

Experiencing place on the move – a walk of sorts – Dario Ellero

OVERVIEW

I have been trying to study how people relate to places as they move and, especially, walk. The setting for my research has been a 'backpackers' hostel' in Ecuador, canton Mejia: the Secret Garden Cotopaxi, where I volunteered. The people under study have been the guests themselves: young Westerners of both sexes, the vast majority of them. I stayed there from October to the end of January 2020

METHODS

In the end, I only used effectively two methods: participant observation and questionnaires. As for the first, I practiced it every time I was guiding a group of guests to a mountain called Pasochoa, this being part of my volunteer's tasks. I also tried to pay attention to what was being talked in the chill-out areas in the hostel in particular. As for questionnaire, this consisted of numerous little stripes of paper with questions around the topics I focused on, left in the hostel for guests to pick and answer

RESULTS

The power of places: in bewitching most tourists who end up going to the same places, or to elicit recurrent behaviors from walkers, on a hike. Or even, in influencing one's general mood, someplace one has just arrived to. Walking as producing an often mentioned sense of connectedness, expressed in terms of closeness to nature. An element of challenge seems also to be frequently if not always present. Walking as an intelligent activity, in its performance, intelligence reflected in the network of footpaths, expressive of 'cognitive processes'



Climbing Pasochoa



Anouk, one of the hostel dogs



Cotopaxi and refugio