


Working Papers Collection | 4



# ASPIRATIONS MAPPING AND PARTICIPATORY PHOTOGRAPHY

BY AMALIA G SABIESCU AND NOÉMI ZAJZON

---

CONNECT2ASPIRE. CULTURAL ENGAGEMENTS AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PROFESSIONAL ASPIRATIONS



This working paper is published in the frame of the AHRC ECR Leadership Fellowship and UKRI Innovation Fellowship *Connect2Aspire. Cultural Engagements and Young People's Professional Aspirations* (2019-2022).

This work was supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), grant number AH/S004424/1.

Cover design and graphic layout by Noémi Zajzon

Cover image credentials: photo taken by workshop participant

Vs. 2.0, August 2023

Loughborough University London

## 1 Introduction

Photography has been used in the social sciences as a research method to offer insight on material culture and social acts, to a level of depth beyond that afforded by traditional word-based research methods (Bentley, Nemer and Vannini 2017; Szto, Furman and Langer 2005; Pauwels 2020). The beginnings of photography as a visual method have been associated with this evocative power of anthropology studies, to document, transmit and preserve aspects of culture and social behaviour and transmit them beyond the boundaries of the community being researched. Early anthropologists would not typically question the truthfulness and accuracy of life, custom and material culture as represented in the photograph (Luvaas 2022). Later anthropology studies acquired a more pronounced critical edge, looking beyond what was being represented, to what was missing such as movement and process, or what was hidden behind the surfaces (Pinney 2011). More recently, the use of photography in the social sciences took a new turn when the camera was handed to the people whose culture and behaviour were being studied, as in instances of participatory photography. This fundamental change meant that participatory photography could cover some of the gaps and reveal some of the hidden aspects that the anthropological camera could not fathom; it could be used for instance as a tool for reflecting on and sharing personal histories and experiences, and how these are embedded in broader concerns and values of the socio-cultural environment in which individuals reside (Gomez & Vannini 2015). This incurred a more pronounced shift of focus from *collective* aspects of culture and sociality (in the form of shared societal traditions and customs, or in vestiges of material culture as studied by anthropology) to capture as well personal feelings and experiences, or the embedding of individual life histories in community socio-cultural and political ecosystems. This working paper investigates the role of participatory photography for engaging young people in deep, reflexive explorations of their aims and aspirations and how these are contextualised in the socio-cultural and economic environments that they are inhabiting. The main purpose and contribution of this paper is methodological: based on an analysis of using participatory photography with young Roma migrants, it offers a series of lessons learnt that speak to both the value and the limits of integrating it as a technique in applied community-based research with young people.

As one of the outputs of the research project Connect2Aspire<sup>1</sup>, this working paper should be read in conjunction with another project output, namely the [Connect2Aspire Aspirations Mapping Toolkit](#) strand on [Aspirations Mapping and Creative Expression](#). The toolkit offers an approach and support materials for engaging young people in a process of mapping emerging life and career aspirations through participatory photography and zine making. Participatory photography is used in the first stage of the process, for generating visuals following an open yet guided process by which young people are invited to use the camera to explore specific aspects of their social and cultural environment that bear upon the formation of their aspirations or affect the likelihood of seeing them come to fruition. The forthcoming section on methods provides further details on the role of participatory

---

<sup>1</sup> AHRC ECR Leadership Fellowship *Connect2Aspire. Cultural engagements and young people's professional aspirations*. <https://connect2aspire.lboro.ac.uk/>

photography in the Connect2Aspire project and the dataset on which this paper draws. The rest of the paper then contextualises participatory photography in social science visual, creative and participatory research methods and offers insights on the role of participatory photography as means to offer enhanced reflexivity and depth to the study of complex social constructs such as ‘aspirations’.

