

Special Issue Place Branding

FUORI LUOGO

Rivista di Sociologia
del Territorio, Turismo, Tecnologia



Guest Editors

Paola de Salvo

Università degli studi di Perugia

Marco Pizzi

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Direttore Fabio Corbisiero
Caporedattore Carmine Urciuoli

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Place Branding: Connecting Tourist Experiences to Territories

Tourism involves different organizations with different aims, such as public or private sectors non-governmental or associations and even communities. Even in the context of marketing concerns, more specifically in the promotion and branding of a location, the scenario of various stakeholders is evident (e.g. a city, a region or a country). Countries, cities, and areas that serve as tourist destinations compete with one another to draw visitors, residents, and business investment.

Tourism is obviously to be considered as one big production machine of local brands, that is, of territorial images which, by virtue of an effective and obsessive repetition, easily turn into real logos universally recognizable. This process leads to an almost automatic identification, to a conditioned reflex that leads to connecting to one specific tourist brand a limited and well-defined repertoire of landscape images.

This ability of the landscape image to become, with synecdoche function (the part for the whole), the identity flag of the tourist product obviously raises questions of ownership: who 'owns' a territorial brand? For instance, "I Love New York" is considered to be the first and most effective effort to brand a city. To potential tourists who were considering a trip to the Big Apple, a concerted, simple, fun brand for the city showed that New York was consciously working to change its image. To New Yorkers, this was a message that their city was a place of which to be proud. As a whole it was an experiment on how a brand can drive internal and external perceptions of a municipality as a catalyst for change. One more example is the 'I AMsterdam' slogan that has proved to be a hugely popular addition to the tourism scene in the Dutch capital. Similarly, in 2003, Las Vegas used place branding to turn the city's reputation for debauchery into a selling point: today, 'what happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas' is a phrase known the world over. Till the more recent slogan of Naples which, recalling the historic phrase of Goethe's journey to Italy ("See Naples and then die"), tries to attract tourists from all over the world with this novel blasting place branding slogan: "See Naples and then come back".

Moreover the use of technologies has radically changed the way travelers find, consume, and generate travel-related information (O'Connor, Höpken, & Gretzel, 2008). The paradigms on which tourism was traditionally based have changed, as have the visitors and their way of travelling. Nowadays the excursionist or the tourist is an attentive individual and a real consumer of local (real) experiences: A person who wishes to get in touch with the destination and establish an authentic and profound relationship with it. The progress of the Internet and social media have had a strong impact on consumers causing changes, first of all, in purchasing habits and behaviors, in their expectations and in the way they communicate. In fact, people can more easily share their thoughts, opinions and sensations with other individuals on the web, whether they are acquaintances (friends and relatives) or strangers. Secondly, Internet has become one of the main sources of information and the most important means by which the territory and tourist destinations communicate with potential visitors.

Places must not only have a differentiator, but also advertise and publicize what they do well if they want to appear more attractive (Moilanen & Rainisto, 2009). Place branding itself is the process of distinguishing and diversifying, where local tourism organizations, cultural and arts facilities, museums, historic preservation groups join and construct a place's image, helping in producing tourist sites with the common aim to attract consumers and investment to a particular local area. From this perspective, literature pertaining to place branding has rapidly grown up. Many streams of research have provided input to the creation of knowledge in the domain of place branding. This diversity of sources encompasses many disciplines that rarely, if ever, attract attention in the marketing and branding literature. For example, the fields of sociology, marketing or politics may be regarded as having a potentially important contribution to offer to the practice of place branding.

Practitioners and academics involved in place branding should therefore be prepared to scan horizons far wider than those associated purely with conventional brand management and brand strategy. This reflects the essential role assigned to image formulation and image communication in theoretical discussions (Kavaratzis, 2004).

This special issue of "Fuori Luogo" systemizes the social impact of place branding and thematizes a variety of strategic visions for the places, their purposes, priorities and strategies to support the local way of life, and finding ways to engage people and visitors, especially through arts, architecture, music, fashion and local food projects. This special issue enables readers to figure out how the tourist experience can be managed as a brand through a variety of issues, methodological approaches, and geographical areas, which allows them to adapt frames to different contexts and situations. The primary focus of place branding – counterintuitively – should be the place's own residents. A good project should make them inspired, enthused, happy to belong where they are, and motivated to do more or better. It is like stirring a whirlwind – the locals start, and the world responds.

