

# Adult training applied on disadvantaged groups; Participatory video as an educational and therapeutic tool

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**Abstract:** The specific subject examined in this paper presents a method through which it is attempted to provide adult instructors with a tool that allows the critical approach to certain issues by utilizing the aesthetic experience. This method is based on the process of presentation, guidance and discovery. The main working tool is films and videos. The use of video in these methods helps participants take on a variety of roles within the training group, such as being instructed by the instructor, running the trainer as a consultant, trainees working on their own, while also supporting an intellectual and cognitive process exploration and even in the form of a game. The Participatory video is an art form where through it a group or community create their own film. The result is that the derivative material from the participatory video becomes a powerful tool for documenting experience, needs, hopes, views, aspirations.

**Keywords:** method, aesthetic experience, guidance, participatory video, roles.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

All people have an inborn ability to be creative. The creative process is therapeutic. The object of expression provides considerable messages to the individual. However, the process of creation is the one that transforms us deeply. As we travel inward, we discover our relationship and connection with the outside world, in order to find our essence or our wholeness. The inside and the outside become one" (Psaltopoulou, 2005: 72) The therapist's intention is to highlight art as a means of expressing feelings, motivations, desires, and memories, as cause of communication, as a process of transition from the Self to the Other, from imagination to reality (Tzanakis, Tsourtou, 2007). Through the use of art, a potentially liberating relationship is created between two communicating subjects, between therapist and patient, between the I and the You, between the inner world of "unspoken" representations and the world of external conventions.

Through artistic creation, the individual regains a basic means of self-expression. He gains access to the symbolic representation of reality and through it, to the metamorphosis of reality. The recognition of the expressive potential of the individual is common in all of the various forms of art. (Drittas, Th. 2004). Through artistic creation, the subject communicates within and through a collective, which recognizes its responsibility and ability to function as a carrier of it (Tsjakkais, Tsjourtou, 2007). Another important approach to the role of art in the development of critical thinking was carried out by the Frankfurt School theorists, especially by Adorno and Horkheimer (1953 [1984], 1970 [2000]). In terms of the theoretical approach to the transformation of problematic perceptions through learning, Freire (1970, 1978) was the pioneer of adult education, who developed the concept of critical consciousness. Subsequently, Jack Mezirow, based on the processing of Freire's concept, developed from 1978 the transformative learning theory, which he defined as

the "process through which we transform problematic frames of reference (thought structures, cognitive habits, cognitive perspectives) - structures of assumptions and expectations - so as to make them more comprehensive, prominent, open, reflective, and emotionally receptive to change" (Mezirow, 2009, p. 92).

Another important approach to the role of art in the development of critical thinking was provided by the Frankfurt School scholars, particularly Adorno and Horkheimer (1953 [1984], 1970 [2000]). In the propositions of the Frankfurt School, the "theory of communicative action" formulated by Habermas (1984, 1987, 1990) holds a special position. This theory is based on the idea that society would function more creatively if the broad field of "world of life" was strengthened, that is, the informal traditions in which people meet and share their daily lives (family, social and voluntary organizations, cultural institutions, lifelong learning institutions). An essential element for the creative functioning of the "world of life" is to incorporate discursive processes, that is, a form of discourse that aims at forming consensus, which is based on mutual understanding and logical processing of human communication concepts (Kokkos A. 2005b).

Finally, Mezirow having as a precious source the work of Habermas, notes that the process of critical reflection in the context of transformative learning is connected to reflective discourse, which he defines as a "special form of dialogue that focuses on seeking common understanding and assessment of the justification of an interpretation or belief" (2007a, p. 50). And he adds: "This process involves evaluating the reasons, which arises both from examining the weight of supporting evidence and arguments and from examining alternative viewpoints. Reflective discourse also includes critical evaluation of assumptions" (in the same, p. 50). With his references to this discussion, which almost covers all of his texts, Mezirow completes the idea of how adult educators can coordinate educational processes that contribute to emancipation. (Kokkos A. 2005a).