## 1.1 Methods and data

Connect2Aspire (*Cultural engagements and young people’s professional aspirations*, 2019-23) is an AHRC-funded ECR Leadership Fellowship that explored new ways of mobilising cultural and creative resources, spaces and networks to support young people to crystallise and pursue career aspirations aligned to their interests and talents. The project included a community ethnography in Coventry and a study on cultural engagements in cultural sites and museums, with a focus on the V&A’s Programme for Young People. Overall, 285 young people have been involved through data generation methods including semi-structured interviews, focus groups, questionnaires, analysis of creative artefacts and creative research workshops. Apart from investigating the process of developing and supporting the achievement of aspirations, this project aimed to create a custom toolkit of research approaches for engaging young people in aspirations research. The development of the [Connect2Aspire Aspirations Mapping Toolkit](#) has been shaped by data gathered from both research strands, focusing on the insights of young people from all walks of life: from regular museum goers that attend V&A events; to NEET young people who have been offered creative skills workshops by the V&A Young People’s Programme outreach efforts in East London; to first generation Roma migrants in Coventry.

This working paper draws on the strand of community-based ethnographic research conducted in Coventry, with the aim of shedding light on how young people develop life and professional aspirations and how out of school go to places for informal learning and skill building are used by young people in this process, what are the existing support structures in place and what are the gaps. To achieve these goals, data collection covered on the one hand the views of young people (n=20), with a focus on the migrant youth of Roma ethnicity and on the other the views of professionals in the areas of culture, heritage and museums; informal education; youth organisations; social care and statutory services (n=20). The 20 young people involved were all first or second-generation Eastern European migrants of Roma ethnic origin. Their views were recorded through semi-structured interviews and creative research workshops. Young people interviews have been designed following preliminary versions of an aspirations development model described in the working paper by Sabiescu (2021), which captured the role of the socio-cultural and economic context of life on the formation of aspirations, with a focus on social circles of influence and support and social networking and communication practices. A second wave of data collection has been conducted by means of workshop-based participatory and creative research workshops. These included three workshops with young people, on communicative ecologies mapping, participatory photography and zine making. A further participatory photography workshop was organised with middle aged and elderly members of the Indian diaspora in Coventry.

The combination of interviews and creative research workshops did not only enable us to gather very rich data on young people, but it also put us in a position to gain insight into the added value as well as the limitations associated with data generation through creative

research workshops when compared to traditional, word-based data generation techniques such as semi-structured interviews. Part of this understanding was used in practice in the creation of the Connect2Aspire toolkit. A series of [working papers](#) further reflect on creative research methodologies for aspirations mapping. While the present one reflects on participatory photography, two others complement the [toolkit strands on communicative ecologies](#) (Sabiescu 2023) and on [mapping pathways to creative careers](#) (Sabiescu 2021).

### *The participatory photography workshop*

While a total of four participatory and creative research workshops have been organised in the project, the one most relevant to this working paper is the one on participatory photography, described here in further detail. The workshop targeted young people at moments of transition and took place in Autumn 2022 in Coventry, UK. This was the first of a two-step experience offered to young people as a safe space to reflect on their life and career aspirations, in an atmosphere marked by creative expression, sharing and exchanges with peers and facilitators. This first workshop was focused on enhancing young people's visual and photography skills and apply them to reflect on the existence (or absence) of a strong professional aspiration and its importance. A call to participate in the workshop was launched through a community centre and addressed young people between 18 and 30 years old, all members of the local Roma community. Four young people participated, three young women and one young man with ages ranging between 18 and 30 years old.

The workshop was designed based on insights from the ethnographic research process that had already been completed at that stage. It was meant to teach young people basics of photography and engage them in a process of directly using this knowledge and enhanced visual literacy to explore the shaping of their own aspirations, under the weight of determining societal factors, opportunities as well as barriers and challenges to achieving them.



The workshop included a morning and an afternoon session. The morning session taught basic techniques such as angles, framing, rule of thirds together with more advanced notions regarding photography symbolism and communicating emotions through photography. There was also a focus on photography and aspirations, where richly symbolic photographs of achievers in different fields, from science to sports, were discussed in relation to the aspirations that potentially animated the pictures depicted, such as self-mastery or scientific

breakthrough, or humanitarian achievements. In several meetings with the project team, these techniques were carefully woven through exercises that engaged young people, so they had a chance to not only learn about techniques and decode examples, but also reflect on their own aspirations in this process.

