Abstract

The information and communications technology of participatory video has been used increasingly over the last fifty years due to its claimed efficacy in generating development at the level of the individual, group and society. Participatory video is a set of techniques to involve a group or community in shaping and creating their own film (Lunch & Lunch 2006). Unlike other kinds of film-making participatory video involves handing-over control of the film-production process to inexpert users to enable them to express and represent themselves, communicating to others about issues affecting their lives. It is claimed that among other benefits, the process of participatory video can enhance participants' self-confidence and self-esteem, individual and collective agency, and serve as an effective mechanism to amplify the voices of marginalised groups to influence the decision-making processes affecting their lives. In recent years writing about participatory video has generally become less celebratory and more critical, questioning among other things, the extent to which control is actually handed over and scrutinising claims that participatory video generates transformational social change.

Introduction

In their practical guide to using video for development Jackie Shaw and Clive Robertson (1997) describe participatory video as using a process similar to the *conscientisation* advocated by Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). By producing films about their own social circumstances and reflecting on the causes of social injustice they found participants learnt to use the camera to 'read the world' critically and to better articulate the change they want to see in the world. This Freirian logic and emancipatory intent is referred to in all of the other seminal texts on participatory video including Braden & Huong (1998), White (2003) and Lunch & Lunch (2006).

Shaw and Robertson describe participatory video as an activity used predominately with disadvantaged or marginalised groups that, "utilizes video as a social and community-based tool for individual and group development ⋯ to develop their confidence and self-esteem, to encourage them to express themselves creatively, to develop a critical awareness and to provide a means for them to communicate with others".

There is however no universally agreed definition as to what constitutes participatory video (Salazar & Dagron, 2009). The term has been used to describe some quite distinct practices and some uses of video in social settings that seem closely related to participatory video are not described as such (High, Singh, Pertheram & Nemes, 2012). Reflecting the diversity of existing participatory video process one network of practitioners (PV-Net, 2008) has defined participatory video as, "a collaborative approach to working with a group or community in shaping and creating their own film, in order to open spaces for learning and communication and to enable positive change and transformation".

Description

With the caveat that there is no definitive or universally agreed 'correct way' to do participatory video, it is possible to outline some common elements of participatory video process as detailed in practical 'how-to' guides such as those produced by Shaw & Robertson (1997) and Lunch & Lunch (2006). An external facilitator or team arrives with the equipment necessary to make a film. Group participants are engaged in discussions about social issues that concern them whilst taking part in practical exercises to familiarise themselves with the functioning of cameras, tripods, sound and lighting equipment. Discussion takes place to determine what films the group will make and participants collaborate in the production of a storyboard/script which is then used to guide participants as they take up the cameras and other equipment and begin producing their own film. Central to most participatory practice are screenings of the rough footage and of the final film to engage participants in a dialogic process of collective deliberation designed to raise critical consciousness (Freire, 1970) about the social issues raised in the film.

In the past, when film cameras and editing equipment were larger and much more expensive, once participants had captured film footage, and perhaps produced a paper-edit (Benest, 2010) a collaborative discussion would take place to determine the film structure and contents. However all of the film and equipment would then be taken away by the facilitating team and the editing would take place at a remote editing suite with the final film being delivered back to the 'participants' at a later date. More recently the size and cost of cameras and editing equipment has reduced sharply making it possible for editing to be done on a laptop, by participants themselves, at the same location and at the same time as the filming. It has also become affordable for the cameras, editing software and laptops to remain with the group after the initial period of capacity-building an eventually which can reduce on-going dependency on external facilitators and so enhance sustainability of benefits (Colom, 2009).

Whilst all participatory video involves a group of people making their own film, projects differ radically with regard to what degree of control 'participants' have over which elements of the film's conception, planning, filming, editing and distribution. In the ground-breaking Fogo Process (see next section) 'participants' co-determined the script and appeared in the film voicing their concerns, but they were not responsible for operating the cameras or the editing equipment (Quarry, 1994). Conversely it is now common for the 'participants' to be the only ones allowed to touch the cameras or editing equipment - in order to hand over as much control as possible to the new film-makers - and for the external facilitators to be relegated to support and advice roles.

Longer-term participatory video engagements that build permanent local film-making capacity are arguably more effective at sustaining the political spaces (Cornwall, 2004) that groups are able open to open up through the use of participatory video (Colom, 2009). Examples of permanent local film-making capacity include Video SEWA, the community video units developed by Drishti in India and the community video hubs developed by InsightShare in South Africa, Peru and London (Colom, 2009).

