

Photovoice as a Visual Research Method: Adaptations from Projects in Peru and Ecuador

El “Photovoice” como método de investigación visual: adaptaciones de proyectos en Perú y Ecuador

Photovoice como método de pesquisa visual: adaptações de projetos no Peru e no Equador

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Abstract: Photovoice is a visual research method which involves participants taking their own photos of a specific topic to represent their views. Projects using photovoice often follow a standard format, yet this does not always provide a good match with specific research situations. Based on experiences from two projects, studies of tourism in Peru and of media use by indigenous organizations in Ecuador, we outline specific modifications to the standard photovoice format that allowed us to better accommodate local cultural context and research needs. These adaptations include a reconsideration of group-focussed versus individual format, research design that fosters different ways of building rapport between participants and with the researcher, and critical reflections on the issue of empowerment. The final discussion considers a few of the complex representational issues associated with photovoice. First, the way that photovoice must be evaluated in light of the increasing prevalence of photography in daily life, with sharing through social media and cameras available on smart phones. The level of experience participants has with photography has an impact on the ways that photos are taken and shared. Photography is a practice deeply entwined with individuals’ understandings of aesthetics and sensory memories. When used with greater flexibility, the photovoice method can be better aligned with local realities and provide a creative and beneficial addition to the research tool kit.

Keywords:

Visual media, visual methodology, photovoice, photography, fieldwork, South America

Resumen: “Photovoice” es un método de investigación visual que implica que los participantes tomen sus propias fotos de un tema específico para representar sus puntos de vista. Los proyectos que utilizan photovoice suelen seguir un formato estándar, aunque no siempre se ajusta bien a situaciones de investigación específicas. Basándonos en las experiencias de dos proyectos, estudios de turismo en Perú y del uso de los medios de comunicación por organizaciones indígenas en Ecuador, delineamos modificaciones específicas al formato estándar de fotovoces que nos permitieron acomodar mejor el contexto cultural local y las necesidades de investigación. Estas adaptaciones incluyen una reconsideración del formato centrado en el grupo versus el individual, el diseño de la investigación que fomenta diferentes formas de construir una relación entre los participantes y con el investigador, y reflexiones críticas sobre el tema del empoderamiento. La discusión final considera algunos de los complejos problemas de representación asociados con la fotovoz. En primer lugar, la forma en que se debe evaluar la foto-voz a la luz de la creciente prevalencia de la fotografía en la vida diaria, con el intercambio a través de las redes sociales y las cámaras disponibles en los teléfonos inteligentes. El nivel de experiencia que tienen los participantes con la fotografía tiene un impacto en las formas en que se toman y se comparten las fotografías. La fotografía es una práctica profundamente entrelazada con la comprensión de la estética y los recuerdos sensoriales de las personas. Cuando se utiliza con mayor flexibilidad, el método de la foto-voz se puede alinear mejor con las realidades locales y proporcionar una adición creativa y beneficiosa al conjunto de herramientas de investigación.

Palabras clave:

Medios visuales, metodología visual, photovoice, fotografía, trabajo de campo, Sudamérica

Resumo: Photovoice é um método de pesquisa visual que envolve os participantes tirando suas próprias fotos de um tópico específico para representar seus pontos de vista. Projetos que usam photovoice geralmente seguem um formato padrão, embora isso nem sempre forneça uma boa correspondência com situações específicas de pesquisa. Com base nas experiências de dois projetos, estudos de turismo no Peru e do uso da mídia por organizações indígenas no Equador, delineamos modificações específicas no formato padrão da fotovoz que nos permitiu acomodar melhor o contexto cultural local e as necessidades de pesquisa.

Essas adaptações incluem uma reconsideração do formato focado no grupo versus formato individual, projeto de pesquisa que promove diferentes maneiras de construir relacionamento entre os participantes e com o pesquisador e reflexões críticas sobre a questão do empoderamento. A discussão final considera algumas das questões representacionais complexas associadas ao photovoice. Em primeiro lugar, a forma como a photovoice deve ser avaliada à luz da crescente prevalência da fotografia na vida diária, com compartilhamento por meio de mídias sociais e câmeras disponíveis em smartphones. O nível de experiência que os participantes têm com a fotografia tem um impacto na maneira como as fotos são tiradas e compartilhadas. A fotografia é uma prática profundamente entrelaçada com a compreensão dos indivíduos sobre estética e memórias sensoriais. Quando usado com maior flexibilidade, o método photovoice pode ser mais bem alinhado com as realidades locais e fornecer uma adição criativa e benéfica ao kit de ferramentas de pesquisa.

Palavras-chave:

Mídia visual, metodologia visual, photovoice, fotografia, trabalho de campo, América do Sul

1. Introduction of Research Projects

The social sciences have long emphasized verbal representation, while visual methods have only gained popularity in recent decades (Collier & Collier, 1986; MacDougall, 1998; Pink, 2004, 2007). Approaches based on visual communication, however, deserve a more prominent place in the methodological tool kit. Our focus in this paper is specifically on photovoice, a method which involves participants taking photos of topics relevant to their lives (Kerstetter & Bricker, 2009; PhotoVoice, 2020; Zainuddin, 2009). According to Milne and Muir (2020), “photovoice is widely recognised as an important participatory research approach with the potential to develop insights into the lived experiences of people and communities, which in turn can challenge prevailing representations, promote dialogue, and contribute to social change” (p. 284). The use of photovoice effectively contributed to our respective research projects in Peru and Ecuador; however, we found that the standard format needed to be modified, leading us to reflect on flexible uses of photovoice and the need to reconceptualize it as an ethnographic method.

