

# A guide to facilitate PhotoVoice projects



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## What is Photovoice?

The famous Chinese adage – "A picture is worth a thousand words" is representative for the guiding philosophy of Photovoice method. Photovoice means a collaborative process for creating and sending a collective message through photos. From the perspective of the main action, it is a participatory photographing process with origins in community photography which has had a strong impact on society during the 60s in the UK and USA. But the focus does not remain on the photographing, which is only a means to create a context for communication and collaboration among group members, for exploring the community/group needs, for reflection on issues and on possible solutions and for coagulating the messages that the group wants to convey. The message sent by the group is exposed through photography accompanied by short texts.

The first methodological documentation of Photovoice was conducted by Dr. Caroline Wang, a professor at the University of Michigan, who used community-based research around the 1990s in order to facilitate the collaboration among members of marginalized groups to help them "identify, represent and develop their community by a specific photographic technique " (Wang and Burris, 1997, pp. Palibroda et al., 2009)

### Photovoice - a tool for:

1. advocacy
2. research
3. public consultation
4. need or context analysis
5. monitoring and evaluation
6. [developing skills](#)

PhotoVoice's added benefit to community photography is the fact that the community's difficulties are presented through the "lens" of the one who encounters them, so the messages become more complex, with "attached" emotions, transmitting exactly the problem in its essence, as it is felt by community members, in order to develop public policies focused on solving specific problems. In terms of education, PhotoVoice fits the theoretical approach of Paulo Freire about empowerment education, which emphasizes the role of education to support critical reflection on our environment and the learner's involvement in its transformation. Thus, education is valued in relation to community development<sup>1</sup> (Kuratani &

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<sup>1</sup> Kuratani, G. and Lai E. (2011) PhotoVoice Literature Review. Retrieved from:

Lai, 2011). In training contexts, PhotoVoice can also become a valuable tool for facilitating the development of diverse skills, with characteristics that place it in the project based learning strategy.

- participants are investigating complex issues in the community, so learning is related to real-life situations;
- cross-curricular topics or thematic approaches are easily tackled; by the nature of the proposed tasks, project-based learning requires the transfer of competences and highlights transversal competencies (communication, negotiation, time management, organization, etc.).<sup>2</sup>
- the workspace often combines the formal space (classroom/training room) with the extended space of the community;
- participants are focused on developing a concrete product in group/s;
- activities and tasks are diverse: documenting, exploring, debating, evaluating intermediate products, etc.; thus, learning outcomes can be obtained at different stages of complexity (analysis, synthesis, interpretation, evaluation).

Known as the "PhotoVoice Method" (a term commonly used in this guide), the whole approach is complex and may involve several methods (e.g. explanation, group discussion, documentation, etc.), means (e.g. photographic paper, computer, video projector, printer etc.) and forms of organizing activity (individual activities, group activities, front activities).

PhotoVoice method can be used with **different age levels, from school students to adult learners**. The topics and the complexity of the final exhibition are adjusted according to the particularities of the group we work with.

The way to use PhotoVoice method is guided by several key steps described below, based on the literature review and the research experience gained within CONNECTOR 2017 learning event, organized by the Romanian National Agency for Community Programs in the Field of Education and Vocational Training. Beyond the organizational steps, it is important to constantly reflect on the pedagogic design of the learning situations in which the method is used: what learning objectives are being pursued and how each stage and the whole

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[http://teamlab.usc.edu/Photovoice%20Literature%20Review%20\(FINAL\).pdf](http://teamlab.usc.edu/Photovoice%20Literature%20Review%20(FINAL).pdf) Access to: 5.08.2011

<sup>2</sup> Ionescu, M., (2003). Managementul clasei. Un pas mai departe. Învățarea bazată pe proiect (Class management. One step further. Project-based learning), Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest

experience can be valued for learning purposes (developing skills, raising awareness, promoting values and attitudes, etc.)