Some participatory video is primarily *process-focused* meaning that it is concerned with the benefit of group dialogue and collective meaning-making claimed to be inherent in the collaborative production process, rather than with the production of a slick and 'professional-looking' film. Other participatory video processes are more *product-focused* with more investment in the 'production values' of the resulting film, especially where the film is intended to play a role in advocacy for social change. In the former case the primary intended audience is the participants themselves and the participatory process is valued as a means of developing the skills, self-confidence and shared values and purpose of the group. It such cases the quality or 'professionalism' of the resulting film is not a priority. In other cases the primary intended audience is external – such as government - and the participatory video process is valued as a means of influencing the minds and behaviour of those with decision-making power to influence the lives of participants. The process/product distinction is not binary. Many initiatives value both to varying degrees and some participatory video processes that begin as internally-focused subsequently develop a desire as the process unfolds to also represent themselves and their issues to external audiences.

Affordances of Video for Development

Whilst it is possible to generate similar outcomes using technologies such as participatory photography or theatre of the oppressed it is claimed that participatory video has particular 'affordances' as an ICT tool for development.

Originated by Gibson (1977, 1979) to refer to the actionable properties of a item, the term 'affordances' was appropriated by Donald Norman (1988) and is now used extensively in the field of technology design to signify aspects of a technology that invite, allow or enable a user to act in a particular way. It is in this sense of the word that it is claimed that particular properties of participatory video 'afford' specific action for development. This section highlights some of them.

New users of video often discover that a digital camera and tripod affords them the excuse and the status-power to approach and question others in a way that they had not previously perceived as possible for them (Shaw & Robertson, 1997). They may also find that holding a digital camera with the red recording light on, affords to them a considered and deliberate response, which in the absence of the camera they might not have been afforded (Roberts, forthcoming). This experience of technology use can have the effect of raising users' confidence and sense of agency.

The ability of the video format to replay footage instantaneously has been likened to Lacan's mirro stage. back "our reality" (Lunch & Lunch, 2006).
the playback function creates a lively feedback loop and serves to engender reflexivity

The audio-visual nature of digital film effectively levels the playing field for people with varying levels of (print) literacies allowing participants with asymmetric levels of educational attainment to collaborate in film production. This is not to claim that other dimensions of disadvantage such as gender, class or ethnicity are disappeared by presence of participatory video.

Participatory Video also lends itself well to M&E (MSC) and to use alongside otherparticipaotry practices such as PLA and PAR.

Participatory action research can also be read as development as, *"It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities"* (Reason & Bradbury, 2006; 2).

As such participatory action research has the potential for 'conscientisation' through a process of collective self-inquiry and reflection (Freire, 1970) in a process designed to enhance people's ability to *'experience their capability and power to produce knowledge autonomously'* (Fals-Borda, 1991; 17).

History

The earliest recorded example of participatory video-making is perhaps the 1967 work by the people of Fogo Island, Newfoundland, facilitated by Donald Snowden and Colin Low. The film-makers set out to show that poverty could not simply be reduced to economic deprivation and that factors such as rural isolation and the inability to access information and communication media also needed to be addressed (Quarry, 1994). The Fogo Process began by filming community members' views and screening them to members of other isolated communities on the island. Thirty-five screenings to a combined audience of 3,000 islanders (60% of the total population) were used to identify a number of key common issues of concern. The islander's film was then shown to the Premier of Canada and the Minister of Fisheries recorded a filmed response to play back to the community and from this dialogue a revised programme of island development was agreed. The Fogo Process became a communication for development prototype in using media to promote dialogue and social change and has since been used in many location around the world.

Alternative roots for participatory video practice can be identified in the community arts movement of the 1970s and in the theory-practice of Paulo Freire (1970, 1974). Shaw and Robertson (1997) note that video's potential as a tool for social action and development was recognised early in the 1970s by community workers, social workers and community arts workers resulting in the development of a vibrant independent video sector in the UK and other countries. Much of this work concerned the use of video as a tool for groups to critically reflect on their social circumstances and act collectively to tackle injustice. Martín-Baró *(1996; 56)* described Freire's praxis of reflection upon action as a method through which human beings are able to interpret and change their reality, *"an active process of dialogue in which there is a gradual decoding of the world, as people grasp the mechanisms of oppression and dehumanisation which opens up new possibilities for action."*

However the critical intent to facilitate transformative social change that characterised much

participatory video of the 1970s and 1980s was arguably compromised in the 1990s when participatory methods were co-opted by neo-liberal institutions including the World Bank and participation was made a condition of financial support by many institutional funders (Cooke & Kothari, 2001). The 'tyranny' of this top-down 'compulsory participation' forced all development actors to claim that all of their initiatives were 'participatory'. This resulted in a proliferation of sham and tokenistic 'participation' claims in project plans and funding bids in order to conform to funder dictates. The effect of this 'compulsory participation' on practice was a preponderance of the use of so-called participatory video that was devoid of transformative intent as well as the commissioning of 'participatory video' in order to legitimise top-down process (Shaw, 2010).

