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# Walk-centric deliberations: Connecting space, place, and learning

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## Abstract

*This article outlines methods of practice-oriented teaching at universities integrating democracy, sustainability, and learning in adult education.. The methods highlight the potential for democratic innovation in local communities in which diverse perspectives come together to address societal challenges. With a focus on sustainability and the connection among place, space, and pedagogy it introduces 'Voice-Resonance Walks,' a deliberative method piloted in Stuttgart, Germany, for social work education. It also highlights pilot deliberations at the district (Mini-Studentlab Deliberative Walks) and cityscape (Public Transport Walks) levels in Hamburg, Germany, involving interdisciplinary student groups in lifelong learning. These examples illustrate how higher education institutions are engaging with the public sphere, with a particular focus on vulnerable groups of citizens and on fostering civic learning. They aim to equip students with the knowledge and skills to become future experts, decision-makers, and active citizens, capable of understanding the challenges facing both their local neighborhoods and diverse urban spaces.*

**Keywords:** deliberation, adult education, walk-centred method, social sustainability

## Introduction

Education is one of many components in the sustainable development process or the route towards a more sustainable society (UNESCO, 2018). The three dimensions of sustainable development (also referred to as pillars) are well known and termed the ecological (also called environmental), the social (split into social/cultural), and the

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economic dimensions. Even if the social dimension has been distinct, ever since sustainable development emerged in politics, this dimension has been more or less neglected as wider debates in general have prioritised environmental (i.e. climate change) and economic (i.e. industrial capitalism) perspectives (Davidson, 2009).

Opielka (2023, pp. 43-46) distinguishes four types of conceptions of social sustainability. A *narrow* understanding of social sustainability sees it, like mentioned above, as one of the three pillars of sustainability, with social sustainability being a kind of counterpart to economic and environmental sustainability, with the latter being the focus of efforts. In contrast, the *internal* understanding of social sustainability does not refer to the ecological dimension but focuses on the preservation of values within companies and institutions – for example, through foundations or in family businesses. According to this understanding, the ecological dimension only comes into view through the preservation of common goods and resources. The *sceptical* understanding of social sustainability is particularly devoted to the sustainability of functional economic systems, such as the financing of pension systems and the limitation of public debt under the aspect of intergenerational justice. The fourth understanding is termed the *wider* understanding of social sustainability. Here, social sustainability is understood as a social transformation project. Opielka also sees the sustainable development goals (SDGs) of the United Nations (UN) as an expression of such a wider understanding of social sustainability. In this article, we focus on the wider understanding of social sustainability.

The key question that Davidson (2009) always finds present when it is necessary to define the social dimension is ‘What type of society do we want to sustain?’ (Davidson, 2009, p. 616). In this question, he sees an underlying political potential with an urgent call for social ethics. This can still be regarded as the core question related to a wider understanding of sustainability in general, and social sustainability in particular. To this question, the following question could be added: Who wants to sustain their society, whose is the society and for whom is it to be sustained? Many of the contemporary sustainability challenges are related to the social sphere.

In 2015, the UN member states adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs. A core promise of the agenda is ‘to leave no one behind’; specifically, goal 10 focuses on reducing inequality within and between countries. Goal 4 of the 17 SDGs particularly focuses on the equal right to education for all and simultaneously calls for adult education: ‘Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all’ (UNESCO, 2018). In order to achieve such a sustainable development, the contours of future societies must be drawn as clearly as possible. This also applies to the normative foundations of sustainability. Dörre (2022, p. 203) suggests using the SDGs as a normative basis for those strategies that aim to free societies from the constraints of rapid, permanent economic growth. Therefore, re-learning will be essential, and pedagogical efforts will be needed to enable or at least accompany and support this learning (Dinkelaker, 2023, p. 47).

Against this background, we first outline the links between sustainability and adult education in the context of participatory democracy. We argue that the current methods of participation make it difficult to include marginalised groups and bring pluralistic positions into exchange. Therefore, we argue for place-based and walk-centric methods. As an example of such methods, we present participatory and deliberative course elements carried out in Germany with students in Hamburg and in Stuttgart as examples that can also be used in adult education. Finally, we discuss the results methodologically and place them in the context of the current debate on social sustainability.

## Sustainability and (adult) education

The current crisis of democracy has led to democratic innovations. Methods promoting political participation and deliberative democracy play an essential role in advancing democratic practices. This is reinforced by the current discourse on sustainability:

With the Rio Conference in the 1990s, the Local Agenda 21 strategies strengthened a new trend towards more deliberative political participation with a focus on sustainability. [...] A broader participatory space with democratic innovations as a 'deliberative turn' can be seen in several new participatory instruments in the invited and invented space. (Kersting, 2021, p. 1)

Here, the term 'invented space' is used to refer to the bottom-up actions of civil society, such as demonstrations of the climate movement or actions in public space. On the other hand, invited space refers to new models of participation initiated by governments or public authorities, which aim to increase the role of initiatives in local decision-making processes. This form of participation is increasingly being accused of only integrating certain groups into participation processes.

