
Walking for Wellbeing:
developing sustainable
engagement between
research, policy and practice.



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1. Background

1.1. The Importance of Walking

Physical inactivity has been described as a pandemic and the promotion of walking for transport or for recreation identified as a key mechanism through which the population's physical activity can improve. In Scotland, the importance of walking for health is highlighted in the Scottish Government's development of a National Walking Strategy launched during the period of this project:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2014/06/5743>. Walking is the mode of activity least influenced by gender, age and socio-economic status so is an activity that is accessible to all.

1.2. Aims

The main aim of the project was to develop a better understanding of walking for wellbeing and to foster an interdisciplinary network to engage in knowledge exchange. Specifically, the project sought to:

- I. explore current definitions of wellbeing and understand how they fit into a walking for wellbeing context ('Walkshop' 1)
- II. consider how best to measure both walking and wellbeing ('Walkshop' 2)
- III. explore how best to embed research and practitioner knowledge within policy and practice. ('Walkshop' 3)

We held three 'walkshops' with experts in various fields with a view to creating a partnership across Scotland. 'Walkshops' are workshops where standing up and light to moderate intensity physical activity is encouraged, and where sitting down for long periods of time is minimised. This was achieved in various ways during the 'walkshops' (e.g. standing ovations, walk-and-talk discussions, outdoor reflection, standing group discussions using a 'carousel' method, etc.). If you are interested in turning your meetings or workshops into 'walkshops', some tips from our learning can be found within the resources for our events.

The findings from each 'walkshop' are discussed in turn.



2. Broadening our understanding of the relationship between walking and wellbeing

There is considerable evidence that demonstrates walking has direct benefits on physical and psychological wellbeing. However, the impact walking may have on other aspects of wellbeing deserves further attention in both practice and research. Specifically, walking may also lead to reduced isolation, increased social cohesion, greater economic activity in neighbourhoods, improved productivity, and an improved understanding of walking as a mode of sustainable transport. Walking in green space may have additional benefits for wellbeing and international research demonstrates how greenspaces of all kinds, from community gardens to nature reserves, support wellbeing at the level of the individual, the community, and the ecosystem. A broader perspective on the benefits of walking for wellbeing can inform research plans and from this provide further evidence that can be used to promote walking for health to organisations and individuals.

2.1. 'Walkshop' 1: What is walking for wellbeing and what role does green space play? 31st March 2014, SUII, Glasgow.

Our first 'walkshop' included interactive sessions from experts on defining wellbeing (Dr Kate Hefferon, University College London (<http://www.katehefferon.com>) and understanding how green space influences wellbeing (Prof Richard Mitchell, University of Glasgow (<http://www.gla.ac.uk/researchinstitutes/healthwellbeing/staff/richmitchell>)). The second half of the day included group activities discussing potential walking for wellbeing pathways and the evidence on walking for wellbeing.

When participants were asked to define what wellbeing meant to them personally, they identified with many societal and individual aspects of wellbeing. Through discussion led by Dr Kate Hefferon these were aligned according to two main theoretical positions of wellbeing: Hedonic and Eudaimonic wellbeing. Hedonic wellbeing is a concept of happiness and subjective wellbeing taking into account cognitive and affective evaluations of how satisfied we are with life. Eudaimonic wellbeing is not simply the experience of feeling good, but includes the actualization of human potential and encompasses concepts such as meaning, purpose, authenticity, intrinsic motivation, congruent values, and psychological wellbeing. Links to more information on this topic are provided in our web resources.

Prof Richard Mitchell discussed how green space has an important role to play in wellbeing in reducing health inequalities via a restorative effect, but that evidence is still in its early stages. He showed data that provides evidence of reduced inequalities in perceived wellbeing across socioeconomic groups when there is access to green space. 'Walkshop' participants took part in an activity outdoors where they walked in a green space and reflected on how nature may impact their own wellbeing.



An 'idea wall' was created by participants where they stuck up ideas of how walking might influence wellbeing. These were summarised thematically into four themes: increased physical activity, improved mental health, increased social connections, and via accessing green space. Group discussion followed on each of these four themes, using a 'carousel approach' during which participants highlighted evidence from research, practice and policy around each of these areas.

