EL USO DE LOS MÉTODOS VISUALES PARA EL DIAGNÓSTICO Y LA INTERVENCIÓN SOCIAL A TRAVÉS DEL ESTUDIO DE DOS CIUDADES EN ESPAÑA Y CAMERÚN

THE USE OF VISUAL METHODS FOR DIAGNOSIS AND SOCIAL INTERVENTION THROUGH A STUDY OF TWO TOWNS IN SPAIN AND CAMEROON

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RESUMEN

Este artículo presenta algunas de las contribuciones de la perspectiva visual al análisis de la realidad social, así como sus ventajas y limitaciones en comparación con el uso de otras técnicas sociológicas más habituales, en una investigación donde se encuentran presentes la aproximación multi-método y la triangulación. En este artículo describimos la desigualdad entre dos ciudades concretas en Camerún (África) y en España (Europa) a través de la observación de fotografías. Se ha combinado la información visual con la procedente de entrevistas, grupos de discusión y otras fuentes. Como resultados, se subraya que el uso de la fotografía supone una contribución para la sociología visual que aporta algunos matices que otras fuentes o técnicas de investigación no aprecian de la misma forma, y ello podría ser de utilidad para la intervención social. Las imágenes parecen identificar otros aspectos invisibles de los datos, o clarificar o proporcionar información novedosa sobre los aspectos de la desigualdad que no aparecen explícitamente a través de otros medios como estadísticas, entrevistas, grupos de discusión, prensa, etcétera. Haber recogido en el proceso de investigación discursos sobre las fotos a través de las entrevistas también ayudó al proceso de investigación en sí mismo y al diagnóstico social.

ABSTRACT

This article presents some advantages and limitations of a visual perspective for the analysis of social reality in comparison with the use of more common sociological techniques, for which a multi-method approach and methodological triangulation were used. In this article we describe inequalities existing between pictures of two particular towns in Cameroon (Africa) and Spain (Europe). We combined visual information with that of interviews, focus groups and other sources. The results show that the use of photography for a visual sociology provides nuances that other sources or techniques do not render and that could be useful for social intervention. Images seem to identify other invisible aspects of data, or clarify or provide new information on aspects of inequality that do not appear explicitly through other means such as statistics, interviews, focus groups, the press, and so on. Collecting discourses about pictures through interviews helped the process of research itself and also the social diagnosis.

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Introduction

Images and communication play a very important role in today's world. Consumer society is a society built on images; images move money, shape our awareness of the world and affect our perceptions of it through processes to construct social reality (De Miguel & Pinto, 2002). The world always had colours. The visual always existed. But why visual is so attractive today? Images are nowadays a key piece of our sociological understanding of the World, and Western cultures have became visual cultures, where due to the massive access to new information and communication technologies, citizens of developed countries continuously live together with the visual, as images produced by human beings through diverse resources as photography, video, television, etc.

The impregnation of society with new technologies, that happens in daily life in all spheres of public and private worlds, has also been reflected in the academic world. One could say that a clear –but for the moment limited- sensitivity to the revision and adaptation of methods and techniques of research has been awaked these days, improving the visual sociology. This focus in the visual has also been common in other social and human sciences. In this article, though main attention is paid to visual sociology, some reflections are useful for other social sciences where the visual could be a technique of great interest for social diagnosis and intervention.

If Sociology has usually employed words and numbers as sources of research, and even this has marked the differences between qualitative and quantitative approaches, a visual focus or a focus on visual sociology involves working with pictures and videos, as static and dynamic images. This supposes, on the one hand, considering the image for the analysis as a *data* itself; and such *data*, for its special nature, shows society with other shades. Moreover, it could enrich our knowledge of the world. On the other hand, due to the production of new types of data for the analysis, new tools for social research are introduced.

Our article is organised around two connected thematic axis: visual sociology and the diagnosis of inequality as an area of intervention. With regard to the first, we are interested in the contributions of the visual perspective to the analysis of social reality, its advantages and limitations compared to the use of other more common sociological techniques. Regarding the second axis, the diagnosis of inequality, what is interesting for us is discussing about what kind of visual approximations –specifically here the use of pictures – contribute to our understanding of this phenomenon, in comparison with that observed using techniques that are more conventional. In a sense, the value of images is incorporated to numbers and words as *data-*, because images show other aspects of reality.