While this approach is known under a number of different names, we use the term photovoice, following Wang and Burris (1997) who first developed this method for use in public health research. Traditionally a researcher provides individuals with cameras, instructs them on basic photographic techniques and ethical considerations, and asks them to take

photos of scenes that reflect their views on a certain topic. This is generally followed by group discussions about the images and sometimes a public exhibit (Beh et al., 2013; PhotoVoice, 2020; Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001). Considering the rapidly increased use of cell phones and social media over the past decade, photography has now become common practice for people worldwide (Miller et al., 2016), so that in most areas people will be familiar with basic techniques already.

The original developers of the method have stated that “photovoice is highly flexible and can be adapted to specific participatory goals [and] different groups and communities” (Wang & Burris, 1997, p. 370). However, it seems that many photovoice projects follow a very similar model without considering how the method could be modified to fit better with the specific needs of participants, or researchers hesitate to call their modifications “photovoice.” Thus, specific examples of photovoice modifications are still not common in the literature (Castleden et al., 2008; Mysyuk & Huisman, 2019). Our photovoice projects provide specific examples of ways in which this method can be adjusted for different research contexts. These studies were both informed by multidisciplinary methods and approaches; however, both authors situate themselves as anthropologists, focusing their research on an ethnographic framework. That said, the projects have distinct topics and goals, providing a good example of the breadth of contexts in which photovoice can be applied. Within this article, the photos are used primarily with the goal of illustrating specifics of the photovoice method, rather than for deeper content analysis. Guelke’s study with a focus on tourism presents a more traditional focal topic of photovoice, providing specific questions to guide the photography process. Hagestedt’s work with indigenous organizations, on the other hand, illustrates how photovoice can be used to facilitate online communication practices. As both projects illustrate, photovoice can provide research results that would be impossible if relying solely on traditional research methods, and this flexible use should be considered by more researchers.

There are two terminology choices that need to be addressed. The first is the use of the term indigenous in uncapitalised form. In North America it has become common to capitalize the term in order to emphasize people’s political and cultural identity. In South America, on the other hand, identification with indigenous identity varies strongly. While in Ecuador we find political movements based on indigeneity, as Guelke will discuss, in Peru many people avoid self-identifying as such (Glidden, 2011). Therefore, we follow other writers about the Andean region who use the term indigenous uncapitalized (Babb, 2011; Canessa, 2005; de la Cadena, 2000; Weismantel, 2001; Zorn, 2004). Even in cases where we

are referencing indigenous organizations, these are collectives of multiple distinct indigenous peoples and are not collectively identifiable by a term that could not be considered pan indigenous (Younging, 2018, p. 90). Second, our use of the terms community and local is not meant to imply homogeneity or reduce people to their association with place (Younging, 2018). These terms are intended as references to the people we worked with, who at the time were connected to a specific geographical location. Particularly in Guelke's research site of Ollantaytambo, the term community also reflects a designation commonly used by inhabitants themselves.

1.1 Tourism in Peru

Guelke used photovoice as part of her research project on tourism development in the Peruvian Andes, conducted between September 2014 and June 2015. This work focussed on the effects of rapidly expanding tourism in Ollantaytambo, a small tourist destination located between the city of Cusco and the famous Inca site Machu Picchu. The town's main attractions are its Inca stone foundations, archaeological site, and magnificent mountain landscape. The project examined the experiences of local people, tourism brokers, and visitors, analyzing the ways in which gender roles and power relations are performed, negotiated, and challenged. Guelke's research employed the standard ethnographic methods; participant observation allowed her to become familiar with the workings of small tourist establishments in the community and build relationships with local people, while semi-structured and unstructured interviews provided in-depth information about the experiences of both visitors and locals.

The photovoice project was conducted towards the end of the research period after Guelke had established good relationships with many local people. All participants were community members between the ages of 20 and 30; they were familiar with taking photos with their cell phones, so Guelke did not provide equipment or photography instructions. Participants were asked to take between 10 and 20 photos of tourism-related issues in their community or workplace, focussing on what they considered particularly positive, negative, or in other ways noteworthy. Guelke asked 12 people to participate and, in the end, received photos from seven of them. While Guelke had originally planned a meeting with the whole group, she later redesigned the format and conducted individual interviews. The photovoice project contributed important insights into local people's experiences with tourism which complemented findings from interviews and participant observation.

1.2 Indigenous Organizations in Ecuador

Hagestedt's research was carried out between October 2016 and December 2017 during two trips to Ecuador, the first to Quito, and the second to Puyo, in the Amazonian province of Pastaza. Focussing on the use of online media for communication, this project was conducted with *La Confederación de las Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador* (CONAIE) and *La Confederación de las Nacionalidades Indígenas de la Amazonía Ecuatoriana* (CONFENIAE). Each of these organizations represents a group of indigenous nationalities and communities in Ecuador, CONAIE at the national level and CONFENIAE within the Amazonian region. The project emphasized a number of different aspects of communication, examining the organization's website design, social media use, and on-the-ground practices. Utilizing participant observation, semi-structured and unstructured interviews, and analysis of online materials, Hagestedt also chose to incorporate visual methods such as photography and photovoice. The photovoice workshops were intended to increase her involvement with the organizations and to gain insight into the perspectives of youth.

The workshops were designed in collaboration with the Communication Director of CONFENIAE, with the focus modified to provide training in photography and online communication skills to a group of youth. This format proved beneficial for both the organization and the researcher. The organization had some influence over the direction of the workshops and was able to target youth that they particularly wanted to encourage to participate. For the researcher, this collaborative planning alleviated the burden of identifying participants and of organizing some basic logistics, such as scheduling and finding locations. The workshops were designed to enhance the photography skills of a core group of youth from CONFENIAE, who were involved in the wider communication program of the organization and ended with a final exhibition to display their skills to the public. Other youth participated for shorter time frames as well, reflecting the organization's broader goal of improving the quality of the visual media being shared by their members and associated with their name.

