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<https://doi.org/10.47862/apples.146719>

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## Discussion Note

### Walking and mapping methodologies: creative explorations of people's relationships with space

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Tim Herrick, University of Sheffield

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*This discussion note reflects on the experiences of collaborating to produce a hybrid workshop on walking and mapping methodologies (Bradley & Herrick, 2023) building on research, scholarship and teaching in this area that we, the authors, have been undertaking over the past decade. The workshop explored how walking and mapping might be used in educational settings, in particular multilingual and transnational environments in higher education institutions. It brought together multidisciplinary perspectives on 'space', drawing on creative inquiry and applied linguistics, linguistic landscapes, and social geography. Our workshop was aimed at anyone with interests in creative approaches to research, particularly those engaged with participants' lives and interactions within, across, and through space; and we intended to examine the challenges and opportunities of these approaches, including applications in their own research, scholarship and teaching. Here we outline the processes and thinking behind them, in the form of a two-part dialogue. We raise questions for researchers and educators about boundaries between research, teaching and scholarship, in addition to how walking and mapping methodologies might be critically engaged with in higher education.*

**Keywords:** walking, creative inquiry, multilingualism, education, linguistic landscapes, schoolsapes

## 1 Introduction

This discussion note reflects on our experiences of collaborating to explore and produce a hybrid international workshop on walking and mapping methodologies (Jessica Bradley & Tim Herrick, working with Tamás Péter Szabó, 2023) building on research, scholarship and teaching in this area that we, the three authors, have been undertaking over the past decade. The workshop explored how walking and mapping might be used in *educational settings*, in particular multilingual and transnational environments in higher education institutions. It brought together multidisciplinary perspectives on 'space', drawing on creative

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eISSN: 1457-9863

Publisher: University of Jyväskylä, Language Campus

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<https://apples.journal.fi>

<https://doi.org/10.47862/apples.146719>

inquiry and applied linguistics, linguistic landscapes, and social geography. Our workshop was aimed at anyone with interests in creative approaches to research, particularly those engaged with participants' lives and interactions within, across, and through-space; and we intended to examine the challenges and opportunities of these approaches, including applications in their own research, scholarship and teaching.

We developed and delivered the workshop for the FORTHEM Campus course 'Approaches to Multilingualism' at University of Jyväskylä which was led by contributors to the Multilingualism in School and Higher Education Lab, coordinated by co-author Tamás Péter Szabó and who was invited to contribute to this discussion note by Jessica and Tim. Our own guiding questions for the workshop as scholarly dialogue were: 'what can we learn from each other about understanding different people's experiences of space?' (Tim) and 'what do walking methodologies bring to our understanding of people's everyday lives?' (Jessica).

In this discussion note we foreground two core elements of our work together. First, we outline the workshop and our approach, considering multidisciplinary walking and mapping as a methodological approach, drawing out alignments across disciplines and explaining how we brought these diverse practices together in our workshop. Second, and in a more reflexive mode, we take a *meta* lens to our work, exploring the experience of breaking down some of the perceived institutional barriers between research, scholarship of learning and teaching and teaching practice. Jessica and Tim are based in the UK, meaning particular discourses are prominent in terms of how academic work can be categorised, hence the reflection on these boundaries. However, many of these tensions are also present in other national contexts, allowing greater understanding of the complexity of contexts in which academics carry out their work (e.g. Ennser-Kananen & Saarinen, 2023).

Our motivation for writing this discussion note together is to invite responses from readers, to understand more about how colleagues across disciplines engage with mapping and walking in their research, and how we might collaborate to develop research practices. We also hope to explore what kinds of activities we might build from this initial conversation. The structure is as follows. First, Jessica and Tim describe and reflect on our workshop, and how we wove together different threads of activity, and second, we invite Tamás, who collaborated with us on the planning and delivery, to offer his reflections on walking methodologies and creative inquiry, including in dialogue with his own research practice.

