. This information could then be utilized to cultivate ways in which to ensure a plurality of perspectives is included. In understanding walking as a sensory practice and how to then address this within the urban planning and design context, there are two main implications to consider: the material and the social.

WALKING AS SENSORY AND HOW THAT TRANSLATES MATERIALLY

If walking is considered as an embodied practice, then what does this mean for the physical environments that people are navigating? There is both theoretical and empirical work that addresses how people interact with the material textures around them. Feld (2005) and Tversky (2003) discuss the sensory in more theoretical terms whereas Brown (2017) address textures and ground-feel from a more empirical approach. Considered together and in the context of urban planners designing for walking conditions, the texts raise an issue of scalability and generalizability. Brown (2017) finds that among her sample, participants enjoy haptic richness in their terrain when running or cycling. This is within an exceptional environment, where people are specifically going to these places to experience a terrain that differs from their everyday. Many terrains that have a textured or challenging

ground-feel are found outside of the “normal” city landscape. Although nature is often considered to exist outside of the city, the types of nature and vegetation within the city are important to consider in relation to the experience of walking and quality of life (Cronon, 1996). Many participants chose to walk in areas where there were elements of greenery or nature. This took the form of parks, brownfield sites such as the Champ des Possibles in the Mile End, or escarpments such as the Falaise Saint-Jacques in NDG. Incorporating urban nature was an integral part of the exploratory aspect of the walks for these participants, even in the winter when these places do not offer the same type of greenery as in other seasons. However, these places were still seen as different or separate from the “cityscape”; these were places for leisure, for a breath of fresh air, to reconnect with oneself and nature. They offer a different feeling and environment than the sidewalks – there is a richness of haptic pleasure even though at a small scale. The snow is sometimes crunchier in the park than on the well-trodden path of the sidewalks, seeing trees can be grounding for some even without their leaves. The following are a few quotes from the participants’ notes that reflect this sentiment:

“...joie: la fraîcheur sur mes joues, les arbres sont majestueux, toujours un grand plaisir de les retrouver – mes arbres.” – G.

“...joy: the freshness on my cheeks, the trees are majestic, always a great pleasure to find them - my trees.”

“...this is what I love about walking, we have time to observe people and things and really savour the moment. Walking brings us to a rhythm and pace that is sane.” – M.

“I often choose to walk through both urban and nature spaces. I live in a neighborhood with 5 parks in proximity” – M.

“Joy: paintings on rocks along the way; feeling of isolation despite urban setting; feeling of a hidden treasure; trees!” – E.

“Au parc rue St-Dominique, le soleil était très bon sur la peau + à l’abri du vent un peu frisquet !” – M-C.

“In the park on St-Dominique St., the sun was very good on the skin + sheltered from the wind that was a little chilly!”

From many of the participants’ perspectives there are already places to derive haptic pleasures in the nature available in the city context. Perhaps it is a question of supporting what already exists in Montreal and taking advantage of the different seasons and experiences they bring. When completing one of my self-guided walks around the neighbourhood of Outremont, I noticed that there was a seating area in Parc Saint-Viateur along

the skating path that has not been there in the past years.



Interventions such as this one is very common in Montreal during the summer but maybe more temporary installations could be implemented in the winter months as well. When discussing with participants during interviews, it became clear that in order to enjoy such interventions there needs to be a certain level of safety in the urban environment, especially during the winter when weather conditions can make walking challenging.

During their self-guided walks, participants were asked to remark on what brought them joy or discomfort. The weather during the period when the majority of participants completed their walks was especially disagreeable, there were multiple snowstorms, and ice covered the sidewalks for several days. Winter can bring many obstacles when it comes to walking, the issue of weather and safety was brought up often in the participants’ notes and throughout our discussions afterwards. Some participants expressed that they would have walked longer if had not been so cold or if the sidewalk conditions had been better:

“first walk 5 km, more or less (an hour)... Mainly because of the cold and ice... Otherwise I would have walked longer...” – M.

“...mon allure de marche est ralentie par la neige” – G.

“my walking pace is slowed down by the snow”

“En bonnes marcheuses que nous sommes, nous avons pensé monter la St-Laurent à pied pour s’y rendre, mais les trottoirs, même les rues, sont méga encombrés de monticules de neige. Les déneigeuses et les chenilles ont beau se faire aller depuis hier soir; ça ne suffit pas. On décide donc de prendre le bus.” – L.

“As good walkers as we are, we had thought of walking up the St-Laurent to get there, but the sidewalks, even the streets, are mega-clogged with mounds of snow. The snow ploughs and the caterpillars have been going since yesterday evening, it is not enough. So we decide to take the bus.”

Being able to live comfortably in the city and to be able to be mobile requires that the sidewalks and pathways are adequately cleared. Safety needs to be established before being able to appreciate the experience of different haptic pleasure or temporary interventions. During interviews I asked participants what could be improved for walking in the city during winter beyond safety. Some answers were in the realm of physical comfort related to infrastructure such as ensuring there are more public toilets and shelters from the weather elements. One participant mentioned that music and lighting are things they enjoy and appreciate in public spaces. These are two things that intrigue the senses and add dimension to what is being perceived while walking through an environment. Similarly, another participant mentioned how walking in the winter allows for a different appreciation of the city: she explained it as how it *“makes you look at the bones of the city”* since there is not as much greenery or people around. This same participant suggested art related walks, where local artists and residents could be involved in creating paths or trails with art leading the walker. She mentioned how she enjoys discovering art along her walks, and that this both adds a sense of discovery and gives the walker a kind of destination even though it is not “purposeful” in the same way as running errands. Similarly, another participant gave herself exploratory objectives on each of her self-guided walks:

“Alors dans mon esprit ... pourquoi ne pas faire une marche ludique ... en cherchant des objets en ligne (minimum 3 !). C’était un objectif amusant – qui me demandait vraiment d’observer partout à la recherche d’objets en ligne.” – M-C.

