SEVEN

Visuals in policy making: 'See what I'm saying'

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Let us be clear, the use of visual methods to inform, analyse and deliver policy is not new! Various visual approaches from the social sciences are used to inform politics and political studies. For example, there have been investigations of political party TV advertisements (Robinson, 1976), as well as the influence of visual imagery such as national flags on political behaviour and decisions (Hassin et al, 2007). There is a long history within the social sciences of visual methods, particularly in sociology, anthropology and the arts (see Grady, 2008; Margolis and Pauwels, 2011). However, to date, there is little work that outlines the ways in which the visual components of the social sciences can contribute to policy making and political analysis.

The hyper-visual nature of modern society emphasises the need for policymakers to actively consider the use of visual methods in policy making and policy analysis (see Knowles and Sweetman, 2004; Ball and Gilligan, 2010; Spencer, 2011). The vast majority of human communication is non-verbal (Davies et al, 1990); we are built to process visual information faster than textual information (Holcomb and Grainger, 2006; Merieb and Hoehn, 2007; Semetko and Scammell, 2012). With new technology, there has been a burgeoning of visual information (Uimonen, 2013), described by Gatto (2015) as a data explosion. There was a 4000% increase in visuals in literature from 1990 to 2008 (Google Ngram Viewer, in NeoMam Studios, 2015) and a 9900% increase of visuals on the Internet since 2007 (Google Trends, in NeoMam Studios, 2015).

Visual information shows us ways in which we interact socially and politically (Smith, K.L. et al, 2004). It affects us cognitively and emotionally, enabling us to communicate better about the issues and emotions that affect our thought processes (Van Oostendorp et al, 1999). As such, visual information is a critical and readily accessible 'data' resource for policy-makers, providing rapid insights into evolving social and political issues and consequent policy preferences. However, access to, and appropriate use of, such visual information is dependent

on policymakers' and/or research colleagues' visual literacy (Symon and Cassell, 2012). This is perhaps best articulated by Robert E. Horn, from Stanford University's Center for the Study of Language and Information, who said:

> When words and visual elements are closely entwined, we create something new and we augment our communal intelligence … visual language has the potential for increasing 'human bandwidth' – the capacity to take in, comprehend, and more efficiently synthesize large amounts of new information. (Horn, 1998)

This potential of visuals highlights that, despite the growing reliance on the visual in our everyday lives and the long history of visual research methods in social science, there is insufficient understanding and application of visual literacy in policy making.

In this chapter, we focus on the use of visual methods in policy making, with the aim to position visual methods as a useful addition to the policymaker's toolkit. Visual methods are grounded in the basis that 'valid scientific insight in society can be acquired by observing, analysing and theorising its visual manifestations: behaviour of people and material products of culture' (based on Pauwels, 2011: 3). This infers that there is 'meaning' in visual elements, as there is in written text. By positioning visual methods as a useful addition to the policymaker's toolkit, we explore two types of visual methods: those that augment current policy techniques; and those that focus on the meaning of and in visual artefacts.

The chapter is organised into three sections. First, we provide a brief overview of what visual methods are and how they are currently used in policy making, including two case-study examples. We then outline the core analytical and ethical considerations of visual methods, and review the strengths and opportunities that visual methods can add to the policy making toolbox. This chapter will conclude by clarifying for policymakers that an understanding of visual methods will enhance communication and potentially lead to better engagement with citizens, other policymakers and academics.

Context

Social science has strong traditions in investigating visual elements, using both quantitative and qualitative analysis approaches (see Ball and Smith, 1992; Banks, 2001; Grimshaw and Ravetz, 2005; Margolis

and Pauwels, 2011; Pink, 2013). There has been a recent rise of visual research methods, described by Pauwels (2011: 382) as a 'fetishisation'. This growth in methods cannot be wholly explained by the correlated growth in technological advances given the often 'low-tech' application of methods and the portrayal of visual artefacts (see Rose, 2014). Another explanation for the rise of visual methods, and, indeed, their relevance, is the importance of visuals in contemporary culture, as previously discussed. Visual imagery is a constant in modern lives, through advertising, online social networking, political lobbying and so on. This accumulation of images embeds visual communication into our psychological and social practices (Ferguson, 2013), highlighting the importance of visual information in our political lives.

Despite this rise in visual information, there is a relatively weak consideration of visuals in policy making, with governmental and political communication dominated by text, and visuals only providing 'glossy graphics' for aesthetic purposes (eg, see the majority of government departmental websites). This is despite the understanding that visuals present many benefits in considering and capturing the complexity of issues, as outlined in Chapter Thirteen on co-design by Evans and Terrey, where 'knowledge packages' are developed with the deliberate use of visuals. In this chapter, we intend to address this gap by providing an insight into the use of visual methods that highlights the benefits and relative ease of application.

