

You now want your Metropolitan Trail to become an official public space. It will take several years between your first explorations and the delivery of an official trail.

LESSON 5

HOW TO PRODUCE A TRAIL

SUB-CHAPTERS

Introduction

- 1) Negotiating the Route
- 2) Nurturing Communities
- 3) Publishing Narratives
- 4) Building Hospitality Experiences

A Metropolitan Trail is drawn (lesson 1), explored (lesson 2), told (lesson 3), shared (lesson 4), and made official (lesson 5). We briefly touched on questions of production in previous lessons. Let's dig in a bit further now.

How can we, together with the right number of partners, produce the 4 previous stages (route, community, story, guide) in a seamless and coherent way? How can we negotiate an official route? How can we build a community of partners around a trail? How can we give shape to the stories that emerge? How can we build a consistent walking program? How much time does that all take? How can we build a budget?

The skills you will need assemble: mapmaking, partnership building, publishing, project management, administrative and financial steering, etc.

This lesson is for people, local communities, and institutions with experience in coordinating cultural, infrastructural, or other projects, or who are interested in acquiring such experience.

ASSIGNMENT

Beginner

Write a 2-page report (routes, intention-narrative-framework, partners)

Advanced

Write a detailed 10-page dossier (routes, intention-narrative-framework, partners, team, budget).



Introduction

THE FIELD OF POSSIBILITY

To produce is to assemble the logistical, financial, and institutional conditions required in bringing a project into a concrete and share existence.

A Metropolitan Trail can be a line on a map that has been explored on the ground. It can be a shared route that is often visited by groups. It can be a route associated with published narratives (films, books, exhibits, etc.). It can also be a place where guides invite the public for regular gatherings. Or it can be an official public space with trail markings—and even become a platform for urban, agricultural, cultural, and social initiatives.

The task ahead of you can significantly vary (in terms of timeline, team, and budget) depending on the type of trail you want to produce.

“Producing a trail” is more than “making a route official” (which only covers the trail’s legal status and signage).

Inversely, if you have less time or financing, you can “partially produce” a trail. For instance, you can choose to develop just one aspect of production: promoting a route online, offering to do monthly public walks (e.g. London [\[link\]](#)), writing a book that tells one possible story (e.g. *La Révolution de Paris*, *Passaggio a Nord-Ovest*), or building group performances on a pre-existing trail (e.g. Istanbul [\[link\]](#)).

How can you get started? Sketching out an idea for a route seems like a good way to start, but it’s not a hard and fast rule. A trail can begin with a brainstorming session involving a group of interested parties (Lyon), or with a series of outings along a pre-drawn route (Istanbul), or with narrative building around a route (*La Révolution de Paris*).

Skills

Many skills are involved in producing a trail: mapmaking (GIS, in-field map reading); partnership building (networking and social skills, interfacing with authorities and local communities); publishing and storytelling; project design; project management, creating and managing a budget; negotiating with local communities; recruiting and managing teams.

Few possess all these skills, and no one excels across the board. In general, producing a trail also implies working in groups, or at least with a partner.

If a trail is to endure, the initial route needs to become a negotiated legal continuity, which amounts to opening a new public space.

I) NEGOTIATING THE ROUTE

In most countries, private property rights mean trail organizers must obtain easements, and they cannot place signs in public and private spaces without prior consent. To produce an official trail is therefore to create a legal continuity, which comprises all the easements and authorizations for signage on the public and private lands covered by the trail. (And even in countries where property rights are less stringent, sharing a route proposal with the relevant local authorities is advised, both to improve the route and ensure its longevity.)

An Exercise in Diplomacy

Creating a trail is an exercise in diplomacy. Different stories can be told depending on which route one chooses to take across a parcel of land, neighborhood, or town. Indeed, choosing a route is often the subject of debate. The aim is for the trail to appeal to different communities (residents, owners, organizations, towns, etc.) and at the same time subvert traditional methods of promoting an area for tourism.

