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Who walks, where and why? Practitioners' observations and perspectives on recreational walkers at UK tourist destinations

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Who walks, where and why?
Practitioners' observations and
perspectives on recreational walkers at UK
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Who walks, where and why? Practitioners' observations and perspectives on recreational walkers at UK tourist destinations

Abstract:

Walking is fundamental and prevalent in all tourist settings. It is the most popular activity in natural spaces and managed outdoor recreation areas, yet receives less attention in academic literature than it should. This paper conceptualises recreational walking, using the findings of a UK-based exploratory study. Twenty three in-depth interviews were undertaken with expert practitioners involved in the management of the walking world. The discourse revealed insights into characteristics and motivations for recreational walking. A diverse range of individuals participate, who demonstrate differing levels of commitment to walking, from short walks for sightseeing purposes to more challenging physical experiences on a more frequent and committed basis. Individual confidence is particularly important in determining how people choose to undertake walks, their level of involvement in the activity, and how they navigate themselves. The interview findings suggest that walkers can be casual or serious in their interest in walking. These distinctions are useful in separating walking in terms of adventure tourism and other forms of tourism.

Who walks, where and why? Practitioners' observations and perspective on recreational walkers at UK tourist destinations

1 Introduction

Walking is a universal tourist activity, encompassing the full spectrum of recreational participation; from intensive long-distance trail-walks and dedicated walking holidays to short unplanned walks at destinations by tourists on a more general holiday. Motivations to walk are diverse, and include experiencing the social and cultural dimensions of places; health, physical rehabilitation and mental wellbeing; adventure; the discovery and interpretation of heritage; access to locations for wildlife and nature-based tourism; pilgrimage and spirituality (Moscardo, 1996; Murray and Graham, 1997; Reynolds and Braithwaite, 2001; Lumsdon and Spence, 2002; Beedie and Hudson, 2003; Connell, 2006; Sharpley and Jepson, 2011).

Whilst there is a presence in academic literature of recreational walking at tourist destinations more generally, analyses of the walking experience and decision-making process do not portray the diversity of those who walk, nor the walks they choose. Walking has been included in the context of literature on the recreation and park movement, emergent from the late 19th century, principally from North America and Western Europe. Exploration of both recreation and tourism often jointly analyses a number of recreational activities in outdoor spaces in terms of their impact management, user profiles, user preferences for activities or environments, risk management, conflicts, motivations or experience (Jacob and Schreyer, 1980; Manning *et al.*, 2000; Torkildsen, 2005; Pigram and Jenkins, 2006; McLean *et al.*, 2008; Dickson and Gray, 2011), but often misses the nuances involved in walking as a focal activity.

Walking is fundamental in adventure tourism destinations, where roads, cars and infrastructure are often scarce. Accessing sites for more strenuous activities such as climbing, rivers for water based activities, or other remote areas for recreation will often necessitate some walking. For a considerable proportion, walking itself is the main or most strenuous activity. When considered more broadly, the range of different walks spans the adventure tourism niche, in addition to more general forms of tourism. For instance, long mountain walks are invariably undertaken by a different subset of tourists than much shorter 'strolls' in rural destinations. Stakeholders providing resources for recreational walking branch many sectors; ranging from tourism organisations to equipment retailers, environmental organisations and health authorities. If one considers the breadth of participation and 'types' of walking, it is arguably the most all-encompassing recreation activity, which leads on to the purpose of this paper.

It is particularly important for those involved in the supply and management of walking resources to know more about its participants. Research can fulfil fundamental purposes in adding to the body of knowledge in a number of areas, and more specifically adventure tourism: as a vital form of travel for activities and around destinations; a frequent tourism

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3 activity in itself; a form of active travel; and a means for tourism managers to incorporate
4 more sustainable approaches into visitor management. Additionally, with the increase of
5 slow tourism, slow adventure and most pertinently slow travel, walking offers a suitable
6 mode to experience places at a slow pace. This paper conceptualises recreational walking,
7 using the findings of a qualitative UK-based exploratory study from the supply perspective.
8 It seeks to investigate the practitioner view on the behaviour of walkers; using the
9 observations of countryside recreation managers and a range of organisational representatives
10 from a nebulous recreational supply sector. Ultimately it produces insight on the preferences
11 and motivations of walkers for locations; and appraises some underlying grouping
12 characteristics of walkers, to understand more clearly the diversity in evidence.
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16 17 **2 Literature review**

18 19 **2.1 Walking studies in the fields of tourism, adventure tourism and outdoor recreation**

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22 Published articles which directly analyse walking in tourist spaces will generally seek to
23 understand an aspect of tourism, using walking as a focal point. Examples include: a study
24 on the Inca Trail, which explores the route as the actual tourist experience (rather than the
25 destination) (Cutler et al. 2014); and investigation into meanings and interpretations of
26 historical culture for stakeholders associated with a heritage walking trail in Hong Kong
27 (Cheung, 1999). Other studies look at motivation, behaviour and route-choice (McNamara
28 and Prideaux, 2011). The movement of tourists, particularly in sensitive areas, is an
29 important research goal, and many movements recorded are walking routes. For instance,
30 Orellana *et al.* (2012) modelled visitor movement patterns in natural recreation areas,
31 identifying most-visited locations in the park, and the most frequently used routes. This
32 study and others like it (see Davies, 2012) inform the development of resources, promotion,
33 management and monitoring of recreational walking sites, highlighting the diversity of
34 walkers' needs including transport, information, and the dichotomy between preferring
35 natural spaces with no signage, and tourists requiring information and interpretation.
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41 Whilst tourism is a relatively new 'field' of study, whose discipline status is still being
42 debated (Tribe, 1997), adventure tourism study is still framing itself. In 1987, Ewert
43 published an overview of previous research, providing a definition for outdoor adventure
44 recreation: '*a self-initiated, non-consumptive recreational activity engaged in a natural*
45 *outdoor setting, that contains real or perceived elements of risk in which the outcome is*
46 *uncertain but influenced by the participant and/or circumstance'* (Ewert, 1987). The
47 inclusion of 'risk' in this definition indicates a restriction towards more 'adventurous' forms
48 of walking tourism. More recently, Weber (2005) noted the tendency of adventure-based
49 recreation studies to neglect the tourism element. Beedie and Hudson (2003) state that
50 mountaineering as a specialist activity now overlaps more with tourism. They suggest that
51 hillwalking in exotic places has been 'redefined as trekking' and that the increase in
52 classifications is a result of the broadening of activities over time. The authors describe three
53 key areas in defining adventure tourism: control is deferred to experts, promotional media is
54 used frequently and technology is used in adventurous settings. It is clear therefore, that the
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3 development of understanding in this area reflects a degree of flux in two elements:
4 categorisation of activities; and the criteria used to classify them as adventure tourism.
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7 The terms used for 'types' of walking in academic literature include specialist activities such
8 as hiking, back-packing and mountaineering. It can be difficult to differentiate; the terms
9 walking and hiking are often used interchangeably (an example being Lieber & Fesenmaier,
10 1984). Ewert (2000) uses activity-based terms including hiking, hiking to a summit,
11 backpacking, backpacking to a summit, mountain climbing and rock climbing (raising a
12 further consideration regarding the boundary between walking and climbing). In adventure
13 recreation spaces, activities may be hard or soft, based on levels of regulation and
14 independence, risk and control (Ewert, 2000). Organised walking groups can be highly
15 regulated and structured, for example (Davies and Weston, 2015). Recreation and tourism
16 activities often occur in the same physical spaces; for example National Parks (McKercher,
17 1996), the countryside, and urban green spaces; and overlap other areas including ecotourism
18 and activity tourism (Pomfret and Bramwell, 2014). Based on Ewert's definitions, spaces
19 vary widely from highly controlled walking activity with low risk certainty and more
20 available amenities (such as manicured forest parks with car-parking, toilets and short easy
21 trail walks) to higher risk, lower control and less amenities (hillwalking or mountaineering).
22 Categorisation of people, activities and places allows academics and managers to understand
23 walking tourists' motivations for different experiences and preferences for walking locations.
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29 30 **2.2 Segmenting walkers and understanding diverse walking preferences**