With the aim of studying the contributions of visual sociology to the knowledge of inequality and its diagnosis, a study between two towns has been carried out. One of these towns is placed in Cameroon (Santchou), while the other in Spain (San Bartolomé de la Torre). Santchou is located in Western Cameroon in the Department of the Menoua in the Mbo plain administrative district. The urban area of Santchou comprises twenty-seven rural villages and has around 20,000 inhabitants. San Bartolomé de la Torre is one of the 79 towns of the province of Huelva (Andalusia, Spain) and has 3,205 inhabitants. These two study areas were chosen within a larger framework for cooperation in which this research study was carried out; specifically a town twinning partnership between San Bartolomé de la Torre in Huelva, Spain and Santchou in Cameroon. This partnership should be understood as one of the technical and political channels for bilateral and direct decentralised cooperation which permits local entities from different nations to establish ties with one another (Confederación de Fondos de Cooperación y Solidaridad, 2001).

The value of the work that we present here is the incorporation of visual issues as research technique (in different moments: the fieldwork, and the analysis), serving as complement to other techniques usually applied in social and human sciences research. The use of photography has allowed us the visualization of new details about inequality, details that are very difficult to find and to interpret through data of other nature and that can be useful for diagnosis and social intervention.

Visual sociology as framework: introducing visual methods

Visual Sociology is a subdiscipline of Sociology particularly concerned with visible dimensions of social life. Nevertheless, visual research is not only focused on the visual or video-recorded images, it also includes audible components as well as visual representations. Visual sociology is being used to

explore sensory experience, emotions and embodiment more broadly. As we further expose, visual images through photography are crucial in our research.

Today, visual sociology must be understood in a socio-cultural context marked by the development and spread of new technologies in visually oriented societies in which images have an increasingly greater impact. Nonetheless, the use of images in social research dates back to the nineteenth century thanks to the work of anthropologists at that time, among them Franz Boas (1895) and Bronislaw Malinowski (1922), who documented their fieldwork with photographs. As Prosser and Loxley (2008) explain in their recent paper, visual sociology got off to a more promising start with the publication of photographs in the *American Journal of Sociology*. This approach, however, met with criticism due to the lack of methodological rigor or the use of photography as mere illustration. Indeed, according to these authors, little visual sociology was worthwhile until the 1970s. After that time, some visual research was particularly important to the development of this subdiscipline of sociology, namely that of Becker (1974) or Goffman (1979), among others, who stressed the importance of rigor, criticism and theory in the practice of visual sociology. Today the importance of images in constructing reality is widely accepted: 'Photography substantially contributes to the construction of social reality… images in the ideas one has about society, social roles and social norms are becoming increasingly more important' (De Miguel & Pinto, 2002: 51).

While the use of images as a research method is relatively new in comparison to other methods employed in social sciences, visually based approaches have come to be of enormous importance to qualitative methodology. Therefore, if in their origin, because of the prevalence of the written word over any other way of expression, social sciences somehow ignored visual world, nowadays it is almost impossible to understand social sciences renewed without the use of images and sounds. Bolton and Pole (2001) have argued that visual methods such as photography are still under-used in the active process of sociological research. Nevertheless, numerous authors have pointed to the value of images for the study and analysis of social and cultural aspects of social groups and concrete geographical spaces (Martin and Martin, 2004); their usefulness as an assessment tool (Hurworth, 2004) and their contribution to the theoretical and conceptual development of the social sciences (Stanczak, 2007). In Spain, for example, De Miguel has underlined the importance of interpreting societies from a visual perspective, particularly when analysing processes of social inequality in a global world (2003). Sarabia (2006) refers to the growing importance of visual sociology as a tool for obtaining data and the value of images for analysing society.