However, several studies have emphasised the crucial role of adult education in promoting sustainability. Lükö and Kollarics (2013) as well as Griswold (2017) highlight the importance of sustainability and ecojustice education in adult learning. Lükö and Kollarics (2013) specifically discuss the connection between sustainable development and adult education. Sumner (2003) extends this discussion to the community level, thereby suggesting that environmental adult education can contribute to local sustainability. These studies collectively emphasise the potential of adult education in advancing sustainability.

Only the current perception of the climate and sustainability issue as a comprehensive social crisis enables the specialised delegation of the pedagogical task exclusively to established educational institutions to be invalidated: Instead, given the global dimensions of the crisis, re-learning is considered necessary everywhere and without exception. Educational efforts can no longer be limited to the day-to-day business of educational institutions (Dinkelaker, 2023). Education must make a difference and promote self-transformation and the transformation of the societies that the individuals and groups are a part of (Wolff, 2015). Educators are crucial in the learning process, according to Wolff and Ehrström (2020), and sustainability teaching and learning requires engaged and creative educators (Burns et al., 2019). It is the educators' role to raise provocative questions and encourage critical thinking by asking the students for convincing arguments. Adult educators help students to acquire the necessary skills, sensitivities, and understanding so they become critically reflective participants in dialectical discourses (Mezirow, 2009). Thus, the discussions among students are important. According to Taylor (2009, p. 9), 'it is within the arena of dialogue that experience and critical reflection play out'.

Rieckmann (2018) argues that a task for education for sustainable development is to support individuals so they begin to reflect on their own roles as actively promoting global social and environmental sustainability now and in the future. In turn, Roos (2015) advocates for a more holistic education. Education here does not primarily imply the acquisition of existing knowledge but rather the development of new knowledge (Dinkelaker, 2023). This is necessary because of the lack of viable concepts. The complexity of the ecological question makes it necessary that the development of these concepts by specialised scientists alone is not sufficient. Rather, all people must participate in this development of knowledge, based on their respective life situations and

they must develop the necessary skills to do so. According to Wolff and Ehrström (2020), in discussions regarding sustainability, and particularly in relation to teaching and learning, the topic of transformation is increasingly present. However, transformative learning is developed for use in adult education and based on deliberative democracy.

In this article, we present examples in which deliberation and learning are combined in walk-centric methods. The use of methods based on walks and place-based in situ observations is not a new concept. Walk methods have been utilised in linguistic landscape studies, as noted by Garvin (2011) and Evans and Jones (2011). Middleton (2018, p. 298) argues that there is ‘a growing interest in walking as method and practice’. A multitude of different walk-centric methods have been developed in different fields of research – for example, Development Walk, Deliberative Walks, Marginal Walking, Transdisciplinary Walks, WalkingLabs, Walking Interviews, Walking Tours, Strollology, Critical Walking Methods, City Walks, ‘Go-Along’ Walks, Structural District Walks, Everyday Urban Walking, Walking Ethnography. Truman and Springgay (2016) state: ‘Walking as an artistic and participatory practice reappears in various disciplines, including its intersections with social science and humanities research methods and methodologies’ (p. 259). The years of the COVID-19 crises have further emphasised the value of walking, or as Springgay and Truman (2022, pp. 171-172) conclude, ‘...as countless places have entered various stages of lockdown over the past 2 years, the capacity to walk has taken on new meanings’, but, at the same time, the pandemic also ‘has further exacerbated walking’s inequalities... walking becomes an ethical and political accountability and responsibility for how we walk, who walks, and where we walk...’.

Walking methods have also been increasingly explored in adult education, each offering unique benefits. Heijnen et al. (2022) found that walking interviews provided a richer perspective on place and practice in outdoor education. Bairner (2011) argues that there is a pressing need to re-assert the educational value of going for a walk:

Walking the streets also provides us with insights into how other people live, and in particular, how they make use of urban space. It is on the street that we most directly experience what it is like to live with strangers... walking teaches us more than any other activity about the places where we live and the places that we visit (Bairner, 2011, p. 382).

Nevertheless, transformative methods are designed for use in adult education and are based on a profound theoretical understanding, which prevents them from being applied in any context or situation (Taylor, 2009). Taylor also emphasises that learning, including transformative learning, is always dependent on context; therefore, it is difficult to ascertain how much the learning environment influences the outcome.

Wolff and Ehrström (2020) provide examples on how sustainability is implemented in four university courses, three in Finland and one in Germany. In all four courses Wolff and Ehrström (2020) described, they strived to awaken students’ curiosity as well as their active self-criticism. They also wanted to encourage participants to broadly and critically explore the field of sustainability and continue exploring the topic, particularly from views that are relevant to their continuous studies and future duties. In these cases, the learning was more or less interactive, learner-centred, participatory, collaborative, and problem-oriented (Rieckmann, 2018). Since the sustainability topic is extremely complex and utterly urgent, lecturers cannot leave students to study the topics alone: ‘...we wanted to emphasise that interdisciplinary, even transdisciplinary approaches, authentic learning environments, and a focus on current topics like leadership illuminate the social dimension of sustainability’ (Wolff & Ehrström, 2020, p. 4191). The methods employed were walk-centred. The following paragraphs elucidate the theoretical foundations of this

approach. Thereafter, the methodology is exemplified through the use of illustrative examples from Hamburg and Stuttgart, which were conducted with student groups.