“So in my mind ... why not do a fun walk ... looking for objects in line (minimum 3!). It was a fun goal - one that really required me to look everywhere for objects in a line.”

“J’ai cherché une thématique ... j’avais trouvé l’expérience de

ma marche 2 ludique ! la couleur c’est vite imposée ... mettons de la couleur dans nos cœurs. Beaucoup de joie, très peu d’inconfort à part un peu le froid (malgré le soleil).” – M-C.

“I looked for a theme ... I had found the experience of my 2nd walk playful! Colour was quickly imposed ... let’s put color in our hearts. A lot of joy, very little discomfort except a little cold (despite the sun).”

These two self-imposed exploratory objectives added to the playfulness of the walks. The joy of encountering art and colours while walking came up often in the participants notes and photographs; the next few images are examples of what was captured.







Perception and discovery in design is something that planners could experiment with, particularly in relation to inciting pleasure or joy. Two aspects that are interesting to keep in mind are seasonality and creating connections. In Montreal's climate, there is the opportunity to experience a variety of haptic richness in the different seasons. There could be ways in which planners could more explicitly utilize seasonal elements to create sensorially stimulating environments that are temporary. Similarly, rather than trying to create entirely new environments, it is perhaps more interesting to consider how to design haptically compelling connections, such as having public art creating discovery paths, between existing places.

WALKING AS SENSORY AND HOW THAT TRANSLATES SOCIALLY

Not only does walking as sensory practice have material implications but understanding walking in this way brings about interesting social considerations. While walking throughout the city, individuals are often occupying shared and public spaces, whether this be the sidewalk, a square, or a park. In moving through these spaces people are having to navigate societal particularities or social interactions with others. Sociality in the context of walking and sharing public space is important for understanding how the material and social aspects of being in the city together can potentially elicit harmony or tension. Although urban planners do not have the power to control what kinds of social interactions take place in spaces, urban form does influence sensibility and perception. There are two main things to consider for the social implications of walking as sensory: sociality and the political.

There has been lots of research done in both anthropology and urban planning related to how people engage with each other in public places. Work in anthropology tends to address sociality more directly, and within the urban planning context how the built form informs interactions is often discussed. Anderson (2004), an anthropologist, Hajer & Reijndorp (2001), a planner and geographer, and Gehl (2006), an architect, all address the general issue of public places and how people can positively inhabit them and interact with each other. Anderson (2004) calls such places cosmopolitan canopies, whereas Hajer & Reijndorp (2001) refer to it as cultural mobility, and Gehl (2006) identifies public life as happening between buildings. These "good" types of public places that they discuss, all offer the opportunity to have new types of experiences, to interact with strangers and cross socioeconomic and racial divides. This is quite the tall order for a public place, and how are planners to design to encourage this type of behaviour? Perhaps it is not within the power of planners to develop fully inclusive public places, but professionals can strive to encourage open and accessible places

even though there are many higher systemic issues that are out of range. For example, Anderson (2004) mentions that homeless people are welcome at the Reading Terminal Market; I question to what extent this statement is really true. Anderson (2004) might be giving an especially positive portrayal as a tactic to perhaps overcorrect the discourse associated to the experience of diversity in public places. This is an interesting thought, as the planning profession is often framed as problem-solving rather than highlighting what is functioning well.

Taking the stance of highlighting what works well instead of what is not, what tangible characteristics might exist related to cultural canopies or places that are culturally mobile? According to what Anderson (2004) describes, proximity and chance for intimacy seem to be important – quite literally being able to bump into others might increase the chances of longer interactions. A mix of activities seems to be another aspect of such places, where people may purchase food and other goods, or simply sit in the space without having to spend any money. Being able to pass through the space as part of a trajectory could be another characteristic. Having the balance between people lingering and others passing through might be the ideal.

The two public places that I have personally experienced that have aspects that resemble cultural canopies or are culturally mobile are Dronning Louises Bro in Copenhagen and the Champ des Possibles in Montreal. Dronning Louises Bro is a bridge where people will gather on the sun exposed side and sits on benches or on the sidewalk to simply sit, drink a coffee or beer, and hang out. Along this bridge there is a major cycling lane and plenty of passers-by as this is an arterial road connecting the city centre to a residential neighbourhood. Although this is a great public place and it attracts many different types of people, the population in Copenhagen is relatively homogenous. Champ des Possibles is an entirely different kind of space; it is a former industrial site that has become a protected green space that connects the neighbourhoods of the Mile End and Rosemont and runs alongside train tracks. This is a liminal space that has become a community space where many different kinds of people are taking care of it and appropriate it in various ways. Although diverse people pass through and hang out in the Champ des Possibles, the surrounding area has gentrified and continues to at a rapid rate. I struggle to imagine how a truly diverse place would function and be sustained long-term without gentrification or another social issue negatively influencing it.

