Participatory Video and Empowerment:

The role of Participatory Video in enhancing the political capability of grass-roots communities in participatory development

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Abstract
This paper explores the potential of Participatory Video (PV) in enhancing the political capabilities of oppressed communities. PV works as a catalyst for groups to develop the power to interact and influence those bodies and institutions with power over. PV does so by supporting the creation of a Freirean dialogical process within the community which leads to collective action. Video breaks the illiteracy barrier and facilitates the access to the institutional and political framework.

For this process to happen, though, PV activities need to take into account the power relations (both between stakeholders and within the community) and need to be catalysed by a facilitator that is ready to be a co-learner of the process and aware of the local dynamics. This paper concludes that PV has indeed a great potential but that, as a one-time activity, the political spaces cannot be maintained over the long term. Instead, it is analysed whether permanent models of PV are able to maintain the political spaces. By analysing the case study of the Community Video Unit Samvad, in India, it is argued that, when made permanent, PV has a strong capacity to empower communities. The paper nevertheless highlights that any long term implementation strategies for PV need to consider three main challenges: sustainability, ownership and the definition of community.
1. Introduction

This paper analyses the potential of Participatory Video in empowering grassroots communities through the creation of political spaces. It is argued that Participatory Video (PV) can work as a catalyst for communities to use their voice and develop collective action to access those with power over (Braden 1998, White, 2003).

‘Empowerment’ and ‘participation’ have been labelled as easy to misuse words that can mask modernization discourses of development. This paper reviews this theoretical debate in an attempt to overcome any depoliticizing effect and base the analysis on the potential of video as a truly transformational tool that deals with the power relations in each context.

This paper will explore the process through which PV catalyses dialogue and collective action. As a participatory communication tool, it supports a dialogic process of Freirean conscientization, or it can be similarly used within a Participatory Research Action methodology (Melkote and Steeves, 2001).

The challenges of PV are also exposed. Particularly, this paper argues that the political spaces can hardly be maintained if the community is left without access to equipment once the project is finished. Alternatively, this dissertation explores the potential of a process-based long-term approach to PV, which generally takes the name of community video.

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1 The complexity of the concept ‘community’ will be highlighted in this paper. ‘Community’ is used here as a group of people who share common factors of oppression and poverty and lack the voice and power to overcome these obstacles. In many occasions they also share the same geographical space but this is not always the case. If the term ‘grassroots’ is used, it describes communities which lack the ‘power to’ influence the institutional framework. It does not intend to be used as a patronizing concept.

2 ‘Power over’ is used as per Nelson and Wright’s conceptualization of power (1995:9) developed in section 2.3

3 (Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Craig and Porter, 2007; Cleaver, 2001; Mosse, 2001; Nelson and Wright, 1995; Ferguson, 1994)

4 The name given can vary depending on the organization’s approach as detailed in section 4.3.
1.1. Research questions

This paper therefore attempts to answer the following questions:

1- Can participation in development be truly empowering rather than a depoliticizing mask and, if so, how do we define empowerment?

2- How does participatory communication lead to empowerment?

3- How does PV harness the empowering potential of participatory communication?

4- Is PV as a one-time activity really empowering if the political spaces created cannot be maintained over the long term?

5- Does community video, understood as a model that uses PV as a long term process and permanent tool for the community, solve the limitations of PV as a one-time activity?

1.2. Methodology

The following chapter focuses on a review of the theoretical debates around ‘participation’ and ‘empowerment’ since the 1990s. The aim is to answer question 1, and, therefore, clarify terms and scope on which to base the analysis of the empowering potential of PV.

Chapter 3 will contextualize PV within the framework of communication for development and, specifically, of participatory communication as an empowering tool. Freire’s pedagogy of the oppressed, Haberma’s Communicative Action Theory and, finally, Participatory Action research (PAR) will be developed to answer question 2.
and as key theoretical backgrounds for the potential of PV. Finally, the movement of 'theatre for the oppressed' will be highlighted as an antecessor of PV.

Chapter 4 describes PV and answers research questions 3, 4 and 5. To answer questions 3 and 4 it revises the literature on PV and briefly analyses three case studies. As for question 5, and due to the lack of extensive literature, it heavily draws on the collection of primary data\(^5\) through interviews and e-consultations to relevant practitioners and the analysis of internal documents of relevant projects and organisations. It focuses most part of the analysis in the case study of the Community Video Unit (CVU) Samvad, in India, through semi-structured interviews, the analysis of internal documents, and, finally, a process of participatory observation\(^6\).

The conclusions confirm the great potential of PV as a permanent tool\(^7\) but it also collects the challenges exposed throughout the paper, particularly concerning sustainability, the definition of community, and ownership. It finally offers recommendations for academics, practitioners and donors.

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\(^5\) See bibliography for detailed list of interviews and consultations
\(^6\) This was a 2 week process that included attendance to 3 meetings of the CVU (being one of them the Editorial Board meeting), observation during production processes, and participation in both a day screening and a night screening.
\(^7\) It will be argued that, as a permanent tool, PV is called in different ways (Community Video, People’s Video, etc.) and needs not be confused with local TV.
2. Development and Power

2.1. Participatory Development in context
Following the criticisms to both modernization and dependency theories, development was eventually declared dead by some authors. David Booth (1985) named this period as the 'impasse of development', as the existent theories were not providing sound arguments or solutions. From this impasse, a range of alternatives emerged. Development discourse started 'moving away from the preoccupation with economic growth toward a people-centred definition of development' (Nederveen, 1998:343). Chambers' influential work led the focus on participation of alternative development approaches.

The emergence of participation as a potential new paradigm (Chambers, 1997) has not been free of an intense debate between scholars. The debate lies on the broadness of the concept itself, which requires careful analysis when the focus of development is empowerment, as in this paper.

2.2. Participation and Power Relations

‘Holding out the possibility of emancipation, Modern Institutions at the same time create mechanisms of suppression, rather than actualisation, of the self.’
(Anthony Giddens in Craig and Porter, 1997:229)

During the 90s, there was a growing recognition of participatory processes being undertaken in a 'ritualistic' manner, resulting into manipulative processes that were harming those who were meant to be empowering (Cooke and Kothari, 2001:1).

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8 Chambers book published in 1983, ‘Rural Development: Putting the Last First’, is a key work in the early days of the participatory approach.
9 Post-developmentalists, like Escobar or Rahnema, rejected alternatives within development arguing that they would ‘remain within the same model of thought that produced development and kept it in place’ (Escobar 1995:222)
Cooke and Kothari’s work ‘Participation: the New Tyranny’ is a key piece within the debate on participatory processes. While recognising the potential of participation, it urges for the need to reflect on ‘the naivety of assumptions about the authenticity of motivations and behaviour in participatory processes’ (2001:14). Mosse questions Chambers’ argument by which ‘PRA-based focus on people’s knowledge has to provide a radical challenge to existing power structures (…)’. Mosse argues that participatory approaches have proved to be ‘compatible with top-down planning systems’. (2001:17). Practitioners in so-called participatory development projects are not passive facilitators but rather ‘shape and direct the process’, own the tools and choose the topics (p.19).

Stewart and Wang list different levels of participation. An information-sharing level would be the less empowering, and participation’s transformational capacity would increase as it scales up towards decision-making and control and initiation by stakeholders (2003:7).10

Nelson and Wright argue that the ‘participatory rhetoric of agencies is often at odds with their organizational structures’ and that while preaching bottom-up approaches, their structures and practice are very hierarchical (1995:14). Similarly, Craig and Porter argue that projects, organisations and professionals in participatory development ‘involve processes and practices which are primarily instruments of control, rather than participation’ (1997:229).