Visual methods

This chapter provides a 'taste' of some visual methods most appropriate to policymakers by exploring visual methods in two broad categories: those that enhance common investigative methods, for example, the use of pictures in interviews; and those that investigate visual artefacts or phenomena, for example, asking people to take photographs for data collection. These two 'tasters' provide policymakers with a basic understanding of visual methods as each method requires different analysis requirements and different ethical considerations, both of which are further outlined in the chapter.

Visual methods that enhance common investigative methods

Visual methods are most often used as a compliment to common policy making investigative methods, for example, using pictures to stimulate discussion in an interview, or using images in a survey. The two most common research methods used in policy-based research

are document analysis and interviewing, with a predominant focus on 'words' in the analysis. By including visuals within these approaches, we can provide additional dimensions that benefit policy analysis and policy making; both are discussed in the following.

Document analysis with visual artefacts

Document analysis is a form of research in which documents are interpreted by the researcher to give voice and meaning around a topic (see Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996; Bell, 2001; Krippendorff and Bock, 2009). Generally, three types of documents are used in policy making document analysis:

- Public records, the official records of an organisation's activities, for example, annual reports, policy manuals, strategic plans and so on.
- Personal documents, such as first-person accounts of an incident, belief or experience, for example, calendars, emails, scrapbooks, blogs, duty logs, incident reports, reflections/journals and newspapers.
- Physical evidence, including objects or artefacts found within the study setting, for example, flyers, posters, agendas, handbooks and training materials.

In public policy, there is a strong tradition of document analysis of public records, personal diaries and physical evidence that focuses on the narratives of words (eg Benoit and Laver, 2007; see also Chapters Three, Five and Seven of this book). A clear example of how visuals can add value and provide greater certainty to an argument is found when investigating visual images in document analysis. While documents vary in type, size and shape, most public records, personal documents or physical artefacts include both written and visual imagery. By focusing on both types of data, a policymaker can be more holistic in their understanding of the document and the narratives and issues raised (Bell, 2001). Some examples of which both words and visuals have been accounted for include Fahmy and Kim's (2008) analysis of how the Iraq war was presented to the American and British populations through newspaper pictures, and Dobernig et al's (2010) exploration of the differences between the verbal and visual presentations of the 2009 Gaza crisis in newspapers.

The decision to include visuals within policy document analysis is clearly a case of '*Does it add value to my investigation?*' and/or '*Is it appropriate*?' For example, fear-inducing visual images of climate

change are extensively employed in the public domain as part of the policy making process to connect with the public. Recent work by O'Neill and Nicholson-Cole (2009) identified that these visual images, which are used to attract public attention, are an ineffective tool for motivating genuine personal engagement with the issue, and hence changing behaviour. Importantly for policymakers, the work found that non-threatening imagery and icons that link to individuals' everyday emotions and concerns in the context of this macro-environmental issue tend to be the most effective in engaging the public on climate change. This understanding highlights that having the right type of visual information is an effective part of the policy implementation process.

Another visual documentary analysis approach is the very structured interrogation of the visual image within the document, as described by Bell (2001). Bell states that there are two important aspects of the visual image to consider. The first important aspect concerns the *objective* visual qualities, such as the picture size, picture position in the text, amount of space allocated relative to the text and so on. This 'objective' information is used to discuss the salience or priority of the visual content, while counting how many visuals of the same event occur over different media (ie newspapers, journals, etc) indicates the frequency of the visual media content. The second important aspect concerns the *subjective* visual qualities, which are about the actual content displayed in the visual artefacts. These qualities could include who is portrayed? How many people are presented? What is their relative position in the picture? Are there specific gestures shown? There are also questions about the contextual setting of the image or the place the image was depicted: where is it? What is expected in this place? What is occurring in this place?

Dobernig et al (2010) adopted this style, counting, classifying and coding the images related to the 2009 Gaza conflict in four weekly newspapers. The results identified the number and type of images, and the disproportional representation of subject material, with 42% of images depicting people or organisations related to Palestine, compared to 29% related to Israel. The results of the newspaper document analysis (which included both visual and written text) showed that the conflicting parties are represented differently in the visual and the written text. For example, in both cases, the Palestinian side is associated with individual civilians, whereas the Israeli side is shown with political or governmental officials. In addition, the visual and written content showed an imbalance in how the conflict parties were portrayed as empathy seems to be promoted for the Palestinian side,

whereas governmental power is focused on for the Israeli side. Finally, the results showed that reports on Israel dominate the verbal reports, whereas the visual reports favour photos of Palestinians. From the results, it can be inferred that the verbal and the visual level do, indeed, 'speak another language' (Dobernig et al, 2010: 102).

