PARTICIPATORY PHOTOGRAPHY:
LANGUAGE MINORITY TEENAGERS' SENSE OF BELONGING?

FOTOGRAFIA PARTICIPATIVA:
A LINGUAGEM MINORITÁRIA DOS ADOLESCENTES,
SENTIMENTO DE PERTENCIMENTO?

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ABSTRACT: This article discusses the different ways of using photography as a research method in social sciences, especially how using participatory photography with young people and children is explored. The advantages of making teenagers and children co-researchers as well as some of the issues that emerge, like lack of control over the data collection and ethical issues, are examined. A case study on language minority teenagers' identifications with and sense of belonging to the language minority group is offered as an example of participatory photography. The interplay between the photographs and the texts produced by the teenagers exemplify the necessity of using several kinds of data instead of only photographs.

KEYWORDS: Photography. Participatory. Belonging. Identification. Students.

RESUMO: O presente artigo discute as diferentes formas de usar a fotografia como um método de pesquisa nas ciências sociais. Aplicando, especialmente, a fotografia participativa com jovens e crianças. As vantagens de usar adolescentes e crianças como copesquisadores, bem como alguns fatores tipicamente emergentes, como a falta de controlo sobre a coleta de dados e questões de ética, são analisadas. Um estudo de caso sobre adolescentes de uma minoria linguística e as diferentes maneiras como eles identificam-se e sentem-se parte desse grupo minoritário é tido como exemplo de fotografia participativa. A interação entre as fotografias e os textos, produzidos pelos adolescentes, funciona como exemplo da necessidade de utilizar diferentes tipos de dados em vez de apenas a fotografia, como método único.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Fotografia participativa. Pertencimento. Identificação. Alunos.

RESUMÉ: Cet article décrit différentes façons d'utiliser la photographie comme méthode de recherche en sciences sociales, notamment la photographie participative avec des jeunes et des enfants. Les deux aspects suivants sont traités : les avantages de travailler avec des adolescents et des enfants comme co-chercheurs ; l'influence de cette méthode sur le travail du chercheur, par exemple liée au manque de contrôle sur la collecte de données et les questions éthiques. Une étude de cas sur les identifications et le sentiment d'appartenance d'adolescents de langue minoritaire avec leur groupe servira d'illustration à la photographie participative. L'interaction entre les photos et les textes produits par les adolescents souligne la nécessité d'utiliser plusieurs types de données au lieu de photographies uniquement.

MOTS CLEFS: Photographie participative. Appartenance. Identification. Étudiants.

Photo 1 - *Belonging and togetherness*
Source: Personal archive

1   INTRODUCTION

Today's world is saturated by photographs. It has been estimated that 1.4 billion photographs are taken with mobile phones every day (JUTILA, 2012). It is estimated that between 1.6 and 3.6 million photos are uploaded on Flickr[2] every day, (40 million on Instagram[3] and 350 million per day on both Facebook and Snapchat. In addition to the photos taken by ourselves and other individuals we face photographs in advertisement and other media. Despite this photo saturation in media and social media we, in social sciences, have not used photography as a research method very often.

The use of photography in research has its roots in anthropology and sociology. In both disciplines it has been a way to collect information about observed phenomena or artifacts. Photographs became more common in sociological research in the 1960s (FLICK, 2002; WARREN; KARNER, 2005). Researchers using photographs in sociological research have met resistance since the photographs have not been considered objective enough. In anthropology film and video have been used more often but already Bateson and Mead used photography in their Balinese study (1942). They took altogether more than 25,000 photographs of which they selected 759 for their analysis (HARPER, 2004). In traditional anthropological research photographs allowed the researcher to photograph artifacts, clothing, foods and rituals to use for further study and examination as well as illustrations when returning home. Photographs also allowed the researcher to share his or her experiences.

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[2] **Available:** <https://www.flickr.com/photos/franckmichel/6855169886/ ; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flickr>
[3] **Available:** <http://mattmaldre.com/2013/05/27/flickrs-1-4-million-photos-per-day-instagrams-40-million-photos-per-day/>

Anthropologists as well as sociologists using photographs have been told that photographs are too subjective and unrepresentative. There were attempts to make the use of photographs more objective and scientific by introducing strict and rigorous ways of handling the photographs (see, for example, COLLIER;COLLIER, 1986; GRADY, 1996; PROSSER, 1996). Even though this is still an issue for many, it is now acknowledged that photographs are instead a way to bring the subjectivities of both the researcher and the participants to the forefront (PINK, 2007). For both sociologists and anthropologists a problem has been the difficulty to publish photographs in both books and journals. *Visual Sociology* and *Visual Studies* are examples of two journals now publishing research with photographs. The International Visual Sociology Association publishes its own journal *Visual Studies*. Society for Visual Anthropology publishes the *Visual Anthropology Review.* Also thanks to more digital journals the decreasing costs for publishing photographs are making the publishing easier. Hence, the field for using photography as a research method as well as the avenues for publishing photographs in research articles are changing.