Naples, 30/12/2022

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Focusing on Place branding an issue of a Journal centred on places, tourism and technology could lead to unpredictable outcomes, and such editing process could even be not so easy to manage. This is especially true in the case of a special issue, since this is usually expected to deal with themes that are not typically debated by its journal. The difficulty of this task, this time, is given by various factors. The topics touched in this Journal, indeed, are typically numerous and diverse, but also open to multidisciplinary approaches and capable to activate a lot of researchers from different fields, since they meet our surrounding reality being declined in infinite research objects. The Place branding subject, moreover, is various and animated by a lot of academics and practitioners with deeply diverse backgrounds. Furthermore, Place branding is experiencing a pinnacle in the effort to realize its theoretical statute and it established, at this point, its own specific terminology, despite its novelty. In conclusion, foreseeing the authors theoretical backgrounds and approaches and spinning the *fil rouge* connecting their works to compose this issue could be a real challenge, as mentioned before, in the context of a multifaceted topic like Place branding developed in a polyhedric journal like *Fuori Luogo*.

Anyway, the last complexity factor we listed, to a closer look, is simultaneously one of the obstacles in this editing process and a strength of it and an opportunity for a Journal with opened developing horizons as this. In this peculiar moment of Place branding as a discipline, indeed, it has both a wide grounding literature and a discrete permeability towards fresh and innovative approaches, which can contribute to shape it. In such a frame, this call for papers could not take for granted the coherence between the essays, the methodological approaches, and the research objects, considering, overall, that the addressee academics are not those typically involved in such debate or concerned in establishing the matter boundaries during these last years. Many of them, indeed, are simply far from a certain lexicon – e.g. “brand” – even being involved in the role of communication in place development for long time.

Place branding as subject matter already overcame the marketing boundaries, demonstrating its impact on places and its interest for different disciplines. The heated answer to this call for papers is an additional example to the reflections carried out by many highly cited scholars who already stated this and a further attempt to exceed the prejudices that still prevents many academics to consider the relevance of this topic, its lexicon, its theoretical framework, and the causes for reflection that it gives in favour of the debate about local development.

Under this light, we can affirm that the occasion produced by this call is even more important. Journals with such a multidisciplinary and multi-thematic attitude like this are privileged spaces, far from the accomplished journals dedicated to this branch of studies and represent an interesting gateway to the stimulating debate about the role of communication in local development.

The need for debate occasions like this, however, is given also by the daily presence in public policies of Place branding discourses and practices, that are keeping on calling academics to reflect.

The role of territories, cities, and regions as agents of globalization are a fundamental part in current research in different fields, indeed. Planetary urbanization is growing field of research through different perspectives and disciplines.

Territories have not only experienced demographic changes (urban agglomeration and migrations), but also changes in their financial potential (Singapur, London as financial hubs are quasi global actors), their infrastructures (railways, airports), as well as in their capacity to influence decisions affecting human welfare (green cities, sanctuary cities).

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In this complex scenario, characterized by the tension between globalization and de-globalization, cities and regions compete to be different and develop a unique voice. The competition evolves as a race for attracting talent (international students, higher education institutions, digital nomads, entrepreneurs), economic resources (industries and business, foreign investment), cultural institutions and initiatives (art exhibitions, music festivals, museums), social capital (NGOs, lifestyle, universities), as well as tourists from all over the world. This is the qualitative leap in Place branding studies: all cities – large and small and even towns like Urueña, Monsaraz or Asilah – are participants in the phenomena and aspire to design a territorial attractiveness strategy that is in line with their own political objectives. For this reason, the objective of territories has been transformed and is now focused on investing to create public value. It is a matter of using the resources at their disposal to highlight those characteristics that make them unique, attractive and, above all, different from other locations. This is the essence of Place branding: to generate, create, manage, and promote a brand, an emotional connection to the space. The strategy uses political and symbolic communication tools to transform the collective imagination and generate opportunities at different levels. Cultural initiatives such as “Hay Festival”, “Aspen Ideas Festival” or “Perugia International Journalism Festival” are initiatives that renew the cultural offer and allow the city in question to be located for a few weeks at the epicentre of global cultural life. In the educational field, Dubai is promoting a campaign to attract students and educational services to become an educational hub of reference. Entrepreneurs dream with Silicon Valley, while young Europeans wish a stagiaire in Brussels.

