

Information gathering for geography data collection



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Introduction:

During the last decade, there has been an increase of the integration of visual methodologies, with geographical research. This aspect has managed to gain an increased attention from geographic researchers. Currently, it is easy for Geographers to access the tools of visual reproduction and production. The society is heavily influenced by visual representations and images. It is easier to pass on information through visual and imagery representation, as opposed to the use of words and symbols. However, the interpretations of these visual images normally lack a critical awareness or analysis. This is because they are always interpreted on a face value. Cloke (2004) explains that visual communication normally occurs through the help of visual aids. It is described as a conveyance of information and ideas in forms that it is easy to read, understand, and look upon.

Thrift and Kitchin (2009) further explains that visual communication greatly relies on vision. Furthermore, it is always expressed or presented with two dimensional images. This includes typography, signs, graphic design, drawings, animation, illustration, advertising, industrial design, etc. Visual communication, explores the concept that visual messages that are accompanied by words have great capability of educating, informing, or persuading the audience of the message under consideration (Rubenstein, 2009). Geographers mainly use visual methodology as part of qualitative method of gathering data. This paper gives a discussion on the different ways whereby geographers have managed to incorporate the various visual methods in their research. This is by using a range of examples. Some of the

major visual techniques analyzed in this paper include auto-photography, and participatory video making.

Auto-Photography and Geographic Research:

Auto photography is an example of an ethnographic research methodology. It provides a tool used in qualitative research methods that help in understanding the qualities of an environment, and geographic locations. This tool is on most occasions used by human geographers for purposes of collecting information. This is mainly because of advances in photographic technology, it is easy to access it, and it is also affordable. Stockinger (2013) explains that auto-photography is directly related to film development, and it relies on the camera technology. In geography, the use of auto-photography is directly related to the invention of disposable cameras (Phoenix, 2010). This was a one-time user camera which could not operate without a film. These types of cameras were very popular in the 1990s, and this is because it was a new technology, and it was easy to use the cameras for purposes of taking images (Kitchin, 2009).

For new researchers, and those without a substantial amount of research funds, this method of data collection was very expensive (Teese, 2008). However, with the emergence of digital cameras, it is now cheaper to use auto-photography for purposes of collecting geographic data. Furthermore, it is easy to take a large volume of photos, through the use of digital cameras (Rubenstein, 2009). Furthermore, because of a drop in the cost of equipments, geographic researchers have gained the capability of developing their own videos that consists of data collected. Under human

geography, researchers have used auto-photography to study the geographic location and elements of children all over the world (Gomez and Jones, 2010).

This technology is easy to use, when studying children. This is because it is easy to categorize these children into subject groups. These children might find it intimidating or difficult to understand the verbal language of research, hence the use of auto-photography. Stockinger (2013) explains that auto-photography is not restricted to the study of only children. It can be used to study and collect data on time-space geographies, human identity, and the interactions between human beings, and the environment. The early pioneers on the use of auto-photography in geography are Joan Wingate and Stuart Aitken (Stockinger, 2013). This is through their study on how the environment affects children, and how to use auto-photography to help adult researchers to understand the different views of children, regarding their environments. This work was able to incorporate the methodological approach in the children's geographies which emphasized on the everyday and local lives of children. It further analyzed the impact of social differences like ethnicity, race and income, on the environmental mobility and experience of children (Reason, 2008).

In concluding their research, the two authors denoted that children who suffered from cerebral palsy, and whose movements were restricted, engaged in taking photographs, as compared to their counter parts, who were normal (Rubenstein, 2009). Furthermore, watching other children playing was a way in which a disabled child was able to participate in the playing activity. Auto-Photography is not only used in the geographic study <https://assignbuster.com/information-gathering-for-geography-data-collection/>

of children. It is also possible to use it in studying time and space. This is better depicted in a study by Johnson, May and Cloke (2008) on the geography of homelessness. Under this research, the researcher were analyzing the various strategies in which homeless people use for purposes of protecting themselves, and maintaining their areas of residence, i. e. space. This is because the homeless are always vulnerable to intimidations and exploitation, and when they are found in wrong places, people would chase them. Johnson, May and Cloke (2008) believes that auto-photography is an important source of getting information. It is far much more useful than traditional sources of information such as books, and newspapers. It complements these sources of information. Furthermore, auto-photography has been used in accelerating the spatial development of Urbanization on Guangzhou (Phoenix, 2010).

