Involving, Sharing, Analysing—Potential of the Participatory Photo Interview

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Abstract: This article discusses the photo interview method used in a participatory inter- and transdisciplinary research setting. The photo interview has proven particularly useful for sustainability and environmental studies in which eliciting community points of view is crucial to the research effort. Based on experiences in several countries, the author describes and analyses the photo interview process and its three phases—involving, sharing and analysing—and explores potential influences on data quality. In the first phase, researchers use the photo interview method to involve community residents from different levels of society in the research process. In the second phase, the photo interview method encourages community residents and scientists to share insights and perspectives and to partner in developing a common understanding of local structures, processes, and possible solutions. In the third phase, the photo interview method allows researchers to analyse visual and textual data as a representation of a local societal context. In decoding images, researchers ground the analysis in subjective perspectives, use residents' visual codes along with other methods to further analyse community data, and explore the wider societal context in which the study is embedded.

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1. Introduction

This article reflects on the use of the photo interview as a tool for inviting local residents to participate in a scientific process within the framework of inter- and transdisciplinary research studies. The experiences of two multicultural studies—in six provinces in China and in five Islamic communities of the Mediterranean—using the photo interview method are described These studies build on preceding photo interview applications and provide insights for further development of the method in inter- and transdisciplinary research settings[1]. As these studies illustrate, the photo interview method is useful for eliciting local perspectives on daily life and involving local residents in a scientific research process. Using the photo interview, local cultural and social settings become visible as residents take photos that show their perspectives on the research question and their experiences with and understandings of the local context. [1]

SUCCESS (Sustainable Users Concepts for China Engaging Scientific Scenarios) was an interdisciplinary study[2] in which a team of scientists from a range of disciplines—sociology, architecture, economics, and ecology—used a case study methodology (YIN, 2003) to develop sustainable future scenarios for seven villages in six provinces (DUMREICHER, 2008a). SUCCESS sought to answer the basic question: What to maintain and what to change in the selected villages? Photo interviews helped the team to explore local understandings of the two questions and gauge potential support for the study[3]. Used in combination with participatory rural appraisal methods (PRA), the photo interview method provided local residents with an opportunity to 1) reflect on the future of their villages, 2) generate data on village life from a social science perspective, and 3) introduce the daily life of rural Chinese communities into the research paradigm. The method allowed villagers and researchers to raise and discuss local problems and socio-economic and environmental challenges in a collaborative way, bring out local perspectives on the potential future of the villages being studied and envision future scenarios (DUMREICHER & KOLB, 2005). Photo interviews allowed the sociological research team to analyse local conditions and develop within the interdisciplinary team future scenarios that balanced respect for human needs with respect for the needs of the environment.

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1   The inter- and transdisciplinary research settings approach was developed in the scientific community of the national program of Austrian Landscape Research / KLF—Österreichische Kulturlandschaftsforschung (BEGUSCH-PFEFFERKORN, 2001).

2   Interdisciplinary is seen as a scientific cooperation process between different academic subjects.

3   The transdisciplinary process is seen as an exchange of experiences and knowledge between scientific and non scientific persons and local stakeholders (NICOLINI, 2001).

Photo 1: SUCCESS Chi Qiao, VR China / Photo interview 03: Village life [2]

HAMMAM (Aspects and Multidisciplinary Methods of Analysis for the Mediterranean Region) is an intercultural, inter- and transdisciplinary study designing future scenarios to save the hammam, the traditional Islamic bath, as a cultural heritage. The project analyses hammams in Islamic neighbourhoods in Fez (Morocco), Constantine (Algeria), Cairo (Egypt), Damascus (Syria), Ankara (Turkey), and Palestine (Gaza) while meeting contemporary demands for sanitary and convenient places to bathe and socialise (DUMREICHER, 2008b). Within this multidisciplinary study architects and historians, town planners and restoration experts, social scientists and environmental experts focused on the hammams with its complex urban and social relations and developed future scenarios that balance the desire of modernisation with the needs of the environment. The multicultural team of social scientists sought to answer the following question: *How does the hammam as a traditional bath house contribute to daily life in the neighbourhood now, and what are its social functions for the neighbourhood?* Conducted in a range of Islamic neighbourhoods, photo interviews provided the members of the research team with a valuable introduction to social life and values of local residents. With the study's visual and interview data the ongoing social functions of the hammam in these neighbourhoods were observed (DUMREICHER & KOLB, 2008a).

Photo 2: HAMMAM, Ankara, Turkey / Photo interview 03: Roof of Shengül Hammam [3]

In this article, I explain the origin of the photo interview method and its development over time. I suggest three phases of the photo interview and explore their contributions to the research process. In closing, I provide examples of ways to analyse the data generated through application of the photo interview method. [4]

2. The Participatory Photo Interview

The photo interview method invites participants to answer a research question by taking photos and explaining their photos to the researcher. Once the photo interview is completed, the photos and interview text are available as data for further research and sociological interpretation using different methods of scientific analysis. [5]