Photographs have commonly been used as illustrations of points discussed in a text. Often the illustrations have shown artifacts or rituals. The photo below is an example of how children dress up for Halloween ritual in the U.S.

Photo 2
Source: Personal archive

However, these kinds of photos do not make the research visual unless the photos are analyzed in the text (Banks, 2000). In order to take advantage of the data photographs provide, photographs can be treated as data and analyzed in various ways (HOLM, 2008a, 2008b, 2014; HOLM, LONDEN; MANSIKKA, forthcoming 2015). Analyzing photos as data is the approach taken in this article.

In youth, research and education photography is used more and more with teenagers and children. It is seen as a way of obtaining a different view of young peoples' lives and views complementing interview and observational data. It is also seen as a means to hear the children's and young people's voices that are often not heard (LODGE, 2009). It has been used to better understand children's views of their surroundings (SERRIERE, 2010), their cities (HO; ROCHELLE; YUEN, 2011) and their education (MARQUES-ZENKOV, HARMON, VAN LIER; MARQUEZ; ZENKOV, 2007; NEWMAN, WOODCOCK; DUNHAM, 2006; HOLM, 1995, 1997)

Photography is used in different ways in research. There are previously taken photos like in family albums, newspapers, magazines and archives. With these archival photographs it is at times difficult to know the context in which the photographs are taken and the photographers' intentions. Therefore it can at times be difficult to interpret them. Today there is a huge pool of these kinds of photographs available through social media sites as well as overall on the internet. Surprisingly few studies have been done on the photographs uploaded onto social media sites. There are, for example, an incalculable number of selfies of teenagers. A difficulty in studying them might be the overwhelming number of them.

A quantitative or qualitative content analysis is often used to analyze pre-existing photographs. The quantitative analysis often involves counting how many times something occurs in a photograph. The qualitative content analysis can be more similar to an ethnographic thematic approach to the analysis.

Another way to use photography is the researcher photographing what is considered interesting or intriguing for the research. Several researchers have raised questions about this approach with regard to how much the camera influences the posing of the participants and how much the researcher's personal interests limit what is found interesting enough to photograph. However, this approach helps the researcher to remember what is not understood or what needs clarification and which can consequently be discussed in follow-up interviews.

The third way to use photography in doing research is when the photographs are taken by the participants. This participatory photography is the focus of this paper. Participatory photography means that it is the participants who take the photographs. Even though the task, what to photograph, is given by the researcher it is the participant who decides on what is photographed and on the composition. Since the participants are in charge of the photographing the power relations between the researcher and the participants change somewhat. The influence of the researcher on the situation will always be there but the

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participants have the power to interpret the task in their own way. Hence, the data obtained through participatory photography can be quite unpredictable. Since photographs are ambiguous and can easily be interpreted in different ways it is crucial to combine them with other kinds of data like interviews or texts written by those who have taken the photographs. Especially more symbolic or metaphorical photographs requires an explanation or elaboration by the photographer.

Participatory photography is also a way to communicate when the researcher and the participants have weak common language skills (see for example VEINTIE; HOLM, 2010). It is also a way to communicate when there are big differences with regard to, for example, social class, gender and ethnicity between the researcher and the participants. This was the reason when I used participatory photography for the first time. I was a white assistant professor doing a study with pregnant and parenting teenage girls with most of them being poor and from a minority background living at the absolute margins of society. In this case photography became a way for them to show me the image of themselves they wanted others to have of them. Through their posing they showed that they wanted to be seen as happy, playful, young girls while through their writings (diaries and poems) they showed the difficult sides of their lives with poverty, abuse and being afraid of how to manage their lives. Their way of posing became in itself valuable data. The two methods gave a much more complex picture of the girls than only one of the methods would have given (HOLM, 1994, 1997).