## Place-based learning and walk-centric methods

In traditional adult education settings, such as a lecture series, knowledge is usually imparted by experts, even in the context of sustainability issues. Although the audience can ask questions, the education remains ‘one-sided’ (Stimm, 2023, p. 67). There is no discursive negotiation of positions or bodies of knowledge. However, participation and deliberation – based on listening to experts; interacting with experts in classrooms; verbalising questions, concerns, or support; as well as following or reading sophisticated texts, charts, and figures – tend to strengthen the position of well-educated, well-situated, and well-positioned citizens. For other groups, this challenges their rights and possibilities to participate in an equal manner. In contrast, in this article, the discussion regarding social sustainability is situated in the space of action. This implies that different actors bring their questions and beliefs as well as their knowledge and positions into the public sphere. Their voices are heard and responded to. In this process of deliberation, something emerges in the situation – not merely different knowledge or a differentiation of one's own perspectives but an ‘in-between’ (Stimm, 2023, p. 60). This in-between emerges only through the coming together of different actors, their contexts, and their knowledge.

According to Szczepanski (2013), where education takes place is a vital didactic and pedagogical question, which emphasises the meaning of place in the learning process. In the context of deliberative democracy, it is also important to pay attention to where learning actually takes place, as this may influence deliberations and the learning process. Currently, even political scholars such as Prosser et al. (2018) note that ‘in practice there has been an emphasis on design and the procedural within democratic innovation, while what is often lacking is detail on the pedagogy of learning’ (p. 213). Learning to deliberate is core to our development as democratic citizens and instead of merely articulating viewpoints, a deliberative process also creates opportunities for these viewpoints to change (Curato et al., 2017). Thus, there is a need to develop deliberative methods that increase participants’ learning of not only issues but also of participation itself. The literature on deliberations has rarely focused on actual learning processes, even though, for example, Hartz-Karp and Stocker (2013) suggest that learning is essential in deliberative democracy and as Sorkin (2009, p. 81) indicates, ‘walking is not simply an occasion for observation, but an analytical instrument’.

Ehrström and Raisio (2014) saw the need for a more holistic approach and combined elements from Citizens Juries and Development Walks to create a new participatory method – Deliberative Walks. Therefore, they united two different participatory methods: one based on discussions and theoretical content (Citizens Jury), and the other observation-oriented and place-based (Development Walk). Deliberative Walks were introduced as a vehicle to learn in a more complete matter (Ehrström, 2015). Deliberative Walks make it possible to grasp the issue under deliberation in a more holistic manner. Ideally, Deliberative Walks could also make learning processes more equal, as individuals who have challenges in learning by listening to experts or reading information packages could also learn by seeing, observing, and feeling (Raisio & Ehrström, 2017): ‘Deliberative Walks implies to plan with people, instead of planning for people, or over the heads of people’ (Ehrström, 2020).

However, the examples presented in this article are variations of Deliberative and Development Walks. They were implemented with groups of students in Hamburg and

Stuttgart. Nevertheless, they can provide helpful suggestions regarding how deliberations on issues of sustainability and the transformation of cities can be implemented using walk-centric methods in adult education. First, we present the examples in order to examine different methodological approaches in a systematic manner and identify the methodological developments that have been made on this basis.

## **Community, place, and space of learning: Experiences from Hamburg, 2019**

First, we present two examples of implementing walk-centric course elements in higher education. Both include a specific walk-centric or walk-including method as well as specific elements that could be characterised as either the main focus point and element of a course (the complexity of sustainability) or as a freestanding common element for three different courses (two-day weekend mini-studentlab Deliberative Walks). Both include a walk-centric deliberation and place-based learning context, but one case is a variation of Deliberative Walks while the other paves a way for bringing walk-centric deliberations to the cityscape at large, with various and different (inner) city districts as arenas for action, made possible by combining public transportation with walking and learning on foot.

The common feature of the University of Hamburg course elements (the complexity of sustainability as well as mini-studentlab Deliberative Walks) was authentic environments and a connection between local and global perspectives. Authentic learning environments are built on situated approaches and the idea that learning is best achieved in circumstances that resemble relevant and real-world contexts (Herrington & Herrington, 2006). The course examples indicate that sustainability courses can assume many shapes and that it is important to create conditions for social sustainability learning at universities. Wolff and Ehrström (2020) argue that it is an advantage to have many lecturers for the same course, but that this is not always possible. Bringing in guest lecturers may also be an option.

