

Using a Narrative Approach for Understanding Views on Air Pollution Policies: Stories from a Community in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia

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Introduction

- During the long cold winter in Ulaanbaatar Mongolia, air pollution levels are among the highest in the world (UNICEF, 2018)
- The main sources of air pollution in Ulaanbaatar are burning raw coal for heating in each household of 'ger' areas
- The GoM has been making efforts to address air pollution issues
- Households in ger areas find it difficult to take advantage of the laws and policy regulations
- A failure may be due to a lack of public participation of proposed policies



Figure 1. Ger areas of Ulaanbaatar outskirts



Figure 2. Ger – Mongolian traditional dwelling

Introduction

Participatory Approach and Narrative

- Participatory approaches that public needs and demands are taken into account during the processes of policy-making and implementation (Masango, 2001)
- It is important that public participation methods and research on public participation adopted with socially disadvantaged or culturally diverse communities accommodate their cultural and social needs and enable them to participate fully in discussion of an issue (Hampton, 2004)
- Narratives, a participatory research method, are an important aspect of public discourse as they contain evaluations and preferences critical to the participation process
- The narrative method, applied to interview techniques, focus groups, ethnographic observations, or other forms of data collection (Harper et al., 2004)

Introduction

Aims

- To illustrate how a narrative approach and its analysis can be used to collect and organize public discourse and community preferences on air pollution issues in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
- To understand the communication of controversial topics, such as air pollution, and to show how to engage vulnerable communities for policy consensus building
- To explore the potential of voluntary participation of residents in improving air quality at the local level

Methods: Narrative Interviews

- Narrative interview techniques tend to let the interviewee control the direction, content, and pace of the interview without setting a fixed agenda
- A narrative interview usually start with open questions, and the skills needed to be a good narrative interviewer include the ability to build rapport and trust early in the interview
- The interviews involved open and follow-up questions about their views on Ulaanbaatar's air pollution
- Hand notes were taken without recording
- Non-verbal encouragement, such as smiles and nods, were used
- A series of meetings and interviews were conducted with stakeholders including central and local governments, government agencies, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs)

Methods: Focus Group

- A focus group with ger residents was carried out to examine the stories on experience of their overall life in the ger area
- Participants were given ample opportunity to tell and elaborate their stories
- The dialogue of the focus group meeting was analyzed using a narrative inquiry process
 - The focus group meeting notes and observations were analyzed using Labov's evaluation model
 - The Labov approach enables an analysis of a community's concerns or preferences on specific issues within a participatory process
 - The components of each narrative form were categorised as abstract, orientation (locating in time and place), complication (what happened), evaluation (how a speaker views the events; conveying the point of narrative), result (resolution), and coda (optional - closing summary)