The range of critiques also point at the idealization of the ‘community’ as a natural, homogeneous and harmonic unified population (Cleaver, 2001:44; Nelson and Wright 1995). This view results into participatory practices that overlook power

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10 Mefalopulos’ typology of participation goes similarly as follows: passive participation, participation by consultation, functional participation and empowered participation (2008:11)
relations within the community, leaving the oppressed without voice and at the same place they are. Chambers’ distinction between ‘lowers’ and ‘uppers’ constructs a dichotomy by which participatory approaches simplify social and power relations that are highly complicated, and this can conceal inequalities and even reinforce them (Kothari, 2001:152). Ferguson’s renowned ‘anti-politics machine’ argument refers to this capacity of participatory approaches to strengthen existing elites and depoliticize development (Ferguson, 1990). Besides, it promotes a ‘localism and populism’ that does not really change existing structural constraints (Mohan, 2001: 163).

‘By homogenizing communities (…) participatory development both draws a veil over repressive structures (of gender, class, caste and ethnicity) operating at the micro-scale, and deflects attention away from wider power relationships (…)’ (Williams, 2004:93)

Scholars have tended to distinguish between participation-as-a-means and participation-as-an-end. As a means, power relations will remain unaltered as traditional authorities will be in charge of project design and management. As an end, participation ‘suggests a transformation in power relations between donor and recipient, with the latter empowered and liberated’ (Parfitt, 2004:539).

Slocum and Rocheleau refer to the perils of instrumentalism, putting as examples the promotion of local participation in the ‘design and construction of rural reforestation, water management or soil conservation structures that serve the interests of urban water supply authorities or electric power generators’ (1995:18).

This paper is concerned with a participation-as-an-end approach, which seeks to create political spaces for communities so that their voices can be heard and can
have an influence within the institutional system of society. The potential for empowerment of PV will be analysed on this theoretical basis that follows.

2.3. Empowerment or the repoliticization of participation

‘As ‘empowerment’ has become a buzzword in development, an essential objective of projects, its radical, challenging, transformative edge has been lost. The concept of action has become individualized, empowerment depoliticized’
(Cleaver, 2001:37)

As Cleaver points out in the quote above, the development industry has adopted this word but, too often, without taking the time to analyse what is meant by empowerment and how it is achieved. According to Nelson and Wright, power is a state in relationship to other individuals or groups within and between societies. The authors describe three models of ‘empowerment’.

(i)  
*Power to.* In this model, power is not a zero sum (one gains it at the expense of another) but an infinite quality that can be achieved by creating ‘more spaces of control’ in society (Giddens 1984 in Nelson and Wright, 1995:8). The first step involves ‘developing confidence (…) by undoing the effects of internalized oppression’¹¹ (1995:8). The second step consists of negotiating and influencing institutions and groups with power over, and the third step involves further collective action if major impact needs to be achieved.

¹¹ Note the influence of the process of conscientização in Freire’s ‘Pedagogy of the Oppressed’, further developed in section 3.3.1.
(ii) *Power over.* Power in this model allows a group to have access to the institutions themselves in order to have power over resources and decision-making.

(iii) *Decentred power.* This is a model introduced by Ferguson, with Foucauldian influence and which shares the views of post-developmentalists like Escobar. Power is not subject to individuals or institutions but it is rather a discourse, an apparatus. The theory, policy and practice in the current development apparatus is an example of such power.

Having outlined these types of power, the big question remains: can empowerment be initiated by those who have the *power to, power over* or who are part of the *decentred power* (i.e. practitioners, researchers)? Rowlands argues that empowerment promoted by those who are already in power ends necessarily in perpetuating the existent power relations (1995:11).

Nevertheless, the debate on participation as a tyranny has evolved towards a more positive analysis on the ways in which participation can lead to empowerment. Hickey and Mohan’s work is a key example on the evolution of the debate and highlights the need for mechanisms to create political spaces.

### 2.3.1. Creating political spaces

Individuals who are politically empowered can try to balance the powers that constraint them from their rights and wellbeing. Therefore, individuals, development organizations and other civil society bodies cannot avoid the state if they aim for a

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12 Rowlands in Nelson and Wright (1995:11)
13 *Participation: from tyranny to transformation* (2004)
sustained alternative development (Annis, 1988, in Friedmann, 1992:142). Nevertheless, Friedmann noted in 1992 that NGOs were increasingly acquiring an intermediary role between the state and civil society. By becoming decentralized state agents, some NGOs can become ‘less reliable as an effective advocate of the claims of an alternative development’ and this urges the disempowered poor to have a political voice of their own. (1992:159).

Political power, argues Friedmann, is not only the power to vote, but the power to voice and collective action: ‘Alternative development must be seen as a process that seeks empowerment of households and their individual members through their involvement in socially and politically relevant actions’ (1992:33). The concept of citizenship is therefore closely related to a focus of development on empowerment (Gaventa, 2004; Friedmann, 1992). Cornwall and Gaventa (2004) highlight that political spaces are not free of power relations, thus, an emphasis on transformative participation needs to pay attention to whose voices are heard and whose voices need to be strengthened or be given new political spaces. Whatever the mechanism of empowerment, it needs to include into the political debate those who are left out. As Moore and Putzel state, ‘It is useful to think of empowerment in terms of increasing the political capabilities of the poor’ (in Williams, 2004:97). Development organizations, though, need a deeper understanding of the power relations and the political framework in which they intervene if they want to effectively identify how to ‘strengthen the political capabilities of the poor’ (Mosse, 2005:63).

Indeed, this is the type of empowerment that this paper is concerned with. As Nelson and Wright point out:

‘(…) whatever model is adopted –in this case Participatory Video- , the point is to institutionalize processes whereby those with newly acquired
'power to' can negotiate with those with 'power over' in the community and in agencies in ways which are 'unpickable' and sustainable when the outsider researcher or development worker has left.' (1995:13)
3. Communication and Development

The theories and models of communication for development have evolved in parallel with the theories of development. Generally, they have been debated between the modernization approach (one way, linear, top-down) and a more recent context-based bottom-up approach ‘historically grounded, culturally sensitive, and multifaceted, with attention to all political, economic and ideological structures and processes that comprise society’ (Melkote and Steeves, 2001:38).

During the 1980s, the broadening of the concept of poverty beyond its economic perspective (capabilities, social exclusion, and participatory approaches) allowed communication to regain its central and multidimensional role (Wanyeki, 2000; Mefalopulos, 2008; Inagaki, 2007).

Sen’s conceptualization of development as freedom and of poverty as a lack of capabilities stresses that development goes beyond national economic growth and individual income:

‘(...) freedoms also depend on other determinants, such as social and economic arrangements (for example, facilities for education and health care) as well as political and civil rights (for example, liberty to participate in public discussion and scrutiny)’ (Sen, 1999:3).

Based on this, Barja and Gigler (2007) develop an ‘Information and Communication Poverty Line’. To be above this poverty line, and, therefore, to own and to be capable to utilise different Information and Communication Technologies, an individual or group requires the ‘capability to exchange transparent information’ about political, institutional, social and technology processes and outcomes of information; as well as the capability to analyse and exchange ideas about these processes (2007:18).
Melkote and Steeves ask ‘who within society determines whether or when a definition of development is acceptable’ (2001:333). This brings the need for participation, and therefore communication, at the very beginning of the development process: in its definition.