I wonder about what this means for the walker and for strictly public spaces like the street. Gehl (2006) has long been making the argument for including public life studies as part of planning and architecture, and perhaps ethnography and autoethnography could bring that goal one step further. It is difficult to under-

stand people's individual experience of place without in-depth qualitative analysis. In thinking about the walker's experience, I wonder if the walker's participation in cosmopolitan canopies is to pass through or does it only become more interesting if they stop and linger? Are there possibilities to engage in mini types of cultural mobility in walking environments? Because walking is slow and often requires an individual to move across different types of spaces, there is a greater chance for social interaction than with other modes of mobility such as cycling or driving. Two participants, M. and M-C., mentioned that by walking regular routes they have come to recognize the unhoused population that often occupy the same corner or a certain section of a street. Over time they have built a rapport where they acknowledge each other and will sometimes exchange pleasantries. During our interview, M. mentioned that this is an essential part of healthy city life, that making eye contact and witnessing each other living our lives is important for quality of life.

Part of the social implications of considering walking as sensory practice within urban planning is political – who has the rights to the landscape or public spaces. Practicing embodiment in public spaces can be political or ideological. M., a participant, reflected on this political connection to walking in her introductory reflection as part of her autoethnographic notes: *“I was born in Aleppo Syria lived in Lebanon for the first 10 years of my life, my family came to Montreal to escape political instabilities and injustices. My Armenian ancestors escaped many times from death and injustice by walking away from their homes. Literally.”* This is not something that can be immediately understood through quantitative methods and is another reason that ethnography would be useful to understand narratives pertinent to the sharing of public spaces. Although not immediately obviously related to the topic of walking, Synder's (2017) discussion of modern United States politics, tyranny, and freedom in his book *On Tyranny* emphasizes corporal politics. This can then be extended to how walking and simply occupying public space can be an act of enacting one's power. Being seen in public can be a powerful action. Similarly, Van Praagh (2010) discusses the aspect of being seen and the negotiation of private and public space. In the case of the Hasidic Jewish community in Outremont, Montreal, and the symbolic boundary of the eruv, two ideological spaces appear: a religious space and a secular space. In the religious ideology the ideal that prevails is that the space within the eruv is private while the secular ideology considers the space public.

Although Van Praagh (2010) is describing the area as a space where there is a negotiation of space where the two ideologies exist side-by-side, I tend to be skeptical of how much negotiation is really happening, given the insular nature of the Hasidic community. However, perhaps a more pertinent point is that this showcases how ethnographic work is necessary to be able to

truly understand the narratives at work in cases such as this one. More broadly, ethnographic work could be helpful in understanding how to make spaces more open or accessible – where meaningful interactions beyond simply passing each other may occur. For example, when I think of the situation in Outremont, an area I walked through often and as part of this project, I imagine that common gathering spaces may lend themselves more to the types of interactions needed for intercultural appreciation. Such as Parc Saint-Viateur, rather than on the sidewalk. So perhaps it is through instances of lingering where understanding can happen. This is not to say that the effects of walking are futile, but rather that for meaningful, deep interactions to occur between strangers perhaps gathering and lingering need to be considered to be part of the walking movements.

Sonia Lavadinho's (2008) text discusses the symbolic component of walking in the city and pedestrian culture. This is interesting to consider in relation to professional practice in planning. She states that “pedestrians make the city through the act of walking” (p. 33). As planners, then our work too can become symbolic if the purpose is to give priority to the performative aspect of walking and giving the ability to pedestrians to appropriate the city for themselves. What kinds of environments and particular interventions may lend themselves to increasing the opportunities to appropriate the city? Perhaps it is trying to encourage more liminal spaces such as the Champ des Possibles. Just as it has material implications, seasonality might also influence sociality, both because of the seasons' temporality and haptic pleasures, and because of the “extremes” of Montreal's weather. Pedestrians cannot so easily appropriate the city in the winter; as already mentioned it could be interesting to focus on how to make walking more pleasant in winter and utilize the inherent haptic differences to intrigue the senses.

It is important to explicitly mention that access to space is not the same for everyone. Different people and populations have conditional access; for example to occupy space in a market most often requires a purchase. Street space and public spaces should be equally accessible for everyone, but unfortunately marginal populations are often overlooked or simply not considered. Urban planning and design should always consider for whom interventions are being produced. Being inclusive is imperative; ethnography and the subsequent inclusion of first-person narratives is a small way to recognize the multitude of perspectives and realities that need to be considered.

SOFTNESS AND (AUTO)ETHNOGRAPHY

WALKING AND THE SOFT CITY

The discussion of walking as a sensory practice is related to the concept of the soft city. As mentioned previously, there are some tendencies in urban planning that are concerned with what is happening at the ground level from people's everyday perspectives – which can be considered to be soft (Sim, 2019). The “soft” in the soft city is “about ease, comfort, and care in everyday life” and about living locally (Sim, 2019). There are three top principles from Sim's (2019) book *Soft City: Building Density for Everyday Life*: give choice through enclosed spaces, make walking a priority, blur the lines between indoor and outdoor spaces. In terms of mobility, Sim (2019) directly challenges the discourse around smart cities and transit-oriented development (TOD), where he argues that TODs are good at connecting people to somewhere else, but advocates for neighbourhood-oriented development (NOD) instead with the intention of better connecting people to where they are. Indeed, living close to areas where walking for leisure is possible was important for all participants of this study where all of them choose to do at least one of their exploratory walks close to their home. Closely related to this was a feeling of community. Some participants even explicitly expressed this in their notes:

“I often choose to walk through both urban and nature spaces. I live in a neighborhood with 5 parks in proximity... Parc Lafontaine, Parc Laurier, Parc Baldwin, Parc De Lorimier, Parc des Compagnons de St-Laurent... This is a neighborhood that prioritises space for the community, 5@7 everywhere. Almost all the alleys are green alleys... I live with one behind my apartment that is so inspiring and full of activities for all ages.” – M.

