

Ritualia

Instruction booklet



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Welcome to Ritualia,
your toolkit designed to support the
observation, analysis, and ideation process
for individual and group food rituals.

→ **Ritualia** is specially crafted for designers and
anyone interested in exploring the rich world of
food rituals and their cultural significance.

Rituals & *Ritualia*

What is a ritual?

A ritual is a patterned, repetitive behavior intentionally performed in a specific context and imbued with symbolic meaning and cultural significance.

Rituals can be personal or communal and are often performed to mark important events, transitions, or life stages. They can also reinforce social bonds, express emotions, or bring about a sense of order and control.

What is a food ritual?

It is the symbolic, cultural, and social meanings and practices associated with food.

What is **Ritualia**?

It is a toolkit that comprises several elements, including the researcher's napkin, a value compass, a value map, and design prompts. Each component serves a unique purpose, facilitating a seamless and immersive experience in understanding and capturing the intricacies of food rituals.

Who can use it?

Whether you are a seasoned designer or an enthusiastic explorer, Ritualia is your companion for uncovering the endless stories behind cultural practices and using them as a foundation for inspired and meaningful design concepts.

Choosing the research context: a guide for using the Ritualia toolkit

Before diving into using this tool, it is important to consider a few key factors that will help you make the most out of your experience. Selecting the right context for your napkin can enhance your project results.



Clear Objectives

Define the purpose of your napkin session. Are you brainstorming new ideas, outlining a research concept, or troubleshooting a problem? Having a clear goal will guide your thoughts and keep your session productive.



Supportive Tools

Gather any materials you might need – pens, markers, sticky notes, or any other stationery that resonates with your creative process. Having these tools at hand will allow you to visually represent your ideas effectively.



Ethical Considerations

Ensure that the chosen context respects the privacy and cultural sensitivities of the participants, obtaining informed consent and maintaining confidentiality throughout the observation.



Cultural Diversity

If needed, select a context that reflects diverse cultural practices and values, enabling a broader exploration of food rituals and their significance in different communities.



Relevance

Choose a context that aligns with the research objectives and the specific cultural aspects you aim to understand and incorporate into the design process.



Accessibility

Opt for a context that allows for seamless and ethical observation, where participants are comfortable sharing their food rituals and cultural practices.



Interest and Expertise

Consider your own or your team's interest and expertise in the selected context to foster genuine engagement and valuable insights during the exploration.



Practicality

Evaluate the practicality of observing the food ritual within the context, taking into account factors such as the location, duration, and availability of participants.

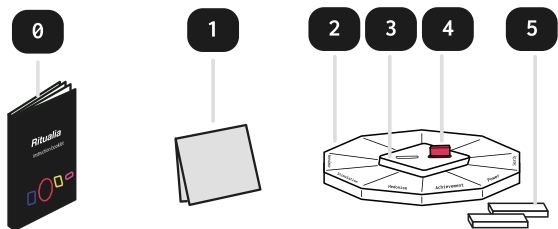


Community Engagement

Involve the community members in the process to ensure a collaborative approach and respectful representation of their cultural practices.

The toolkit

Components



PURPOSE ELEMENT

Instructions

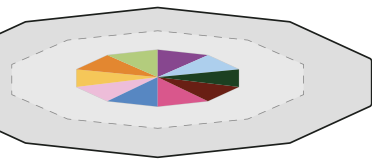
Researcher's napkin

Value compass & tokens

Toolkit understanding

Observation in context

6



Value map

7



Value guide

8

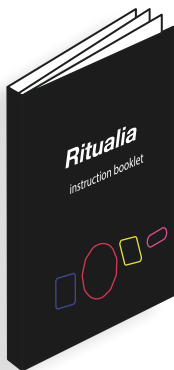


Design prompts

Ritual analysis and ideation

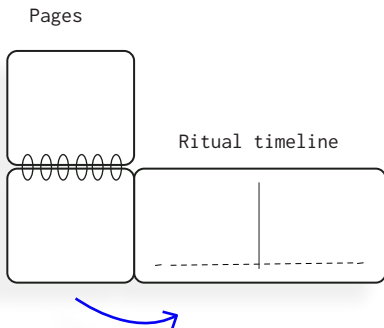
Concept assessment

0 The instruction booklet



The present booklet introduces you to the use of the toolkit. It serves as guidance through all the diverse components of the toolkit, their specific purposes, and how they can best be utilized. Detailed explanations and step-by-step instructions, along with a set of guidelines can be found in it. Its aim is to allow you to tailor the toolkit to your research objectives and personal preferences.

