

Ecological Probes for experiencing nature

Summary

An introduction to creating ecological probes and using them to explore a natural environment in a sensory and intuitive manner. This creates a starting point to find tangible ways to involve the more-than-human world in your design.

Learning outcomes

- Make (pre-designed) ecological probes to explore a natural environment's qualities.
- Reflect on the experience of exploring the natural context through probes and make sense of it.
- Consider and reflect on the impact of your actions on non-humans in the environment.
- Imagine new or improved ecological probes suitable for your project.

Outline/Content

- Why work with ecological probes?
- What are ecological probes?
- Make your own ecological probes
- Explore your environment with the ecological probes
- Analyse your findings and reflect on the use of the probes

Key readings

Rosén, A. P., Normark, M., & Wiberg, M. (2022, October). Noticing the environment—A design ethnography of urban farming. In *Nordic Human-Computer Interaction Conference* (pp. 1-13).

Why ecological probes?

- To aid more-than-human-centred design
- They raise awareness of non-humans involved



What are ecological probes?

- They originated from a student project about creating appreciation for non-humans/nature by letting people notice them.
- Based on biomimicry: How seeds stick to fur as inspiration for collecting non-human material unintentionally.
- Purpose:
 - Collect & displace non-human material
 - Increase understanding of a natural environment
 - Input for reflection

Biomimicry Inspiration

Photo by Lucas Loorbach

MAKING: Homework

- (make groups?)
- Make probes by following the DIY worksheet
- Help each other when unfamiliar with techniques



EXPLORING

- Where to explore:
 - Outside, natural environment, context of a current project?
- Things to try:
 - Go beyond a paved path, try different terrains
 - Consider the impact of the season
- What to avoid:
 - Disturbing the environment
 - Remove living organisms carefully from your probe in the location they got attached to it (take a picture of them).
 - Do not leave trash and use natural materials for making your probe.
 - Do not go off the path when that is indicated (otherwise you disturb the ecosystem).
- Document!

HOMEWORK:

Analyse your exploration & Reflect

- Use your pictures as a starting point to annotate your initial observations
- Consider what these observations can say about the environment
- Consider how you impacted the environment
- What does it mean for your role as designer?



Reflection

- Compare findings in small groups
- Reflect on the following:
 - What is an insight that you got due to the use of the ecological probe?
 - How did the probe influence how you perceived the environment?
 - What did you learn about the more-than-humans you encountered?
 - How will you use your insights and learning in future design activities?
 - How would you change the probe to improve the exploration or to explore something else?

This teaching activity was developed as part of the MOVA project co-funded by the European Union. <https://mova.uni.mau.se/>



**Co-funded by
the European Union**

Disclaimer: Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.