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VISUAL ARTS-BASED RESEARCH METHODS IN SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH

Jari Martikainen

University of Eastern Finland, Kuopio, Finland

jarimar@uef.fi

Abstract

Toward the end of the 20th century, scholars in various fields of science started to challenge the dominant position of discursive research methods based on verbal materials. This pursuit was motivated by the inadequacy of positivistic science in addressing the sphere of visual, sensory, embodied, and emotional experiences. Inspired by the visual, material, sensory, and emotional turns in social sciences, social science researchers began to develop and apply arts-based research methods aiming to diversify the understanding of the social world provided by discursive research methods. The study at hand discusses the contribution of arts-based research to social science research, based on literature on arts-based research. In particular, the study concentrates on visual arts-based research. At first, it sketches the background of arts-based research in social sciences and summarizes briefly the scope of arts-based research in social work, management, and organizational studies, as well as sociology. Then the study defines arts-based research and discusses the contribution of visual arts-based research methods to social science research, paying attention to their limitations, as well. Finally, conclusions are drawn and suggestions for future research are made. The study shows that arts-based methods may motivate and encourage participants to reflect on the topic of the research and share their thoughts and feelings. In addition, arts-based research may appeal to emotions and lived-experiences providing a more

holistic insight into the participants' experiences. Finally, arts-based methods seem to promote critical thinking.

Keywords

Arts-Based Research, Visual Research Methods, Social Sciences, Experience, Empathy, Participation

1. Introduction

“Arts-based research is committed to acknowledge the multiple dimensions that constitute and form the human condition – physical, emotional, spiritual, social, cultural – and the myriad of ways of engaging in the world – oral, literal, visual, embodied. That is, to connect the work of the academy with the life and lives of communities through research that is accessible, evocative, embodied, empathic, and provocative.” (Cole & Knowles, 2008, 60)

Toward the end of the 20th century, social science research started to show increasing interest in the use of visual materials in order to diversify understanding of human experiences and social phenomena (Goopy & Kassan, 2019; Weber, 2008). However, it was only at the beginning of this century that arts-based methodologies began to gain a greater foothold in social science research and established their position in qualitative social science research (McNiff, 2018). In this process, sociology and anthropology did important pioneering work. Step-by-step diverse visual materials, such as photographs, films, drawings, cartoons, maps, and symbols, began to be used in other fields of social science research as well (Weber, 2008). Currently, arts-based research, meaning “the use of visual materials (...) employed by a social research during the course of an investigation” (Banks, 2001, ix), has established its position as a form of qualitative approach to social science research (Coemans & Hannes, 2017; Pain, 2012; Wang, Coemans, Siegesmund, & Hannes, 2017). However, as McNiff (2018) argues, it is suitable for other disciplines, as well (see also Pain, 2012). In addition, arts-based research is regarded as not only diminishing the divide between arts and sciences (Vist, 2015; Weber, 2008), but also providing a fruitful basis for interdisciplinary research (McNiff, 2018).

Different terms have been used to refer to diverse methodological approaches applying arts in research. These terms include, for instance, a/r/tography, art as inquiry, art-based inquiry, artistic inquiry, and arts-informed research (Leavy, 2015, 2018). Even though some authors regard the aforementioned approaches as distinct methods, arts-based research is often used as an overarching

term referring to diverse methodological approaches using art in research (Leavy, 2018). For this reason, the study at hand adopts the term arts-based research, which Eisner coined already in the 1990s (Barone, 2008; Wang et al., 2017).

The emergence of arts-based research methods is connected with various “turns” during the past decades that challenged the supremacy of language-based research in social sciences. These turns have been labeled, for example, “material turn” (Dale, 2005), “visual turn” (Clark & Morris, 2017), “sensory turn” (Jay, 2011), and “emotional turn” (Koivunen, 2010; O’Sullivan, 2001). The common denominator for these turns is that they do not consider intellectual knowledge and verbal communication as the only modes of knowledge and communication relevant in terms of scientific research (see, e.g., Cole & Knowles, 2008; Goopy & Kassan, 2019; Wang et al., 2017). Instead, they seek alternative ways of knowing and communicating in order to understand the social world in more nuanced ways (CohenMiller, 2018; Cole & Knowles, 2008). Leavy (2018, 15) describes this alternative way of knowing provided by arts-based research as “aesthetic knowing” characterized by reflexivity, empathy, compassion, and a combination of sensory, emotional, and intellectual involvement.

