PHOTOVOICE (Paradigm-stretching methods)

Photovoice is a participatory method that uses photographs to highlight the experiences, perspectives and stories of individuals and communities. It brings out diverse viewpoints and enables deep reflection. It is often used in research, community development and decision-making support. Caroline C. Wang and Mary Ann Burris developed the Photovoice method in 1997.

In the context of the green transition, photovoice combines photography and verbal expression (written and spoken) to observe the environment. The settings can be one's own workplace in the health and care services or natural surroundings, with the goal of documenting and analysing one's environment, such as everyday challenges. The implementation involves using mobile devices, specifically taking photos with a smartphone.

What is required:

- Openness and willingness to share personal experiences
- Ability to reflect on and analyse images individually and in groups
- A safe space where participants can share their thoughts

Level of difficulty: 2 – requires guidance and participants' readiness to share their experiences and structure them either for personal work on one's environmental identity or for generating ideas for environmentally friendly solutions in the workplace

Time required: 1–3 hours (a single workshop) or a longer process (days/weeks)

Materials:

- Camera or smartphone
- A notebook or digital note-taking tools
- Printed photos (if working face-to-face)

Participants: Individuals or groups (2–20 people); applicable to various target groups

How to use:

1. Defining the topic – choose a topic or a theme to explore (e.g., nature-based wellbeing, environmental issues in the workplace, community support for the green transition).
2. Taking photographs – participants take photos related to the chosen theme.
3. Selecting and analysing photographs – Each participant selects 3-6 photos and reflects on their significance.
4. Group discussion – participants take turns sharing their selected photos (1-3 photos each) while others listen without interruption. Afterwards, all photos are reviewed, and each participant shares their thoughts on the images and the photographer's narrative. The facilitator takes notes during both phases.

5. Drawing conclusions – identify key themes and potential actions based on the discussion.
6. Presentation or sharing – photos and findings can be shared with a wider audience, e.g., in a hospital lobby exhibition, in an environmental activity report, in informal workplace settings such as during a discussion in the break room or as an awareness-raising message on social media.

When to use:

- At the beginning – to explore the topic and spark discussion
- During the process – to understand the situation of the community or organisation
- At the end – for reflection and drawing conclusions

Why to use:

- Useful for exploring complex social and cultural phenomena that require deep and diverse understanding
- The visual approach can reveal perspectives that verbal expression may not capture
- Enables participants to voice their own experiences and perspectives
- Promotes a sense of community and deep discussion
- Can be used in various fields (research, education and training, idea generation, customer and patient work)

How to document:

- Photographs taken
- Notes from group discussions and emerging themes
- Visual presentations, posters or reports combining photos and findings

The roots of the method can be found here: Caroline C. Wang and Mary Ann Burris developed the Photovoice method in 1997, aiming to promote health and empower communities. Participants took photographs reflecting their daily experiences and challenges, using these images as tools for discussion and change. The method has also been applied in Participatory Action Research (PAR) and Arts-based Action Research. Photography has been integrated into Paulo Freire's (1921-1997) critical pedagogy. Connections can also be found in Douglas Harper's (2002) research on visual ethnography and storytelling methods.