Through images, we are able to 'see' what cannot be perceived through the written word or numbers. Today, visual analysis is an interdisciplinary method employed in many disciplines. Indeed, the use of visual representations has become increasingly widespread in fields from sociology to anthropology, social work or psychology. As Halford and Knowles (2005) argue, one of the clearest advantages to the visual approach in sociological research is the bridging of the gap between the researcher and the subject. This shortened distance between the two permits the social scientist to enter the universe he or she wishes to analyse. Another advantage of using visual mediums in the research is the ease with which they could be disseminated in a global world in which images 'move like the wind' and the fact that a closed space is no longer needed to exhibit them.

Some of the first studies to employ visual sociology as a research method appeared as early as the 1960s and focused precisely on the third world (Harper, 1994). Many and diverse social phenomena are now studied using this approach, although visual methods are particularly useful in research studies focusing on everyday social life. Indeed, a wide range of aspects of the African continent have been studied using visual methods including education (Karlsson, 2001), the life of women prisoners (Gibbons, 1998) or health education (Brouwer, 1995).

Following the line of other works, our study uses photography as a medium to observe differences in social inequality between a town in Spain and another in Cameroon in a qualitative manner. Emphasis is on the importance of visual methods placed to gain better insight into specific features of daily life and basic aspects of each country in a variety of spheres including infrastructures, education or healthcare, among others. As said above, one of the merits of visual analysis is that it provides an alternative approach to a text-based analysis or quantitative data, permitting researchers to gain a better understanding of a particular reality.

Objectives and initial hypothesis[2]

As we explained in the introduction, our paper is around two intertwined themes articulated: the visual sociology and the diagnosis of inequality. Regarding the former, we are interested in the contributions of the visual perspective to the analysis of social reality, its advantages and limitations in comparison to the use of other more common techniques, as part of an investigation with a methodological design, which makes value on the visual approach, in a context where a multimethod approach and triangulation are present. On the second axis, the diagnosis of inequality, what is interesting to us is to discuss what is bringing the visual approach, in this case the use of photographs, to our understanding of this phenomenon, and its implications for social intervention.

These broad objectives can be into specific issues divided such as knowing, through statistical data, the macro-social context of these two places (Santchou and San Bartolomé de la Torre), observe the inequality between Cameroon and Spain and show some of the areas where inequality is located, through a visual approach. Then, the main idea is to observe some social inequalities that exist between these two towns, without losing sight of regional or national contexts.

Specifically our goal is to analyze these differences through images, visualise social differences and inequalities in diverse social scenarios. To this end, we were interested in exploring through the pictures specific spheres of inequality such as urban infrastructures, healthcare and education, technology and daily life, as well as other differential aspects such as gender, in order to understand patterns of social organisation and some of the basic motivations that drive these patterns.

The initial hypothesis with which we have worked is that the use of photography in the study of inequality allows seeing some nuances that by other sources are not noticed. And that, they are complementary in a multi-method design, and it is expected through the photographed images to identify other invisible aspects of data, or clarify or provide new information on aspects of inequality that do not appear explicitly through other means such as statistics, interviews, focus groups or press.

Methods, techniques and data

Our methodological design is framed inside these new approaches that try to use visual documents (as photographies) as particular tools for the research, using image as a provider of discourses about society and constructing social and cultural meanings. In this sense, we used images, not only to illustrate, but as documents to analyse and interpret our object of study, in a frame of theoretical and methodological pluralistic that also make use of triangulation (Beltrán, 2000; Brewer & Hunter, 1989; Bryman, 1995; Pourtois & Desmet, 1992), and that emphasises the need for coherency between research methods and the object of study.

Nonetheless, as Sontag (1996) states, photographs do not provide complete truths, only partial ones. Yet something also remains unseen in a photograph. We must not forget that when researchers (like professional photographers) take photographs, they also leave their mark. In van Dijk's words (1999: 22), semiotic messages such as photographs can express underlying ideologies. On the other hand, following Sontag (1996), ideology is what marks that which constitutes an "event" and makes it worthy of being photographed. For some people this could be a limitation for the use of pictures in social research, for there is always a subjective perspective behind any selection, but, as Aguilar (2006) underlines, this look is no more subjective than that implicit in other techniques for the collection of data. That is, we are aware of our marks. It also happens regarding the participation of other researchers in our team. This traces stay in the pictures after doing the fieldwork. This is a clear limitation, and we must be conscious of it.

