

# Seasonal walks to cultivate a habit of noticing

## Background:

Understanding seasons and seasonality is, to a large degree, linked to individuals and groups skill at perceiving or apprehending the temporal rhythms in an environment. This skill is associated with ‘habits of noticing’ seasonal cycles; from animal lifecycles to phenology, hydrology, weather, or patterns of social activity. Habits of noticing are shaped by how we engage with an environment – our activities – so that a gardener has a differently honed habit to an office worker, and there are many who feel that large sections of modern society are losing their ability to sense or read the seasons. Some groups are working hard to cultivate a general awareness of their environment – a practice often associated with ‘mindfulness’ movements and other ways of re-connecting with the natural environment, often appealing to all senses (Lefebvre noted that the instrument for apprehending temporalities is with the human body and senses). One approach is to organise walks to notice an environment, as a long pedagogical tradition, often deployed in schools for example. The CALENDARS project joined school students (in the 12 year old age group and 16 year old age group) on walks in New Zealand and Norway, sometimes just observing how teachers ran these walks, and other times augmenting this practice with some purposeful guidance on how to notice seasonality.

## Objectives:

- i. To cultivate a group’s habits of noticing seasonal rhythms in an environment
- ii. To stimulate personal reflection – a reflexive habit of noticing – on how individuals think, feel and act seasonally, and what seasons mean for them.
- iii. To develop a sense of the seasonal rhythms particular to a place.

## Requirements:

- A group of motivated participants (no more than 40), and a walk leader
- Preparation: the walk leader plans a route in advance and prepares a set of

seasonal cues as a starting point for stimulating participants habits of noticing.

- The route may be through a 'natural' or 'built' environment.
- Timing: Walks range from 90 minutes to 2+ days in length. One consideration is to repeat walks in different periods of the year, to compare what is observed.
- Camera/diary: The walk can be augmented with writing breaks, and the use of cameras to record and compare images of the walk at different times of the year.

## **Method:**

1. Before starting the walk, it is important to assess participants' experience and fitness for walking distances, and calibrate the walk appropriately. This extends too to participants experience of noticing seasonal cycles, which will differ. Also, be clear on the objective of the walk. Some walks emphasize observing seasonal rhythms in a landscape, while others emphasize personal reflection, and some may combine both observation and reflection.

2. Participants are free to walk at their pace, and with their choice of walking partners, or alone. The walk leader leads at the front and nominates a group member to walk at the back and ensure the group stays together. Over the walk, participants are invited to notice and discuss with walking partners some of the seasonal features of the environment; things flowering? Activities underway? Smells and sounds and other sensations. Participants are asked to use all their senses, and the leader may create opportunities to exercise senses, for example by walking bare foot through a waterway to feel the temperature of the water, to smell the soil, or close their eyes and listen to birdsong.

3. At planned junctures, the leader may pause and draw the groups attention to seasonal features, such as flowering plants, birds' nests, or soil moisture, as cues to help participants start to notice. Participants will take much for granted, and it is by an effort that they learn to notice again. This is an opportunity to ask participants to photograph scenes. This is particularly useful when planning to organise walks at different points of the year, when the same photograph can be taken on each walk and compared. Recording

observations – in photos or diaries – for later comparison and reflection is an important part of the activity.

4. At planned junctures, the leader may pause and ask the group to reflect on how they think and feel about the particular period of the year they are walking in, and to think about what that ‘season’ means for them more broadly. This is asking participants to reflect inward on what distinguishes this time of the year for them personally, perhaps associated with cherished memories or habits. These reflections may be done in silence, may be noted in notebooks or shared among the group. An overnight school excursion within the CALENDARS project gathered around the fire at night and discussed what winter meant for them.

5. It may be appropriate to debrief after the walk, to take notes and discuss the seasonal rhythms participants observed, and their personal reflections. These notes may be kept and returned to if organising a series of walks over the year. This is also an opportunity to reflect on what defines seasonality