Interviews with visual artefacts

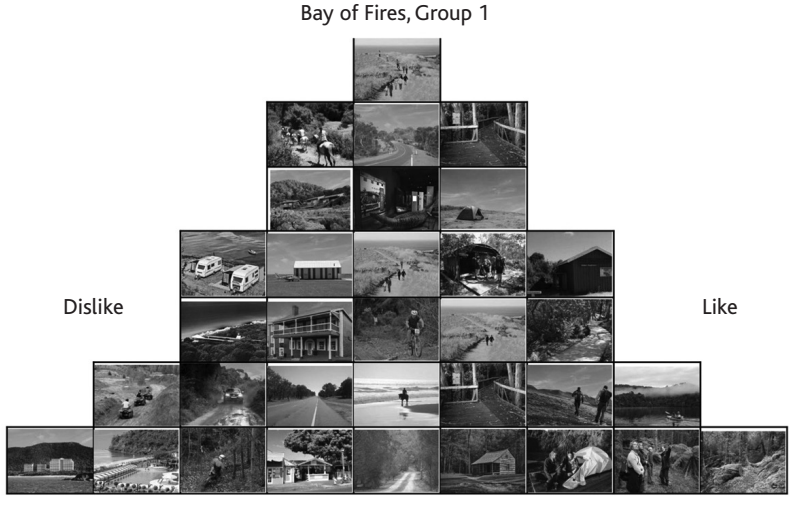
Interviews are a core method within qualitative social science and are used extensively in policy making (see Chapters Five, Six, Eleven, Twelve and Thirteen of this book). An interview is a conversation in which the interviewer questions the respondent in order to gain information. Interviews can be formal or informal, structured or unstructured. They can be conducted one-to-one or in groups, face-to-face or by telephone, Skype or email. They are not 'chats', but have structure, purpose and focus, and are often recorded using a combination of audio, video or written notes for subsequent analysis. Here, we focus on the introduction of 'visual stimuli' into the interview environment, for example, the introduction of a photograph, artefact or other object that leads to both a verbal and visual response in the respondent.

When considering the introduction of a visual artefact into an interview, the most common form is through the inclusion of photographs. This can be done as deliberate methodology, for example, the use of photographs instead of written description in a Q-methodology (see Brown, 1980; Hardy et al, 2014). Figure 7.1 provides an example of a Q-methodology sort where photographs were used rather than text statements to determine study participants' tourism preferences (see Hardy et al, 2014).

Alternatively, photo elicitation uses a more unstructured approach, where a photograph of the issue or place under discussion is introduced in the interview and then discussed. Photo elicitation provides many benefits, including a capacity to 'get inside' an issue and its context, bridge psychological and physical realties, assist in building trust and rapport, produce unpredictable information, and promote more detailed interviews in comparison with verbal interviews (Hurworth, 2004). The data can be coded and analysed in both qualitative and quantitative form depending on the approach desired and the research question under investigation (Lapenta, 2011).

The second way to incorporate visual methods into interviewing is to record the visual outcomes of the interview, focusing on body language and its relationships to the verbal discussion. Atkinson (1984)

Figure 7.1: Q-sort using photographs to determine tourist preferences



Source: Authors' image.

produced a book on the use of body language, intonation and verbal and non-verbal cues for delivering high-impact political speeches. Based firmly in more ethnographic fields, this work is considered highly complementary and necessary in some forms of analysis, for example, discourse analysis. This inclusion of non-verbal cues as data has been found useful; however, it creates implementation challenges as some respondents do not want to be videoed or act in non-natural ways during the interview due to the visual recording process.

Investigating visual artefacts

Visual artefacts can be investigated as the focus of a policy making exercise, with the visual artefact becoming the object of the research investigation and hence the visual method focus (see Harper, 2002; Moore et al, 2008; Margolis and Pauwels, 2011). A popular visual method useful to policy making is respondent-generated images.

Respondent-generated imagery is where a respondent, subject or person involved in the research is asked to provide a visual image (eg photograph, drawing, video artefact) in the context of the investigation. It has been used extensively with children and youth (Hogan and Pink, 2012) but has had little application in other areas despite its considerable potential given the burgeoning use of the Internet and the personal posting of images (see Chapter Eight on big data). One application of the use of respondent-generated imagery in

policy making is found in Australian local governments, where efforts have been made to engage citizens in local identity policy making by asking citizens to enter a photographic competition on 'the best place in my neighbourhood' (Howard, 2012).