3.1. Participatory Communication in historical context

3.1.1 Modernization approach

Communication theory and practice after the WW2 needs to be understood under the modernization theory of the 50-60s. If development was achieved through economic growth, communication was focused on transferring capital, knowledge and technology from the Western world to the ‘developing’ countries, in order for them to increase their GDP (at the macro level) or for communities and individuals to acquire skills and technology (at the micro level). Communication was a one-way, top-down approach, generally based on the Lasswell’s unilinear formula. Early models of communication departed from the belief that mass media had a strong power to inform and influence attitudes and behaviours (Inagaki, 2007; Melkote and Steeves, 2001; Mefalopulos, 2008). The bullet theory or the hypodermic needle model are examples of such theoretical approach. ‘Until the late 1980s, most development institutions neglected the potential of communication as a dialogic, cross-cutting investigative tool’ (Mefalopulos, 2008: 47).

In his book ‘Diffusion of Innovations’ (1962), Everett Rogers ‘was concerned mainly with adoption of new ideas, it said little about the socio-cultural and structural

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14 ‘who - says what - in which channel - to whom - with which effect’ (Melkote and Steeves, 2001).

15 Melkote and Steeves identify four overlapping areas in communication under the modernization paradigm: (i) Communication Effects approach, (ii) Mass Media and Modernization approach, (iii) Diffusion of Innovations approach and (iv) Social Marketing approach (2001:143). They cannot be developed in this paper for length limit but are analysed by the authors in great detail.
environment in which these ideas were to be adopted. (...) But so was the economic growth paradigm in which it lubricated' (Moemeka, 2000:3). The only difference that this model adopted is the recognition that different groups might react differently to the mass media messages (Inagaki, 2007:6). This ‘pro-persuasive’ and ‘pro-top-down’ model grounded most extension programs run by USAID during the 70s (Melkote and Steeves, 2001:55).

The Social Marketing approach replaced the former theories, which became obsolete and empirically flawed 16 and embraced entertainment-education programs (edutainment), emphasizing a strategic communication that challenges the values, knowledge and behaviour patterns of the receivers (Melkote and Steeves, 2001: 146). It is still used in current communication for development programs, especially in health awareness (HIV or Malaria prevention) and family planning.

3.1.2 Critical approaches to the modernization paradigm

Dependency approach

In parallel with development theories, a group of communication scholars, especially from Latin America, followed the path of the dependencists. Dependency and world-system theories served as the theoretical platform for the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) movement which led an important debate calling for more equitable flows of information. 17

Nevertheless, it partially failed to give an alternative. It was still a one-way approach, being the main difference ‘who was controlling and sending the message and for what purpose.’ (Mefalopulos, 2008:50). Nevertheless, it did leave a legacy for the

16 The same Rogers was announcing in 1976 ‘the passing of the dominant paradigm’ (Rogers in Mefalopulos, 2008: 45). Actually, Rogers revised his model and evolved towards more participatory approaches (Gumucio-Dagron, n.d.:8).

17 This claim resulted in the famous McBride report ‘Many voices, One world’, published in 1980 by UNESCO. (Inagaki, 2007; Mefalopulos, 2008).
emergence of some of the perspectives within the participatory/multiplicity approach that focus on the oppression of poor societies.\footnote{In the chapter ‘Communication Strategies for Empowerment’, Melkote and Steeves write: ‘Blame-the-victim ideologists, social Darwinists, and the top-down experts of development, among others, have aimed to change the individual but leave the structure of dependency within and between societies intact’ (2001:331).}

**Participatory/Multiplicity approach**

As argued in Chapter 2, different approaches emerged in the 80s within the academic world in an attempt to provide alternatives to development studies. A shift started to take place from a top-down model of assistance towards a model that takes into account what really people need (Gumucio-Dagron, 2008:69).

Communication for development was also influenced by the different theories and intellectuals emerged from the colonial struggle for freedom and independence and from the struggle for liberation from poverty and oppression. Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed is an example of such theories.

Mefalopulos (2008) argues that rather than resulting in a unified paradigm, the broad spectrum of participatory approaches has generated different theoretical models. Inagaki (2007) and Mefalopulos (2008) outline some of the most renowned of these models: Liberation Pedagogy (Freire, 1970), Putting the Last first (Chambers, 1983), Empowerment Approach (Friedmann 1992), Multiplicity Paradigm (Servaes, 1991), Another Development (Melkote, 1991; Jacobson 1994), and Autonomous Development (Camen, 1996). Rather than looking for a unifying grand theory, these models ‘seem more interested in identifying and analyzing drawbacks and limitations of current development practices, especially at project and community level (...).

Common features of this perspective are the emphasis on people, the endogenous vision of development and the attention to power and rights issues' (Mefalopulos,
2008:51). It is therefore within this emergent paradigm that we need to situate the role of video as an empowering tool.

### 3.2. Participatory Communication

*‘The successes and failures of most development projects are often determined by two crucial factors: communication and people’s involvement’*  
(Servaes, 2003 in Mefalopulos 2008:8).

Participation cannot happen without communication, which is key if the ‘real needs of the so-called beneficiaries’ need to be taken into account. (Gumucio-Dagron, 2008:69) The UNDP states that ‘genuine involvement and participation cannot occur if the information needs of all citizens (including those at the margins of societies) are met and the voices of those most affected by development decisions are heard’ (2006:6). The focus of communication for development is being shifted from information diffusion to contextual analysis and empowerment. (Mefalopulos, 2008; Servaes, 2008; Wanyeki, 2000; Inagaki 2007).

However, different communication strategies will lead to different participation levels. Participatory two-way communication can work as a tool for identification, design, implementation and evaluation in development projects and processes. But, also, as an objective in itself that gives voice and empowers people: ‘The goal of communication becomes that of conscientization, leading to an anchoring of cultural identities that liberates people from powerless positions and places them in a position to construct their own future’. (White, 2003:36).

‘A focus on empowerment has a direct consequence on the objectives of development communication’ (Melkote and Steeves, 2001:327). Nevertheless, if
‘participation’ and ‘empowerment’ have often been misused concepts, so has ‘participatory communication’. Melkote and Steeves point out the gap between the theoretical discourse of ‘participatory communication’, focused on empowerment, and the outcomes of the practice, which often fails to address structures of dependency and power inequities (2001:351).

3.3. Community empowerment through participatory communication

Melkote and Steeves (2001) argue that for communication to help empower communities, a focus needs to be put on the organizational value of communication and the role of participative social action. Rahman (1991), cited by Melkote and Steeves, identifies three ways of domination, which feed one another:

(i) control over the means of material production
(ii) control over the means of knowledge production
(iii) control over what legitimizes the worth and utility of each knowledge

Those with power over the means of production can also control the knowledge production and decide which knowledge is valid and worth. As long as inequalities on control over knowledge persist, inequalities over the means of production will do as well (2001:342). Therefore the right of people to tell their own stories has to be in the core of any participatory approach towards empowerment. (2001:355).

In a recent World Bank research paper, Inagaki, firstly sceptical, recognises that participatory communication approaches have indeed a greater potential towards empowerment and collective action:

‘(…) programmatic outcomes that are more generative than inductive (empowerment, coalition building and resource generation) are the
domains in which participatory projects made much greater contributions than modernization or diffusion projects. Traditionally, projects based on the modernization and diffusion theories are designed in a way to relay messages working through the individual psychology of the receivers of information; less attention is given to types of effects that occur in collective and social levels’ (2007:38)

3.3.1. A ‘Freirean’ process of awareness

Freire’s pedagogy of liberation provides a solid theoretical ground and a necessary departing point to analyse PV as a participatory communication strategy for empowerment.