2.2. Outputs from Walkshop 1

The following resources related to this walkshop are freely available on the SUll website <http://www.scottishinsight.ac.uk/Programmes/Wellbeing2014/WalkingforWellbeing.aspx> and will be collated in a blog post following the walking for wellbeing blog promotion in early 2015:

- All slidesets used by Dr Kate Hefferon and Prof Richard Mitchell
- Information on a reflective activity to complete in green space
- 'Collated' outline of Twitter discussions via Storify
- Link to the Scottish Walking Strategy:
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2014/06/5743>



3. Measurement of Walking and Wellbeing

Appropriate measurement tools are necessary to develop a useful evidence base, undertake appropriate programme evaluation and for wider surveillance. However, to date there is limited knowledge of the range of options, especially for the wider dimensions of wellbeing.

3.1. 'Walkshop' 2: Measuring Walking for Wellbeing. 12th May 2014, SUII, Glasgow.

Our second 'walkshop' included interactive sessions from experts on why we should measure walking for wellbeing (Dr David Rowe, University of Strathclyde (<http://www.strath.ac.uk/humanities/courses/physicalactivityforhealth/staff/drdauidrowe>) and evidence on walking and 'affective responses' (mood) (Prof Panteleimon Ekkekakis (<http://www.public.iastate.edu/~ekkekaki/research.html>)). The day also included practical sessions on measuring both walking and wellbeing.

A key message from Dr David Rowe's presentations was that measuring both walking and wellbeing require good measurement practice and clearly identified questions (who, what, why, where and when and how are you measuring). Difficulties in measurement often occur because these are not identified early in the research or evaluation process. Participants completed a practical exercise using photographs to try to complete the 'what' question in relation to the measurement of walking. For example, questions around speed of walking, footwear, reasons for walking (e.g. active travel, for fitness, hill walking etc), and place of walking were discussed. There are many tools available for measuring walking, but no one size fits all approach. There is a trade-off between practicality and/or cost of measurement versus its reliability and validity and this trade off must be managed.

There are established links between positive affect (mood) and walking but there are challenges in traditional, psychological methods used to measure mood. Moderate intensity physical activity (e.g. walking) has positive effects on 'mood', whereas more vigorous intensity activity may have negative effects on 'mood' and on long term adherence. Prof Panteleimon Ekkekakis presented on the difficulties associated with measuring 'affect' or 'mood' and challenged the traditional, psychological measures (e.g. State Trait Anxiety Index (STAI), Profile of Mood States (POMS) and Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS)). The group discussed and noted the merits of a tool used locally (Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS <http://www.healthscotland.com/documents/1467.aspx>) which is used in the Scottish Health Survey.

3.2. Outputs from Walkshop 2

The following resources related to this walkshop are freely available on the SUII website <http://www.scottishinsight.ac.uk/Programmes/Wellbeing2014/WalkingforWellbeing.aspx> and will be collated in a blog post following the walking for wellbeing blog promotion in early 2015:



- All slidesets used by Dr David Rowe and Prof Panteleimon Ekkekakis
- Information on a practical activity defining walking with photographs
- List of potential measurement tools and there use in different settings



4. Bringing together researchers, practitioners and policy makers

In Scotland there are: researchers developing an evidence base for walking for health; practitioners delivering walking for health programmes; and policy makers legislating on walking. Building collaborative relationships between these different parties will be mutually beneficial and help to identify future, practitioner-guided and educationally-focused research avenues; increase the impact of high quality research; gain valuable insight into the challenges of implementation of research findings; deepen our understanding of effective walking for wellbeing promotion on the ground and delivery through all sectors of formal education (primary, secondary, higher and CPD).

4.1. 'Walkshop' 3: Embedding walking for wellbeing in policy & practice: 16th June 2014, Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh

The last 'walkshop' was a very interactive session with a lot of group discussion. It began with a session on the global perspectives on walking policy and lessons learnt from the Toronto Charter (Prof Fiona Bull, University of Western Australia (<http://www.uwa.edu.au/people/fiona.bull>), principal author of Toronto charter, (http://64.26.159.200/icpaph/en/toronto_charter.php). In response to the recent launch of the Scottish Walking Strategy, this was followed up with a discussion of where to focus next in relation to Scottish walking for wellbeing policy and practice (Rona Gibb, Paths for All/Scottish Government). In the afternoon an interactive session on decision making in the real world included a 'Diamond 9 exercise' on what participants individually use to make decisions in their role as a researcher/practitioners/policy maker. We also benefited from input from Niamh O'Connor (Scottish Government), Frances Bain (Paths for All) and Keith Irving (Living Streets/Cycling Scotland). The session ended creating top tips for influencing policy and practice.