2.1 Origin of the photo interview

Researchers have used photos to elicit information in research settings for more than 50 years. For several decades, however, photos used in research were always taken by professional photographers or the researchers themselves. It is the participatory aspect of the photo interview process, in which participants take the photos, that distinguishes the photo interview method from other research approaches using photos. The method applied by the author and described in this article builds on the work of Ulf WUGGENIG, who used the photo interview method in a participatory way as part of a larger sociological study of people's lifestyles (WUGGENIG, 1990). In conducting a survey of people's living rooms, WUGGENIG gave his respondents an "instant" camera ("Sofortbildkamera"). He asked them to take photos of important objects and artefacts in their living room and interviewed them immediately after. WUGGENIG called this photo interview process "Fotobefragung" and emphasised the active role of the respondents in his research, in which the respondents—not the researcher—chose what to photograph. In giving cameras to his research respondents, WUGGENIG

introduced a new approach in social science research. WUGGENIG's approach, however, built on previous research practice, in which anthropologists and ethnographers used photographs to document and observe unknown cultures (MEAD & BATESON, 1942). A first shift in the use of photos occurred when the anthropologist John COLLIER (COLLIER & COLLIER, 1991) used photos as prompts in interviews intended to explore changes occurring in the lives and environment of French Canadians in the 1950s. For COLLIER's study, a professional photographer took pictures of local living situations, and interviewees used the photos to introduce and explain their lives. COLLIER found that using photos as prompts helped to stimulate respondent communication and memory in the interview situation. Douglas HARPER introduced the use of photos in his sociological study of material and folk culture entitled "working knowledge" (HARPER, 1987). HARPER began his study of a mechanic living and working in a remote rural area by taking photos of the mechanic as he worked and recording field notes. HARPER then discussed his photos with the mechanic in order to understand his way of thinking and working. The photos were a useful tool for studying the respondent's social situation, perspective, and skills over time. "The goal of the research was to share Willie's perspective. It is a gradual and incomplete process, now ten years long and not over yet" (HARPER, 1987, p.12). HARPER's study provides an important and meaningful example for visual sociology. As with the work of John COLLIER, a major difference between HARPER's method and that employed by the author is the role of the participant. For both COLLIER and HARPER's studies, interviewees reviewed photos taken by professionals or researchers. With the participatory photo interview method, however, respondents are both photographer and interviewee. [6]

My own use of photos in research has refined over time. I first used photo interviews to document advertisements in public spaces when research participants took photos of advertisements on billboards they liked or found interesting. There I studied participant's reception and coding of photos (KOLB, 1993). Secondly, when studying day-to-day approaches and personal concepts of health I gave cameras to my participants in order to document their orientations towards personal concepts of illness and health. The results of the study showed the broad range of health perspectives—from personal social networks, hospitals, health care organisations, to nourishment, healthy products and addressing the "foreign" language of medical science (KOLB, 2001). Interestingly, the method seemed to bring about a shift in some of my participants' personal orientations, from a focus on illness to a focus on health. More recently, as described under the SUCCESS and HAMMAM studies, I have used photo interview in a participatory research setting, to give local residents a voice in a scientific process. The participatory photo interview in these studies has been useful on several levels, to 1) support sustainability of the research, 2) overcome the complex challenge of resolving both natural and social science problems, 3) integrate local knowledge in the scientific process, and 4) activate local people to participate in working towards a common future. The photo interview allows the research discussion to start with real places and real experiences (DUMREICHER & KOLB, 2006, 2008b). At the same time, visual data prove useful for envisioning and speaking about possible, desired futures. As

participants "audience" (ROSE, 2007) their images for each other and for researchers, they begin a cognitive process of developing and expressing their ideas, feelings, and concerns. [7]

2.2 Phases of the photo interview

Based on practical experience using the method in different cultural settings, I suggest that a common structure for an effective photo interview process with four phases has emerged. In the first or *opening* phase*,* researchers invite photo interview respondents to consider a general research question and consider how to take photos that reflect their viewpoint on the question. The *opening* phase starts a cognitive process on the part of respondents as they reflect on the influence or meaningfulness of the scientific question for their own life concepts and experiences. In the second or *active photo shooting* phase, participants implement their reflections by taking photos of specific subjects in their social and material surroundings—for example, places, buildings, people, social networks or local activities and businesses that relate to the research question and are meaningful to them. In the third or *decoding* phase*,* participants consider their photos and verbalise their thinking in an interview with a researcher and, when desired or culturally appropriate, in collaboration with other participants also. The final or *analytical scientific interpretation* phase involves researchers analysing the data—photos, interview transcripts, and observations—generated by the first three phases of the photo interview. The following sections provide a more detailed discussion of the photo interview's phases. [8]

3. Involving Respondents into a Scientific Research Activity

The self-generated aspect of photos in participatory photo interviews has important implications for photo production, photo topics, and other technical aspects of photographs used in research on local conditions and perspectives. Photo interview allows residents to contribute their ideas and social constructs to a research process in a deeper way than is possible with other methods of social research. Usually in social research and also in qualitative methods researchers are responsible for determining the research questions, but with the photo interview, interviewees can establish or add new themes to the research questions from their point of view. Thus, respondents play an active role in designing the research effort as they interpret the research question and bring in their ideas and their existing local knowledge, e.g. about a region, neighbourhood or village, into the scientific research process. Photo interview respondents are not "research subjects" but rather active participants as they consider the research question and identify issues and topics of interest to themselves and their community. Respondents become partners with social scientists as they ask for explanations, feedback, and information. In turn, researchers have a responsibility to recruit participants who are willing to take an active role in supporting the research by taking photos and becoming engaged in a discussion and reflection process that can take several weeks or longer. Experience shows that a key factor in successful recruitment is to take as long as needed to explain and discuss the aims of research with potential participants in a detailed,

participatory manner. It is during the *opening* phase that participants decide to commit to taking an active role in the study. Often participants want more information about the study than may have been anticipated—for example, they want to know the aim of the study, what to take photos of, possible topics for discussion, and the potential contributions of their ideas and efforts. Often participants ask about how their own ideas can align with the proposed research question and the aim of the research. [9]