Local communities may seek to modify the proposed route in the following ways: 1) increasing the number of kilometers so users can “visit more local landmarks” and 2) discouraging routes that reveal less flattering “backstage” parts of a town (industrial zones, commercial zones, dump sites, etc.). The challenge is precisely to convince a town to 1) accept that a route passing through the town is only a fragment of a larger journey and story; and 2) expand the notion of “landmark” to include everything that contributes to a town’s reality and character.

Technical Board

Building this complex object generally involves a technical board made up of the trail’s main stakeholders (production team, financial backers, organizations, hiking clubs, towns, etc.). The board is usually run by the project’s main financial backer.

The technical board, which meets more or less regularly depending on a project’s timeline and progress (annually, twice yearly, monthly), is an assembly of different forms of expertise (property, urbanism, roads, landmarks, tourism, etc.). It also elicits community interest within the metropolis. (The board can sometimes play a team building role, rallying diverse interests around a less conflictual initiative).

A Conductor

The trail is also an opportunity to invite people to experience a metropolitan territory on foot. A trail doesn't go everywhere. Its aim is not to provide an exhaustive experience of a place, but to tell a story. Creating is a way of choosing. It's important to provide a narrative.

To keep things in line and ensure that this complex polyphonic object remains coherent, there usually needs to be a conductor who can make important decisions based on a number of parameters (geography, in-field considerations, aesthetics, narratives, politics, etc.).

Signage

Once the authorizations have been obtained to ensure a trail's legal continuity, you can start putting up signs. Although signage is simple in theory (building a continuous and clearly visible chain of signs in both directions), it is actually a rather rigorous and nuanced process. Indeed, signs should adapt to the specific context of each change in direction.

The signage process is also an opportunity to expand the circle of people involved in the project. You can call on organizations, residents, young people, and anyone who might be interested in taking part in the concrete birth of the trail.

Major Stages

- Model Process for Officializing a Metropolitan Trail

- Coming up with a stable route—creative or artistic work (see lesson 1)

- designing an initial form;
 - to the extent possible, taking an exhaustive inventory of existing paths;
 - drawing a first version of the route and gathering route proposals (“sketch”);
 - refining the sketch through field explorations (see lesson 2);
 - finalizing a first route (drawn “with a red ballpoint pen on a 1:25,000 map” or in a .kml file on Google Earth).

- Obtaining easement authorizations one by one—mostly administrative, partnership building, political work

- present the project to the impacted segment of public and private owners (link toward extracts of the GR2013 Atlas by Nicolas Mémain);
 - negotiate the route (both ways);
 - finalize a route that everyone can agree on;
 - obtain signed authorizations.

- Signage—technical work
 - build signage teams;
 - come up with a plan for setting up signs, sector by sector;
 - supply materials.

Creating a trail implies creating production communities who will bring a trail to life.

2) NURTURING COMMUNITIES

We have seen how the birth of a trail is inextricably linked to the emergence of a first group of walkers, who take part in the first scouting sessions (lesson 2). Over time, the production of an official and enduring path should lead to the emergence of a more complex system of diverse communities, which will need to be nurtured. However, it is important to remember that avoiding all conflict is impossible in such wide-reaching and enduring local initiatives.

The work undertaken during the negotiation phase of a route brings a new community into being: the technical board, which will be stable over the long term. (In a certain sense, all the owners who give their permission for easements are also a kind of community).

Nurturing Residents

We are walking through places where people live. It is therefore worthwhile to get in touch with residents, speak with them about the trail, provide them with documentation, invite them to join in on future walks, ask if they are interested in helping to build the trail, etc. The thousands and even millions of locals are an asset for metropolitan trails.

Trails also help build connections between organizations with an interest in the neighborhood, social issues, and general local issues (cultural, social, educational, environmental organizations, etc.).

Nurturing Local Authorities

It's important to try to build a community of interested parties within local bodies, to incorporate their concerns into the project and convince them to respect the values and independence of the trail.