The afternoon session was conducted in a nearby park. Young people had the chance to apply what they had learnt, while taking photographs to tell the story of the lifestyle they aspired to. This central topic was research informed and part of a theoretical model on aspirations development tested throughout the ethnographic strand of research. The afternoon session involved as well the two facilitators engaging with each of the four participants, asking questions and helping them focus the photographic work on their emerging story of the lifestyle they aspired to. The visual imagery resulting from the photography workshop was thereafter used in a zine making workshop, where participants used a ready-made zine format to document their emerging aspirations and pathways to achievement, as well as associated challenges.

Facilitation was considered very important in the process, and a facilitation strategy was adopted which employed active questioning that accompanied cycles of collective/group work and individual applied tasks. A professional photographer and creative arts facilitator acted as lead facilitator throughout the workshop, and a researcher acted as second facilitator. In collective sessions, facilitators encouraged sharing and reflection throughout or after joint photography tasks. These were interweaved with one-on-one dialogues where each participant was encouraged to share their ideas, experiences, and ideas.

## **2 Participatory photography as a visual, creative and participatory research method**

Photography is classified as a 'visual' (Pauwels 2020; Stanczak 007; Banks and Zeitlyn 2015) and/or a 'creative' research method (Mannay 2015), while participatory photography is additionally included in the repertoires of techniques of participatory research (see for instance Mikkelsen 2005). The beginnings of visual research are linked to anthropology and the need to decipher and understand the richly culture-coded artefacts belonging to communities in extra-European lands, which anthropologists started exploring and studying. Ever since, at the centre of the visual research study remained the dynamic between human behaviour and material culture, where material culture includes virtually everything that has been produced in a human society and encoded with cultural meaning and symbolism (Pauwels 2020). In visual research the focus of study is often made of material culture artefacts; however, their study is actually a lens in the values, norms, traditions and beliefs of a society or community. When the object of study is material culture, formalised visual research distinguishes between:

- The Content - that which is being depicted (the 'what'); and
- The depiction: the style or Formal qualities ('how' it is represented), which gives insight into the world and creative intent of the producers (Pauwels 2020).

The dynamic between truth and representation in photography has been problematised at length in visual anthropology and sociology. As Edwards (2015) argues, position taking on this matter is not uniquely related to the reading and analysis of anthropological photographs,



it is rather entrenched in the process of production of anthropological evidence. The way this dynamic is approached in social science research is related to the grounding ontological and epistemological assumptions of the researcher, including aspects tied to the systems of beliefs that affect the research act (Stanczak 2007). Thus, where we deal with representations, it is important to problematise this analysis, to avoid taking for granted what is being represented (Pauwels 2020). Every representation is culturally coded, it can give insight into the socio-cultural norms, vocabularies, styles and even livelihoods and norms, values upheld in a socio-cultural milieu. Let's take the example of a traditional Romani livelihood-sustaining craft – metalsmith crafting. At first glance, the large cauldrons for spirits brewing that are produced, or the kitchen utensils may be thought of as merely functional devices for either brewing spirits or cooking and serving food. However, if we zoom in with our analysis, these objects of craft may provide rich insight into the world of the community where they have been produced. Part of this insight is embedded in the cultural object itself, which needs to be analysed to decipher these meanings. This may be for instance related to the material from which it is made to the way its shape has been optimised for supporting the traditional brewing process or traditional finely printed motifs or designs.

But even richer insight comes from broadening the lens of analysis to include the process of creating the artefact (Pauwels 2020), asking questions such as: Who is typically entrusted with metalsmith crafting? Is it only men, or do women play any role in the process? What role does this craft play in sustaining the livelihoods of this population? How are metal objects designed and produced, what techniques are used? Are these techniques specific to a unique Roma group, or are they practiced widely? How are these techniques transmitted? Is metalsmith a family profession, passed down from father to son? Or are there specialised guild-like associations entrusted with passing down skills and supporting the continuity of the craft? The analytical angle can then be broadened further to look at how metalsmith is essentially a socially, economically and culturally embedded activity, from the production process to patterns of use, such as brewing spirits after autumn fruits are harvested in European countryside.

The process of analysis in visual research comes full circle when including also the reaction or response of the onlooker, the one who is deciphering the material culture artefact (Pauwels 2020). In anthropological research, this is equivalent to a critical and self-reflexive process of analysis by which the anthropologists themselves become aware of the bias and determination carried by their own cultural luggage, and how this influences the process of interpretation in an anthropological research setting.