Another important factor contributing to the increased interest in arts-based methodologies in social sciences is the important role the visual plays in our contemporary, visual era (e.g., Mannay, 2015; Rose, 2014). We live in a visual environment and visual forms of media play an ever-increasing role in people’s everyday lives and social practices (Clark & Morris, 2017). People are surrounded by a plethora of visual messages and, in addition, send visual messages themselves on social media, for instance. Even though arts-based research does not only refer to visual approaches, these play a major role within arts-based research. This paper focuses on visual arts-based research.

2. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to map the scope and contribution of arts-based research in the field of social sciences based on literature on arts-based research. This research task is carried out by summarizing the scope of arts-based research in social sciences as well as presenting the main advantages of arts-based research in general and in social science research in specific. Consequently, this study has three research questions: 1) What does visual arts-based research mean, 2) what is the contribution of visual arts-based research methods to social science research,

and 3) what are the limitations of visual arts-based research? At the end, concluding remarks and suggestions for future research are presented.

3. Literature Review on Arts-Based Research in Social Sciences

In the 21st century, visual research methods have been applied to the study of a number of topics in diverse fields of social sciences. This literature review summarizes some of the topics that arts-based research has covered in the fields of social work, management and organizational research, and sociology. The literature review is conducted by content analysis. It focuses on the visual materials used in arts-based social science research and topics studied by using them.

In social work research, diverse visual methods ranging from photography to drawing and clay modeling have been applied when studying people's experiences of diverse matters (for a more detailed presentation, see Clark & Morris, 2017). Often social work researchers have used visual methodologies in studies conducted among marginalized groups of people (Lenette, 2019). For instance, Groot and Hodgetts (2012) and Moxley, Feen-Calligan, and Washington (2012) used photographs in studying the experiences of homeless people. Phillips and Bellinger (2011), in turn, applied photography in exploring asylum seekers' conditions, whereas Desyllas (2014) focused on studying female sex workers' experiences. Rogers (2017), for his part, studied the experiences of children in foster care, whereas participants in Jarldorn's (2016) study were prisoners. Hus (2009) and Huss, Kaufman, and Siboni (2013) have used a range of visual approaches to study the lives of Bedouin women in remote areas in Israel, and Ali (2018) has explored Dalit visual culture in India. Ridgway (2019), for her part, used participant-created drawings to study ageing. Other scholars have applied visual research methods to explore sensitive and painful experiences. Such research includes, for instance, studies on child mistreatment (Hubka, Tonmyr, & Hovdestad, 2009), domestic violence (Humbreys, Mullender, Thiara, & Skamballis, 2006), problems with mental health (Aldridge, 2014; Beart, Barnard, & Skelhorn, 2015), and children's experiences of war (Mitchell et al., 2019).

In the field of management and organizational studies, arts-based research includes a wide variety of approaches and materials, such as drawing and painting (Mannay, 2010; Martikainen, 2018a, 2018b), photography, videos (LeBaron, Jarzabkowski, Pratt, & Fetzer, 2018; Shortt & Warren, 2017; Toraldo, Islam, & Mangia, 2018; Warren, 2005), creative movement, and dance (Biehl-Missal & Springborg, 2015; Hujala et al., 2015). In addition to producing visual research

data, participants have also produced verbal data based on reflection on visual materials, such as paintings and media images (Klenke, 2014; Martikainen & Hujala, 2017). In management and organizational studies, arts-based methodologies have been used to study, for instance, employees' perception of leaders (Martikainen, 2017; Martikainen & Hujala, 2017), organization members' conceptions of their organization (Martikainen & Hujala, 2014), and wicked problems in organizational life (Martikainen, 2018a). Similar to research in the field of social work, visual methodologies applied in the field of management and organizational studies have often focused on exploring people's experiences.