## **Learning objectives mainly supported through the PhotoVoice method**

The objectives of PhotoVoice method are determined by the content and the context. This method supports significant learning objectives due to the specificity of how its activities are organized in accordance with the topic, target group and context:

- ✓ Developing teamwork skills;
- ✓ Stimulating reflection on reality;
- ✓ Developing creative writing skills;
- ✓ Forming basic skills in photography;
- ✓ Assuming some principles and norms of photography ethics;
- ✓ Stimulating creativity and spirit of initiative;
- ✓ Developing self-confidence and improving self-image;
- ✓ Developing the capacity for action to solve a community problem;
- ✓ Developing the capacity to interact and support community relations.

Beyond how the PhotoVoice method has been popularized as a community development method, it is important to understand the fact that it has a much broader scope of applicability both in adult education training programs and in teaching/learning activities from school or university.

## **How to use the PhotoVoice method?**

The PhotoVoice method requires good planning and detailed preparation of each stage. We can identify three major steps: preparing – photographing and processing the photos - presenting and valorizing the results.

### **A. The preparation phase**

#### ***A.1. Setting goals and defining the topic***

In this introductory session, the participants, with the help of the facilitator, establish and discuss the issue they will be addressing (example: lack of local water, pollution of a village / city, stereotypes and prejudices, human rights violations etc.), the purpose of their action and

the desired impact. Even if the facilitator / teacher has some general themes, it is preferable for the participants to choose the theme, to formulate it as a community issue or as a subject to be investigated. Involvement in defining the theme motivates and makes them responsible, as part of the process. Depending on the context of application, the method may start from a community problem when it is used as an advocacy method or as a public consultation tool or from a general theme when it is used for didactic purposes (example: situations discrimination, school violence or other issues requiring awareness-raising, awareness-raising). Choice of topic and goal setting are closely linked, based on the needs and expectations of the participants. In learning contexts, the skills development is the main objective. When the method is used for public consultation or community development, as well, the learning objectives are followed also by objectives such as: influencing public policy, encouraging social involvement, community cohesion, etc.

Following discussions, the participants will have a clear picture of what they might capture in the photos, so they are in line with the set objectives and, implicitly, the needs of the community or the training needs. It is advisable to use specific methods to **develop critical thinking** and **creative writing abilities related to images** at this stage (e.g. avoiding clichés in speech, translating emotions in writing, pursuing a logical thread, the credibility of the transmitted message, rewriting, reformulation, etc.). In classroom implementation, this step can be done with the session for the development of **photography skills and photography ethics**.

#### *A.2. Preparing the necessary resources (space, cameras, other resources)*

**Space and material** resources are determined by the context of PhotoVoice (class or other training spaces), and the necessary materials are cameras (or phones), paper, pencils, pens, laptop, photos, etc.

**The facilitator** is generally teacher or trainer, but can be anyone who has facilitation skills, abilities to prepare and deliver training sessions and facilitate learning.

#### *A.3. Familiarize participants with the PhotoVoice method*

In the introductory session, the facilitator will focus on team building, on activities for **participants to know each other** in order to facilitate **group cohesion**. Later, he will explain to

the participants the process through which the PhotoVoice method will be carried out and will establish with them the directions of action.

It is important that the methods used by facilitators are dynamic and interactive and determine participants to show interest and to **develop their personal and social skills** - these will be valorized in community development.

#### Exercise - CONNECTOR 2017

Participants are offered a set of photos and a message set, they must negotiate and determine together which message is associated with the photos.

One of the primary responsibilities of the facilitator at this initial stage is to create an **open, comfortable and safe environment** for participants so that they can feel and express themselves safely. Security, comfortable environment and free expression are conditions for **authentic results**.

The next step is to establish **common rules** for the proper conduct of the sessions. The facilitator can give responsibilities to the participants (example - one of them can be responsible for keeping time).

#### Examples of group rules (Rutgers, 2016)

1. Confidentiality - if personal issues are discussed.
2. We respect each other.
3. We listen and give the others time to talk.
4. We come in time.
5. We respect differences of opinion.
6. Close our phones or our ringer.
7. We are all involved.
8. We organize the time effectively.
9. We learn from each other.
10. We have fun.