It is on this last aspect that we would like to dwell on, for a moment, to introduce some of the premises of the visual and creative research approach employed in the study we report on. The turning of tides in anthropological research is associated with counter-narratives of anthropological enquiry that place under scrutiny the alleged objectivity of the anthropological account. In attempting to represent other cultures, early anthropologists all too often lost sight of how their representations of otherness were also culturally filtered through their own eyes and interpretation. As Edward Said, one of the founders of postcolonial studies writes, these representations of *otherness* are done from a Western lens, and supported by “*institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles.*” (Said 1978: 10).

We can locate the emergence of respondent-generated artefacts in visual research at this crossroads, initially spurred by the critique of the unilateral manner of representation in anthropological research. An early example is the visual anthropology project 'Through Navajo Eyes', films produced by Navajo people outside Western norms of video production (Worth and Adair 1972). This was a fundamental shift of power in research relationships, placing the camera in the hands of the local people representing their own culture, rather than maintaining the power in the hands and the interpretive lens of the anthropologist.

Ever since the project *Through Navajo Eyes*, research methods that generate data through local participation and visual production have been considered particularly suitable for indigenous, migrant or underrepresented communities. The dynamic between representation and truth, so critical to the research process, takes a different turn as well in participatory visual research. The camera is handed to local people, moreover most methods include specific tasks and exercises that encourage reflection, sharing and deep investigation of the topic being studied, in either individual or group settings. Participatory photography studies conducted in development contexts have been reportedly associated as well with outcomes cherished by the participating local groups, ranging from empowerment of marginalized groups, awareness raising on collective issues and collective action taking for positive social change (see Skovdal & Cornish 2015, Chapter 5 for an outline of photovoice processes and examples of applied projects in development research and practice).

There are varying degrees of participation possible in photography-based research (Pauwels 2020). Photo elicitation is a form where participants are asked to produce visual imagery on specific topics, which is then discussed in groups and analysed to generate insight around the questions asked by the project (Vannini et al. 2015). Photovoice and participatory photography are considered more participatory processes, where participants have more freedom to document their issues and priorities through photography, while staying aligned to a central theme or topic for research, which is in general relevant for the community participating (Skovdal & Cornish 2015).

The richness of insight in visual and creative research comes from the manifold sources of data, encompassing: the visual artefacts produced, such as photographs; the process of producing them; and in particular the dialogic settings in which the production process and the artefacts are discussed. In the study we report on, the focus is on the process and the dialogic, reflexive sessions that have proved to be particularly insightful with respect to data generation. Another important aspect that the study focuses on is the balance between the collective and the individual in data generation. Depending on aims and approach, the process can be geared more towards exploring collective attributes and dynamics; or individual ones. At the same time, if the project is community-based, which is often the case with participatory photography or participatory video, the individual and the collective focus reinforce and inform one another, providing rich nuance that is not afforded by purely word-based data collection techniques.



### 3 Key insights on using participatory photography for mapping youth aspirations

The analysis of the participatory photography workshop and its outcomes suggests that participatory photography can be a valuable tool for enhancing participants' reflection on internal states, personal experiences and the way these connect with future-looking life and career aspirations. At the same time, the overall approach and the selection of the techniques employed proved to be critically important. In this part of the working paper, we report on the insights resulting from the Connect2Aspire study, grouped around four take aways that capture critical aspects in the design and delivery of the experience:

- In situ workshop design and the role of ethnography
- The role of photography training: visual literacy and reflexivity
- Role of facilitation: Dialogue and active questioning
- Participatory photography and zine making

#### *In situ workshop design and the role of ethnography*

Tips, insights and curated sequences for participatory photography workshops are offered in research methods and development literatures (see for instance Skovdal & Cornish 2015; Mikkelsen 2005). These result from many years of applied research with participatory photography involving many diverse groups around the world and are very useful resources for setting up a new project. Yet, the diversity of these tried out techniques also speak to the need to customize the process *in situ*, as the knowledge shared most often comes from applying the methods in customised local formats. The design of participatory photography needs to be localised firstly to respond adequately to the local group and blend into the local context; and second, to adequately integrate in its design the particular requirements of the research being conducted. It is in the dynamic between these two poles – the local community/participating group and the research aims – that the project gathers nuance and relevance in a community-based study.