The Place branding process is particularly complex because it transcends the usual channels that make up marketing strategies and business plans. Place branding involves a process of governance that has to do with local development and territorial management, and in which various public and private actors participate. Moreover, this new management model involves the joint work of actors from different fields: economic, tourism, cultural, political, social or sports. Thus, the main challenge of Place branding will lie in finding the right synergies between the actors involved, so that their interests are satisfied. This phenomenon has led to a new way of understanding international relations and has provided a new space for different social agents, organizations, companies, and institutions to exchange ideas and launch proposals to be applied at the local level with the aim of generating an impact and transfer to the international sphere. When Place branding is integrated into municipal policy, it acquires the status of public policy and becomes professionalized. Without professional direction, decisions are left to the whim of political councils which are too concerned with fashions, the latest trend or short-term results. This “fast food policy” is counterproductive and disconnect citizens from global projects.

Globalization, decentralization, and urbanization have given way to a new understanding of state structures that benefits and empowers territories. Whereas states have more bureaucratic, rigid and hierarchical structures, territories and their governments offer practical solutions to specific problems. In this way, they demand responsibility for creating, planning and implementing public policies that offer solutions to problems that have been generated by the territories themselves or that develop in their spaces: traffic, pollution, inequality, gentrification or privatization of public spaces in cities; lack of investment, talent, technological resources or depopulation in rural areas. The interests of territories are shared among them, but different from those of states. The new political agendas make it possible to face global challenges from a local perspective in order to decentralize powers and generate greater influence from the territory which, until now, has played a secondary role. Therefore, the promotion of the territory will also measure its success in its participation in formulating policies that combine the incorporation of horizontal elements (multilateral cooperation) with vertical elements (local governments).

This multilevel governance approach represents an advantage for global initiatives. For example, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represent the model for the implementation of global decisions, driven by states in the international community, to be executed at the local

level. The recognition of these local capacities (Voluntary Local Review and other similar instruments) facilitates a differentiation that links climate, investments, municipal management.

In this sense, communication has become a fundamental pillar in the process of promoting the territory. Place branding integrates all territorial realities and must be designed for both insiders and outsiders. The new narratives are based on the construction of proposals that show coherence between what one is internally (the identity of the place, its characteristics and that of its inhabitants) and what one wants to be externally (what the territory can offer, what makes the experience of visiting the place, living or investing in the territory unique). The aim of the communication process is to link the projected brand image with the perception of the territory by the resident citizens and the outside population, through coherent and homogeneous messages that enhance its ability to boost the socioeconomic reality of the site. The promotion of the territory goes beyond highlighting the landscapes or monuments that make it up. It has to do with its identity and the design of a brand based on it. For this reason, the active role of the local community is essential to unify all those brands and sub-brands that are related to a site. To achieve this purpose, the bet has to focus on carrying out a collective project, in which all the actors involved, and stakeholders participate and collaborate, leaving aside ideologies, personalistic purposes and stimulating a relationship that is sustainable over time.

The Covid-19 pandemic has given rise to a new communication paradigm in the field of territory. Crisis communication has resulted in a scenario in which cities, regions and other sub-state territories are able to transmit messages with transparency, agility and a flexibility that adapts to the form and channel. Opinion leaders in a territory, mayors or governors have found in communication, based on a strong identification with their community, the best way to generate trust in their own citizens and in others, understood as potential visitors, residents or investors. In this new way of proceeding, the territory participates in the international agenda through a new localism, where leaders and leaders are key players. Their personal style is based on leadership, through charisma, and drives political initiatives that transcend their territorial boundaries. Here, social networks become a fundamental loudspeaker, where a global sense can be given to their appearances through content and digital platforms. A significant example is the COP on Climate Change, where the participation of urban and territorial leaders is gaining more and more weight and repercussion.

