

Chapter 36

Grassroots Innovation for Human Development: Exploring the Potential of Participatory Video

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ABSTRACT

Can digital technologies serve to highlight and strengthen the work of social organizations that promote human development? This is the question the authors want to answer in this article, in which they analyse an eight-month participatory video (PV) process, promoted by a group of university researchers and conducted in collaboration with two grassroots innovations (GI) in the city of Valencia (Spain): the Fuel Poverty Group and Sólar Dómada. The innovative component of PV is situated in two areas: firstly, as an action research methodology, the PV process enables people's participation, with the aim of generating learning, agency and contextual knowledge from the participants; secondly, the innovation is found in the product, the video itself. The video narratives can be used to disseminate the practices of the GIs and offer a space for critical reflection on the structural constraints that may hamper the diffusion of innovations. Furthermore, the audiovisual work itself has its own agency and has the potential to create opportunities for advocacy and contribute towards removing barriers that limit human development.

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INTRODUCTION

Can digital technologies serve to highlight and strengthen the work of social organizations that promote a model of a more equitable and sustainable development? This is the question we want to answer in this article, in which we will analyse an eight-month participatory video (PV) process, promoted by a group of university researchers and conducted in collaboration with two social organizations in the city of Valencia (Spain): the Fuel Poverty Group and Sólár Dómada. We call these two groups Grassroots Innovations (GI) according to the definition by Seyfang and Smith (2007), who understand GIs as:

networks of activists and organizations generating novel bottom-up solutions for sustainable development; solutions that respond to the local situation and the interests and values of the communities involved (p. 585).

Business and industry are no longer the only actors of innovation, but also groups of people from civil society, mainly activists or non-profit organizations, that generate bottom-up innovation in response to local needs. The aim of this kind of innovation is to lead to a transition to a more sustainable society, introducing a normative direction of innovation (Smith et al., 2010).

In this paper, we complement this normative perspective of innovation for sustainability with the human development and capability approach, which arises from such a tradition in humanist social philosophy and humanist economics (e.g., Haq, 1999; Nussbaum, 2000; Gasper, 2009). It stresses: a plurality of values, not only the values of economic utility as expressed and promoted within markets; secondly, a human-wide concern and solidarity, as in human rights philosophy: the field of reference is all humans, where ever in the world, and in particular all those affected by one's actions; and thirdly, it recognises the normality and centrality of interconnections: side-effects of markets mean that market calculation is insufficient even if we only use a value of economic utility. Human development theory, represented for example in the UNDP Human Development Reports, moves to analyse processes and connections not only within disciplinary and national boundaries. Economic policies towards low-income countries for example can have major wider impacts, on conflict and violence, the flow of arms and the creation or strengthening of international crime networks, disease, migration, international epidemics, and more efficiency (Boni & Gasper, 2012).

Following previous attempts of dialogue between GI and human development (Pellicer, 2016), we can call this kind of innovation GI for Human Development.

The first GI is the Fuel Poverty Group, a new group of volunteers, mainly university students that want to challenge fuel poverty¹ by giving advice on how to reduce fuel consumption. This group is part of a wider network named the Platform for a New Energy Model², which works towards a more democratic and sustainable energy model.

The other group is the Solar Dómada³, a group of people who are occupying a private plot, highly deteriorated at the time of their occupation (2013), as a way to assert the need for social spaces in the neighbourhood. Solar Dómada also seek to highlight that another kind of coexistence between neighbours is possible; one based on respect and intercultural coexistence. In the centre of the plot is the Garden of Ca Favara, one of the symbols of neighbourhood participation, involving more sustainable practices of food production and consumption.

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