

Methods and technologies for transformative planning

Territory as media and social media as territory

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Abstract: How can planners find within social media new spontaneous ways through which people imagine, represent and socially produce a territory? This is what I have investigated in a peripheric neighborhood of Rome, trying to highlight how, through the acknowledgement of digital habitat embedded in a territory, it is possible to understand citizens' narration and hopes for their territory, as well as to find new ways to enhance participatory processes. I investigate how the habitat developed through a daily and routine use of mobile technologies of communication could make emerge new action spaces. I have identified insurgent democratic practices and new ways of citizens' engagement with their own city political issues, given a recurring distrust regarding official and established politics. Hence, since physical territory is a media of a diverse range of social relationships, also social media have become a portion of that territory where people can develop debates and conflicts regarding "major" themes and the image they would like to build for their territory. If researchers and planner accept that these contradictory and emotional digital places are in fact new portions of territory, alternative imaginations of space can be identified, generating new forms of collective appropriation of urban space.

Keywords: Social Media, Social production of space, Participatory processes, Ethnography.

Introduction

How our ways of inhabiting the city have changed after the spread of digital media?¹ This is what I have investigated in a peripheric neighborhood of Rome, Italy, conducting a three-year-long ethnographic research inside several Facebook groups related to that territory. To answer to such an open question, first we need to think the practice of "dwelling" a place as the production of locality process (Appadurai, 1996), that is the meaningful context for individuals' and groups' action. This context is practiced in the everyday life, through the social practice of imagination (ibid.). Defining dwelling as a production of meaning process, a suitable course of action cannot be to observe digital media use as an analytical tool that can guide us through urban space (Ratti, 2018), but rather analyse the spread of narrations and auto-representations that this technology allows. This form of communication is mostly visual, and it can be produced by international organizations but also by countless individuals in their daily routine, and is starting to characterize more and more our everyday life, narrating our places, the space we cross and the kind of sociality we use in them. Observing this narration, the territory results as a hybrid between physical and digital spaces whose boundaries and meanings are

¹ The terms to refer to the variety of artifacts that can hook up to different portals on the web are at the same time many and few. I propose to define them in general as digital electronic media or more simply digital media. The term "media" comes to refer to the ability of these artifacts to create networks of communication between people and spaces. The electronic and digital adjectives serve instead to qualify the type of reference technology, i.e. technologies that are powered by electricity and which are developed on (or can be reduced to) a binary code.



constantly being negotiated. The individual finds himself to be knotted in this encounter. Moreover, the production of meaning, not being centralised but scattered, breaks the traditional border of social classes, allowing new forms of debate, confrontation and discussion between people and groups.

Identifying these changes could be very important for planners: the spreading of narrations producing the sense of places, presenting themselves as a fundamental part of the inhabiting process, lead to the origin of hate speeches and invention of stigma, but also of new forms of participation and collaboration, new ways of regrouping with neighbours in order to take care of the territory, making an effort to produce it as a meaningful context. Thus, we are in front of new spontaneous ways through which people imagine, represent and socially produce a territory. If researchers and planners accept that these contradictory and emotional digital places are in fact new portions of territory, they can play an important role in these processes. Accepting the importance of online debates within the production of local imaginations, even when they are unpleasant, is a necessary step forward that we have to take to help new forms of collective appropriation of urban space developing, and also to counteract against various form of hate speech.

Also, Considering the territory as a media of social relations and the same media as a part of the territory, it is possible to observe their relation to see in what terms they contribute to help individuals and groups to cope with the intricate and often indecipherable interaction that is the relationship between global possibilities and local capacities. To address these issues, I committed myself into the habitat developed through a daily and routine use of mobile technologies of communication, internet and the social media of Montesacro, a peripheric neighborhood of Rome.