The involvement process continues during the *active photo shooting* phase, when participants begin to enter their social field and take photos of their environment without control or influence from the research team. During this phase, the perspective of the outside research team moves to the background as participants use cameras to capture their ideas and determine relevant issues from their perspectives. In my experience, the technical aspect of taking photographs can be an important influence on participant willingness to commit to taking part in the research and promoting the research activity among other residents and potential participants. Simple technical training related to taking photos is an important precondition to successful participation, as respondents use the technical instrument of the camera to become observers of their community and lives. The cultural setting is an important determinant in the type of camera to use. For example, in a remote area like a village in rural China, using disposable cameras are practical for participants who have limited experience with modern technology. Further, the cost of these cameras is low, and there is little harm if they are lost. In urban areas, however, respondents may prefer to use personal digital cameras, and may own a camera already. [10]

3.1 Participant engagement

During the *active photo shooting* phase, respondents continue to reflect on the research question and often discuss it with family and friends. Participants' *tacit knowledge*[4] about an issue emerges as they go through a process of visualising the issue and producing images. Photo respondents often find this phase empowering as they make their perspectives explicit in their photos as they engage in a very personal way in the research question, and think about how it matters in their lives and communities. Participants often gain new insights into their lives and reality as they reflect on their subjective situation from a different point of view, through the lens of the camera. They become researchers of their own culture, lives, homes, neighbourhoods, and villages as they take photos for the photo interview and speak about their photos in their own words. The process appears to encourage participant ownership of the problem or question at hand and initiate a process of role transformation—from resident to advocate. During the interview, when participants discuss their photos, their photo taking strategies and processes are often an important part of their narration and may reflect participants sense of engagement and empowerment in the research process. Although the use of the photo interview is not intended to be an empowerment tool, it starts a process where people take on a more active role in their social

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4   In sustainability research tacit knowledge is seen as non scientific knowledge, added to scientific knowledge, valuable to find local solutions for stakeholders (NICOLINI, 2001).

environment. For example, as related by a participant in a project to uncover local views of health and illness: "The poster was fascinating, it was so big and, as I told you, I was really running after this poster" [Na das Plakat hat mich irgendwie fasziniert, weil das so schön groß war, wie g'sagt, und dem bin ich wirklich nachgelaufen"] (KOLB, 2001, photo interview 02, p8/2-3). In this quotation the research participant described the effort to take the photo, while reflecting on the motif of the photo. During the interview the activity of photo taking—the *active photo shooting* phase—became part of the narration. [11]

3.2 Involving disadvantaged groups

An important advantage of the photo interview method is its ability to engage and improve communication with participants from disadvantaged groups, particularly the elderly, children, and those who are illiterate or have little education. Mutual engagement by social scientists and local residents as they discuss participant photographs results in a levelling of the power imbalance between researchers and participants. To facilitate a levelling of the inherent power imbalance, it may be useful to support elderly persons in the photo taking process because of eye maladies, as regarding an image can be a problematic issue for elderly. The benefits are rich data as the elderly tell stories and give narrations. The opposite challenge arises when working with children, who take interesting photos, but do not always speak at length about their selections. When inspired to speak, how-ever, they may speak more openly about topics that adults may not feel comfort-able talking about, in part due to fear of action by government authorities. An example of a photo and narrative by a child, approximately 10 years old, follows.

Photo 3: HAMMAM, Damascus, Syria / Photo interview 04: House of a friend, who left the neighbourhood [12]

"This is the house of my friend. At the moment they left their house. They moved into another house. I don't know where, but I think over the (main) street" (Photo interview 04, p3/4-5). The topic of a new street through the quarter was causing

feelings of fear to all residents of the neighbourhood within the HAMMAM neighbourhood study in Damascus, but was addressed by participating children. [13]

3.3 Representatives for the community

Often participants are well aware that they are acting as representatives for the whole community. In order to engage the larger community, photo interview projects can serve as a starting point for a common learning process within the whole community. Once participants are introduced to the idea and process of research, they are often interested in continuing to participate in the wider research process, for example, joining workshops that invite the whole community to review and discuss data and information on local experiences, values, and hopes produced through photo interview or participatory workshops with residents. Wider participation of community residents begins when the active photo-taking phase is complete. It is in the outreach phase that the *photo interview* intersects with the *photo voice*, a participatory needs-assessment method developed by Caroline WANG to engage local rural women in determining local funding priorities for a new health care system in China.

