

MEEPLE MATE

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AFFILIATION

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AIM

We are running a cultural probe study to understand what artefacts can tell us about improving the experience of board gaming and other hobbies for people who can't be in the same place. We ask how might people use the Meeple Mate to feel more connected to their board gaming community?

DISTANCED PLAY

The Hybrid Distanced Play project examines how two or more people can play a physical board game together, even when they are not in the same place. During the COVID-19 pandemic, people adopted "homebrewed" methods for distanced play of hybrid digital boardgames through creative appropriations of technologies and household objects (Sparrow & Rogerson, 2023). The Meeple Mate extends this work by exploring and imagining opportunities for novel hybrid digital boardgames and play, and fostering meaningful connection between players.

METHODOLOGY

The Meeple Mate is a high-fidelity artefact deployed as a cultural probe study. Cultural probes allow participants to be co-designers through exploration, imagination and reflection. Probes generate "inspirational data" that provides insights into the participant's world (Gaver et al., 1999). After creating an initial paper prototype (pictured below left), we designed and built five high-fidelity artefacts. We built the Meeple Mates out of MDF, with laser-cut plastic Meeple Mate pieces, LED lights and an internal Arduino circuit. We have conducted a pilot study with 1 person over 8 days.

CULTURAL PROBE

In the Meeple Mate study, participants are provided with the artefact to place in their home for eight days. They are given a box that contains a diary, polaroid camera, envelopes with daily instructions, and etched character pieces. Each day participants open an envelope and complete the diary prompts. Participants are encouraged to be as creative as they like, drawing pictures, writing poems, and sticking polaroids in the diary. After 8 days the artefact and probe is picked up, and participants will be invited to a focus group to discuss their experience with the Meeple Mate.

THE MEEPLE MATE STUDY



Initial paper prototype and the high-fidelity Meeple Mate artefact



Participant Diary from the first day of the pilot study



Inside the Meeple Mate box

BE INVOLVED!

If you are interested in games and would like to participate in the Meeple Mate study, please contact us via the QR code.



REFERENCES

Gaver, B., Dunne, T., & Pacenti, E. (1999). Design: Cultural Probes, *Interactions*, 6, 1 (Jan./Feb. 1999), 21–29.

Sparrow, L. A., & Rogerson, M. J. (2023). Lessons from Homebrewed Hybridity: Designing Hybrid Digital Boardgames for Distanced Play. *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction (CHI PLAY)*, 45–72.