Photo Voice

Photo Voice is a creative participation method in which participants express their perspectives on a topic through photographs. They capture places, situations, or details that represent their experiences, concerns, wishes, or positive examples from everyday life.
The photographs make personal perspectives visible and help others better understand how people perceive places, environments, and specific issues.

Participation Depth	Inform
Project Phase	Onboarding
Goals	Understanding & Gathering Perspectives
Format	Analogue, Digital, Hybrid
Duration	1 - 3 Hours
Target Group	Directly Affected, Interested Public, Hard-to-Reach Groups
Group Size	Small Group up to 15, Medium Group up to 30, Large Group from 30
Characteristics	Simple, Activating

GOAL OF THE METHOD

The goal of Photo Voice is to make personal experiences, perceptions, and needs visible. By taking photographs, participants document their own view of places, situations, or everyday challenges and highlight issues that are often overlooked in traditional discussions. The method provides an accessible way to participate while making complex or emotional topics tangible through visual storytelling.

PROCEDURE

Preparation

1. Define the objective and guiding question
Begin by considering:

- Which perspectives should become visible?
- What is the central question?
- What should participants photograph?

Important:

The task should be open enough to encourage creativity while remaining easy to understand.

Examples include:

- "Photograph places where you feel comfortable in your neighbourhood."

- "Which places make your everyday life more difficult?"
- "Where do you experience good or poor mobility?"
- "Which places do you think should change?"

2. Define the timeframe and process
Decide:

- how long participants will have to take photographs
- how the photographs should be submitted
- how many photographs each participant should provide

Important:

Allow enough time for participants to take photographs naturally as part of their everyday routines.

3. Provide guidance on privacy and image rights
Explain:

- what may and may not be photographed
- how photographs containing identifiable people will be handled
- whether the photographs may be published or exhibited

Important:

People should generally not be photographed in a recognisable way without their consent.

4. Prepare the evaluation framework
Before the activity begins, consider:

- how the photographs will be organised
- which themes or categories will be used during analysis

Possible categories include:

- mobility
- accessibility

- safety
- quality of public spaces
- green spaces

Preparing these categories in advance makes the evaluation process more efficient.

Execution

1. Introduction to the method
At the beginning of the process, either in person or during an online meeting, the facilitation team explains:

- the purpose of the method
- the photography assignment
- the timeframe
- technical guidance
- privacy and image rights

It is helpful to discuss examples together, such as:

- What makes a photograph meaningful?
- Which perspectives can photographs communicate?

2. Taking photographs
Participants independently photograph places, situations, or objects.

Important:

The focus is not on photographic quality but on the personal perspective behind each image.

Participants may choose to:

- document challenges
- highlight positive examples
- express feelings or perceptions
- suggest opportunities for change

3. Submitting the photographs

Photographs may be submitted:

- by email
- through an online platform
- via a messaging service
- as printed photographs

Each image should ideally include a short description explaining:

- Why was this photograph taken?
- What does it show?
- Why is this place important?

4. Joint review and discussion
The photographs are then reviewed together, either in person or online.

Helpful discussion questions include:

- Which themes appear repeatedly?
- Which places are perceived differently by different participants?
- Which challenges or opportunities become visible?

The photographs may be:

- displayed on walls
- placed on maps
- presented digitally

Evaluation

1. Analyse the photographs
Organise the photographs by theme or location.

Pay particular attention to:

- recurring patterns

- differing perspectives
- conflicts or unmet needs

2. Document the results
Present the findings in a clear and accessible format.

Possible formats include:

- a photographic documentation
- an exhibition
- a digital gallery
- a report
- a map-based visualisation

3. Use the results
The photographs can:

- be explored further in workshops
- serve as the basis for discussions
- support planning processes
- illustrate issues during political decision-making

Photo Voice is particularly effective as an entry point to broader participation processes.

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

WHEN USEFUL?

- personal perspectives should be made visible
- addressing topics closely connected to everyday life
- working with young people or groups that are difficult to reach
- documenting spatial challenges or qualities
- complementing other participation methods with a creative approach

WHEN NOT USEFUL?

- results are needed within a very short timeframe
- image rights and privacy cannot be managed appropriately
- the topic has little or no visual or spatial dimension

TIPS

- Keep the photography assignment clear and easy to understand.
- A small number of well-explained questions is often more effective than many detailed instructions.
- The personal stories behind the photographs are often just as valuable as the images themselves.
- The method works particularly well when focusing on real places and everyday situations.
- Allow sufficient time for collective reflection and discussion.

NOT SUITABLE FOR

- very short-term participation processes
- groups without access to cameras or smartphones
- processes where there is no opportunity to review and discuss the photographs together

View online: https://methoden.urbankit.de/en/methods/photo-voice