2. Participants: Group versus Individual Format

Photovoice is typically a group-based method, with discussion of photos within a group setting as one of the key aspects of project design. In many cases participants are recruited from pre-existing groups, like an organization (Duffy, 2018; Castleden et al., 2008). Groups are also usually stable throughout the photovoice process, with the same participants

taking photos and meeting later to share and discuss their images. The most frequently cited benefit of using a group format is that interactions between participants may create discussions that would not happen between the researcher and a single individual, adding depth and complexity to research findings (Budig et al., 2018).

The use of a group, however, may not always be possible and can in some cases even be counterproductive. Though much less common than group-based discussions, a one-on-one approach may be necessary in certain situations. For example, in their project with sex workers in two US cities, Capous-Desyllas and Forro (2014) held discussion sessions with individuals in order to protect their safety and privacy. Even though Guelke did not work with such a vulnerable population, local work practices and complex relationships between community members also necessitated a move away from the group model. Hagedstedt's research setting with existing groups, on the other hand, provided a good foundation for the traditional group approach in her photovoice workshops. The two projects illustrate some key factors regarding working with groups and individuals in a photovoice project.

2.1 Tourism in Peru

One advantage of drawing on pre-existing groups as research participants is that people know each other and are presumably more comfortable sharing information in a group setting. However, Guelke found that the local cultural context in Ollantaytambo provided some challenges in that regard. As part of compensating community members for their research participation, she had volunteered as an English teacher at a small hospitality institute. The students seemed like a perfect group for the photovoice project; all of them were from Ollantaytambo or nearby communities and had previous experience working in tourism. Unfortunately, the institute encountered problems, though, so classes were suspended indefinitely, and most former students moved away. Given these problems, Guelke decided to draw on informants with whom she had already conducted interviews and felt good rapport.

Table 1 provides a brief overview of the participants, their involvement in tourism, and the number of photos each of them contributed. Even though participants were asked to share between 10 and 20 photos, as shown in the table below, in the end they provided a highly uneven number of images.

Table 1. Overview of Photovoice Participants and Images in Guelke's Project

Participants	Occupation	Photos total	Photos included
Edy	Hostel manager	7	0
Ronald	Waiter	12	0
Johnny	Artist and street vendor	22	2
Daniela	Hotel and store manager	36	1
Diego	Tour guide, waiter	37	0
Alberto	Tour guide	42	1
Rosa	Hotel worker	70	0
Total		226	3

Most photovoice projects consist of a series of meetings over several weeks, but participants can find this time commitment challenging (Budig et al., 2018, p. 438). After several months of research in Ollantaytambo it had become evident that people working in tourism were very busy, which made committing to scheduled meetings very difficult. When Guelke had first asked locals to take part in the project, the biggest concern they expressed was time pressure. Even though the project was already designed with a more flexible schedule, time constraints were still prohibitive for some, and the one reason given by all five people who did not complete the project. Switching to a system of individual meetings allowed the researcher to accommodate local people's needs much better than group meetings, which many participants likely would not have been able to attend. This also fit better with the general cultural custom of more informal ad hoc meetings rather than scheduling in advance.

Follow-up interviews were mostly held in the participants' workplaces, such as craft stalls or restaurants. Guelke repeatedly stopped by and inquired if people were available, which had proven effective for interviews earlier in her research. For most participants this meant some quiet time at work where they could sit down and chat but still attend to their duties. Daniela, shown in the photo below, reviewed her pictures with the researcher sitting

outside her store and stopped a few times to serve customers; similarly, Alberto, a tour guide, responded to several inquiries from tourists while discussing his photos. This approach afforded participants much greater flexibility and likely resulted in higher response rates; it also dovetailed with the local practice of blending different types of work and socializing. During slow times, market vendors will often sit together and chat, attend to children, or work on crafts while occasionally attending customers; the same can be seen in smaller restaurants and hotels (Guelke, 2018). Adding the photovoice interviews into this flexible scheduling matched the local cultural context better than asking people to reserve a special timeslot and engage in activities separately.



Image 1. Guelke - One-on-one follow up interview discussing participant's photos.

It is also important to consider that groups of people are rarely homogenous and harmonious. Through the course of Guelke's study, it became clear that tourism development is contributing to increasing disparities of wealth in the community. Locals often criticized those who succeeded economically as setting themselves apart and sometimes verbally or even physically attacked them. This meant that people were generally reluctant to reveal details about their business strategies and successes. Wang and Redwood-Jones (2001) have discussed a number of risks for photovoice participants, including the violation of privacy and possible misinterpretations of the images. Concerns about sensitive topics and safety

have also caused participants to leave a study part-way through (Duffy, 2018). Conducting follow-up interviews one-on-one allowed Guelke to facilitate greater privacy and protection for participants. Another useful strategy may be to combine both individual reflections and group discussion, as others have done (Barman-Adhikari et al., 2019; Capous-Desyllas & Forro, 2014). While it will not be feasible for most researchers to investigate all potential animosities, it is important to consider what general tensions could compromise participants' comfort and safety as well as the project's results. This will be much easier to assess for a researcher after relationships with participants are already built, as will be examined in the section on rapport below.