This is a province located in China. For example, in the year 2000, Guangzhou began a series of spatial expansion. This was after its merger with the districts of Huadu and Panyu. To effectively develop the province, there was a need of proper urban planning and development (Kochak, 2006). The use of auto-photography was essentially in this aspect. Urban planners of Guangzhou took a series of photographs, of various locations of the province. This was for purposes of studying them, and hence coming up with a better policy, on how to plan the province. Policy formulators were able to use these photos for purposes of planning to build an extensive road network that connected the province of Guangzhou and Foshan (Chiang, 2005). This is clearly depicted on the North Western border of the provinces of Guangzhou and Foshan. The construction land between the borders of these

two provinces is directly connected with one another, and road network has approximately sixty intersections (Loo, 2009). This is for future expansion.

Participatory Video Making and Geographic Research:

Participatory video is a process in which the participants work together for purposes of creating a video in regard to their common experiences. It is also a way of making an inquiry of the various challenges that affect the lives of the participants (Kitchin, 2009). This concept is widely used in the collection of data when studying human geography. Due to the immense benefits that participatory video making has, geographers have emphasized on its use in the collection of data. Under participatory video making, the participants and the researcher are joint owners of the data that emanates from the research (Rubenstein, 2009).

This research emphasizes that social action is an important part of a research. Furthermore, social action is exploratory, relational, and unpredictable. Participatory video making is therefore seen as an opportunity for empowering geographers with social skills that can help them to efficiently interact with the participants of the research (Chiang, 2005).

Don Snowden was the first person to engage in participatory video making (Kitchin, 2009). He pioneered the use of media for purposes of enabling the community to develop various solutions to their problems. In his research, Snowden was able to work with Colin Low a film maker (Kitchin, 2009). He carried out a study of Fogo Island, which was a small fishing community in Canada.

His main aim was to identify the various challenges and opportunities that are experienced by the residents of this community. In this research,
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Snowden managed to develop a film on different villages in the Island (Hueber and Alderman, 2011). These films illustrated various challenges that they were facing, and the ways of overcoming these challenges. By watching the videos of each village, the different villagers in the island were able to realize that they were facing similar problems (Bergman, 2010). On this basis, they had to come together for purposes of ensuring that they develop a solution to the problems that were facing them (Hueber and Alderman, 2011). Politicians were also able to view these videos. On most occasions, politicians were very busy, and unable to visit the Island, and learn on the different problems that the Islanders were facing. Furthermore, the Island was far away from the main land of Canada. As a result of the production of this video, the government was able to change its policies regarding the Fogo Island (Hueber and Alderman, 2011).

This is by improving the welfare of the people of Fogo Island through education, and building of infrastructures that could enable them carry out their fishing practices in an efficient manner. Furthermore, people within the Island began collaborating with each other for purposes of finding a solution to the problems that affected them. This technique was so successful that other geographers began using participatory video making in collecting data. Hester Parr examines the use of participatory video making in a mental health institution. Parr (2007) believes that it is possible to use participative video making for purposes of helping to change the manner in which the society views people with mental problems or disability. Furthermore, she explains that video making is useful in helping to hold important data about the effects that arts has on the mental health of another person.

Parr (2007) argues that participative video making is a collaborative process that requires the cooperation of all the parties involved in it. This would therefore make it possible for the participants to provide an in-depth data regarding the problems of the research. On this basis, Parr (2007) explains that participative video making is an important aspect that can help in solving the problems of a society. For instance, Parr (2007) explains that the use of a video referred to as *Recovering Lives* was successful in positively depicting the mentally ill people in Dundee. The filmmakers were able to collaborate with the mentally ill individuals in coming up with this video. They had an opportunity of telling their experiences and challenges that they face while living with this disability (Hay, 2010). On this basis, the filmmakers succeeded in explaining the different problems that mentally ill people face.

Conclusion:

Currently, most geographers are involved in gathering information through the use of visual methods of data collection. The most prominent of these methods are auto-photography, and the use of participative video making. Auto-Photography has been made possible because of the emergence of digital cameras. This makes it easier for geographers to take as many photos as possible. It is also a cheap method of collecting data, because digital carry are easy to afford. On the other hand, participative video making involves collection of data through film. Under this method, the geographer would collaborate with the population, while gathering data concerning a particular area of their research. These methods are used by geographers to solve a

particular social problem. They are widely used in the area of human geography.

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