The selection of pictures for this work was guided by a previous work with primary and secondary sources: comparative social indicators between Spain and Cameroon showed some of the fields where inequality is more evident (see The Human Development Reports issued by the United Nations Development Programme, 2007 and 2009), and so did the qualitative fieldwork (interviews, focus groups).

At the beginning of the research, hundreds of photos on multiplicity of settings and social situations were in Santchou and San Bartolomé de la Torre taken, most of them are not going to be mentioned in this work, but may be subject to future publications, concerning religion, marriage, children, childhood and other issues. Then, in a more targeted selection process to focus on how the photographed images make visible aspects of inequality that other data do not, is when we established 'equivalent social spaces' to be compared across the images (from which social indicators, interviews and focus groups highlighted). The result was the selection of some

meaningful photos representative for social spheres, which is going to be presented in this text.

This research benefited itself from the use of different techniques for the production and analysis of data: from primary sources (photography, focus groups, in-depth interviews, life histories), to secondary ones (statistics or reports). In the following paragraphs, we explain what is concerning the use of photography for this article, due to its centrality in this work.

Two types of pictures were in the fieldwork for this visual approximation carried out. We took spontaneous and natural images from daily life and social spheres, and posed images to show some particular aspects of reality. For the analysis of data, depending on the technique that was employed every time, conventional procedures for a qualitative analysis were used, that is, through visual and textual information we applied usual procedures as selecting, clasifying, coding, and so on. These intellectual operations were applied similarly to the data, regardless of the technique by which they were obtained, although the visual material is of different features to the text. We used these procedures with the exception of purely quantitative data from different reports, that we have used descriptively to contextualize the research. In addition, pictures were taken and afterwards were shown to experts from both countries, with whom we discussed about them to guide and improve the interpretation of images.

At least in our work, the value of visual is specially achieved in relation to the contents that appear regarding inequality, because they give us new nuances of it –as we will highlight in the next sections-, than to the fact of having used different techniques in analyzing the data. However, if we make the distinction between production techniques and data analysis ones, the visual appears as an additional technique of production of data that is complementary to the interviews, focus groups and life histories used.

Finally, we would like to comment that the use of visual methods and the use of photography involve attention to ethical issues. In our case, it was taken into account applying for permits at any time, particularly with regard to minors in Spain and Africa.

North-South inequalities visualised through two local spaces (Santchou, Cameroon and San Bartolomé de la Torre, Spain)

In what follows we will provide a comparative description of the patterns of inequality and basic differences that were found between the two towns in a variety of social spheres. These social spheres were visually represented through a series of photographs that have been selected from those taken for the broader project.

Urban structure

As many experts have described, the urban structure of developed countries differs from that of less developed countries and is tied to different activities of daily life (Giddens, 1991; Manzini and Jégou, 2003). And this is linked to the percentage of population residing in urban and rural areas, which is an expression on the degree of modernisation and technological development. Comparing Cameroon and Spain, this difference is shown through some indicators. For instance, in 2012, 77.6% of the Spanish population resided in urban areas, compared to 45.5% of the population in Cameroon. Related to the electrification rate, the Spanish one is of 99.7% whereas in Cameroon is only 48.7% in 2012 which means that almost half of the population had no access to electricity (UNDP, 2013). The AARD[3] in the proportion of the population without access to improved drinking water – sources, was of 23% in Cameroon contrasting with the low level (<2%) in Spain (World Health Organisation, 2012).

In our study, we found differences between the two twin towns Santchou and San Bartolomé de la Torre in terms of modernisation as well as urban facilities and infrastructures. Such differences can be found in transport, urban design and planning and the socioeconomic activities that take place in both spheres. Urban planning usually reflects the needs of a given area. During the fieldwork carried out in Cameroon and Spain, we found that both towns have main streets where a large part of public, social and commercial life is conducted. The images show the differences between basic aspects such as asphalting, buildings (which were always one-storey in Santchou), traffic or cleanliness. Housing is radically different as well. While San Bartolomé has modern brick buildings in neighbourhoods with running water, electricity and sewer systems as well as other facilities and services, the situation in Santchou is bleak with wooden structures lacking electricity and water as well as other basic elements (Figure 1).

