

Participatory video for empowerment¹

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Participatory video (PV) is widely used as a tool for capacity development and as a strategy to empower those who are often marginalized and socially excluded. The technique has been used particularly in the international development context. Group training in video documentation and editing is a successful approach enabling the perspective of the poor to be shown and their voices to be heard. This methodology enhances community networking and awareness building. The process of PV furthermore contributes also to the personal growth and the empowerment of its participants.

The overall objective of this project was to engage members from recycling cooperatives in Brazil and autonomous informal recyclers in Canada in actively exploring environmental/human health and social justice issues related to their professional activity and to empower them to enhance livelihood opportunities, through training in multi-media technology and in citizen journalism. Worldwide the number of people whose livelihoods depend on the collection, separation and recycling of urban waste is growing, particularly in large cities. They are called informal recyclers –*bidders* in North America and *catadores* in Brazil- and they recover resources. They are often perceived as scavengers or dumpster divers and they suffer from a negative stigma. Recovering materials that are considered garbage has become a widespread survival strategy for those who are poor and socially excluded in the developing world but also in the rich North America. They provide an important service to the community by cleaning up the environment and redirecting materials.

The goal of this project was to build the capacity of organized recyclers from cooperatives in the metropolitan region of São Paulo, Brazil and of informal recyclers in Victoria, Canada in video documenting. A two weeks workshop was conducted in April 2008 in São Paulo with 20 recyclers.

During the first session of the workshop the following two activities were conducted within small groups of 5 individuals: (1) **Choosing a Theme**: Participants decided on a collective theme for the video; (2) **Community Mapping**: On a large piece of paper participants draw places and monuments that are meaningful to them; places linked to certain ideas and facts relevant for the story to be told. This exercise helped participants to identify: the geography of those places that contribute to the community and places that need to be transformed; the dynamics of geography with recent changes to the physical/social landscape; as well as significant cultural, social, religious places; location where important events have occurred.

The second session of the workshop included: (1) **Video training**: Participants were trained hands-on in small groups to use cameras. The training techniques included: (a)

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Basic camera operations; Turning camera on, loading and unloading battery, charging battery, charging, focusing, maintaining white balance, and zooming in and out; (b) *Concept of a shot*; shots can be put together to create new meaning; (c) *Shoot-to edit techniques*; preparing your shots; (d) *Shooting techniques*; close up, pan (left/right), and tilt (up/down), b-roll (Each participant had an opportunity to frame shots of his/her partner/group); (e) *Sound*; as a separate element that can be manipulated independently of the image. This created a number of options: voice-over narration; cut-away shots during interviews; music; (e) *Interviews*; conventional framing, background, questions, answers, sound, interviewer behind the camera etc. It was suggested that the groups conducted interviews with each other; (f) *General Recording*; The director was instructed to tell the camera operator when to press record and call “action!” when the shot is to begin; (g) *Logging video*; document the cue-out points for the editing cues; (h) *Reviewing Footage*; After shooting, the raw footage was reviewed with the participants. They had the option of making changes to their initial plan depending on what footage they had obtained. Once the technical introduction was completed groups started to do their first shots, applying the **Name Game**. Each trainee was asked to tell in front of the camera their expectations, hopes and fears over the next three days.

A third session dealt with the **storyboard technique**. In this exercise participants agreed on a common story they wanted to tell, based on the predetermined theme. On a piece of paper the participants draw 8-10 triple boxes, in which the scene information was recorded: (1) Image sound details; (2) Details of the shot: Where, Who, What. Finally, the group agreed upon the distribution of responsibilities for filming, directing, sound, organization, general helper, and still photographer.

Over three days, four groups of recyclers from different locations worked together in videotaping their own stories. Most of the stories were about their relation with the community during the door-to-door collection, the environmental perspective of waste as a contaminating nuisance and the necessity for resource recovery and one group had build a story called: “the evolution of the *catador*”, where an autonomous recycler was approached and convinced to work in a cooperative. After the fieldwork all groups convened again to learn about post-production and to view a first collective video edited together with pieces from each group. Each group then received a DVD tape with their own material. The individual group videos will help them publicise their still precarious working conditions and their important community contribution.

The workshop itself was also video taped and a shortened, edited version of a *Step by Step Guide in Participatory Video* is currently being produced. Additional outcomes from the project were photo and video material that provides the wider community of recyclers, the government and NGOs with a better understanding of the social, environmental and health issues related to informal and organized resource recovery. Key environmental issues involved in resource recovery and the challenges of global development are made visible through this process. There is also potential for the material to be used in academic training, creating awareness and changing behaviour regarding the issues raised in those materials.

A shortened version of the workshop was conducted in Victoria, BC during one week in November 2008 with 11 autonomous recyclers. This workshop covered theme finding exercises, the development of a storyboard, group filming and collective viewing, feedback and discussions. The recyclers told stories about: “the binner entrepreneur”, “a day in the life of a binner”, “binners’ traplines”. In both cases, the workshop stirred a strong sense of citizenship in the participants and they commented about the re-empowering aspect of PV. The recyclers from Canada and Brazil felt reassured by seeing themselves in the video and being able to project images about their work to the wider community.

Source: Gutberlet, J. 2008, *Recycling Citizenship, recovering resources: Urban poverty reduction in Latin America*. Ashgate, Aldershot, 163 pp.