

Expressing and Constructing the Self and Nation through Walking
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Susanne Österlund-Pötzsch 2018. *Gångarter och gångstilar. Rum, rytm och rörelse till fots*. [Walking types and walking styles. Space, rhythm and movement by foot.] Gothenburg and Stockholm: Makadam förlag. 293 pp. ISBN 978-91-7061-264-0 (print).

The practice of walking is not only about lifting the left foot and setting it down in front of the right foot, then lifting the right foot, setting it down in front of the left foot, and repeating this action, but it is also always connected with places. It can be about discovering a place or creating a relationship to a place, which becomes evident in Österlund-Pötzsch's book *Gångarter och gångstilar*. The book is a book rich in photographs throughout, so places are not only present in writing, but also visible in the book. The reader encounters, for example, a child walking on a beach, a woman bending down to greet a dog on a pavement, a small group of people walking in the woods while picking mushrooms, and people stopping at a sales stand looking at pilgrim staffs and souvenirs in Santiago de Compostela. These photographs illustrate how the author gives space to both everyday places and more particular places, and still, walking, and not places, is the most central theme in the book even though walking is always discussed with the place as context.

The place as context also shows in the questions that Österlund-Pötzsch poses in the introduction: Why do we choose to walk or not to walk in different contexts? How do we walk? With whom do we walk and how are we dressed while walking? How do we experience walking? How do others interpret our walking? What do we do at the same time as we walk? As the author suggests, these questions are all connected to cultural dimensions of walking, and our answers to the questions express our lifestyles, our living conditions, who we are, and who we want to be.

After the introductory chapter, which also very briefly covers earlier writings on walking within the humanities and different theoretical strands, the book consists of six somewhat thematic chapters written in an essayistic style and a concluding chapter. The book is not a theoretical book on the practice of walking, nor would I argue that it is a book that could be directly used as a coursebook for students in ethnology or folkloristics, but I am sure that, as a teacher, I will refer to it and use it when teaching about space and mobility. On the other hand, the book does not make any claims about being either of those two types. At the same time, I want to emphasize that the book is

a very welcomed contribution to ethnology and folkloristics. I would argue that it is definitely ethnological and folkloristic in its approach since there is an emphasis on walking in relation to everyday life, communication, rituals, and attitudes, which Österlund-Pötzsch acknowledges in the introduction.

Walking interviews is a method used in both early and contemporary ethnology, and even though this book does not discuss walking as a method per se, I read *Gångarter och gångstilar* as a book in dialogue with walking as a research methodology. Österlund-Pötzsch uses her and others' walking as a methodology while writing about walking.

After the introductory chapter, six more or less thematic chapters follow. Most of these are of a cultural-historical character, but the latter chapters are more contemporary. The approach also influences the empirical material that the author focuses on, which includes Österlund-Pötzsch's participatory observations and experiences, interview material collected by others, as well as more or less formal interviews conducted by the author. In addition, some of the empirical material consists of and is described as secondary sources, non-fiction, archival material, and newspaper articles from the 17th and 18th century. Three of the chapters deal with walking in relation to nation-building, Nordicness, and mobility while collecting Swedish-speaking national culture in Finland at the turn of the 20th century. The author discusses the possibility or impossibility of viewing specific walking as Nordic. Here, the author discusses for example Nordic walking (in Finnish: *sauvakävely*; in Swedish: *stavgång*) and leisure walks in the forest rather than in the city. In addition, Österlund-Pötzsch writes about how nature has been important in building the Nordic nations as modern through music, art, and literature, but also through walking expeditions with the aim of collecting and documenting cultural-historical phenomena.

The more contemporary chapters address tourism, mushroom picking, gathering of wild eatable herbs or geocaching, every day walking with the dog or the stroller, walking for pleasure and business or exercise. Rituals can be found in the before-mentioned examples, but rituals related to walking are also discussed in a specific chapter on parades, marches, Sunday walks, pilgrimages, and shopping. The chapters are characterized by intertwinement, as well as a shift in focus within a chapter or part of a chapter. This shifting focus is something that I, as a reader, understand as part of the essayistic writing style of the author. At the same time, I would have liked a more in-depth focus instead of the shiftings even though I see the structure of the author's associations. To give an example, the author writes about pilgrimage more generally, then moves on to write about female pilgrims, women walking in cities during the 16th and 17th century, the nexus of gender, the body, walking and different places, contemporary women, and finally walking and feelings of safety or fear.

Even though it is always impossible to include everything in a book, I get a feeling that the author is trying to do precisely that. At the same time, the author does narrow down her subject. One explicit choice made by the author is to focus on more or less voluntary walking, and not one related to homelessness or life as a refugee. At first glance, I would have stated that, in its essayistic style and broad scope, the book is written for the public. This may be true, but what makes the book relevant for readers within ethnology and folkloristics is the continuous presence of theoretical concepts: rituals, performativity, and spatiality. In some parts of the text, they are explicitly present, and in others, they are less explicit but still in the background.

The aims and themes of the book are definitely within the author's expertise and related to Österlund-Pötzsch's previous work as it covers both mobility and the Nordics. In 2003, the author defended her doctoral thesis on how North Americans with a Finland-Swedish background can use their ethnic heritage as a personal resource (Österlund-Pötzsch, 2003) in Nordic Folkloristics at Åbo Akademi University. After this, as also mentioned in the book *Gångarter och gångstilar*, she has participated in a research project on Nordic spaces (during 2008–2012). The project has resulted in several academic publications (see, for example, Österlund-Pötzsch 2010; 2011; 2013; 2017), which also form the basis for this book.

The broad scope, which I have focused on to a great extent in this review, can also result from the earlier-mentioned empirical material that the book is based on. The empirical data is broad, which consequently also makes the scope of the book broad. This said, I argue that the book is a joy to read. To the reader, it becomes clear that the book stems from the joy of walking and a fascination with how we use walking as a way of expressing ourselves. This is something we do in so many different ways, just as the author shows us.

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