2.2 Indigenous Organizations in Ecuador

The two organizations that Hagestedt worked with, CONAIE and CONFENIAE, offered a perfect opportunity to form groups for a more typical photovoice format. Each of the organizations has a Communication Director who is in charge of the communication strategy of the organization, of posting on social media, and who coordinates the development of events to support the organization's communication goals. Much like Guelke's experience in Peru, Hagestedt encountered difficulties implementing plans with CONAIE during her first research trip in Quito, demonstrating the challenges of organizing this type of event as an outsider. It became evident that a successful group photovoice project required the endorsement of a local authority figure to encourage participation. While CONAIE's Communication Director was interested in facilitating the project, the late start of planning in the research trip and the lack of a pre-existing group of interested youth made implementation impossible. During her second research phase, Hagestedt successfully coordinated with CONFENIAE's Communication Director, Andrés Tapía, to plan and organize a series of workshops in the Amazonian region.

Hagestedt's original concept was to provide photovoice workshops with youth in a series of communities throughout the Ecuadorian Amazon, to gain a broader perspective on how communication was viewed throughout CONFENIAE, and to identify topics that organization members felt could receive more focus in official communications. While somewhat interested in knowing how their communications plan was received within the organization, CONFENIAE identified skill building in photography as a more valuable focus for the workshops. This organizational need became the driving force behind Hagestedt's research during her second trip and led to the creation of materials that still reflected what

was important to the organization's youth, while also providing photos the organization could use within their own online communications.



Image 2. Workshop participants in Yaka Runa practicing writing text that could be used with their photos in online communication, by Hagestedt.

Originally, the planning for the workshops involved different groups of participants in a series of communities, reflecting Hagestedt's desire for broad data collection from diverse regions of the Amazon. The change in focus to skills development resulted in a series of three workshops carried out with a core group of youth Hagestedt and Tapía loosely planned these workshops at the beginning of the research trip; after the first workshop, however, the plans were adapted each time to reflect changing circumstances and to take advantage of new opportunities. While the first workshop was composed of only the core group of participants, other workshops varied in size, often taking advantage of collaborations with communities and other organizations. This flexibility provided access to the training for the largest possible number of participants. Table 2 outlines the number of participants in each of the workshops and the collaborating organizations, many of which are associated with specific communities.

Table 2. Photovoice workshop participation

Dates (2017)	Workshop Location	Number of Participants	Collaborators	Number of Images Captured
November 7-8	CONFENIAE headquarters	10 on first day; 11 on second day	CONFENIAE	Photos: 1229 Videos: 3
November 15-17	CONFENIAE headquarters; Puyo	5 core group on first day; 33 total (8 core group) on remaining days	CONFENIAE; CONAIE; El Churo	Photos: 863 Videos: 3
November 21-22	Yaka Runa	7 core group; 8 community members	CONFENIAE; Yaka Runa community	Photos: 913 Videos: 3
November 29	Tiwintza	3 total (1 core group)	CONFENIAE; Shuar Arutam	Photos: 28
December 5	Tena	17 total (1 core group)	CONFENIAE; Nación Originaria Quijos (NAOQUI)	Photos: 341 Videos: 4

As the above table shows, the group size fluctuated widely from one workshop to the next. While there was some consistency in participation thanks to the existence of the core group, this variation in participation levels also reflects the short-term nature of most participants' involvement in the photovoice project. Like Guelke, Hagedstedt found that even individuals who were interested in participating often had scheduling conflicts or were unable to travel the necessary distances to participate in the workshops. In the context of the Ecuadorian Amazon, the rough terrain and low population density in many areas mean that individuals may have to make serious personal sacrifices to participate in consecutive events. This changing group dynamic made it difficult to discuss the photos in as much depth as photovoice typically entails. These challenges and the needs of the organization were reflected in modifications made to the project's design, but the group structure used by Hagedstedt closely reflected the typical group approach used in most photovoice projects.

3. Rapport

One of the most important elements of photovoice projects is the rapport that can form between researcher and participants and among participants themselves; in fact, in some projects participants have reported that the most beneficial result for them consisted of the

new relationships established with each other (Budig et al., 2018). Some researchers have selected participants because of existing rapport (Musoke et al., 2020), while others have included special strategies to build rapport with participants early in the project (Barman-Adhikari et al., 2019; McKernan, 2019). The issue can become relevant in different ways and deserves greater consideration in discussions of research design. For both Guelke and Hagestedt, these personal connections emerged as an essential aspect of their photovoice projects, and it is worth considering how this can be facilitated best. In Guelke's case, the rapport established during several months of previous research increased local people's willingness to participate, highlighting the importance of considering how photovoice fits as part of a larger research project. Conversely, Hagestedt had almost the opposite experience. By designing her workshops at the beginning of her relationship with CONFENIAE, her photovoice project functioned as a means to develop rapport and a relationship that had not previously existed.

3.1 Tourism in Peru

Guelke found that both the number of photos and the information local people were willing to share was greatly affected by the trust and rapport built over the previous eight months of research. As shown in Table 1, the number of photos participants contributed was highly uneven, ranging from seven to 70 images per person. The largest number of images and most in-depth information was provided by people Guelke had already worked with closely, and this correlation between previously established rapport and willingness to engage with photovoice was also noticeable in the specific ways participants spoke about topics. When Guelke first started interviewing local Peruvians about their experiences with tourists, the responses were invariably positive. "We love tourists", most of them responded, and when asked if there were any problems, the most common answer was that "there aren't enough tourists". It was only after several weeks or months that local people became more comfortable sharing critical views, and some of the photovoice images provide concrete illustrations for this. Ronald had included an image of garbage tourists had left in a hotel room, and so did Daniela, a woman of about 30 who was running a hotel and store in the main square. She shared several similar photos, such as image 3, and when reviewing them commented: "This is disrespectful. There are garbage cans in the rooms; why don't they use them?" Without good rapport established earlier, it is doubtful that Ronald and Daniela would have openly expressed these critical views towards Guelke, who as a foreigner living in town shared many characteristics with tourists.