In the special topic that we are examining in this text, a process is presented. This process is attempting to provide adult educators a tool that allows critical approach to topics through the exploitation of sensory experience. These methods are mainly: presentation, guidance, discovery. In these three methods, films and video are the main working tools. Additionally, they focus on the co-processing of topics both by the educator and the group of learners. The learners are guided to their goals through group work and activities, designed role-playing games and discussions. In this way, social relations and contacts are created. Communication is cultivated for personal relationships, the teaching pace is adapted/adjusted depending on the group, the flexibility of teaching is ensured, and the learner is on constant feedback. The use of video in these methods helps participants take on many different roles within the learning group. These roles may include; being guided by the trainer, the trainer functioning as a counselor, and working independently, while also supporting a process of intellectual and mental exploration in the form of a game. Through these methods, learners can practice skills and abilities, gain confidence and understanding in what they are learning, and promote communication and social relationships. These methods, especially when video is used, may limit to some extent the learner's autonomy to work alone, but at the same time they give him/them access to new knowledge, skills and directly or indirectly makes them involved in the learning process.

#### **The philosophy of the program is focused on:**

The vulnerable and marginalized adults are the target groups that need to participate in lifelong learning programs the most. Despite the efforts of many European Union countries to improve the skills of these population groups through their policy frameworks, numerous studies have shown that the worse the social situation of individuals is, the less likely they are to participate in lifelong learning programs.

This context signifies that adult education is a complex process for vulnerable groups: exclusion from education is a phenomenon, which is directly linked to exclusion from society. Measures are needed to facilitate access to lifelong learning education (incentives and empowerment of these groups to increase self-confidence and trust), and to provide basic skills, in which every kind of learning process is based on (personal and social skills as well as self management skills).

The technique that was followed in order to enhance lifelong learning in adults through the support of social skills was the participatory video method for disadvantaged individuals.

The idea behind this program is that the creation of a video by disadvantaged individuals themselves could be easy and accessible. Video is an extension of technology in teaching and learning, and is a way of bringing people closer in order to explore topics, to be empowered, to be activated in their own actions, and finally to present their own truth through their own eyes.

This method was selected because video is a powerful form of communication that allows the other party to use emotional characteristics at times, meaning, to appeal to emotion, and logical characteristics at other times, i.e., to appeal to reason. The video provides everybody the opportunity to communicate an idea to a broad audience, but at the same time is aesthetically appealing, has intelligent content, and has the power to inform about any potential dangers.

The creator always ensures that the text, sound, and image in the video are designed to be interesting and to attract the attention of the audience, to have the appropriate colors, and the appropriate soundtrack.

Therefore, when the creators are also the protagonists themselves, both the process and the result have different worth and meaning. The journey of the creators themselves up to the point of getting to the result has great value, and this is what gives the greatest satisfaction. The feeling that we have reached where we wanted, through effort, through perseverance, through challenges, and through all this we gained knowledge. The feeling that in the most important things in our lives, it is not the destination that is important, but the journey itself.

The purpose of the practice of this method is to mobilize and support weaker groups of the population in their reintegration into society. In order to achieve this result, the program is being experimented with a new educational method, a therapeutic method through art based on participatory video.

### **What is a participatory video?**

The general philosophy of participatory video programs is based on the fact that the video is accessible and approachable and a very effective way of bringing people together while exploring issues, concerns, reinforcing creativity, and helping to express stories.

This process is particularly empowering because it allows a group or a community to take ownership of their own initiatives to communicate or solve their problems, as well as to communicate their needs and ideas to decision-makers and/or other groups and communities.

Therefore, processes related to participatory video can be a very effective tool for attracting and mobilizing groups experiencing social exclusion and marginalization, and helping them to apply their own ideas and suggestions in their efforts to overcome stereotypes and prejudices.

In this method, individuals are trained by a specialized instructor and, with the support of him, they create a short film step by step to address issues that affect them and that could be dealt with, talk about their daily lives, and reveal their reality through their own eyes.

In participatory video, the stages of script writing, filming and sound recording, editing, narration, and subtitling are carried out by the team members themselves under the supervision of a specialized instructor.

In addition, it provides basic skills to disadvantaged individuals, both in their relationships and in their functioning, strengthening their ability to take care of their personal relationships and helping them adapt to their social environment. The method focuses on the concepts of spontaneity and creativity, role theory, the value of relationships and team behavior.

Spontaneity, and creativity are characteristics that define the participatory video method and reduce the feeling of anxiety and difficulty in expression.

Therefore, the proposed methodology leads to the possession, re-discovery, and establishment of relational communication skills, which are necessary for personal relationships that help people adapt or re-adapt to the social level. That is the level of self-development and self-actualization - personality development (thinking, feeling, behavior) and business and technical skills acquisition. Through this methodology the use of camera, video editing, etc is also promoted, alongside with the promotion of integration and reintegration into society. Personal development, social integration, thus fostering social establishment and active citizenship are also supported.