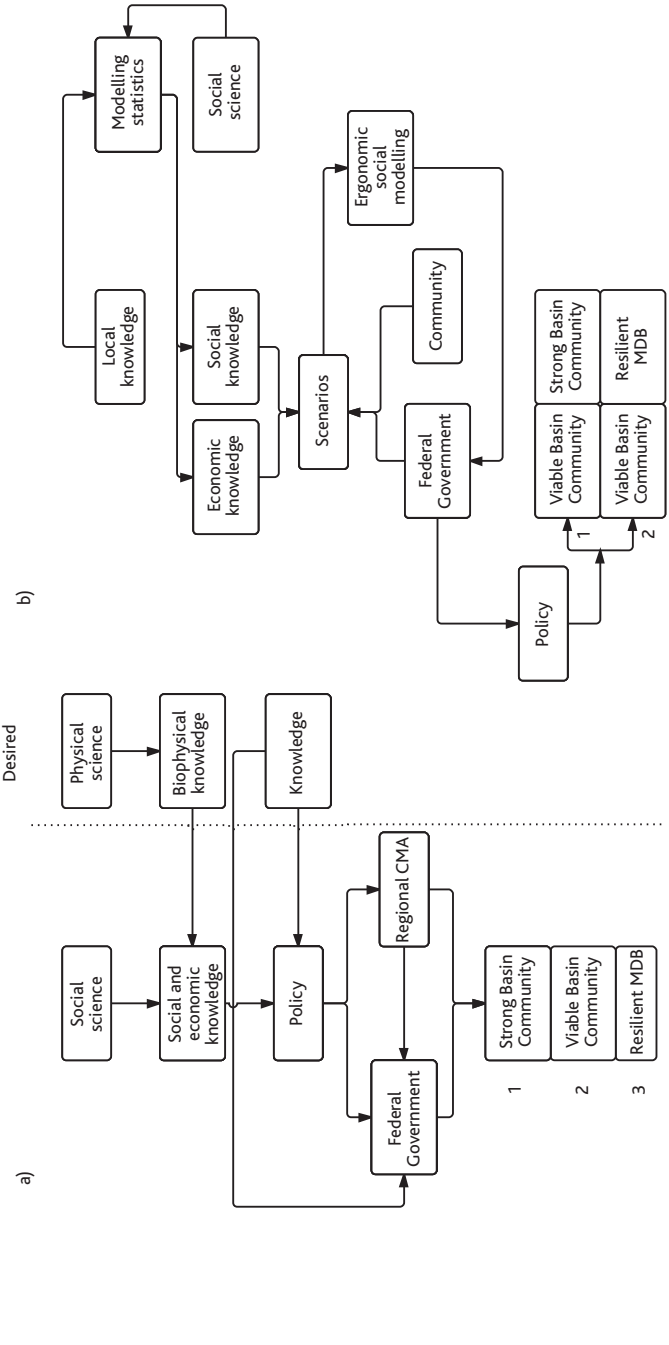
In many instances, a policymaker needs to understand not the aggregate societal inference, but a personal response – how will this policy affect a particular individual or family? What aspect of people's lives will change with an adjustment in service provision through a new policy? Respondent-generated images help to understand these personal perspectives on an issue, providing an ability for respondents to: engage multiple sensors in the understanding of an issue; provide individual perspectives that are not fully dictated by a policy or research framing; provide innovative data; and create an environment of control or power that is held by the respondent in the research space (see Van Leeuwen and Jewitt, 2001; Van Dijck, 2008). The weaknesses of respondent-generated imagery include the potential lack of control that a policymaker can have over respondents.

One example of how asking respondents to construct visual artefacts can be used is a small study that investigated how researchers at the Murray-Darling Basin Futures Collaborative Research Network (University of Canberra) understood their influence on policy making in the Murray-Darling Basin (for a study description, see Pearson and Moon, 2014). The approach asked respondents to visually describe (using a whiteboard, pre-coded variables and a marker pen) their research project and how it would influence policy making (see Figure 7.2). These 'influence diagrams' are a visual representation of the respondents' mental map of their research project's effect on policy making. The respondent was asked to provide an 'influence diagram' one week before and after a field trip, to determine if time and/ or the field trip altered their conceptions of how their project influenced policy.