“I love back lanes, looking into back yards, and seeing streets from the lane ways. In my neighbourhood I often walk through the back lanes rather than the main streets. There is always so much more to see!” - K.

“I love seeing the little gardens people make, some of which are visible even in winter. Walking along this route makes me feel connected to my community, and I see lots of cyclists, joggers and walkers down here due to the bike path.” – E.

To encourage walking and a soft mobility system, Sim (2019) suggests to “design consistent, high quality walking infrastructure, with continuous sidewalks, curb extensions, and varied surfaces” all with the aim of having pedestrians prioritized. These broad recommendations seem simple and relatively feasible. Consistent provision of decent infrastructure so that pedestrians can move around more easily and efficiently is one part of

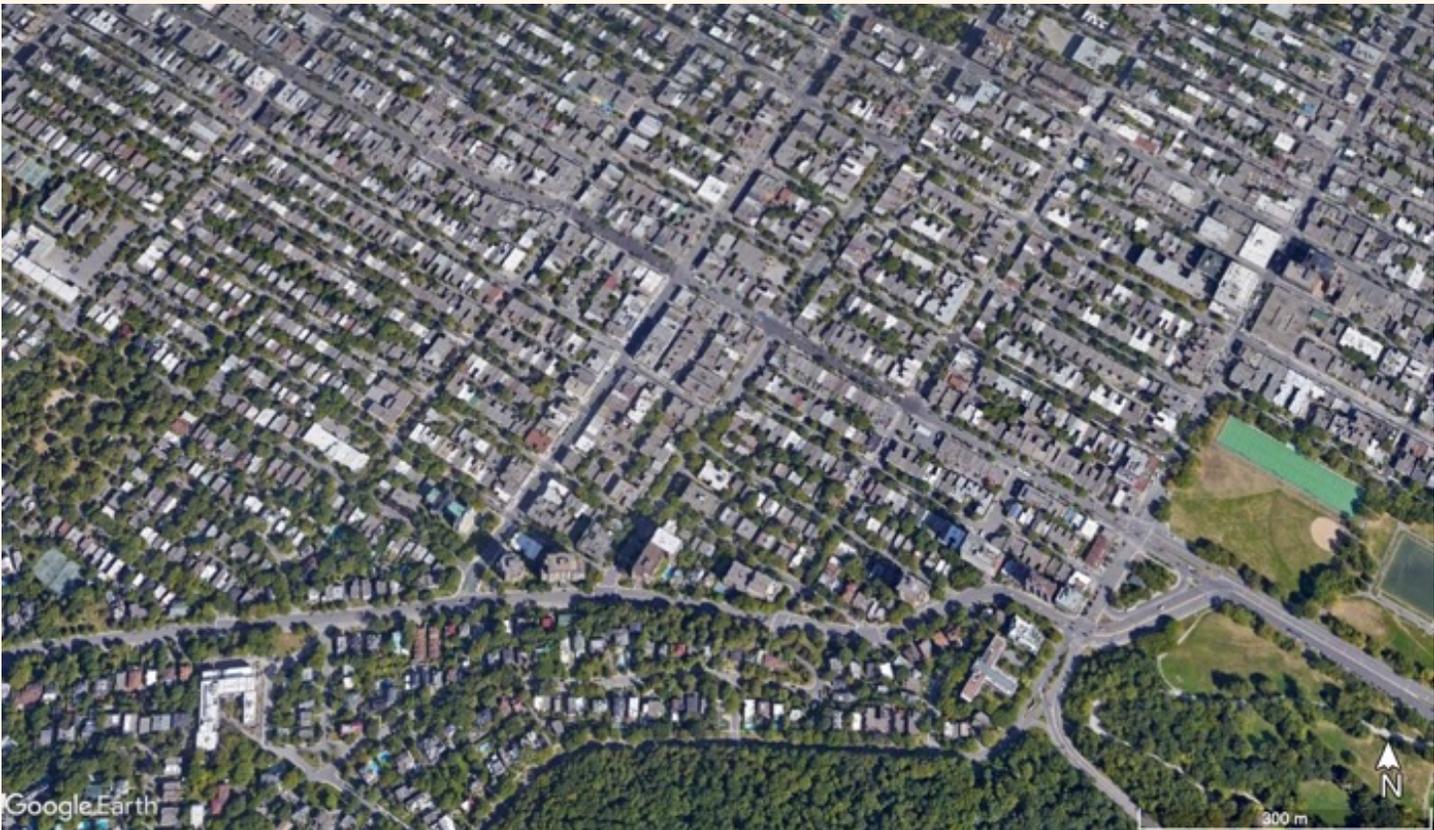
softness, and the other is how this might lead to people connecting with each other and with their environment in a somewhat meaningful way.