Heijnen et al. (2022, p. 529) argue that ‘mobile research methods, comprising a range of research approaches that aim to gather data while on the move, allow for rich and situated encounters with the places and people in which outdoor researchers are interested’. They note that although outdoor education often occurs in dynamic, mobile settings, research in this field has predominantly relied on traditional stationary methods, which underutilize the potential of mobile approaches. Heijnen et al. (2022, p. 533) further argue that ‘it is important to recognize the political and contested dimension of sense of place’ and that the process that shape place meanings are, partially, ‘driven by differing languages and potentially conflicting ideologies’ (p. 533). The concept of place links individuals to locations through the establishment of mutual meanings, and, thus, outdoor education that is responsive to place should be attentive to the distinct needs of each area. Furthermore, the goals of place-responsive outdoor education should align with adjustments in teaching methods. To paraphrase Heijnen et al. (2022), mobile research methods and place-based learning methods with in situ observations offer researchers the ability to not only ask questions regarding the place but also questions in the place. ‘Furthermore, the mobile act of walking itself allows both participant and researcher to engage with place in a direct and embodied way’ (p. 543).

In 2019, Ehrström arranged a place-based deliberation with in situ-observations in education that exemplify how bringing deliberations to the streets and including in situ-elements in education can assume different forms and bring insights on different (geographical) scales. This can also exemplify changes in teaching practices, indicated

by Heijnen et al. (2022), for place-responsive outdoor education aims. In this case, by taking advantage of a wide urban public transport network to extend the geographical area covered in a Development Walk to that covered in a modified Public Transportation Walk. This pilot was organised as a modified one-lecturer version of The Complexity of Sustainable Development course in Lifelong Learning at the Faculty of Education, University of Hamburg, Germany, in 2019. The course essentially focused on two full-day seminars – the first on social sustainability connected to urban transformation and the second on popular culture and learning; the course also included traditional two-hour weekly seminars addressing the different pillars and definitions of sustainability, with a focus on social sustainability. Before the full-day seminar on urban transformation, organised as a walk-centric deliberation, in the inner city of Hamburg, each participating student was tasked to prepare a short presentation of one of the districts and a specific contested space or issue in it as well as to discuss the characteristics and specific place-based challenges for local-level social sustainability in that particular area. Theoretically, the emphasis was on place-based learning through a (structured) Development Walk during which the group visited seven inner-city districts with various characteristics. The idea was to present a varied map of the city in which different districts and places face varied challenges. Accordingly, the students explored districts from the newly built Hafencity to the traditional working-class St. Pauli, cultural and counter-cultural Sternschanze, wealthy University district Rotherbaum, and inner-city shopping districts (in Neustadt).

The structured and modified Development Walks method that was created for this course element was, in essence, a Public Transportation Walk, using public transport networks for longer distances among localities (both U-Bahn and S-Bahn). Seven interdisciplinary students participated in the pilot Public Transportation Walk and experienced several urban environments while discussing various place-connected social sustainability challenges. All students prepared presentations on a specific location and on specific place-related challenges at a selected contested space. As these presentations and discussions were held at the very spaces of deliberation, in effect, higher education brought deliberations to the streets, to the wider cityscape, for a more holistic understanding of both local-level and city-wide challenges. After each presentation, the walk leader positioned the presented and discussed local challenges and contested issues and spaces to a global context. During the course, and particularly in this walk-centric deliberation, the students experienced connections to the global in the local and the local in the global – that is, how global trends and phenomena connect to local ones, and vice versa. This was further emphasised in a follow-up seminar in class, in which experiences were discussed in greater depth as well as how the various transformation processes and district identities related to global trends.

Here, the discussion/group deliberation also did not follow directly after the walk-centric deliberation. Instead, the group discussed experiences from the in situ-observations in a subsequent seminar in class and then reflected over how the in situ-observations in different localities connect to global trends and social sustainability challenges. On the whole, organizing a city-wide and walk-centric deliberation/in situ-observation may be considered challenging. However, the rewards for organizing a Public Transportation Walk to different localities is worthwhile. First, an urban in situ-observation walk-centric deliberation provides space for a more general and wholesome understanding of the varied urban landscape as a whole, with its ongoing simultaneous and varied transformation challenges and opportunities. Arguably, this also increases the understanding of a city-wide sustainable development and combination of multiple varied challenges as well as various forms of urban transformation. The often-understated



connection among social, economic, and ecological sustainability challenges are also brought forward in a common, but also contested, urban cityscape with simultaneous and varying transformation processes.

However, this also creates challenges – first, on course planning, as it is not possible to organise everywhere, and all places are not accessible by public transportation within a realistic timeline, not even where public transportation networks are excellent. Thus, the included urban spaces need to be easily accessible by public transport and the time factor is essential, as public transportation will take its own time, including waiting at stations. Group size is another challenge, as public transportation and keeping the group together limits the number of participants in each group more than walking by foot. It is also important to consider providing everyone with an equal opportunity to participate in the course and field experience. In this case, all participants were university students and all of them had personal public transport monthly cards, which Ehrström considered an important prerequisite for organizing a deliberation by public transport. Due to time challenges – including dependence on public transport timetables, walking between stations, and the spots for deliberation – six hours was considered the minimum time required for such a deliberation; more specifically, it needs to be considered a full-day course element, including lunch break. In contrast, a traditional Development Walk (on foot) normally consists of two hours of walking and observing, with five to six stops along the route, followed by a common discussion/deliberation (usually another 1.5–2 hours). Informal discussions between stops while walking was more inhibited as ‘walking’ to a large extent involved moving by public transport and shorter walks to and from stops.

