

Method Template: Contextual Postcards



Rationale

The aim of the method is to understand people's relation to their current situation or environment. It also samples a variety of locations amongst distributed groups.

Preparation

Determine an aspect of interest about how people relate to their environment. Examples include: enjoyment of architecture in the city, perception of safety, or current family issues. Develop postcards which can be handed back to you after they are filled out (or post-paid stamps in a more advanced study). If relevant, ask a few demographic questions, but primarily focus on short, open-ended questions that ask about the participant's current situation. Ask about the objects they can currently see, their current social relationships, or their current problems. Be wary of asking them to predict the future; ask them about what they know, using their own language. Try to elicit the unexpected.

Activity

Go to a location relevant for the activity or situation being studied. Hand out the postcards to people in the environment and ask them to fill them out and return them.

What To Look For

Anything that people feel strongly about is interesting. Look for unexpected requirements relevant to design. Determine what issues are important to the participants and which are not. Find interesting areas for more focused studies.

Afterwards

Look for larger trends in responses and issues that are relevant to many people.