Utilizing Participatory Visual and Digital Methods in Sport-For-Development and Sport Management Research: Process, Benefits, and Challenges

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In 2005, Skinner and Edwards suggested that although qualitative methodologies have grown to become more accepted within academia, the use of these methodologies are limited within sport management. Relatedly, recent work within the growing field of sport-for-development (SFD) has emphasized the importance of utilizing participatory and innovative forms of methodology and methods, in order to account for and illuminate participant perspectives in development-related research (Hayhurst et al., 2015). As qualitative research becomes increasingly more prominent in the field of sport management (Hoeber & Shaw, 2017), and areas such as SFD continue to grow (Schulenkorf et al., 2016), it is essential to expand understanding of non-traditional forms of qualitative research such as the use of visual and digital methods.

Although limited in use within sport management (Shaw & Hoeber, 2016), visual and digital approaches have been advocated for in management research due to such methods’ ability to: (1) increase participants ownership in research and their voice in regards to management; and (2) improve inclusivity and credibility in management research which in turn may improve organizational decision making (McCarthy & Muthuri, 2018). In the context of SFD, such methods aim to prioritize and engage participants in critical dialogue about the possible interconnections of sport and development while challenging traditional hierarchical research relationships (Hayhurst, 2017). Despite the promise held by participatory approaches in both SFD research (Spaaij et al., 2018) and sport management research (Skinner & Engelberg, 2018) little scholarly work has discussed the processes, benefits, and challenges of using visual and digital methods.

The purpose of this presentation is to therefore provide an in-depth examination of the use of visual and digital methods based on a study concerned with SFD for refugees in Uganda. Guided by a participatory research approach, the objectives of the presentation are to: (1) describe and explain the foundations of visual and digital methods; (2) discuss the benefits and challenges of utilizing visual and digital methods in a study of SFD; and (3) expand on the methodological contribution that such methods may have for the field of SFD and sport management more broadly.

Three key implications of visual and digital methods will be considered. First, an explanation of the novel methods of photovoice (Wang, 1999), photocollaging (Castleden et al., 2008) and digital storytelling (Hayhurst, 2016) will be outlined. Second, a discussion will be held on how visual and digital techniques aim to: (1) enable individuals to record and represent their everyday realities; (2) stimulate critical awareness about personal and community strengths and concerns; and (3) reach policymakers (Wang, 2006). Third, the ability of visual and digital methods to provide alternative forms of dissemination and translation of knowledge, for example through public displays or online videos, will be emphasized (Mitchell et al., 2014). The presentation concludes by suggesting that adopting participatory visual and digital approaches offers originality for both research impact and practical application that contributes greatly to the recent call for the use of diverse methodologies and methods in the field of sport management (Singer et al., 2019).