The course language was English and the participants were both domestic German and international students. In this course, an interdisciplinary approach was utilised mainly in lectures on the different pillars of sustainability and various definitions of social sustainability as well as two full-day seminars that focused on rather different topics (challenges related to urban transformation processes in different districts, and the social role of popular culture) and their connection to (social) sustainability challenges. Being the first pilot experience, more systematic analysis of student feedback would have been valuable. However, due to the small number of participants (seven), a more systematic analysis was not considered to be that meaningful and questionnaires were not utilised before and after the course. Student feedback was still essential and during the final course meeting, students were given the task to orally comment on the setup of the course, course content, and particularly the seminar on urban transformation and experiences of place-based learning in urban environments. The course administrator also did emphasise that all feedback, positive and negative, was valuable and important to consider when planning any follow-up course. All seven students’ comments regarding the setup of the course were positive, particularly regarding the place-based course element (Public Transportation Walk). Even though the experiences were not systematically analysed, this is still valuable information.

Further, this course strongly focused on the social dimension of sustainability and, thus, mainly on the complexity of sustainability from a social perspective. Mainly concentrating on one dimension, but with introduction and awareness of the different dimensions of sustainability, may be a best-case alternative for one-lecturer courses, while a multi-lecturer version allows for a wider, more multidimensional and interdisciplinary handling of the very complex issues of sustainable development.

A few of the same students in the above course also participated in a larger (approximately 20 participants) Studentlab experience in Hamburg 2019 – also at the Faculty of Education, University of Hamburg – and was organised as a two-day course element for participants in three different master study courses. This, in turn, was a mini-

version of studentlab Deliberative Walks and a pilot experiment of how a studentlab Deliberative Walk would work as a course element and in a two-day version instead of a full course version. If a full course is too difficult to arrange, a course element or weekend exercise might be easier to include in the curriculum. Nevertheless, a two-day version (methodology and citizens' jury elements day 1, Development Walk and deliberation elements day 2) includes the same main elements as a full-scale studentlab Deliberative Walks (for this, see Ehrström, 2020).

A post-course questionnaire and written comments by participating students reveal that, as expected, the largest drawback and challenge for a mini (short) version is the (limiting) time factor; participants particularly found the deliberation element and conclusions stressful due to very tight time limits for group work and presentations, especially for reaching common conclusions, while all other elements worked well and the overall experience was positive. It is important to consider, if opting for a shorter two-day version, that sufficient time is divided among all elements of the deliberation. Higher education students will obtain an understanding of combining different learning methods and Deliberative methods in a two-day experience, but may be frustrated if deliberation and conclusion elements are hurried. This can be counter-productive, even though the overall experience of this pilot was clearly positive.

The student groups are not always diverse, and the environment can be the campus. However, as these two examples reveal, courses or course elements do not need to be constrained to campus and can also include a wider learning environment. It does not even have to be in close vicinity of universities, but can even be multidistrict oriented, if the infrastructure (like local public transportation system and access) and course planning allows for such alternatives.

## Community, place, and space of learning: Experiences from Stuttgart, 2022

Based on these findings, we present the results of a student semester project in Stuttgart, Germany. Fourteen social work students at Ludwigsburg Protestant University of Applied Sciences were assigned the research project of identifying the needs and interests of marginalised groups in the midst of an ongoing transformation process in one of Stuttgart's inner city districts. The project is linked to the International Building Exhibition (IBA) 2027 that is currently being prepared in the Stuttgart region and will be presented to the public in 2027. Kersting (2021) notes that participatory tools have been developed in Germany due to the increased importance of sustainability in the public sphere and the demand for more direct and Deliberative forms of participation from the climate movement or nature conservation associations. Not surprisingly, the aim of IBA 2027 is to encourage participatory practices and foster dialogue among residents, urban planners, and policymakers to collaboratively establish a sustainable and inclusive urban environment. IBA projects and districts have been identified throughout the Stuttgart region to achieve this objective. An example of such a project is the urban quarter called Leonhardsvorstadt.

Leonhardsvorstadt comprises two distinct neighbourhoods separated by the Züblin parking garage. To the east of the garage lies the opulent Bohnenviertel, while to the west is Leonhardsviertel, commonly referred to as the 'red light district'. In comparison to the entire city, Leonhardsvorstadt reports a substantially larger percentage of individuals with immigrant backgrounds and welfare beneficiaries. In contrast, the district has a below-average proportion of children and young people as well as green and open spaces (Landeshauptstadt Stuttgart, 2020, p. 36). Moreover, the redevelopment or redesign of

the current Züblin parking garage area is planned as part of IBA 2027. This location is viewed as a ‘key area’ (IBA, 2023) and a future centre for the community with increased permeability between the two neighbourhoods.