Field study and method

The choice of this particular area of the Italian capital is not accidental. First of all, I needed to indagate the use of these technologies not on exceptional cases, but on practices linked to the everyday routine within urban space. In this sense, my research can be defined as a “anthropology of ‘us’ “, meaning an ethnographic research geographically and socially distant from classical and ‘exotic’ cases of study. The protagonists of this research, the inhabitants of the “III Municipio”, also called “Montesacro”, are in fact people from middle class, and the neighbourhood itself is a liminal area of Rome, geographically and socially. The “III Municipio” of Rome is a rather extensive area of the capital², characterized, as is easy to imagine, by a variety of neighbourhoods with different historical and social characterization. Located in the northeast area of the capital, it is undergoing changes due to a moment of expansion, generational change and especially the emergence of new forms of associations and forms of land management from below. It is an area marked by a certain geographical and social mediocrity. The word should not be understood in the negative sense, but instead indicates how this area is inhabited by a middle class and is geographically in the middle of different trajectories. Its "natural" border is the GRA³, which divides it from the countryside and from the many neighboring municipalities; the area is also crossed by two road axes that are historically a link between the "true "center and the "real "suburbs outside the motorway ring: the Via Nomentana and the Via Salaria. The two ancient "vie consolari" are the roads built by the ancient Romans which, starting from Mentana in the Lazio region and from Porto D'ascoli on the Adriatic Sea, cross in the III Municipio to arrive at Porta Pia and Piazza Fiume (city centre). The Tiber laps the western border of the quadrant, while it is the smallest Aniene river to cross it, one of the main tributaries of the river that gave birth to the capital. Referring to the common sense and the ways in which this territory is represented, apart from rare exceptions, it appears to be a rather anonymous area; in Rome in fact you can hear about (more

²According to official data of December 2016, it counts 205,019 inhabitants

³ The “Grande Raccordo Anulare”, the highway that surrounds the almost entirety of the city of Rome.

or less rightly) of criticality as Tor Bella Monaca or Corviale, or of upscale places such as Parioli and the Prati district, or, of course, of the "most beautiful places in the world" located in the historical center. But you will hardly hear about the III Municipio, for better or for worse. This is not an area known for its social or economic criticalities (even if present), nor for particular qualities (although existing). Of course, it's an hour's drive from the countryside, but it doesn't take much less time to get to the Colosseum.

Starting from this self-perception detected in the territory, it is possible to imagine the necessity of its inhabitants to produce a new meaning, also to respond to the changes in action. Montesacro is therefore a precise context, a small-bourgeois area of the Roman suburbs, within which to observe the uses of digital media and the paths traced by them, at the individual and collective level, so that we can identify continuity and disjunctures in the locality's production processes and in the management of the urban space.

Having to work within such a vast territory, I chose to divide it into several cases of study. In this paper I will focus in particular on the case study regarding what happens within Facebook groups related to the Municipio. I have approached this context through the classical methods of ethnography. On the one hand, I tried to build networks of knowledge within the territory, attending various public occasions or simply strolling around, on the other, I joined the various Facebook groups to which I was interested, first getting to know the managers and moderators and then entering into their daily life. The next attempt was to unite the two contexts into one where I could pass seamlessly from an offline meeting to a chat or observing a post uploaded to Facebook.

I also tried to observe the use of Facebook and in general digital media within a precise frame, that of "incidental narration" (Bausinger, 2011). In fact, I noticed that the use of these technologies, and in particular the stories uploaded on Facebook that we are going to talk about, were not performed in a way obvious or blatant, but exploiting one of the most recent features of digital media: their "incidentalness". If, in fact, until a few years ago also an action like the Internet connection was marked by a whole series of rituals capable of putting them "outside" the normal flow of a day, the use that today we make of even the most futuristic technologies - Let's think about how "magical" is that my voice or my face can be heard and seen live at the other end of the world - is no longer an exciting and exceptional fact, limited to a precise context, as could be the games room of a bar or the computer of your office. Today digital media are used in a routine manner and subjected to the context, almost hidden and, in fact, incidental. The narratives of the territory in which we live made online, which we are now about to meet, are thus presented as incidental multimedia narratives, narratives calibrated through the affordances and the languages of digital media.

Narrating the "other"

During my research within this territory, I confronted myself with different contexts and different people: I met young adults who were moving alone for the first time, I entered some schools and I interacted with many of the groups created on Facebook with reference to the Municipio or to the various neighbourhoods that are part of it. In this paper, I will focus in particular on what I could observe by inserting myself in the circuits of these Facebook groups.