> "Photo voice can be a tool to reach, inform, and organize community members, enabling them to prioritize their concerns and discuss problems and solutions. Photo voice goes beyond the conventional role of needs assessment by inviting people to become advocates for their own and their community's well-being" (WANG & BURRIS, 1997, p.373). [14]

As with the photo interview, participants in photo voice take an active part in a study as photographers. For photo voice, WANG and BURRIS identify three project phases: "Selecting (choosing those photographs that most accurately reflect the community's needs and assets; contextualising (telling stories about what photographs means), and codifying (identifying those issues, themes or theories that emerge" (WANG & BURRIS, 1997, p.380). [15]

Participation by the larger community is an important aspect of the photo interview. For example, the SUCCESS study used the generated visual material for community activities such as a *"*public presentation" and exhibition (KOLB, 2007) alongside findings from scientific observations and investigations, and residents, stakeholders, and scientists discussed together the participant-generated and researcher-generated data. These and other types of outreach and community involvement efforts support learning on several levels: they build the individual capacity of villagers for example as they began to learn English, and they developed their own local cultural activities e.g. preparing a welcome ceremony for foreign researchers with dancing and drumming. The study of SUCCESS was often the initial activity in the village and within the "small projects" villagers' capabilities were empowered to find local solutions for local environmental problems or common desires (MARSCHALEK, 2008). [16]

4. Sharing Knowledge—Producing Common Knowledge

4.1 Decoding visual information

The reception of photos and images is highly influenced by the local culture of a society, which provides conventions for understanding how audiences *decode* an image (ECO, 1991, p.195). Several factors—the contemporary visual culture, the historical cultural experience of a society, and local cultural methods of decoding images, as well as cultural capital (BOURDIEU, 1991) and technological developments—influence local participant as well as research scientist understandings of images and visual messages generated through photo interview. Members of societies learn through their cultural socialisation to understand and interpret visual information. This understanding enables participants in transdisciplinary studies using the photo interview method to decode images just as they do already with images in media, such as newspapers or television, and feel that they are members in a common societal communication process. Respondents in cultural settings as diverse as Vienna, Damascus, Cairo and China have been able to use their cultural knowledge to code—*in taking photos*—and decode—*narratively in the interview*—visual images during the photo interview. The current global capability to use visual information is an important factor contributing to the use and value of the photo interview.

Photo 4: HAMMAM, Ankara, Turkey / Photo Bettina KOLB: Respondents discussing photos [17]

4.2 Starting the dialogue

After the participatory phase of taking the photo, the phase of *decoding* the visual information begins. Participants take on an expert role in this phase as they describe their photos and initiate a dialogue between respondent and researcher. The photo influences the interview situation as an impulse to speak: for the set-ting of the photo interview, the photo is a helpful tool to motivate the respondents

to participate in the interview (WUGGENIG, 1990). The *decoding* phase opens up a new level of engagement between respondents and researcher. Participants describe their photos in their own words, in a non scientific language and the researcher encourages them to speak about their personal values. This phase establishes dialogue and trust, and the researcher encourages participants to argue for their viewpoint. Ideally, the photo interview promotes mutual learning by both scientists and residents in a conversation between equals. During this phase respondents introduce the researcher to their world through their photos and give their verbal explanations of the images (KOLB, 2007). Thus the photo interview is an important moment of interpretation and understanding, when the respondent explains and makes explicit his or her intention in capturing the image and recounts a first interpretation of it. It is not always possible to discuss all photos taken by a respondent. I recommend that respondents take responsibility for selecting which photos to discuss in the interview, as this allows them to frame the situation, determine the order of topics to be discussed, and feel valued for their work. The photos thematically guide the interview. The researcher should encourage respondents to speak freely about their photos and encourage storytelling of an episodic nature (KOLB, 2001). To complete his or her understanding, the researcher should ask questions. Sometimes photos are discussed with a group of participants or with several interview partners. The conversation permits scientists and participants to build a common knowledge about the research questions and the situation being shown in the photos. This common knowledge includes both scientists and local resident-experts, thus embedding the research results in a civil society process that may improve implementation and sustainability of any potential solutions or actions suggested by the research. Thus the photo interview is well suited to fit within a sustainability and environmental research and development endeavour. [18]

4.3 Sharing a common reality—a common learning process

Participating in a photo interview starts a communication and learning process and an exchange of knowledge. Discussing the visual material in the photo interview creates a new role for the interviewee, as he or she shares expertise about the life or environmental situation of interest to the researcher. The photo interview discussion makes dialogue between researcher and respondents more "symmetrical", an important characteristic of the photo interview (WUGGENIG, 1990, p.112). Researchers learn from respondents and photo interview participants take on the role of experts as they appraise their lives and communities. In such a research process, the researcher needs to be open for new insights that he or she did not expect. The following photo is an example of an unexpected topic in the hammam case study in Fez. The photo shows a place hardly seen by tourists and researchers, but shown and discussed during several photo interviews: the location where garbage is dumped in the river bed. In a hot climate like Fez, the garbage rots quickly and the smell is strong; residents complained about this problem and wanted to solve it.

Photo 5: HAMMAM, Fez, Morocco / Photo interview 01: Garbage in the river bed [19]

Photo interviews in the HAMMAM study often raised the question of waste management especially when considering the future of the hammam; thus, the project consortium had to consider this matter within their future scenarios for the hammam neighbourhood. Before studying in the hammams neighbourhood with photo interview, researchers had not anticipated discussing environmental and waste management in the town. The visual representation of the community provided by respondents provided an opportunity for scientists to look through the lens of respondents and learn about residents' day-to-day issues, and their local qualities and potentials. Within a framework of transdisciplinary research, when scientists work together with stakeholders or governments, the photo interview can bridge the gap between non-scientific and scientific persons, between governmental experts and non-governmental local residents. [20]

