



Future Urban Study

The Facts

The Future Urban study is part of a series of exploratory design research projects where Nokia's advanced design team studies selected emerging lifestyle trends in depth. The study took place in the shanty towns of three fast-growing cities, Mumbai (India), Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) and Accra (Ghana). The fieldwork took place from June to November 2007, and the research team spent about two weeks in each city.

The team consisted of a range of design specialists from Nokia including design ethnographers, industrial designers, packaging designers, filmmakers, interaction designers and usability experts.

The Issues

The study set out to explore the global megatrend of growing urbanization - the increasing amount of people living in urban rather than rural areas - and to understand how this will influence people's lifestyle so that we can design mobile devices and services that address this.

Many of this new urban population are not settling in traditional cities but rather forming their own communities and creating completely new urban areas. The team visited shanty towns on the outskirts of Rio, Mumbai and Accra because they are good examples of these types of expanding urban environments.

People living in such communities face a number of challenges in finding jobs, establishing social networks, acclimatizing to the new environment, and dealing with limited resources and infrastructure. These issues are very prominent but not unique to these communities - they are issues many people around the world will face as the urbanization trend continues. This makes the findings of the Future Urban study relevant to many different communities and countries around the world.



Future Urban Study

The Issues

The main research theme of Future Urban centers on identity: How do people construct, maintain, communicate and dispose of their identity in these communities? What could be the role of technology in assisting the process? The study aimed at delivering not only ideas for potential new products and services, but also in-depth documentation of people's lifestyles and living environment so that the fieldwork experience can be brought back into Nokia and shared across the company.

How the study was done - research methods

The design teams used a number of different methods to study and observe people in the communities they visited. These include:

Deep dives: This is the core of the fieldwork and involves studying in-depth a small group of specifically selected members of the community. The designers spent a "day in the life" shadowing and interviewing each individual, staying at their home, going to work with them and doing what they do. 30 of these in-depth interviews were conducted for the project.

Street surveys: The research team conducted more than 750 street surveys and interviews asking people how they use their mobiles, where they carry them and how it fits into the lives.

Nokia Open Studio: The Nokia team set up design studios in each of the communities and asked local people to come along and design their ideal mobile device. More than 220 people came along, giving the team a real insight into local cultures and the important issues in people's everyday lives ranging from security, level of technological understanding, importance of staying in touch with family, entertainment and other local cultural trends.



Future Urban Study

Findings

The Future Urban team will take the wealth of images, stories, insights and experiences gained in the field back into the design studios, sharing it with the 300 strong team of designers in Nokia. These designers are working today on products that will hit the market in one, two or even three years' time, and they can draw on the research findings to inspire new ideas.

The findings can be applied in many different ways. For example, Nokia's colors and materials designers can look at the research to see how people protect their phones from the wet in Mumbai during the rainy season, or how people in Rio use color in their clothes, homes and accessories. This will influence new ideas for materials, colors and finishes.

The research also identified some longer term cultural trends that may have a growing prominence and impact on how people live in the new urban areas. These provide food for thought for designers and may in time influence future products and design work.

Many people have migrated to these new urban areas from rural ones. It takes some time for a community to form and build social networks. This can translate into people spending more time indoors or struggling to build their own identity. Mobile technology can help address some of these issues. For example, the research found that a mobile device can often be an important source of family's entertainment, providing music, games and photos they can share and use together.

The research also showed how a mobile device has become an important part of constructing one's identity. Many of the people living in these urban areas are starting totally new lives and trying to create social and physical identities in new and very crowded areas. Mobiles can play a role in helping them to create their identity in this environment, not only providing a way to be contacted but also to help build an identity by making a statement about their personality and what is important to them.