Within these spaces, I have identified insurgent democratic practices and new ways of citizens' engagement with their own city political issues, given a recurring distrust regarding official and established politics. Focusing on immigration policies and the consequent production of identity, I observed how citizens, through continuous and conflictual micro-narrations of their neighborhood life, produce stereotyped representations of the "other". At the same time, these micro-narrations have led citizens to reflect on both their attachment to the territory and transformative actions capable of producing a different one. So, now we will observe how by setting the ethnographic gaze on the processes with which stereotypes and even hate speeches are produced, it is possible to identify the reasons behind these processes and to imagine intervention strategies to shift the attention on forms of construction of community and bottom-up design practices of the urban space.



First of all, I have to describe what kind of people daily attend these Facebook groups. These groups can be composed of a few hundred people or touch peaks of 30000 users, but of course not all the members of the groups participate actively in their lives or the discussions that are born within them. The people who are engaged daily in these discussions in fact tend to be individuals between thirty-five and seventy years of age. They are people who live the changes of their territory and in general the changes that are summarized in the words "globalization" and "modernity" through a growing feeling of insecurity.

The novelties brought by these processes make less strong the "traditional traditions" (Bausinger, 2008) on which the groups model their daily routines, thus leading to the emergence of these feelings of anxiety, frustration, forms of displacement (de Martino, 2002) that must be solved by rebuilding the meaning of living in a given context. In this territory and in general throughout Rome, this problem is addressed mainly through the construction of the rhetoric of "degradation".

To make understandable the "disorder" that they experience in their daily lives, the inhabitants of Montesacro imagine a minority "which is determined [...] as "contaminated", and then becomes scapegoat of the "disorder" [...] which crosses current local social dynamics» (Simonica, 2009, my translation), which is often detected in immigrants and secondly in younger generations. This disorder, therefore, is articulated within the word "degradation". For this rhetoric to work, however, it must be articulated, discussed, put into play. As I have seen during my research, the space for public discussion within the III Municipio is very little. This happens, on one hand, because of the growing distrust of institutional spaces for these discussions, on the other for the actual absence of physical places where to meet. The groups on Facebook have then slowly become the favourite places for these discussions, both when it comes to groups created by some political association or volunteer, but especially in larger generalists groups where the discussions seem to arise in a "spontaneous" manner.

In fact, within these groups it is very difficult to discuss political issues and in particular the topic of immigration. Looking at the case of one of the largest of these groups, we see how before we can enter to be part of it, we should stop to read a hefty regulation. Among the most repeated rules there is the prohibition to discuss the topic "foreigners" or "immigrants", penalty the ban, i.e. the expulsion from the group. Within the guidelines in fact, it is specified, precisely in relation to these rules, that its purpose is to build a lost idea of community, providing a platform where to exchange ideas, information and simply know each other in the scraps of time offered by the frenzy of everyday life, between neighbors who inhabit the same territory. To pursue this goal, you must avoid any discussion that could overturn the limits of education and become infuriating, create quarrels and long even endanger the integrity of the group

So what are the prohibited arguments? They tend to be summarized by the golden rule of the group, also positioned graphically above all others and detached in the body of the text: *You cannot talk about politics*. The concept is reiterated more precisely: "One cannot speak of Roman politics or worse national". The following rules appear to be a series of postulates of the same, or however clarification to indicate any theme that can slip into a discussion between opposing parties with different interests.

It is not therefore allowed to speak of religion, because at the end of the day everyone can believe what he wants in respect of others; you cannot talk about football (the combination between the two arguments does not want to be sarcastic), since undoubtedly the discussion would slip into unreasoned arguments and therefore in discussions; it is forbidden, clearly, in any way to talk of issues concerning race or nationality. In a nutshell, you must not speak of any form of alterity, which is in fact declined in some equally prohibited generic themes: the Rom, the immigrants (again), the vegans and the animalists (a sort of home-made foreigners), the gender and, finally, the cyclists.

These rules can make you smile as much as worry, but their sense is obvious: discursively exclude all otherness, create a forced localism that tries to conceal that in Montesacro there are not only white heterosexual omnivores

(and to what it seems no lovers of cycling) but also second generations, Rom, homosexuals, vegans etc. The reason is not necessarily an antipathy towards these categories, indeed, but just the willingness not to address these topics for which the group is simply not ready.