The last part of the introduction session will focus on participants' expectations, will establish the terms of action and also the elements related to the Photovoice process and planned activities.

It is also important to properly manage the **time**, in accordance with participants' schedule. Depending on how we use the Photovoice method, its duration may be shorter or longer. **In school**, the duration **depends on the number of hours allocated to a specific subject and the length of a school activity**. But a good organisation of content can make it easier to be implemented in a relatively short time.

## B. The photographing session and preparation of the exhibition

### B.1. Basic abilities in photography and photography ethics

For Photovoice, minimal skills of using a camera are required. The facilitator checks the participants' abilities and, if necessary, makes a brief presentation and some practical activities. Once they are assured that the participants have learned basic skills to take pictures, the facilitator discusses the ethical elements that the participants need to know and apply.

#### Ethics of photography

1. **Will this affect anyone?** It is important not to take pictures that may affect the reputation of others.
2. **Can it be dangerous for me?** Do not put yourself in dangerous situations to take pictures, nothing is more important than your safety.
3. **Does the image I want to capture really represent the problem? Is it really relevant or out of context?**
4. **Do you invade someone's personal space by taking that photo?** If so, it requires written permission (see example in resource chapter).
  - ✓ I need permission for a photo in which someone can be recognized (face, tattoo, etc.), photography of minors, private property and things;
  - ✓ I do not need permission for - photographing people who cannot be identified, public figures or public places.

In order to get into detail and develop photographing skills, training sessions on light, compositions, symbols and photo messages can be made.

### B.2. Taking photos in the community

For this stage, the participants go to the community. Several photo sessions can be made, each followed by a discussion session. Participants can take pictures individually or in teams (2-3 people). They **apply some of the skills previously acquired** to capture the issue as authentic as possible.

From the administrative point of view, for participants' photos, you need to have **documents proving the permission for taking the photo** (if applicable) and **documents that offer the right to publish the photos**. Instructions on how to do this and examples can be found in the Practices and Resources Communities section.



In the case of using the Photovoice method for research or documentation, it is possible to offer participants the freedom to select different photos from books, private albums, or from online, with the obligation to specify the source.

### *B.3. Discussion sessions based on photos and experience*

The photo sessions are followed by discussions about the photographing experience and taken photos. Prior to the discussion session, the participants choose a few photos that they consider most relevant to the objectives.

The number of selected photos varies depending on the size of the group or the theme - most often, 3-5 photos are selected. For each selected photo, the person who made it create a



*Discussion and creating message session, CONNECTOR 2017*

message in which it expresses synthetically what it wanted to transmit through that image. For creating the messages, you can use the **SHOWED method** (instructions for using it can be found in the resource and practice communities section).

The facilitator will take photos from the participants (named with the participant's name and having a photo number, the same will be with the messages in order to avoid confusion in the processing stage). In certain situations, when a participant has difficulty selecting photos, the facilitator can provide support (guiding the selection of relevant photos for the theme), or he can select himself 1-2 photos to expose and to discuss. In the last part of the session, the participants **will present the photos with the related messages** and they will **organize them into categories**.

#### **Examples of questions to facilitate message creation**

- What represents the photo? Who's in the photo, when and where?
- What determined you to capture that image? What did you feel about it?
- What would you like the one who see this photo to understand or feel?

#### B.4. Photos Processing

Photo processing requires **image editing skills** from a facilitator or a member of the team, because the photos may require interventions (if they are too small, if the frame has been moved, etc.). You also need to attach the text to the image, which can be done digitally or you can use the classic version - sticking the message to the physical image.

It is **recommended to use photo paper and an A4 or larger size**, but if the resources are limited, you can use normal paper. **Print costs can be relatively large**, so this is one thing to plan from the beginning.



*Photos processing, CONNECTOR 2017*

#### C. Presentation and valorizing results

Presenting and valorizing of results can take various forms:

- ✓ classic exhibition (printed photos)
- ✓ online exhibition
- ✓ postcards
- ✓ other advertising materials (calendars, web pages, albums, etc.)