In sociology, visual approaches have been used to studying meanings connected with diverse social phenomena and practices, including class, gender, multiculturalism, immigration, ethnic conflicts, collective identities, consumerism, and work and organizations, to name but a few (Batziou, 2011; Nathansohn & Zuev, 2013; Zuev & Krase, 2017). Recently, sociological research using visual research methods has focused, for instance, on urban environments (e.g. Krase, 2012; Lofland, 2003; Shortell & Brown, 2014), social movements and activism (Doerr, Mattoni, & Teune, 2013; Askanius & Uldam, 2014; Vergani & Zuev, 2011), and forms of (social) media (Smith & Sanderson, 2015). Recent research on social movements includes, for instance, Zuev's (2016) and Williams and Whitehouse's (2015) studies on religious movements, Keifer-Boyd's (2011) study on social justice activism, Hardbarger and Maguire's (2018) research on community development and human rights movements, Olesen's (2013) research on social movements, and Rudel's (2011) study on environmental movements. In addition to examining people's experiences of social issues and phenomena, sociological research using art-based methods has been interested in visual environments, phenomena, and matters as conveying social and cultural meanings.

4. Definitions of Arts-Based Research

Arts-based research is qualitative research with the aim of understanding social phenomena and peoples' thoughts and experiences about them in a deep and nuanced way (Cole & Knowles, 2008; Goopy & Kassan, 2019; Leavy, 2018). Visual materials used in visual arts-based research are thought to provide researchers with a more holistic understanding of social matters than mere verbal research methods (Goopy & Kassan, 2019; van der Vaart, van Hoven, & Huigen, 2018; Wang et al., 2017). Arts-based research aims to gain insight into people's feelings, emotions, and experiences, as well as their tacit modes of relating themselves to the social world (McNiff, 2008;

Weber, 2008). With this kind of insight, arts-based research attempts to diversify the understanding provided by verbal research methods or methods that primarily address intellect (see e.g., Cole & Knowles, 2008; van der Vaart et al., 2018).

Chilton, Gerber, and Scotti (2015) define arts-based research as belonging to the “aesthetic intersubjective paradigm,” which, according to Leavy (2018, 6) draws on “sensory, emotional, perceptual, kinesthetic, embodied, and imaginal ways of knowing.” In addition, arts-based research draws on embodiment theory and phenomenology, because it defines the body as the site of knowing and regards arts-based research as a potential site for the emergence of novel realizations (Chaplin, 2005; Leavy, 2018).

Visual arts-based research methods refer to a range of diverse research practices that “use visual materials of some kind as part of the process of generating evidence in order to explore research questions” (Rose, 2014, 26). Visual materials may serve various functions in arts-based research. The central aim is to get insight into people’s lives, thoughts, experiences, emotions, and feelings (Leavy, 2018; van der Vaart et al., 2018). In the method of photo voice, for instance, participants are asked to make photos of their everyday activities, tasks and duties, hobbies, communities, and environments, and to provide an insight into their lives and experiences by showing the photos and talking about them (Budig et al., 2018; Miller, Buys, & Donoghue, 2019; Woda, Haglung, Belknap, & Cleek, 2018). Through drawing activities, in turn, participants are invited to express their feelings and experiences related to matters in their personal and social lives, and afterwards to comment on their drawings verbally (Mannay, 2010; Martikainen, 2018a). The idea is that participants act as guides to their own lives and experiences. Thus, it is not the researcher who decides which topics of everyday life, for instance, are dealt with in the research project, but it is the participants themselves who indicate what is important from their own perspective (see, e.g., Leavy, 2018).

Arts-based research includes a variety of different approaches ranging from approaches in which the making of art itself is a primary mode of inquiry to approaches in which art is used as a means of producing research data (McNiff, 2018; Weber, 2008). Firstly, art can be used as a basis for producing and collecting verbal research material (Rose, 2014). Because of their concreteness and tangibility, images are found to serve as a fruitful platform for discussion, for example (Martikainen & Hujala, 2017; Weber, 2008). Secondly, visual images can serve as the research material either alone or accompanied by participants’ verbal comments (Mitchell, Theron, Stuart,

Smith, & Campbell, 2011; Rose, 2014). Thirdly, visual materials can be used as a means of summarizing and presenting research findings, which it is hoped will make the findings more understandable and accessible to a wider audience (Cole & Knowles, 2008; Rose, 2014). In addition, visual materials may be used when planning research and defining the research tasks (Leavy, 2018). Thus, the arts-based approach does not refer to data analysis only, but it can be applied in all phases of research from problem generation and data collection, to data analysis and finally to the presentation of research findings (Leavy, 2018; Lopez, Wickson, & Hausner, 2018; Schenstead, 2012).