The participatory photography' approach is exemplified in this article with a study where language minority teenagers were photographing their identifications and their world as minority language speakers. Language Minority Students' Sense of Belonging to a Language Minority Group

The language minority students in this study are Swedish speaking ninth-graders attending Swedish-speaking schools in the metropolitan Helsinki region in Finland where the majority language is Finnish. About 6% of the population in this region speaks Swedish. The students live in a very Finnish language dominated milieu outside the school. Depending on the school 50-80% of the students come from a bilingual family background. Finland is a bilingual country, but the status of the Swedish language as a national language has been challenged frequently during the last few years partially due to the increased popularity of the populist right-wing party 'True Finns'. We were interested in whether and how the teenagers going to Swedish speaking schools identified with the Swedish speaking group in Finland called Finland-Swedes. There is much talk in the media about this group and the verbal anger directed at them but we almost never hear anything from young Swedish-speaking students about their own views about their minority position. Hence, the photography was a way to give them a way to express how they perceived their identifications with the Swedish speaking language minority group and how they perceived the group per se (see also HOLM; LONDEN; MANSIKKA forthcoming 2015).

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The photography study is part of a large multi-sited ethnographic study with four lower secondary schools. The photography study was done with 43 students in one school. Photo-elicitation interviews were done with 22 of the students. In-depth interviews were conducted with 62 students. The students took 337 photographs that we were able to use. Many more were taken but due to missing permission slips from parents we were not able to include the photographs in the analysis. The students wrote a sentence about each photograph or gave a title to each photograph which facilitated our understanding of them. How Do We Interpret Photographs in Research?

An ethnographic analysis was done on the photographs meaning that the photographs were treated in the same way as, for example, interview data. The photographs were analyzed separately as well as together with the interviews. We were looking for themes emerging from the photographs without any previously established categories. Then we compared the themes emerging from the photographs with those emerging from the interviews and vice versa. The analyses resulted in a complex picture of the students' own identifications and their overall relation to the minority language group. The two sets of data complemented each other and gave together a more in-depth understanding. The photographs were basically of two kinds, namely quite straightforward literal photographs of Finland-Swedishness and then more metaphorical photographs.

The students identify the Finland-Swedish spaces in their milieu through literal depictions of Finland-Swedishness. The sport handball is included as a sport mostly played by Finland-Swedes. The Finland-Swedes read Swedish-speaking newspapers and go to the theater where there are plays performed in Swedish and therefore students have taken photographs of Swedish newspapers and theaters. They photographed books by a Finland-Swedish author Tove Jansson who became internationally known for her children's books about the Moomin trolls. Interestingly this student also points out that the designer of the mug with the Moomin character is also a Finland-Swede. Often the photographs have an undertone of wanting to prove the existence of the Finland-Swedes by showing places and spaces that the students consider their own. They say straight out in the interviews that they are happy to be who they are despite the difficulties that go along with being a minority.

Photo 3 - *Handball is clearly a sport where the players often are Finland-Swedes.*
Source: Personal archive

Photo 4 - *HBL = a Finland-Swedish newspaper*
Source*:* Personal archive

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Photo 5 - - Where do we go to see plays in Swedish? –
In the Swedish Theater of course!
Source*: Personal archive*

Photo 6 - Tove Jansson = Finland-Swedish! Moomin = Finland-Swedish!
+ The mug has the same form as the mug designed by Kaj Franck = Finland-Swedish!
Source: *Personal archive*

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Likewise there are numerous photos of bilingual street signs through which the students in a way show the group's existence since the streets signs are only in Finnish unless the municipality contains 8% Swedish minority language speakers.

Photo 7 *- Many Swedish-speakers live in this community* (bilingual sign)
Source: Personal archive

Students are proud of the concrete Finland-Swedish markers and spaces like newspapers and street signs. These concrete markers seem to be even more important for the bilingual students than the Swedish only speakers since they have taken many more photos of these literary manifestations of the Finland-Swedish language and group.

Many students are proud of their Swedish language and say it is a beautiful language which probably comes from that it is perceived as a softer language (Scandinavian, Germanic) in comparison to the Finno-Ugrian Finnish that tends to be perceived as harder due to its many double consonants.

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Photo 8 *- The flowers symbolize the beautiful Swedish language*
Source: Personal archive

The symbolic or metaphorical photography provides a vehicle for the students to express their more abstract thinking about their identifications and belonging.

Photo 9
Source*:* Personal archive

The students often identify the archipelago in southern Finland as Finland-Swedish and sailing as a Finland-Swedish hobby even if they themselves do not sail. Many students have family roots in the archipelago or they have vacation cottages there. It gives the students a geographical space and roots that are Finland-Swedish even if they themselves live very integrated lives in a mostly Finnish environment except for in the school. There are also many photos of the schools which is the other stable physical space that they claim as theirs.

The saying about the Finland-Swedes is that everybody knows everybody since it is a small group and the students say this too with their photos and in their interviews. The language is perceived by the students to be the common glue together with the Swedish-speaking school. Interestingly the students have redefined who is a Finland-Swede. It used to be defined as a person who registered as a Swedish speaker, but the students have redefined it as someone who speaks both Swedish and Finnish and goes to a Swedish-speaking school. Hence, especially the photographs depict a language group which position is not static but in constant movement.