It is important to plan with the participants how to valorize the results, depending on the objectives: how the results are presented, who is invited to the exhibition or to whom the products (postcards or other materials) will be sent. Depending on the reasons behind (example: problems identified in the community, needs, interests or wishes of the group, issues of global interest etc.) and in order to increase the impact, businessmen, representatives of the local community, representatives from different ministries, NGOs, Church representatives, local televisions and newspapers should be invited.



*Photo taken during Photovoice training, CONNECTOR 2017*

**People who can help solve the problem situations** and develop the community in which the method has been deployed will be identified together with the participants and invited to the exhibition or targeted by the awareness campaign that can be organized with the help of the products.

## Who and how to evaluate?

The evaluation of the results also adapts to the context in which the method is used. When the predominant purpose is teaching, training, evaluation the focuses are on "learning/training outcomes": what capacities the participants have formed, what attitudes they manifest, etc.

Usually, learning outcomes are assessed: a) ongoing (**continuous or formative assessment**) - by observing how participants implement the skills acquired in training sessions for different activities, which allows recalibration of the training process and individualization, or supports interventions in situations where participants are in difficulty; b) at the end (**summative evaluation**) - by methods such as: portfolio, presentation, self-evaluation, conversation, analysis of the products of the activity (example: exhibition) etc.

The main purpose of the assessment is to learn from our experience.

When the method is used for community development, advocacy or public consultation, the evaluation takes new forms, specific to project evaluation. Thus, both the competencies acquired by the participants and the effects of their actions in relation to the established objectives (example: the way in which the problem addressed can be appreciated by analyzing sources of information - press, websites, blogs, pages of socialization, posters, etc., how many decision-makers have been informed about the problem, what measures have been taken as a result of social action mediated by the Photovoice method, etc.).

It is desirable that the evaluation be carried out by the participants together with the facilitator. Involvement of participants in the evaluation contributes to encouraging reflection, critical thinking, and assuming responsibility for the learning / training process.

## Why should we use the Photovoice method?

Over time, the Photovoice method have proven effective in various disadvantaged communities. From the best-known Wang and Burris application, who supported the



**It's my bike, I use it to go to school, 5 km away ...**

*Photo taken by CeRe Romania Photovoice, Source - CeRe training course support, CONNECTOR 2017*

development of public policies to improve the condition of women in China's villages, there have been multiple applications that have had a greater or lesser impact on the community in which they have taken place.

An example is offered by the "This is my voice" project under the Youth in Action Program, conducted with deaf people to draw attention to their abilities, which can be valuable to the labor market. Another "Freedom of Fame" project by Canada's Women's Excellence

Center for Women's Health has involved women with precarious material, because of their inability to find a job in a prejudiced world.

There are also theoretical tests and theoretical approaches to the Photovoice projects used as an assessment, needs analysis or public consultation methods, as a training method it was more less used.

*"Beyond the essence and objectives, it's fun"* (Photovoice Simulation Participant, CONNECTOR 2017)

Being a process that combines the ability to involve participants in community development with various training strategies, Photovoice acts both at the personal and community level - this is the main reason for the success. For impact, a Photovoice method must have visibility, so it is good to be promoted to social networks, the media, or to invite people to support community development.

As we have seen, the central goal of Photovoice is to stimulate participants' ability to engage in community development. Using Potovoice, the participants will also have the skills to:

- ✓ improve written and oral communication;
- ✓ develops the ability to understand and respect other points of view;
- ✓ strengthen the positive relationships in the community;
- ✓ increase civic involvement;
- ✓ develops family-community dialogue;
- ✓ gives participants "voice";
- ✓ develops teamwork skills;
- ✓ facilitates awareness of the problem;
- ✓ creates powerful visuals materials;
- ✓ can have a high impact with relatively low costs;
- ✓ stimulates creativity;
- ✓ improve self-esteem;
- ✓ can be adapted to different training contexts and different target groups (school, youth, adult education)<sup>3</sup> (PhotoVoiceWorldwide, 2015).