Image 3. Garbage left by tourists, by Daniela

Tourism encounters involve emotional dimensions as well; many tourists hope for some form of emotional connection with the people they meet, and to succeed in their business hosts have to perform significant emotional work to satisfy these demands. Johnny was one of the young local artists selling his drawings in the street; he was well-known for his joking nature, and one of his strategies consisted of approaching tourists by saying: “Hello, my name is Picasso! Would you like to see my paintings?” While this often-elicited smiles and caused visitors to stop for a moment, most walked past with stony faces and did not engage with him. When asked about these common rejections, Johnny had often laughed and commented that he was used to it. In the context of the photovoice project, however, he expressed another dimension of his experience. Two of the photos he contributed, shown below, were taken by a friend of his and show him trying to sell his paintings outside one of the large new tourist restaurants. The exact moment of rejection captured in the images reflects the often-alienating nature of this work.



Image 4 (a) and (b). Johnny trying to sell his artwork, photos by unknown friend

When looking at these photos later during the one-on-one interview, Johnny's tone became unusually serious, and he commented that he was tired of spending his days trying to make a sale and worrying about money. He spoke about his hopes for the future, of finding a quiet place to live and being able to focus on painting the patterns in the landscape instead of repeating the same motifs for tourists. As other researchers have found, the images elicited emotional aspects that regular interviews had not (Scarles, 2010; Zainuddin, 2009), and in this case the rapport built earlier in the research helped build the necessary foundation for this to happen.

The existing relationship with participants also facilitated more open conversation about discrimination based on ethnicity, another sensitive topic. In many tourist sites the bodies of local people become staged for tourist displays (Bruner, 2005; Desmond, 1999). In the Andes as well, specific aspects of indigenous culture have become a major attraction for visitors, and this plays out in a cultural context where indigenous people are strongly marginalized and discriminated against (Poole, 1997; Weismantel, 2001). Local racial categories are highly variable and situational; rather than referencing phenotypic differences, they are based on cultural and socio-economic markers like education, occupation, and clothing (Canessa, 2005; Mitchell, 2006, p. 53; Weismantel, 2001). As Hagestedt discusses, in neighbouring Ecuador many indigenous groups are advocating for their rights based on

their indigenous identity. This is far less common in Peru, where terms referring to indigenous people are often used as harsh insults for those deemed lower on the social scale, and as a consequence people generally do not self-identify as such.

In the context of tourism, however, indigeneity becomes reframed as a valuable commodity. In Ollantaytambo one can see indigenous women and children, mainly inhabitants from nearby highland communities, posing for photos. Many researchers have voiced concerns about commodification and the potential loss of cultural meaning (Greenwood, 1989). In the Andes, the colourful fringes along indigenous women's hats have traditionally signalled their social status, such as being married, but as outfits are changed to appeal to tourists, the meaning of these elements is often lost (Henrici, 2007, p. 93). In Ollantaytambo women and children appear to pose in their traditional dress; the only additions were a few plastic flowers pinned to the hat, which can be seen in Alberto's photo below.



Image 5. Two indigenous girls interacting with tour group, by Alberto

Two photovoice participants, Rosa and Alberto, took pictures of girls posing in Ollantaytambo, and follow-up conversations revealed aspects that would likely not have emerged without existing rapport. Many inhabitants of Ollantaytambo had voiced critical opinions, accusing indigenous people from nearby communities of taking advantage of tourists and “just begging”. Alberto, however, commented that this work allowed people to

buy goods they could not grow in their communities and that it was an easier way for them to earn money than selling agricultural produce. He also revealed that he had relatives in one of the nearby highland communities who sometimes posed for photos and that community members had a system of taking turns to come down into Ollantaytambo. This communal approach to organizing tourism work is an interesting finding. It illustrates how communities have taken steps to manage participation and distribute the benefits more evenly, which could provide a model for countering the growing wealth gap which so frequently accompanies economic development. Considering the widespread discrimination against indigenous people and locals' criticism of them posing in their community, it is doubtful that Alberto would have shared information about his personal connections in a group setting and without an existing positive relationship with the researcher. As the above examples illustrate, the trust and rapport established over several months of research helped facilitate Guelke's photovoice project and resulted in participants sharing more of their personal feelings and experiences.

3.2 Indigenous Organizations in Ecuador

Hagestedt's workshops were originally planned as a small portion of the research project, intended to complement the other methods and offer some support to the organizations as they contributed to the data collection. In the end, these workshops became a major focus of the research project and led to the development of strong rapport. Though the original research goal of the photovoice project was to understand how organization members saw the official communication practices and whether they could be improved, the final project design focussed on a different direction. The workshops' final goal of improving photography skills led participants to emphasize the quality of images that they were producing rather than the personal perspectives that were being communicated. Youth also chose to participate in response to organizational needs rather than from a desire to share opinions. Despite this research limitation, there were other useful outcomes of the workshops, the most important of which were the connections that developed between Hagestedt and the photovoice participants, and with the organizations more generally.

The rapport that developed through this series of workshops existed on two separate levels: that with the organizations, and that with the individual participants. Each of these reflects a different type of relationship and development of trust. CONFENIAE has a long tradition of involvement with researchers, which contributed to the Communications Director's willingness to engage with the project early. CONAIE and CONFENIAE are

closely connected organizations, often collaborating on events and drawing support from one another. Over the course of research, involvement with CONFENIAE grew, and Hagedstedt was able to develop greater trust and connection with the Communications Director of CONAIE as well.

