Time sequencing

Purpose

Discrete visual documentation of different activities in one location may be useful for practitioners and researchers who want to:

• Document changes of legal and illegal activities, or presence of actors in one location over a specific period.
• Identify and discuss the reasons behind this, and strategies for change.
• Develop interventions or plan research in that location.

Things to consider

• You will need a digital camera or a phone with a camera. You will need photo-editing software – there is free software available or you could use Adobe tools if you have the budget and skills.
• Researchers decide what should be in or out of the picture. They need to know the topic and the place very well. This knowledge cannot be assumed to exist inside a photographers or a (digital) designers head.
• Academic researchers who are not living or working in these areas or businesses may miss things. Therefore, working with local activists, researchers and survivors helps to understand what to look for, how to see, when to observe. One cannot delegate the analysis or the data analysis to one person, it must be done together to make sense, to be as accurate as possible. Also, for safety, a participatory approach makes more sense as it allows different people to observe.
• Safety - taking pictures at night, being on the streets at night may be risky.
• Privacy - taking pictures in public spaces is legally allowed in most countries. However taking pictures of clearly recognisable shops can be restricted, so it’s worth checking this before starting. People do not know that these images will be anonymised when they see the researcher.
• Composition/aesthetics - take different shots with different compositions to have a choice of frame.
Practical steps

1. Look for examples of pictures which you hope to produce and share these with the people who take the pictures for reference.

2. Identify a person who takes the pictures.

3. Identify a person who can do the digital editing of photos and who has the software.

4. Identify the exact location that you want to document. Does that spot match the research question? Determine what should be in and outside the frame. Where do you stand to take that shot?

5. Observe the activities that you want to map to understand the rhythm of these activities and the actors involved. This knowledge informs the time during which pictures could be taken to document these activities.

6. Identify potential threats to safety during photography and develop a response to mitigate the risks.

7. Determine what times of the day the pictures should be taken to document the change in activities in that area.

8. Create a legend with colours to show the different types of activities or venues or people (example below).

9. Apply the legend to digitally draw and colour these pictures taken in one spot to show the activities in that spot at the selected times of the day.

10. Use the legend to convert the reference photos into visual, anonymised images. Make sure you remove all identifying features such as the names of individual businesses.

Case study

We used this method to document economic activities in what researchers, practitioners and the government working against human trafficking had previously identified as “Adult Entertainment Hotspots” in Kathmandu, Nepal, known for human trafficking and sexual exploitation.

There is a burgeoning hospitality, entertainment and wellness industry in Nepal, which includes restaurants, hotels, music venues and massage parlours. Labelling of these areas as “hotspots” with businesses in the Adult Entertainment Sector (“AES”), risks that everyone in that area is stigmatised by association, affecting their safety and compromises their ability to make a living.

We wanted to document the different types of economic activities available to the visitor or resident at different times of the day in well-known “AES hotspot” areas.

Researchers took photos at different times of the day based on their knowledge of the topic and area. They made a list of the types of venues/shops and observed the opening and closing times of regular streets in these “hotspots”.

We created a legend with colours to show the different types of economic activities which included sales of consumable items, such as vegetables and groceries, non-consumable items such as pashmina and handicraft, wellness and various types of service sector, hospitality and entertainment such as Dance Bar, Khaja Ghar, Guest House, and Dohori.
The colours showed different types of activities in the picture.

We used this colour-coded legend to create images of street views of the economic activities at different times of day.

The images below show which venues are open and closed at 10am (morning) 7pm (evening) and 10pm (night), across three different locations within Kathmandu.
Findings

The images show mixed informal commercial venues and residential housing in these urban areas. Within these streets, the rhythms of customers and activities change over a day. Venues, such as a vegetable stall, or a small restaurant, often operate informally, have long hours up to 12-14 hours a day, and may pay workers little. Some such as guesthouses, and hotels are open until late at night and open early in the morning. Many venues such as souvenir shops are unrelated to commercial sex, or commercial sexual services and close well before entertainment begins or restaurants open up for dinner.

These areas are important commercial as well as residential areas. There are no reports of human trafficking in the many small enterprises in these “AES hotspots” that sell vegetables, bread or souvenirs.

These visualizations demonstrate that there is not an “AES sector” in designated “hot spots.” Rather, there are various economic activities that belong to different sectors -hospitality, entertainment and wellness- that are integrated in the lives and geography of the residential community.

Related resources


Credits and other information:

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Please email participate@ids.ac.uk with any feedback you may have, including examples where you have used this method in practice. For more information on participatory methods, please visit participatorymethods.org where you can also find an electronic copy of this guide.

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