



## **Film-making for social change amongst rural youth in agroecological transition in the Zona da Mata mineira, Brazil**

*Produção de filmes como ferramenta para a mudança social entre jovens do campo em transição agroecológica, na Zona da Mata mineira, Brasil*

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### **Tema Gerador: Juventudes e Agroecologia**

#### **Abstract**

Even though young peasants are active in agroecological organizations and capable of producing videos with their cell phones, they usually don't produce films for social change. To encourage this practice, youth organizations linked to unions of peasants in the Zona da Mata-MG and a Ph.D. researcher specialized in ethnovideography co-organized film workshops. The workshops had two goals: 1) to learn to film for social change and 2) to bring together young people from the countryside. The workshops allowed us to reflect on the potential of producing films for social change, as they revealed the realities of gender oppression and struggles of young peasants, enabled the exchange of knowledge and problematized food production while pointing out exits, such as Agroecology. The article concludes that there is a lot of potential in film production by rural youth for social change particularly through a new kind of participatory film: *peasant-to-peasant through video*.

**Keywords:** rural youth; videoactivism; film for social change; agroecological methodologies

#### **Resumo**

Ainda que envolvidos em organizações agroecológicas e capazes de produzir vídeos com os celulares que possuem, jovens do campo usualmente não produzem filmes visando mudança social. Buscando fomentar tal prática, organizações de jovens ligadas à sindicatos de camponeses na Zona da Mata-MG junto com uma doutoranda especializada em videoetnografia realizaram workshops de cinema. Duas linhas orientaram as oficinas: aprender a filmar para mudança social e envolver jovens do campo através desses workshops. A realização das oficinas permitiu refletir sobre o potencial da produção de filmes para mudança social, revelando realidades de opressão de gênero e lutas das jovens camponesas, troca de saberes e problematização da produção de alimentos apontando saídas, como a agroecologia. Foram evidenciadas as potencialidades da produção de filmes pela juventude do campo e a emergência de um novo tipo de filme participativo: *camponês-camponês através de vídeo*.

**Palavras-chave:** jovens do campo; vídeoativismo; film para mudança social; Metodologias agroecológicas



## Introduction

Participatory film-making for social change is the making of films that engage various involved stakeholders in a process of (simultaneous) network building, social learning or dealing with dynamics of power and conflict, whereby the community are the problem owners and participate in diverse roles in the film production process (Goris, Witteveen and Lie, 2015). Lie and Mandler (2009) describe strategic objectives of film-making such as video for capacity building and video for awareness raising and advocacy. Most examples Lie and Mandler provide in their typology of the use of video for rural change require a longterm intervention of extension workers, filmmakers, researchers or others to ensure a durable use of this medium. To explore sustained use of filming for social change two film types which require less external support from institutions are studied. Mediated peasant-to-peasant, which falls in the category “video for capacity building” and video activism which fall in the category “video for awareness raising and advocacy”.

Harding (1997), who wrote one of the first handbooks on video activism, describes a video activist as “a person who uses video as a tactical tool to bring about social justice and environmental protection.” Twenty years later there are quite some studies about video activism but fewer are known about peasants using video activism.

The Zona da Mata region of Minas Gerais has been experiencing during the last 30 years the expansion of agroecology due to the combined work of peasants, peasant unions, the NGO-Centro de Tecnologias Alternativas da Zona da Mata and staff and students from universities in the region. Gradually, more peasants are transitioning from conventional to agroecological farm management. This social learning process takes place in a network of stakeholders that organize and participate in diverse activities that seek to raise awareness, build relationships, share skills and knowledge. One of the approaches that is very effective is the *Intercâmbios* (ZANELLI et al., 2015) based on the “*Campesino-a-Campesino* (peasant-to-peasant) methodology (CAC). Rosset et al. (2011), describe CAC as “a *Freirian* horizontal communication methodology or social process methodology, that is based on peasant-promoters who have innovated new solutions to problems that are common among many peasants or have recovered/re-discovered older traditional solutions, and who use popular education methodology to share them with their peers.” It departs from the notion that peasants have more trust in other peasants with regard to innovations than in extension workers. And even more when they see the alternative themselves. Mediated peasant-to-peasant builds on this methodology using film instead of face-to-face meetings. In the present research we study the potential of mediated peasant-to-peasant as a filmtype and methodology of peasants to share knowledge amongst themselves via video.



Social learning is used as a concept to study the process of knowledge sharing. Bearing on the work of Reed et al. (2015 cited in Goris, 2015) social learning in this case implicates a change in understanding of the role that media play in processes of social change; a learning process through social interactions; and an intention to apply the acquired knowledge.

## Methodology



Using a participatory action-research approach, a series of 11 film workshops were carried out in three municipalities of Zona da Mata (Araponga, Divino and Espera Feliz), with the participation of 64 young peasants, mostly from agroecological properties. The film workshops had two objectives: 1) to activate young peasants in support of “the movement” by teaching them how to film and edit on a smartphone. This objective came from the peasant union. And; 2) to investigate the potential of this tool to support social learning for agroecological transition.

Acknowledging that most young peasants are familiar with smartphones and most of them capable of producing videos on their smartphones the film workshops departed from the assumption that the participations had a basic understanding of making films. In the film workshops, the young people learned about the characteristics of filming with a smartphone, different film styles, script-writing and editing. Young people practiced script-writing, filming and editing in the workshops to stimulate learning by doing and learning from each other. The film workshops were focused on using film as a strategic tool for social change and for the exchange of knowledge. In total 20 films have been made during the workshops.