4.4 New information on the photo

Valuable features of a photo are its ability to balance the power dynamic between respondents and researchers and introduce new topics as respondents and researchers examine the photo intensively together. New information and new aspects of the photo *emerge and become visible*, for the photographer as well as the researcher (WUGGENIG, 1990, p.112). By looking at the photograph very carefully during this phase, new details appear that were not noticed or taken into account by the photographer in the moment of shooting the photo. In an example from the HAMMAM study, a participant and researcher began to discuss a photo showing a little boy about five years old, explaining that he is her friend. The boy was standing in front of a house, but the respondent did not mention the house or its function at first. However, in describing and discussion the situation in the photo, the respondent noted the function of the house: a public toilet for men. The respondent explained that there was no such house for women and that she wished there were. Women working in nearby shops had to make individual agreements with familiar families to go to toilet in neighbouring houses. The fact

that the boy was standing in front of a building initiated a discussion about the function of the building and brought up a problem that would not otherwise have been discussed with a foreign female researcher. Nevertheless this unintended occurrence was a valuable contribution to the overall understanding of the social situation within the neighbourhood of the hammam. [21]

4.5 Standpoint of the photographer

Experience shows that participants are very engaged in the research process while taking the photos. In the *active photo shooting* phase participants are acting freely on their own and are not observed by the researcher. They act within their social environment with its own rules and normative behaviours, outside the purview of the researcher. It is through the perspective of the photographer that the scientist perceives social activity, thus illuminating both the perspective of the photographer and the action before the camera. REICHERTZ suggests differentiating the action in front of the camera ("Handlung vor der Kamera") and action with the camera ("Kamerahandlung") (REICHERTZ, 1994). The action in front of the camera is this activity which is seen in the image. In the following example, it is the hand and figure of a young man. The action with the camera shows the point of view of the photographer—both from a technical and an action standpoint—taking a photo. In the example that follows, the photographer went outside of the village to the edge of the settlement to take his photo. While walking, he met other village dwellers coming from the fields and took a photo of the young man seen below.

Photo 6: SUCCESS, Xia Futou, VR China / Photo interview 02: Walk into young man [22]

Analysing the point of view and action in front of the camera, the researcher's interest is focused on a specific group of village residents: young men. In the SUCCESS case study of the village Xia Futou, young men had a problematic living situation within the village community. In several photo interviews, young men were visible in photos but did not appear to have any explicit tasks or roles in their community. In effect, the young man in the photo was communicating with

the photographer and acting in front of the camera as if to say "hello" and "here we are". He was asking the photographer and by implication the research team not to forget to study also the situation of young men within the community as a whole. Another clear example of point of view and action on the part of a participant photographer arose in the hammam study in Cairo. The photographer chose to visit only the locations that were acceptable places for women. In her and her family's opinion, Islamic women should only be in private areas of homes, not out in public areas. Thus, her photo interview provided the female researcher with insights about where Islamic women are allowed to go without breaking the rules. The following example shows the perspective of a young female photographer, and a daily view[5] from the balcony to the public street.

Photo 7: HAMMAM, Cairo, Egypt / Photo interview 05: View on the street [23]

Experience from several photo interview studies shows that taking a photo is a serious and important moment for the participants. In the interview, they often report why they went to a specific place and reveal their motivation as they describe the distance or other challenges they may have had to overcome in taking a photo. By analysing the perspective of the photos, one can reconstruct a certain way of walking within the neighbourhood and see the photos as a documentation of the photo taking process. The order of images on the film shows the sequence of places visited by participants. Locations become visible within a photo; and persons, their social network, and their situations are integrated by the photographer and made visible through his or her lens. The point of view of the photographer tells its own story. During the photo interview it can be useful to have a map of the neighbourhood on hand for pointing out the

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5   The sociologist Fatima MERNISSI born in Fez 1940 describes and analyses the life of women in the harem inside the houses, in their rooms, terraces and courtyards, in the period when she was growing up in this specific female world (MERNISSI, 1994). She is showing in her work, that women in Islamic culture life in a specific "women's life", accompanied with a specific view on the world, protected from the men's world outside the houses on the street. Women were not allowed to leave the house of their own, but only accompanied by a male relative. MERNISSI describes different rituals, dominating the female life: the story telling on the terraces, the visits in the hammam, the family meetings and the wish of her mother and grandmother to develop the daughter's life with education and self-determination.

location of the places visited or noting the perspective from which the photos were taken to enhance the photo interpretation phase[6]. [24]

5. Analysing Photo Interview Material

Different disciplines approach the task of analysing photo material from different perspectives. The geographer and visual researcher Gillian ROSE suggests analysing three aspects of visual images: "the production of images, the image itself and the audience" (ROSE, 2007, p.13), a distinction that brings out several strategies for visual interpretation. In sociological research, images and photos become a database of visual and social data. Other disciplines, including history of photography (KOSCHATZKY, 1984), art history (PANOFSKY, 2006), philosophy (SONTAG, 1980, BARTHES, 1985), and semiotics (ECO, 1991), assess the qualities and characteristics of images and have developed strategies to bring images into their disciplinary research context. With semiotics, images become representations and elements of a cultural expression (ECO, 1991). In English-speaking countries, visual data are commonly seen as representations of the current media and society and ripe material for sociological analysis of society and the media. In other European countries, such as France, Germany and Austria, using photos for sociological interpretation is increasingly accepted but the use of visual material is still unusual in academic research. However, within a qualitative paradigm worldwide, more and more examples of visual studies can be seen, for example in hermeneutical interpretation of photos from the Second World War (HAUPERT, 1994) or in analysing visual messages within the societal context of advertising (ENGLISCH, 1991; REICHERTZ, 1994). Aside from these rare examples, questions remain concerning how images should be framed, either with methods of observation or interpretation (BOHNSACK, 2007; MÜLLER-DOOHM, 1997; SOEFFNER, 1989). [25]