The influence diagrams were then visually assessed for themes and quantitatively coded to determine which variables were used and which way arrows were arranged between variables, and analysis was conducted using statistics and network analysis. Network analysis results were compared with the interview analysis to identify key themes, direct and indirect influence approaches to policy, and engagement with other projects and broader policy issues.

The respondent-generated visuals provided clear data showing that researchers who undertook the field trip had a statistically significant change in their influence diagrams that represented the effect of their research on policy making. The change was found in more links

Figure 7.2: Influence diagrams of a respondent who undertook the field trip, showing before (7.2a) and after (7.2b)



Source: Pearson and Moon (2014: 204). *Note:* CMA = Catchment Management Authority; MDB = Murray-Darling Basin

to other projects, a greater number of ties to pathways that would influence policy and more internally connected projects. Figure 7.2 shows this change, where Figure 7.2a was before the field trip and Figure 7.2b was after, exhibiting more backward arrows (ie going from bottom to top), closer ties between project components and additional pathways to policy influence (ie government bodies or agencies). In addition, the use of respondent-generated visual methods enhanced the respondent experience with one stating '*this was the best fun I've had in an interview*'. The approach also provided novel insights for the respondent as many had not directly considered how their research would influence policy as a systemic flow of issues and ideas.

Analytical and ethical issues in the use of visual techniques

As identified at the beginning of this chapter, the social sciences have a long history with visual data analysis and each separate discipline has developed alternate approaches to the analysis of visual data (for ideas on different approaches and disciplinary biases, see Ball and Smith, 2011). The challenge for any study is to know which analysis approach is most applicable for the study objectives and data collected.

In this section, we outline three approaches to visual data analysis and provide a step-by-step guide for how visual data could be included in policy making. The rationale for focusing on the analysis of visual data is to ensure that its inclusion in policy making is based on a transparent, clear and salient approach.

Social science has a wide range of analysis approaches; however, for policy makers, there are three common approaches that could be of use – content analysis, semiotics and symbolic interactionism – with content analysis being the most popular (for a more extensive discussion of these and other approaches, see Ball and Smith, 2011). As shown in Table 7.1, each approach has different key questions guiding the research, aims, units of analysis, interpretations of the world and researcher skills. For example, research that was interested in analysing visual data for themes would use content analysis; if symbols were of interest, then semiotics would be more appropriate; if the research was interested in how symbols interacted with people, then symbolic interactionism would be the best approach to analysis in the investigation.

Each approach highlights that the policymaker must have visual 'literacy', the ability to see, to understand and ultimately to think, create and communicate visually (see, eg, Kress and Van Leeuwen,

Table 7.1: Comparing approaches to visual studies

	Content analysis	Semiotics	Symbolic interactionism
Key questions	What are the significant categories and themes predominant in any communication?	What do signs mean within sociocultural contexts?	How are meanings created and sustained in social interaction?
Aim of analysis	Identification of patterns of messages. Manifest and latent contents of communication	Discovery of how signs work to convey sociocultural meaning	Analytic description; concept generation and development
Unit of analysis	Drawings, images, photographs and paintings that can be collected and coded into predetermined categories (quantitative) or interrogated for themes (qualitative)	Images analysed for the *signifier* (the sound, image or word) and the *signified*, which is the concept the signifier represents	Participant and direct observation to examine interactional uses of images and objects
How is the social world interpreted through the data?	A web of messages exchanged by senders and receivers	A multiplicity of codes. Certain codes become dominant ideologies	A vast network of interactions between people and objects
Researcher skills	Reading visual imagery for thematic content, and the identification and coding of themes within visuals	Reading visual imagery for symbols and understanding cultural context to identify what they signify	Reading visual imagery to understand the links between an object or visual and people's behaviour, understanding or cultural context
Exemplars	Robinson (1976), Krippendorff and Bock (2009)	Sayre (1994), Wagner (2006)	Charon and Hall (2009), Hassin et al (2007)

Source: Adapted from Ball and Smith (2011: 395).

1996). The visually literate viewer looks at an image carefully, critically and with an eye for the intentions of the research question.