Following Rose (2012) in ensuring a critical visual methodology not only the 20 films to which Rose refers as the *image site* are studied but also the *production site* and *audience site*. Goris et al. (2015) elaborate on the importance of the audience site, stating that “participatory film-making for social change considers that a film requires



an audience to be complete. The audience is included as a stakeholder in processes of participatory film-making for social change in order to highlight the envisioned impact of participatory film-making for social change (Goris et. al, 2015).

The participants' discussions about scripts, drawings (production site), filmed material (image site) and reactions on the films (audience site) were documented and analysed to explore how young peasants engaged and evaluate the potential of filmmaking to foster social change towards sustainability in rural areas of peasant agriculture.

In all workshops ethical aspects have been addressed and all participants agreed to be part of the research. The young peasants asked for informed consent to film people outside of the film workshops.

## Results and Discussion

The film workshops have been an iterative process whereby follow-up workshops in the three villages were agreed upon during the first film workshops. The fact that young people actively participated in the workshops in all villages shows that there is an interest in video making. Also people with weaker ties to the agroecological movement participated, making the workshop a promising tool to engage young people in the agroecological movement. The first workshop in Divino was organised together with the coordinators of EcoJovem. One of their coordinators stated: *"We first want to learn to film ourselves because at the weekend meeting we won't have time. We will be busy with organizing the event."* The second film workshop in Divino was part of a larger youth gathering that also offered other workshops such as dance, football, climbing, to meet the different interests of youth and to give ample space for young people to engage in various ways.

At the first film workshop in Espera Feliz young people elaborated on their interest to learn more about filming. They wanted to learn how to make video blogs (vlogs) and how to film performances. Their interest was not necessarily filming for social change. One of the girls suggested to make a film about flowers and after defining the objectives, genre and audience of the film, the group agreed to make a film on the endless purposes of flowers. In the film they show flowers for medicinal use, and flowers which you can eat but also the beauty of flowers. At the end they produced a film that can be classified as mediated peasant-to-peasant sharing local knowledge on local flowers. Noteworthy is that the family who hosted the workshop already produced films which can be classified as mediated peasant-to-peasant. One of the films they produced is on making cheese and their way of living (Avelar, 2016).





Some of the films produced at the film workshops were shown at a regional gathering of young peasants. The theme of this event was sharing local culture. Rural youth performed songs, poetry and showed some of the films they produced in the workshops. A short clip to mobilize young people to come to this event was made during the film workshops. They used the film workshops to produce a film to attract new people to the agroecological movement. The film is about a young guy who is wondering where his food comes from. He starts searching the internet and finds information on EcoJovem and *Intercâmbio* (peasant-to-peasant meetings) after which he decides to go to such a meeting and become an agroecological peasant. In this example young people used the filmworkshops for videoactivism.

Many of the films made by the youth are both mediated peasant-to-peasant and video-activism. It depends much on the interpretation of the peasant-to-peasant methodology if resolving gender issues is also seen as an issue for peasant-to-peasant exchange or more a film for awareness raising and advocacy. Both films on gender issues made by the youth in Espera Feliz show how girls at the countryside are dealing with gender issues and prejudices. This kind of sharing of experiences on problem-solving by peasants is at the heart of peasant-to-peasant methodology. Via film it becomes mediated peasant-to-peasant. At the same time mediated peasant-to-peasant is used in this case as a tactical tool for social justice and as such it is also a form of videoactivism.

There are several indicators of sustained use of film for social change. Within the timespan of three months that the filmworkshops took place one of the mothers of a girl involved in the film workshops asked her daughter to make a film of the annual meeting of the peasant union. The girl made this film. Two other films of people, who participated in more than one film workshop, have been posted meanwhile on the facebook site of the youth organisation.

In Divino, one of the discussion was on how to ensure that the films remain accessible to a general public for a longer period of time. One of the women noted: "*When you post a video on facebook it's hard to find it after some time.*" The discussion on the audience site is less articulated in the other municipalities. In Espera Feliz, they recognize the importance of thinking strategically about where to place the films but less effort has been put in creating own media channels such as a facebook site. This shows that is not only important to *study* the production, image and audience site but also to spend sufficient time on the audience site. This includes looking at the distribution and viewings of the films, within the series of film workshops. This could be the subject of a workshop, af-



ter the workshops on script-writing, filming and editing. Reactions of the youth and the filmed material indicate that the part on script-writing is the most essential in learning to visualize a story.

Reactions on the films, of which 55 written reactions, show that young people foresee the potential of film for social change and are interested in sharing films. A woman from Divino stated that: *"The learning places we have are very important, yet through television we only receive distorted information. The way they talk on television, it seems that the cuttings on social welfare are good things."* Almost all youth were in favour of sharing the self made films via facebook. Learning together to use this tool for social change reveals a process of social learning.

## Conclusion

The article has shown that both mediated peasant-to-peasant and videoactivism. are promising tools to support young peasants and to foster social change. The process of making the films, as well the filmed product itself, engages young peasants in a process of joint reflection in which reality is problematized and knowledge shared. Continued interest in organizing more (profound) film workshops and the fact that participants made films outside the workshops, indicates that the use of film for social change can be sustained. *Peasant-to-peasant through video* is a valuable addition to peasant-to-peasant, as a familiar means for young peasants to exchange knowledge and as an alternative when distances are too long, or when means are lacking to organise, face-to-face meetings.

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