5.1 Image production or involving participants

In analysing the photo interview, visual and interview data has two distinct aspects: the process of image production and the photo and text material. In the photo production process, participants contribute to the overall research question and present their individual subjective viewpoint, visible in the photo content and also in the image's technical aspects, for example, the photographer's point of view or perspective. The photographer's point of view reveals a social process and tells a story about the person who is taking the photo, within the larger context of the participatory photo interview process of several respondents who are taking photos for the study. Thus, researchers may have a great number of photos to analyse and consider. A useful and even necessary first step in the analysis involves classifying photos from all participants into "specific" groups, categories, or themes of photos, irrespective of photographer. All the photos taken by participants can be seen as respondent answers to the research questions. Categories for codifying the visual material should emerge from the empirical date of the field work bearing in mind that photos are response. [26]

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6   First experiences with showing standpoints and reference points on a map were positive.

The HAMMAM study provides an interesting example of categorising photographic data. For this study, researchers focused on a sociologically relevant reading that considered the spatial and societal frame of the photo, the social activity depicted, and the photo taking process. The process of analysis used is distinct from other visual sociological approaches where images e.g. advertisements, photos in newspapers and electronic media, have been produced in societal daily life and are used as representative data material. Thus, photo interview again emphasises the active role of the participants and the participatory aspect of the method in the analysis as well as the data generation phases. In analysing the production context of the visual data produced for a photo interview study, researchers can understand participants' different approaches to answering the research question and showing what matters in their community. The process of taking photos is a socio-cultural activity and an intervention by participants into a social sphere as they explore the research question and participate in the study. Thus, image production is part of the research and belongs to the participatory part of the scientific setting. Participants are researchers within their social situation as they explore their daily life and reveal their attitudes and the attitudes of their milieu within a certain cultural framework. Photos are "supporting" research (ROSE, 2007, p.239) and the production processes that resulted in the photos are also data presenting a socio-cultural situation. Thus, visual data and their production processes provide important cultural information and illustrate participants' and communities' wider ethnographic and societal approaches, as suggested by Paul Atkinson,

> "There are many social phenomena that can and should be analysed in terms of their appearance and performances that may be captured in visual terms. These are not, however, separable from the social settings in which such phenomena are generated and interpreted. They should not be explored purely as 'visual' topics, but as integral to a wide variety of ethnographic projects" (ATKINSON, 2005, par.16). [27]

Another analysis strategy is to examine the content of the photos, a step which emphasises photo motifs (ROSE, 2007, p.59) as representations of a specific local spatial situation. For example in the HAMMAM study, where the neighbourhoods of six different working hammam were observed as part of the social and spatial framework of the hammam itself, photos from several different locations showed similar topics, e.g. abandoned houses and neglected places, sites or renovated houses. The empirical material suggested classification of the photos into several categories: 1) sites and famous places from a visitor's or tourist's perspective; 2) single renovated buildings, mostly shown as an example of good practice in taking care of the neighbourhood; 3) lively places like shops and the markets; and 4) neglected places, often ruined or abandoned buildings in the neighbourhood. The following table provides a list of the photos taken for the study of the neighbourhood of the hammam in Constantine (Algeria) grouped in the four categories described above[7]. The table shows the number of photos taken per category and provides a summary of photo content.

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7   HAMMAM: Data Report of the hammam in Fez and Constantine, WP S: Social Aspects: Socio-cultural patterns in the hammam and its neighbourhood, Heidi DUMREICHER, Bettina KOLB, Deliverable 10, unpublished internal report, 2008.

Number of photos	Category	Contents of the photos
3	Sights, famous places	Several photos from the bridge and the valley of Constantine (see also Photo 8 in this article)
1	Renovated buildings	Photo of a renovated building, white and blue painted with balconies in the medina
9	Shops, on the market	2 photos from a shop (jewellery, wedding dresses) 2 photos women shopping clothes on the market 2 photos pedestrians peasants 3 photos view from a window to the street
1	Ruined buildings	One photo showing a ruined house with a broken roof. Aside there is an open space where the empty walls show that there *has been* a house

Table 1: HAMMAM, Constantine, neighbourhood categories [28]

Grouping the photos provides an overview of the visual data and clues to answering research questions concerning places and activities in the neighbourhood. The photos' contents contribute to an understanding of the problems and challenges the neighbourhood and town face on a daily basis. Similarities among the photos could be seen in the places depicted, their visual content or the story that the photo was telling. For the hammam study content analysis provided valuable input to the interdisciplinary case study research, as the analysis provided a picture of the actual situation of the hammam neighbourhoods and became a basis for envisioning future scenarios. The photos depicted both positive and negative potential in the neighbourhood as seen from the perspective of its residents, and showed the connectivity among places within the hammam and its spatial situation in the urban neighbourhoods in a certain socio-cultural setting. Thus, in this research context, the material of the photo interview study can be analysed as a "mirror of activities", where places of positive or negative attitudes are shown to me as a researcher. Starting with an empirical description of the photos, I then connected the spatial places with the "seven fields of encounter", a theoretical concept of a socio-cultural and spatial conjunctions (DUMREICHER & KOLB, 2006). Using this theoretical approach, I could define the embedded nature of the hammam within the larger city space, and could develop possible future scenarios for the hammam and its neighbourhood grounded in the topics depicted and described by neighbourhood residents. [29]