Despite coming from different traditions and, despite Sen does not make Freire’s work explicit in his writings (Walker, 2005:107), Freire’s concept of oppression as a barrier for the liberation of individuals and communities resembles Sen’s capabilities approach by which the lack of opportunities as capabilities stops individuals and societies from their freedom. If Sen defines development as freedom, Freire describes it as the liberation from oppression.

Communication plays a key role in Freire’s approach. If the oppressed got in touch through a dialogical process with their sources of power and oppression, this would lead to a conscientização, an awakening that would result in them being able to identify their own solutions. Communication in this dialogical process requires not information transmission but an egalitarian and emancipatory dialogue ‘that leads to expanded consciousness and power’ (Melkote and Steeves, 2001:299). This is an extremely relevant framework in which to analyze the potential of PV in empowering communities.
3.3.2 PAR Methodology

Building on Freire’s pedagogy, and having its roots in social psychology, the Participatory Action Research (PAR) has evolved during the 90s as a methodology applicable to international development. PAR refers to the type of research that involves collective action within a group of individuals in order to identify, research and come up with solutions and action for a specific change that can improve their own lives. The process\(^{19}\) starts with the recognition and will to achieve some change. ‘In deciding just where to begin in making improvements, a group identifies an area where members perceive a cluster of problems of mutual concern and consequence. The group decides to work together on a ‘thematic concern’ (McTaggart, 1997:27). This could well be a definition for a PV process, which will be developed in later chapters. It is also in consistence with Habermas’ influential Communicative Action theory: ‘Those engaged in communicative action gather a solidarity, based on belonging to groups, as they enter in personal relationships with one another\(^{20}\).

The PAR works as a relevant framework for the theory and practice of PV as a tool for empowerment. Melkote and Steeves state that in PAR, ‘the role of the outsider, if helpful at all, would be as a facilitator’ (2001:343). Similarly, Habermas states: ‘In a process of enlightenment there can be only participants’.\(^{21}\) This is a key concept in PV\(^{22}\).

3.3.3. Theatre of the oppressed

Inspired by Freire’s pedagogy, the Brazilian Theatre director Augusto Boal was one main precursor of the international movement of ‘theatre of the oppressed’ as a participatory tool for social change (Singhal, 2008, p.384). PV finds in theatre for development a clear antecessor. Already in the late 50s, ‘Boal was experimenting

\(^{19}\) The term action research was coined by social psychologist Kurt Lewin (1946,1952) (Mc Taggart, 1997)


\(^{21}\) Habermas (1987b:343-4) quoted by Kemmis (2001)

\(^{22}\) The role of the facilitator in PV will be developed in Chapter 4.
with participatory theatre, audiences were invited to discuss a play at the end of the performance’. (2008: 384).

Since the 70s, development agencies have recognised theatre as a powerful communication tool for education and community development. (Mavrocordatos and Martin, 1995:61). Nevertheless, it is not the benefits of theatre as message delivery that this paper or Freire’s movement is focused on, but the power of theatre as a conscientization tool\(^{23}\), that opens a dialogue and helps communities to acquire the political capabilities to defend their rights and influence the control of resources.

Bhattarai (2007) explores the use of theatre as an alternative media in Nepal. In 1980, the first Nepali street play was staged by the theatre group Sarwanam. The plays reflected current issues that affected communities and included a part that consisted of ‘thinking’ the action. Bhattarai explains how, in one of the plays, the police went into stage and held the performers. The political environment is indeed a key element to consider because the political capabilities catalysed through theatre (or video) can be frustrated by censorship and threat.

Mavrocordatos and Martin refer to the Drama Unit of a UK based NGO, SOS Sahel. Theatre allowed the community members to speak boldly and to represent actions that they would not take in a real situation. A group of women in the village, for instance, performed a story where some agents from the Forestry Department would set fire, deliberately, on the dry vegetation. Afterwards, the agents would approach the village and ask for money as a punishment for the fire damage. Unlike what would have happened in a real setting, the women showed courage in the play and refused to pay anything. The play ended with the agents being fired and the Chief

\(^{23}\) Note once more the Freireian roots of this approach, developed earlier.
ordering the villagers to report any other case of corruption such as this (Mavrocodartos and Martin, 1995).

The authorities began to pay attention and to feel threatened by the theatre plays and the assertiveness of the community. Following two plays, the Forestry Department reached an agreement with the village and changed some of the initial plans. Theatre gave the community the political capability to influence in the institutional and political space of the Malian government (1995:67).
4. Participatory Video (PV)

‘Tools can empower or disempower. (…) We need to think about what we are doing in development and why we are doing it’ (Slocum et al, 1995, 29)

This above seems an obvious quote, but, as argued, insufficient contextual analysis can lead to the perpetuation of dominant powers. Likewise, video can become an instrument with rather negative consequences, a new burden into the community or organization. Video can indeed be a very powerful tool, as it is argued in this paper, but deciding to introduce video in a community without having thought why is needed, and how is it going to be done can be rather damaging (Bery, 2006:42). The question remains of ‘who decides what is an appropriate medium’\(^\text{24}\) and it is clear that, after being introduced to its potential benefits as well as challenges, the organization or community should decide whether the tool is appropriate or not.

Chris and Nick Lunch’s\(^\text{25}\) definition of PV serves as a useful departing point to start our analysis:

‘Participatory video is a set of techniques –and a process - to involve a group or community in shaping and creating their own film. (…) making a video is easy and accessible, and is a great way of bringing people together to explore issues, voice concerns or simply to be creative and tell stories. This process can be very empowering, enabling a group or community to take action to solve their own problems and also to communicate their needs and ideas to decision-makers and/or other groups and communities. (…)’ (2006:10)

The origins of PV go back to 1967, when the Canadian Donald Snowden\(^\text{26}\) introduced it to a fishing community in Newfoundland, Fogo Islands (White, 2003;

\(^{24}\) Bery (1995:42)  
\(^{25}\) Founders and directors of Insight, a UK-based organisation specialised in PV.  

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Lunch, 2006). By doing the films and showing them to different villages on the island, the participants realized that they shared problems and that they could solve them by working together. After the films were shown to the authorities, different policies and actions were changed. Therefore, through video, the communities were able to have voice and influence within the political framework.

4.1. PV: uses and methods

Video is an attractive and nowadays relatively cheap technology and a visual language accessible to illiterate communities (De Vreede, 1990). Within a participatory process, its advantages increase. It becomes a context-based tool: the audience can identify itself with the visuals, as they have been produced by the community and about issues that affect the community; it serves as a catalyst for a dialogical process that leads to collective action (Seneviratne, 2007); it serves as a tool to approach policy-makers as well as other communities (vertical and horizontal communication); the list is long and its potential is 'unlimited' (White, 2003:100).

As it has been argued, PV can become a depoliticizing tool at the micro level if it becomes a quick technique to gather local knowledge that does not pay attention to the local dynamics and power relations. Lunch warns about the dangers of using PV to 'add value to development projects by exploiting the participatory approach' (2006:4).

Therefore, despite PV can be used as a participatory tool in the design, implementation and evaluation of projects, this paper is concerned with PV as an empowering process and an end in itself.

26 Snowden is has been considered the pioneer in the use of PV since he used it in community building in the Fogo Islands.
27 These techniques were known as the ‘Fogo process’. (2006:11)
28 Passive participation or a participation by consultation tool.
4.1.1. PV as a process and an end

‘Simply handing over cameras is not PV’ (2006:4). PV requires knowledge and sensitivity from the facilitators. The facilitator needs to understand the purpose of the process as well as the local dynamics and power relations. ‘Such an approach requires flexibility as well as careful analysis of the outcomes of each day’s activities’ (Braden, 1998:16).