Rapport with individual participants developed following Hagedstedt's initial involvement in the organizations. The fact that CONFENIAE offered the workshops in conjunction with Hagedstedt from the beginning, demonstrated a level of trust between the organizations and the researcher, essentially providing legitimacy for the project. Holding these workshops provided an opportunity for Hagedstedt to meet youth in a situation that offered them a clear benefit. Many of the participants would not have been interested in talking to a researcher without an initial introduction or the legitimacy granted through association with the organizations. Indeed, many of the youth had previous experiences working with the Communications Director who helped organize the workshops. By offering a series of workshops, Hagedstedt was able to become increasingly familiar and develop trust and rapport with the youth over time. Rapport was demonstrably stronger with youth who participated in multiple workshops, with a greater likelihood of conversation and continuing communication outside of the workshops, such as over social media. The personal connection with the core group, shown below, also deepened thanks to a final celebration and photo exhibition in Puyo, providing a final opportunity to acknowledge the work done by the individuals and to celebrate their photography in a public venue. Hagedstedt's rapport with the core group was solidified through this experience, providing enough trust for the final workshops to be collaboratively planned in the communities of two group members.



Image 6. Hagestedt with the core group of workshop participants, by Andrés Tapía.

The workshops created insight into the lives of youth participants by highlighting what is important to them through what they chose to photograph. Much like Guelke experienced, the topics and level of detail that participants were willing to share with Hagestedt changed as they became increasingly comfortable over time. Early photographs commonly presented aspects of daily life. Later workshops focussed on themes identified by the participants, where they were asked to brainstorm topics that were important to their communities and that they wanted to communicate with a broader audience. Typical topics included environmental destruction/protection, defending their territories, and the importance of education and economic stability. New participants would often be hesitant to voice opinions, and in later workshops core members usually provided the first ideas. The presence of the core group helped to reduce tension between the researcher and new participants, especially with the necessity of obtaining informed consent before beginning each workshop, a process that could sometimes make participants feel intimidated or exacerbate the power differential.

Much like Guelke's experiences in Peru, the development of rapport with the core group allowed Hagestedt to gain deeper insight into their perspectives. Initially the photos tended to focus on positive aspects of daily life, such as those demonstrating pride in traditional culture. Over time discussions also began to include comments on environmental

degradation and conflicts with the government and multinational corporations. For example, a member of the core participant group, Marco, described the image shown below of CONFENIAE's headquarters overlaid by fire as symbolizing the passion and drive that members have for defending their lifestyle and communities. Hagestedt's association with the organizations likely helped to break down some barriers that may have limited the topics she could have broached independently.



Image 7. CONFENIAE headquarters with fire, by Marco

4. Power and Empowerment

The efficacy of photovoice for areas beyond pure research has been widely recognized. When Wang and Burris (1997) first developed the photovoice method for public health research, their main goals included fostering critical discussions and petitioning decision makers and service providers for positive change (p. 370). Valued as a method that gives precedence to often excluded voices, “photovoice seeks to investigate, disrupt, and ultimately improve structures and practices that often fail to fulfill the needs of diverse populations” (Call-Cummings et al., 2018, p. 1). Researchers and activists have employed photovoice with people marginalized in a range of different ways (Wang & Redwood-Jones 2001; Beh et al., 2013; Lykes, 2006). All of these photovoice researchers mention the factor

of empowerment, providing an opportunity for marginalized people to express themselves, gain new skills, and effect positive change.

Some researchers forward the perspective that photovoice should be used only in a social justice or empowerment framework and claim that projects often lack rigor or are used as replacements for longer-term ethnographic methods (Liebenberg, 2018). Indeed, there are valid concerns about projects claiming to empower, while continuing to privilege the voice of the researcher over those of participants (Evans-Agnew & Rosemberg, 2016). However, we argue that photovoice projects can be used in a range of different ways, as long as researchers are intentional in their design and transparent about their goals. For example, Guelke did not employ photovoice with the explicit purpose of empowerment, but rather with the primary goal of data collection. Hagestedt, in contrast, was not focussed on using photovoice as a research tool but rather to assist the organizations. In the process she found that there were complex and multi-layered aspects of empowerment in her photovoice workshops, but that these were not directed at a single structural inequality like most photovoice projects.

4.1 Tourism in Peru

Guelke's goal for her photovoice project was focussed on gaining insight into her participants' experiences and perspectives. While most photovoice projects work with "underrepresented or at-risk communities" (Photovoice, 2020), Guelke's participants generally did not fall into this category. Inhabitants of rural areas in Peru are disproportionately affected by poverty, but in comparison to other community members, the people who participated were no more marginalized in terms of social status or wealth. As discussed earlier, interviews were conducted with individuals only, which precluded opportunities for relationship-building between participants as part of a group. While Hagestedt provided detailed instructions about photography during her workshops, Guelke simply asked participants to take pictures; there was no explicit skill-building involved, and the project did not provide an exceptional avenue of expression or social activism.