1 Researcher's napkin



The researcher's napkin is a tool that aims at supporting observations in context.

Material

This square-shaped “napkin” measures 9 cm by 9 cm and is integrated into a compact block notes booklet format.

How to use

Bring the napkin with you to take notes while exploring the chosen context. This will allow you to gather all the crucial information, dividing it into categories.

Content

The napkin's content is structured to accommodate essential measurable parameters related to the eating context. Each page within the napkin is dedicated to capturing specific data points crucial for comprehensive observation and analysis. Each page allows gathering key elements, including:

1. **Context** in which the exploration takes place: A designated space to record the contextual information surrounding the eating event. This may involve details about the location, occasion, or any relevant cultural factors.
2. **Roles of Diners:** An area to document the roles and relationships of individuals participating in the meal, shedding light on their interactions and dynamics.
3. **Artifacts:** A section to note down the objects, utensils, or items used during the eating ritual, elucidating their significance within the cultural context. In the page there is room for the most and less used object and the one with a higher symbolic significance.
4. **Language Triggers:** A field to capture verbal cues or triggers exchanged among diners during the meal, which can provide insights into communication dynamics.
5. **Ritual Timeline:** A timeline format to chronicle the sequence of events and actions throughout the dining experience.
6. **Extra Notes:** Additional space for researchers to jot down any relevant observations, thoughts, or insights that may not fit into the predefined categories.

Tips for use in context

→ **Be inconspicuous**

Place the napkin subtly on the dining table, ensuring it does not draw excessive attention, allowing participants to engage in their food rituals naturally.

→ **Potential awareness**

At the same time, be aware that some participants may notice the napkin, becoming conscious of its observational purpose, potentially leading to self-censorship or altered behaviors.

→ **Record observations discreetly**

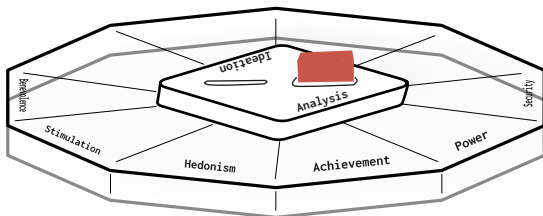
Use the napkin discreetly to jot down key observations and insights during the meal, avoiding any disruptions to the participants' dining experience.

→ **Bias**

Be mindful of your own cultural biases and assumptions while using the napkin to record observations, striving for objectivity in the analysis of participants' cultural practices.



2 Value compass



The value compass is designed to facilitate the exploration and ideation phases of multicultural food rituals after gathering data on the researcher's napkin.

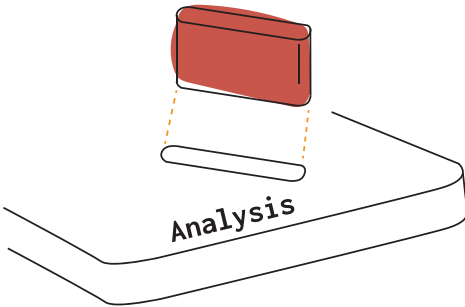
How to use

The value compass serves as your navigational tool on the value map (on page 22), guiding you to pinpoint and visualize the alignment of your goals, actions, and decisions with the cardinal directions of the core value you identified was underlying the food ritual. To utilize the value compass, position it on the value map as a guiding tool. Let it steer you through the process of value hunting, aiding in the identification of distinct phases – whether it involves analysis or ideation – while ensuring a focused exploration aligned with your core values.