Table 7.1 also identifies the units of analysis. Each of these different approaches requires visual data to be converted from its original state

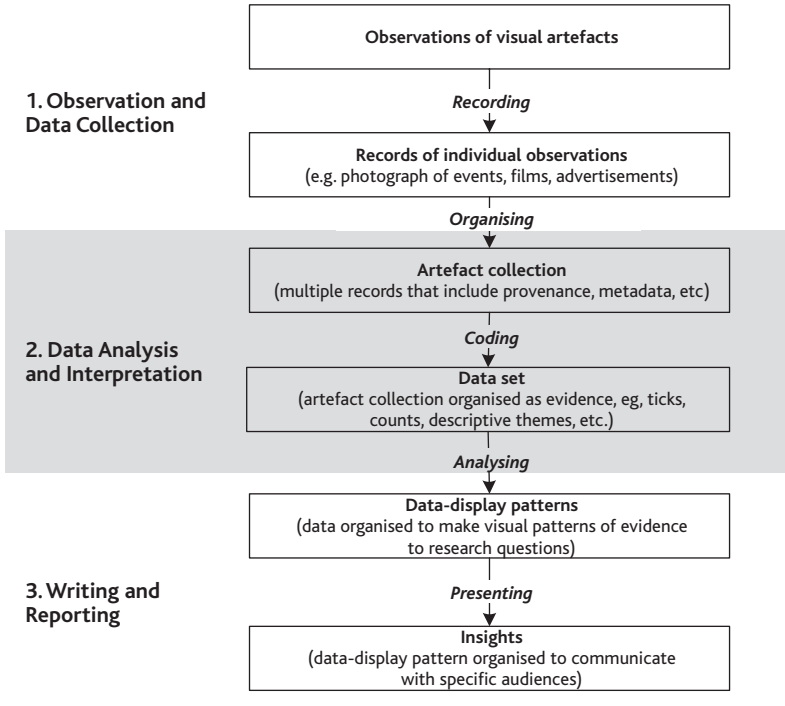
(ie film, photograph, etc) to a state that is conducive to analysis and reporting. The unit of analysis for visual images needs policymakers to understand what it is that they are actually going to investigate within the images. For example, some policy making is concerned with the categories of issues – as such, content analysis is used in visuals, for example, the amount of times that a specific person is portrayed in a set of visual images. Or, perhaps, as investigated in symbolism, there are symbols present in images and we are interested in how these symbols are used and the associated cultural significance, such as the use of bicycles in transport management plans. Alternatively, we may be interested in the relationship between a visual artefact and people's response; by using symbolic interactionism, we can uncover, for example, how a specific policy flyer is received by stakeholders through video recordings and analysis. So, while you can use the same visual data (eg political advertisements), the focus of the investigation (or research question) will drive the organisation and analysis of the data in different ways.

Figure 7.3 outlines the three broad steps used in visual methods for policy making: observation and data collection; data analysis and interpretation; and writing and reporting. The three steps are common to all research methods; however, when using visual methods, there are a few nuances to the tasks in each step.

The first step in the use of visual methods is to identify the 'artefact' collection – the collation of research records. For visual data, this collation of records may be broad as it needs to encompass the spectrum of visuals used in a study (eg film, photographs, autobiographical diaries, respondent imagery, etc).

The second step – data analysis and interpretation – is where visual methods can transform into either a qualitative or quantitative study, or both. Here, the researcher must be clear about the unit of analysis (for different types of unit of analysis, see Table 7.1); these can either be as presence/absence codes, counts of events or qualitative descriptions of themes. The last task in this step is to determine how data will be displayed and what patterns or analysis will be undertaken. For example, we referred earlier to the visual influence diagrams where the data unit was the arrows between variables (see Figure 7.2); these were coded as one-way or two-way arrows and then analysed using network analysis. This is quantitative analysis of the influence diagrams, which was different to the qualitative analysis of the interview that accompanied the respondent-generated diagrams, which employed the content analysis of key themes.

Figure 7.3: Three steps in the use of visual methods in policy making



Finally, there is a need to write and report on the research conducted. A benefit of visuals is that *pictures speak louder than words*, so in the conveying of information, the resubmitting of visual data and the construction of new visuals to convey a simple and clear message is often easily achieved. The use of data visualisation to convey policy messages, or research outcomes, can be instrumental for policy analysis as it attempts to make data more accessible, interactive and engaging.[1]

Data visualisation encapsulates the variety of forms to represent statistical and other numeric and non-numeric data through pictures and graphics (eg policy network drawings, graphs and informatics) (Gatto, 2015). Used in conjunction with narratives, data visualisation reduces knowledge gaps between data users (eg policymakers, policy analysts, experts, citizens), supporting evidence-based policy making through the improved representation, communication and interpretation of knowledge (Brandes et al, 1999; Ruppert et al, 2013). Visual data is more manageable than texts and numeric tables, allowing us to rapidly make comparisons, identify patterns and understand the meaning behind the data (Koch et al, 2006).

