

# #2 Making images photography/film/mapping

## *When planning*

1. Will it be possible to identify someone in my images?
2. Will I need any permissions to take images in public or private spaces?
3. Will I ask for consent to take images of participants?
4. Will I let people know who I am, what I am doing and my intended outputs?

## *While recording*

5. Am I making anyone feel uncomfortable?
6. Am I treating participants as people rather than subjects?
7. Am I mindful of local tensions, cultural expectations and sensitivities at play on site?

## *Before displaying*

8. Have I protected information that might compromise dignity or safety?
9. Have I considered how audiences might make alternative interpretations?
10. Have I invited the individual or community who is the subject or owner of the images to have a say in their use?

# About this protocol

## *Why built environment researchers make images*

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Research is a quest for new and better insight. Our research at the Bartlett addresses real-world problems through critical and creative approaches. Still and moving images are a powerful means of communicating ideas while opening up ways of seeing and knowing. We take photos on field trips, make infrared images to measure building performance, map patterns of spatial configuration, film users at site visits and draw new structures entirely, all to better conceive, understand, analyse and transform our built environment.

Visual research methods present familiar and novel ethical issues. It may not be appropriate or possible to take images without participants' awareness, to film in a seemingly public space or even invite participants to take images which document their relationship with the built environment. Ethics is about what kind of lives we should lead, what actions are right and wrong, what qualities of character we should develop and what responsibilities we have for each other and our ecosystem. To conduct research ethically it is important to consider the benefits, risks and harms to all connected with and affected by it.

## *What ethical principles relate*

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The people, places and visual methods you use will each raise their own ethical considerations related to a common set of principles that encourage ethical conduct and promote interaction based on good faith and mutual respect.

*Benefit not harm:* Your research must have a benefit to society and any risks involved to participants must be minimized, balanced against the potential benefit to the overall community, and clearly explained to participants before they give their consent.

*Informed consent:* You must inform your participants about the study and what is being asked of them, including any potential risks or benefits, in order for them to make an informed and voluntary decision about whether or not to participate in the research.

*Confidentiality:* You must inform participants of the extent to which confidentiality can be assured and respect their right to remain anonymous in dissemination and display.

## *How to use this protocol*

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Protocols define appropriate ways of approaching research. This protocol aims to assist you in recognising the ethical dilemmas which arise from making images and to address them with confidence and creativity. It is designed to be a point of reference throughout all stages of your research—from planning your search for insight, to conducting activities in the field, to communicating what you have learned, to safeguarding your images.

This protocol contains *questions*, *principles*, *guidelines* and *resources*. The series of guiding *questions* on the first page act as prompts for you to reflect on the potential ethical considerations in visual research which emerge throughout a

project. The *principles* on this page inform best practice. These are not just regulatory hurdles for you to jump through at the beginning stages of your research but concepts that ground ethical inquiry throughout. The *guidelines* on the following pages expand on each of the questions, illuminate the different ethical concerns they raise, and propose recommended actions which embody these principles. The *resources* list further information and forms.

These guidelines are not exhaustive and cannot address all the possible situations you will face. Insightful and imaginative research encompasses a range of sites, cultural contexts and people and there will always be a need for flexibility.

# Guideline 1 *Will it be possible to identify someone in my images?*

## *What ethical principles relate to this question*

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Participants in visual research may be active or passive subjects of images. They may be collaborators, they may be the subject of portraits, or they may be users of a site under observation. UK law enables you to film or take photos of places or individuals in public space. But doing so when someone has a reasonable expectation of privacy may be considered invasive. It is important to avoid disclosing sensitive personal information without consideration and consent.

A key ethical consideration is to minimise *harm* to participants while maximising the benefits of research. Visual methods can create types of harm that may be unforeseen. There is potential for personal disclosures to create discomfort as participants may feel exposed and vulnerable to criticism when images are shared with audiences.

*Confidentiality* can be defined as a commitment to protecting an individual's privacy. The goals, processes and outcomes of visual research require you to give careful consideration as to whether you can ensure confidentiality. Photography, film and graphic representations are capable of creating highly detailed and intimate portraits of individuals which can identify participants, third parties or even yourself.

A fundamental application of respect is to ensure that participants are enabled to make decisions about their research participation. In visual research it is important to consider *consent* as pertaining to not just the collection of images but also to analysis, presentation and dissemination of images.

## *How you can act ethically*

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When taking images of groups of people in public spaces or at events it may not be practical for you to obtain consent from everyone present. But you can be prepared with information sheets and consent forms if someone does approach you to inform them about the research in plain language and to receive informed consent for sharing data in verbal or signed form.

When taking images of identifiable individuals, or of people in private spaces, it is polite and good ethical practice to seek consent. A verbal request before recording may be appropriate.

In other situations, for example ethnographic work with a community, written or audio-recorded consent after extensive discussion is best practice. It may be important to develop relationships of mutual trust with study participants, so that the images taken emerge from collaborations between researcher and participants and are jointly owned. This may involve showing participants the images prior to wider presentation.

If you wish to anonymise individuals, using blurring techniques to obscure faces or identifying information prior to public display can facilitate ethical display but risks dehumanising participants by objectifying them and taking away their right to make an informed choice about revealing their identity. You might instead wish to crop to remove identifying features or ask participants to take metaphoric photos to depict experiences.