Viewing a landscape full of traffic signs, and paved roads in a residential area, leads us directly to a formal regulatory system that explicitly regulates the traffic, even outside of urban areas. The fact that most of the houses in Santchou lack of delimitation

of the land occupied, the less we could talk about privacy and security, and about different means of regulating the ownership and urban structure. Today cities absent of electrical installations or urban boundaries are distinctly uncommon in Spain, even in small rural towns. The same could be said about the anecdotal presence of a chicken in the street (Figure 1).

Urban structure

Figure 1. A street in Santchou (Cameroon)

Source: Gualda and Ruiz, 2007.

Women, technology and daily life

Women are a fundamental element of any society, albeit their achievements vary depending on the society in question. According to Fonchingong & Ngwa (2005), women in Cameroon continue to play a fundamental role in ensuring access to food. The majority of food consumed by families in Santchou comes from products cultivated by the families

themselves, products that the women must transport to their homes as shown in Figure 2A of a woman carrying bananas and wood to cook in her *hote*. In contrast, in San Bartolomé de la Torre the daily shopping is transported in trolleys to facilitate a domestic task that is also much lighter. In the centre of Santchou it is common to see women transporting large loads to sell at the market or for family consumption. These women must often travel long distances on foot, as the main street is located far from their households or from the land where the food is grown. Although it is also common to see the women of San Bartolomé travelling to do their shopping, the distances are shorter and the loads they carry are lighter. As a result of processes of modernisation and the presence of household technologies throughout Spain, women no longer spend time on domestic tasks such as fetching water or washing clothes by hand (Durán, 2007; Demométrica, 2007). Through Figure 2A and 2B, one could easily visualize not only gender inequality (very well measured by statistics), but also the hardest aspects of the conditions in which is developed domestic work, the type of work women do, the ease or difficulty to execute them, the technological means available or not to perform these tasks, and so on. While several years ago a process of generalization of consumption to medium class was in consumer societies described –see for the case of Spain in Alonso y Conde (1994)-, a visual observation of other scenarios, makes very evident the inequality of the scope of this process. This kind of nuances easily observed through the images, are not measured by statistical indicators as, for instance, the Gender Inequality Index, that reports wide differences between Spain which ranks 15th (value 0.103) and Cameroon that holds the 137st position (value 0.628) (UNDP, 2013).

Women, technology and daily life

Access to water is another aspect of daily life that sets the developed world apart from the less developed world (Figure 2B). While in the developed world water is considered a public good for cleaning, personal hygiene and cooking, obtaining water in the underdeveloped world involves travelling outside the home to the nearest well (owned either by the family, a neighbour or a public well) and transporting the water. This task is usually the responsibility of women or girls who are in charge of cooking and cleaning. It is not difficult to understand Nana-Fabu (2006) when she states that women in Cameroon have long been the economic backbone of the coun-

Figure 2A. Woman carrying bananas and wood in her hote

Source: Gualda and Ruiz, 2007.

Figure 2B. Woman drewing water from the well

Source: Gualda and Ruiz, 2007.

try and yet remain marginalised in society and in the economy. These aspects must be modernised in order to gain better access and control over resources (education, loans) and if global development is to occur in the country.

Infrastructures and healthcare

Healthcare is one of the areas where underdevelopment is most evident. This is particularly important if we take into account the Acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) epidemic affecting not only Cameroon (Unaids/ Who, 2004), but other countries of Africa as well. This is one of the aspects that is a clear indicator of the enormous differences that exist between Cameroon and Spain. The Human Development Reports issued by the United Nations Development Programme (2007, 2009, 2013) and World Health Statistics reports (2009, 2012) reflects the differences between both countries, through indicators such as life expectancy at birth and morta-

lity rates, health expenditures, and others. It is very significative, for instance, that the public spending in health (% of GDP) in Cameroon was of 1.5 in 2010 while in Spain was of 6.9% (UNDP, 2013).