Rolf Ahlrichs has been aiding the transformation process of Leonhardsvorstadt since the winter semester of 2020 by conducting theory–practice seminars for social work students in their third and fourth semesters. In the summer semester of 2022, it was decided to incorporate the method of Deliberative Walks. The method was selected for social work education as it combines community and social space orientation. The 14 students were divided into 4 research groups, each of which was tasked with investigating a specific target group and focusing on a distinct theme, including prostitution, safeguarded areas for women, and viewpoints of children and adolescents regarding the district. The groups were formed on the basis of the students’ individual interests. The students obtained a better understanding of different living situations in the district as well as individual perspectives on social and political necessities. The primary research inquiry was how the area around the Leonhardskirche (a church) and the Züblin parking garage could become a space for the community and include marginalised groups. The results were documented via scientific posters, which were exhibited in the district and at a public event as well as in the academic community to introduce our research approach. A project report was created by the students to reflect on the research process.

During the seminar, the method ‘Deliberative Walks’ was presented for the first time. It was explained by Peter Ehrström that the full use of this method may not always be required, as the matter at hand could also be addressed through either a theoretically focused approach (citizens’ jury) or a task-oriented technique (Development Walk). It was evident that implementing a full execution of the method during the seminar was impracticable due to time limitations. Consequently, the students elected to carry out Development Walks.

Initially, it was required that the students contact the target groups for their walks. The plan was to take walks through the neighbourhood, with four to five stops in which the experts provided information that focused on transformation processes in the neighbourhood, which were exemplified at each stop.

The first group of students focused on young children in primary school. They wanted to find out where these children play in the neighbourhood, how they navigate their environment, and what their preferences are for the neighbourhood. To engage with the children, the students chose to work with a youth centre and the local primary school. The students organised a walk around significant sites, such as the church, skate park, Züblin parking garage, school, and red-light district. Four children enthusiastically participated in the walk. Experts provided insightful ideas at each location, sparking lively discussions between the children and experts. Additionally, students utilised the time between sites for one-on-one conversations with the more reserved children. The students concluded that the research methodology served as a reliable tool for initiating dialogue with people who would not usually express their opinions. Children, in particular, are an intriguing cohort, as they are often consulted but rarely considered to be specialists in matters relating to a place. The discussions documented by the students suggest that the children explicitly communicated their expectations for the future of their neighbourhood and simultaneously provided insight into their needs. For the redevelopment of Leonhardsviertel, the children’s priorities were mentioned to be safety in the neighbourhood, a park with sufficient green spaces and seating, designated areas for safe play approved by their parents, and safe streets where they can walk independently.

The second group conducted a survey of young people in the district. The research method was slightly modified and supplemented with additional techniques, including

the needle, photo, and neighbourhood inspection methods (Deinet & Krisch, 2002). The young people mainly determined the route of the walk, which was guided by the significant places they had identified using the needle method. During the walk, the young people were asked to use their mobile devices to take a picture of something that they felt best represented the place. Immediately, the individuals implemented the interpretation and identified the reasons for their selection as well as their personal associations with the visible elements. Initially, contact was made with several schools and youth organisations, but only young people from one particular organisation were present at the agreed meeting place. This highlights one of the complications of conducting research with young people. The walk was carried out by five participants aged between 14 and 18 years. In line with the abovementioned group, the locations visited during the tour included the Züblin parking garage, the skate park, a football pitch, the school, and the red-light district. At each station, there were different prompts and opportunities to stimulate central questions. Looking back, the students found the method fascinating and varied, although they highlighted the challenges of motivating young people to engage with this format and make commitments with them. However, the walk revealed certain positive connotations inherent in the area (such as a sense of familiarity) while also highlighting the existence of detrimental aspects (such as the prevalence of gang-related activity in the area), as well as high levels of police surveillance, particularly of young people. It was noted that young people were faced with a lack of adequate space or facilities.

The original plan for the third group of students was to take a walk with the police. However, this was not possible due to lack of permission from the police station management. Instead, the students resorted to the original methodological roots of Development Walks (Safety Walks) to highlight the safety of women in Leonhardsvorstadt. The study aimed to investigate the safety of women in a neighbourhood across a wide range of age groups. Women who lived in, frequently visited, or stayed in the district were encouraged to participate. The research question was related to identifying places in Leonhardsvorstadt where women feel safe or unsafe and the factors that influence their perceptions. In order to obtain meaningful results, the group of students decided not to specify the route but let the three participating women aged between 25 and 60 years determine it. The church (Leonhardskirche) was used as a starting point to discuss subjective feelings of safety. The women then visited places that they felt were less safe and then ventured to places that they felt were safer. Lighting was found to be important in creating a sense of safety, but litter, dark street sections, and visual obstructions, such as art or plants in public spaces, created insecurity. It is important to consider the presence of people in public spaces. Perceptions of safety differ between the red-light district, where large crowds and police presence contribute to a sense of safety, and the adjacent affluent residential area, which is perceived as unsafe due to the prevalence of lonely streets at night. In their project synopsis, the students reflected on the inequalities that exist in planning processes. They recognised Development Walks with marginalised groups as an important method of involving those without a voice in political issues.

