TOOL: POSTCARD FROM THE FUTURE WORKSHOP METHOD

Abstract

The postcard of the future is a tool for project staff members, workshop organisers and product developers for gathering out-of-the-box ideas from participants. The main purpose of this method is to obtain a comprehensive idea of the consumers' expectations that is minimally constrained by socially desirable answers.The postcard of the future can for example be implemented as part of a workshop in the planning phase of a project when the project plan is still open to adjustments.

What is it?

The "Postcard from the future" method is a quick and intuitive tool to get an insight into the beliefs and expectations of your participants. This method can support you in adapting your product concept or project to the needs and expectations of the consumers. Through the postcard of the future, project staff members, workshop organisers or product developers gather 'out-of-the-box' ideas from participants and their speculations for the future that would otherwise remain inaccessible.

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When to use?

The "Postcard from the future" method can be used on different moments and with different goals in mind. For example, this tool can be used during a workshop or focus group as "icebreaker" at the beginning or a separate session later in the programme.

It can be a method to identify consumers' expectation at the start of a smart energy project or a product development process by letting them describe scenarios they can imagine for the future for a set time and topic. During the project planning, the "Postcard from the future" can be implemented as part of a co-creation process. This can relate to the development of the overall concept of the project as well as specific issues, e.g. a product that will be introduced to the participants.

In addition to using the "Postcard of the future" at the start of a project, you could also finish with it to compare consumers' expectations before and after the project and how they have changed.

What do you need to do?

Create the right state of mind

The method itself is fairly straightforward. Participants are handed a blank postcard and asked to create a postcard from the future, which can include two parts:

- **Creating a motif from the future for the front side of the postcard**. Participants can draw, write, handicraft their expectations for the future for a given topic and time e.g. "Daily Domestic Routines in 2030" or "Personal mobility in 2030" (see examples below). The topic is determined by the project staff.
- **Writing what the future is like on the back of the postcard**. Participants write the text for the postcard imagining what they would be writing on the given topic at the given time. Encourage your participants to address the postcard to someone close to them - a relative or close friend. The text should, in simple words, describe specific aspects of their life they imagine for the future in relation to the given topic. That works especially well by e.g. framing it as a humorous incident or situation.

To put your participants in the right frame of mind, it can be beneficial to make them aware of the status quo first, e.g. through impulse talks or presentations or by asking your participants how they perceive the world (regarding to your topic) as it is now. Furthermore, a possibility to get your participants in the right state of mind is for the moderator of the postcard method to make a postcard, show the picture to the participants and read to them what he wrote on the back of it – Example for the topic mobility 2030 *"Hi Gran. How are you? It has been nice visiting Max here. He drove us through the city in his new EV, which was really interesting. And you don't even have to get out of the car to charge it! That works via the ground. 'Inductive charging' he called it……."*

Create a safe environment for participants

Furthermore, it is important to take into account that not everybody likes to draw and some participants might be shy about their skills in that department. To remove this barrier, pre-prepared icons to cut and glue can be offered. There are a lot of good online services that offer icons, etc., but take care to stick to their terms of service.

- http://www.flaticon.com/
- https://thenounproject.com/
- http://iconmonstr.com/

Don't rush your participants

Give your participants enough time to work on their postcards before continuing with the workshop programme. If you ask your participants to both create a motif for the postcard as well as writing a text, you should give them at least around 30 minutes to work on it.