However, despite the proliferation and demand for data visualisation, there remains a reluctance to accept it as a reliable analysis tool due to the high risks associated with such an accessible and powerful medium (Burn-Murdoch, 2013, in Gatto, 2015). The quality and origin of data representation is important, with the production of visual data being a result of 'complex sociotechnical acts involving a variety of actors and technologies with the persuasive power to shape people's engagement and interaction with the world itself' (Williamson, 2016: 132). Visuals can benefit policy through their accessibility. With access to more data and more technology, data visualisation is evolving from static graphics to more interactive visualisation tools that have become policy instruments in themselves. However, data visualisation must be treated with caution as without sufficient critique, visualised data can 'flatten and compress extraordinary complexity into simplified seductive visual presentations' (Williamson, 2016: 134), potentially damaging public policy processes rather than aiding them.

Ethical considerations

Visual methods that produce images of individuals raise particular ethical issues in relation to informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality, and the law (Wiles et al, 2008, 2011; Pauwels, 2010; Rowe, 2011). Informed consent is based on the premise that research participants are adequately informed of the research objectives and process, and consent to participating. When using visual methods, this would include agreement not only to produce visual images, but also to display those images to different audiences, in different contexts and over different time periods (Wiles et al, 2011). The practicalities of gaining such consent can be problematic, especially in public spaces with a large number of people, where obtaining informed consent is impossible (eg public rallies, sporting events), and, in some cases, permission to photograph public places may be required or it may even be illegal (eg photographs of defence bases) (see Wiles et al, 2011). Similarly, it is often impossible to maintain anonymity and confidentiality within visual methods (Wiles et al, 2011). A variety of techniques are used to maintain anonymity and confidentiality, including the blurring of identifying attributes (see Wiles et al, 2008), only publishing images that do not depict recognisable individuals (see Barrett, 2004; Moore et al, 2008) or recreating imagery with actors (see Hubbard et al, 2003, in Wiles et al, 2011: 698). The dissemination of visual artefacts (eg on the Internet) invokes important legal issues, such as copyright and moral rights. 'Found' images (eg

those available on the Internet) covered by copyright may be used in research only with the permission of the copyright owner (see Rowe, 2011). In addition to this, moral rights help to ensure that the image is used within the intent and commitments initially prescribed when gaining consent from the participants (see Rowe, 2011; Wiles et al, 2011). These ethical considerations should not stop the use of visual methods, but rather highlight the need to adequately consider what is needed from the images and hence the need for well-planned visual investigations from the outset.

This section provided a 'taste' of how visual methods can be included in policy making, and focused on the fundamentals of how to undertake the analysis when using visual methods. In doing this, it has outlined three common approaches to analysis, and the necessary steps to consider when using a visual method. In focusing on analysis, we highlight the skills that researchers need to undertake visual methods, including visual literacy. In addition, we have closed with a snapshot of the some additional ethical considerations required when using visual methods. Overall, visual methods can add value and richness to a policy making process focused on the textual or verbal narratives.

Challenges in implementing visual methods in policy making

In this final section, we outline the strengths and challenges in implementing visual methods in policy making. As outlined in Table 7.2, these strengths and challenges are necessarily broad given the range of visual methods and analytical approaches that can be incorporated into policy making.

There are always strengths and challenges with any method and approach. In this hyper-visual contemporary culture, visual materials are an important research medium due to their ubiquitous nature in society and associated accessibility. As such, visual methods provide opportunities for policymakers to explore social and political development in a manner that directly engages with stakeholders and complements existing methodologies. By focusing on visual images and artefacts rather than written words and numbers, visual methods enable the engagement of members of society often marginalised from traditional policy analysis processes.

Further compounding issues of visual literacy is the perceived illegitimacy of visual methods as a research methodology. Despite being well established in other disciplines, policymakers still have a strong preference for evidence perceived to be more 'tangible', predominantly

Table 7.2: Strengths and challenges of visual methods for policy making

Strengths	Challenges
• *Holistic understanding through visual methods*. Visual imagery is part of our societal communication approach and hence its incorporation into policy making expands the policy making toolkit to better reflect the mediums used in society • *Building on a long tradition*. Visual methods are well established in other social sciences (eg ethnography, media studies); hence, policymakers can pull on these long traditions in application • *Visuals add to current policy approaches*. Visual methods are a new dimension to the call for pluralism in policy making and are complementary to other, more traditional, methods explored in the book, for example, big data • *Pictures tell a thousand words*. In some instances, there is high potential for a greater impact of policy making if visual images are involved • *Engaging better with people*. Using visual methods with respondents creates a new dynamic in data collection that is positive to respondent outcomes, for example, fun or building trust and rapport • *Innovation for policy*. Visual methods provide a different approach to getting at an issue as they are able to bridge psychological and physical realities • *Boundary crossing*. Visuals can cross cultural boundaries and engage participants that have limited verbal and written skills	• *Skills upgrade*. Skills required for 'visual literacy' are not taught to policymakers and need to be added to the toolbox • *Clarity of visual data organisation*. Visual methods may require extra tasks in the policy making process that could hinder the robustness of the work by novice policymakers • *Ethics*. Additional ethical requirements in the collection and presentation of some visual data could limit the uptake of the visual methods in policy making • *Legality*. (Il)legitimacy of visual methods by practitioners and academics may hinder initial acceptance

