Conducting Video Research in the Social and Solidarity Economy: Empowering the Cinderella Economy Towards Social Justice

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ABSTRACT
This paper focuses on the potential use of visual research for the study of the social and solidarity economy, by presenting some of the methodological insights and challenges that arise for the use of video research in the study of such initiatives reflecting on the authors experience of the Living in Minca project. This paper contributes to advancing the debate on the use of non-conventional research methods and the impact that visual researchers can make by empowering small and local practices, which are part of the so-called ‘Cinderella’ economy towards social justice and reaching audiences outside academia.

KEYWORDS
Cinderella Economy, Social and Solidarity Economy, Social Justice, Video Research, Visual Methods

INTRODUCTION
Recent years have witnessed a growth in the use of visual research methods in the field of organisation and management studies (Bell et al., 2014; Meyer et al., 2013; Fele, 2012). It is often suggested that this growth is somehow related to the increasing importance of visual images in contemporary social and cultural practice (Heath & Hindmarsh, 2002). However, the relationship between ‘visual research’ and the ‘social and solidarity economy’ (SSE) has not yet been interrogated. The aim of this paper is therefore to present and justify the use of visual research, and video research in particular, as a method which can enable researchers within the SSE field to ‘push further into the felt, touched and embodied constitution of knowledge’ (Crang, 2003, p. 501).

The concept ‘SSE’ is used throughout this paper to refer to forms of economic activity that prioritise social and often environmental objectives, involving producers, workers, consumers and citizens acting collectively, driven by values such as solidarity, equity and democratic governance, fostering social cohesion and favouring decentralisation and local development. The sector includes cooperatives, mutual health and insurance associations, NGOs with earned income generated activities, fairtrade networks, community-based organisations and self-help groups organised to produce goods and services, associations within the informal or popular economy, and various forms of solidarity finance such as complementary currencies and digital crowdfunding, as well as sharing schemes associated with ‘the sharing or collaborative’ economy. Tim Jackson, in his 2009 publication, ‘Prosperity without growth’, introduces the concept of the ‘Cinderella’ economy1 to refer to an economy

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of smaller scale, locally embedded, which includes community based organisations and similar related activities that share both social and environmental goals, and which is often ignored in the market.

In this paper, we set out a case for how applied video research as an innovative visual method can be used not only to create ‘new’ knowledge accessible to wide and diverse audiences, but also to enable social justice², providing visibility to those that are excluded by empowering small and local practices, which are part of the so-called ‘Cinderella’ economy. This paper presents some of the methodological insights and challenges that arise for the use of video research in the study of social and solidarity economy initiatives (SSEIs), by reflecting on the Living in Minca project. This project was conducted over a three-year period (September 2013 to November 2015) with the express goal of exploring local small SSEIs around the world. A multiple video case study research design was chosen for the purpose of capturing rich descriptive contexts and gaining a picture of the diversity of such practices in Asia, Africa, America and Europe.

The following three combined elements are critically explored to provide an underpinning framework for enhancing growth in SSE video research studies. The first element incorporates a discussion of the benefits of using video research in general, and specific considerations that needed to be taken into account to prevent the misuse of video which emerged from our study. The second element is an appreciation of our research design and practice looking at the three main video research stages: preproduction, production and postproduction. The third element is a reflection of the ethical challenges and innovations in the dissemination of data when using video research as well as the impact created with our research by empowering ‘the researched’ and reaching audiences outside academia. In so doing, examples will be illustrated to help readers gain a better understanding of the elements discussed.

The first element: Benefits and Considerations for the Use of Video Research

Video research can be created ‘in the field’ by both researchers and/or the researched, and can also be gathered from secondary sources. As Jewitt (2012) highlights, video data have particular qualities and features that differ significantly from other kinds of data such as audio recordings or field notes. A key potential of using video to collect data is that it can support an exploratory research design or data-discovery phase (Rose, 2016). This is because video allows the researcher/s a small window into live realities that no other medium can provide, capturing actions and words as they naturally occur at a particular time and location (Pink, 2007a; Luff & Heath, 2012).

In general, video research allows more control over the data gathering procedures as well as more reflexivity (Barbour, 2014). Video can be ‘re-opened’ for more analytical passes than some other forms of data collection; notably it can capture things that researcher/s might not have noticed at the time of being present, as well as being open to review and analysis by others (Fife, 2005). Video data provide the possibility to re-awaken the memories and experiences of both the researcher/s and the researched (Luff & Heath, 2012), serving as a valuable adjunctive tool in many types of research projects, as the participants can be invited to reflect and contribute to the different stages of the study (Schaeffer, 1995). Besides this, video research allows researcher/s and the researched to express themselves creatively and in doing so, enables them to express aspects of their experiences or emotions which would otherwise remain unsaid (Rakić & Chambers, 2011). It also allows the researcher/s to present the findings in non-conventional ways such as with a documentary, reaching wider audiences (Jewitt, 2012).

Despite the power of using video as an instrument for research, there are several issues that researcher/s need to consider to prevent the misuse of video research. The first issue to take into account is the importance of evaluating the objectivity of the research questions linking video data

² In this paper, social justice refers to the ethical dimension of the research, which aims to empower the researched and increase visibility to those who are often excluded.
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