

# 3.10 Cultural Artifacts

Discovering perceptions of people using artifacts that are culturally relevant to sociocultural groups



## EXAMPLE PROJECT: *Comunidad Diabetes (2009)*

Comunidad Diabetes is a project that explored community and wellness through a cultural lens. The project focused on diabetes in Chicago's Latino neighborhoods suffering from high prevalence rates. The goal was to rethink community health models to promote sustainable well-being and build a solution to prevent the disease and support those who are diagnosed. *Cultural Artifacts* was one of the research methods used by the project team to understand the Latino community's perceptions of health around food and community.

Lotería cards, a traditional Mexican board game, was used to establish a strong cultural and emotional connection to the research participants. Nine questions were developed in a kit containing these cards and given to each participant to be completed over a two-week period in their home and at their leisure. The idea was to make the activity fun, exploratory, and stress-free. Each question could be answered either by writing or using an image from one of the Lotería cards to illustrate how the participant felt about the question. After the two-week period, the kits were collected and analyzed for deeper meaning and insights based on the participants' responses. The team then did a follow-up interview to better understand the narrative behind the responses.

The research data from the Cultural Artifacts method and other research tools were then compiled for analysis and synthesis in Stage II of the project, where the team began to concentrate more on how they could contribute to a rollback of diabetes and obesity in specific Chicago neighborhoods as demonstration models for transformative social change.

**BENEFITS**

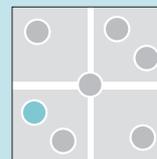
- Builds empathy
- Captures users' points of view
- Grounds conversation with artifacts
- Promotes playfulness
- Reveals the unexpected

**INPUT**

- Project's topic
- A relevant artifact significant to the group of users being studied

**OUTPUT**

- In-depth knowledge of users' activities and thought processes
- Kits and activities completed by users

**WHEN TO USE****WHAT IT DOES**

This method leverages the emotional charge and cultural meaning artifacts have on people. The connotation of “culture” here is not restricted only to nationality or ethnicity. Sociocultural groups have particular customs, behaviors, traditions, thoughts, and practices of everyday life. In other words, every group has its own culture. The Cultural Artifacts method reappropriates a specific element of that culture, either tangible such as a physical object or intangible such as a specific belief the group has, into an artifact relevant to that group and uses that artifact to discover peoples' perceptions traditionally overlooked by other research methods.

**HOW IT WORKS****STEP 1: Develop a kit with Cultural Artifacts and tasks.**

Taking into consideration cultural nuances about the group of people particular to the project, develop a research kit containing a disposable camera, journal to record thoughts, voice or video recorders, and cultural artifacts. Artifacts are reappropriations of specific elements from that culture/group. The artifacts are intended to trigger the most emotional responses, allowing researchers for a deeper conversation with participants that would not be possible with a traditional Ethnographic Interview. The kit also includes some tasks that you want the participants to do. It could be a set of questions or requests for creating something for which you want the participants' response in the form of stories or interpretation of the artifacts in the kit.

**STEP 2: Brief participants.**

Explain the artifacts and the tasks included in the kit to participants. All materials must include printed instructions and contact information in case participants need feedback.

**STEP 3: Provide time for participants to respond.**

Allow ample time for participants to respond. The objective is to allow them to do this at their leisure in a stress-free environment.

**STEP 4: Collect kits.**

Collect the kits in person or retrieve them by mail through a prepaid postage included in the package.

**STEP 5: Analyze information.**

Once the kits are collected, analyze the information provided and prepare for a debriefing interview with participants.

**STEP 6: Interview participants.**

Because the method's tasks are meant to be inspirational, a follow-up, semi-structured interview is conducted with participants to review and dig deeper into their responses.

**STEP 7: Frame inspirations.**

Framing the participants' inspirations into insights helps the design team generate personas and scenarios.