In Connect2Aspire, the participatory workshops have been offered in the final stages of the project, after the rich ethnographic research had been completed and much of the data analysed. The ethnographic research served to inform the design of the participatory workshops, including the data generation approach and the strategy for youth engagement. The protocols for generating data were interweaved with steps in the participatory photography process, including a visual literacy and photography crash course delivered by a local professional photographer and creative. This decision was taken based on evidence regarding the value of visual practice for the local Roma community. Several members had been previously involved in photography projects, and a photography exhibition was organised a few years before to celebrate intergenerational connections in the local Roma community. Thus, photography was chosen as a means to both engage young people and yield deep, reflective data by fusing research processes in processes that appeared engaging and dialogic to young people. For instance, the photography workshop was designed to deliver basic photography techniques in the morning, through both frontal teaching and applies tasks; so that in the afternoon participants could curate their own photo-story.

Elements of research that underlined the importance of aspirations and started getting participants reflective about their own aspirations were interspersed throughout. Then after the workshop, participants were handed instructions for using the cameras to document specific instances of the process of forming and steps to achieving aspirations, or barriers associated. The ethnographic process helped as well with relationship building with participants and connections in the locality. Participants were recruited through a local community centre that was also involved as a project partner.

### *The role of photography training: Visual literacy and reflexivity*

One of the key decisions we had to take when designing the workshop regarded the role of photography training. On the one hand, participants could be merely handed in the cameras or allowed to use their own mobile cameras, as taking photographs is such an intuitive process, practiced by youth widely nowadays. The argument in favour of skipping training is that photographs taken in this process would be more genuine, closer to participants' own visual style and perhaps prone to emanate ideas about photography and staging that are local. On the other hand, giving participants firstly a short course in photography can be thought to have other benefits for the entire process: we wanted to test whether more careful photography set-ups, with attention to elements of lighting, composition, angles and even to symbolic elements of photography would make participants more attentive and more reflective, and ultimately more aware of the message that a carefully curated photograph sends. We considered as well that including a photography course would be more motivating and engaging for participants, as they could gain something concrete, have a tangible benefit from the workshop in the form of enhanced photography skills.

We have chosen to thus offer a photography course and designed it carefully in a process led by the professional photographer in dialogue with the researchers. The photography crash course gave step by step illustrations, tips and ideas on using light, angles, patterns for evidencing certain aspects of the portrayed objects and people and highlighting certain qualities: such as the strength associated with photographing a subject from below so that they loom high and powerful; and the way someone is minimised, made insignificant if being pictured from the top down. Or how the skilful use of light and darkness can evoke ideas of hidden or concealed. This was very useful for participants when it came to staging and thinking through the photographs they wanted to take, related to the lifestyles they aspired to. Enhanced nuance was afforded by being able to employ photography as a new vocabulary, with its complex repertoire related to use of lighting, composition, framing, angles and symbolism. Visual literacy elements, as much as they could be taught in a one-day workshop, proved to be important elements in this process.

A related observation is that we found it was important to weave photography skills exercises with elements of the data generation process, thus designing specific tasks by which young people would reflect on their own aspirations and share their ideas or experiences. For example, in one of the applied exercises, which young people had to first analyse photographs to discern how a photograph could convey a certain feeling or generate an emotion in the onlooker; and then design their own setting for evoking a powerful emotion. We designed this exercise so that the task asked participants to set up an evocative, emotionally-charged photograph that represented an obstacle or a challenge regarding the process of achieving their aspirations. A short story will illustrate this.

### **The Glass Story [1]**

*18 year old Carina was the elderly of many siblings. Her family relied on her to help with childcare for her younger brothers and sisters. They wanted to ensure the best for her in life, and secure her path to a viable profession and a financially stable lifestyle. At the same time, they were highly protective of her and Carina felt their protective attitude as a straightening jacket. Her future dreams were all crystallised around her aim to become independent and make her own decisions. When asked to use the camera and angles to portray the challenges to achieving her dream profession, she developed a scene where a half full glass of water was leaning dangerously on the very edge of the table. She photographed this glass on the edge as a symbol of the double-edged challenge she encounters: On the one hand her parents' helping hands keep the glass from falling. On the other hand she would like to take the risks herself, and find her own means of getting back to security.*

As illustrated by this story, participants had to think about the best way of portraying an emotionally charged event or situation in their lives related to their aspirations - either achievements or associated challenges, and then they had to enact it. This compelled an examination of inner states and emotions associated with their aspirations and led to very creative set-ups. More than this, designing episodes of active dialogue around these set-ups, to encourage sharing and discussion added to the value of creative tasks. This aspect is discussed next.