In short, Place branding comprises an area of work, research and action of enormous theoretical interest, social impact and knowledge transfer.

City Branding and Place Branding in the Metaverse: how real cities build their virtual image and how virtual cities do it²

Introduction

The concept of a brand, from a business and commercial perspective, is associated with the identity, the image of an institution or a product, which implies the imperative existence of values and a unique, differentiated, and well-defined personality to connect and influence the public (Heilbrunn, 2006; Kapferer, 2007).

However, this term is also associated with territories in different dimensions: countries, cities, or places of different kinds. The brand at the territorial level is built and communicated through the «Marketing of territories» (Aranda, Combariza, 2007), «Place-branding» (Anholt, 2003), and «City-branding» (Ashworth, 2009; Kolb, 2006; Kavaratzis, Ashworth, 2006), i.e., communication and negotiation efforts that reinforce precisely that identity of a place.

In the end, the interests of this type of strategy and actions are focused on investments and the economic-productive sphere of business, industry, and tourism, as well as political influence.

In this dynamic, it is possible to see how the actions and interests of different places overlap. For example, “City branding” seeks the recognition of different characteristics and virtues of a nation outside its borders, while internally it has a transversal approach against the scope of the image of its different regions, cities, and places (Garrido, Estupiñán, Gómez, 2016).

In the specific case of cities, their identity is subordinated and promoted by macro processes such as the globalization of the economy and communication, as well as by the decentralization process of states (Calvento, Colombo, 2009), which allows them to become independent actors with an international scope.

Manfredi (2020) considers that the local political agenda favors and promotes important, even privileged, economic scenarios that evolve in different productive spheres. In this way, it is possible to speak of a model of urban cosmopolitanism based on a narrative of global cities that act in the face of problems as complex as climate change and human rights. The author argues that cities are increasingly seeking to become global players, which makes them invest more energy and resources in consolidating their image not only internally but also internationally, especially in the economic scenario (Taylor, 2012).

1. Place, City and Destination branding

When a branding strategy or any marketing method is applied to a place (regardless of its size: town, city, region, country) to promote greater social, political, and economic development, then we speak of «place branding» (Anholt, 2003).

The development of this type of branding according to Hankinson (2004) derives (should derive) from a coordinated process between institutions, companies, commerce, politicians, non-governmental organizations, and civil society. In short, it is an essential process in economic development (Fan, 2006).

However, place branding is identified or developed through two categories. The first is delimited by geographical space: “Country branding” (Andrade, 2016; Fan, 2006; Olins, 2000), “Nation branding” (Anholt, 2007; Fan, 2006), “Region branding” (Bruwer, Johnson, 2010) and “City branding” (Ashworth, 2009; Kolb, 2006; Kavaratzis, Ashworth, 2006). The second refers to the

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context to which a given “place branding” corresponds, i.e., it refers to more specific brands such as “Destination branding” (Morgan, Pritchard, Pride, 2004), which is closely related to “Country branding” and “City branding”, although with a more specific focus on economic activities such as tourism (Pike, 2005).

In short, it is possible to combine the discipline with the geographical entity to build a place branding strategy (Blain, Levy, Brent, 2005).

In the specific case of city branding, for example, it can be seen in the construction of a city's identity and image. However, what is most important is how the various stakeholders (civil society, business, commerce, politicians, and NGOs) are linked and engaged in this process (Hankinson, 2004; Karavatzis, Ashworth, 2006).

If these stakeholders are committed to common goals, the city brand will be successful, competitive, and sustainable (Pashkaleva-Shapira, 2007).

Brand identity seeks to relate the public consumer with the brand and the product, considering their needs and expectations (Florek, Insch, Gnoth, 2006). The city as an independent entity, beyond the state, becomes increasingly important, especially through international exchange processes, even developing multiple identities according to the profiles and interests of residents, visitors, and investors (Owen, 2015; Leffel, Acuto, 2018; Manfredi, 2020).