Methods: Focus Group

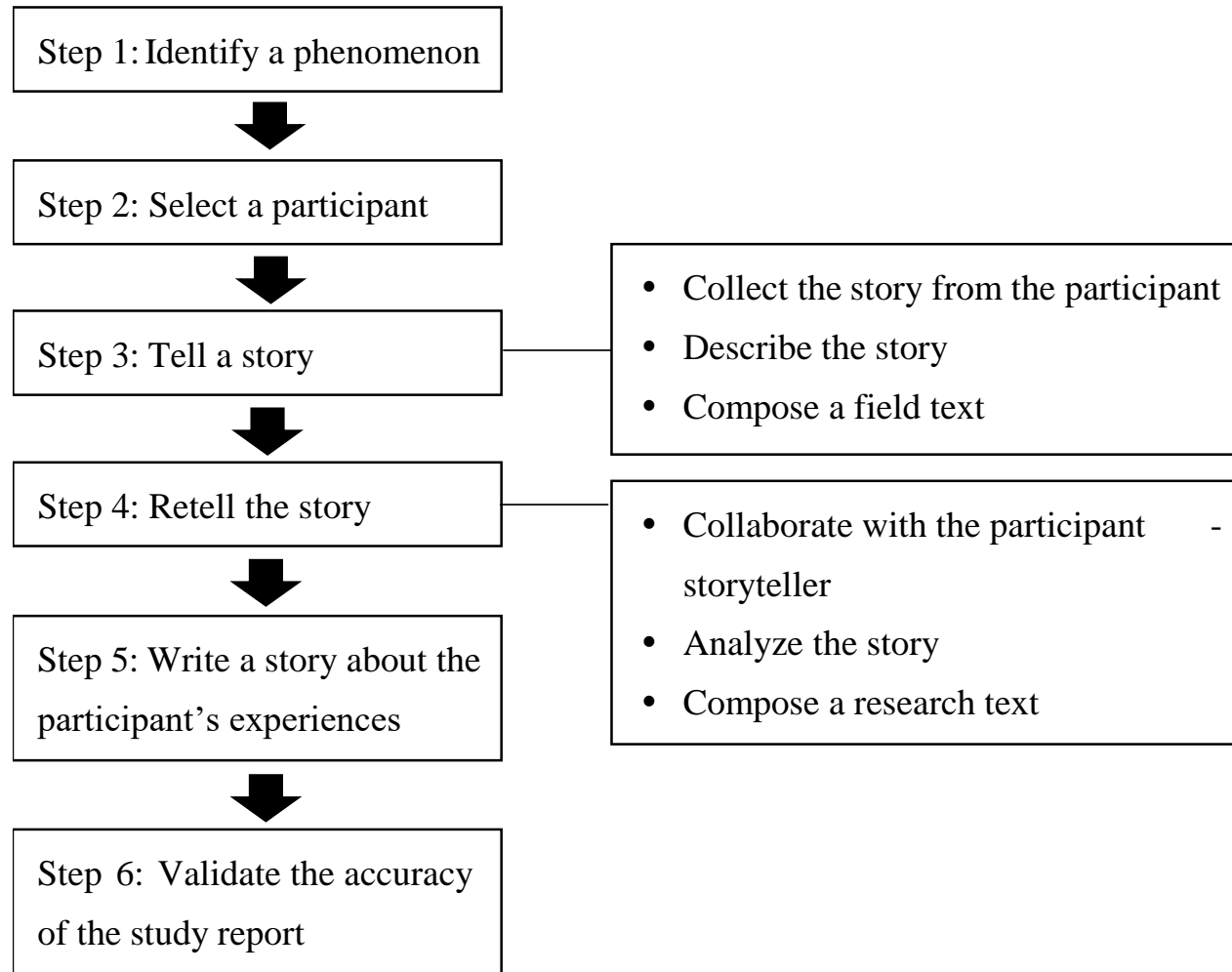


Figure 3. Narrative inquiry procedure

Results: Qualitative Interviews

➤ ***Director of the Energy Regulatory Commission***

- The use of raw coal will be banned from May 2019
- The GoM encourages residents to use refined coal
- Air quality in Ulaanbaatar is improving

➤ ***Executive Director of an NGO***

- Most residents in the ger areas do not benefit from the current 'free nighttime electricity' policy
- Air pollution in Ulaanbaatar has not been improved and even got worse

Results: Focus Group Meeting with Ger Residents

Difficulties of Living in Ger Area

Abstract: Air pollution is the most serious problem affecting their lives.

Orientation: They migrated to the ger area where there was no infrastructure about ten years ago. They suffer from chronic respiratory diseases every winter, which causes various diseases and affects their health throughout the year. They have been experiencing complex symptoms for years, including difficulty breathing, tingling eyes, and stuffy chest. Especially they were concerned about the health of their children.

Complication: The residents go to hospital regularly and the use of medicines is high. Since opportunities to make hospital appointments are limited and both expensive and time consuming, they mostly take medicines, although they wonder if it is effective.

Evaluation: The community needs more accurate information and education about how to prevent health problems from air pollution. The provision of health care services at the local level should be expanded.

Result: Winter air pollution in Ulaanbaatar has been severe for decades, and measures to solve the issues need to continue.

Coda: The community recognizes the need to take actions by themselves to reduce air pollution and wants more information on air pollution and its health impacts.

Results: Focus Group Meeting with Ger Residents

Government Policies and Practices

Abstract: Policies and measures for addressing air pollution issues do not meet their living condition and practices.

Orientation: They are familiar with the 'free nighttime electricity policy' that has been in effect since 2017. They heard that government plans to prohibit the use of coal from May 2019.

Complication: Opening for free electricity by 9 p.m. is too late since it takes time to warm the whole house, most of the residents already burn coals in the early evening. Refined coal promoted by the government is rarely used because of its poor thermal efficiency.

Evaluation: It is doubtful whether the coal ban policy will be realistic. It may cause a backlash from the residents of ger areas. They may try to secure coal at all costs and may burn everything they can lay their hands on if deprived of coal.

Result: They were expecting the application time of the free electricity to be adjusted considering their lifestyle. Soil pollution is also threatening their health.

Coda: More realistic plans and measures considering the circumstances of residents in ger areas are required. Policy makers need to listen to the various voices of the residents.

Results: Focus Group Meeting with Ger Residents

Possibility of Public Participation at Local Level to Address Air Pollution Issues

Abstract: The community has a keen interest in environmental issues, including air and soil pollutions, and has expressed a willingness to collaborate.

Orientation: They have been working together to cultivate vegetables for self-sufficiency. They grow different kinds of vegetables in each household, have regular meetings twice a month to share cultivation information and learn techniques.

Complication: They formed a community called Bumbat Bayalag (spring abundance), consisting of 14 households with members aged between 35 and 67 years. They have a willingness to change and take actions such as planting trees if they know how to improve the air quality.

Evaluation: There are several NGOs that work closely with residents in ger areas to try to improve their lives. They realize the importance of addressing the air pollution issues with public and community participation.

Result: It turned out that they are using Facebook frequently and it was suggested to open a Facebook page to secure next steps for our study and continuous collaboration in the future.

Coda: They have also collaborated with foreign organizations, especially Korea, and visited Korea for training. They expressed their willingness to collaborate with us to make a better town and expected their community to be a good example to other ger areas.

Results: Focus Group Meeting with Ger Residents



Discussion

- The narrative analysis conveyed the community's concerns about air pollution and its context
- The narrative analysis provided a structure and context for understanding and presenting the stories communicated in the meeting
- Through interview results and narrative analysis using Labov's evaluation model, it was possible to identify stories and counter stories
- The conflicting stories mentioned in this narrative analysis show that communities can provide a transformative voice that can lead to changes in environmental governance

Conclusions

- The study was possible because stakeholders and residents actively shared their knowledges and experiences without expecting anything in return
- We gained understanding of the local communities in Mongolia and discovered the potential of community-based studies to approach the solution of local issues in the cultural context of Mongolia
- To ensure the continuity of collaboration with them, we suggested them a work, sharing photos of their regular meetings, and they shared them



Regular meeting on April 30, 2019



Regular meeting on May 15, 2019