## 2 Pre-session activities

As we prepared our workshop, we were aware it would need to be delivered in a hybrid manner – to participants on campus at the University of Jyväskylä and participants joining online. Jessica attended in person, alongside Tamás, while Tim presented from the UK. Over 100 people registered for the event, from 58 different institutions internationally from all continents. Our pre-session activities included creating a world map on the digital platform Padlet (and we thank our University of Sheffield School of Education departmental learning technologist, Hadrian Cawthorne, for his work in developing this). Participants were invited to gather images or take photographs which related to

multilingualism in their local environment and create a collage to post onto the map with the location of the photographs roughly marked. 23 participants engaged with the task from eight different countries, including Japan, Poland, Sweden and Norway. We also suggested three advance readings, including a walking and mapping study of a UK university (Cox et al., 2022), walking research in Manchester (Stevenson, 2017) and an introduction to creative inquiry in applied linguistics (Bradley & Harvey, 2019). All of this was intended to ground our work in a shared understanding, thereby allowing us to make as much collective progress as possible within the session.

### 3 Creative approaches to research

We started by contextualising walking and mapping approaches within the broader orientation towards creative methods, in particular creative inquiry and collage-making. Creative inquiry in Applied Linguistics was one point of departure, understood following Bradley and Harvey (2019, p.93) as:

- research with the arts (i.e., what can working with the arts tell us about applied linguistics?);
- research into the arts (i.e., what can working with applied linguistics tell us about the arts?); and
- research through the arts (i.e., using arts-based and arts-informed methods as theory and methodology).

Creative inquiry, as an attempt to define and name research which crosses disciplinary boundaries, is both tentative and critical (Harvey & Bradley, 2023, p. 359), and here we tentatively and critically position the methodologies we explore today as ‘research through the arts’, exploring people’s everyday experiences and engagements with language and space. We recognise the diversity and complexity approaches in creative or artistic orientations to social sciences research. In applied linguistics, special issues in this area include ‘kieli ja taide’ (Pöyhönen & Paulasto, (Eds), 2020) and ‘Beyond and besides language: Intercultural communication and creative practice’ (Harvey et al. (Eds), 2022), with recent books also exploring these intersections (Ainsworth et al., 2023 and Lytra et al., 2022).

Creative inquiry includes participatory processes of art making, such as Pöyhönen and colleagues’ collaborative photography project with unaccompanied minors living in Swedish Ostrobothnia (2020), through which young people created images which reflected their experiences of being in a new place, in this case Swedish-language-dominant Western Finland. This led us to our second point of departure of collage as a creative method.

Collage in social sciences research is understood as making tacit ideas explicit and enabling new, or different, insights (Butler-Kisber & Poldma, 2010). In applied linguistics, Prasad (2018) explored children’s experiences of plurilingualism in Canada and France, drawing on collage for accessing and analysing social representations of language. She herself trained as a creative practitioner in order to undertake the work, acknowledging the complexity of interdisciplinary methods, in addition to a personal desire to understand histories and principles of this approach. In their collaborative arts-based project exploring

young people's experiences of multilingualism in public space, Bradley (co-author of this note) & artist-researcher Atkinson drew on collaborative collage as a 'sensory map' of young people's experiences of walking and mapping, visualising language as one lens through which we experience space.

### 3.1. *From collage to walking: interdisciplinary perspectives*

Alignments and synergies between participatory arts-based research, collage and walking are therefore ripe for exploring. In geography, walking research, or more specifically 'talking while walking' is described by Anderson (2004) as generating a 'collage of collaborative knowledge' (p. 254). In linguistic landscapes, or more specifically schoolscape research that focuses on educational institutions (Brown, 2005), Szabó and Troyer (2017) draw on the 'tourist guide' approach to describe 'situated practices of embodied conduct and verbal interaction [that] blur the boundaries between observation and observers' (p. 306). From a sociological migration studies perspective, O'Neill & colleagues (2017) write about 'walking, wellbeing and community' in a participatory arts research project with women seeking asylum in the north of England, while in intercultural communication Badwan and Hall (2020) explore a 'walk-along' Manchester's curry mile, thinking about 'places, emotions and materiality'. Materials related to walking have been created by researchers and creative practitioners in the Centre for Cultural Value at the University of Leeds (Hall and Pitches, 2023) demonstrating the applied possibilities for walking and mapping, in this case in arts evaluation. Our collaborative project brought different elements together in terms of walking as a way to explore landscapes in a multisensory and embodied manner and in terms of mapping as visual and multimodal representation and contextualisation of the landscapes explored.

