Community Mapping (Map-Based Method)

Community Mapping is a participatory method that enables people to represent their perceptions of a place using maps or drawings. Participants identify important locations, frequently used routes, barriers, or everyday challenges by marking them on a map. This makes local knowledge, experiences, and needs visible in a spatial context.

Participation Depth	Participate
Project Phase	Onboarding
Goals	Developing Ideas
Format	Analogue, Digital
Duration	1 - 3 Hours
Target Group	Directly Affected, Interested Public
Group Size	Small Group up to 15
Characteristics	Playful, Activating

GOAL OF THE METHOD

The goal of Community Mapping is to make people's perspectives, daily routes, needs, and challenges within a specific area visible. By working collaboratively with maps, participants identify how places are used, where barriers or conflicts occur, and what changes they would like to see. The method provides a strong foundation for understanding local experiences and using these insights to develop ideas and planning measures together.

PROCEDURE

Preparation

1. Define the target group and study area
Begin by considering:

- Who should participate?
- Which area will be explored?
- What is the central question?

For example:

- children's routes to school
- mobility of older adults
- accessibility within a neighbourhood

- places where people feel unsafe in public spaces

Depending on the topic, it may be useful to organise separate sessions for different target groups.

2. Prepare the maps
Prepare maps that are large enough and easy to read.

Ensure that:

- important streets and landmarks are clearly visible
- the maps are not overly complex
- there is sufficient space for participants to make notes and markings

If using digital maps:

- test the software in advance
- provide technical support where needed

3. Organise the event
Plan for:

- an easily accessible venue
- sufficient workspace
- materials for all participants
- enough time for discussion and exchange

For longer sessions, providing light refreshments can be helpful.

4. Invite participants
Use communication channels that are appropriate for your target group, such as:

- social media
- posters and public notices
- schools
- local clubs and associations
- neighbourhood initiatives

- senior community centres

Important:

The invitation should clearly explain:

- what the event is about
- why participation matters
- how the results will be used

Execution

1. Welcome and Introduction
At the beginning of the session, the facilitation team explains:

- the purpose of the workshop
- the overall process
- how to work with the maps

Important:

Not everyone is familiar with reading or using maps. Allow enough time to explain the materials and answer questions.

Helpful prompts include:

- "Please mark places that are important to you."
- "Show the routes you use most frequently."
- "Where do you feel unsafe or face barriers?"

2. Mapping Activity
Participants work individually or in small groups using the maps.

They may:

- draw routes
- mark important locations
-

add comments

- identify challenges
- note ideas and wishes

For example:

- dangerous intersections
- missing seating areas
- poorly lit pathways
- popular meeting places
- locations with limited accessibility

A shared legend using colours or symbols is highly recommended.

For example:

- red = problematic areas
- green = positive places
- blue = important routes

3. Facilitated Support
During the mapping activity, the facilitation team supports participants throughout the process.

The facilitators:

- answer questions
- help participants interpret the maps
- encourage quieter participants to contribute
- ask follow-up questions about interesting observations

Helpful questions include:

- "Why is this place important to you?"
- "When does this issue occur most often?"
-

"Who is affected by this situation?"

4. Presentation of Results
After the mapping exercise, participants present their maps to the group.

They explain:

- which places they identified
- which challenges became visible
- which ideas or wishes emerged

The facilitation team records:

- common themes
- differing perspectives
- frequently mentioned issues

Evaluation

1. Document the Results
Document the following:

- completed maps
- participant comments
- discussion outcomes
- key findings

Useful documentation methods include:

- photographs
- digital versions of the annotated maps
- written summaries

2. Analyse the Results
Analyse:

- which locations were mentioned most frequently

- which issues appear repeatedly
- which needs become visible

The results can then:

- inform future planning processes
- serve as the basis for concrete measures
- be explored further in other participatory formats

Source: https://mobilitaetsplanung-hessen.de/methodenkoffer-partizipative-planung/

WHEN USEFUL?

- local knowledge and everyday experiences should be collected
- addressing topics such as mobility, safety, or accessibility
- discussing specific places, routes, or neighbourhoods
- working with particular target groups, such as children, young people, or older adults

WHEN NOT USEFUL?

- maps or spatial references are not relevant
- highly abstract topics are being discussed
- participants have difficulty working with maps and no support can be provided
- quick decisions need to be made without a participatory process

TIPS

- Use simple, easy-to-read maps whenever possible.
- Use colours and symbols to make the maps easier to understand.
- Ensure that all participants receive support if they are unfamiliar with working with maps.
- The method is particularly effective when discussions focus on specific places or routes.

NOT SUITABLE FOR

- complex decision-making processes
- very large groups with limited opportunities for discussion

- situations where spatial context is not relevant

View online: https://methoden.urbankit.de/en/methods/community-mapping-kartenbasiertes-verfahren