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32 Differentiating between walkers, either by characteristics or walking behaviour is seldom
33 focused upon in tourism or any other branch of study. A typology was developed for urban
34 pedestrians based on their route preferences (Millonig and Gartner, 2009), but this falls short
35 of analysis of tourism behaviour. Kay and Moxham (1996) attempted to classify walkers to
36 explore the notion of 'hoardes' clogging up the countryside. The study utilised a
37 classification of twenty types of walking (rather than the walkers themselves they focused on
38 the activity), ranging from occasional short strolls to 'Munro-baggers' (and including
39 sauntering, ambling, strolling, tramping, rambling, hill-walking, and yomping). They were
40 generated subjectively based on five dimensions: difficulty of the walk, ability of the
41 participants, level of planning required, where the walk was on a scale ranging from 'relaxing
42 and sociable', to 'challenging and rewarding', and where the walk fits on a continuum
43 between mainstream activity and esoteric minority activity. The exercise highlighted the
44 diversity of walking as an activity. Other instances where researchers have attempted to
45 categorise walkers include: research subjects self-classifying themselves as hillwalkers under
46 the umbrella of mountaineering (Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 1996), and studies of
47 visitors to natural areas which focus on multiple forms of outdoor recreation, in which
48 walking and hiking are differentiated from other activities (Tomkins, 1990, Brandenburg and
49 Ploner, 2002). The diversity of walk types, the true nature of walkers and their route-choices
50 is not illustrated in these categories. The relationship between walker and location is much
51 more complex than often considered to be in the literature (Den Breejen, 2007).
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3 The process of segmentation in tourism allows links to be drawn between activities in
4 outdoor recreation and characteristics such as age and gender (Pomfret and Bramwell, 2014).
5 Segmenting tourists on their characteristics, travel activities and patterns can produce tangible
6 'groups' for which marketing can be targeted (Bryant and Morrison, 1980). In rural tourist
7 areas, 'psychographic' segmentation based on more unique characteristics including lifestyle,
8 personality, recreational expectations and motivations can explain visitor behaviour (Frochot,
9 2005; Molera and Albaladejo, 2007). Exploration of motivations is not new in tourism study,
10 and has developed from understanding the 'needs' one feels to offset everyday normality and
11 stress with more fulfilling, relaxing and exciting activities (Dann, 1977; Crompton, 1979; Iso-
12 Ahola; 1982). These needs are universal to walking and other forms of recreation. Other
13 needs reflect benefits of recreation such as health and well-being (Wolf and Wohlfart, 2014),
14 social interaction and nature (Lepp and Herpy, 2015).
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19 Hill *et al.* (2008) examined the Appalachian Trail finding that hikers' benefits were
20 associated with the wilderness experience, as visitors achieved greater self-fulfilment and
21 self-esteem, as a consequence of sharing the activity experienced camaraderie, and
22 companionship. The affective benefits of walking also include relaxation, no stress, control,
23 excitement and freedom (Anable and Gatersleben, 2007). In any travel-related form of
24 recreation, push and pull factors and their interplay are important in the choice of destination
25 (Crompton, 1979; Chon, 1993). Push factors are motivational traits inherent in the individual
26 which cause them to make the tourist trip, and pull factors are specific attractive forces
27 relating to the destination. Recreational walking can therefore be characterised by two types
28 of motivation: general motivations to perform the activity, and specific motivations relating
29 to the routes and locations chosen. However, given that walking tourists reflect a range of
30 motivations from challenge, risk and adventure to more sedate needs such as relaxation, push
31 and pull factors will differ depending on individual characteristics and preferences for
32 walking locations.
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38 There are a number of studies in health-related literature which identify 'objectively
39 measured environmental variables' (see Humpel *et al.*, 2002; Saelens *et al.*, 2003; Giles-Corti
40 *et al.*, 2005), that is, characteristics in the walking environment which may increase or
41 decrease the population of walkers using certain routes. Pikora (2003) studied physical and
42 social determinants of walking and cycling participation in Australia, using environmental
43 factors grouped as: functional (gradient, access, path design, surface width, traffic speed and
44 volume), safety (crossings and lighting), aesthetic (architecture, trees and street maintenance)
45 and destination (local facilities and parks). Alfonso (2005) modelled walking needs, using a
46 framework influenced by group, individual, regional and physical environmental variables.
47 The first order of variables (feasibility) was considered most important and must be realised
48 by an individual for them to consider the second variable (safety). Pleasurability was the
49 least important group of factors, in contrast to the motivations inherent in recreational
50 walkers. The urban setting of many route choice studies in the field of health, and the
51 functional nature of many of the walks analysed can explain this.
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3 In natural settings, both tangible and intangible elements of the environment are considered
4 either objectively or subjectively by individuals. An analysis of activity-based tourist
5 segments by Agapito *et al.* (2014) indicated that hiking and trekking were highly associated
6 with rural sensory or a nature based experience. The most frequently cited sight-related
7 aspects of the experience were landscape, natural light and diversity of colours, whilst
8 hearing-related sensory elements were predominantly birdsong, wind and the sound of the
9 sea. Higham (1998) acknowledged the emerging trend of tourists becoming more likely to
10 branch away from more established routes and locations, and the rise in wilderness tourism
11 and independent travel. The preference of some tourists for a holistic wilderness experience
12 suggests a different need being met in terms of exposure to certain natural elements
13 associated with locations.
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18 The element of choice is key in understanding preferences for tourist settings. Martin (2008)
19 modelled choices of destination for discretionary tourist travel, by grouping a series of
20 processes: demographics, external influences and 'pre-framing events' – which interact to
21 frame tourist's choices, and their selection of destinations. In turn, activities once at the
22 destination are influenced by both pre-trip factors and on-site influences which occur in situ.
23 This model is relevant to a walking trip as initial choices lead the walker to a destination, but
24 other, perhaps unplanned, forces act when on the walk causing the walker to evaluate the
25 choice of route. Pigram and Jenkins (2006) state that, when understanding recreational
26 choices, making predictions is problematic because of the subjective nature of recreation
27 decisions and because choices can sometimes be bound by constraints, including physical
28 capability, awareness, wealth, time availability and family obligations. Conflicts between
29 participants of different activities and obstructions such as weather are also relevant
30 (Cessford, 2003; Tucker and Gilliland, 2007).
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36 **3 Research Method**