This study has identified additional facets of softness in Montreal: seasonality, recognizing the senses and the possibility to connect spaces through aspects of joy. Softness, in its broadest interpretation, can encompass seemingly menial pleasures like feeling the warmth of the sun while outside on a cold winter day or making eye contact with a stranger passing by on the sidewalk. Instances of joy have already been mentioned but a couple more examples of softness illustrated in participants' notes related to discovery in unfamiliar areas are:

“a wonderful daycare was in the process of closing their day, and there were sounds of little children ringing in my ear as I decided to turn back to Ontario street” – M.

“Discovering for the very first time Zytynsky's Deli. A tiny shop. Smelled wonderful” – J.

Sim's (2019) discussion of the soft city and the design principles that he puts forward can perhaps be viewed as utopian and too firmly rooted in a Northern European context, but his main point that there are joys to be found in everyday life and in witnessing others living out their lives in local contexts is relevant everywhere. Many of the design principles outlined in *Soft City: Building Density for Everyday Life* are not easily replicable in a North American city such as Montreal. For example, Sim (2019) praises the courtyard configuration in Copenhagen, Denmark and discusses the benefits of having similar block and building configurations which would simply not be feasible in Montreal. The two images on the following page illustrate the block configuration in Copenhagen (top) and in Montreal (bottom).



One of the main benefits to this courtyard configuration is that it allows for blurring the lines between public and private space and allows for sociality (Sim, 2019). It is interesting to consider other types of environments where there is a negotiation of space and social interactions. Yli-Kauhaluoma & Timonen (2016) and Abass et al. (2020) both discuss very different empirical contexts, the first addressing a shopping district in Helsinki, Finland and the second suburban areas of Greater Geelong, Australia. Both make interesting points about walking and the negotiation of social space. Yli-Kauhaluoma & Timonen (2016) emphasize the challenge between having people linger and flowing through the shopping district in Helsinki. As a primarily commercial space, a balance must be struck between allowing people to hang around and walk through the shopping centre but not loiter (Yli-Kauhaluoma & Timonen, 2016). This is made even more difficult as the merchants would like shoppers to linger while mall management want to avoid loitering. It is common knowledge that people will often go to the mall to simply “hang out” or walk around. In Abass et al.’s (2020) text public spaces are discussed in relation to neighbourhood sociality and pedestrian-friendly design. The authors explained that open public spaces, such as parks and playgrounds, encouraged social activities and connections. Closely related to this, pedestrian-friendly environments that provide safe and effective walking conditions are linked to neighbourhood contentment and provide opportunities for social contact (Abass et al., 2020). It is nevertheless important to mention that living in close proximity to someone is not a guarantee for social interactions.

I find this discussion pertinent in the Canadian winter context, as individuals cannot always occupy outdoor public spaces. People will often escape weather conditions and seek refuge in shopping malls. Montreal’s underground city is interesting to consider in relation to this; having the ability to walk through the downtown area indoors is quite compelling. However, since the underground city is still a commercial space, the experience of walking through this area is very different from walking around at the street-level. Ultimately, shopping centres, the underground city included, are private spaces. Even if they might evoke similarities to public spaces, they are privately owned with private interest. In principle, it would be possible to make indoor walking spaces more pleasant and accessible, but the ultimate barrier to this is that they are not truly public spaces. An element of blurring the lines between indoor and outdoor space in the courtyards in Copenhagen is also the blurring of private and public space. However, in this case the private spaces are generally homes and not commercial spaces. Working with the weather conditions is surely part of the way forward in creating a softer city (Sim, 2019).

In framing walking as a sensory practice, it becomes clear that it

is more than just a way to move from one area to another. Walking allows for a particular type of engagement with space that can excite the senses and connect oneself to the city and to others. Walking in itself is soft, and by creating cities that prioritize pedestrians they will be inherently softer. Essentially, working towards a soft city is to consider a human-scale approach to planning at the everyday level. This type of perspective mirrors the benefits of qualitative methods, specifically ethnographic methods which highlight an empathetic approach.

ON (AUTO)ETHNOGRAPHY

Walking has been framed as a practice of embodied knowing through space. In relation to planning, this brings about the issue of incorporating pleasure and intrigue and thinking beyond the functional. It is clear that people do not only walk for functional reasons but also for leisurely or exploratory reasons. Designing for such subjective and often sensory experiences is difficult and presents challenges when trying to include plurality. This question leads to the discussion of the role of the planner, and whether it is their place to act as an expert or as a facilitator and how that may actually function in practice. People’s mobility, engagement, and reactions to their environment is so highly subjective which highlights the importance of autoethnography and qualitative methods generally as they may allow insight into different ways of experiencing the world from a first-person perspective.

In *The Politics of Aesthetics : the Distribution of the Sensible*, Rancière (2006) rethinks the relationship between art and politics. There are four main elements of Rancière’s (2006) argument that are noteworthy and relevant to the topics of walking, autoethnography and planning: the sensible, regimes, positionality, and disruption. The sensible, referring to the sensory, is something often overlooked and requires more attention in urban planning as it is directly related to the experience and perception of environments. These experiences and the way in which planners understand things as practitioners are framed within regimes. For example, as has been already mentioned, transportation in planning is often framed and understood through “big data” and there is a general unquestioning of whether qualitative methods could be equally useful. Just as a qualitative perspective may help to uncover the nuances involved in transport planning, positionality is also essential in the question of for whom we are designing. The final aspect of Rancière’s (2006) argument is disruption. This text has already addressed the potential of creating disturbances through design, but here disruption refers to the ways in which we might disrupt societal norms and regimes; autoethnography may be a way to disrupt the dominance of functional approaches in transport planning.