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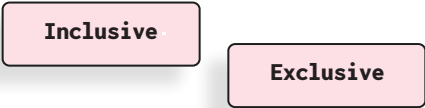
The focus needle



The focus needle is the uppermost component of the *value compass*, serving as a guide to indicate the current phase of work for designers or users.

How to use

This pointer features two distinct holes, that allow you to position the needle to denote whether you are in the analysis or ideation phase of the process. This visual indicator helps maintain clarity and alignment throughout the ritual exploration.



Inclusive

Exclusive

The tokens in the toolkit, split into two rectangular and two circular coins, are elements built upon the distinctions of inclusive vs. exclusive and collective vs. individual. They add depth by providing a more nuanced understanding of behaviors.

Inclusive vs. Exclusive

In the context of food practice analysis, an **inclusive** attitude refers to behaviors and practices that foster a sense of openness, community, and togetherness during food rituals. It involves activities and gestures encouraging inclusivity, such as sharing food, engaging in communal dining experiences, and inviting others to participate in the meal. On the other hand, an **exclusive** attitude pertains to behaviors and practices that create a sense of exclusivity or separation during food rituals.



Collective vs. Individual

The distinction between collective and individual coins in the toolkit regards the examination of participation patterns among people.

The **collective** aspect refers to behaviors that emphasize group engagement and shared experiences. On the other hand, the **individual** aspect concerns behaviors that highlight personal engagement and autonomy during food rituals.

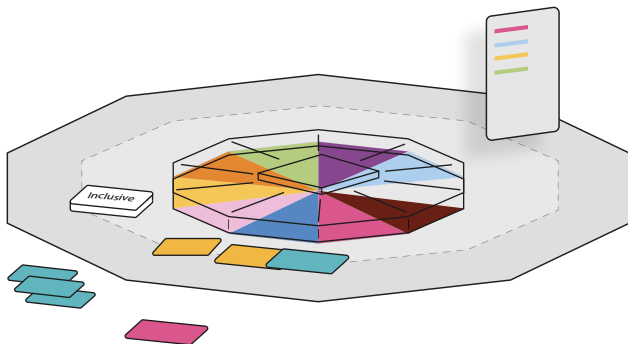
How to use

Feel free to use these tokens flexibly at any point of the ideation or analysis phasr, assigning additional levels of relevance and meaning to various aspects of the context.

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Value map and value guide

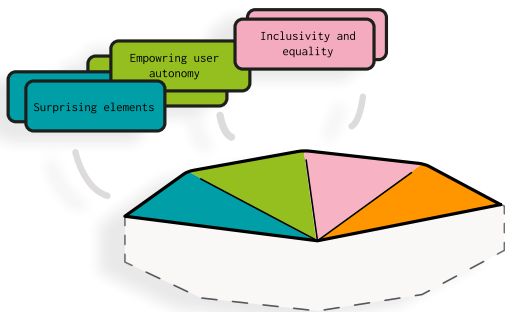


The value map is a A2 sheet of paper that serves as a foundational canvas for positioning the value compass. Its purpose is to provide a stable base for conducting analyses and generating ideas during the phases of the ritual study.

+ Value guide

The toolkit also incorporates a value guide, a separate sheet in A5 format, which encompasses the comprehensive definitions of each of the ten values. This guide serves as a quick reference for designers and researchers when picking a value from the map or the compass.

8 Design prompts

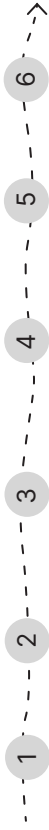


The design prompts are part of the toolkit in the form of compact paper labels. Each value within the toolkit is associated with a variety of prompts, allowing you the flexibility to choose those that resonate most with the context you are exploring.

How to use

During a single ideation session, it is entirely feasible to employ multiple design prompts, each associated with distinct values, with the aim of involving a wider range of inspiration sources.