Prof Fiona Bull highlighted that Scotland is a policy leader in walking for wellbeing, but must continue to identify and use relevant evidence and nurture links with policy & practice in order to embed knowledge.

4.2. The top tips for embedding walking for wellbeing into policy and practice

The session ended on the creation of top tips for embedding walking for wellbeing in policy and practice:

- Identify the specific policy change or gap you want to influence
- Identify the primary and secondary 'audiences' or targets (those who make the decisions and those that can influence the decision makers)
- Frame your message (or 'pitch') to the audience – it must be salient
- Identify and use relevant evidence – collect new/relevant/local data if needed



- Set clear objectives for your interactions and meetings so you can focus yours and others efforts towards the same policy change
- Use the community and powerful others to advocate and influence as well as your direct approach to policy makers
- Use case studies and influential individuals relevant to different sectors as well as a direct approach to decision makers

4.3. Links to the Scottish Performance Framework

Walking for wellbeing connects to a wide range of policy areas (*inc health & wellbeing, sustainable transport, road safety, planning & land use, urban/rural environment, tourism, recreation & access, urban/rural economic development, disability & equality, education/life long learning, climate change, housing, sport, community planning, early years and volunteering.*) and has a potential role to play in 16/50 national indicators of the Scottish Performance Framework:

1. Reduce traffic Congestion
2. Improve Scotland's reputation
3. Improve KE from University research
4. Improve levels of educational attainment
5. Improve people's perceptions about the crime in their area
6. Reduce deaths on Scotland's roads
7. Increase the proportion of healthy weight children
8. Increase physical activity
9. Improve self-assessed general health
10. Improve mental wellbeing
11. Reduce premature mortality
12. Improve people's perceptions of their neighbourhood
13. Increase cultural engagement
14. Increase people's use of Scotland's outdoors
15. Reduce Scotland's carbon footprint
16. Increase the proportion of journeys to work made by public or active transport

4.4. Outputs from Walkshop 3

The following resources related to this walkshop are freely available on the SUll website <http://www.scottishinsight.ac.uk/Programmes/Wellbeing2014/WalkingforWellbeing.aspx> and will be collated in a blog post following the walking for wellbeing blog promotion in early 2015:

- All slidesets used by Prof Fiona Bull
- Description of the Diamond 9 Exercise
- Links to various resources on influencing health and/or physical activity policy
- Top tips for embedding walking for wellbeing in policy & practice



5. Related Ongoing Work and Future Recommendations

A number of aspects of this project are still ongoing. We have begun blogging in this area and will collate this information with a promotion of the blog commencing in early 2015 in order to disseminate findings from our workshops and encourage any further discussion in this area.

In order to continue a network on the topic of walking for wellbeing, we will invite participants of the workshops to be engaged with an established network set up by the Physical Activity for Health Research Centre (PAHRC) at the University of Edinburgh ('friends of PAHRC'). Along with the blog, this will allow an easy method of communicating between key stakeholders.

(<http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/education/rke/centres-groups/pahrc>)

We have continued to use workshop activities and recently presented in this way at an international conference on public health (European Public Health Conference 2014 (EUPHA) 19-22 Nov 2014: Abstract available at

http://www.eupha.org/repository/conference/2014/Glasgow_2014_programme_booklet.pdf
[Session X5](#))

Since starting this work, the Scottish walking strategy has been launched and an action plan is under development. As active stakeholders in this process we will encourage the use of these materials as resources for the walking strategy action plan via direct contact with Paths for All.

We plan to continue the nurturing of collaborations between research, policy and practice. Professor Mutrie sits on the National strategic oversight group for physical activity and will highlight the walking for wellbeing resources to this group which comprises key policy makers.

We have demonstrated strong evidence for the concept that walking can contribute to individual and community wellbeing and hope that this message becomes a headline topic in future wellbeing agenda for policy or practice.