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<sup>3</sup> PhotoVoiceWorldwide., (2015) Benefits of Photovoice. Taken from: <http://www.photovoiceworldwide.com/benefits.htm>, Accessed: 14.08.2017

Last but not least, the Photovoice method shows, through the specificity of the work, a very good level of interaction between the participants, which has a motivating effect and makes the learning more pleasant.

Like any method, Photovoice has certain limits that are good to keep in mind to minimize its effects.

- ✓ The time needed is relatively long. A rigorous time management is needed, given that the activities take place over a period of time - from a few days to a few weeks.
- ✓ Participants may have trouble expressing their ideas about their photos; the facilitator will support them without "forcing them" and showing sensitivity to their feelings or difficulties.
- ✓ An in-depth analysis of a problem can also trigger negative feelings.
- ✓ There is a risk of camera losing or damage; participants should be warned of this risk and learn to use them correctly and safely.
- ✓ Continuous monitoring of how the activities progresses and how participants involve in the activities is needed.
- ✓ In some stages, "dead times" may appear. For example, it takes a long time for each participant to download the photographs to the computer, and the participants have to wait. For such situations, it's a good idea for the trainer/facilitator to have prepared relevant workloads (example: to note the messages they want to associate with each photo)
- ✓ The theme chosen for the application should be interesting, provocative so that the participants show interest. A less relevant topic determines a lower degree of involvement or attachment to a cause.
- ✓ Costs can be relatively large, depending on amplitude. To reduce costs, cameras from mobile phones can be used, online exhibitions can be organized, etc.

Being aware of the implications, advantages and limitations of implementing Photovoice method is using or acquiring the necessary skills to facilitate, all we have to understand is that *"there are so many ways to apply Photovoice in school, in training or with seniors that all you need is just to start"* (Participant Photovoice simulation, CONNECTOR 2017)

## How can Photovoice method be applied in Erasmus + projects?

The Photovoice method offers a wide range of applicability, being flexible according to context and theme, target group and objectives, so worldwide it was possible to implement it mostly in disadvantaged communities, by different institutions (NGOs, social assistance centers, universities, schools, multinationals) and programs.

In the educational area, there are projects running through Erasmus + that use the Photovoice method. We will present short examples that can be used as sources of inspiration for the development of such projects across all five action lines: School Education, Vocational Education, VET, Youth, University Education, Adult Education).

Both in Erasmus and other contexts, the Photovoice method has been generally applied in the learning process of young people or adults, however, it can also be applied successfully in the school environment.

*"Photovoice is a difficult process, but worthwhile results!"* (Photovoice Simulation Participant, CONNECTOR 2017)

In order to encourage the application of the method in school, we will present an adaptation of **an eTwinning project (part of Erasmus +)** called "World War One through our eyes" by teacher Cristina Gîrlă, from the National Pedagogical College, "Constantin Brătescu", in Constanța, in collaboration with teachers from other nine countries.

This project aimed to develop **research skills, teamwork, creative writing and critical**

**The Erasmus + project - "Being a Refugee is not a Choice"** was a partnership involving 6 European countries that focused on raising awareness of the refugee situation and drafting possible solutions to develop intercultural competences for young people.

More details

<http://eycb.eu/cms3/UserFiles/file/Being%20a%20Refugee%20is%20not%20a%20choice%20-%20INFOPACK.pdf>

The Erasmus + project "Youth Participation Through Pictures" was a Romanian-Slovak partnership that looked at how social exclusion affects Roma communities, as well as taking steps to solve the problem.

More details at: <http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/projects/eplu-project-details-page/?nodeRef=workspace://SpacesStore/89fe7932-ab86-4d94-9c60-15729eec1178>

**thinking.** Also, with First World War as a theme (any other theme may be chosen), students have **gained knowledge about the subject.** The Photovoice method can be used in classrooms, in groups of two, three colleagues and through the eTwinning platform, in international groups.