Chambers (1997) refers to the use of video as an empowering method and a process approach. He argues that it provides a ‘visual medium for confident presentation of local realities to other levels’ and that it can therefore be a tool that connects communities with authorities and other communities (1997:218). The role of the ‘outsider’ or ‘upper’ in the participatory process would be that of a ‘new professional’ as per Chambers’ language, a facilitator that listens and learns.

The main criticisms to Chambers, as argued in chapter 2, focus on his idealization of the community and on a rather simplified view of power relations (Mosse, 2001, Kothari, 2001). A key step before starting a PV project, is to decide who participates. Bearing in mind that communities (a complex concept in itself\(^{29}\)) are not harmonious and that one of the main goals is to deal with power relations, this is a crucial exercise. It is complicated and requires a careful local analysis of politics, hierarchies, castes, gender, religions, etc. (Lunch, 2006; Braden, 1998).

\(^{29}\) Nelson and Wright state: (1995:15): ‘Community is a concept often used by the state and other organisations rather than people themselves, and it carries connotations of consensus and ‘needs’ determined within parameters set by outsiders.’
A PV process needs to be adapted to each context and according to the goals that are pursued in each case. But, as a general starting point, it consists of the following steps, which heavily draw on the steps outlined in Insight’s handbook (2006:12):

1- Participants learn to use video equipment through games and exercises. They learn filming techniques, types of shots, angles and sequences, and also preparing a storyboard. This is ideally done through a facilitated experimenting process, not a teaching session.  

2- Participants discuss issues that are important for the community and identify a change that they want to seek in line with the dialogic process and the PAR methodology described in 3.3.

3- The video is planned, storyographed, directed and filmed by the participants. Decisions on the editing process are ideally taken by the participants although the technical hand is sometimes that of the facilitator, particularly when the projects are rushed or there is not time to train the participants (especially if they are illiterate) in editing software. In some other cases, the footage is shown to the whole community in day or night screenings and their feedback is taken for the final editing. This is seen as part of the Freirean dialogic process that involves the whole community.

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30 The UK based organization Living Lens, specialised in PV, stresses the importance that the camera is on the hands of the participants from the very beginning of the very first exercise. (Rose McClausand, LivingLens co-founder and co-director. Interview).

31 Insight (2006:12) point out that the facilitators can support the process using Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) tools.

32 Insight uses an editing technique that allows participants to decide overall structure of the film in a piece of paper. This involves them in the decision-making of the editing process despite ‘not directly getting hands on the mouse’ (Chris Lunch, co-director Insight, E-consultation).

33 It is important, though, that having the participants to edit is not seen as an obstacle. In successful cases like VIDEO SEWA, illiterate woman are editing films which are being screened in festivals and broadcasted in western TV channels (Neelam Dave, Video SEWA - Interview)
4- The final video is screened to the community in daily street screenings and on small screenings in different households. These playback sessions start a discussion process, which is a crucial step within the dialogical process of PV (Bery, 1995:42).

5- The video is shown to the relevant authorities or groups with power over. Communities are making use of a new political space that allows them to interact with the political and institutional framework in society. Videos can also be shown to other communities (horizontal communication), which can strengthen civil society networks, reinforce assertiveness, raise awareness and collective action, and increase pressure to further influence the political spaces. Why and how does video allow for this political space to take place is the main question that this paper attempts to answer in section 4.2.

4.2. PV and power

‘Participatory Video as a process (…) can serve as a powerful force for people to see themselves in relation to the community and become conscientized about personal and community needs. It brings about a critical awareness that forms the foundation for creativity and communication. Thus, it has the potential to bring about personal, social, political and cultural change. That’s what video power is all about’ (White, 2003:64)

Bery (2003:103) explores the multidimensional process of empowerment and includes the following four elements. Element v is added in this paper:

i- A concept related to the psychology of the self (‘self-awareness, self-esteem, self-confidence’).

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34 This is in line with Nelson and Wright’s definition of ‘Power to’ (section 2.3 of this paper)
ii- An understanding of the power structures and the location of the self within the systems in society.

iii- An economic level of independence that allows the self to analyse and take risks (action).

iv- A political analysis and the ‘will to change the systems themselves’.

v- As argued in chapter 2.3, a fifth point needs to be added in Bery’s list, and it goes beyond the ‘will’ expressed in the former element to the action and, therefore, the creation of political spaces that place the voice and decisions of the less empowered into the institutional and political framework.

Communities are usually too occupied in struggling for survival to embark in this dialogic process of analysis with one self and the community (Bery, 2003:104). Even if they are not, their position in society and the lack of capabilities to have their voices heard may stop them from taking action. Melkote and Steeves refer to Freire’s argument that ‘individuals have the internal capacity to develop themselves on their own terms, but need relationships to recognize and act on this capacity. Relationality is never instantaneous, but requires a process of communication’ (2001:298).

PV facilitated by an organisation works as a catalyst to start the dialogic process that deals with issues (i) and (ii). The presence of a local NGO provides the space and tools for this process to take place despite the economic dependence of the participants (iii) and, finally, the videos as a product themselves become a vehicle of interaction between the communities and the authorities with power over. Authorities may not open the door to listen to an illiterate member of a slum or a remote and deprived rural area, but they will be keener in watching a video or feel threatened.

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35 It will also be seen that, after watching the video, policy-makers are more likely to approach these grassroots communities and listen to them.
by its dissemination. Videos can open the channel of communication between underrepresented communities and those in power who these communities would not be able to access (Braden, 1998:13).

However, the enormous potential of PV comes with big challenges. The following case studies will expose them.

4.2.1. Some PV experiences and its lessons

Bhattarai briefly explores two examples of the early use of PV in Nepal. Between 1985 and 1987, the Worldview International Foundation supported the training of illiterate women in the production of videos. The films they made were then addressed to policymakers and to other communities. Thanks to them, the women became confident and articulated able to assess the needs of the community, offer recommendations to the policy-makers, and track their response. Similarly, in another project in Nepal, USAID funded the production of community videos, which also created a space of communication between villagers and policy makers. These outcomes seem to meet the 5 elements towards empowerment outlined above. Nevertheless, further evaluation on the projects concluded that the political spaces created through video ‘could not be maintained in the long term’ (2007:157).

Braden analyses the experience of a pilot PV project led by Oxfam in Vietnam in 1995. She acknowledges that communities are not harmonious units and that choosing the participants is a key step for a truly participatory process. The pilot project encountered in this step a key challenge. The political context meant that ‘people could not participate at all without the consent of the Party Committee and the local authorities’. Actually, the Oxfam Vietnam Country representative defined ‘community’ as ‘the people and government together’ (1998:79). Besides, the poverty affected everyone, including the members of the political party, and this disguised the
different ranges of status. In her conclusions, Braden states that the project did not ensure the representation of a wider range of villagers but highlights the difficulties of doing so in the short period of time that the project took place (18 days in total). This is a lesson for donors and practitioners to reflect on the importance that participatory approaches require process based activities and a ‘new kind of reflective field-worker – living and working alongside underrepresented communities- critically conscious of the economic, cultural, and social contexts of the local groups and their relationships with other players’ (p.99). In the videos, the villagers had offered solutions to some of their main problems, for instance, designing a sea-dyke to solve a sea-water flooding of the land. The authorities reacted very positively to the video and stressed the importance of the local knowledge to effectively address the problem.