The fourth student project group investigated sex work in the Leonhardsviertel red-light district. The students' practical planning included a theoretical discussion on sex work, exploring the district to identify the population groups associated with sex work, and contacting experts to provide input for discussions during the walk, with the aim of including different viewpoints. The students attempted to contact the sex workers through social workers at a counselling centre to encourage their participation. None of the local sex workers agreed to participate in the walk. However, the group managed to engage a

wide range of actors in the district who are either directly or indirectly involved in the issue of sex work. Two social workers who support sex workers in the area, two bar owners, a brothel owner, a member of the German parliament with roots in Leonhardsviertel, and a journalist participated in the walk. The stops on this walk were a counselling centre for sex workers, two bars, and a brothel. During the walk, very different positions on sex work were expressed. The atmosphere was characterised by a high level of emotional intensity, particularly in relation to the divergent political stances on the legal regulation of sex work. However, all participants agreed that the red light district should be preserved in the future, despite differing opinions on sex work itself.

The name of the ongoing transformation and planning project for the 'Neue Mitte' (new centre) area suggests a comprehensive process of transformation and gentrification. This is not desirable for any of the participants in the four student projects. Finding common ground and identifying a least common denominator can be a crucial first step in discussing the future of the neighbourhood. It can also increase the likelihood of addressing numerous challenges and creating opportunities to improve the social situation and local sustainability in a contested urban space, despite significant differences in local interests. The walks demonstrate how to tackle major challenges and find common ground. Action and effective communication can improve local social sustainability in a contested urban area. By bringing together different perspectives and working together in structured activities, progress and social sustainability can be achieved. Therefore, it is crucial to initiate communication and discussion regarding the common future of this urban space.

## Methodological discussion

The starting point for the above examples in Hamburg and Stuttgart was Deliberative Walks (which includes Development Walks and Citizens Jury methods) and Development Walks methods. However, these methods were varied and modified in the student examples. In the following section, we present the differences between the methods presented and discuss the possible applications of these for adult education.

The use of different walk-centric and walk-inclusive methods in society can also be argued as to be like a ladder-like learning process, where democratisation and the interest to deepen participation by advancing to more demanding and theory-oriented deliberations increases the civic learning process towards active citizenship and informed participation in deliberative processes. The specifics of these three steps in the learning process ladder leads from more in situ-observation oriented to more in situ *and* theoretically oriented methods and are expected to be followed by a subsequent step of theoretically oriented deliberative methods, which are based on interacting with experts, stakeholders, and decision-makers. A step-by-step process increases the interest and knowledge to interact in these processes for more vulnerable civic groups that otherwise easily choose not to participate or are not invited to participate. In this manner, walk-centric and walk-inclusive methods may play a more structured role in the democratisation process in cityscapes.

The hypothesis for Development Walks is that the learning process is strengthened by in situ observations of specific situations and spaces. Simultaneously, complex planning issues, for example, are concretised. This makes Development Walks a *walk-centric method* rather than a walk-inclusive one. Interviews reveal that the learning process and knowledge of planning issues – specifically of the place itself – increased through the participation in this walk-centric deliberation. It was also a positive learning experience (Raisio & Ehrström, 2017). As a method element, in Deliberative Walks and

studentlab Deliberative Walks, the Development Walk element has commonly been regarded as the most positive one (Ehrström, 2020). Development Walks have been identified as an important method for citizen participation: ‘One walk produced several suggestions for (re)development... A common walk gives the (participants) opportunity to discuss, recollect, and create new ideas’ (Ehrström & Katajamäki, 2013, p. 76).