During the **initial training phase**, the project objectives and the directions of action have been established. Thus, an introductory lesson with central elements about the First World War and group cohesion activities (example: collaborative games, negotiation) have been carried out. Also, in this session, **the structure and stages of the project were presented.**

**Activity description** - Students went to the field in libraries or anywhere they have access to First World War information, made or selected photos (from albums, books, the internet) and created a creative text about them (example: documenting life of a hero from First World War, mapping battles, documenting the events that led to First World War etc.)

After the training phase, a **training session** was held in the next hour **to develop creative writing and photographing skills**, and it is also recommended **that methods for developing these skills are also applied to content** related to the First World War theme. (example - a set of images from First World War was presented and children was asked to create a creative text about the images).

After developing these skills, for two weeks (or more depending on the theme and schedule), the students have **conducted documentation photographing and writing activities.** The texts that accompany the images are done in group sessions, but given the limited time of school hours, work sessions in pairs or study groups are used as an alternative method.

In the third week, students **presented their work through an exhibition.** The “tour of the gallery” method was used and after, a discussion with children about their projects and their work experience took place, to enhance learning and to assess the formative effects of the method as well as the level of understanding.

As you can see, using the Photovoice method as a an educational method transfers the focus from the community development, as it was popularized over time, to learning outcomes and development of skills. It is thus a learning method that can be used in the school, university or any other learning environment in which the specific skills of this method are desired.

Another advantage of using the Photovoice method is that it can easily be **integrated into the curriculum** (the previous example can be valorized in the context of the history hours).



As a conclusion, we can say that the Photovoice method has multiple applicability perspectives: in non-formal contexts (working with youth for community development on different themes such as "How and where I learn" in disadvantaged communities to attract investment in the development of the school environment ), in formal contexts (in the school or university environment for acquiring skills, on the example of eTwinning project above) and in adult learning contexts (example: in the organizational environment for institutional development, projects that focus on the employees' vision). With these multiple directions, the educational valences of the method depend on the facilitator's creativity.

## Communities of practices and resources

- ✓ Example evaluation report  
<https://www.aucd.org/docs/A%20Report%20on%20the%20Photovoice%20Projectx.pdf>
- ✓ SHOWED method  
<https://culturalphotovoice.wordpress.com/2013/11/26/showed-method/>
- ✓ Examples of Worldwide Photovoice applications  
<http://www.photovoiceworldwide.com/lectures.htm#sthash.y4r5KkW1.dpbs>  
[https://humanecology.ucdavis.edu/sites/g/files/dgvnsk161/files/inline-files/CRD\\_147\\_s11.pdf](https://humanecology.ucdavis.edu/sites/g/files/dgvnsk161/files/inline-files/CRD_147_s11.pdf)  
[http://psych1.lse.ac.uk/psr/PSR2011/20\\_07.pdf](http://psych1.lse.ac.uk/psr/PSR2011/20_07.pdf)
- ✓ PhotoVoice adaptation for content application in the university environment  
[https://sydney.edu.au/education\\_social\\_work/professional\\_learning/resources/papers/slc-2015/Bentz-keynote.pdf](https://sydney.edu.au/education_social_work/professional_learning/resources/papers/slc-2015/Bentz-keynote.pdf)
- ✓ Reflections from the Photovoice experience  
[http://www.stanleyteacherprep.org/uploads/2/3/3/0/23305258/photovoice\\_as\\_a\\_critical\\_reflectiion\\_methodology.pdf](http://www.stanleyteacherprep.org/uploads/2/3/3/0/23305258/photovoice_as_a_critical_reflectiion_methodology.pdf)
- ✓ Documents required for making photos and using them in the exhibition  
<http://www.wpunj.edu/uppc/images/UPinPC+Photovoice+Facilitator+Toolkit+Final.pdf>
- ✓ Photovoice Documentary  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RhHidNnstQc>
- ✓ Video training for the application of the method  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UuPcnl3X\\_3c](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UuPcnl3X_3c)
- ✓ Communities of practice  
<http://www.ce-re.ro/home>  
<https://photovoice.org>  
[www.photovoiceworldwide.com](http://www.photovoiceworldwide.com)