

PV-NET Statement on Participatory Video in Research

Having met at Walton Hall, The Open University, Milton Keynes, February 2008

To consider the relationship between participatory video and social research, where participatory video is 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.

Mindful of the diverse and complex nature of research, and seeking to increase our awareness of the entailments of bringing academic, policy, practice or local forms of knowledge to the fore.

Conscious of the long history of participatory video in community development and advocacy, knowledge sharing and community arts initiatives, and an increasing interest in the subject in academia, albeit from minimal beginnings.

Yet alert to the dangers of superficial or extractive participatory work, of the tension between the values underpinning conventional and participatory research evident in current academic discourse and within many practice contexts, of the difficulty of facilitating social learning processes to ensure the depth and analysis required for research rather than a superficial level of “media engagement”, and of the limitations that resources, expectations and project management place on action research.

And Aware of questions concerning the fit between participation, action and research that arise when using participatory video, in the face of insufficient understanding of the long-term outcomes of participatory video, of a lack of widely-agreed professional standards, and of insufficient understanding of the overlap with visual methods in general.

We are nevertheless convinced that the effective use of participatory video in research practice can enrich knowledge production and sharing, improve research outcomes and align academic research with the interests of the individuals and communities who are the stakeholders in our research, particularly in of social justice for those who find themselves disadvantaged and voice to those who are excluded or oppressed.

So determined to stimulate the use of participatory video within the research of the social science community:

We call for a spirit amongst researchers, practitioners and users of participatory video and new media that:

- Pays attention to diversity and to inclusion and exclusion amongst individuals, researchers and communities. Participatory video is ideally participant-led, bridges different worlds within and beyond academia and gives voice to those who might otherwise not be recognised.
- Builds on past experiences of participation in research, sensitive to the known pitfalls and benefits of participatory methodologies.
- Appreciates a need for rigour in research, but confidently defends the rigour that arises from collective processes.

- Acknowledges the tension between ensuring quality of process and diversity of viewpoints, best dealt with by surfacing issues of power, skill and interest, and by a commitment to teamwork, co-design and the careful negotiation of purpose amongst those involved in working with participatory video.
- Looks beyond individual projects and seeks to serve community interests and the public good through social learning, partnership and the strategic interweaving of initiatives to meet community needs.
- Respects the right of participants to determine the contributions they wish to make to shared processes and to give or withdraw consent to collective outputs.
- Above all, celebrates the opportunities that the increased availability of new media and technology and the emerging interest in participation in research provides for social learning, and asserts a collective ambition to use those opportunities well.

We commit ourselves to a programme of capacity-building and training that:

- Builds and maintains an active and open international network of practitioners, activists and academics to share experience, and to provide a context of rigour and accountability for our work.
- Works through existing events and local partnerships to share skills and build relationships within the network.
- Seeks to develop funding opportunities to develop training, network events and projects for network members and like-minded groups.
- Fosters skills and knowledge by supporting flexible training for academic users of PV and promoting existing training opportunities available for PV practice in community settings.
- Gathers news and practical resources and makes them available to network members through an active virtual community as well as to non-members.
- Reflects and promotes, in its way of working, the spirit of participatory video as outlined above.

We undertake to communicate our emerging understanding of the field by action to:

- Create links with other communities of practice, acknowledging the need for links with other researchers and practitioners within a global context.
- Publish papers, books, resource materials to build acceptance for participatory video in research methodology, extending its recognition beyond existing disciplinary frameworks such as visual sociology, participatory geography and applied visual anthropology.
- Seek to improve the capacity of the social science community to extend its acceptance of different forms of knowledge as research outcomes.
- Raise the profile of participatory video amongst policymakers and the public through the press, the internet and public events.
- Work with research funders to build understanding that although robust participatory methods have higher costs and involve longer timeframes than extractive research, they provide greater benefit.
- Strive to make our network communication and resources as accessible as possible to those outside of the network.

And we call for research to support our work that:

- Addresses the need to refine and develop an appropriate, situated ethics of participatory video.
- Reviews the extent of current practice in PV and cognate methodologies in research.
- Constructs and tests indicators, process documentation strategies and innovative participatory monitoring and evaluation methodologies to explore the full range of outcomes of participatory video processes.
- Develops the use of social technologies to extend the application of PV, including simple editing workflows, online presentation of material and the use of mobile devices in film-making.
- Considers the influence of PV work upon research methodology and practice.
- Investigates the skill-set required to successfully undertake PV work within research, and to integrate research and action agendas.
- Promotes a scholarship of participatory video that is applied, relevant and mindful of the interplay of action and research in social learning.