Different issues may crop up depending on which departments are funding the project (e.g. culture, communications, urban planning, transportation, environment, tourism, local attractiveness, etc.). No matter what, it's important to remain open to different areas of expertise and encourage communication between departments.

Aligning With Major Events

Major events can create visibility and motivate a wide range of actors to get involved in creating a trail and work to meet concrete deadlines. They can help bridge divides between local authorities, channeling their energy into a shared local project (e.g. the GR2013 would not have been possible without Marseille European Capital of Culture in 2013). Major events also provide an opportunity to create something that endures past their term.

However, this type of event also plays a role in developing tourism, as such operating within a logic of a “race toward attractiveness” between cities, which goes against the mission of these trails. What’s more, urban walking can be very easily coopted into a tool of communication and gentrification, in a dynamic of appropriation of peripheral spaces by the center (e.g. “exploring the banlieue”, “owner tours”, “expanding the area of what’s known”, “clearing out the terra incognita”, etc.).

Alliances between trails and major events are forged out of complex political negotiations, in the face of instrumentalization, misunderstandings, and a certain ambiguity.

What forms should the narratives produced by a trail take?

3) PUBLISHING NARRATIVES

What brings a trail to life is not just its officialization and signage; it’s the fact that it generates, aggregates, and elicits new stories.

A Book

The official birth of a trail is typically marked by the publication of a first guidebook, which is the first narrative. The narrative can take a digital form (website, application, etc.), but it most often appears in a paper format (annotated map, guidebook, book, etc.).

The book usually includes the following components:

- maps (1:25,000 scale, advised minimum)
- description of the route (the guide, properly speaking)
- “cultural content” (basic information, foundational narratives, key places along the route)

Creating Stories

The book is a significant work, but it is just the beginning of the story. Once a trail is official, collective work can begin across the metropolis. The trail can serve as a tool for inquiry and observation.

To generate a collective dynamic that would encourage metropolis res-

idents to learn about their respective backgrounds, identities, and stories, it would be advised to set up a platform for different centers of research (social sciences, history, geography, etc.), architecture centers, urban planning agencies, archivists, guides, authors, and documentarists. And we would suggest offering frequent events (e.g. monthly). [link: Caravan2013, 1001 nights].

The Trail and the Museum

One mode of telling a trail's story is to use photographs, texts, installations, archives, and collected objects. Here, it would be interesting to delve into the complex relations between the trail and the museum.

Metropolitan Trails have not been designed to house artistic works along the way. Other cultural and tourist initiatives have done just this: "Routes culturelles", "Estuaire de Nantes", etc.). Metropolitan Trails are more interested in the actual landscapes themselves. The aim is not to provide a "background for artworks".

To a certain extent, the route itself can be considered a work of art, even if trail producers do not all claim to be artists. And even when they are artists, their work on trails tends to be in the name of a "weak coefficient of visibility" (Hendrik Sturm) or an "art in indifference to art" (Denis Moreau).

Peri-urban walking was born as a snub to museum practices. Here, we can speak of the work of Christine Breton (link: text read by Julie at the Mucem) and of Hendrik Sturm [Wildproject interview], which resonate with Robert Smithson's move out of galleries and into natural landscapes and with other American and English Earth Art artists [link]. This tendency converges with the notion of horizontal construction, by society, of a shared people's heritage, in line with the ideas of the Faro Convention—which opposes the notion of a vertical heritage, built by elites, to benefit societies in need of "education". [Link: <https://www.coe.int/fr/web/culture-and-heritage/faro-convention>]

At first glance, the metropolitan trail is a kind of anti-museum: outdoors (and not in a building), open day and night (no hours of operation), free (not paid), guiding visitors to objects (not gathering objects in a preordained place), deeply anchored in geography (not delocalized), documenting the ordinary (not precious objects), modern (not past).

Still, this anti-museum guides visitors along an established path, to different situations, places, and objects, with the aim of sharing a predetermined point of view. In a way, the creator of a route can be seen as a curator of a kind of involuntary museum: the metropolis—a city which can be seen as the "ultimate work of art", sedimenting centuries of aesthetic effort and applied art.