An important starting point for arts-based research is that the concept of ‘arts’ is not understood as an academic discipline or something that only trained artists or people with artistic talent can do (McNiff, 2008; van der Vaart et al., 2018). Instead, arts are understood as processes and visual products available to everyone, through which they construct, communicate, or express their thoughts, emotions, and experiences (McNiff, 2018; Rose, 2014). Thus, the artistic quality of the visual products is not important, but the possibility to construct and communicate understanding of social matters through visual means is (van der Vaart et al., 2018; Weber, 2008). In this presentation, ‘arts’ refers to visual materials at large, as used as a part of a research method.

While some scholars regard arts-based research as a variety of practices that focus on creating visual products related to the research topic, others use visual images and objects as a basis for reflection (Leavy, 2018; McNiff, 2018). Visual research materials can be grouped as researcher-generated, participant-created, and found materials (Clark & Morris, 2017; Pain, 2012; Pauwels, 2013; Rose, 2014). Researcher-generated materials refer to visual materials selected and delivered by the researcher (Rose, 2014). These can include, for instance, media images, photographs, paintings, and three-dimensional objects that the participants are asked to observe and reflect on from the research topic’s point of view (see e.g., Martikainen, 2017; Martikainen & Hujala, 2017). Most often, these reflections are verbal—written or oral—but visual modes of reflection, such as drawing, are also used (Clark & Morris, 2017; Martikainen, 2018a). Participant-created visual materials, in turn, mean that the participants themselves produce visual materials on the research topic (Mannay, 2015; Rose, 2014). Participant-created materials are often photographs (photo voice) taken by the participants themselves, but they can also be drawings, paintings, collages, and performances, to name but a few (see, e.g., Clark & Morris, 2017; Huss et al., 2013; Mannay, 2010; Warren, 2005). Found materials refers to existing visual materials that

participants bring to the research situation (Rose, 2014). These can include, for instance, media images, family photographs, and advertisements. According to Clark and Morris (2017) and Rose (2014), participant-created materials—especially photographs—are the most frequently used materials in social science research.

A common assumption is that visual materials can motivate participants to discuss the research topic (Rose, 2014; Mitchel et al., 2011). Even though some scholars represent a view that visual materials can speak for themselves, and matters expressed visually are difficult express in words (McNiff, 2008; 2018), most proponents of arts-based research consider it to be necessary that people explain visual materials verbally (Clark & Morris, 2017; Mitchell et al., 2011). They argue that participants' verbal reflections are vital when the aim of the research is not only to deliver a researcher-driven analysis of images, but also to understand how participants experience and perceive images and research topics related to them (Mitchell et al., 2011; Rose, 2014). Thus, in reality, visual arts-based research methods are mostly multi-modal, combining visual materials and their verbal reflection (Martikainen, 2018a).

5. Contribution of Visual Arts-Based Research Methods

We are surrounded by diverse visual messages in our everyday lives. We perceive them and use the perceptions to orient our actions. However, as Weber (2008, 42) states, “seeing, being surrounded by the visual, doesn't always or necessarily mean that we notice what we see.” Thus, in many cases, we do not pay conscious attention to the visual qualities of our everyday encounters. By directing participants' focus toward visual materials and the messages communicated by them, arts-based research may sharpen their observation so that they pay more conscious attention to the visual elements in social reality (see Mannay, 2015; Weber, 2008). In this sense, in addition to promoting valuable information about participants' thoughts and experiences, arts-based methods may improve participants' skills in visual literacy. Such skills are of utmost importance in the contemporary visual culture (Elkins, 2008; Sturken & Cartwright, 2017).

