

Der Empirische Stadtspaziergang – ESP

The Empirical City Walk

The Empirical City Walk (ESP – Empirischer Stadtspaziergang in German) is a qualitative instrument that can be used to research a place, a district, a small town, or a selected area. It can be compared to a local inspection, but its approach is more methodologically holistic. It is easy to apply and therefore suitable for all target and age groups. The Empirical City Walk can be used as a diagnostic tool before a planning procedure.

Step A: First mental examination of the place

We think of a place, a city, a neighborhood, etc. and start to collect our thoughts about the location by answering the following questions (alone or with others):

- A1. What do I/we already know about this place?
- A2. What makes this place interesting for me/us?
- A3. What exactly would I/we like to find out (optional)?

Step B: Get to know the place

- B1. What do I/we do to get to know the place?
(Do I walk around, do I ride my bike, do I stand in the middle of the location and make observations?)

Step C: Systematically grasp the essence of the place

- C1. What thoughts are going through my/our minds? What does this place remind me/us of?
What do I/we associate with it? What do we associate with this place?

C2. Where are the landmarks of the location? Where are the exits and entrances? Where is the center? How long does it take me/us to get to the edges of this place (*on foot, by bike, by public transport, by car?*)

C3. What does this place invite me/us to do? What would I/we like to do in this place?
What would I/we definitely not like to do in this place? Would I/we rather stay or rather leave?

C4. What do I/we see, hear, smell, feel?
(Closing one's eyes can make hearing, smelling, and feeling a more intense experience.)

C5. What people frequent this place? For what purpose? Does a particular group predominate? Is there a particular activity that predominates? How do people encounter each other?

C6. Where are attractive and unattractive details and moments?

C7. What would I/we like to change about this place? What would we like to keep the same?
How would the changes affect the essence of the place?

Step D: Final considerations and diagnosis

Here, all observations come together and a final evaluation about the place is made.

D1. What makes the place unique? How can the "essence" of this place be represented?
What holds the place and its "essence" together? (Essence as a concept is associated with life, aliveness and character).

D2. What is the conclusion? What can be said about the essence of this place?

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More details about the Empirical City Walk as a scientific method can be found in:
Ehmayer, C. (2014). Die „Aktivierende Stadtdiagnose“ als eine besondere Form der Organisationsdiagnose. Ein umwelt- und gemeindepsychologischer Beitrag für eine nachhaltige Stadt- und Gemeindeentwicklung. Hamburg: disserta Verlag