5.2 Audiencing the photo and sharing information

The data—photo and text—generated by the photo interview process has a dense and holistic character and is produced with a logical and emotional motivation to communicate a specific topic to the researcher. This motivation is explained in the interview situation, when participants give a narrative of the photos, a certain way of "*reading*" and decoding the image. Within the photo interview the respondent and photographer describe what the image represents and what the photographer intended to show. The delicate question of the objective content of the photo is postponed. The respondent organises what to think about the photo and expresses a subjective reading of the image within the context of the photo interview. Generally, the photo is considered as valuable material for research, embedded in a research process centred on a question that matters both to the researchers and to the participants. The narration becomes a first interpretation by the participant as he or she explains the motivation for taking the photo. The first interpretation can be seen as kind of "*participants' reading*", and becomes a foundation for common knowledge between researcher and participant. Ideally the interview produces an autonomous reading of the photo that supports the respondent's conception of world. In a further step this reading by the respondent can be augmented by an additional reading, by the researcher. [30]

In the photo interview participants select photos and give detailed and reflective explanations. This selection process shows the value of the data material and can create a sense of ownership, interest and personal engagement by respondents. The interview gives a first interpretation of the photos from the participants, a verbal statement for photos, or a narrative within the conversation. Sometimes it explains a hidden feeling or concern, details of social life become evident. Sometimes valuable information and details of social life become visible by chance, when the interviewer and researcher can work with the visual material of the photos in the interview. In a process of co-creation participant and researcher are "audiencing" the photo and follow their specific subjective images and concerns. In the following example Miriam (name changed) explains the photo she has taken from the famous bridge in Constantine (see next paragraph photo Constantine *Sidi M'Cid* Bridge). While audiencing the photo Miriam speaks about the possibility of leaving the city:

> "If I would leave Constantine, I would not take in my head but—she shows the photo —I would not remember anything … I would not remember anything… this is Constantine for me, the bridge and the rock, this big rock, I don't know" (Photo interview 01, p2/2). [31]

In a first interpretation one can say that Miriam is thinking about leaving the town. Within her daily life leaving the city is an everyday situation because she works outside the city. But what remains from her home town when she leaves it for a longer period? She starts to think about the possibility of leaving and how she would feel. She holds the idea of leaving in her mind as a possibility or a threat. If she really did leave, she says that the rock and the bridge would be the main

elements that she would always carry along in her mind. She does not show the Medina on her photo; rather she shows the natural side of the city, the famous access to the medina which, even by being absent from the photo, is still the mental centre of the town. With the repeated "I don't know" she shows that she is following a stream of thoughts that is not easy to follow and even less to express: Should she really think of leaving this town? Yet contemplating this possible future helps her to identify what is relevant for her in the moment of the interview. [32]

The photo interview method invites participants to talk about feelings and concerns using the photos as stimuli. During the interview participants often speak in a narrative way, but also using short phrases that reveal serious intentions and conflicts. With Miriam's example, her fears and desires related to leaving the town are revealed, and the discussion opens up a latent research question of the overall HAMMAM study. Residents of the hammam neighbourhood and clients of the hammam were reflecting the possibilities of the "modern" life facilities and the "old" ones. Respondents mentioned the medina and the hammam as tied to the "old" ones, while they seemed to see life in a modern surrounding as personally desirable. But what is behind the complicated interdependency between old and modern features of the hammam for the everyday life of its residents? The Algerian case study in Constantine contributed insights to answer this question by providing an interesting example of how the modern features of the hammam are part of the city's colonial history. As is apparent in the description of the following photo as well as comments made by the participant during the interview and researcher observations made during the field work, a comprehensive picture of residents' values and appreciation for the city become evident. [33]

5.3 The image itself—scientist's reading

Focusing on the image itself, its subjects and motifs, is an essential aspect of exploring patterns and social constructions within a sociological analysis. The scientist's reading or "audiencing" of the image in turn also provides a valuable resource for understanding the cultural content of the photo expressed in visual codes. A photo itself is meaningful for the photographer in a way that is not always explicit to other audiences (BECKER, 1974). Thus the first and essential step in the scientist's interpretation is to communicate the "content" of an image for a scientific audience. One task is to list the main contents of the image; this "fixing" of the photo identifies the visual content that the researcher is able to read and understand and becomes the basis for further interpretation. There are many ways of understanding an image (ROSE, 2007), but a description is necessary to point out how the researcher is "reading" or "audiencing" the image and understanding its visual content. This task is a question of communication and fixing the content for the audience and is not an ontological or philosophical question concerning the reality revealed in the photo. Fixing the content provides a guide for any observer of the photo to begin to read it and forms the basis for the scientific interpretation. Following scientists who work with visual material; it seems that a formal description of the visual content is helpful (BOHNSACK, 2007; ROSE, 2007). For the hammam project, the initial step in establishing a

"scientific reading" of the photos involved formally describing the contents of the photo as fixed in three of the image's sectors: front (sector 1), middle (sector 2), and back (sector 3).