For some projects it may be appropriate to consider the process of obtaining consent not as a 'one-off' but as a series of decisions that take place as the project unfolds – once they have created images and once they have had an opportunity to see how they are going to be used.

Think about who you are sharing information with and why. Guard against potentially negative implications. Long after a project has ended, the information you hold about participants may still have implications for their well-being.

# Resources on making images

## Web-based materials

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Cox, s. et. al. (2014) *Guidelines for Ethical Visual Research Methods* – [http://artshealthnetwork.ca/ahnc/ethical\\_visual\\_research\\_methods-web.pdf](http://artshealthnetwork.ca/ahnc/ethical_visual_research_methods-web.pdf)

ESRC (2010) *The Research Ethics Guidebook: a resource for social scientists* – <http://www.ethicsguidebook.ac.uk/Visual-methods-101>

International Visual Sociology Association (2009) *Code of Research Ethics and Guidelines* – [http://visuelsociology.org/?page\\_id=405](http://visuelsociology.org/?page_id=405)

The National Centre for Research Methods  
Wiles, R., Prosser, J., Bagnoli, A., Clark, A., Davies, K., Holland, S., Renold, E. (2008) *Visual Ethics: Ethical Issues in Visual Research*. Southampton: ESRC National Centre for Research Methods - <http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/421/1/MethodsReviewPaperNCRM-011.pdf>

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## Books, chapters and articles

Berger, J. and Mohr, J. (1982) *Appearances*, in Berger, J. and Mohr, J. *Another Way of Telling*. London: Vintage, 81-130.

De Laat, S. (2004) *Picture perfect: Ethical considerations in visual representation*. *Nexus* 17: 122-149.

Krauss, A and Möntmann, N. (2013). *Scandalous: A Reader on Art and Ethics*. Berlin, Sternberg Press.

Pink, S. (2007) *Doing Visual Ethnography: Images, Media and Representation in Research*. London, Sage.

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## Forms

Partially completed information sheet and image reproduction consent form overleaf.

**Project Title**  
Start and end dates

**Information sheet for [participant group]**

**Who is conducting the research?**

My/our name(s) is/are... and I am inviting you to take in part in my research project, ['title of project']. Explain whether you are a student or member of staff and some details on your previous experience conducting research or your areas of interest. It may also be helpful to give some background information about the Bartlett and its expertise in built environment research.]

I am hoping to find out [give a brief summary of the aims of the project using clear language appropriate for your audience.]

I very much hope that you would like to take part. This information sheet will try and answer any questions you might have about the project, but please don't hesitate to contact me if there is anything else you would like to know.

**Why are we doing this research?**

[Outline the main research questions and state why the research is important.]

**Why am I being invited to take part?**

[Inform participants how they will contribute to the research by taking part.]

**What will happen if I choose to take part?**

[Give details on the location and medium you are using to record images i.e. photography or filming and how these images will be used.]

**Will anyone know I have been involved?**

[It may be clear due to the nature of the research that anonymity will not be possible – this is not necessarily a problem as long as participants are made fully aware of this. If you do not plan to anonymise participants, reasons for this should be provided and the extent to which their data will be used should be stated.]

**Could there be problems for me if I take part?**

[If you are dealing with sensitive issues then demonstrating an awareness of potential risks should be included. For example reassuring the participant how any difficult subjects will be handled carefully or that if they feel uncomfortable they are entitled to withdraw from the research and remain anonymous.]

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## **What will happen to the results of the research?**

[Be as clear as possible when giving details of any how the images will be used and displayed as a result of the project. State how/if you plan to share the results of the research with participants. State how long you plan to retain data, who will have access to it and how it will be securely stored.]

## **Do I have to take part?**

It is entirely up to you whether or not you choose to take part. We hope that if you do choose to be involved then you will find it a valuable experience.

[Make sure you reassure participants that if they choose not to take part there will be no negative repercussions for them.]

**Thank you very much for taking the time to read this information sheet.**

**If you have any further questions before you decide whether to take part, you can reach me at [email/telephone/address].**

**Project Title**  
Start and end dates

**Image Reproduction Consent Form for [participant group]**

This form refers to or [photographs and/or film] that you supplied, or [photographs and/or film] that you allowed [name] to make as part of [‘title of project’] in which you have participated. All images will be securely stored. As discussed with you, images may be shared within the research project to assist in the analyses. I may also like to use images (in electronic or print form), in reports, presentations, publications and exhibitions arising from the project. Please could you sign one of the boxes below to indicate whether or not you are happy for me to do this. I won’t use any photographs outside the research team without your permission.

**1.** I give my consent for these images to be reproduced for educational and/or non-commercial purposes, in reports, presentations, publications, websites and exhibitions connected to the [‘title of project’].

Signed..... Date.....

**2.** I would like to see any images taken by or featuring me before publication in order to give my consent for them to be reproduced for educational and/or non-commercial purposes, in reports, presentations, publications, websites and exhibitions connected to the [‘title of project’].

Signed..... Date.....

**3.** I do not wish any of these images to be reproduced in connection with the [‘title of project’].

Signed..... Date.....

Thank you for participating in my project. If you have any queries about this form or about the project or your participation in it, please do not hesitate to contact [name, phone number, email, address].