In the evaluation one year after, it was found that the participants were disappointed because the sea-dyke never arrived. Oxfam was negotiating with potential donors to get funding but the community was never informed about these negotiations. While Oxfam wanted the community to own it, the community was rather expecting a tangible and material result from the film, which they considered to be Oxfam’s film (1998:78). This exposes the risks of using video as a means to a final goal or product rather than as a dialogic process in itself or when the expectations from both sides are not clarified at the beginning.

Instead, videos made with other participants on problems of corruption within the local primary school were successful in allowing villagers’ complaints to be responded by authorities. Videos started a process of dialog between the different parts (school managers, teachers, and children’s parents). During the evaluation process, villagers stated that in previous school meetings they would not dare to express their views so directly. Video, though, empowered them to be assertive and confident and it also made those with power over to be more accountable. One year
after, the school had better systems of communication and it was much more transparent (Braden, 1998).

Panos London\textsuperscript{36}, through its Oral Testimony Programme, supported a PV work on Environmental Change in Androy, Madagascar, in partnership with the IFAD\textsuperscript{37}, the Andrew Lees Trust and the UK based organisation Living Lens as the workshop facilitator. Siobhan Warrington states that ‘in terms of outputs the project exceeded expectations, and demonstrated the potential of the medium’\textsuperscript{38}. The films were screened at the International Climate Change Conference in December 2008 and also at the International Indigenous People’s Summit on Climate Change in April 2009. ‘In addition –states Warrington- the project organised a regional screening event which brought the community film makers and regional government and non-government decision makers together to discuss the issues presented in the films’. It also allowed for self-representation of the community and as a way to record and communicate its concerns and solutions.

The selection of the participants by the local partner\textsuperscript{39} ensured that there was equal number of men and women but it was discovered at the workshop that participants were all from one clan. Further evaluation of the project will explore how this happened and how significant it is. Warrington also asks whether 10 days is sufficient time for the local partner to gain ‘in-depth understanding of using video as a tool for horizontal and vertical communication’. In terms of the wider community, the workshop increased ‘communication skills and confidence’. Nevertheless, Warrington states that there are ‘not necessarily future opportunities to use (these) skills’, and

\textsuperscript{36} Panos London is a member organisation of the global Panos Network that ‘promotes the participation of poor and marginalised people in national and international development debates through media and communication projects.’ (quoted from www.panos.org.uk/aboutus)
\textsuperscript{37} International Fund for Agricultural Development
\textsuperscript{38} Head of Oral Testimony Programme, Panos London (e-consultation).
\textsuperscript{39} Andrew Lees Trust
that further evaluation is needed\textsuperscript{40}. The longer term impact of this outcome is yet to be seen\textsuperscript{41}.

The different cases briefly developed above give PV a significant potential as a transformative dialogical process through which communities develop the power to interact with those with power over.

The cases also expose the main challenges. The interests and production routines of the donors can still represent an obstacle for projects to be process-based and to span beyond the one-time activity, development organisations still need to give more importance to the analysis of power relations and to the concept of ownership in order to achieve truly participatory and empowering processes. The definition of community itself represents a challenge. Some of these can be overcome if the stakeholders are aware of them and willing to solve them. But a question remains: once the activity has finished, how can the community continue harnessing the potential of video as a transformational tool? For Rose McCausland\textsuperscript{42} the achieved individual assertiveness and confidence in speaking out can remain once the project is finished. Nevertheless, as seen in the former cases, without the advantages of video as a catalyst and as a tool to contact those with ‘power over’, it is no so clear that these assertiveness and confidence can be harnessed towards the rest of the dialogical and empowering process that leads to the creation of political spaces. McCausland states that it would be ‘very irresponsible’ to run a PV workshop and, at the end, to take away the equipment without having explored options for the community to keep having access to this tool.

\textsuperscript{40} An independent evaluation of this project is taking place at the time of submission of this dissertation.

\textsuperscript{41} Panos London: ‘Outcomes and outputs for the Participatory Video work on Environmental Change in Androy, madagascar’ (e-consultation with Siobhan Warrington)

\textsuperscript{42} LivingLens, co-founder and director (Interview)
So, when PV is a one-time activity, can it really create political spaces for the community, if these cannot be maintained over the long term? For this to happen, it is argued in this paper that the community should be able to access or own the equipment permanently and to have the time to dedicate to the process and the production and dissemination of videos. This conversion of PV into a permanent and community owned tool acquires different names depending on the model or the organization. Following Drishti’s model, it is called in this paper ‘Community Video’. Its potential is explored in the following section.

4.3. Community video and the creation of political spaces

‘A media in the hands of community people is the most powerful tool to empower community voices’ (Drishti)

Community Video goes beyond PV by making video a permanent tool by, for, and of the community. This community can be geographic or one of interest (Wanyeki, 2000). As a concept, it owes a lot to Community Radio and shares with community media in general its principles and ‘its origins in people’s struggles against oppressive regimes, poverty, and exploitation (...)’ (Fairbairn, 2009:6). It differs from radio it in many ways as well. Not only because of the obvious technical differences but also because Community Radio is ‘both a participatory form of media in practice and a statutory sector of broadcast policy’ (Coyer, 2007:1). While Community Radio depends on supportive legislation, it can be easier for community video to be independent from government permissions and law. This is because Community

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43 Drishti is an organization based in Ahmedabad (India) that uses media and arts to empower communities.
44 www.drishtimedia.org
45 Community radio is very much established form of community media and a participatory development tool. The World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters’ website contains a wide range of information: www.amarc.org
Video\(^{47}\) is a newer phenomenon and also because videos are not broadcasted but screened in the streets or in private households, which does not require for viewers to own a TV or an aerial. In India, for instance, the different Community Video Units (CVUs) that the organisation Drishti supports, take different stands on it depending on the state and the political context. Kavita Dasgupta\(^{48}\) explains that ‘the law is not very clear on that’ and that the parental organisations that support the CVUs play this by ear. Only two (out of 10) CVUs preferred to ask for permission. The rest are doing daily street screenings with normality. In other political contexts, though, the dissemination of videos can become a bigger challenge. In Malaysia, any video material needs to be approved by the Malaysian National Film Board (Seneviratne, 2007:106). For this reason, KOMAS\(^{49}\), organises ‘screenings by invitation in a closed venue like a house or a hall so that it is officially a private screening’ (2007:106).

The rapid evolution of video technology into smaller and cheaper high quality equipment offers a unique opportunity to harness the benefits of PV into a more lasting empowering process for oppressed communities, rather than a one-time activity.

The UK based organisation Insight has over 15 years of experience in using PV as a transformational tool and is currently shifting towards community video\(^{50}\), which Insight calls ‘People’s video’. Insight’s strategy since 2007 focuses in establishing a

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\(^{47}\) Community Video cannot be confused with local TV. Not only because the dissemination method in PV is not broadcasting but also because a local TV can be another one-way and top-down information channel at a micro level that has little to do with the participatory and the empowering dialogical process described in this paper.

\(^{48}\) E-consultation with Kavita Dasgupta, Programme Manager of the Community Video department in Drishti (Ahmedabad, India).

\(^{49}\) KOMAS is a popular communication centre based in Kuala-Lumpur and set up in 1993 which uses community video to strengthen the identity of communities and to favour collective action (Seneviratne, 2007:106).