The process of taking photos and discussing them afterwards, however, appeared to be an enjoyable activity for people and may have indirectly facilitated situations of empowerment. As Wang and Redwood-Jones (2001) point out, photovoice participants are commonly the subjects of other people's photographs, so the very act of taking photos can provide avenues of empowerment (p. 561). Arguably this factor is particularly prominent in the context of tourism where local people frequently become objectified and have their pictures taken by outsiders without consent (Sontag, 1977; Urry, 1990). Reactions ranging

from discomfort to outright hostility have been documented in different locations (Bruner, 2005; Turton, 2004), and at various times Guelke had heard local people complain about visitors' insensitive practices of photography. Tourism analysis has highlighted how visitors can exert power over places and people through the "tourist gaze" (Urry, 1990). Therefore, facilitating a situation where local people take photos of their own community, and possibly of visiting tourists, can help rebalance this relationship to some extent. Three of Guelke's participants commented specifically on their enjoyment of this role reversal and told humorous stories of tourists who were surprised at being photographed. However, it is important to acknowledge that these experiences of agency and empowerment were clearly short-lived and unlikely to continue beyond the end of the project. Guelke's goal for the use of photovoice was data collection, and potential situations of empowerment were beneficial side effects only. The researcher also had full control over which images to include in publications and how to present them. In a few cases, photos were cropped slightly to comply with standards of photographic composition. While the selection and modification of images was intended to reflect participants' emphasis of content, it nevertheless constituted an exercise of power on the part of the researcher. It is important to reflect on these dynamics and to clearly identify a project's objectives, so that we can avoid raising false hopes and the assumptions that photovoice automatically facilitates lasting empowerment.

4.2 Indigenous Organizations in Ecuador

Within Hagestedt's research, the potential for empowerment was high because the workshops targeted youth within the organizations. The opportunity to improve skills and create media that were useful for the organizations provided youth with greater involvement and helped increase their overall influence. Much of the empowerment resulting from these workshops occurred at the individual level, providing opportunities that youth may not have experienced without their participation in the workshops. Some of the youth who participated in the workshop series continued their involvement with communication activities after the workshops were over, becoming frequent photographers during events held by the organizations. For example, a few of them became involved in the *Lanceros Digitales* communication group during the *Marcha por un Diálogo con Resultados* from Puyo to Quito in December 2017. Those who continued to take part in the communication activities of the organizations, however, were in many cases those who were already interested in communication practices previously. For example, two of the youth owned their own cameras, which they had already been using regularly, and the workshops offered

strengthening opportunities for their skills and emphasized their ability to contribute to CONFENIAE's communication. For those who were not interested beforehand, the workshops offered an entertaining introduction to new skills, but did not necessarily have a continuing impact on their lives.

One example of this empowerment of the *Lanceros Digitales* happened just before the end of the research project. As the *Marcha* arrived in Quito, CONFENIAE and CONAIE held a *Consejo Amplio* that was attended by hundreds of indigenous people and allies. These events function as community consultations, during which leaders present information and make speeches, and every community member has the opportunity to speak. Hagestedt was asked by Tapía to help organize a photo exhibition of images taken by the *Lanceros Digitales* throughout the march to accompany the event. The display of hundreds of photos allowed marchers, as well as those who had not been able to participate in the march, to discuss the journey. The youth were able to demonstrate their photography skills and engage with the larger community as communication experts. The photographers were proud to share their images, which also provided tangible keepsakes for many marchers.



Image 8. CONFENIAE members looking at photos taken by the *Lanceros Digitales* during the *Marcha por un Diálogo con Resultados*, by Hagestedt

Participants were empowered as a general group through these workshops as well, providing a stronger voice within the organization. Individuals who became media creators often involved other youth in ongoing communication practices, creating materials that share youth perspectives at an increased level. Youth were also willing to put their photographs and other media onto social media websites. Facebook is one of the main methods for communication for both CONAIE and CONFENIAE, which provides an avenue to communicate with people external to the organizations without the control of traditional media. Youth are likely to share things which are not being posted on the official organization website, often resharing photos and memes about the organizations or more general political content.

There are limitations to the empowerment that occurred through these workshops, however, most notably in the involvement of women within the workshops and communication as a whole. Mosedale (2005) argues that empowerment should be a collective process; rather than only expanding individual women's choices, it should aim at "redefining and extending the limits of what is possible" so that women in general can benefit (p. 252). This argument holds true within communication, where challenges to participation by women have been noted by scholars among movements such as the Zapatistas in Mexico (Belausteguigoitia, 2006, p. 106). Women are typically responsible for a higher proportion of household labour than men, causing them to have fewer opportunities to learn and utilize communication skills. While both CONAIE and CONFENIAE are explicit in their desire to support women's greater involvement in the organizations, these are cultural barriers that are not often discussed. Though many young women participated in the photovoice workshops, they often left part way through to prepare meals or care for children. Only a couple of young women were able to participate in more than one workshop. Again, this speaks to empowerment that was created at an individual level within the organizations, as opposed to the empowerment of an entire group of people. While empowerment at this level is still valuable, it does not lead to systemic change that would provide more opportunities for all women.



Image 9. Participant Maria taking photos near CONFENIAE headquarters, by Hagestedt

Many researchers working with indigenous people's frame photovoice projects in the context of decolonization, providing a voice for indigenous perspectives against repressive institutional power structures (Harper, 2012; Kessi, 2018; Carroll et al., 2018). Whether or not Hagestedt's research can be considered decolonizing is more complex than whether it can be considered empowering and is reflected in the ongoing outcomes of the workshops. Photovoice within this project was not an inherently decolonizing method, as it had an immediate impact mainly on the internal communication of the organizations, encouraging youth to become more involved in the organizations, to share their perspectives of issues commonly discussed in large gatherings, and to take on a larger role within the organization's communication. The decolonizing impact of the workshops relies on their external impact, as decolonization reflects the interactions between indigenous and non-indigenous populations. The *Marcha por un Diálogo con Resultados*, discussed briefly above, may be one example of the potential decolonizing impact of these workshops, as the youth participants were interacting with mainstream media creators, sharing perspectives and taking images. It is important not to overemphasize the power of these workshops alone, however, as they occurred during a time of extreme focus on communication within the organizations when other workshops and opportunities were also taking place and emphasizing many of the same

skills and approaches. Even though the photovoice method was originally designed with the goal of empowerment, this outcome is not guaranteed, and raising false expectations for social change should be avoided (Johnston, 2016). Researchers need to specify what purpose photovoice is to serve, for whom, and where the limitations of the projects lie.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