## 4 Spatial methodologies

The wide-spread, diverse, and often transdisciplinary, take-up of walking and mapping in research, frequently linked to creative orientations to social sciences research and linguistics, leads to the question of why space matters in learning experiences. One answer is provided by Nespor (1994), who argues that "'knowing' (although it ultimately takes the form of decontextualized, 'internal' essences) is the product of activities contextualized in space and time" (Nespor 1994, p. 8). Nespor's work marks a spatial turn in thinking about higher education and draws on data from ethnographic accounts of university study in Physics and Management in different institutions. Individuals construct knowledge within specific conditions, some of which are obvious *within* the context, and some of which go *beyond*, linking individuals with a multiplicity of other knowledge practitioners:

physicists from Berkeley are closer in space-time to their colleagues in Europe than to migrant workers in the next county, or managers in New York to their counterparts in Tokyo than the poor in the South Bronx (Nespor 1994, p. 3)

If not all individuals in the same space have the same connections with other spaces, it is clear that the same spaces can be experienced differently by different individuals. In the context of learning spaces, this is explored by Andersson, Sadgrove, and Valentine (2012), who looked at different students' experiences of the same university campus. Their work is helpfully complemented by McGregor's 2003 insight that in a school context, each interaction with space changes its meaning: "The spatial and the social are reciprocally constructed through materially embedded practices and performances that create and maintain everyday social relations" (McGregor, 2003, p. 354). Space is made and remade through interactions, just as, through a creative inquiry lens, the significance of creative projects shifts through processes of making, reviewing, and sharing.

We also do not stay still in space. In illustration of this point, Stevenson (2017) walked with international students through two cities in northern England, to explore how they made sense of these cities and their places within them. Research methods were closely negotiated with participants, so they followed specific routes, and ways of gathering and recording data that made particular sense to them, for example walking, filming, eating and listening. In addition, participants generated artefacts that had meaning for them, including postcards between their home and host cities. This led the lead researcher to understand walking methodologies as the displacement of knowledge (cf. Malinowski et al., 2023):

After walking at the shoulders of my participants for twelve months, learning their routes, hearing their stories, I underwent a process of refamiliarization with a city I had lived in for twenty years [...] in choosing to walk the routes of others and experience my city through their senses, I willfully staged my own reorientation in a city I thought I knew. I came to know it in unfamiliar ways. The new sensations and routes I encountered had me reevaluating my assumptions about the sensory landscape of the city (Stevenson, 2017, p. 568)

## **5 Walking, mapping and space in three areas of our own academic practice**

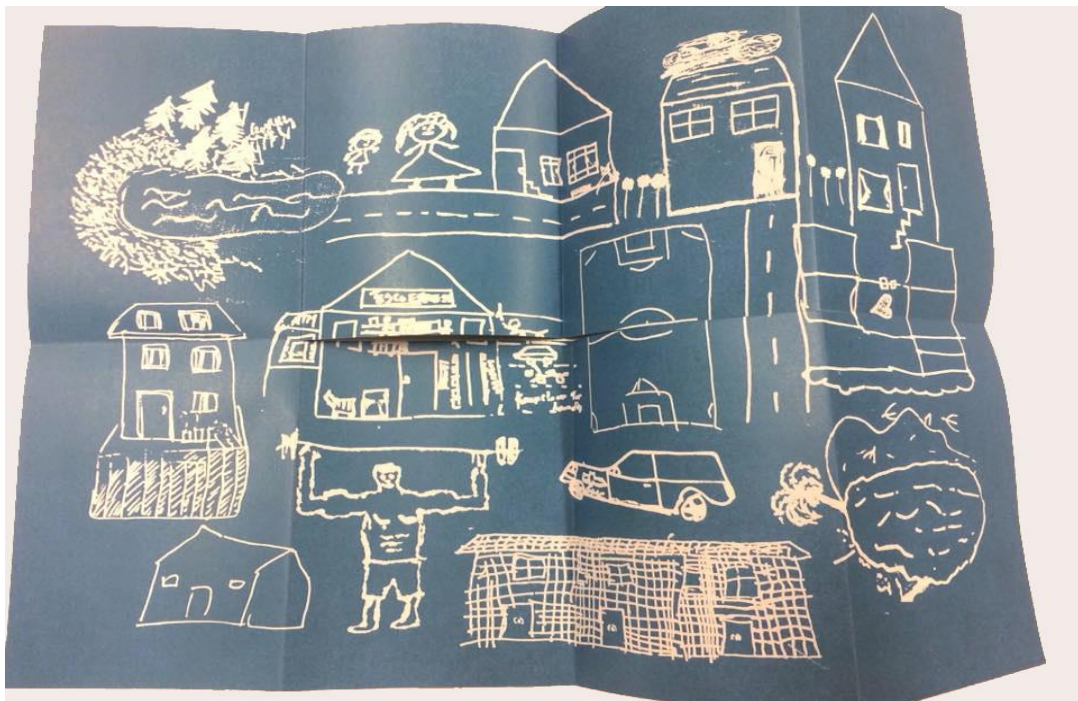
After having outlined methodological orientations in terms of creative approaches to research and an introduction to spatial methodologies, we then considered some of our own academic work which has engaged with space, walking and mapping in diverse contexts.