### **Role of facilitation: Dialogue and active questioning**

A related insight offered by the workshops is that the value of participatory photography comes across in conjunction with carefully curated facilitation sessions, favouring dialogue and active questioning. Group exchanges as well as one-on-one focused conversations are important elements when seeking to generate reflexivity in participants. It is particularly important for each participant's experience in the workshop to be followed closely at key moments with active questioning, helping them to render in visual format sometimes highly complex ideas, wishes or challenges. The group talk, on the other hand, serves to expand on potential associations and generate a joint, agreed meaning of the task at hand and the limits of possible options to explore.

### **The glass story [2]**

*The activities in the park gave further nuance to Carina's reflection on her dreams and challenges associated with achieving them. The task was for each participant to set up one or more photographs that illustrated the life they aspired for, or the lifestyle associated with a profession they cherished. When asked to portray her dream profession or lifestyle, Carina realised that what she wished for was actually a well-compensated, secure job. She did not wish for something adventurous, or anything that implied insecurity. Rather, on close inspection it appeared that there was no tension at all between her own dreams and those that her parents had designed for her. This was an insight that came to Carina during the*



exercise. She had been so focused on resisting her parents' imposed planning of her future, that she missed a close focus on what she really wanted to do herself in life. While the future goals were not that different from her parents' what she really wanted was rather, for her to be able to make her own decisions.

As illustrated in this story, the exercise with the camera in the final stage was used to shed light on highly complex decision points and experiences associated with pursuing a certain professional goal. Exchanges in group preceding the camera exercise, as well as the one-on-one conversations focusing on a story to tell through photography were useful as catalysts in this process.

### Participatory photography outcomes and zine making

The analysis of the participatory workshops also resulted in one of the key outcomes of this project, the Connect2Aspire Aspirations Mapping Toolkit. The participatory photography experience is integrated in the [toolkit strand that focuses on Creative Expression](#), where participants are encouraged to reflect on the connection (or disconnect) between their life and career aspirations, in an atmosphere marked by creative expression, sharing and exchanges with peers and facilitators. In this experience, a participatory photography session should be planned before a zine making workshop, for participants to generate imagery that will be subsequently used to create their zines.

**My Aspirations Zine**  
Connect2Aspire Aspirations Mapping Toolkit | Zine Making

**Self-portrait** What are the most important roles that you perform right now?

Roles I invest most time in

Roles most meaningful to me

.../ What I really like doing

.../ What I am very good at

.../ What I wish to achieve in life

**My Social Life**

My inspirational figure

.../ Stories of belonging

.../ Stories of not belonging

.../ My media spaces

Social media

.../ People and groups I follow

1

2

**Figure 2.** Two pages of the aspirations zine template used in the zine making workshop. Visual and graphic design by Noémi Zajzon.

We found this complex, step by step process rewarding both for research (in terms of data generation depth) and for participants (in terms of enhanced awareness of their own aims, aspirations and enhanced reflexivity). The process starts with the explorative, yet loose nature of the participatory photography workshop, where young people first start to focus on important questions regarding their aspirations, and to select some to explore visually. This brings awareness to critical factors and steps in the development of their aspirations. As illustrated above, for some young people the process can be effective in allowing them to come to grasps with and understand how their own predispositions and talents align (or not) with the life and professional futures that are being prefigured. To follow, the zine making workshop offers a format in which young people will put these understandings in a sequence, following their aspirations development pathway. The photographs taken by participants would then be used to make an aspirations zine, based on a journey of self-reflection and expression in dialogue and exchanges with peers and facilitators. This is a further reflective process, but one in which participants glue together their ideas, making a story of how their aspirations come to be, and how they see these developing in the future.

