PARTICIPATORY VIDEO

"Video can be a powerful tool for stimulating self-expression and interaction in group development work. Used in a participatory way, video encourages people to examine the world around them, raise awareness of their situation and help them to become more actively involved in the decisions that affect their lives."

Jackie Shaw and Clive Robertson

Participatory Video (1997)

What is Participatory Video?

Participatory Video (PV) is an interactive group process, mediated by video recording and playback activities, the early stages involve participants in videoing themselves and the world around them, watching these recordings together (playback), and then reflecting on what was said or shown. Later, group members create their own 'films' (e.g., video stories, messages or vignettes) for different audiences depending on the context and specific project purpose.

Shaw, J. (2021). Extended participatory video processes. In: Burns, D., Howard, J. and Ospina, S. (eds.) The SAGE Handbook of Participatory Research and Enquiry. London SAGE Publishing.

Development of PV

The Fogo Island process (1967) is often cited as a foundational participatory filmmaking example because it reflects the method's key elements.

Canadian islanders facing government resettlement were involved in filming their concerns. Screenings of the recorded material catalysed wider community dialogue, and then edited outputs mediated exchanges back-and-forth with government decision-makers.

Almost as soon as video technology became more widely available, educators, social activist and community art workers have been developing new ways to utilise these new technologies in non formal educational settings.

As video became increasingly available, many practitioners tested the social and research possibilities. Thus Participatory Video has diverse roots including: the participatory epistemologies and transformative pedagogies (e.g. Fals Borda 2001, Freire 1974) underlying bottom-up development communications in the global-south (Melkote 2004, White 2003); the community arts movement

in the global-north, where community video tackled disadvantaged group's concerns (Nigg and Wade 1980); and as feminist epistemology with indigenous groups exploring grounded ways of seeing (e.g. Kindon et al. 2012, Mistry and Berardi 2012).

These diverse origins mean there is considerable debate on what constitutes participatory video and a methodological pluralism reflecting practitioners' different motivations and positions (Roberts and Muniz 2020, Plush 2016).

Application of Participatory Video

Generally, in Participatory Video, projects adapt to the needs of participants and contexts rather than using formulaic series of activities. Technical skills are developed alongside the creation of content.

Participatory Video is a methodology predominately used to encourage individual and group development. While technical, organisational and creative skills are learnt and video content created, the positive change that participants go through as part of the process is seen as the most important outcome.

Context for Participatory Video

Community empowerment: Participatory Video aims to get in touch with a community that lives in conditions of marginality and give it the opportunity to appropriate an expressive language and to represent itself, with the ultimate aim of building an empowerment path and claim.

Advocacy: Participatory Video is used by a group of subjects who intend to report a problem and make claims through it to mobilise public opinion.

Therapeutic: Participatory Video is used by a set of subjects who, in following this path, want to bring about a change in their personal discomfort in a collective way.

Research: Participatory Video, in some cases, is used as an anthropological/ social/ethnographic investigation tool within a specific area of study, an alternative tool to get in touch with the other and give space for free expression.

Participatory Video workshops

KEY ELEMENTS OF A PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

·   Participants always operate the equipment

·   Everyone attending must agree to appearing on video

·   Participants take turns at every role

·   Playback everything recorded in its entirety

·   Never video other people without permission

·   Video material recorded in initial workshops is confidential

Facilitators support participants in planning, identifying themes, subjects, and goals to be achieved and in recording material. The facilitator also manages the expectations of the group, the ground rules to be aware of and additional support issues required by the group members. The facilitator should also ensure that everyone in the group gains a basic understanding of the camera and audio equipment to be used.

It is vital that the participants use the equipment themselves and make creative decisions.

The facilitator should also make sure that production roles are rotated throughout the group, ensuring that everyone has an equal chance to develop skills and confidence in front of and behind the camera.

Structure of Participatory Video projects

A typical project structure for a PV project with both production and process outcomes might look like this:

1. Initial engagement

PV games and exercises to get the group working together, technical skills developed alongside looking at issues. Everyone swaps roles, no-one becomes identified as camera operator, director etc. Generally, none of this is shared outside the workshop setting.

2. Developing ideas

Storyboarding techniques and other exercises such as video chat shows, storytelling exercises on a particular issue to develop and expand content ideas. Participants work on visual sequences and interview questions.