### *5.1. Walking and mapping in research at intersections of language and the arts*

Jessica's doctoral research in dynamic multilingualism in street arts performance and production (Bradley, 2017; 2018; 2021; Bradley & Moore, 2018), which also encompassed street arts education, led her to interests in both people's understandings and engagements of space and in creative research methods. She undertook linguistic (Copland & Creese, 2015) and visual ethnographic research (Pink, 2021) with street theatre performers who were collaborating across companies and countries to create a place-based production to be toured across

towns and cities for a street arts festival. Her original questions related very closely to language: ‘how do street artists use translanguaging across, through and beyond language, to work together across creative production processes?’ But as she continued to spend time with the performers, she observed how important understanding of public space was to their practice, with many conceptualising their work as *creating* and *disrupting* space. She started to become interested in how street artists negotiate public space through creative practice, how they understand people’s experiences of public space, and how they draw on these understandings in creative production. This led to an expansion of my original logos-focused research questions, towards ‘what is the role of ‘language’ in a practice that is largely non-verbal?’.

Another research project with the same creative practitioners, this time based in Inner-East Leeds and in collaboration with a refugee NGO (Simpson & Bradley, 2023) explored intersections of creative practice and ESOL, asking ‘what does it mean to belong?’ in a new place, with a focus on experiences of space in the everyday. One activity early on in the programme led by an Applied Theatre practitioner, McKay, involved collective creative mapping of everyday life in the neighbourhood, using large pieces of paper taped to the floor and involving walking, sketching and mapping. The large-scale map was then reworked into a digital artwork by one of the collaborating artist-researchers, forming the basis for a project zine as an output from the research, a representation of collective movement through public space that also captured aspects of sharing that experience (McKay, 2019).



**Figure 1.** Visual representation of map activity led by Sam McKay, produced by Louise Atkinson (2017)

## 5.2. Walking and mapping to explore the campus learning landscape



Tim worked with colleagues in multiple disciplines to explore how students construct and utilise the campus as a “learning landscape” (Cox et al., 2022). They conducted walking interviews, in dyads, between a researcher and a research participant, (as in Stevenson, 2017), in addition to peer-group walking tours with shared prompts, asking “in what ways does this space support learning?” Participants were invited to draw maps, showing their connections between spaces (cf. McGregor, 2003). These activities were followed up by investigations of the distinctive experiences of students from minoritised ethnicities, sexualities, and gender identities. The project findings included helpful insights about student experiences of the campus, including that they value being alongside each other, even when they are working independently. The study shows that how we design spaces is only half the puzzle; the other half is how students *use* them, contributing to discussions on post-occupancy studies and their implementation in architecture and the need for more systematic approaches (e.g. Rosén Rasmussen, 2021).

### 5.3. *Walking and mapping in teaching*

These projects have informed teaching activities, including work we jointly carried out with doctoral researchers on an Educational Doctorate (EdD) programme at the University at which we both work. The context was a module focused on research methods in education, which forms a transition between the ‘taught’ component of the programme, and the doctoral study itself. The EdD is a distance learning programme, meaning that students have varying relationships with the University campus and the city itself. Materials were prepared by Tim, and included a “[walksheet](#)” – a series of prompts for a campus walk, but there was a high degree of autonomy as to what groups did. After the activity, the students shared photographs and artefacts and discussed what they had found, and the experiences of walking within a research framing. Every group returned with *something*, and all with *different things*. The activity and discussion allowed for sharing of a diverse range of knowledges, with participants and also with passers-by. It also prompted wider discussions about research methods, ethics, and Education as a discipline.

## 6 Workshop activities

Having set out the theoretical research context and how we have operationalised this in our own research, scholarship and teaching in this area, we then invited participants to a group activity, led by our two guiding questions:

- 1) what do walking methodologies bring to our understanding of people’s everyday lives?;
- 2) what can we learn from each other about understanding different people’s experiences of space?