More recently there has been a concerted attempt to reconstruct and recover a participatory practice that builds critical consciousness (Benest, 2010) and political agency and capabilities (Williams 2004) and aims once again at social transformation. This movement 'from tranny to transformation' (Hickey & Mohan 2004) does not deny that fake-participation was - and continues to be - used to cloak much poor and counter-productive practice. What is does deny is that existence of fake-participation negates the value of authentic-participation or its emancipatory potential when in the hands of grassroots organisations such organisations such as Video SEWA (Stuart & Summer 1993) & Video Volunteers or Insightshare partners?

Analysis & Criticisms

Practitioners claim a wide range of positive personal, group and societal benefits can be secured through the use of video for development. Stuart & Bery (1996) and Braden & Huong (1998) are among scholars who claim that participatory video enables a group to identify and agree issues of common concern and to voice them effectively to more powerful decision makers. However as has been pointed out (Shaw, 2012) the fact that an issue has been voiced does not mean that it has been heard, and the fact that it has been heard does not mean that it will be acted upon; in fact allowing many voices to be 'heard' can also be a cynical tactic of oppression in Marcuse's (1965) sense of 'repressive tolerance'.

Participatory video has been used extensively in development work as a pedagogical tool in part, due to the research finding that content from audiovisual materials is recalled four or five times better than heard materials and nine time better than read material (Fraser & Villet, 1994) and that behavioural change is most effective when modelled on the activities of people that look like ourselves and to whom we can most easily relate (Bandura, 1995). However this says nothing about the social or developmental value of the video content; video can be equally effective at relaying reactionary content as progressive content. As Mosse (2001) argues the appropriation of participatory methods by multi-lateral agencies and multi-national companies provides telling evidence that participatory methods are perfectly compatible with top-down planning systems and neo-liberal agendas (Mosse, 2001).

Conclusion

Participatory video is no quick fix for development (Lunch & Lunch, 2006; Shaw, 2012). It can be used to build individual and collective agency and critical consciousness raising for social change (Shaw & Robertson, 1997) to confront gender injustice (Protz, 1998; Kelly, 2004; Singh, 2010) and as part of people's self-action to claim rights or entitlements (Benest, 2010). However it can also used for the purposes of what Freire called 'domestication': to produce promotional videos to legitimate top-down non-participatory decision-making (Braden & Mayo, 1999 in Shaw, 2012) or otherwise be co-opted by funders and institutional development in ways that dilute and corrupt the original radical intent of participation (Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Mohan, 2001).

In order to recover and repoliticise a progressive participatory practise, including that of participatory video, it is necessary to embed practice in wider politically processes (Kelly, 2004) and extend engagements beyond short one-off projects (Colom, 2009). Only by making a conscious return to a focus on raising critical consciousness (Waddington & Mohan, 2004) and by building political agency and political capabilities (Williams, 2004) will it be possible to recover the emancipatory potential of participatory video.

We should neither demonise nor deify technology (Freire, 2001) but rather seek to appropriate it critically and adapt it creatively to the task of transformational development. Like other technologies video has the potential to be a tool either for oppression or for liberation. In order to resist 'domestication' by the World Bank and structures of neo-liberal 'development' and in order to realise video's emancipatory potential participatory video needs to be applied with conscious, critical intent; that is to say that practitioners themselves must be critically conscious in order to enable participants to effectively expose and challenge the hidden power-interests that structure underdevelopment.

When used critically by practitioners and participants to challenge domination and create contexts for political and social transformation (Walsh, 2012) participatory video has valuable affordances to enable communities to produce and disseminate knowledge that can effectively challenge dominant practices. Evidence suggests that participatory video is most effective when used as one aspect of a broader and longer-term strategy to build the necessary agency and political capabilities for producing social change (Williams, 2004; Colom, 2009; Walsh, 2012).

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