And yet, the political issue, articulated mainly through "the problem of immigrants", is the most addressed on these groups, through very special tactics (de Certeau, 2001).

In fact, these attitudes are opposed with particular sagacity to two strategies: that explained in the regulations of the groups that basically prohibits even just to appoint the other and the less visible but very powerful of the judgement of the society (ivi). In fact, at formal level, being racist is absolutely deleterious and disadvantageous. The common sense seems to think our society as naturally anti-racist, also thanks to many campaigns to raise awareness of the topic. In short, racism understood as the act of formulating discriminatory judgments on a person as belonging to an ethnicity or nationality other than their own is cleared at several levels as something wrong.

So how do these people evade the formal and moral prohibition of defining the characteristics of the other? By engaging in the rhetoric of degradation, they document, almost always through the use of photographic images, various problems of the area due to the presence of an "other" and its attitudes.

By inserting myself within all these groups I could see how my Facebook home was quickly flooded with photographs able to document the "degradation" in every way possible. For example, often appeared photos of garbage bins whose contents had been spilled outside. Among various accusations to the municipal waste management system, there is no shortage of comments like: «Someone did the shopping, huh? », indicating how some "stranger" had searched in the trash something to take away. On the same trend travel the many photos of the "remnants" of the abusive markets near the metro stations "These here make everywhere dirty and steal customers from the ITALIAN shops that pay taxes". A broken fountain testifies that "it has been tampered with... Someone takes a shower and then the water no longer passes, because it is clogged the drain». And if it is not repaired is because then "comes the sly that if the disassemble and if the pieces came". The photo of a car with a broken window, the window of a shop that has suffered the same fate and others, do not simply tell a theft, but bring the discussion quickly to move on the number of "foreigners" that has been increasing in the last years.

The perpetrators of this degradation, however, never appear in photos and only after some time are nominated within the speeches. The other is defined in these examples as a ghost that hangs over the territory, however invisible.

The alterity in fact appears personified in its different representatives only when this image can testify the existence of a single value that seems to be transversally shareable: the sacrifice for the territory. Who wants to fight a racist post seen a few hours earlier, not being able to start a discussion on racism because of the regulation, shares the photo of a "foreigner" at work while cleaning the sidewalks in exchange for little money, with a sign at his side that explains how he wants to integrate with the work and demonstrating gratitude and certainly not 'begging for pity'. This seems to be the only way to remind everyone that "immigrants" are always human: communicating their willingness to sacrifice themselves free of charge, or almost, to contribute to the territory where it arrived.

There are therefore two ways of defining the other within the groups, one in negative and the other, theoretically, in positive. In both cases the discussion takes on tones capable of attracting the attention of the moderators only after some time. In the second case, that of the "foreigner" good and worker, the discussions begin only when someone doubts the honesty of the operation, implying that it is only a farce, maybe foraged by someone who earns something behind. In the first case, however, the discussion degenerates when someone finally names the other as guilty of the degradation portrayed in photos, whether it is the Rom, one of the most

popular culprits, or the more generic "blacks", "Africans", "refugees". If someone tries to question the actual guilt of these people or, worse, try to justify them by talking about the social reasons behind any degrading gestures, then accusing those who brought into play the presence of the other on the territory to have prejudices, the debate is unleashed.

"Who thinks it is right to help these poor people... Realize that soon they will not ask for more, but take what they need and it is your fault» is explained very often in the comments; as you can see the accusation of racism is fought with that of "perbenismo" ("perbenism") that is the will to treat well someone who evidently does not deserve it for the purpose of being "fashionable", to resemble young people and therefore not be considered "old", inadequate or ignorant. These would be the only reasons for defending foreigners, without a real awareness of the problems of the territory and above all an interest in finding a real solution.

Through these indirect tales, the debates and the ensuing conflicts, come to produce the two extreme boundaries in which the other as an individual can be defined, both reasoned through the mediation of the physical space and the relationship with the territory. The other can be totally predatory and disinterested in the territory, or it can be totally aimed at sacrificing itself for it, thus making itself worthy of consideration.

At the same time, they also build two polarities of the attitude that is correct to maintain when we talk about certain issues: you cannot be racist, but, of course, it is equally shameful to be a "perbenist".