Participants were asked to develop a small-scale research project that would adopt, bring in, or foster multilingual teaching and learning, to better represent



or engage with the changing demographics of a nominal region. We asked them to include something about participants, use of creative approaches, inclusion of walking and map making, and a rationale for the approach.

The hybrid nature of the workshop meant that we had one group of six participants present in a classroom, and two online groups in Zoom break-out rooms. As we had experienced with the doctoral teaching, participants wanted to explore different approaches to researching and how they might bring in creative, walking and mapping into their own research. Project ideas include walking tours through the home to explore identities and multilingualism, as well as the challenges and limitations of walking methodologies in rural research contexts, where distances might be longer than in city-based research. This led to discussion of travelling methodologies in general, for example car journeys and public transport. There was also a helpful strand of discussion around the practicalities of this form of research, which addressed our objective of sharing practices as a form of support for academic work in international contexts.

## **7 Reflections and next steps**

The workshop enabled us to build a space for the creative exploration of diverse research approaches, to share ideas and learn from each other. It also foregrounded the blurred borders between research, scholarship and teaching, often defined as discrete activities, however all of which entangle and co-inform. We invited participants to feedback on the workshop and suggest further areas for collaboration, and a suggestion included a practical workshop on the logistics of research and data generation while walking or travelling.

For Jessica the experience of preparing and delivering the workshop enabled her to think critically about walking and methodologies and creative research approaches, learning from my colleague whose disciplinary experience is different to mine. As a researcher who has interests in linguistic and semiotic landscapes, and in particular creative engagements with language in public space, it was generative to explore this within a sociolinguistic context, with scholars interested broadly in multilingualism. For Tim there was richness in the initial collaboration with Jessica, bringing theoretical concepts to bear on concepts that had emerged relatively organically; and joy in sharing some of this thinking with participants from across the world. It's striking that each of the forms of inquiry we adopted within the workshop – collaging and mapping – focus on drawing together disparate elements to make new meaning from existing materials. The educational experience itself was somewhat like that, creating the space for colleagues in different locations and with different histories to share experiences, looking less for coherence and more for potential lines to follow in future activities.

## **8 Walking and mapping: a response from a schoolsapes perspective**

I, Tamás, am grateful to Jessica and Tim for inviting me to this discussion. It is relatively rare to have the opportunity to reflect on one's own practices in a publication which gives wider freedom than standard scholarly papers.

I depart from my co-authors' two questions that were (1) what do walking methodologies bring to our understanding of people's everyday lives? and (2) what can we learn from each other about understanding different people's experiences of space? Specifically interested in schoolscape studies, I rephrase these questions to ponder (1) what do walking and mapping the landscape bring to our understanding of learning and teaching and (2) what we can learn from each other in transnational co-creation projects on the topic.

(1) When defending my doctoral dissertation in 2011, little I realised or problematised how heavily I was socialised in a certain tradition of sociolinguistics research that valued written texts and recorded speech – even the recorded speech being represented and presented predominantly in the form of transcripts (cf. Szabó & Laihonon, 2024). Conducting classroom interaction research, I have been long immersed in a rich variety of educational spaces with all their features including those beyond speech: the visual signs on display, the various artefacts used in class and outside, the outdoors and indoors temperature during the visit, the touch and feel of the bench in the classroom or the sofa in the library, the smell and taste of food in the canteen – and many more. Although I sometimes long travelled to the sites, got lost in unknown or less known towns and villages, followed teachers and pupils from class to recess and back or had strolls around my accommodation site, the data I was meant to “collect” (or, rather, generate) were the audio recordings, field notes, school documents and occasional surveys – everything in a textual modality or ready to be transferred into a text. The rich multimodal, multisensory, and embodied learning I experienced on the research site was only briefly reported back in writing, and only when directly related to verbal interaction, for example, when a teacher pointed to the blackboard and I needed to make this clear in the transcript. With only the recordings and field notes at my disposal, a lot of details got lost – but still there was enough to analyse from the combined conversation analytical and discourse analytical perspective I chose. This logocentric approach, how useful it ever is, leaves out countless researcher experiences that might be even more influential or formative to my analysis than the classroom recordings and various texts collected and generated on site. Now that I have immersed myself into the highly multimodal, multisensory and materialist business of schoolscape research, I more and more realise how much creativity and how many revelations come to surface if we include other senses than just sight and hearing.

