



STEP C

PHOTOGRAPHIC SURVEY



TIME: 1/2 day or two shorter sessions.



MATERIAL: cameras (digital or disposable cameras can be used), photocopies of maps, pens, scissors, glue, A1 sized card, blue tack.



PEOPLE: the working team and all willing participants.



Images are powerful ways to describe a space and its qualities/problems/potentials.

WHAT IS A PHOTOGRAPHIC SURVEY

The photographic survey is an exercise used to collect impressions of areas in your neighbourhood that have previously been identified as requiring transformation. This exercise is straightforward and easy to carry out.

In the previous exercises you identified priority areas. The photographic survey focuses separately on each of these areas by giving members of the team the responsibility to make a visual document and interpretation of each of them.

At its most basic, this exercise is about photographing what your team sees as the positive, negative or neutral characteristics of each of the priority areas in order to prompt discussion on them; it provides additional information to be used in further detailed discussion.

The photographic impressions are conveyed through details, materials, surfaces, people, and whatever the photographer finds useful and important. This survey has long been used in participatory scenarios and is suitable for any age group. It can:

- produce a visual document of the current conditions of the priority areas in your neighbourhood that you have selected at the outset of your Goal Setting session and investigated in more detail in the Mental Mapping session;
- capture the photographers' personal perceptions of these priority areas;
- produce photographs that help to focus discussion on specific details requiring improvement, and that can lead to the discussion of a wide range of issues, from the cosmetic/visual to social, economic, functional, or managerial.



C

NOTES TO FACILITATOR

It is important to ensure that everyone taking part in this exercise is aware of what the priority areas are (from previous exercises).

New members of the team have to be briefed on the reasons why these areas have been prioritised.

Always keep in mind the outcomes from previous meetings and exercises. The team will be able to recognise the progress they are making.

If equipment or finances are tight then camera and film can be shared, but make sure everyone has a turn at using the camera. (A digital camera can be very useful).

Try to ensure those who take the pictures can meet up again to discuss the outcomes.

It is helpful that the following is taken into consideration:

- This exercise can be carried out by individuals or groups.
- Dividing participants into age groups (e.g. children, youths, adults, elderly people) will generate a wider spread of responses to, and interpretations of, these areas. Remember that a 14 year old may see and experience a place in a completely different way to a 60 year old.
- Distributing a description of the survey (see: Steps 1-3) ensures that all participants know what they are doing and why they are doing it.
- Agree a time scale for the working session. It may be possible to do it in one day, but people could take the photos over a period of time and meet again on another occasion when it is suitable for everyone. Taking pictures over a period of time provides an opportunity to record, for example, how a space or area is used throughout the day/week, who uses it and what the weather conditions are that encourage or discourage its use.
- Local schools, local clubs and groups can also take part in this exercise in their own time; it is always interesting to have different groups describing – in this case visually – the same place. Results will vary greatly, but will reveal a multitude of relevant perceptions and attitudes.
- The variety of subjects that people will photograph is often unpredictable; the collection of images often contains shots that can be used for local exhibitions. So make sure you file and store these images with care. They can document the whole process and even serve the purpose of 'evidence' to accompany planning proposals.

THE PROCESS: Photographic Survey

1. Preparation

○ 10 mins

Gather all the participants.

Give out copies of maps of the area they are supposed to take pictures of, including routes to and from the area. This will be used to record the location at which each photograph has been taken.

2. Instruction

○ 10 mins

Explain that the participants should describe their impression of the place using just images; they should not solely rely on a single overall image of the physical space or area, but can go more in to detail and convey its characteristics, the impressions it conveys, the qualities they see in it (they might want to record issues of maintenance, upkeep, safety, beauty, isolation, activities etc.).

They can take pictures of building types, of materials, of colours, of vegetation, of paths, of litter, signs of vandalism, of people and their activities, or anything they think is relevant.

3. Take pictures

○ 1hr+

Send the participants out for an hour or so depending on the size of the area. They may go out more than once.

Ask participants to mark on the map the location from which they take each picture and to number them, and to record the reasons why they have taken each photograph.

Several people can collaborate as a team but ensure everyone has a say in what pictures are taken.

If the exercise is carried out in one day then collect the films and develop them as normal sized prints in a 1 hour shop to keep the momentum going. To economise you could meet up a day or week later once the film has been processed. (If using a digital camera ensure the resolution is set as high as possible to enable you to print.)

If for the presentation and interpretation of the images you meet at another time, have the pictures ready by then.



Disposable cameras are easy to use and fairly cheap if you do not have any other camera.

Make sure participants have a map to mark from where they are taking pictures.

4. Present and Interpret

○ 30 mins

The presentation and interpretation of the images is the next main task. Gather the team again and return the images to the individuals/groups that took them.

Ask each participant to prepare a presentation of their images, describing where and why these were taken, and what they are supposed to symbolise and portray.

Make sure the images are visible to everyone by posting them on boards, on the wall, or displaying them on tables. When exhibiting photos, it is useful to cluster them according to themes, locations etc.; it is also useful to accompany them with written comments; use post-it notes to add and organise comments.

5. Summarise

○ 30 mins

After all individuals and groups have presented their collection of images, ask them to single out the most significant images, and place them on a large-scale Ordnance Survey map indicating the priority areas. This is a useful exercise that can offer vivid and clear representations of the areas and reinforce previous ideas for improvement.

You can then use other maps that add goals and comments generated in the previous sessions to establish links between the outcomes of the various working sessions. Make sure participants keep the original goals in mind and develop increasingly detailed ideas for particular places, their characteristics, strengths, faults and shortcomings.

Furthermore, encourage participants to upgrade the goals matrix:

- by including new issues, improvement objectives and targets raised in the Photographic Survey in the Action Matrix accumulated at the end of the previous Mental Mapping session;
- by entering into the Action Matrix reinforcing comments on already listed priority areas and improvement proposals; this makes them stronger and documents the degree of importance given to them by the team members;
- by highlighting with your team unresolved differences of opinion that may have arisen between different individuals or groups during the Photographic Survey session, or between newly established proposals and comments that contradict previous opinions listed in the goal setting matrix.



THE PROCESS cont.

EXAMPLE

6. Sum up

○ 30 mins

Sum up this exercise by stating the level of accomplishment of the discussion and highlighting plans for the next working sessions, which will continue the progressive refining of ideas on how to act on the area studied.

After this working session, contact all relevant local authorities and other public bodies and discuss your priority area programmes. It is important to get their feedback and also for them to be aware of your objectives so that they can advise you on the feasibility of your programme and, where appropriate, ensure cognisance is taken of your programme in their own plans.

You might be concerned about the maintenance of space. Images of litter on the ground, graffiti on walls, shop fronts in disrepair, convey immediately the severity of your concern and can stimulate debate even more than words. These are strong images taken by Arthur Parkinson an Architecture student in a Photographic Survey; they have later been displayed as part of a students' exhibition at The Lighthouse, (UK Centre for Architecture and Design), in Glasgow.



Images can generate productive debate. It can be useful to divide the participants into groups if there are too many. Ask each group to deal with one area at a time.



C

PHOTOGRAPHIC SURVEY MATRIX

Update the Action Matrix with the outcomes of the discussions generated during the Photographic Survey. Organise comments on each priority area according to strengths, weaknesses, actions and time scale.

C