5.1 Arts-Based Research Generates Emotions and Empathy

Arts-based research engages participants in the research not only intellectually, but also emotionally (Leavy, 2018, 3). Arts both express emotions and generate them and, in addition, appeal to the sensory side of human experience (Eisner, 2008; Lopez et al., 2018). The evocative power of arts provides researchers with a means of addressing participants not only intellectually

but also emotionally (van der Vaart et al., 2018). Through the aforementioned characteristics, arts-based methods appeal to lived experiences, making the research topic more personally relevant (Lopez et al., 2018; Weber, 2008). Thus, research using arts-based methods may gain a more holistic insight into people's experiences and thoughts than research using mere verbal research methods (van der Vaart et al., 2018; Weber, 2008).

Eisner (2008) argues that arts and arts-based research methods may generate empathy among research participants (see also Lopez et al., 2018; Pearson et al., 2018). In this sense, arts may enable research participants to adopt other people's points of view, associate themselves with the feelings and thoughts of other people, and understand social matters from other people's perspectives (Eisner, 2008; van der Vaart et al., 2018). By cultivating an empathetic experience, arts-based research can promote compassion, increasing people's mutual understanding (Leavy, 2018; Pearson et al., 2018; Weber, 2008). Naturally, this kind of empathetic understanding may be generated between participants and researchers as well, providing researchers with a more nuanced understanding of participants' lives and experiences.

5.2 Arts-Based Research May Reveal Tacit Experiences and Facilitate their Expression

According to Eisner (2008), arts can cultivate imagination. McNiff (2018), in turn, argues that fictional arts-based methods may encourage research participants to observe phenomena in more open-minded ways, which may offer the possibility of finding new ideas, points of view, and insights into the world (see also Galafassi, Tàbara, & Heras, 2018; Taylor & Ladkin, 2009). McNiff (2008, 40) argues that "in the creative process, the most meaningful insights often come by surprise, unexpectedly, and even against the will of the creator." This kind of openness to the emergence of new ideas also provides the participants with the opportunity to understand social encounters in a novel way (Pain, 2012; Weber, 2008).

McNiff (2008) states that it can be difficult for many people to diverge from their habitual ways of looking at things. Images used in arts-based methods may provide research participants with cultural mirrors (Martikainen, 2011, 2018a) through which they can mirror, reflect on, and become aware of their tacit experiences and habitual ways of thinking and acting. According to Mannay (2010, 2015), by providing a new perspective for observing social reality, visual materials may manage to make familiar matters appear unfamiliar. In fact, this novel perspective provided by images may not foster reflection on the research topic alone, but also participants' own relation to the topic (Martikainen, 2011). Thus, arts-based research may also increase participants' self-

awareness. As Eisner (2008, 11) argues: “Art helps us connect with personal, subjective emotions, and through such a process, it enables us to discover our own interior landscape.” Arts can make long-lasting and deep impressions, and, for this reason, the realizations made when participating in arts-based research may have a significant impact on people’s lives (Leavy, 2018).

Visual research methods and materials are often considered as providing means of making abstract ideas more tangible (Pain, 2012). For example, emotional and tacit experiences are often difficult to articulate verbally (Rose, 2014). One commonly acknowledged advantage of arts-based research methods is that visual materials are capable of capturing experiences and dimensions of thought that are difficult to express in words (CohenMiller, 2018; Goopy & Kassan, 2019; van der Vaart et al., 2018).

5.3 Arts-Based Research Facilitates Participation and Fosters Critical Thinking

Arts-based research is often regarded as participatory in the sense that it invites people to share their thoughts and feelings with each other (Coemans & Hannes, 2017; Leavy, 2018; Pain, 2012). Visual materials are considered to facilitate communication between researchers and participants (Pain, 2012; van der Vaart et al., 2018). Images and other visual materials invite people to participate, gather together, and share opinions, views, and experiences (van der Vaart et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2017). In addition, arts-based research may foster participation in the sense that, for many people, images can be more accessible than verbal accounts, including scientific concepts and terms (Cole & Knowles, 2008; Goopy & Kassan, 2018; Weber, 2008). It is thought that the capacity of visual materials to appeal to lived experiences lowers people’s threshold to participate and talk about their views and experiences (Cole & Knowles, 2008; Coemans & Hannes, 2017). Valuing each and every person’s lived experiences as a significant contribution and diminishing the role of scientific concepts in the research situations, arts-based research diminishes the traditional, hierarchical power-relation between researchers and participants, and facilitates more democratic participation (Goopy & Kassan, 2019; Leavy, 2018; Pain, 2012). In this way, arts-based research might also be able to reach marginalized voices and perspectives often lacking in research (Leavy, 2018).