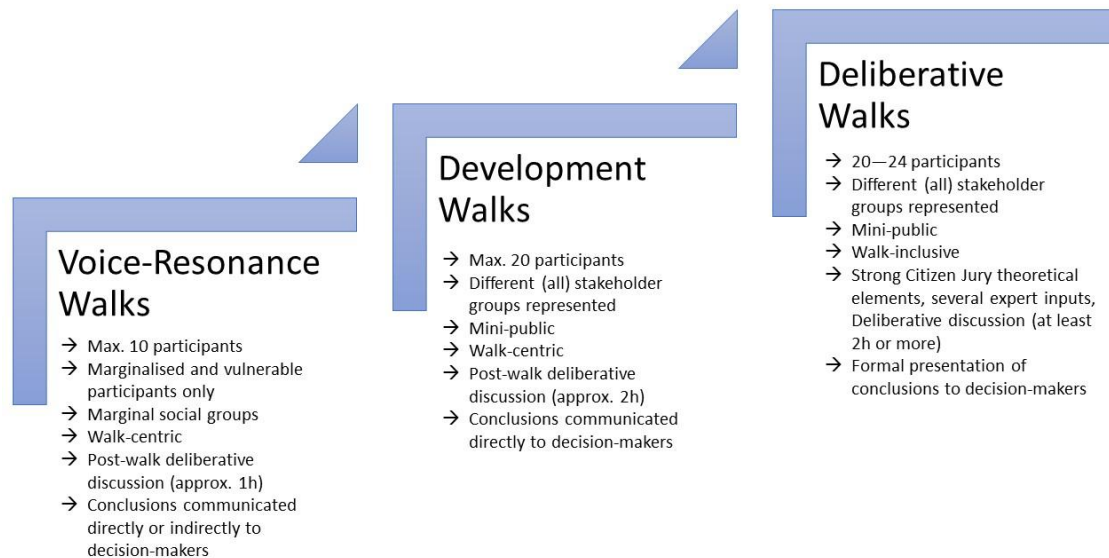
In contrast, the Deliberative Walks method is a *walk-inclusive method*, as it combines place-based in situ-observations (walk) with theoretical in-class elements (citizens’ jury). However, the walk element in Deliberative Walks and studentlab Deliberative Walks have also been identified as the most important element for participants own learning processes (Ehrström, 2020). Based on these findings, it is argued that including a walk element in deliberations can lower the threshold for participation for more vulnerable groups in society. Then, a walk-centric deliberation is argued to lower that threshold for participation even further and is, therefore, considered a low-threshold entrance to participation and a civic learning process for inclusion and more active citizenship in transformation processes. Typically, a few representatives of planning authorities may also dismiss issues for deliberation as being too difficult and complex for ordinary citizens. However, Ehrström and Katajamäki (2013) argue that experiences from citizens’ jury and Development Walks reveal that citizens are good at being able to have diverse opinions and creatively consider important questions if given the opportunity and structured procedures to do so.

In our scientific evaluation and analysis of the students’ project reports in Stuttgart, it was observed that the walk-centric method had been modified through the students’ projects. These modifications have influenced our methodology of walk-centric methods and the development of a method called Voice-Resonance Walks, which we define in the following manner:

Facilitated by walk leader(s), group-specific participants proceed through a pre-defined route with a selected numbers of stops that are chosen based on both/either facilitator-led identification of critical stops and/or participant-proposed stops, record reflections, and discuss their surroundings, giving resonance to the arguments of others, after which participants develop common proposals for development, or least common denominator(s) that participants agree on, and communicate this to public officials.

In contrast to Development Walks, Voice-Resonance Walks focus on specific marginalised target groups whose voices are barely heard in political or public discourse. In the Voice-Resonance Walks, their voices find resonance – that is, they are heard and there are answers. This is a first step towards political participation. As visualised in Figure 1, Voice-Resonance Walks can also play an important role as an entry point for civic learning processes (to deliberate) for growing active citizenships and strengthen the participation of vulnerable groups in democratisation processes. The method Voice-Resonance Walks will now be trialled and further developed in various field studies. This is assumed to be a suitable method for accompanying transformation processes in cities, particularly by involving population groups that are otherwise barely represented in public discussions. However, resonance, only arises when their arguments are not only heard but also included in political decision-making processes.

*Figure 1.* Ladder model of walk-centric and walk-inclusive methods. Valuables: ideal group size, participants and groups, walk-centric or walk-inclusive, theory-elements, results. Source: authors' own figure



The examples from Hamburg and Stuttgart demonstrate how sustainability issues can be problematised and discussed using walk-centric methods. The process involves opinion-forming and deliberation, which can be applied to other areas of adult education. Although this particular case involved students, the methodology is transferable to other groups of people and civic learning processes.

## Conclusions

The relationship among political engagement, social participation, and an individual's circumstances and access to economic, social, and cultural capital is complex. Unfortunately, socially disadvantaged groups often face barriers that make it difficult for them to engage in participatory processes, thereby limiting their ability to participate even when they are willing to do so. In this paper, walk-centric methods were described; in particular, Voice-Resonance Walks were found to enable marginalised groups to represent themselves in a standardised and low-threshold setting, as individual participants receive the necessary social support to reveal their concerns and articulate their interests. Adult education could play a key in supporting this process in the public sphere by organising and offering Voice-Resonance Walks. On the basis of positive experiences in such rather sheltered processes, marginalised groups can, as a next step, participate in further deliberation processes. In the process of social emancipation, social sustainability can be established and marginalised groups become an integral part of the community and a basis for collective responsibility for one's own environment is created. Taken together, these walk-centric methods and course elements contribute to creating an arsenal of methods that connect place, space, and learning, with a focus on urban (social) sustainability, an often overlooked and downplayed pillar of sustainability, both in society and education.

The challenges of the impending change are significant, and it is crucial to involve as many people and different perspectives as possible. In light of a wider understanding

of social sustainability, it is even more crucial to develop participation opportunities for all population groups and discuss common solutions. However, previous participation procedures frequently resulted in the exclusion of specific target groups. Therefore, in this article, we presented low-threshold walk-centric methods and discussed their variations; these variations are suitable for involving people in development processes, thereby turning those affected into participants. Thus, it is evident that adult education is required to accompany and implement such processes. In doing so, adult education makes a contribution to the democratisation and sustainability of society.

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The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship or publication of this article.

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