Looking back to my previous career preoccupied with the logocentric approach to classroom interaction and language ideology research, I realise how much my other senses drove me in the field, even though I gave little significance to that in my papers. Later, however, I allowed myself more freedom to rely on all of my senses in making sense of the learning environments I studied. For example, already with some experience in schoolscape research, I entered a new site some ten years ago, and the first sentence I wrote to my field journal was “a very good aromatic scent welcomes me”. I think this scent, which came from a candle lit in the classroom I entered, contributed to a positive, relaxed, and open state of mind that then influenced my fieldwork during its whole duration in several ways.

On the same site, I conducted walking interviews with teachers, parents and students to gain users' insights into my schoolscape analysis. Occasionally, a parent volunteered to video record one of the walking interviews, adding his external view to my understanding of what I had been doing routinely in various

schools. Based on the video, I finally understood how I as a researcher learn *from* and *in* interactions with the research participants, the built environment and my digital devices I use while walking the schoolscape together (Szabó & Troyer, 2017). My takeaway message from such encounters and their analysis would be that while co-walking and co-mapping schoolscales, the surrounding artefacts we choose for attention and the handling of devices we use for documentation shape the interaction much more than I originally assumed. While my attempt was to facilitate participatory exploratory walks in which the research participants decide on the trajectory and the topics of the walk, it turned out that in practice there was a continuous negotiation between the participants and myself as a researcher, and the handling of the camera and the voice recorder played a central role in that negotiation.

(2) Metaphorically, transnational collaboration is also a way of walking and mapping together as contributors meet at certain points of their individual professional trajectories and find out where and how they continue their explorations. Luckily, the FORTHEM Campus course Approaches to Multilingualism was already designed to enhance such encounters through a call for contributions, and I gladly accepted Jessica and Tim's proposal for the workshop. Besides the fine details of their methods and the rich local contexts of their studies, what I perhaps personally learnt the most from our co-creation process was that researchers and educators in different countries and contexts might end up being interested in similar topics and methods and come to similar results despite the differences in their theoretical backgrounds and frameworks. This reminds me of the importance of recognizing the role of the theoretical frameworks in our work; that is, that theories are tools for analysing data and making sense of the results, but in themselves they do not define the research as directly as we might assume.

Another revelation from this shared journey is that it is highly fruitful to take such marginal(ised) approaches as creative inquiry into practice. Although I myself do not (yet) use the term *creative inquiry* for my work, as a researcher of creativity in pedagogy (Bradley and Harvey, 2019; Harvey and Bradley, 2023) I see the value of improvising, opening up opportunities and changing plans in co-creation with the research participants. If that father did not volunteer to video record the walking interview, I would still have another understanding of my fieldwork practices, thinking them more participant-led than they actually are. If Jessica and Tim would not offer their walking and mapping workshop to become part of our collaborative efforts, I would miss a wider understanding of how my schoolscape research can be embedded into academic and societal context, and perhaps I would be too focused on the linguistic landscape tradition I am familiar with, instead of a more relaxed and inclusive understanding of the myriad ways of walking and mapping together, both physically and metaphorically.

## 9. Concluding thoughts

Through this writing, the three authors have continued their journeys together, finding points of intersection and parallel paths, as well as areas where divergent routes may help us more effectively reach our individual destinations. Walking does not have an obvious end-point, and neither does creative inquiry – we can

never turn the last corner or generate the final insight. So while this article also, by necessity, has to be open-ended, we can at least offer one potential point of further departure. It seems fitting for this to take the form of a critically reflexive question: if spatiality, movement through space, all elements of the environment encountered within that space are to be fit matter for linguistic study, is there anything left outside of language? We welcome other authors, walkers, and talkers exploring this and many other questions.

## Funding

FORTHM Alliance is co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the authors only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union.

## Acknowledgements

Jessica would like to thank Sari Pöyhönen for ongoing support and collaboration, including for this research visit. Tim would like to thank the group of Sheffield colleagues who got them interested in this area to start with. Jessica and Tim both thank the FORTHM Alliance for enabling this transdisciplinary conversation and Hadrian Cawthorne for the skilled ed-tech support. Kiitos.

## Disclosure statement

The authors declared no conflict of interest.

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