Indeed, perbenism is the biggest problem according to these people, because it prevents us from catching the real crises and because it would be the tool that politics uses to prevent dissent and exploit tragic situations for profit purposes. «I am more afraid of the perbenists. I put everything in the same basket? Tell the raped girls. I just want to find out that we're proud to be Italian». Of course, even those who fall in the other side, that of racism, are controlled. After having undergone the righteous ire of those who believe that these are shameful behaviours, not only their posts are often erased by the moderators, but they are also regiven by those who share their battles. Racism is, to all intents and purposes, wrong, one must be able to define the other as dangerous and liable to be eliminated without being racist. They are rhetorical that have a very delicate balances and whose dynamics may seem absurd if viewed from the outside, but that work in their context, precisely because they are based on the precise tactics.

As this dynamic may seem poor in meaning, it is precisely the one through which is built the imaginary in relation to the arrival of migrants in the territory. To grasp its effectiveness and the ability to continually build and reiterate such strong stereotypes about the "other" and the "us", we must therefore grasp the narrative and everyday aspect of it. What I have just told can look like an extreme situation, but in reality it is part of a sphere of very common behaviours, of which all of us in some measure are carriers, aimed at trying to include certain concepts in the "common sense" of our own group. This is what the researcher has to do, try to understand how and under what conditions the ways of building the "common sense" carried out on Facebook are capable of producing certain social effects. To think about in the dynamics just told, there was nothing that was not already said talking about racism; What is peculiar is the way of giving value to a discourse that is formally discredited at institutional level. The sum of each of these small subjective and occasional stories succeeds in fact (at least in the eyes of the group) to evade this problem by constituting itself in what we could define a "collective narrative", that is, something whose size and scope is more than just the sum of the individual parts.

It is precisely when the participation in this collective narrative becomes a kind of a daily ritual that its power and the capacity of its concepts (for example the arrival of the other linked to the degradation of the territory) become almost obvious and come to light. The continuous sharing of images with the more or less concealed purpose of narrating the other becomes almost a performance to be staged, able to become central in the description of the other, but especially of the territory itself and its inhabitants. These performances seem to have almost the value of rituals: they are in fact repeated in a form that, although not explicitly defined by any



authority, is quite recurrent and fundamental because they can survive the censorship. In addition, these performances seem able to define the membership of a cultural group by acting through the simplification of the characteristics of the “us” and the “other”. They are therefore daily narratives capable of constructing taxonomies, i.e. rules for classifying behaviours and individuals. It is precisely through these rituals that the inhabitants of the III Municipio (re)produce the relationships between the different "collective identities" that recognize and put in hierarchical order their values. (Simonicca, 2006)

The definition of the “other” and of the “us” that is built within this dynamic reveals therefore also the deepest motivations for which it is put in place, which are then those proposed already by the regulations of the groups: to recreate a neighborhood idea that is supposedly lost in the past and make sense of the disorder present in the territory.

A few months after the end of my ethnographic research, I decide to return to attend the different Facebook groups regarding Montesacro. I am in front of a post that has obtained hundreds of responses and interactions. Within it is asked a simple question: "Who still thinks that Rome is the most beautiful city in the world?"

The answers I can read in the comments reveal something surprising. In fact, they summarize with great efficacy, in their accumulation during the hours, all the discussions, the comparisons, the shares of photos and in general all the conflicts and all the narratives that had alternated on the Facebook wall of the group in the precedent months.

Some in fact respond with photos of some famous monument, as if to say that Rome is still beautiful, despite the difficulties of the moment. Someone respond that something is actually changing for the worse and it is finally time to ask these questions; someone else instead perform effective summaries of the various discussions between racists and perbenists, proving to remember them all perfectly. All those debates and all the narratives do not seem to have been lost in the powerful and unstoppable flow of the social network, but instead they are inserted not only in the memory of the people, but in their routines, in the daily ways of production of locality. The continuous reference, implicit or explicit, to what has already been discussed on the groups is not linked to the "infinite memory" of the Facebook platform, because some posts that are cited are far dozens of minutes of scrolling the mouse along the wall of the groups, as long as they have not been deleted by the moderators. While "lost" in the flowing of Facebook, the discussions have therefore left a sign. Arrived in January of 2018, I return to include in my routine the observation of groups and participation in their activities and I realize that something has actually changed. The "War Bulletin", the endless succession of photographs concerning different types of degradation, has not disappeared, but has changed to some extent.