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38 The aim of this study was to understand in detail the differences between people who walk in
39 tourist spaces, their characteristics, preferences and motivations. The research was
40 particularly focused on gaining a broad but detailed picture of behaviour and decision-making
41 of this diverse group of tourists. Twenty three in-depth interviews were undertaken with
42 practitioners who have had long-standing and continued exposure to the needs and wants of
43 walkers. The value of this approach and its outcome is to frame the activity of walking, the
44 nature of its differences and provide important contextual basis for future study. Essentially,
45 whilst it is clear to many that walking is a wide-ranging phenomenon spanning adventure
46 tourism and more general tourism, it is useful to understand more clearly how this segment
47 behaves through the prism of the supply sector's viewpoint from the management of
48 experiences of walking tourists: and whether or not they consider that there are distinct
49 groups or 'types' of people who fundamentally seek different experiences and behave
50 differently.
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56 The human-centred nature of these aims, and the fact that almost all of the interviewees were
57 walkers themselves reflect a pragmatic approach, which places importance on the
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3 consequences of the research in a real-world perspective (Watkins and Giola, 2015). Their
4 close involvement with the activity means that they 'live within the world' of walkers; a
5 situation which could potentially be construed as bias, but it is that bias itself which offers a
6 credible provider of the emerging themes in inductive research (Charmaz, 2006).
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9 Interviewees were selected on the basis of their connection to and knowledge of the walking
10 tourism market in the UK and were engaged in walking-related occupations including:
11 writers, researchers, countryside and recreation managers, equipment developers, walking
12 planners and group leaders. This selection method is known as purposive sampling (see
13 Patton, 1990) which is focused on developing a frame for the research area. Table 1 details
14 the occupations of the experts interviewed.
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18 INSERT TABLE 1 SOMEWHERE NEAR HERE
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20 The method of in-depth interviews is a powerful tool to understand the lived experiences of
21 people regarding a particular subject area, rather than testing a hypothesis or discrete
22 evaluation (Seidman, 2013). In simple terms, it is a conversation with a research purpose
23 (Kvale and Brinkman, 2009). A good qualitative interview will achieve breadth and depth in
24 terms of insight into the subject area (Yeo *et al.*, 2013).
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28 The interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes, using open questioning, allowing the
29 interviewee to talk freely around the subject area. Recordings were transcribed and coded
30 using NVivo software. The interviews were coded using a 'bottom up' approach (Pidgeon
31 and Turner, 1991), by constructing the codes and identifying their relationship as the
32 transcripts were examined.
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35 The analysis process then drew together codes into a coding tree which stemmed from initial
36 themes relating to the principal aspects of the subject area of recreational walking, differences
37 between walkers, and route choice. These themes diverged and were developed over the
38 course of the interviews as new themes emerged in the analysis process. In some cases,
39 codes became both more nuanced and defined, but the core themes therefore became more
40 illustrated and concrete as they were understood better. The organisation of codes was part of
41 the process, and increased understanding and meaning in the data.
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48 **4 Findings**

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50 INSERT FIGURE 1 SOMEWHERE NEAR HERE
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52 Figure 1 shows how, over the course of the 23 interviews, a number of themes emerged
53 regarding the experiences walkers seek, how they are characterised by the interviewees and
54 how the research was developed through the analysis process. Topics began under broad
55 headline themes of experiences, characteristics, motivations and behaviour; with extra
56 consideration given to the dynamics of the research and supply side perspectives, as they
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3 added a further dimension to the analytical process. Over the course of interviews, the
4 differences between walkers began to become sharper in focus: different walking conditions,
5 choices and experiences affect the way that walkers think about and approach the activity;
6 and personal confidence in one's walking ability affects choices. When the final few
7 transcripts were analysed, the complexity of the research subject area had become apparent.
8 The following sections explore the themes as they developed.
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11 **4.1 Initial understanding of the research area**

12 **INSERT FIGURE 2 SOMEWHERE NEAR HERE**

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16 Figure 2 explains the themes and research thought processes emerging from the first step of
17 analysis. Discourse reflected universal motivations for recreational walking: health and
18 wellbeing, relaxation, the escape from the everyday, discovery of surroundings, history,
19 culture and the visual experience. Physical exertion and feelings associated with more
20 challenging forms of walking were also discussed. In some extreme cases, this extended to
21 the most challenging experiences.
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25 *'You've got these hundred milers who are in for the slog. They've got two and a half*
26 *days to do it in.'*
27

28
29 The perceived achievability of the walk was discussed. Tangible achievements include
30 reaching a summit, navigational objectives, or literally feeling tired afterwards. Individuals
31 are likely to assess their own ability and fitness, and the relative difficulty of the walk. One
32 respondent suggested that walkers often experience post-activity satisfaction as a 'bath
33 moment', a metaphor for reflecting on their achievement:
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37 *'... the entertainment, the outcome comes by getting back...because someone once*
38 *said to me: 'What's the best bit about walking and I said jokingly: 'It's the bath*
39 *afterwards, or the pub afterwards'...you know, when you've finished the walk you've*
40 *got a sense of achievement.'*
41
42

43 The speed of walking as a mode of transport was considered unique in comparison to cycling,
44 car and other modes, offering a unique experiential interaction with surroundings. Walking
45 was also considered a social experience, particularly in organised groups as it represents a
46 chance to meet likeminded people, combat loneliness, share an experience and spend
47 valuable time with family and friends.
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51 *'There are certain elements about, in terms of relationships, with partners and friends*
52 *and family, that's the one time they are uninterrupted by the things that they have in*
53 *normal life. So celebrating those moments is cherished time. There's a powerful*
54 *health aspect to it, but I think if walking were bad for them they'd still go and do it.'*
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57 Solo walking was considered a more insular experience, in which the walker becomes
58 immersed in their external environment with minimal human interference.
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3 Similarities and differences of individual walkers began to emerge, based on preferences for
4 landscapes. Sensory factors are widely important to choices and the quality of visual
5 attraction offered by routes can be conceived as an 'overall' quality such as a mountain-
6 scape, or depend on individual elements such as water, tree cover or a specific point of
7 interest, either natural or man-made. One respondent also noted that visual preference
8 extends to urban spaces, especially in tourist areas because it adds to the overall tourist
9 experience. Tourists are likely to also visit nearby urban areas before or after walks.
10 Seasonal variations in the visual appearance of landscapes are also significant elements of
11 location preference:
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15 *'So it's a closeness to nature, and how that changes through the seasons.'*
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18 The degree of management on particular routes was another recurring theme. Tourist
19 expectation encompasses a scale ranging from a wilderness experience within relatively
20 untouched surroundings to heavily 'manicured' sites with gravel paths, and prominent
21 facilities. Motivations for wilderness locations include the desire to travel lesser-frequented
22 routes, avoid crowds of people and experience the tranquillity offered by more remote areas.
23 Natural authenticity is a key element of the experience.
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26
27 Alongside walking-related themes, much insight was gained on the supply perspective,
28 reflecting the diversity of organisations involved in areas such as marketing, transportation
29 and the design of walks. Interviewees were consistent on their observations of walkers'
30 preferences despite this. Understanding more about walkers' varying needs and sustainable
31 visitor management emerged as important areas within circles of practitioners. Ultimately
32 the differences between walkers' thoughts and actions were developing at this stage of the
33 analysis.
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36 37 **4.2 Exploring confidence: a core theme in the analysis**