\(^{50}\) Soledad Muñiz, Hub Coordinator, Insight (Conversation, 7-8-2009)
These community based hubs are an important part of our strategy as it is here that we see the strongest and most long term impacts (...) we see hubs as something that needs to grow organically in a number of phases. Insight does this once the community has been introduced to a PV project and if the community finds in it a useful tool that needs to be used as a permanent empowering process. Since 2007, Insight has supported the creation of ‘hubs’ in South Africa, Peru and London. Other hubs in Alaska, Panama, Kenya and the Philippines are also being created. The process includes the development of sustainable strategies, both in terms of the local management of the ‘hubs’ as well as their financial survival.

In July 2006, Drishti started its Community Video Programme. To set up a CVU, Drishti partners with a local NGO, a parental organisation for the CVU. A CVU is a ‘hub’ or a community production company run by 6-10 members of the community who are trained in video. According to Drishti’s model, the content is decided by a Community Editorial Board, whose members live and work in the community. The video unit produces a film every two months, and multiple daily and night screenings are done. As argued, power relations need to be carefully considered when choosing the producers, the Editorial Board and, generally, in every aspect of the process.

Video allows audiences to reflect on themselves. The discussions after each screening follow up the dialogic process. Therefore, as in PV, the same process towards Freire’s conscientização takes place. Besides, the videos not only collect the voices of the community but also include a call to action.

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51 This is similar to what other organizations like Drishti and Video Volunteers call a Community Video Unit (CVU). They are different models but share the vision of using PV as a permanent tool for community empowerment.
52 Chris Lunch, Co-founder and Co-director, Insight (e-consultation)
53 This programme was started in partnership with the US organization Video Volunteers.
For community video to be by, for and of the community, the process includes a strategy towards ownership and sustainability. Drishti envisions CVUs that can become financially independent from the NGO and donors; and, in the path towards ownership, that communitarian systems of management can be put in place.\footnote{Conversation with Kavita Dasgupta, Programme Manager of the Community Video department in Drishti (Ahmedabad, India).}

These are the main challenges, which will be explored in the case study that follows. However, there is no single model. In Latin America, there are various communities who have been benefiting from community video for a long time, like the Zapatista communities in Chiapas with the support of Chiapas Media Project/Promedios\footnote{Halkin, A. (2009) ‘Outside the Indigenous Lens: Zapatistas and Autonomous Video-Making’ Retrieved from www.comminit.com}, which started using video in 1995, or like the video unit in the renowned Self-Employed Women Association (SEWA) in India, also a different model, which started very early, in 1984.

The impact stories of the Samvad case study in the following section will expose the way a CVU empowers people by creating a permanent political space from where to influence those with power over.

4.4 Samvad Community Video Unit (CVU)

4.4.1 The video unit and its challenges

Saath is an NGO based in Ahmedabad, Gujarat (India). It started in 1989, with an Integral Development Programme for the slums of Ahmedabad. In 2006, the organization was exploring ways to give voice to the slum community. ‘There were a lot of things that the community wanted to talk about, a lot of things they needed to discuss, a lot of things they needed to voice their concerns about, and there was no platform to do that. We explored other ideas, like starting maybe a newsletter. But we
felt video would be much more powerful because people at the ground level are not so highly educated.\textsuperscript{56} Drishti approached Saath with the concept of a CVU, which Saath saw as the solution it was seeking. The video unit was started.

Saath identified people from the slums to run the CVU. The selection of producers ‘was representative of gender, geography, religion, cast (…)\textsuperscript{57}’. The video unit was called Samvad (‘dialogues’) and consisted of 5 men and 3 women out of whom 5 were Muslim and 3 Hindus. After two months being trained on the production of videos, the first Video Magazine was done in August and called ‘Aapno Samvad Aapno Vistar’. This film was made during the Monsoons and addressed matters of cleanliness and the improvement of infrastructure. The second film addressed the issue of communal harmony, a sensitive topic after the very recent history of communal riots in Ahmedabad.

The producers received ongoing training support for a year and a half. The team would rotate and some would be in charge of producing the films, while the others were in charge of the street screenings and discussions. Currently, the CVU has hired four new members (also from the various slums) which will focus solely on the distribution part, while the 8 producers will focus on producing the films and on extending the production towards income generation activities in order to become sustainable.

\textsuperscript{56} Yasmin Rehmani, Operations Manager, Samvad Video Unit (interview)
\textsuperscript{57} Yasmin Rehmani, Operations Manager, Samvad Video Unit (interview)
Saath also organised an Editorial Board, a committee that ideally consists of ‘people who live and work within the community’\textsuperscript{58} to discuss the topics and review the final cuts. Currently, the Editorial Board consists of the team of CVU producers and of representatives of Saath, and its Resource Centres.\textsuperscript{59}

Both Drishti and Saath highlight that the CVU needs to be \textit{by}, \textit{for} and \textit{of} the community. Judging from the topics of the films, the people who produce them, those who appear in them, and the audience that watches them, the CVU is certainly \textit{by} and \textit{for} the community, but it is more difficult to achieve the total ownership (\textit{of}). The impact stories below expose the impact that the CVU is having within the community for the creation of political spaces. But reaching a complete ownership (in terms of financial and operational independence from the NGO Saath) is a process that takes time. As advised by Drishti, Saath is working to strengthen the implementation strategies, being \textit{Community Empowerment}, and the representation and roles within the \textit{Editorial Board}, two of them\textsuperscript{60}. In terms of Community Empowerment, roles and responsibilities for the CVU were shifted away from Saath in May 2009. Since then,

\textsuperscript{58} Drishti (nd) ‘Empowering community voices’ (Internal document which describes the model of the CVUs.)

\textsuperscript{59} The Resource Centres are information hubs established by Saath within each community so that people can have access to different services and government schemes.

\textsuperscript{60} Strengthening interaction with audience, innovative film techniques, revamp community editorial board, and increase public awareness are the other 3 main strategies.
the overall coordination rotates between the producers every three months; there is one producer in charge of day screenings; another (whoever with the highest educational level) is in charge of accounts; two of them are in charge of coordinating the two distribution teams. The new organizational structure is a step ‘towards greater ownership’.

As for the Editorial Board, Saath has aimed in its 2009 report at a committee that has a 50% of representation of women or disadvantaged groups from the community. Saath defines its community as ‘economically deprived groups of people of various religions, sects, castes and creed living in poor housing conditions in urban slums’. Nevertheless, the new members introduced in the Editorial Board in 2009 are managers of different programmes in the NGO Saath (Youth Job Training, Urban and Rural Initiatives, Microfinance). ‘These managers represent a broad cross-section of the Ahmedabad community and are from different economic and social sectors of society. They will be able to offer much interesting input, as they experience social issues of the city every day in their work’.

They nevertheless do not share the socio-economic profile of economically deprived voiceless slum dwellers, despite working in the slums and being very close to their needs and problems.

The definition of community and the initial important role of the parental organisation, in this case Saath, offer dilemmas and can contradict the strategies of survival and ownership of a CVU. While the video unit can be a powerful channel to inform the community about schemes and services available to them, a 50% presence of NGO workers can overshadow a video unit as a tool owned by the community to establish dialog and collective action and to influence the authorities and bodies with power.

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62 Yasmin Rehmani, Operations Manager, Samvad Video Unit (e-consultation).
The good intentions of the NGO in using the video unit to expand access to health, education, infrastructure, job training schemes, micro credits and other services and resources makes it harder for Samvad to develop an organizational structure that makes the CVU a media that is 100% owned and managed by the community. Nevertheless, there is a danger in aiming at this ownership when the boundaries of the ‘community’ are not clear or are too wide, and when it requires institutional organisation from disperse or non-organised communities.65

Besides, Samvad CVU is yet not 100% sustainable. Despite it has started to produce films for external organisations and to sell its own DVDs, it still depends financially on the parental organisation and external donors. The partial or total withdrawal of the NGO is a process that needs to adapt to each situation. And it cannot be assumed that this is always a desirable goal. The concept of community and the path towards ownership and financial sustainability are, therefore, intertwined challenges.66

4.4.2 Samvad’s impact and political spaces

Despite the challenge that represents to use PV in a permanent basis, this model offers great potential in the creation of political spaces.