The practice of acknowledging the researcher's positionality and integrating it throughout the research process is one aspect of autoethnography that can either be a benefit or disadvantage to the research. Chang (2016) notes that it is imperative for the researcher to find the balance between integrating their positionality without it becoming a self-indulgent exercise with a first-person narrative that lacks valid analysis. This explicit subjectivity is interesting, especially when it comes to researching topics that are related to perception and experience such as walking. Planners should experience the places they are planning first-hand because this provides different types of information that is not accessible through second-hand descriptions or computer-generated environments. Incorporating this subjectivity explicitly would be beneficial. However, I can see how within the planning profession it could be precisely for this reason that people might be skeptical of using this method at a large scale. Of course, feasibility and lack of resources might be two other likely reasons to dismiss autoethnography or ethnography more generally.

Ethnographic methods can be invaluable to the work of planning because they support participatory processes that are already widespread within the profession. These methods do not need to be applied to enormous samples or executed over substantial periods of time. Of course, "pure" ethnography would demand the full immersion into the context in question over months or even years at a time. However, it is still incredibly beneficial to conduct ethnography and autoethnography with small samples over short periods of time. I view the integration of ethnography or autoethnographic methods in the planning process as supplementary and supportive rather than as the central guiding method in the process.

There are many ways in which ethnography and autoethnography could benefit the planning theory and practice. The methods involved would especially be helpful in generating information related to the nuanced embodied experience of place, as discussed in relation to walking. Although these qualitative methods are seen as resource and time intensive, small sample sizes and group exercises could be implemented. Ultimately, ethnography's role in the planning discipline should be supportive rather than dominant. As the participatory process can sometimes be performative, it will be essential to use ethnography as a replacement for other methods rather than simply adding it to the current toolbox of participatory methods. The context of the project should always be taken into consideration as not all planning processes will require a qualitative method such as ethnography. Similarly, the context should instruct when ethnography takes place within the process. For some projects it may be helpful to implement it at the beginning, others even after the interventions have been completed. Fundamental to the ethnographic approach

is to be subjective and to incorporate positionality, and so this should always be considered when employing related methods. Because of its subjective nature, ethnography ultimately requires the researcher to perceive situations through an empathetic and involved lens which I see as a major advantage for the planning discipline.

ON (AUTO)ETHNOGRAPHY IN URBAN PLANNING

Part of the aim of this study was to carry out an autoethnographic exercise to help evaluate how qualitative methods might benefit urban planning and how it could potentially be implemented. The participatory process of guiding participants through self-guided walks and autoethnographic note taking led to a few insights related to how methods such as those employed in this study could be applied more broadly in planning. Because of the small nonn-representative sample of participants, these insights are meant to be starting points for further discussion and research that goes beyond the scope of this project. Throughout the interviews with participants after they had completed their walks, it became clear that all participants had joined the study because they were interested in the topic of walking; all of them are habitual walkers. Most of the participants also self-identified as people who are generally involved in their local communities and so perhaps more likely to engage in this type of exercise. It will be important to consider how to engage a broader variety of participants and how to effectively maintain participation. Those who were interviewed found the exercise enjoyable and several participants mentioned that the open-ended nature of the exercise and that they could complete it on their own time rather than going to a conventional community consultation where a participant must go to a specific place at a certain time. One participant, who works in social and community mediation, discussed how she liked these qualitative methods and could see the potential benefit for helping planners better understand the community in question. For her, a big issue in community consultation is that there is a large gap between the expert and the community member; autoethnographic methods might help planners understand how to reach out to residents and go towards them rather than expecting them to come forward and attend consultations.

How then could ethnographic or autoethnographic methods be integrated into urban planning? One of the first steps in incorporating the use of these types of qualitative methods into the discipline is considering how to train urban planners for this type of work. There are two ways that this could be accomplished: through introducing training in the accredited educational programs which urban planners must complete to be adequately

qualified and through a professional development workshop. Both options are compatible and complementary with the competencies that are listed as part of the *Professional Standards Board for the Planning Profession in Canada*. Outlined below is how ethnographic methods could be integrated into urban planning programs and a professional development workshop.

Below is a chart that is featured on the *Professional Standards Board for the Planning Profession in Canada* website. The *Professional Standards Board for the Planning Profession in Canada* oversees the evaluation of urban planning degrees offered at Canadian Universities to determine whether they are providing adequate education and competencies for students to become planning professionals. This chart outlines the competencies that

Functional Competencies					
Human Settlements	History & Principles of Planning	Government and Law	Issues in Planning and Policy-Making	Processes of Planning and Policy-Making	Plan and Policy Implementation
Forms, scales and settings of human settlements	History of planning in Canada and other countries	Political and institutional frameworks of planning	Environmental, social and economic sustainability	Visioning, goal-setting and problem-framing	Regulatory tools
Processes and factors of change in human settlements	Planning theories, principles and practices	Planning laws	Equity, diversity and inclusiveness	Information gathering and analysis	Fiscal/financial tools
	Planning ethics		Public finance and economics	Public consultation and deliberation	Design and management of public projects
	New developments in planning		Land use, design and infrastructure		Monitoring and evaluation
Enabling Competencies					
Critical and Creative Thinking	Social Interaction and Leadership	Communication		Professionalism	
Gathering and analysing quantitative and qualitative data	Mediation, facilitation, negotiation, and conflict resolution	Written communication		Managing complexity, uncertainty and change	
Identifying patterns and trends	Inclusion of diverse people and values	Oral communication		Learning from practice	
Thinking at various geographic scales	Team-work and team-building	Graphic communication		Handling ethical dilemmas	
Designing scenarios and plans	Relations to bosses, officials and the public	Use of information technology			