3. Recording content

The sessions can be used for recording material by the participants themselves, reviewing content, working on visual sequences to support narratives.

4. Editing

As editing progresses, this is generally undertaken by facilitators who then share draft edits with the group online and in sessions for the group to make revisions. Further production can take place as required.

5. Sharing

The final content to be shared may not be a single traditional video programme. It could be clips on a website or social media posts. The project provides participants to tell their own stories in their own words and control the process of how they are disseminated. They should be fully involved in discussions about how this takes place.

6. Evaluation, follow up and developing continued support for participants

Participatory Video and social action

For Participatory Video to have meaningful impact on social issues it needs to move beyond short term production-led projects. Increasingly, the importance is seen of ensuring that participants voices are heard and more importantly listened to and acted upon. Projects like StoryAp provide the framework for longer lasting engagement with on-going horizontal (peer-to-peer) and vertical communication (to decision-makers and influencers of policy). It also provides a way for people to share and learn, reflecting on what has gone before and building on it.

This way of working can be described as an extended PV approach which was developed to better mitigate the associated risks and is more effective due to the iterative spirals of videoing, reflecting and taking new actions over time. For example,

to navigate the ethical risk of inappropriate exposure, the first two stages clearly separate videoing in safe spaces, to establish inclusive dynamics and generate internally-focused research discussion, from video's later uses to mediate external communication (Shaw 2020).

https://www.makingallvoicescount.org/publication/pathways-accountability-margins-reflections-participatory-video-practice/

Project example

The *Participate* network was created to bring lived experiences of poverty into UN deliberations during creation of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDGs). As part of the project young people from the Spatial Collective used Participatory Video to explore local issues and communicate effectively with decision-makers.

Initially five 2 hours workshops took place, these involved short video-recording and playback exercises to explore issues. Videoing activities mediated the exchange of experiences and ideas. Structured progressively, the emphasis shifted from '*I am*' to '*who are you*' to '*we are*' to '*what are our interests*'. The group used the statement-in-a-round format to share positive and negative experiences and to later complete the statement 'I feel strongly about .... because...... ', which elicited diverse viewpoints. The group then recorded shot by shot documentary exercises.

At this community-level stage they scaled horizontally by screening their videos to mediate wider dialogue at community events. On slum sanitation, this increased the range of perspectives with community elders and women joining young people to identify solutions, such as working together to build closed sewage culverts.

On reflection, the youth group considered that showing videos drew in more people than usual and involving them in sense-making processes.

The young people were supported in developing compelling policy messages and worked alongside experienced video-producers using parallel production processes to co-construct output videos suitable for global policy space.

The Mathare young people created a video, *Working together for change*, which illustrated the systemic barriers and what local security action can achieve. The Kenyan videos alongside visual outputs from the other 30 *Participate* countries formed physical and online exhibitions leading up to the UN SDG summit and influenced development of the SDG 'leave no-one behind' narrative.

https://www.real-time.org.uk/knowledge-from-the-margins

Project example description from Shaw, J. (2021)

"We are trying our best to bring about change, but we cannot tackle wider social problems alone, so we want you to work with us. In tackling security, we have had success and setbacks, we have learnt what we can do together and where we need your help".   Spatial Collective participant.

https://www.real-time.org.uk/working-together-for-change

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StoryAP

Stories for Active Participation Archive

The **StoryAp archive** is part of the project StoryDec, Storytelling to Develop Civic Competences in Young People, Erasmus Plus Project – Youth.

The objective of StoryDec is to create paths of civic and social education addressed at young people, through autobiographical methodologies and digital storytelling.

Project web sites

- http://www.storydec.eu/

- http://www.storyap.eu/

Partners

- CEMEA ITALY – IT (Coordinator) - https://www.cemea.it/

- CEMEA FRANCE- FR - http://www.cemeacentre.org/

- Association Pro Xpert – Romania - https://proxpert.org/

- StowarzyszenieTrenerow Organizacji Pozarzadowych – Poland - https://stowarzyszeniestop.pl/

- Storie di Mondi Possibili – Italy - http://www.storydec.eu/partners/storie-di-mondi-possibili-italy/

- Mobilizing Expertises – Sweden - http://mexpert.se/

- Real Time – UK - http://www.real-time.org.uk/

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