Visual communication in EIA: stakeholders’ perspectives

Ana Roque de Oliveira
Portugal
ana_roque_oliveira@yahoo.com
Visual communication in EIA: stakeholders’ perspectives

Ana Roque de Oliveira  Sofia Bento  Maria Partidário  Angus Morrison-Saunders
Visual communication in EIA: stakeholders’ perspectives

Ana Roque de Oliveira ◆ Sofia Bento ◆ Maria Partidário ◆ Angus Morrison-Saunders
Inclusive Public Participation & Visual Literacy

Ana Roque de Oliveira
Maria Partidário
"[Image] is the worthiest, most striking translation of thought."

Frédéric Mistral (1830 – 1914)

Copyright © The Nobel Foundation
Without emotion we do not reason well.
Meaning?
“each map/diagram is a mental construct, which can tell something about how different groups of people see reality.”

Cees Leeuwis (2004)
Meaning?

- Dialogue
- & critical thinking
Visual literacy

The ability to successfully *decode and interpret* visual messages and to *encode and compose* meaningful visual communications.

Bamford (2003)
Project Design
(by the proponent)

Project Presentation

Public Perception & Input

VISUAL TOOLS
Visual literacy

Contexts (e.g. verbal form) and relationships

Questioning, challenging, interacting

Critical visual literacy
You see what I mean? – A review of visual tools for inclusive public participation in EIA decision-making processes

Ana Roque de Oliveira*, Maria Partidário

CEG-IST, Instituto Superior Técnico, Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal
VISUAL TOOLS IN TODAY’S EIA PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Ana Roque de Oliveira & Maria Partidário
CEG - IST
Portugal
anaroliveira@tecnico.ulisboa.pt
VISUAL TOOLS IN TODAY’S EIA PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

How to design?  Who to involve?
CONCLUSIONS

1. Visual Tools may promote inclusive public participation

2. Visual Tools should be adequate to the stakeholders
Move away from the “one size fits all” approach
Customize your visual tools!
RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Move away from the “one size fits all” approach

2. Allow for stakeholders’ active participation in the choice and design of the Visual Tool
Visual communication in EIA: stakeholders’ perspectives
Rural, urban and industrial settings

Case 1: extractive industry;
Case 2 and Case 3: infrastructure projects
(Non-participant) observation
Interview Guide – Proponent/Consultant

Introduction

This research is being conducted as part of my PhD at Instituto Superior Técnico, in Lisbon, to get to know the views of public participation participants/visitors to information centers about the use of visual tools such as photographs, maps, charts, videos, models, etc.

I am especially interested in knowing the basis for the choices about content and type of the visual tools used in this public session/information center. The conclusions of this research can be used to improve future communication between the project proponents and the public, and to guide the incorporation of local knowledge into the design of future projects.

All the information you provide in this interview will only be used for this research project and will not be shared outside the research team. Your name will not be used, so that nobody can identify you with any answers. This interview will be audio recorded, including your verbal consent. Do you consent to this interview? [if requested by interviewee, sign consent form]. If yes, do you have any questions before we begin?

Background information

No. of interview:
Stakeholders

Project proponents

Public
Proponent perception about the design and use of visual communication

Public perceptions regarding their understanding and experience of visual communication
Who designs the visual tools?
Who designs the visual tools?

We defined, together with the consultants that we used to conduct the environmental impact report, the presentation guide. So, we defined what we wanted to communicate and how we wanted to communicate (…). I believe [it] involved the people that it should involve (…).
[we used] noise maps (...) so they would understand (...) 

(...) I don’t understand anything (...)
Public’s low visual and technical literacy

➢ Lack of perception of public needs

Project proponent’s low visual literacy
Visual tools/Representation of proposed project

- Complex images
- Low-quality images
- Technical language

Project proponent's low visual literacy
- Lack of perception of public needs

Public's low visual and technical literacy
Those who make these presentations are very technical people, very technical engineers, very familiar with the project, and with the concepts and the technical terms, right?
Visual tools/Representation of proposed project

- Complex images
- Low-quality images
- Technical language

Project proponent's low visual literacy

- Lack of perception of public needs

Public's low visual and technical literacy

- Fast-paced presentations
- Separation of roles / Formal relationships
- Disempowerment

Presentation of the proposed project
(...) after unloading all that quickly, [they asked] ‘do you have any questions?’ That is not how it should be. (...).
Visual tools/Representation of proposed project

➢ Complex images
➢ Low-quality images
➢ Technical language

Project proponent's low visual literacy

➢ Lack of perception of public needs

Public's low visual and technical literacy

➢ No understanding of visual and technical information
➢ Fear, distrust, inhibition

Presentation of the proposed project

➢ Fast-paced presentations
➢ Separation of roles / Formal relationships
➢ Disempowerment

Project proponent's low visual literacy

➢ Lack of perception of public needs

Public's low visual and technical literacy

➢ No understanding of visual and technical information
➢ Fear, distrust, inhibition
Distrust...

the *truthfulness* of ‘well-rehearsed’
oral information
the real intentions of proponents

• simply complying with an obligation

• overcoming the public through weariness
The one that presents has to come down off the pedestal, to come down to earth...lack of power...
no legitimacy to intervene:

‘The oral part did not seem that bad, but who am I to say so?, right?’
...and other strong feelings

fear

of making a fool of themselves
indignation

• not being heard in the project design

• not being well informed about the project’s impacts
frustration:

‘Oh, those numbers [pictograms with statistics],
don’t ask me because I don’t know how to read that!’
Presentation of the proposed project

- Complex images
- Low-quality images
- Technical language

Visual tools/Representation of proposed project

- Project proponent's low visual literacy
  - Lack of perception of public needs

Public's low visual and technical literacy

- No understanding of visual and technical information
- Fear, distrust, inhibition

Presentation of the proposed project

- Fast-paced presentations
- Separation of roles / Formal relationships
- Disempowerment

- No reflection
- No dialogue
Time for reflection

(...) meanwhile the information settled in, right?, (...), and only later we remember that, hey, and what if we had asked this or that?
Visual tools/Representation of proposed project

- Complex images
- Low-quality images
- Technical language

Project proponent's low visual literacy
- Lack of perception of public needs

Public's low visual and technical literacy
- No understanding of visual and technical information
- Fear, distrust, inhibition

Presentation of the proposed project
- Fast-paced presentations
- Separation of roles / Formal relationships
- Disempowerment

- No reflection
- No dialogue

No critical visual literacy
Understanding stakeholder experiences with visual communication in environmental impact assessment

Ana Roque de Oliveira\textsuperscript{a}, Sofia Bento\textsuperscript{b}, Maria Partidário\textsuperscript{c}, Angus Morrison-Saunders\textsuperscript{d,e,*}

\textsuperscript{a} Environmental Consultant, Portugal  
\textsuperscript{b} SOCIUS/CSG, Lisbon School of Economics & Management (ISEG), Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal  
\textsuperscript{c} CITUA, Instituto Superior Técnico, Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal  
\textsuperscript{d} Centre for People Place and Planet, Edith Cowan University, Australia  
\textsuperscript{e} Research Unit for Environmental Sciences and Management, North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa
The Role of Visual Tools in Inclusive Public Participation in Environmental Impact Assessment
32. Visual tools in social impact assessment: issues of perception, communication, and ethical dilemmas

Ana Roque de Oliveira
Let’s continue the conversation!
Post questions and comments in the IAIA24 app.

Ana Roque de Oliveira
Portugal
ana_roque_oliveira@yahoo.com

#iaia24