Throughout an urban planning degree, students will learn both quantitative and qualitative methods. Of course, adding ethnographic training would help bolster research competencies under the “Critical and Creative Thinking” category but it can also support many of the other skills planners must learn. As I have argued throughout this text, ethnographic methods could support the participatory process and the inclusion of various perspectives and so strengthen competencies related to “Social Interaction and Leadership”. Ultimately utilizing qualitative methods such as ethnography allows an individual to develop a way of understanding and reflexivity. At its core, ethnography is a sort of lens that seeks to provide a subjective understanding of personal perspectives and experiences. This type of method will be more useful in some research contexts than others, but overall, it is vital for planners to gain insight in more human-scaled, or soft, methods. Not only is this advantageous for research purposes but also as a way to gain competencies that lead to a more empathetic understanding, something that is necessary when planning for people and even more important if considering designing softer cities.

In addition to being included in urban planning university programs, training in ethnographic methods related to walking could be given in the context of a professional development workshop. The workshop could focus on strengthening “Enabling Competencies” relevant to the urban planning discipline, more specifically those related to “Critical and Creative Thinking” and “Professionalism”. It would include two empirical exercises, a reading compendium, and a plenary discussion with a facilitator and all participants.

The empirical exercises will be given to participants prior to any of the readings and could be completed prior to the workshop. In participating in these exercises, individuals will be further developing their skills in “Enabling Competencies” such as “gathering and analysing quantitative and qualitative data”, “identifying patterns and trends”, and “thinking at various geographic scales.” Participants will be divided into two groups, with each group only completing one of the exercises. All participants will be working with the same site and walking route, which should be easily accessible to them. One group will be asked to examine the site and pedestrian route without visiting the site, only relying on desk research, statistics, and computer-generated information such as Google Street View. The second group will be asked to perform an autoethnographic exercise like the one asked of the participants of this study. Instructions on notetaking might include something such those in the box to the right.

Both groups will be asked to consider the site and route with the task of considering how to improve the walking experience in relation to intriguing the senses and enhancing exploratory

Before heading out on your first walk, please answer the following questions and record your answers in a notebook or on a word-processing document where you’ll be keeping track of your observations. Your answers to these questions don’t have to be long; this is just a warmup exercise for you to start reflecting on how you engage with your environment and to better understand your perspectives as a participant in this project.

- 1. Write a little bit about who you are and your relationship to walking. For example, what you do for a living, if you live in the area in question, if you walk often and whether you mainly walk to get from one place to another or if it is for fun or for exercise (or all three). Include whatever you find is relevant for us to know about how you might see the world and your everyday surroundings.**
- 2. How familiar are you with the area in question?**

Take notes, including:

- The route and approximate length of time**
- Your reasons for choosing routes or paths**
- Remarks on what brings you joy**
- Remarks on what makes you uncomfortable**

Include yourself and your point of view in your notes, don’t be shy in incorporating your subjective perspective.

connections. This part of the workshop will bolster abilities to “design scenarios and plans” as participants are proposing design interventions for the site and route in question. After having completed the exercises all the participants would be provided with the reading compendium. The readings assigned would include the following:

Brown, K. M. (2017). The haptic pleasures of ground-feel : The role of textured terrain in motivating regular exercise. *Health & Place*, 46, 307–314.

Chang, H. (2016). Excerpts from *Autoethnography as method*. London : Routledge.

- Ch. 1, Culture: A Web of Self and Others (pp. 15–31)
- Ch. 2, Self-Narratives (pp. 31–43)
- Ch. 3, Autoethnography (pp. 43–59)

Cronon, W. (1996). The trouble with wilderness ; or, getting back to the wrong nature. In W. Cronon (Ed.), *Uncommon ground : rethinking the human place in nature* (pp. 69–90). New York : Norton.

de Certeau, M. (2011 [1980]). Excerpts from *The practice of everyday life* (S. Rendall, Trans.). Berkeley : University of California Press.

- Walking in the city (pp. 91–110)
- Spatial stories (pp. 115–130)

Forsyth, A. (2015). What is a walkable place ? The walkability debate in urban design. *Urban Design International*, 20(4), 274–292.

Gehl, J. (2006). Life, spaces, buildings—and in said order, please. In M. Moor & J. Rowland (Eds.), *Urban design futures* (pp. 70–75). London : Routledge.

Hajer, M. A., & Reijndorp, A. (2001). Excerpts from *In search of new public domain : analysis and strategy*. Rotterdam : NAI Publishers.

Jensen, W. A., Stump, T. K., Brown, B. B., Werner, C. M., & Smith, K. R. (2017). Walkability, complete streets, and gender : Who benefits most ? *Health & Place*, 48, 80–89.

Lavadinho, S. (2008). The pedestrian as urban actor. In G. Borasi & M. Zardini (Eds.), *Actions : what you can do with the city* (pp. 28–36). Montréal / Amsterdam : Canadian Centre for Architecture / Uitgeverij SUN.