38 39 **INSERT FIGURE 3 SOMEWHERE NEAR HERE**

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41 It became clear that respondents considered segmenting walkers to be more complex than
42 using only demographics and primary motivations for walking. Figure 3 illustrates the
43 development of themes beyond general motivations to walk, showing how experiences
44 gained from walking environments, navigation and the level of engagement of individuals
45 affects their choices and behaviour. A core emergent theme became apparent which
46 transcended many other aspects of the subject area. Many interviewees perceived an
47 intangible and potentially variable level of confidence in recreational walkers, which can
48 explain behaviour and route-choices made.
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53 *'We've definitely found confidence to be a major factor and sometimes it needs to be*
54 *more acknowledged I think. And there are different aspects to that because some of it*
55 *is about tangible skills: map reading, basic techniques or knowing about equipment*
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3 *and so on. And other aspects of confidence are quite intangible and almost about*
4 *cultural expectations.'*
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7 Within the numerous instances where interviewees discussed confidence, the primary
8 individual characteristics affecting walkers' level of confidence were reduced to:
9

- 10 • Their level of experience of recreational walking (a result of the previous amount of
11 walking undertaken, and the level of challenge involved in those walks)
- 12 • Their technical ability (for instance knowing 'how to walk' on difficult surfaces,
13 challenging, longer distance and hill walks)
- 14 • Their navigational ability (the ability to read and follow maps, and negotiate the
15 environment using physical aspects of the landscape or land marks)
- 16 • Their physical ability (personal fitness and level of stamina).
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20 Figure 4 describes the influences confidence, ability and experience have on each other. If an
21 individual's level of confidence is considered as a continuum, the research findings suggest
22 that people with high levels of experience and ability are likely to be more confident and
23 attempt walks of greater distance and difficulty.
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26 **INSERT FIGURE 4 SOMEWHERE NEAR HERE**

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29 A consensus amongst interviewees indicated that individuals who are less confident require
30 accurate, uncomplicated information on navigation, landmarks and transportation.
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33 *'The barriers that they faced and the things they were telling us was that they needed*
34 *better information and much more information. They needed somebody to help them*
35 *to start with whether it was a guided walk or whether it was a bit of training to use a*
36 *map and compass so it is – it's building up their confidence.'*
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39 These requirements apply to tourists who are infrequent walkers, using walking as a vehicle
40 for sightseeing, although there are other contributory factors. The relative safety of having
41 others make route-choice decisions characterises this end of the confidence scale. There were
42 indications that confidence increases by gaining walking experience, learning from more
43 experienced walkers, engaging in decision-making on walks and walking solo.
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47 *'Because they know it's up to them to take the lead or to get themselves out of trouble*
48 *or so on. And if there's someone else more experienced they sometimes don't develop*
49 *the confidence because it's always left to the same person to read the maps, read the*
50 *routes, whatever. So I think beyond that there's quite a lot of complex dynamics*
51 *going on there...that can make people more or less confident.'*
52
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54 Interviewees suggested that building confidence to a higher level often stimulates an
55 experiential desire for more adventurous forms of walking, the motivation to seek new
56 challenges and risks, venture further, and in some cases lead others. A long-distance
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walkers' group manager discussed how group members progress to leading the group themselves:

'So the leader will go out and reccy a walk. And then he'll take a party of whoever turns up. And it wasn't until I'd been in the group 4 or 5 years until I felt confident enough to lead a walk.'

In some circumstances however, walkers experience 'false confidence'. They then potentially face difficulties in challenging conditions: at altitude or when weather changes.

'The casual walkers probably don't. You do occasionally see people who are trying to get along Striding Edge [a challenging route in the English Lake District] in winter on the snow and they are just wearing trainers'

Despite confidence appearing to be the most significant differentiator of individuals from the data, it still remains an intangible quality. From many of the respondents' opinions, experience appears to be interrelated with gaining confidence.

4.3 Casual and serious walkers

INSERT FIGURE 5 SOMEWHERE NEAR HERE

A second significant theme emerged from the data which also relates to confidence. A number of respondents used the terms 'casual' and 'serious' without being prompted by the interviewer to differentiate walkers. Figure 5 demonstrates how the analysis began to characterise these differences. A recreation manager from the Lake District National Park Authority, encapsulated general characteristics of these two groups when discussing information needs.

'We worked with a consultancy company and they did a needs and preference research. And they categorised all the different types of users and one of their categories was serious and casual walkers. So the needs and preferences of each of them came out to be quite different. And I think and it's my opinion but you look at serious walkers – you think of hill walkers. It's not something that they just do as part of a day out or as part of a general holiday. It's something that is their primary purpose especially when you're in a national park like this. The reasons that people come here are different.'

In some cases the distinction was used to describe traits of individuals based on their attitudes to walking as a recreational activity. The two categories provide a means of conceptualising the difference between: a group of people who consider walking an important recreational pursuit to which they devote a reasonable amount of time and energy in their lives; and another group of people who do not necessarily pursue walking as a regular activity, engaging in walks sporadically or for sightseeing at a destination. For serious walkers, the strenuous nature of the walks they choose and the inclusion of hills and mountains, are indicative of

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2
3 their preferences. The interviews also strongly suggested that the devotion of serious walkers
4 encompasses attitudes to weather, the environment, skills and equipment, and to other areas
5 of their lives.
6

7
8 *'They don't seem to mind even if it's wet. That's when the serious walkers differ.*
9 *They go out rain or shine.'*
10

11 The use of a map to plan the walk adds to the holistic experience:
12

13
14 *'I think. A lot of the fun of walking for the more committed is that planning process*
15 *mug of coffee maps out. Where are we going to go. How are we going to plan this?'*
16

17
18 Table 2 summarises some characteristics which respondents associated with serious and
19 casual walkers.
20

21 **INSERT TABLE 2 SOMEWHERE NEAR HERE**

22

23
24 Several respondents also referred to a serious walker's 'identity', hinting at a visible
25 subculture of recreationists; the high specification clothing represents a 'uniform' in this
26 sense to identify a 'walker'. The image of being serious was discussed further by one
27 interviewee:
28

29
30 *'...a completely novice backpacker would buy a brand new shiny back pack. And*
31 *then would come across really experienced back packers whose stuff was all worn,*
32 *and then they would purposefully rough up their equipment (...) I have actually*
33 *heard...it's more of a climbing thing I think, (...) of people marking their equipment so*
34 *it looks as if it's not new. To make them look more experienced.'*
35
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37
38 'Serious walkers' value the challenge of the route, long distances and steep gradients, and in
39 some cases the time taken (this reflects when walking becomes a sport). In some cases this
40 extends to longer term goals by completing a checklist of mountain peaks (for example, to
41 walk all of the Scottish 'Munros'). Other important parts of the experience reflect feelings of
42 the need for comfort or safety, although for more serious walkers this may be traded off for
43 risk and adventure. For casual walkers, comfort also reflects elements such as being close to
44 toilets, smooth path surfaces, shops and refreshments.
45
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47 **4.4 Complexities of the research perspective**

48

49 **INSERT FIGURES 6 AND 7 NEAR HERE**

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51
52 As the analysis process progressed, the nuanced nature of categorisation emerged; through
53 consideration of the various niches of more dedicated walks: long-distance walking, hill
54 walking, rambling clubs or the more technical, challenging mountain walks outside of the
55 UK; and at the other end of the scale more functional walks which could still be
56 'pleasurable', 'health walks' for people unused to walking, and guided tours.
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3 It was suggested that the concept of 'serious walking' may be indicative of circumstances.
4 References were made to situational variables such as lack of available time, which affect the
5 ability of individuals to walk often. Indeed, the proximity of an individual's residence to
6 suitable locations to go walking may impact their current 'status' as a serious or casual
7 walker:
8
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10
11 *'Absolutely...well it's pretty much the same thing but it depends on their*
12 *incumbrances and their time of life. How much time they have how far away he*
13 *country is. Because you might have somebody...let's call them a scrambler and put*
14 *them at category five. The demanding type. Yet because of his job he's now forced to*
15 *live in Cambridge. And that means that it's 250 miles to the*
16 *next...acceptable...country...in his book. And that might be something that he can't do*
17 *very often. Whereas in his previous job he lived in Penrith and went up the Dales*
18 *every day.'*
19
20