The biggest change is perhaps the almost total absence of narratives concerning the “other”. To comment on the various photos regarding the degradation, you no longer end up talking about the "foreigner" as the main culprit. I want to be clear, I do not mean to say that racism has disappeared from Montesacro, but simply that the incidental narratives no longer find appropriate tactics to construct a deterministic relationship between the presence of the other and degradation. The question that arises to me is: why? It does not seem to me possible that this change could simply be due to an increased ability of the moderators to expel and censor those who assume racist attitudes, nor that simply the subject has passed out of fashion. The other did not disappear only in narratives aimed at defining it as a cause of degradation, but also in those photographs in which it is portrayed at work for the common good of the territory. It is therefore possible, and it is this possibility that I want to explore now, that precisely the characteristics of the incidental narratives for how they are performed on Facebook have had an effect on the construction of these speeches.

As I hope to have clarified, the deepest purpose of the discussion fossilized for months on the subject of the "other" was not so much to discuss the figure of the foreigner, but to define an "us", the identity of the inhabitants of Montesacro. In particular, the "us" on which they, the members of the groups, are that figure put

in crisis, disoriented and apparently incapable of finding themselves in the current structure of the neighbourhood. The rhetoric of degradation and also the various culprits from time to time identified serve in fact to articulate in a sensible way (which, I want to specify again, does not mean appreciable, but only meaningful) the feeling of displacement, of an emotional detachment that the inhabitants of Montesacro live towards their neighbourhood and their city. And it is this detachment, it seems to me, the main problem that is dealt with through the incidental narratives, not so much that a road is impassable because of the holes in the asphalt, that the trash bins are crowded in another street or that there is a growing number of black people waiting for the bus. In fact, to create a discussion able to accumulate almost a thousand answers is not a technical question like «how come the municipality is struggling to manage the cleanliness of the neighbourhood?», but a much broader, almost existential question: «Why did we stop thinking that Rome is the most beautiful city in the world? And, if it's not the most beautiful city in the world, what city do we live in then? And what role do we have in it? ». To understand the almost dramatic extent of this question it is necessary to enter deeply within the cultural intimacy of the inhabitants of Montesacro as Romans and of the relationship that the citizens of the capital build with the history evoked by the City.

«The monuments are no longer enough! We hide behind the monuments, but we do not live in it, it is true that Rome sucks» Screams a lady in one of the comments to the post in which this question was posed. «If you go abroad even once you realize that no major city is reduced in this state».

In the game between global imaginations and local possibilities, the territory came out defeated and they together with it. They cannot adhere, nor want, to those global imaginations that excite their children or grandchildren, they cannot escape from the Roman reality, physically or figuratively: they cannot, in short, ignore Rome. On the other hand, they are not even able to ignore that something is wrong in Rome, which perhaps is no longer the centre of the world, but a periphery. And it's not even the most beautiful city in the world. To affirm that the monuments are not enough to guarantee a certain quality of life means to break up in a violent way that relationship naturalized between physical and historical quality of the territory and quality of the life of the inhabitants: to have an archaeological finding under their own house is not very useful if they no longer know what role to occupy in the globalized world. One of the most effective imaginations to be put to work to produce the locality in the Roman context cracks, to the point of bringing the inhabitants of the district to seek other rhetoric in which to take refuge.

The relationship with the territory is therefore damaged, not only because of the difficulty of managing the changes, but especially because the inhabitants feel that they cannot intervene on the territory, not to have any form of agency on it. The discursive expulsion from Montesacro leads to subtract the space of the Facebook group to the dynamics of the social network to make it the place to rediscover this role. While the loss of a producer of meaning such as the history of Rome leads to a different one, this feeling of insecurity and uncertainty leads to the genesis of episodes of violence, albeit at the moment only verbal, in an excess of and self-determination, strengthening the essentialization of cultural diversity (Appadurai, 2005); whether this diversity is found in "foreigners" or in the youngest, it is still in a "other".