## 5 Conclusion

Aspirations are complex states, and their development is enduring and non-linear. Creative engagement approaches such as participatory photography offer the potential for deeper engagement and reflexivity, by offering participants other means for expression and communication, beyond the propositional (word-based) ones. In Connect2Aspire, this potential was investigated by means of creative research workshops that included a short course for imparting basic visual literacy and photography skills. The aim was to test this potential as well as map the conditions by which we could facilitate deep engagement, reflexivity, sharing and exchanges in a friendly, safe atmosphere.

In conclusion, our experience suggests that there is enhanced value in using visual and creative data generation approaches such as participatory photography; yet that the design of the experience and how it is integrated in the overall project design are very important. In Connect2Aspire, we gave prominence to the local context and worked to deliver an engaging, rewarding experience for the young people involved. To this purpose we used the ethnographic research conducted in the project to help us design a participatory format fit and engaging for local young people. The further enactment of the experience was analysed closely with a view to understanding its impact and potential for data generation, but also in order to complete the design of the Connect2Aspire Aspirations Mapping Toolkit. The decision to put together the potential of participatory photography and zine making is one that appeared promising, in that it engages young people in an initial explorative, creative process (in participatory photography) and encourages them to thereafter give a meaningful sequence to the resulting photographs (in the zine making workshop). However, our project could only test this potential in a very limited way. Thus, further research is necessary to fully gauge the value of longer-term engagement of young people through creative research methods such as participatory photography and zine making, specifically for generating understanding of complex psychological constructs such as aspirations.

## References

- Banks, M., Zeitlyn, D. (2015). *Visual methods in social research*. 2nd edition. SAGE.
- Bentley, C., Nemer, D., Vannini, S. (2017). “When words become unclear”: unmasking ICT through visual methodologies in participatory ICT4D. Special Issue on Cultural Diversity and Community Technology Design, for the Springer Journal AI & Society.
- Edwards, E. (2015) Anthropology and Photography: A long history of knowledge and affect, *photographies*, 8:3, 235-252, DOI: 10.1080/17540763.2015.1103088
- Luvaas, B. (2022). “Photography”. In *The Open Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, edited by Felix Stein. Facsimile of the first edition in The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Anthropology. Online: <http://doi.org/10.29164/22photography>
- Mannay, D. (2016). *Visual, narrative and creative research methods: application, reflection and ethics*. Routledge.
- Mikkelsen, B. (2005). *Methods for development work and research: a new guide for practitioners*. Sage. (Chapter 2 Participation in development; Chapter 3 Participatory methods in use)
- Pauwels, L. (2020) An integrated conceptual and methodological framework for the visual study of culture and society In: Pauwels, L., Mannay, D. 2020. *The SAGE handbook of visual research methods*. Second edition. SAGE Publications, Inc. pp. 15-36
- Pinney, C. (2011) *Photography and anthropology*. World Rights: Reaktion.
- Sabiescu, A. (2023) [\*Aspirations Mapping and Communicative Ecologies\*](#). Connect2Aspire research project Working Papers Collections, 5.
- Sabiescu, A. (2021) [\*Museums and Young People’s Creative Career Choices. Young People Profiles and Information Needs\*](#). Connect2Aspire research project Working Papers Collections, 3.
- Sabiescu, A. (2021) [\*Developing Aspirations through Social Assemblages. Towards a conceptual model\*](#). Connect2Aspire research project Working Papers Collections, 2.
- Said, E. (1978) *Orientalism*. Routledge & Kegan Paul: London and Henley.
- Skovdal, M., & Cornish, F. (2015). *Qualitative research for development: a guide for practitioners*. Practical Action Publishing. (Chapter 5. Photovoice)
- Stanczak, G. C. (2007). *Visual research methods: image, society, and representation*. Sage.
- Vannini, S., Rega, I., Sala, S., Cantoni, L., (2015). Using Photo-elicitation to Explore Social Representations of Community Multimedia Centres in Mozambique. *The Electronic Journal of Information Systems in Developing Countries (EJISDC)*, 67,8.
- Worth, S., & Adair, J. (1997/1972). *Through Navajo eyes: An exploration in film communication and anthropology*. University of New Mexico Press.