21
22 This idea of fluidity between casual and serious walking became a conceptual question
23 suggesting that there could not be two 'boxes' which are completely separate, in which
24 different individuals fall into:
25

26
27 *'Yes. It's obviously very difficult to have a dividing line. The lines are very blurred.*
28 *There's a lot of overlap.'*
29

30
31 It also transpired that there may well be a degree of mobility between groups. One person
32 could engage in 'casual' and 'serious' walks at different times.
33

34
35 *'One particular person might do a very casual walk one day dog walking, or just*
36 *walking to the shops. And then at the weekend they're doing a round of five Munros*
37 *or something. Very much at the serious end. And they're the same person.'*
38

39
40 It was suggested that becoming a serious walker can be an aspirational movement. This idea
41 of progression suggests a casual-serious continuum rather than discrete groups, in which it
42 might be difficult to pinpoint where exactly a walker changes from being casual to serious.
43

44
45 Thus, although many respondents could provide a number of definitive characteristics which
46 separated their idea of casual and serious walkers, there must be caution in using the terms as
47 distinct definitions. It may be easy to generalise to an extent, but one must view the potential
48 of using such categories as a useful framework for study, observation and to use practically in
49 providing resources for walkers, rather than a distinct and closed division of people who
50 walk. That also is the nature of segmentation in tourism.
51

52
53 Collective characteristics reflective of all walkers were also discussed. For instance, walkers
54 were considered to have a relatively high environmental awareness. It was also suggested
55 that during young adulthood, more adventurous outdoor activities are attractive whilst
56 walking represents a less strenuous activity in later life – confidence in one's ability may play
57 a part in this. However it became apparent that motivations and preferences varied between
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3 walkers, in terms of their interest in the landscape, preferred route characteristics, and the
4 level of management of the routes they choose.
5

6
7 Regarding route-choice, a question was raised over whether a decision chain exists for
8 walkers, either purely based on experiential expectations or partially by situational factors.
9 The interview findings suggest that a hierarchy of factors interact to determine eventual
10 route-choice. Initial prompts include suggestions by friends to walk certain routes or visit
11 locations, previous experiences, or specific points of interest seen in books or other forms of
12 media. In some cases a specific purpose such as walking a dog, or finding somewhere to eat
13 influence choice of route.
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16
17 Situational factors affect route choice, both before and during walks. Rain, wind and cold
18 temperatures can be a deterrent. Certain decision elements relate to practical considerations
19 including: transport access to certain routes, the distance of the intended walk from home or a
20 holiday base and the availability of information about how to access a particular walk.
21 Physical barriers such as stiles, farms, fences or roads are common *in situ* deterrents which
22 also affect route-choice. More general dislikes include conflicts with other users such as
23 horse riders or cyclists, encountering cattle, large amounts of litter on routes and having to
24 negotiate barbed wire fences. Perceptions of these issues range from mild irritation to more
25 major disturbances which can adversely influence overall satisfaction with the walking
26 experience. Other problems, such as extremely poor surfaces, can completely stop the walk.
27 Personal safety and security are additional concerns for some walkers, both in rural and urban
28 locations. The more obvious attributes included demographic differences (age, gender,
29 socio-economic variations and ethnicity).
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35 Wider factors in a decision chain can be specific to individuals or groups of walkers.
36 Clearly, route-choices are made either by one individual or are based on the preferences and
37 constraints of a number of people. One respondent suggested that although the balance of
38 individual requirements determines the group dynamics with respect to route choice, certain
39 individuals may exert greater influence than others. The presence of younger children or
40 adults with limited mobility within groups can entail greater consideration of the route-
41 chosen, in order to make it achievable.
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46 A further element relates to specific purposes which need to be fulfilled on walks.
47 Sometimes main or subsidiary purposes of walks are more functional such as walking to
48 work or exercising a dog. This tests conceptual boundaries of defining walks for recreation
49 or tourism, as it is debatable whether the walk is functional, for pleasure, or both. Several
50 respondents emphasised the importance of deriving pleasure from functional walking. This is
51 a conceptual matter, as a walk may be functional to one person, yet to another their route may
52 be chosen to make a functional walk more enjoyable, rather than for convenience. Ultimately
53 this decision is subjective to the individual.
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56 **Discussion and conclusion**

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3 This study has provided an in-depth exploration of the observations and experiences of
4 professionals involved in the supply of outdoor walking resources in areas of adventure
5 tourism. The findings indicate that practitioners see the activity as much more diverse than a
6 singular activity which is often treated with a one-size-fits-all approach in research in the
7 area. Walking is a universal tourist activity which bridges adventure tourism and other forms
8 of tourism, and there are numerous ways in which it can be subdivided, based on
9 characteristics, motivations and walking preferences.
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13 The research indicated that the terms 'casual' and 'serious' are useful and more tangible
14 categories to differentiate walkers, particularly in the eyes of practitioners who are tasked
15 with meeting the needs of tourists. The work of Stebbins is relevant here. Originally,
16 Stebbins (1982) produced a conceptual statement on serious leisure, noting at the time the
17 trend towards people working less and a growing minority of people spending more time
18 indulging in leisure activities deemed as 'serious'. Walking for recreation fulfils this
19 definition if one considers the current market for long-distance walking, 'peak-bagging',
20 mountaineering or walking holiday tours; forms of walking which 'fit' the adventure tourism
21 study area more closely than others. Stebbins (1997) later noted a further classification of
22 activity: casual leisure. Casual leisure is often discussed as a foil for describing or
23 illuminating serious leisure and requires '*little more than minimal skill, knowledge or*
24 *experience*' (Stebbins, 2004). Stebbins initially outlined six 'types' of casual leisure, three
25 of which are relevant to the derived experience and motivations for a more 'casual form of
26 walking': active entertainment, sociable stimulation and sensory stimulation. These criteria fit
27 with walkers who may walk as part of a more general holiday in an adventure tourism
28 location. Do casual walkers fall outside of the adventure tourism spectrum? Probably, but the
29 resources and locations involved are often the same. Furthermore, as walking is important to
30 all tourism forms, they require equal attention to definition. Regarding the 'aspirational'
31 element of serious walking, proximity is important in drawing people together in recreational
32 relationships (Argyle, 1981), and the main criteria for being inducted as a serious walker is to
33 be in the locations, close to the other serious walkers. More attention to the aspirational
34 dimension would be beneficial to future research.
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42 The other key finding of the interviews suggested that confidence is one significant
43 differentiator of individuals and the walks they choose, and the challenge for researchers is to
44 understand exactly how this partially intangible concept manifests in walkers and walking
45 behaviour. Confidence is generally only a small part of conceptual models in tourism
46 research. Pearce and Lee (1995) studied an array of different categories of aspects drawn
47 from touristic experience, including romance, stimulation, isolation and autonomy.
48 Confidence falls into one factor group category (self-development) as 'Gaining a sense of
49 self-confidence'. Self-esteem and identity are important elements of Pomfret's (2006)
50 conceptual framework for mountaineers and if one considers mountaineering at the 'serious'
51 end of the walking spectrum, it is suggested that confidence is part of the mechanism which
52 determines these qualities. However, that spectrum is fluid, and Beedie and Hudson (2003)
53 suggest that there is also no longer a gradual promotion from low level walking to more
54 adventurous activity, as trends indicate a reduction in independent operations within
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3 mountain-scapes, due to a higher degree of organisation of activities. To understand
4 confidence in both walking and tourism activities further, more overlap between psychology
5 and the field of tourism would be useful.
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8 The study provides a conceptual exploration of the recreational walking market, producing
9 insights into the differences between walkers in their motivations and route-choices, which
10 outdoor recreation practitioners use to focus the supply of resources, information and
11 marketing. Future research should look at factors affecting groups and route-choice using
12 empirical study, to better form segments and remove some of the grey conceptual areas still
13 present. The research showed that many practitioners use their own categories but the
14 collective knowledge base would benefit by understanding segments and their characteristics
15 further. Whilst there is some potential bias in using interviews with practitioners, much depth
16 on this subject area has been gained, due to them being immersed in the 'world' of walkers.
17 A more direct study on walkers themselves would be equally valuable.
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Table 1: Occupations of interviewees