In other words, the same city can be a commercial and financial reference, and at the same time be a cultural or gastronomic reference (Cervantes, Muñiz, 2010). However, “the boundaries between investments, commercial interests, and urban projects are increasingly blurred, drawing the city more as a branch of a “big holding” than as an autonomous and authentic city” (Kolo-touhckina, Seisdedos, 2017, p. 122).

It is increasingly common to witness how cities are configured as scenarios and political actors on the international stage, in debates on social and migratory issues, to be a cultural, scientific, or innovative reference or as active agents in the face of the problem of climate change. All this causes a significant asymmetry in the field of actions and capacities between them (Barder, 2019). Industrial and business lobbies that have an environmental and socioeconomic impact today go directly to cities without referring to national actors (Herranz, Sidorenko, Cantero, 2017). Complex issues such as climate change assign moral force to cities as political actors (Bulkeley, 2013). In short, we are witnessing a hybrid model where cities and countries are facing the same problems and challenges for which agendas, actions, and offers are built, both jointly and individually at the international level, and where actions and decisions coincide between these actors (Latour, 2013; Manfredi, 2020; Vanolo, 2017).

1.1 The Metaverse: what it is and who operates in it today

The term metaverse comes from a composition of two words: “meta” which means transcendent, and “universe”, alluding to a virtual world where users interact and perform activities as they wish (Changhee, 2021).

In other words, it is a digital extension of any action of a social, ludic, or productive nature by human beings, or as Abbott (2017, p. 126) specifies, it is a world of a virtual nature where people adopt cyber identities.

Referring to the metaverse does not allude to a homogeneous environment, because it is quite the opposite. The metaverse is the sum of platforms and spaces not yet interconnected, with different levels of immersion and in many cases involving multi-screen access.

For Castronova (2001), to reach this category, the following basic conditions must be met: interactivity (real-time communication with individuals and their ability to alter the environment), corporeality (the connected individuals will be represented on the platforms by an avatar) and persistence (the metaverse continues its course despite the user being temporarily disconnected).

Therefore, it is worth noting that not just any virtual environment can be labeled as a “metaverse”. One can speak of the metaverse when digital platforms provide interactions and experiences in an open world, making tools and resources freely available to individuals. Users determine their progress and direction, seeking, according to their desires and possibilities, dialogues, commercial transactions, educational efforts, and entertainment (Barnes, Mattson, 2011). From the report “Technology Vision 2022”³ Accenture has introduced the concept of the “metaverse continuum”, by virtue of its constant evolution and expansion since:

- It uses various technologies such as extended reality, smart objects, or edge computing.
- It increasingly encompasses the “vit-real”, i.e., experiences ranging from the purely virtual to those that combine physical worlds and elements with virtual ones
- Determines the reinvention and transformation of business models.

The current technological debate seems to focus on how the metaverse should be developed, i.e., whether it should be based on what is called the “replicated world” (digital twins of the real) (Accenture, 2022) or through native proposals that exploit and explore the disruptive resources of the virtual environment to the maximum. However, so far there does not seem to be any decisive keys or consensus in this regard.

It is possible to locate the first signs of the metaverse around 2003 with “Second Life” and then with Roblox in 2006. In both cases, millennials were actively involved, i.e., the same people who had previously witnessed the global expansion of the Internet and its product, playful, interactive, and socializing possibilities.

This is the same segment of users that migrated digitally to social networks, especially in 2007 with the global emergence of Facebook, making them a set of users with a strong digital culture, determined by the transmission of online broadcasts and videos through this type of platform (Lu, 2021).

Recently, this audience segment is associated with the acquisition and creation of digital goods for their home, and access to virtual events and cryptocurrencies (YPulse, 2022). However, other segments cohabit and intervene in this context, such as centennials and Alpha: the former noted as “digital natives” (Baysal, 2014; Prensky, 2001; Turner, 2015), and the latter, children and tweens defined by streaming and digital-mobile interaction (McCrinkle, Fell, 2021).