Use flow



Ritualia flow and its related activities

Preparation and decision about the ritual to discover

Collecting data

Transferring data for analysis

Reflection/ discussion of the analysis

Transition to the ideation phase

Ideation and concept generation

Person involved

Researcher or design team

Tips toward multicultural contexts

Beware of the chosen cultural context

Beware of the chosen cultural context

Look at data through a cultural lens

Consider validating your finding with interviews

Validate the concepts with interviews or group sessions

Tool involved

Ritualia researcher's *napkin* + Guidelines

Using post-its or notes to frame the ritual toward a chosen value

Value guide

Focus needle, *value map*

Value map and design prompts

Guidelines

Guidelines for contextual research in cross-cultural settings

The guidelines proposed for carrying out research in multicultural scenarios represent the bridge that connects the theoretical insights gained from this project's research to the practical application in the real world, ensuring that every encounter and observation is conducted with respect, integrity, and commitment to understanding and appreciating the richness of diverse cultural practices. Be mindful of:

Prioritizing consent

Contextual understanding

Familiarize with the food ritual's cultural context (as advised on Page 8).

Understand the historical, social, and religious factors influencing the participants' behavior and practices.

Respecting participant boundaries

Respect the participants' privacy and obtain informed consent before the observation. Do not record any personal information without explicit permission.

Ask for permission

Seek permission from the participants before photographing or recording audio or video during the observation.

Beware of personal and spatial factors

Identify personal biases

Periodically reflect on your biases and how they might influence your observations. Seek feedback from other team members to gain multiple perspectives on the data.

Stay objective

Try to maintain objectivity during the observation process. Be aware of any preconceived notions or assumptions that might influence the perception of the ritual.

Be keen to actively listen

Listen attentively to verbal and non-verbal cues from participants. Pay close attention to their comments, gestures, and expressions, as they can provide valuable insights into the cultural significance of the food ritual.

Beware of the body language

Pay attention to participants' body language, as it can reveal emotions and reactions that might not be explicitly expressed.

Building research ethic

Consider cultural sensitivity

Respect the cultural norms and practices of the participants. Be aware of potential cultural differences and avoid imposing cultural interpretations on their behavior.

Remain ethical

Be conscious of ethical considerations and avoid exploiting the participants or misusing the gathered information.

Building a bond

Non-interference

Refrain from interfering or influencing the food ritual in any way. Be a silent observer and avoid making any changes to the natural flow of the event.

Engage and build trust

If appropriate, engage in friendly conversations with participants to build rapport and trust. This can lead to more open and authentic responses during the observation.

Tracking

Record-keeping

For how much that is possible, take detailed notes and record observations promptly to ensure accuracy and capture all relevant information. Use the researcher's napkin or any other suitable method for recording observations. If this involves recording or photographing, always ask for consent first.

Data reliability


Data analysis

After the observation, analyze the data objectively and systematically. Look for patterns and themes that emerge from the observations.

Validation

Validate your observations with participants to ensure accuracy and clarify any ambiguous points.

Curiosity and support



Continuous learning

Embrace the observation process as a learning opportunity to deepen your understanding of different cultures and their food rituals. Continuously seek to improve your observational skills throughout the research journey.

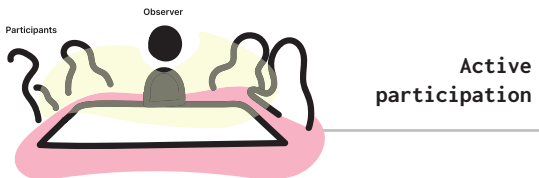
Be available

In case participants would want to reach out for questions and support.

Researcher in context: types of participation to the ritual

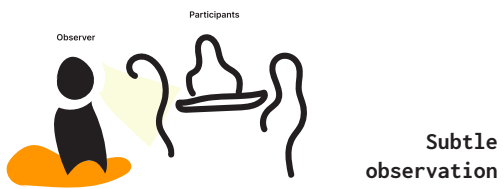
Defining the roles of a researcher is an essential step, but it is equally important to consider the proximity they maintain to the observed context. This deliberation makes one wonder “*How close should the researcher be?*”

There are three possible approaches: active participation, subtle and external observation (as illustrated on page 33). Each approach has advantages and limitations, influencing the depth and authenticity of the collected data.