Photo 8: HAMMAM, Constantine, Algeria / Photo interview 01: Sidi M'Cid Bridge [34]

The photo shows a valley built of rocks, a natural crossover and a bridge connecting the two sides of the rocks. On the photo one can distinguish three main elements: In the front (sector 1) the rocks of the valley are shown with the natural crossover between the two sides, the water of the river and the river beds. Walls built from the water, straight walls of lime, falling straight into the valley. The rocks are without vegetation, in the river bed as well as on the left side of the rocks, one can see a tree. In the middle part (sector 2) of the picture, the further valley can be seen, more and more green plants ending up in white modern build-ings in the back. A bridge with two arches crosses the valley in the background, for a familiar observer, the *Sidi M'Cid* bridge of Constantine. On the left side the street becomes visible with a white car and the street lamp. The third part (sector

3) of the picture is a white plane separated in two parts by a dark line— the bridge. On the rope bridge, three cars are crossing the valley. The bridge is nearly in the sector of the golden ratio, and accomplishes the natural window of rocks in the middle in a symmetric replication. The description forms the basis for the next step: an analytical interpretation of the visual contents of the photo within its cultural and historical background, a process which embeds the photo's content in its context and reveals the deeper story told by the photo. In a sort of cultural reading this analytical step explores the images, cultural connotations, historical experiences and societal qualities. The photo of the rocks and the valley shows a fascinating unique natural situation, the characteristic ravine of Constantine, dividing the town into two parts. This unique scenery defines the local area with is natural environment, in case of Constantine the lime rock. This natural scenery creates and establishes the unique local identity. And within the quotation of the local identity, one can say, that it is difficult to imagine how this photo was taken. The point of view of the photographer is interesting, and without local knowledge about the pathways, not possible to reproduce. From this perspective, it is not easy to understand how to gain access to the rocks. The photo talks also about the experience of the local residents as regards coping with the limestone. In addition to the historical development, which is also mentioned in this picture, it shows the daily local mobility required to use the pathways. This aspect considers the local historical experiences and strategies of local stakeholders in coping with this unique natural situation, but also with the power of the French colonial powers. The bridge on the photo was designed in 1908 by the French technician Ferdinand Arnodin, who was a specialist in designing suspension bridges[8]. The bridge was completed 1912 and has a main span of 164 meters. The bridge represents outsider knowledge, introduced by the occupying force. The photo raises the question, what human technical intervention can contribute to a future development of the place and the future life quality? The photo shows three elements, in a visual way: the central elements in sector 2 include the street built up in the rocks and the modern buildings, while the central element of sector 3 is the suspension bridge. The medina where residents live or work (the old place and quarter of the studied hammam) is not visible in this photo. Although the photo represents the conflict between the nature and technique or modernisation, the photo argues with the natural situation and the technical achievement of the bridge. It could be read as a positive connotation of the technical achievements, and it could tell about the pride of living in a natural setting of such beauty. Although the bridge is just a line on a photo—where nature dominates in terms of planes—the image has a very strong black and white contrast where the bridge is represented. The bridge is connecting two sides of the valley. The natural situation is successfully bridged through technical intervention. The bridge can be seen as a symbol of technique, and guarantees mobility, as a sign for movement and the possibility to leave the medina as a place on the rock—or else to reach the medina from the outside. Therefore the bridge could be read as a symbol of mobility and also of power and control. [35]

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8   For further information see http://www.constantine.free.fr/LaVille/pontsidimcid.htm [2007-06-19].

This part of the article has shown that interpreting the photo interview data requires interpreting visual data and the interview text together along with image production and the patterns revealed in the image. Viewing and analysing the visual, text, and field observation data together creates a holistic picture—in the presented example—of the hammam and the values, hopes, history, culture, and daily lives of its clients and residents of the hammam neighbourhood. In this example of the HAMMAM study the scientist's reading of the photo brings out the capacity of humans to apply technical expertise in a site whose natural elements are challenging. This analysis makes visible both historical strategies and the viewpoint of the photographer. The analysis reveals that technical achievements provide mobility through the challenging terrain while at the same time local residents have the daily experience of moving through the site by using pathways through the rocks. Considering information from the interview in conjunction with the image, we know that Miriam intended to communicate her daily task of leaving the city and coming back again. She talks about her decision to live in this city with all its problems and opportunities, and the possibility of leaving. Analysing all available data material together—from the topics revealed in all neighbourhood photos taken for the study to a detailed analysis of one photo, establishes useful empirical information about the hammam and its neighbourhood on which to base community development work and future efforts. [36]

6. Conclusion

The article explained the origin of the photo interview method and its development within sociological studies and showed how the participatory photo interview was successfully used in the inter- and transdisciplinary research setting of sustainability and environmental research. Within this work I showed the characteristics of this visual sociological method and presented examples of visual material and results of applied research, emphasising the participatory character of this method. Applying this visual method I suggest noticing three phases of the photo interview: involving, sharing and analysing within the interpretation of the data material. I explored the contributions of the phases to the research process and how scientists can consider the relevant insights and perspectives. For scientific analyses the data material of the photo interview—photos and text—show its qualities, because of the dense and holistic character and the several interpretation levels researchers can use. As shown, the method of photo interview has proven particularly useful within the specific setting of multicultural, inter- and transdisciplinary studies where scientific research aimed at contributing to a local participatory process. The participatory photo interview is a useful method of visual sociology to share results of social science with scientists from other academic disciplines, local stakeholders and respondents. The photos and visual materials intensify the communication between all research partners and the participatory photo interview process presents the point of view from respondents: from observed research objects to appreciate daily life experts. [37]

Acknowledgements

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