Tversky, B. (2003). Structures of mental spaces : How people think about space. *Environment & Behavior*, 35(1), 66–80.

Van Praagh, S. (2010). Sharing the sidewalk. *Canadian Diversity*, 8(3), 6–9.

Wunderlich, F. M. (2008). Walking and rhythmicity : sensing urban space. *Journal of Urban Design*, 13(1), 125–139.

After having completed the exercises and readings, all participants will meet for the workshop to discuss their reflections, findings, and suggestions. The goal will be to compare the processes of the empirical exercises and the suggestions that both groups have identified for the site and route in relation to the sensory experience of walking. Having one group rely on quantitative methods and the other on qualitative methods will illustrate how they are both valuable in different ways. During this last part of the workshop, the facilitator will outline how best to use ethnographic methods in relation to the reading compendium. This last step of the workshop will encourage the refinement of “Professionalism” skills such as “managing complexity, uncertainty and change”, and “learning from practice.” As professionals, urban planners must undergo professional development and a workshop such as this one is pertinent for the current paradigm where active transport, and therefore walking and walkability, is at the forefront of many discussions.

CONCLUSION

This study explores the importance of walking for urban design and planning in ways that complement the functionalism of active transport. Throughout the participatory process of the study and this analytical discussion I have considered how walking, and the sensorial and aesthetic in general terms, can help planners to appreciate place and realise the right to a soft city. Framing walking as phenomenological leads to the consideration of how this translates in urban environments both materially and socially. Along with theoretical discourse, the autoethnographic recordings and interviews were used to frame walking as a sensory practice and the concept of softness. (Auto)ethnographic methods were discussed in relation to the participatory process of this study and in relation to the potential contribution to urban planning, especially in regard to how they could be integrated in accredited planning degrees and a professional development workshop.

Based on the discussion above, thinking of walking as a sensory practice can help to understand it as a form of mobility that has material and social implications which urban planners should take into consideration. With this framing, walking can then be related to different types of experiences in certain environments. It then becomes possible to think of ways to make walking more interesting or to highlight what brings people moments of joy when moving through their urban environments. Many participants mentioned, both in their notes and in interviews, that seasonality plays a big role in the experience of walking. Since this study was conducted during the winter where there were several snowstorms and icy conditions, it was stated by many participants that safety needs to be accounted for before improving the experience of walking in other ways. Another material aspect of walking that was highlighted throughout the participatory material was the creation of connections through exploratory means such as art. As discussed, the material and social aspects of walking in the city are closely related when considering walking as a sensory practice. Just as the target population needs to be considered in connection with the material characteristics of urban spaces, the social and political meanings associated with the embodied occupation of space also needs to be considered. Playing with seasonality and the senses allows planners to encourage walking beyond functional purposes. This is important because walking is a way of enacting belonging and “making the city” in some ways (Lavadinho, 2008).

To encourage walking as sensory practice is to make the city softer. The concept of the soft city takes into account how to make the everyday meaningful. In the discussion above, softness is linked to both walking and to (auto)ethnographic methods within the context of urban planning. There are two major ways to encourage softness in relation to walking as stated by Sim (2019) and echoed by the participants in this study: having

good pedestrian infrastructure, and connecting people with their environment and each other in potentially meaningful ways. These ideas move beyond the explicitly functional approach of transport planning and challenges the discourse around TODs and instead promotes NODs (Sim, 2019). Specifically within the context of Montreal, the need for safe walking infrastructure in winter is one aspect of promoting softness in the sense of having quality infrastructure. While playing with seasonality, recognizing the senses and the possibility to connect spaces through aspects of joy, are several other aspects of softness that relate to connecting people with their everyday environments, both materially and socially.

I have argued that the appreciation of the sensory aspects of walking are easier to uncover using ethnographic methods and how this is beneficial for when designing for haptic pleasures and generally promoting a soft city framework. Ethnographic methods are also beneficial for participatory processes such as the one conducted throughout this project. Reflection on the processes of this study shows how the type of asynchronous participation was perceived positively among the participants and thought to be potentially valuable to community consultations. Not only are these methods beneficial for this type of participatory research, but I have outlined how they could complement accredited educational planning programs, including their integration into a professional development workshop, and the overall advantages of learning ethnographic skills. Generally, being equipped with ethnographic skills urban planners will learn a more empathetic, context-based, and empirical approach to their work which could be especially advantageous for participatory processes.

The discussion generated through this research project aims to move away from the dominant transport view of walking and to add to the phenomenological discourse around walking. Through framing walking as a sensory practice, it becomes clear that it is important to include subjective understandings of the experience of walking through different environments. This is important because perceptions of environments are so personal but also because quantitative data cannot provide information about the experience of being in certain urban spaces or embodied knowledge. One way for urban planning professionals to ensure that redesigns or interventions that address mobility and connectivity are planned in a way that will benefit users, increase quality of life, and ultimately realize rights to a soft city is to include more qualitative methods in transport planning.

**THANK YOU FOR
WALKING**

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I walked

To find new versions of softness

Softness in the city

A city as soft as a body

the warmth

the crunchiness

the stoney bits on the path

Stones smell good when you cuddle them Aldous says

stones are soft

Textures are good

to be good is to be soft

I want to make my city softer

A city as soft as a body