1. The researcher's **active participation** in studying food rituals offers several advantages. By immersing oneself in the ritual, the researcher can gain firsthand experience and a profound understanding of the participants' perspectives, feelings, and emotions.

However, active participation also presents inherent limitations. The researcher's presence may introduce the observer effect, wherein participants modify their behavior in response to being observed, leading to potential alterations in the natural flow of the ritual.



2. On the other hand, when approaching a **subtle observation** (perhaps adopting shadowing techniques), the researcher aims to be unobtrusive and discreet, closely observing participants without actively intervening. In this case, the impact on the ritual is likely to be minimized as participants may become less aware of the researcher's presence. Shadowing allows for a more natural and authentic representation of the ritual, as participants are less likely to alter their behavior due to the researcher's close proximity.

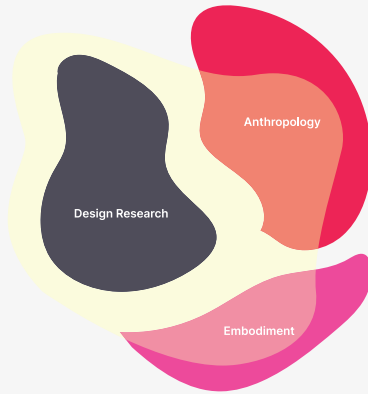


External observation

3. The **external observation** of food practices - likely those in the street environments or shorter explorative moments - can offer a non-intrusive approach to studying cultural practices. Observing from a distance allows researchers to capture the natural dynamics of the ritual without directly influencing it, ensuring authenticity in the participants' behaviors. However, external observation may have some downsides, such as the potential lack of detailed insights into the participants' motivations, emotions, or cultural meanings associated with specific actions.

Whatever is the chosen method, whether it be active participation subtle or external observation, the important thing is to prioritize ethical considerations and participant well-being (as it has been extensively illustrated on page 27). Openly communicating with participants about the research, obtaining informed consent, and respecting their boundaries during the data collection is paramount to conducting responsible and respectful research. Overall, the categorization above is to be taken as a generalization derived from the collective insights gathered from various contexts and research experiences.

The project



The research behind the creation of this toolkit delves into the social aspects of food, commensality, and food rituals. It investigates the interplay between embodied gestures, artifacts, and language in shaping food cultures. This exploration extends to food rituals, reflecting and reproducing social norms and values (Sutton et al., 2018), while language in the culinary world serves as a dynamic space for intercultural communication and identity negotiation (Piller, 2003; Parasecoli, 2014). The complexity of multicultural contexts poses a challenge for designers aiming to develop inclusive solutions that resonate with diverse cultural perspectives (Visser et al., 2005). Context

mapping techniques have emerged to address this, offering designers insights into users' contexts, including their cultural and linguistic dimensions (Hao et al., 2017). However, ethical considerations and the need for a robust framework for ritual observations demand reliable tools.

To this end, the Ritualia toolkit was developed. It provides a systematic approach to observing and analyzing rituals, guiding designers in understanding the material world with its artifacts, habitual actions, roles played by diners and the language they use in food contexts. This toolkit equips designers and practitioners with the means to navigate the intricacies of diverse cultural settings, fostering culturally sensitive design solutions.

By relying on solid anthropological and cultural frameworks, these toolkit contributes to bridging the disciplines of interest for gaining a deeper understanding of cultural practices and values.

Applying an interdisciplinary approach allows designers to engage with diverse cultural contexts, crafting concepts contextually tailored. As food studies evolve, this research adds to understanding the intricate relationship between food, culture, and social dynamics in contemporary society by providing a designerly lens.

Cited literature

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This project is the result of a Master Thesis in Design for Interaction at the Delft University of Technology, Faculty of Industrial Design Engineering.



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