Walking Tour

A Walking Tour is a participatory method in which residents, planning professionals, public authorities, and policymakers explore a specific area together on site. During the walk, participants visit selected locations, identify challenges, and discuss possible improvements directly where they occur.
The method is particularly well suited to topics with a strong spatial dimension, as places can be experienced and assessed collectively. Walking through an area together often reveals practical insights and everyday perspectives that may not emerge in traditional meeting formats.

Participation Depth	Participate
Project Phase	Onboarding
Goals	Understanding & Gathering Perspectives
Format	Analogue
Duration	1 - 3 Hours
Target Group	Directly Affected, Interested Public, Hard-to-Reach Groups
Group Size	Small Group up to 15, Medium Group up to 30
Characteristics	Creative, Activating

GOAL OF THE METHOD

The goal of a Walking Tour is to explore places together on site and make different perspectives on challenges, opportunities, and patterns of use visible. Through direct observation and discussion, participants generate practical insights, experiences, and ideas that can inform future planning and participation processes. At the same time, the method strengthens dialogue between residents, planning professionals, and public authorities.

PROCEDURE

Preparation

1. Define the objective and topic
Begin by considering:

- Which locations should be visited?
- What will the route be?
- Where are suitable meeting points?
- Which questions should guide the discussions?
- What should participants learn or identify during the walk?

Examples include:

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"How safe are local school routes?"

- "Where are places to sit or spend time missing?"
- "Which barriers exist in the neighbourhood?"

2. Plan the route
Design a route that includes:

- relevant locations
- easily accessible paths
- sufficient space for group discussions

Important:

The route should be as accessible as possible and not overly long.

It is helpful to:

- include several short stops
- select locations that represent different perspectives and conditions

3. Involve planning professionals
Depending on the topic, invite experts such as:

- urban planners
- landscape architects
- transport planners
- social workers

They can:

- explain relevant background information
- answer participants' questions
- provide additional context

Important:

Professional expertise should support the discussion without dominating it.

4. Identify the target groups
Consider:

- Who uses the area?
- Who is most directly affected?
- Which perspectives are often underrepresented?

Walking Tours can be organised specifically for groups such as:

- young people
- older adults
- families
- people with limited mobility

Adapt the route, language, and schedule to meet the needs of the participants.

5. Promote the event
Advertise the Walking Tour through:

- public notices
- social media
- local organisations
- community groups

Important:

Clearly communicate:

- the meeting point
- the duration
- the route
- the purpose of the Walking Tour

Execution

1. Welcome and introduction
At the beginning of the event, the facilitation team explains:

- the purpose of the Walking Tour
- the programme
- the route
- the schedule
- the discussion guidelines

For smaller groups, a brief round of introductions can also be helpful.

2. Walk through the area together
The group follows the planned route, stopping at selected locations.

At each stop, participants discuss:

- existing challenges
- personal experiences
- wishes and ideas
- opportunities for improvement

Helpful guiding questions include:

- "How do you experience this place?"
- "What problems do you notice here?"
- "What would you like to see changed?"

3. On-site discussion
Participants exchange their perspectives directly at each location.

This helps reveal:

- different perceptions of the same place
- everyday experiences
- spatial relationships and local context

Important:

Ensure that everyone has sufficient opportunity to contribute their experiences.

4. Document observations
Throughout the Walking Tour, record:

- observations
- ideas
- concerns
- conflicts

Supporting documentation may include:

- written notes
- photographs
- marked maps
- sketches

Photographs of problem areas or successful examples are particularly valuable for later analysis.

5. Closing discussion
At the end of the tour, participants come together for a final reflection.

Together they review:

- the key findings
- frequently mentioned topics
- remaining questions
- possible next steps

The closing discussion can take place outdoors or in a nearby indoor venue.

Evaluation

1. Document the results
Prepare a clear summary of:

- discussions
- observations
- ideas
- photographs
- annotated maps

Important:

The spatial context of the findings should remain clearly visible in the documentation.

2. Publish the results
The findings may be:

- shared with participants
- published online
- incorporated into future planning processes

This promotes transparency and keeps participants informed.

3. Use the results
The collected observations can be used to:

- develop concrete measures
- inform future participation activities
- prioritise identified challenges
- support planning processes

Source: https://mobilitaetsplanung-hessen.de/methodenkoffer-partizipative-planung/

WHEN USEFUL?

- addressing spatial planning issues
- places should be experienced and assessed together
- discussing topics such as mobility, accessibility, or the quality of public spaces
- gathering everyday experiences from local residents

- introducing planning or participation processes
- discussing challenges directly on site

WHEN NOT USEFUL?

- an accessible route cannot be provided
- weather conditions or outdoor circumstances are unsuitable
- confidential or highly sensitive discussions are the primary objective

TIPS

- Allow sufficient time for discussion at each stop.
- Fewer stops with more in-depth conversations are often more effective than covering a long route.
- Choose a route that is safe and accessible for all participants.
- Photographs are extremely helpful for documenting discussions and locations afterwards.
- Participants' everyday experiences are often the most valuable source of local knowledge.

NOT SUITABLE FOR

- purely theoretical topics
- very large groups
- issues without a spatial dimension
- events that require a high level of confidentiality or private discussion

View online: https://methoden.urbankit.de/en/methods/spaziergang