As our two research projects have illustrated, photovoice works as an effective methodological tool in different research contexts. Aside from providing data and engagement, the resulting photos allowed us to communicate our research findings in a way that was grounded in participants' understanding. We learned, though, that photovoice can, and sometimes must, be modified from its traditional format in order to accommodate situational and cultural factors of specific research sites, and we draw the following conclusions: First, photovoice does not need to be carried out in a group format. An individual approach can provide an effective alternative and greater benefits in situations where issues like participant availability, privacy and potential social conflicts are of concern. Second, consideration should be given to the way photovoice fits within the design of a larger research project. While it can provide an effective means to build rapport with participants, the project might only become feasible *after* a connection between researcher and participants has been established. As in Guelke's case, having observational and interview data from participants before the photovoice project allows the researcher to triangulate the data and to consider it in a broader context. Such a research design can provide the researcher with extra information that can facilitate selection of images which are truly relevant to participants. Third, while photovoice was originally designed to facilitate empowerment, these outcomes are not inherent in the method; it may also function strictly as a research tool. Hagedstedt's work further demonstrates that the creation of data does not need to be the key goal of a photovoice project. Through a focus on the needs of organizations and individuals, researchers can create relationships and establish trust, which can prove helpful if photovoice is carried out early in the research and are benefits independent of data collection. Researchers need to clearly communicate their project's goals, the specific ways in which they privilege and share local voices, and how these may be used towards advocacy and empowerment. Thus, some of the goals of visual methods can only be achieved if the researcher considers carefully how the method needs to be adjusted to meet participants' needs in their specific cultural and research context.

While we have examined the impacts of local cultural and situational variables on photovoice projects, some broader global factors should also be considered. Due to the increased availability of cell phones, more people than ever are taking photographs (Miller et al., 2016). During the individual follow-up meetings in Guelke's project, several participants had offered and commented on tourism-related photos which they had taken privately outside of the project. Guelke had initially felt concerned about this mixing of images but in the end decided to include a few of these photos and comments (Guelke, 2018). In retrospect these pictures taken independently may have provided more representative perspectives of people's experiences than those taken as part of the project. It was also noticeable that participants tended to elaborate more in their discussions of these images, indicating that the situations and objects depicted had higher personal relevance for them. Hagedstedt noticed a similar element of participants' prior photography experience influencing their participation in her workshops. Youth from the organizations were already sharing images online frequently, but in many cases were not thinking critically about how those images were reflecting on the organizations or more broadly influencing perceptions of indigenous peoples in Ecuador. CONFENIAE wanted to address this issue during the workshops, which were designed to focus largely on improving the photography skills of the youth, and more generally on the qualities that make photos appropriate for online representation. As Shankar (2016) emphasizes, "the uncritical use of photovoice has allowed a kind of reinvigoration of a positivist orientation toward authenticity, in the idea that the 'true story' comes through a community's images and words" (p. 158). These workshops provided a counterpoint to the overly simplistic perception of images as "authentic," reflecting a deeply considered approach to representation on the part of CONFENIAE, and a desire to encourage similar reflexivity by the youth.

The strong focus on image quality in Hagedstedt's workshops is not common in photovoice. Shankar (2016) has effectively criticized the limited view inherent in many photovoice projects which regards the images as descriptive of circumstances rather than as expressing aesthetic and artistic form particular to individuals. Hagedstedt's workshops focused heavily on the aesthetic aspects of photography, with participants who had greater previous experience taking photos explicitly framing complex shots to represent abstract concepts. Given the widespread use of photography, photovoice is increasingly unlikely to present a new mode of representation, but rather taps into familiar practices of participants' lives. This new prevalence of photography also means that many people have developed specific approaches to depict their world. Two of Guelke's participants commented

specifically on aesthetics, in one case the image of flowers in a garden and in another a new hotel in the evening light. Within the workshops led by Hagestedt, the focus on the quality of photographs led to much deeper discussion of aesthetics. Many of the youth with previous photography experience were particularly interested in aesthetics and symbolic representations, as can be seen in image 7 above, which was very carefully composed. While the comments from some participants may have been solely about the subjects depicted, actively investigating the photographers' potential artistic considerations could broaden insights gained from the project and should be given greater consideration in photovoice projects. In addition, it is important to reflect whose aesthetic values are given weight and what power inequalities this may perpetuate. In her analysis of photography and race in colonial Peru, Poole (1997) cautions that "the pleasure that images give us, however, is in itself molded by aesthetic ideologies whose histories are anything but innocent" (p. 19). In the context of Guelke's project it is necessary to question to what degree local people were reflecting the "tourist gaze" of outsiders in their photos, while Hagestedt's workshop instruction was influenced by national and international standards that may have differed from indigenous people's aesthetic.

Visual methods, including photovoice, provide rich opportunities for gaining access to different aspects of research participants' views. By allowing people to access other sensory memories and emotional experiences, engagement with the visual provides perspectives that are usually not reflected through verbal description alone (Pink, 2007; Scarles, 2010), yet the conditions for this need to be right. As our respective projects have shown, the photovoice method can, and often needs to be, adjusted to fit local cultural context; allowing it to effectively complement traditional ethnographic methods. Since photovoice and related visual communication methods employ a mode of expression that many people are already using in their daily lives, we consider these approaches more appropriate and relevant than ever.

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