In both cases video games such as Fortnite or Minecraft have been determinant, allowing them to assume the acquisition and exchange of virtual goods and accessories as a habitual and even necessary activity. Not in vain, in 2021 investments of over 54 billion dollars were reported around the metaverse (JP Morgan, 2022).

In short, these are dynamics and scenarios that seem to determine the immediate future of the Internet as we know it today. The new “Alpha” generation (born after 2010) is investing more and more time and money in virtual activities and platforms, which automatically makes them the native audience in correspondence (Sidorenko, Herranz, 2021). It is possible to affirm, therefore, that for the metaverse, its most assiduous visitors are represented by the most digital, hyperconnected, and multiscreen audiences.

The main references of the metaverse refer any user to the first interactive and semi-immersive 3D platforms such as “Second Life” or The Sims, and more recently Animal Crossing New Horizon, Fortnite or Minecraft, although technological progress around virtual reality has allowed the development of immersive platforms such as Stageverse, Spatial, AltSpace VR, VR Chat, Population One, and Horizon Worlds, among others.

With the advancement of blockchain technology, it has also been possible to see the birth of decentralized metaverses, the most prominent, but not currently the only ones being: Decentraland, The Sandbox, Cryptovoxels, Somnium Space, Webaverse or Axie Infinity. Likewise, with a

3 See [accntu.re/3m8g7fy](https://www.accenture.com/3m8g7fy)

more social network profile, projects such as FlickPlay «the first social platform of the metaverse in which the social value of NFTs is built» are emerging.

The most active players today in these interactive virtual environments are, on the one hand, brands and companies. Each one uses the environment that best suits its target audience and marketing strategies now.

To mention a few cases, Vans and Nike have opted for Roblox, since this platform is today a reference for the “Alpha” public and even younger. In this case, the strategy aims at a long-term image investment, becoming a reference and thus ensuring continuity and validity despite the generational turnover.

In the specific case of Vans, the approach is motivated by the fact that avatars do not look like their real-life users, but they look like their avatars, so they offer several virtual accessories that have their real replicas in correspondence. Gucci has been another that has launched exclusive accessories through such a scenario.

Figure 1. The Vans World web



Source: Vans www.vans.es/roblox-vans-world.html

In Decentraland we have seen Coca-Cola, Mahou, or Heineken, for example, organize events to better connect with their target audience and even increase their reach to the potential audience, carrying out different recreational activities with rewards in NFT. Atari on its side has set up a casino that operates with cryptocurrencies and digital assets.

In the case of Miller, the brand chose precisely this same scenario to broadcast exclusively in February 2022 its traditional ad during the Super Bowl, so for the first time, it rejected conventional television as an appropriate medium. The virtual environment allowed it not only to show the content in question but also to organize other types of activities to build customer loyalty and apply new inbound marketing techniques.

Companies such as HSBC, Carrefour, and Warner Music have acquired plots in Decentraland and The Sandbox to take “virtual shares” in the short term.

Meanwhile, through Animal Crossing New Horizon, companies such as KFC, Hellmans, LEGO, Netflix, and Ben Sherman among many others, have innovated by venturing into a terrain that ensures them to increase their reach (Herranz, Sidorenko, 2021).

However, the music and entertainment industry have also made their presence felt: the band MUSE was chosen to inaugurate the Stageverse stadium with an exclusive concert, while Travis Scott, Ariana Grande, and Marshmellow organized massive events through Fortnite and Snoop Dog apart from “building himself a mansion” in The Sandbox, has chosen this scenario to launch an exclusive NFT collection.

For its part, the online music platform and podcast iHeart Radio has likewise bet on Fortnite in 2022 to present a concert by Charlie Puth, while users enjoy the possibility of carrying out various activities of a social and playful nature⁴.

The American hamburger chain, Wendy’s, established itself in Horizon World in early 2022 based on a gamified experience with a strong brand and product presence. In this way, the franchise seeks to reinforce contact with its target audience through virtual content and interactions that do not correspond to conventional, intrusive, and direct advertising strategies, but that reinforce branding and marketing efforts.