‘All the video magazines promote social change through linkage with non-government organizations in the slums, or government bodies at the local or state level’.67 The members of the communities are connected through these bodies when videos are shown to authorities. Also, when members of the community attend the

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64 This is in line with Friedmann’s argument in section 2.3.1. (this paper): By becoming decentralized state agents, some NGOs can become ‘less reliable as an effective advocate of the claims of an alternative development’ and this urges the disempowered poor to have a political voice of their own. (1992:159).
65 Drishti is now exploring the possibility to set up a CVU for a different type of community, one which is not necessarily delimited according to geographical assumptions but according to other defining elements -i.e. a group of sex workers in India-. (Conversation with Kavita Dasgupta, Programme Manager of the Community Video department in Drishti).
66 Although literature on community media in general tends to highlight financial sustainability as the main one (Bhattarai, 2007; Dean, 2009; Fairbairn, 2009).
screenings, the distributors collect their names and the members of the NGO’s Resource Centres follow up to make sure they facilitate them the information they need to respond to the call to action.

From January to May 2009, Samvad did 156 night screenings, reaching an audience of over 26,400 slum dwellers. The day screenings during this period reached 17,000 people.\(^{68}\)

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**The picture in this box has been removed for this online version of the paper to protect the privacy of the women who attended the private day screening.**

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**The video playing in the image on the right raised the issue of gender-based violence in the community.**

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Slum dwellers know that the video unit is a tool that helps them in influencing and lobbying the government. Rehmani\(^{69}\) explains how a group of neighbours had complained to the government about a problem with a sewage line. Frustrated for not receiving any response, they lobbied the Ahmedabad Municipal Board by threatening to ask Samvad to make a film about their problem. After the warning, the sewage line was quickly fixed. Such was the power of video, even before it was made.

One of Samvad’s films addressed the problem of corruption in ration shops\(^{70}\). Slum dwellers have a ration card that allows them to a specific quantity of litres of kerosene for their daily cooking. Nevertheless, shopkeepers cheated constantly. They would fill in the dwellers’ tanks with half the litres they were meant to receive.


\(^{69}\) Interview with Yasmin Rehmani, Operations Manager, Samvad Video Unit

\(^{70}\) All Samvad films can be seen at: www.drishtimedia.org/saath.html
The dwellers were aware of that but they did not feel they could protest. After watching the film, the members of the community were inspired to raise their voice collectively. About 15 days after the film was done, government officers raided the shops for inspections. Licenses were temporarily suspended. When the shopkeepers returned to work, they corrected their practices both for shame and also for fear that the film unit would track their attitude again.71

There are many more impact stories from this and other CVUs that Drishti is supporting. Certainly, films done by the community have inspired their members to be assertive and to take action. Both examples outlined show that communities have gained power to access those with power over thanks to the dialogic process catalysed by video.

71 Information extracted from Drishti and Saath internal documents on 'impact stories' of the CVU Samvad.
5. Conclusions

This paper has explored whether Participatory Video is a tool that can develop the political capability of grassroots communities to influence those with power over them.

After clarifying terms of reference of often misused words such as ‘participation’ and ‘empowerment’, this paper argues and concludes that PV has indeed a great potential to empower communities if two extremely important elements are carefully considered throughout.

One of them is the role of the facilitator, who needs to be aware that he/she is not teaching or transferring expertise but facilitating a dialogical process. The facilitators need to have a strong understanding of the local dynamics, be ready to listen and learn, be prepared for activities never to work out as planned and to ‘step out of their expert role and become co-learners in the project’ (White, 2003:45).

The other key element is the selection of the participants, which needs to be consistent with a careful analysis of the power relations in each context.

Having considered these two elements, both theory and the different case studies support the argument that PV works as a catalyst for communities to enter a dialogical process with themselves. This process increases self-awareness and self-assertiveness and allows communities to explore their problems, identify sources of oppression, identify solutions, and design processes of collective action. Theoretical support for this process can be found in Freire’s ‘Pedagogy of the Oppressed’, Participatory Research Action models and in Haberma’s Communicative Action Theory. Within this process, video is a medium that overcomes the illiteracy barrier and that allows grassroots communities to vertically interact with authorities as well as to communicate horizontally with other communities.
Nevertheless, based on both literature and on the collected primary data, this paper highlights the difficulties in maintaining these empowering effects over the long term when PV is used as a one-time activity and if the community does not have access to video equipment once the activity is over.

In order to use PV as a permanent tool, different organisations have come up with various models with the same aim of establishing a video unit that is by, for and of the community. This paper concludes that the potential of video under this approach can be indeed greater than PV as a one-time activity, because its impacts can be extended over the long term. Nevertheless, the analysis of the CVU Samvad, in Ahmedabad, India, also exposes the many challenges that need to be faced in order to harness this potential.

5.1. Challenges

Throughout the paper, the complexity of the concept ‘community’ has been highlighted. Communities are not unproblematic and harmonious, and its boundaries are often decided by outsiders without attention to local dynamics. This has special consequences when PV is designed as a permanent video unit, owned and managed by the community. The delimitation and definition of community will influence on the design and efficiency of local management structures. Video SEWA, for instance, a renowned video unit set up in 1984 within SEWA\textsuperscript{72} works with a specific community within India which is not geographical: poor self-employed women workers.\textsuperscript{73}

This is intertwined with two other big challenges: ownership and sustainability. The strategy towards ownership can be slowed down due to financial dependence with

\textsuperscript{72} SEWA: Self-Employed Women’s Association (Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India).

\textsuperscript{73} In 2000, Video SEWA became a freelance video production unit registered as a member’s cooperative (SEWA had in 2008 a total membership across India of 966,139 women –www.sewa.org-).
donors or the parental NGO. Similarly, sustainability strategies can also become inefficient if there is no sense of ownership from those who the NGO is intending to transfer responsibilities.

Finally, related to the importance of understanding PV as a process and as an end in itself, the work routines of donors need to be revised. It has been argued that the potential of PV in creating political spaces is greater when this tool is available to the community on a permanent basis. Nevertheless, the insistence of donors in sponsoring one-year plans or in requiring immediate impact and quantifiable assessment puts serious obstacles to the empowering dialogical process that video can catalyse.

5.2. Recommendations

Like in development in general, there is no blueprint to follow when using PV as a tool to empower communities and the context is the first element to take into account.74

Nevertheless, this paper has insisted on the main aspects that need to be considered: the political context, the power relations both between stakeholders and within the community, the role and characteristics of the facilitator, using PV as process and understanding the dialogical process that leads to collective action, the definition of community, the need to clarify the role of the parental organisation and the donors and to design strategies towards ownership and sustainability from the beginning according to the local circumstances and to the will of the community, and, finally, a change in the work routines of donors and NGOs.

74 Despite not being analysed in this paper due to space reasons, the benefits of PV might not be able to be harnessed in militarised regions or areas with protracted crisis, where horizontal and vertical communication might be impossible due to the absence of an institutional framework or for security reasons.
If these elements are considered, there are strong reasons to argue that PV has indeed a great potential to increase the political capabilities of grassroots communities to influence those with *power over* and seek for social change.
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