numbers and text through narratives. The strong evidence of the benefits of visual methods has resulted in a growing uptake of visual methods across disciplines and contexts, highlighting the capacity for such methods to be undertaken in conjunction with traditional word- and number-based methods, including those described in the other chapters of this book. Visual methods can enhance these methods through methodological pluralism, providing insights into experiences and emotions not typically available through other approaches, while

maintaining the perceived rigour and quality deemed acceptable by policymakers.

Finally, visual methods are able to engage a range of stakeholders that are perceived as at the 'fringe' of the engaged policy group. These stakeholders have barriers to entry into policy making processes because they have different cultural backgrounds, language capacity, functional literacy or are 'scared' of direct engagement with traditional research methods, such as interviews, surveys and so on (Rose, 2014). The use of visual methods to engage these often marginalised stakeholders highlights the need for policy making practices to reflect the broadest set of cultural and social dimensions in which they operate. Sometimes, this is hard, and new, alternative approaches such as 'respondent-generated images' rather than online surveys or face-to-face interviews provide both policymakers and stakeholders with new ways to explore old issues and new ways to engage.

Conclusion

This chapter focused on the use of visual methods in policy making, with the aim of positioning visual methods as a useful addition to the toolkit of policymakers and analysts. It has provided guidance on the types of visual methods available to policymakers, approaches to analyses and the ethical considerations therein. This focus on the 'nuts and bolts' of the use of visual methods in policy making has provided clear insight into what, how and why visuals can add to the policy making process. It is clear that visual methods use a variety of visual materials to generate evidence regarding the exploration of research questions in order to elicit broader understandings of the social world, in particular, the inner emotional and creative interpretations, and to engage with people in alternate (non-text-)based approaches.

The hyper-visual nature of contemporary culture renders visual materials an important research medium, especially in policy making, which has strong links to society and culture. As such, visual methods provide opportunities for policymakers to explore social and political development in a manner that directly engages with stakeholders and complements existing methodologies. By focusing on visual images and artefacts, rather than written words and numbers, visual methods enable the engagement of members of society often marginalised from traditional policy analysis processes. Visual methods provide space for an alternative framing of issues, insights and understandings, using 'new' methods that readily engage and inspire participants, which is important in this era where political engagement is waning.

Opportunities for the use of visual methods in policy making include:

- to complement written text analysis, providing a comprehensive picture of issues or context that is critical in a polycentric approach to policy making;
- to provide policymakers with the ability to explore different sets of data readily found in society (eg images, films, etc) that reflect a broader set of culturally based public policy issues than present in written text;
- to provide the capacity to engage with issues that are not obvious and physical, for example, political concerns;
- to enable engagement with alternative stakeholder groups that are traditionally under-represented in policy making processes; and
- to add dimensions to policy making that reflect the broader visual and auditory stimuli context of society and its various forms of communication.

These opportunities for visual methods in policy making extend from basic application to strategic insights. It is our hope that by including visual methods as a distinct and significant contribution to this book, future policymakers will be able to trial the approach and develop a more refined applied research agenda for future policy analysis.

Further reading

The last decade has seen a boom in the critical analysis of visuals and their role in policy making as 'science'. However, it has yet to make an impact in the practical world; as such, further readings are limited to journal articles and books – although numerous PowerPoint presentations are available online that outline specific methods that may assist future projects. Some great readings to start with are the following:

- For an overview of visual methods, see Margolis and Pauwels (2011) book, *The Sage handbook of visual research methods*.
- For a better understanding of each approach, consider the references provided in Table 7.1, more specifically for content analysis;
- For an example of data visualisation, see Williamson's (2016) description and Pearson's Learning Curve (available at: http://thelearningcurve.pearson.com), and consider the rapid emergence of data journalism (see: http://www.datajournalismhandbook.org/1.0/en/).

Note

[1] See the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD's) Gapminder, available at: http://prev.gapminder.org/