Because of its potential to generate alternative and novel views on social matters, prior research has strongly associated arts-based research with critical research (Cramer, McLeod, Craft, & Agnelli, 2018; Kędra & Źakevičiūtė, 2019; Leavy, 2018). It can lead people to notice hidden power relations and oppressive conditions, and it can provide means of challenging dominant

stereotypes and ideologies (Bagley & Castro-Salazar, 2018; Leavy, 2018). By cultivating empathy, arts-based methods may lead to identifying not only drawbacks related to one’s own life, but also oppression experienced by fellow people, increasing sensitivity to the problems of communities (Goopy & Kassan, 2019), as well as to those of the environment and the whole of humankind (Galafassi et al., 2018). Before people can challenge harmful stereotypes or unjust conditions and ideologies, for example, they have to become aware of those stereotypes and conditions (Leavy, 2018). Arts-based research is one means of increasing this kind of awareness (Bagley & Castro-Salazar, 2018; Leavy, 2018). Such awareness and the possibility to use it as a basis for orienting one’s actions may provide people with feelings of agency and empowerment (Bagley & Castro-Salazar, 2012; Capous Desyllas, 2014; Goopy & Kassan, 2019).

To conclude, the main contributions of the visual arts-based research methods to social science research are summarized in Figure 1.

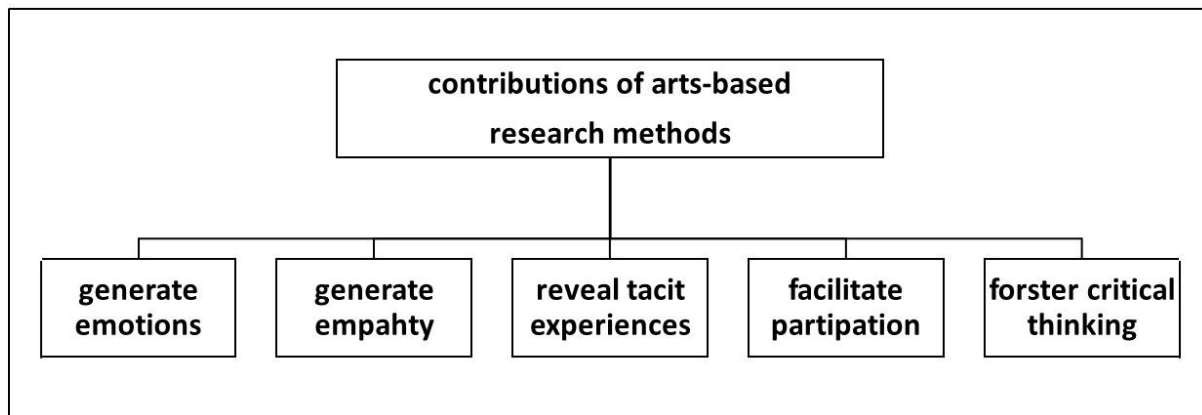


Figure 1: *Contributions of Arts-Based Research Methods*

6. Limitations of Arts-Based Research

Literature on arts-based research has also raised critical considerations and identified limitations of arts-based research. One target of criticism has related to the interpretation of visual products created by participants. It has been questioned whether researchers can access the meanings intended by the participants. Since visual images are not transparent windows to participants’ lives and experiences, it is necessary to ask participants to discuss their images (Clark & Morris, 2017; Mitchell et al., 2011). In this way, the participants themselves guide the “reading” of the images, becoming research partners rather than mere objects of research (Leavy, 2018).