Walking-related occupation	Number
Professional writers of walking guides	3
Producer of walking route leaflets	1
Academic researchers	2
Countryside and recreation managers for local authorities, countryside services and Forest Enterprise	4
Walking equipment marketing experts	2
National and regional executives of the Rambler's Association and Long Distance Walker's Association (national walking groups)	2
Editor of popular UK walking magazine	1
Walking holiday and accommodation providers	3
Urban walkability expert	1
Large walking events organiser	1
Health walk co-ordinator (Natural England)	1
National access forum representative from the Institute of Public Rights of Way and Access Management (IPROW)	1
Sustainable transport campaigner	1

Table 2: Characteristics used to describe casual and serious walkers

Defining characteristics	Casual walkers	Serious walkers
Walking as a priority of recreational or tourism interest	Part of holiday or day out. Fit walking around other activities.	Primary purpose of recreation / tourism activity. Will walk whatever the weather
Skills required	Will change plans if barriers such as poor weather occur No skill generally required	Technical skills similar to sporting activities
Equipment	May have equipment, some people do not.	Spend significant money on equipment
Type of walking	Day walking or strolling	Hill walking Long-distance trails Steep, wilderness
Preference for type of landscape	Manicured visitor sites	
Preparation	Little preparation	Planning part of the process
Nature of interest	Some enthusiasm	Enthusiasm ranging to obsession
Need for amenities	Prefer to be within reach of facilities and civilisation	Prefer to be away from civilisation
Mode of transport	Open to bus and train walks	Mainly car users

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Figure 1: Stages of interview analysis and emergent themes