And symmetrically speaking, museums have long questioned their own frameworks. A museum like the Mucem in Marseille, initially born out of ethnography and folk art, aims to document the ordinary, our present time, human societies, urban landscapes, etc.

The confrontation between trails, which are in part linked to a curatorial mission, and museums, which seek to rethink their practices, can be fertile grounds for reflection. (For instance, the Mucem asked the metropolitan trail creators to present their project, and that is how the Metropolitan Trails Academy began).

Exhibits linked to Metropolitan Trails include [Koln], [CCIMP2013], [Mucem display 2017-2023], [Pavillon Arsenal], [Athens expo], [LVM].

Technique and Social

4) BUILDING HOSPITALITY

In France, the question of trail layout has been a particular focus for “collectives of architects” (first Bruit du Frigo, then Cabanon Vertical and ETC with the Bureau des Guides du GR2013, YesWeCamp in Paris, etc.).

Citizen groups have also implemented non-predatory forms of tourism in fragile zones. One such group, the cooperative of Hôtel du Nord residents in Marseille, has rallied around the notion of hospitality and walking, with locals hosting walkers and sharing their local stories and perspectives. [Link: : <https://www.hoteldunord.coop/>].

Spending the Night: Peri-Urban Refuges

Users of Metropolitan Trails can enjoy a rather wide range of lodgings (hotels in city centers and suburbs, bed and breakfasts, rooms with local residents, camping sites, etc.), but there are some areas, particularly in a city’s outskirts, where there is less on offer. Inversely, sometimes hikers come across places that lend themselves to spending the night.

In Bordeaux, a large program was developed to create 11 refuges where walkers can spend the night at each stage of the trail. [book link]

These basic refuges (no water or electricity) were made in situ (from the targeted areas themselves) as pragmatic solutions (out of a concern to build welcoming and cozy shelters where families with children would feel comfortable) to give Bordeaux residents and visitors a unique experience.

Legally speaking, these refuges were defined as “performative works” (see Bruit du Frigo/Zebra3) and therefore are not subject to urban planning regulations or the usual administrative obligations.

Mixed Uses: GR2013 Hospitality Program

The program established by the Bureau des Guides for the GR2013 lays out different aspects of trail hospitality: signage (arrows, observation post signs, etc.), trail blazing, and even “huts”, light furnishings, stopping point

structures, shelters, and observation points for walkers and locals. [Link: Le Rocher. <https://www.gr2013.fr/rocher/>]

One focus of their work was the idea of “finding intersections in uses by hikers and locals” (Cabanon vertical).

Inventory of Metropolitan Amenities: Toulon

Hiker needs sometimes generate new uses (or desired uses) of existing amenities—a bus shelter to provide protection from the rain, an old wash house where people can put down a mattress and sleep, drinking fountains, etc.

In Toulon, an inventory is underway to assess the amenities that could be used by hikers—benches, shelters, courtyards, viewpoints. This will help give a sense of what else could be added.

Local Considerations: The Greater Paris Trail

Integrating the presence of thousands of locals (residents, businesses, institutions, towns, etc.) along the route during the planning phase: that is what YesWeCamp does for the Greater Paris Trail.

Establishing a trail is only partly technical. First and foremost, it is perhaps a social initiative that should encourage trail use by locals and welcome walkers—for instance, with scallop shell signs along the Camino de Santiago.

Experiences

“Local Community Workshops”

Defining a negotiated route can include implementing work processes with the local community (towns, intermunicipal links).

Local community workshops involve providing towns or intermunicipal bodies an innovative protocol for inter-department meetings, which can help improve routes thanks to local insights on property lines and lesser-known landmarks that can enrich the trail’s metropolitan narrative.

Student Workshop

Build an educational program on the route, narratives, and hospitality as part of a summer school or other workshop. This can be a wonderful way to kick off or further develop a project.