Photo 10 - We are like a chain. A tight group.
Source: Personal archive

Another saying is that the Finland-Swedes are happier and research shows they live longer than Finnish speakers. The students often bring forward that they have a lot of fun, feel free and happy.

Photo 11 *- We always have fun, even in school.*
Source: Personal archive

Photo 12 – Happy, loving and bilingual!
Source: Personal archive

Even though many students play with the stereotypes, many students also actively resist stereotypes about Finland-Swedes and in this photo a student claims that the Finland-Swedes are all different from each other like every sunset is different from the previous ones.

Photo 13 - *No one is the same*
Source: Personal archive

However, identifying with and belonging to a group, which almost all the Swedish-speaking and bilingual students say they do, also means for the students that they also think about the future of the minority language and the minority language group especially in the currently somewhat hostile populist political climate.
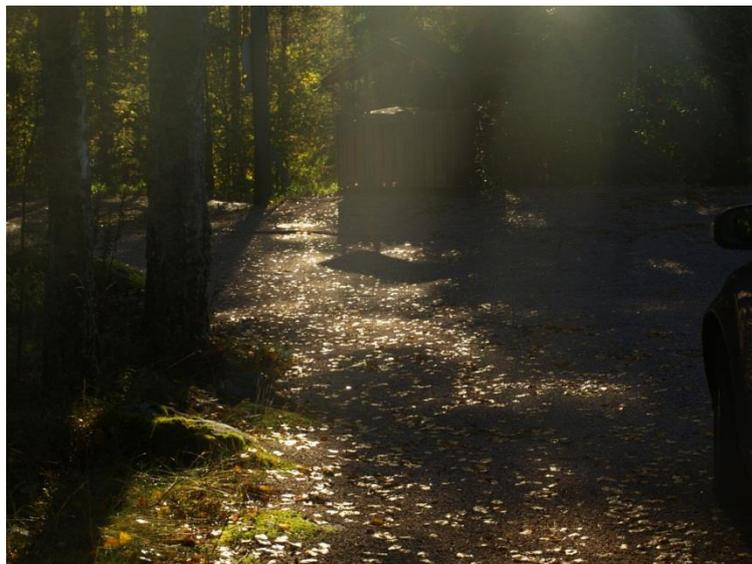

Photo 14 - *It's still a long way to acceptance*
Source: Personal archive

Photo 15 - *Finland-Swedishness is like fall, a time no one really looks forward to*
Source: Personal archive

There are many photographs and comments about that it is fine now but for how long? They are wondering if there is a future for this minority language group and thereby for themselves. However, they are happy with who they are even though they are wondering about their future. In the interviews the language and language issues were emphasized and this came through in the photographs as well especially in the literal, concrete photographs. However, as can be seen above there is also another kind of photography – the more metaphorical. The metaphorical photography brings forth a deeper level of thinking about the minority language group. Who are they and where are they rooted, what are they happy about and what are their worries. These issues were not brought out in the interviews. Hence, it is clear that the participatory photography and the interviews complement each other and give a fuller picture of the students' thinking.

2 DISCUSSION

Many interesting questions emerged in this participatory photography study. First, as photographs in general, these too are at times ambiguous and difficult to interpret. It can be difficult to know even with the help of the written statements when the students, for example, refer to themselves as members of the language minority group and when they talk about the entire language minority group. This is related to the power the participants have to interpret and reinterpret the task given by the researcher. The participants become co-researchers and can influence the study and the research questions by their own data collection. The power relations between the researcher and the participants are renegotiated and the research becomes more collaborative or as Joyce Tenneson says "My best photographs are an honest

collaboration, and when the viewer also connects, I feel the circle is complete".(http://www.johnpaulcaponigro.com/photographers/quotes/joyce-tenneson/)

An issue related to the participants being co-researchers is ethical issues that emerge when students reinterpret the task. As we also saw in this study was that students avoided photographing people because they did not want ask for permission slips. Only some who photographed people obtained permission slips. This in a way puts a limit on what is photographed and thus included in the study. In addition, without permission slips interesting photographs cannot be used.

Another question that emerged was how important it is to have in-depth knowledge of the history and current situation of this language minority group in order to understand the photographs. The question emerged particularly when there were photographs that depicted stereotypes, harassment or worries for the future. The researchers involved in this project were all from the same language minority group and knew immediately what the students were referring to with regard to, for example, the harassment they experienced while an outsider would probably have interpreted the photographs somewhat differently. In other words, the researchers had a similar habits with regard to being a member of the language minority group which facilitated the understanding of the more complex and metaphorical photography.

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