Another target of criticism has been the relation between visual and verbal modes of expression. Even though visual materials are used and produced in arts-based research, it is customary that “visual experiences” are commented and reflected on verbally (Clark & Morris, 2017; Mitchell et al., 2011). In addition, research reports are written documents as a rule. Thus, it has been questioned whether it is possible to capture the visual experiences and their nuances in words. As McNiff (2008, 35) states, “artistic knowing is not something that can always be reduced to language.” There are always nuances of visual experience and visual modes of knowing that cannot be expressed verbally (Leavy, 2018; McNiff, 2008). However, that has never been the goal, either. Instead, the role of visual materials is to provide an alternative mode of knowing that could diversify our discursive understanding (see Galw, Inder, Kable, & Hazelton, 2017). In addition, for some people, expressing ideas and experiences through visual means may be easier than expressing them through verbal means. Thus, it is important to provide participants with the possibility to express themselves in alternative ways (Galw et al., 2017; Martikainen, 2017). Some studies suggest that it is precisely the gap and lack of complete compatibility between visual and verbal modes of expression that activates reflection (Martikainen, 2011, 2017). In addition, several studies indicate that the multimodal fluctuation between various modes of knowing and expression may enable deeper understanding (Leavy, 2018; Martikainen, 2018a; McNiff, 2008).

A further critical point has been associated with the capacity of visual materials used in arts-based research to address emotions, memories, and lived experiences. Some of the experiences and memories generated by visual materials may be painful (Boydell et al., 2012; Cox, Kazubowski-Houston, & Nisker, 2009). Thus, from the point of view of research ethics, researchers must be aware of this. Especially when the research topic is sensitive and there is the risk that producing visual materials or reflecting on them might burden participants, it is necessary that researchers have a plan for how to arrange support for participants when required (Cox et al., 2009). That being said, this risk is not only relevant in terms of arts-based research but in terms of all research dealing with sensitive topics.

Finally, the use of images as a starting point for reflection has attracted critical attention, especially when the images are chosen by the researcher. It has been stated that the selection of images influences the research findings (see, e.g., Martikainen & Hujala, 2017). This kind of criticism seems justified. For this reason, the researcher should provide detailed information about the images and explicate the reasons for their selection. In addition, the possible impact of the

choice of images on findings should be reflected on carefully. Even though it is true that the words and terms used in interviews or questionnaires also direct participants to answer certain questions and comment on certain things, the visual tangibility of images (Dewan, 2015; Kuipers, Jones, & Thierry, 2018) may influence participants' thoughts and utterances more than verbal instructions.

7. Limitations of the Study

When taking into consideration the encompassing amount of literature on arts-based research, as well as the wide scope of research topics studied using arts-based methods in social sciences, it is evident that this review only presents a slice of the entire field of arts-based research in social sciences. Similarly, it is beyond the scope of this study to review arts-based research in all fields of social sciences or approaches to arts-based research other than visual. In addition, since this study focuses on defining and discussing arts-based research as an approach to social science research, the presentation of arts-based research methods themselves, namely at the level of practical analysis, was not included in the research task. Despite these limitations, this study is based on current and recent literature on arts-based research and, for this reason, may provide a timely and concise introduction to visual arts-based research in social sciences, and may serve as an inspiration for social science scholars to delve more deeply into arts-based research.

8. Conclusion and Scope for Future Research

Even though arts-based research and its contribution are often compared to research using verbal materials and discursive research methods, it is important to note that these methods are neither rivals nor mutually exclusive. Instead, they provide participants and researchers with alternative ways of exploring the research topic, contributing together to a more holistic and nuanced understanding of the social world. As such, arts-based research combining visual and verbal materials might offer a fruitful basis for interdisciplinary research. In the future, it might be useful to compare the findings related to one topic based on research using verbal materials and methods, on one hand, and visual materials and methods, on the other hand. This kind of comparison would concretize the contribution of visual arts-based methods and develop understanding of their role in diversifying our understanding of social reality. In addition, it would be beneficial to make a literature review on arts-based research in social science research focusing on the type visual materials, such as drawings, photographs and media-images. This kind of review

would provide researchers with means of using visual materials that best meet the purposes of their studies.

It seems that in the current times, research methods that facilitate the participation of diverse and marginalized groups of people in social science research are needed. In addition, it may be argued that in the current times of political, social, and environmental crises, we need research methods that raise people's critical awareness and foster engagement in promoting social and ecological sustainability. Last but not least, we need research methods that foster our responsibility for and appreciation of fellow people. With its ability to facilitate participation, promote collaborative reflection and generate empathy, arts-based social science research could pave the way for this kind of more inclusive, responsible, tolerant, and sustainable future.

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