The healthcare system in Spain is structured and organised in a complex manner (Donati, 1994; Rodríguez, 1987) to account for a wide array of aspects such as the functions of the different agents in the system, access to health services, patients' rights or the assessment of the quality of the services, among others. Unlike the hospitals of Huelva and San Bartolomé de la Torre, the healthcare facilities of the two hospitals in Santchou (a public and a private one) are very deficient, and pictures give good account of it. Differences in infraestructure, and others are also clearly reflected in photos taken at local level. For example, the delivery rooms of the hospital in Santchou are a long shot from those of the Juan Ramón Jiménez Hospital, which is equipped with modern devices to assist and monitor births, as well as to provide primary care for newborns (Figure 3C).

Although maybe there are best hospitals in Cameroon, it is inconceivable to find a delivery room of this kind in Spain (Figure 3B), where health control mechanisms and even mass media immediately could denounce the existence of such facilities.

The differences in colours that predominate in the photos are also expressive of aspects that have to do with modern health culture that enhances the health, welfare of the patient, their families and professionals, the quality of care, etc. Thus, while in the Figure 3B all of these elements are absent, in the Figure 3C, we see signs of concern not only for health but for social psychological aspects of health as may be the comfort, aesthetics, etc. The predominant green colour in the delivery room, or in general in the operating room: bed linen, uniforms or gowns, disposable material, etc., expresses the concern (since 1941) that blood to pass a little more unnoticed and that environment provide an visual break for both patients and professionals[4].

Some photos clearly show us the differences in the organisation and distribution of medicines and healthcare material. The poor hygienic conditions in which medicines are kept in some hospitals of Santchou (Figure 3A) contrast with the procedures followed at Juan Ramón Jiménez Hospital to ensure high standards of quality and safety of the medicines. At this hospital, medicines are prepared in single doses and kept on trolleys in each ward of the hospital. The prescribed medicines are classified in drawers that are labelled with the name of each patient, room number and bed number. Similar procedures are used in health centres and local offices, to ensure hygiene, disease prevention, etc.

Education

Like other underdeveloped countries, the formal educational system of Cameroon has largely been the result of efforts by Christian missionaries (Molindo, 1984), sometimes in conflicts with the governmet (Akoko and Oben, 2006). The presence of religious institutions in the educational system of Cameroon explains why part of the country's population is literate, although not on a par with Spain as the Human Development Report of the United Nations Development Programme (2013) reflects. Moreover, as occurs in Africa in general, there are marked internal inequalities in education in Cameroon (Eloundou-Enyegue Parfait and Shapiro, 2005). Certain indicators such as infrastructures, school facilities and equipment, school materials, quality of teaching, human resources and expenditure on education,

Figure 3A. Pharmacy in a hospital in Santchou (Cameroon)

Source: Gualda and Ruiz, 2007.

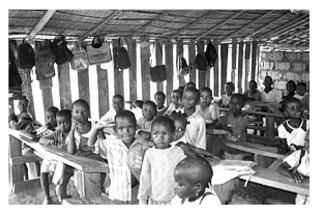Figure 3B. Delivery room in a hospital in Santchou (Cameroon)

Source: Gualda and Ruiz, 2007.

Figure 3C. Delivery room in a hospital in Huelva (Spain)

Source: Gualda and Ruiz, 2007.

Figure 4A. Classroom in a school in Santchou (Cameroon)

Source: Gualda and Ruiz, 2007.

Figure 4B. Classroom in a school in San Bartolomé de la Torre (Huelva, Spain)

Source: Gualda and Ruiz, 2007.

among others, clearly demonstrate this fact. For instance, regarding public expending on education, the percentage of Gross Domestic Product in Cameroon was of 3.5, while Spain invested 5.0% (2005-2010). Concerning inequality of gender, only 21.1% of women achieved at least secondary education (% 25 and older, 2006-2010) while 63.3% of women reached that education level in Spain (UNDP, 2013). In sharp contrast to Spain, where schooling is compulsory until the age of 16 (Carabaña, 2007), students in Cameroon must continue to work in the countryside or do domestic chores while attending school; activities which are common among the young boys and girls of Santchou. Enormous gender differences also exist in the educational sphere due to the fact that the traditional culture of Cameroon continues to make education a priority among males (Fonchingong and Ngwa, 2006); a bias that has disappeared in Spain due to the introduction of compulsory education.