Optional: Show selected postcard at the end of the workshop

At the end of the workshop, it can be nice to show off some of the postcards by reading them out loud to the participants. Readers can be switched or, alternatively, the participants can choose some of the postcards and read them to each other. For this optional step, an additional 15 minutes should be scheduled.
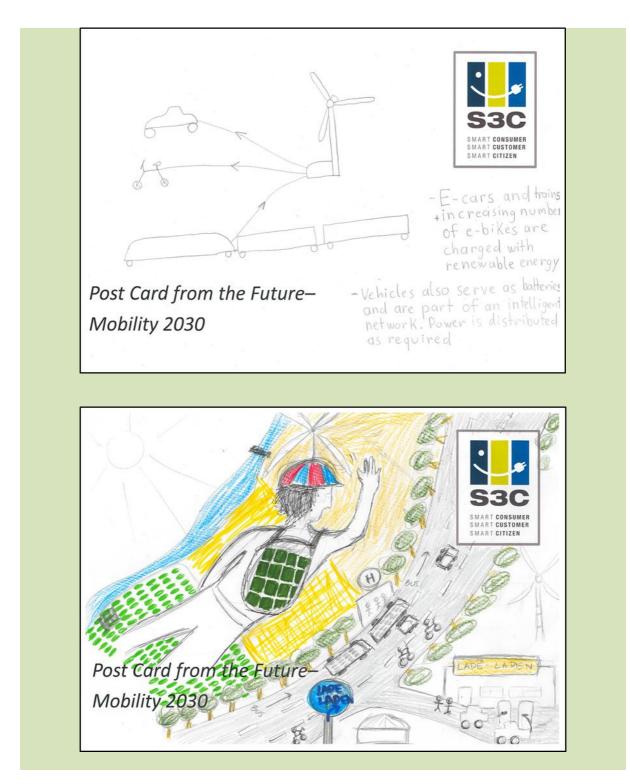
Handing in the postcard should be uncomplicated and free for the participants

The number of participants doesn't matter, as the postcards can be collected at the end of the meeting or the postal charges can be provided to the participants, so they are able to send the postcard later on. At the end of the workshop, the postcards are handed over to the project staff or the workshop organiser. Ideally, a postcard rack can be procured in which the participants can place their postcards once they are finished crafting them. Apart from creating a nice visual, participants are able to peruse each other's postcards before leaving or during the lunch and coffee breaks.

Mobility in 2030 - what the front side of the postcard (motif) could look like
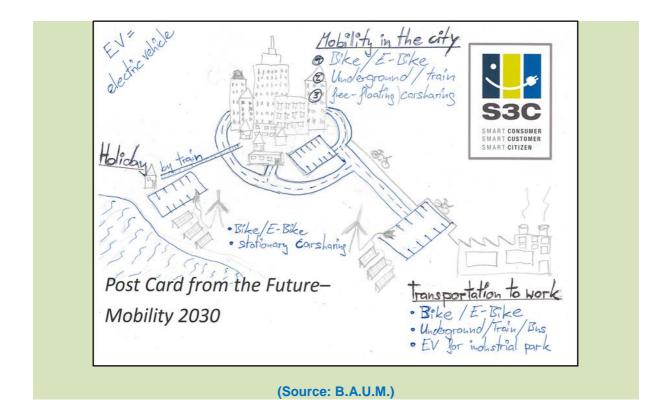
Below, exemplary postcards from the future for the topic "Mobility in 2030" are depicted. Participants were asked what they expected mobility to be like in the year 2030. What would change? How would they get to work, etc.

Post Card from the Future— Mobility 2030

- E-cars and trains + increasing number of e-bikes are charged with renewable energy

- Vehicles also serve as batteries and are part of an intelligent network. Power is distributed as required

Post Card from the Future— Mobility 2030

(Source: B.A.U.M.)

S3C paves the way for successful long-term end user engagement, by acknowledging that the "one" smart consumer does not exist and uniform solutions are not applicable when human nature is involved. Beyond acting as a passive consumer of energy, end users can take on different positions with respective responsibilities and opportunities. In order to promote cooperation between end users and the energy utility of the future, S3C addresses the end user on three roles. The *smart consumer* is mostly interested in lowering his/her energy bill, having stable or predictable energy bills over time and keeping comfort levels of energy services on an equal level. The *smart customer* takes up a more active role in future smart grid functioning, e.g. by becoming a producer of energy or a provider of energy services. The *smart citizen* values the development of smart grids as an opportunity to realise "we-centred" needs or motivations, e.g. affiliation, self-acceptance or community.

S3C performed an extensive literature review and in-depth case study research in Smart Grid trials, resulting in the identification of best practices, success factors and pitfalls for end user engagement in smart energy ventures. The analysis of collected data and experiences led to the development of a new, optimised set of tools and guidelines to be used for the successful engagement of either Smart Consumers, Smart Customers or Smart Citizens. The S3C guidelines and tools aim to provide support to utilities in the design of an engagement strategy for both household consumers and SMEs. The collection of guidelines and tools describe the various aspects that should be taken into account when engaging with consumers, customers and citizens. More information about S3C, as well as all project deliverables, can be found at www.s3c-project.eu.