### **The research phase of participatory video in Greece.**

#### **-A retrospective on the evolution of participatory video in the world**

Towards the end of the 1950s, a new but complex form of art emerged in Europe and in the United States. Using many names such as "video art", "experimental video", "artists television", "new television" it used a wide range of artistic movements, theoretical ideas, technological achievements, and political and social activism as a source of inspiration. The

artists that worked with video at this time were especially influenced by the artistic movements and ideas of Fluxus, Performance Art, Body Art, Arte Povera, Pop Art, Conceptual Art, Minimalist sculpture, avant-garde music, experimental cinema, contemporary dance and theater, and a wide variety of heterogeneous cultural activities and theoretical ideas.

Since the arrival of video in the art world, it has been rapidly developed as an independent medium. From the 1960s to the 1990s, there was significant development in electronic and digital technology. This progress transformed video from an expensive, specialized tool exclusively for television, large organizations, and institutes, into a consumer good in the hands of artists. Video art thus became a global phenomenon. Video becomes a witness, a living memory that is integrated into action.

The first experiments related to participatory video were Don Snowden's work, a Canadian who took the lead in the idea of using media in order to enable the human-centric approach of community development. Moving on, the Head of Extension Department at Memorial University of Newfoundland, Snowden cooperated with director Colin Low and National Film Board of Canada's Challenge for Change program to apply his ideas in Fogo islands, a small fishermen's community. The villagers of the island, through watching movies of other people, realized that they shared plenty of the same problems, a lot of which could be solved through cooperation. This technique developed by Snowden became well-known as the *Fogo Process*. Snowden practiced *Fogo Process* in India in 1984 and all over the world throughout his whole lifetime.

The first film created totally by a community was in 1969 from "Challenge for Change video VTR St-Jacques" Body, and it was filmed in a poor neighborhood of Montreal. Instead of the directors Dorothy Henault and Bonnie Sherr Klein contribution, members of the community were trained in the video so as for their hard work on affordable and accessible healthcare to be representative. St-Jacques's work was presented all over Canada and USA, which resulted in motivation of more groups of people.

One of the first crucial books on participatory video was published in England in 1997 by Clive Robertson and Jackie Shaw, Directors of "Real Time Video" and has been a guide for plenty of subsequent books and articles. "Real Time" is an educational charity which first used a lot of the techniques and methodologies that are used up until today and have been applied in the participatory video sector from 1984.

Nowadays participatory video is used widely above the globe and has been applied to lots of different cases. Methods vary from expert to expert, some of them let the process be more open while others prefer guiding their topics. There is no particular way of applying the participatory video, apart from the fact that it is a product of a specific group of people and is created within a truly participatory and democratic process.

- **Retrospective on the history of participatory video in Greece**

In Greece there is no history in practicing participatory video programs, except for the practice of technical videos and more frequently of documentary-type of videos. Some facts regarding the development of these techniques are the following;

#### **Adult training and its relation to the video utilization**

In the 1980s there was an increase and specialization of programs that were working on adult training, prompted by the introduction of Greece in EEC. Public institutions are founded, with the exclusive subject matter of adult training and education. Concurrently new techniques are developed, with the form of goal reaching methods. One of these methods is the usage of pictures as a teaching way, considering that in this way the learning of the programs would be easier. The first tries are made with the inclusion of radio broadcasts and television shows (mainly focused on learning foreign languages) in public broadcasting organizations. The picture becomes rapidly mainstream, due to the fact that it has stronger power as a means of communication, which leads to the first television unit, "educational television" in an accessible hour to the audience. At the same time the usage of the video is gaining ground, as a teaching tool.

## **2. CONCLUSIONS**

Participatory video is an art form, through which a group of people or a community creates its own film. Its overall philosophy relies on the fact that the video is easy and accessible and it is a notable way of bringing people closer while it also explores topics, concerns, strengthens creativity and enhances story-narration. This process is thus considerably empowering, as it allows a group of people or a community both to take its own initiatives for communication or to solve

their problems and to communicate their needs and ideas to the decision-making bodies and/or to other groups and communities. On that account, processes that are related to participatory video can be a very effective tool on attracting and motivating groups of people that are experiencing exclusion and marginalization and helping them apply their ideas and suggestions, in their effort to overcome prejudices and stereotypes. The result is the product of the participatory video material becoming a strong tool that backs up experience, needs, hopes, opinions, expectations. Participatory video has the strength to give a voice and thus, a representation to the voices of those that usually are not heard and not seen and represented to others, while it can be a voice of marginalized groups.

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