Schools in Santchou face serious obstacles ranging from overcrowded classrooms to the lack of facilities and equipment (see Figure 4A). They also have problems to pay teachers, difficulties in obtaining school materials or these are in a poor state or must be reused[5], and even, according to Abadzi (2007), some Cameroon schools dedicate less time to teaching than it has been by the government established, particularly in low-income areas.

Perhaps one of the most striking aspects of the educational system of Santchou is the precariousness of the schools themselves, clearly visualized in Figure 4A, where, for instance, satchels do not hang on hangers, but on tables, all reflecting the limited public investment in education. Many of the school buildings are in a state of ruin and built out of in-

adequate materials. Toilets are often located outside the main building and are dirty and unsafe. This contrasts sharply with the schools in San Bartolomé that are equipped with excellent, well-maintained facilities (Figure 4B).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

At the end of this route, we agree with Prosser and Loxley (2008) concerning the potential for using image-based methodologies to gain knowledge about social reality. Images and communication play a very important role in today's world. By contributing to the construction of social life, images provide information about the world to aid professionals and researchers alike to gain a better understanding of it. However, we cannot forget that the act of taking photographs, as Sontag explained (1996), involves an ideological or culturally guided selection. In our study, we have taken photographs that highlight striking aspects of the inequality between Spain and Africa; and particularly between the two twin-towns; inequalities that are in turn reflected objectively in international social indicators. Yet the image goes beyond the data to express details that mere numbers and other data and sources cannot display. Remember the satchels that do not hang on hangers, but on tables; or the typical green colour in modern hospitals. Nevertheless, the visual (as numbers, texts and others) is but a simplification of a more complex reality, never attainable in its complexity. Aware of this limitation, we have aimed to highlight basic differences around the notion of inequality and difference.

Following Berger (1974), advertising, in its particular interpretation of the world, persuades, fasci-

nates and causes the sensation of almost touching and owning, awakening our desire to buy. Drawing on this idea in our research, we believe that the clear visualisation of differences or inequalities through images can be a useful tool for promoting action and raising awareness among citizens about the need to overcome inequality. In this context, it makes sound sense to conduct an integral research project based on the use of images at all stages including the research design, fieldwork, and, especially since the advent of internet, with which they can be disseminated and presented publicly for the purpose of both research and intervention. It can be very useful in projects for international cooperation.

Indeed, the results of a research study based on visual approaches can be useful for raising awareness among a wide range of social groups including children and the elderly about aspects such as the situation in which a large part of the planet lives and the tremendous gap that divides Africa and the western world. At the same time, such awareness can contribute to designing different actions for cooperation and the promotion of development[6], and also suggest new proffesional fields for social interventors and agents.

In conclusion, the results described above clearly supports the usefulness of employing visual mediums for purposes of research and intervention, and even dissemination. However, photography as a methodological tool is not a panacea. For us the use of photography in this work has acquired its full meaning to be used as part of a strategy of triangulation of different research techniques.

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Notes

1   ESEIS, Research Team on 'Social Studies and Social Intervention' (www.eseis.es)/ CIM, Centre for Migration Studies (www.uhu.es/cim).

2   This research study was conducted under an agreement signed with the European Foundation for the North-South Cooperation (www.fecons.org).

3   Average Annual rate of Decline since 1990 up to the latest available year.

4   See in http://enfermeradequirofano.iespana.es/indumentaria.htm.

5   All of this was also reported by interviewed experts in Santchou.

6   A larger collection of photographs than those shown here were exhibited at the City Hall of San Bartolomé de la Torre during the 1st *International Conference on Africa and the Western World: Seeking New Relations* held in Huelva in November 2007 (Gualda and Ruiz, 2007).