The incidental narratives that occur online present themselves to some extent as forms, perhaps not strictly of "active citizenship", but certainly as a way to regain an agency with respect to the territory. These modalities mainly consist in identifying the ethical and moral qualities capable of keeping the neighbourhood networks in their feet. This however means that to find the meaning of living in Montesacro, outskirts of Rome, it is not enough to rely on the physical qualities of the territory, intending with these also the cultural heritage constituted by monuments and historical sites, but it is necessary to rediscover a certain quality of the citizens.

«Of course, Rome is the most beautiful city in the world. It's not an answer to your question, it's a fact. Us Romans however, we are assholes»



This is the argument that, in more or less similar forms, begins to return in the comments to that post I was talking about earlier and this seems to me a positive consequence of the discussion: the awareness of the need for a certain degree of engagement in daily life which one cannot do less to feel full-fledged inhabitants of their own territory and the rediscovery of the value of neighbourhood networks and of a collective and non-individual approach to the policies of management of the neighbourhood.

This is one of several case studies with which I have compared myself during my research. In other cases as in this, the interaction between digital platforms and territory is the one that exists between two different spaces capable of being mediums of various forms of social relations.

In fact, physical space has always been a medium of communication, in the sense that it has always been able to generate "meaning" in relationships. It is a medium insofar as it is able to influence (but not to determine) action, but also built through social action. The territory as a social and cultural product presents itself as the medium of that intricate and often indecipherable interaction that is the relationship between global possibilities and local capacities (Bonis, 2001). The novelty to be taken into account is that parts of those platforms created by the digital media and managed by international organizations can be tactically torn (de Certeau, 2001) and sewn up within a local context. Precisely these spaces subtracted and localized informally become the privileged places of the social and political discussion of the neighbourhood, those where, even if in an incidental way, more strongly is practiced an idea of neighbourhood as space of the meeting between contiguous, the comparison and the "free" exchange of opinions and information, whose only advantage is the establishment of a better community, although the forms through which this happens are often very conflictual.

Conclusion

I believe that the conclusions I have just tried to draw can open up to a number of considerations in relation to possible future scenarios, in the field of social research but not only, on which I would finally like to concentrate.

Firstly, by reasoning on the methodology of research, it seems to me increasingly difficult to imagine future investigations in the field that, in any context, can be exempt from working within the digital territories as in the "physical" one. I hope it is evident the importance of these spaces in the daily life of those who have access to it and consequently how it is no longer possible to think of a work on the field that does not consider the enormous agglomeration of meanings and narratives produced; this would lead to the exclusion of a fundamental part of the social life of individuals.

But I think that reflection on the subject should not stop at the point of view of "pure" research (as long as it can exist). Instead, we can reason on these issues also in proposing action-research practices. If it is true that in the digital portions of the territory, which are performatively and continually produced, the discussions appear to be extremely polarizing and violent, I think this happens because the spaces of the social networks remain in our society among the few where it is still possible to articulate a debate, to trace a space for conflict (even violent), to build a space for its own diversity (real or suppository). Moreover, precisely because of the possibility to "domesticate" our own digital spaces that is offered by the various platforms that possess them formally, the possibility of customizing them and making them familiar, they are often closer and intimate (Herzfeld, 2005) of many physical places, which especially in the context of the city are increasingly difficult to "modify" by an average user. Thus, what is encountered within these intimate spaces and "neighbors" assumes a value and meaning much more important than what comes from external sources, even when they are official. A council, an opinion, even a medical or generically scientific information, are easier to accept if they come from someone who is actively and politically engaged within these networks, just like, in our daily lives, we more easily accept advice from a friend or relative than from a stranger. In this sense, I think it is necessary for us researcher to be more inclined to "get our hands dirty", to accept that even behind the rhetoric and the most unacceptable



speeches, is concealed the attempt to find a sense of one's existence, remembering that this is a common trait of that humanity that, in any case, unites the researcher and the subjects of any study.

In the case of rhetorics such as racism, the aim is to be able to deconstruct that and to propose an idea of humanity that is more *sensible*, i.e. that has more meaning, of that proposed by racism. This certainly is not a simple task. Researchers must agree to lose themselves between networks (digital and not), sometimes to compromise, to displace themselves, in order to find themselves together with the people with whom they work. I would say that in this there is nothing to lose, if not our certainties.

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