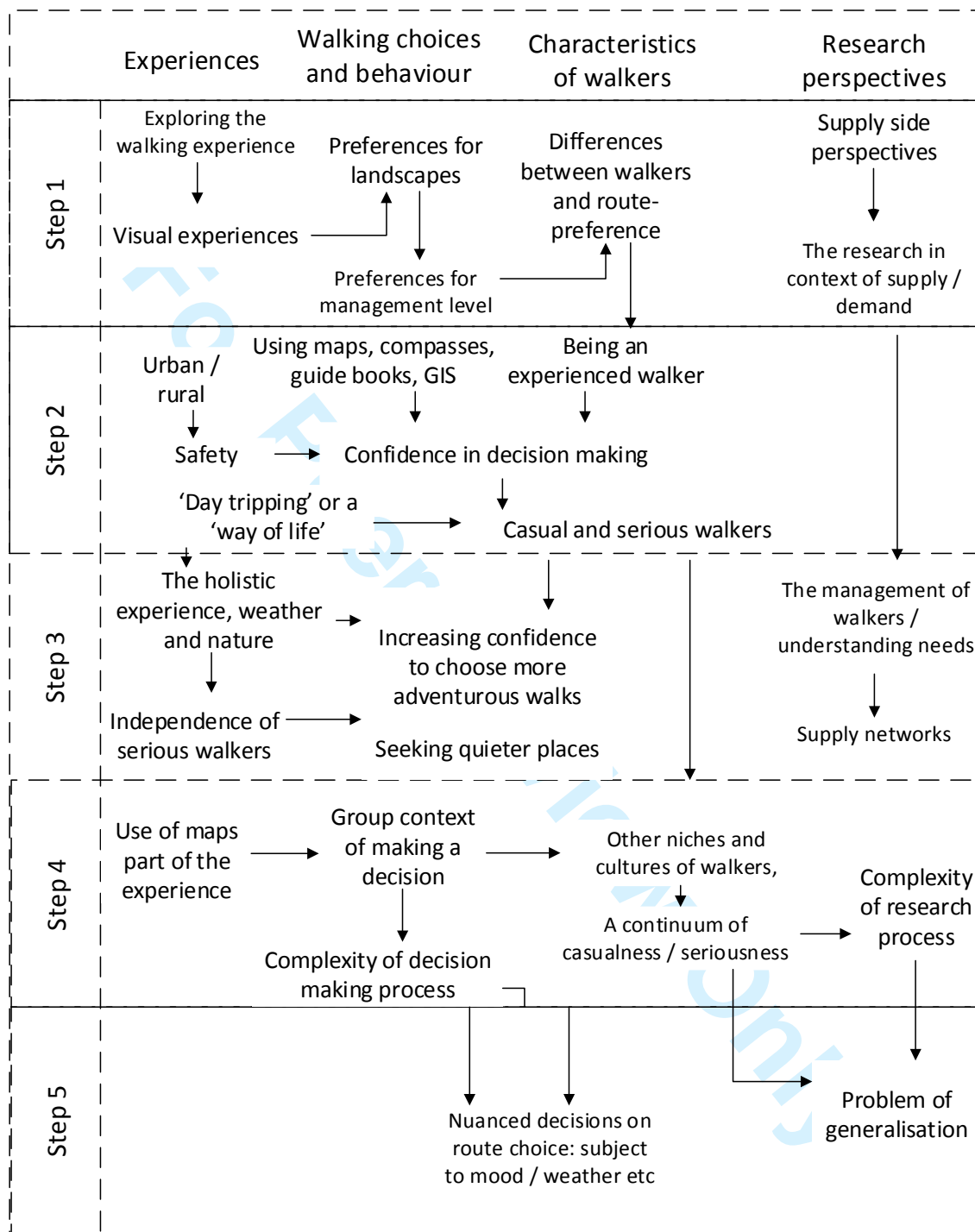


Figure 2: First step of analysis: emergent themes

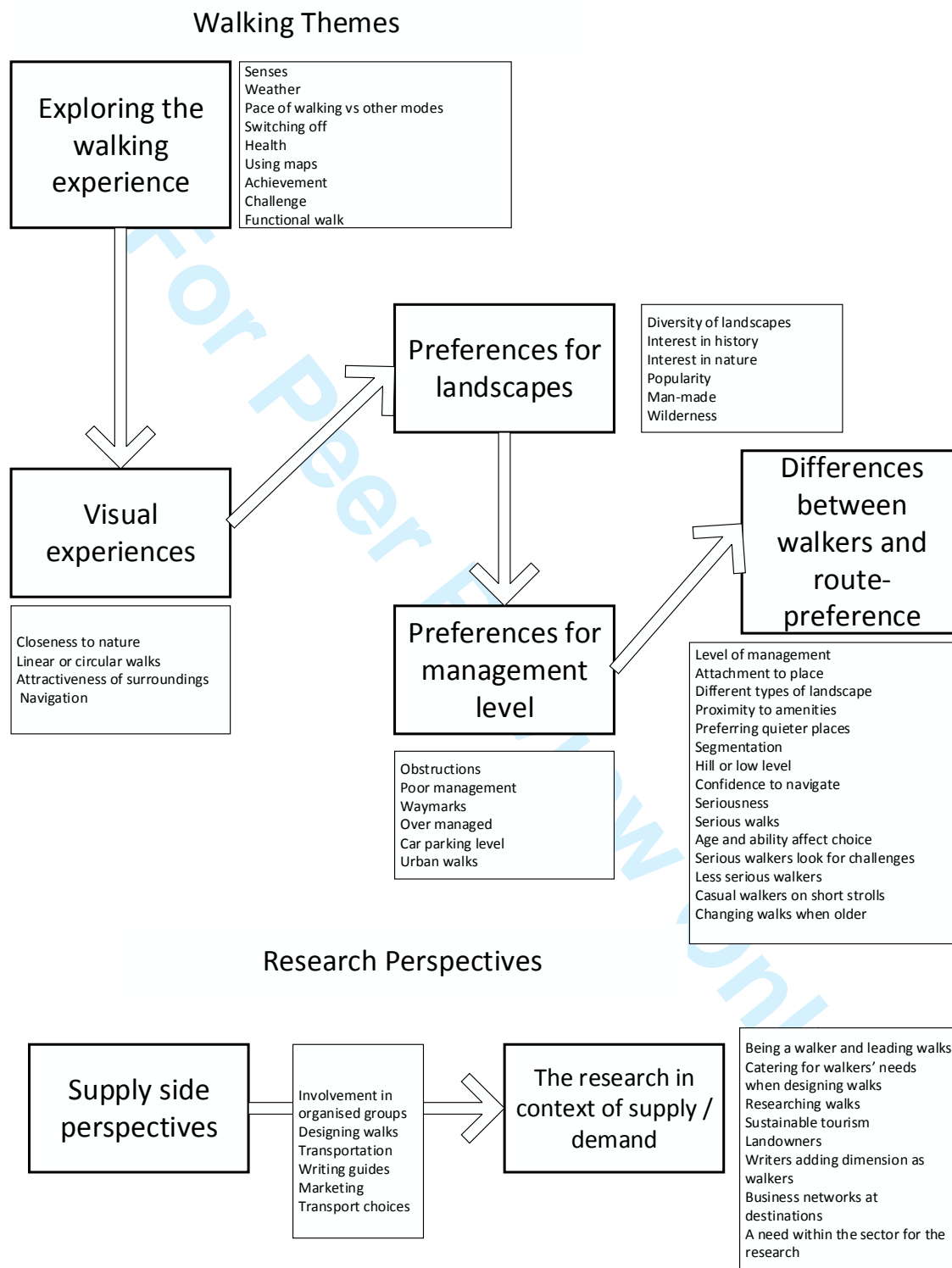


Figure 3: Second step of analysis: emergent themes

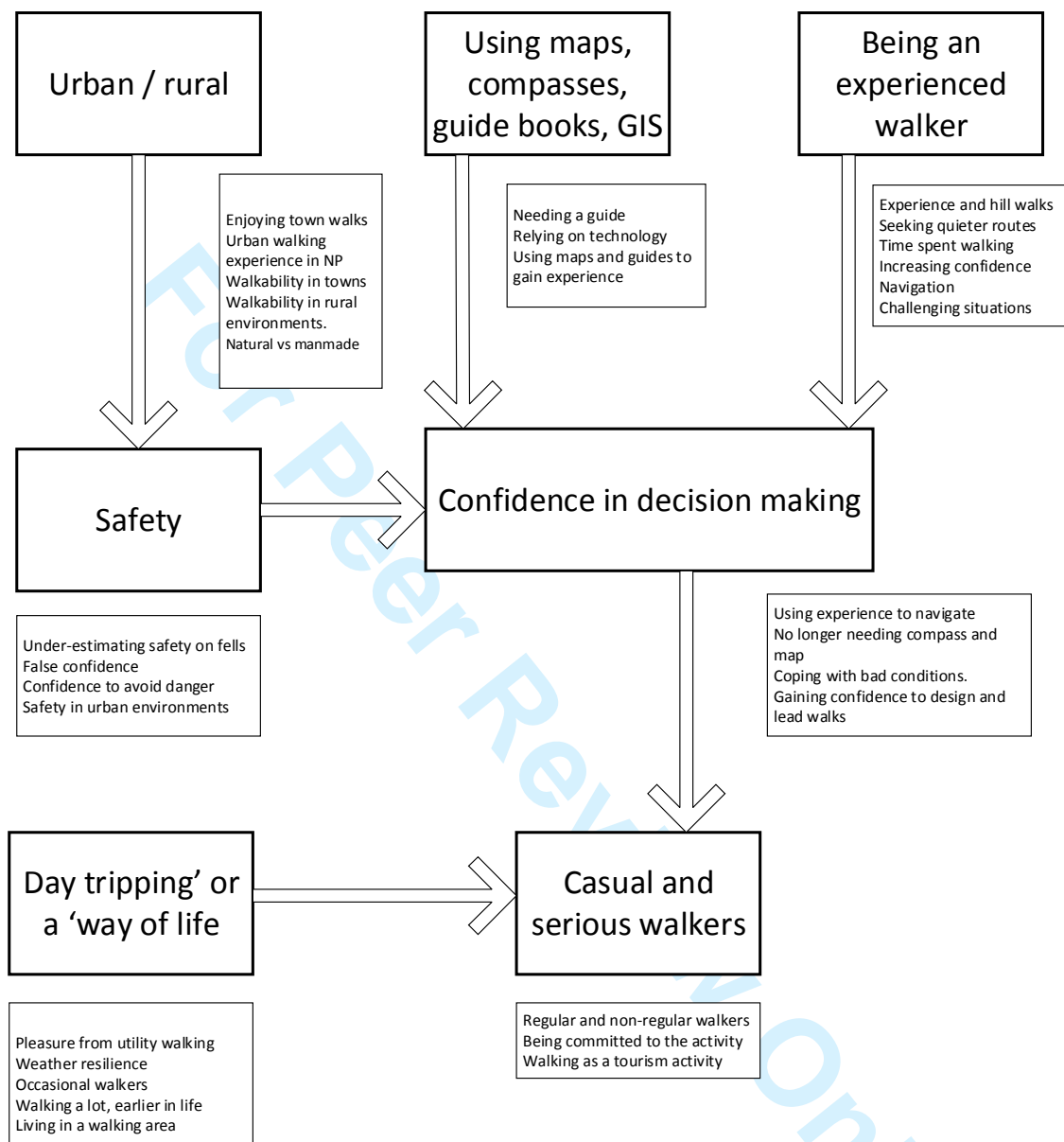


Figure 4: Relationships between walking related attributes



Figure 5: Third step of analysis: emergent themes

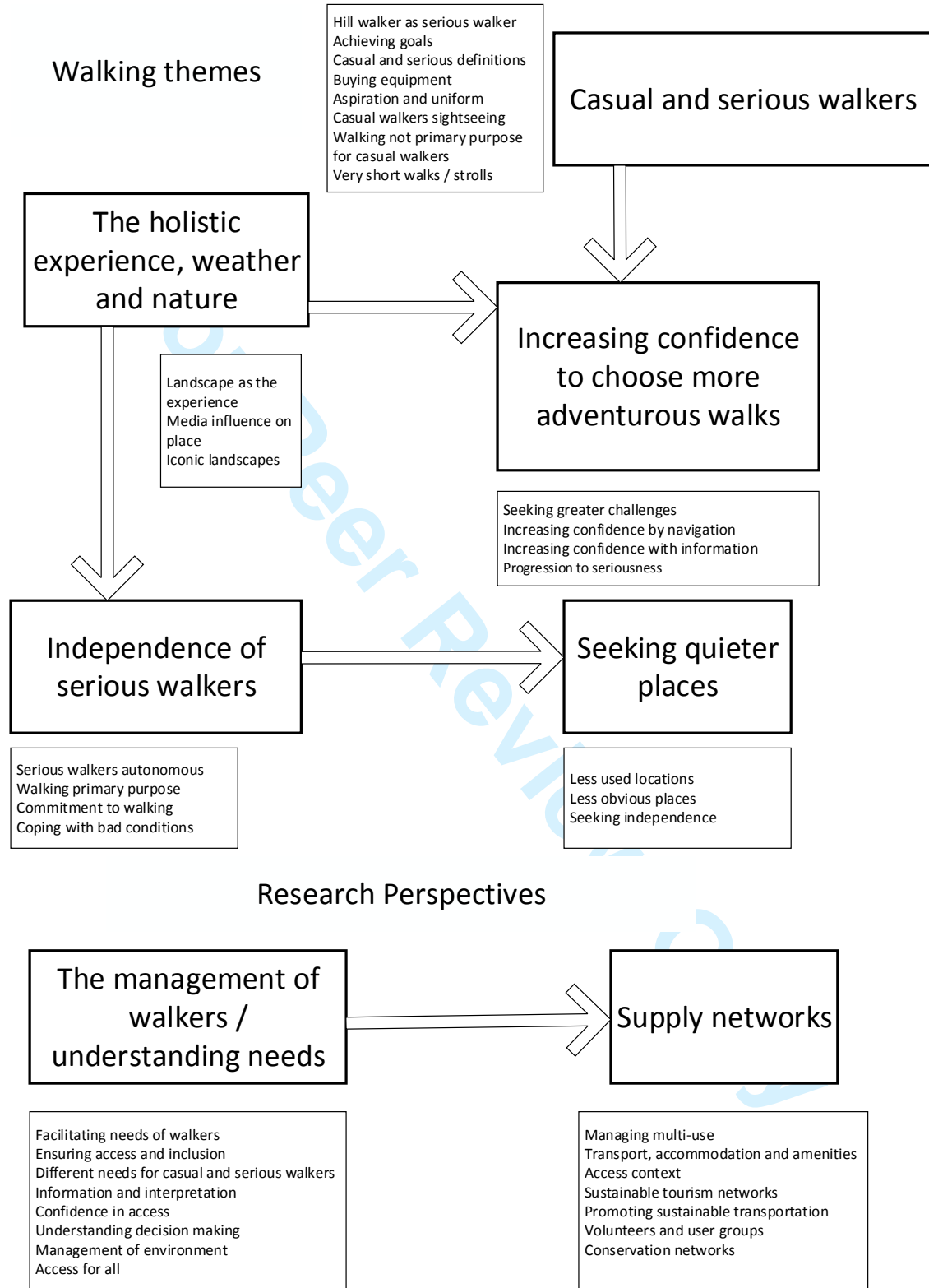


Figure 6: Fourth step of analysis: emergent themes

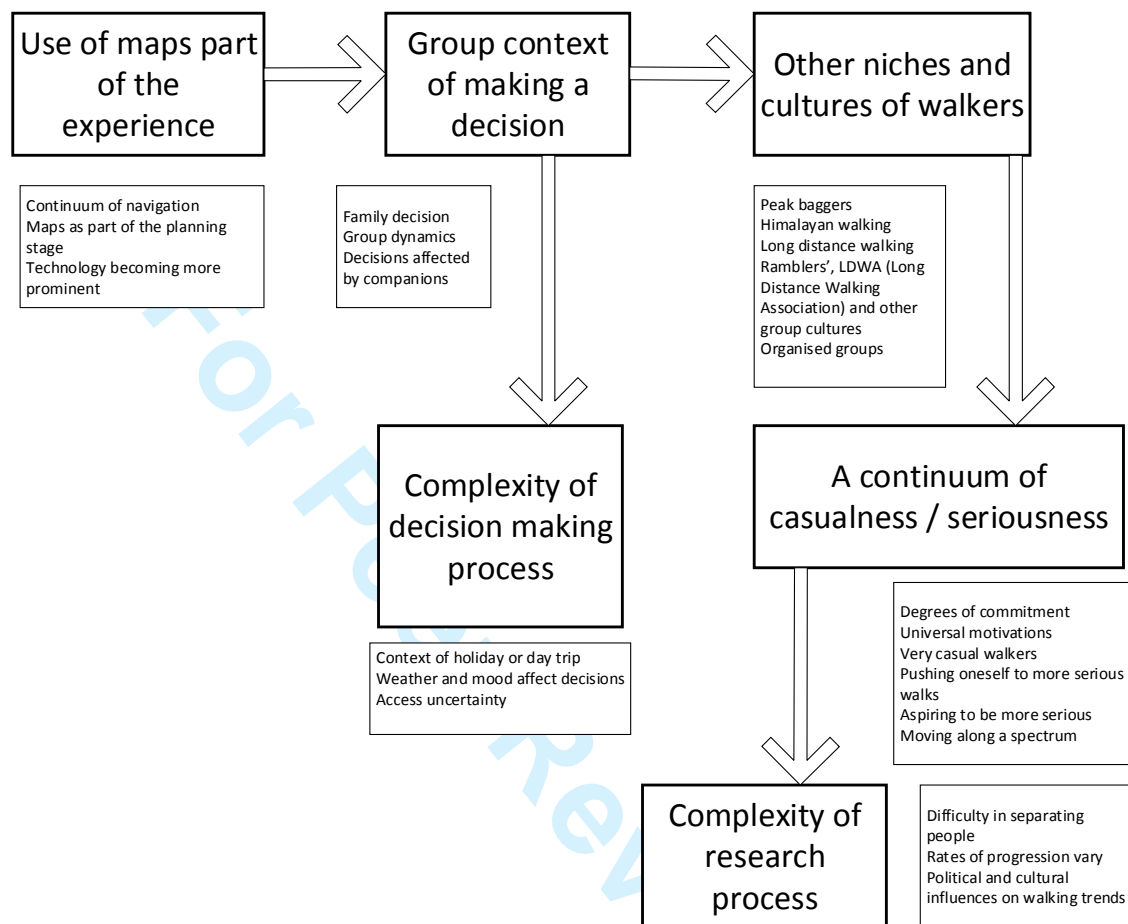


Figure 7: Fifth step of analysis: emergent themes

Nuanced decisions on route choice: subject to mood / weather etc

Problem of generalisation

Mood and energy affect route choice
Group dynamics
Life situation
Walkers' need for flexibility
Cultural influences

Large range of variables
Fluid interaction of variables
Phenomenon too complex to predict
Classify walks or walkers as casual or serious
Walking confidence intangible and complex
Utility / pleasure spectrum

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