Another area involved in this process has been politics. It has been possible to see the Democratic Party innovate especially through Animal Crossing New Horizon, whether by creating campaign material or a specific island for the candidacies of Joe Biden and Kamala Harris in 2020, or Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez participating in a virtual “house-to-house” - or island-to-island - in the context of the tighter confines for Covid-19 in the same year.

Figure 2. Democratic Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez hosts a virtual “face-to-face” through Animal Crossing New Horizon in May 2020.



Source: Twitter

Finally, countries and regions have “made a move” in the same field. The island of Barbados, having completed its transition to the republican model at the end of 2021, thus leaving the Commonwealth, announced an agreement with Decentraland for the opening of a virtual embassy in this metaverse, becoming the first nation to carry out such a decision⁵.

As Manuel Pascual’s article (2021) in the newspaper El País shows, according to the minister of the newly independent nation, Decentraland constitutes an important forum through which the island intends to continue working with its traditional partners in the diplomatic arena, but which will also allow more in-depth innovations in the field of investment, tourism, cultural industries, as well as specific and disruptive socializing dynamic.

⁴ See bit.ly/3EBIrlx

⁵ See bit.ly/3M6lxSG

In early May 2022 it transpired that the Virtual Assets Regulatory Authority (VARA) of Dubai, was establishing an office in The SandBox: "MetaHQ", thus becoming the first crypto regulator in the world to establish its presence directly in the metaverse. However, as an important detail, the exact location of such an entity in this virtual environment is still unknown despite the official announcement through the social network Twitter⁶.

When accessing the domain `metaverso.navarra.es` it indicates:

«You are about to access the metaverse of the Government of Navarra, a space that arises to stimulate innovation, bring digitalization closer and open new channels of communication more agile, direct and effective. This action responds to the Government of Navarra's clear commitment to digital transformation as a tool that unites and connects society, companies and the Administration».

The Government of Navarra (Spain) has developed an interactive virtual experience through which it offers a room with all the information related to the administration's current and future policies, an auditorium for events of various kinds, and four private spaces for civil servants where they can meet with other users more directly.

This initiative has been deployed through Spatial's metaverse, which can be accessed through Meta Quest virtual reality viewers in an immersive way, or through computers and mobile devices in a semi-immersive way.

2. Methodology

Given that the metaverse is currently in an incipient phase and, therefore, spread across a significant number of platforms that do not currently allow interoperability, the review, and analysis of those cases that have transcended to general, specialized, or niche media, through reports and news, has been considered here.

We established as a starting point for the review of the sample, all information related to the subject from April 13, 2021, when Epic Games announced that it reached the funding of 1 billion dollars for the construction of a metaverse, news that presumably accelerated Facebook's decision to take a step forward in this regard and be called Meta for its intention to build an interactive virtual universe.

The deadline for review through digital sources has been set for April 30, 2022, considering the first four months of that year.

The article "How cities are engaging in the metaverse" by Julia Glickman (2022), Senior Coordinator in National League of Cities Center for City Solutions, has also been taken as an important starting point.

All the sources consulted in the survey process have been contrasted in order to avoid referring to inaccurate data, taking into consideration the handicap that this is not a mainstream topic and that it is often addressed in a niche or specialized source in the field in question.

From the search carried out through different digital platforms and search engines, the following have finally been obtained as case studies of real cities in the metaverse (CR): Miami, Shanghai, Seoul, Dubai, Tokyo, Los Angeles, Sentosa, and Benidorm. For their part, the native virtual cities (VC) found, and therefore subjected to analysis, are Aetheria, Genesis City, and Mega City.

A priori an unequal sample is observed between both categories, however, the choice was to analyze all the cases found in the period already established according to the exposed search criteria. The evidence of the sample presupposes a current interest in the development of digital twins (virtual replicas of real cases, rather than native projects).

⁶ See bit.ly/3IYQRbj

These references have allowed us to establish as research questions: is it relevant for a city to extend its image and influence to the metaverse? Are Place branding and City branding reinforced through this type of strategy? Does entering the metaverse imply any type of operational or communicational advantage for cities? Is the metaverse a new representation or extension of the concept of the city, or rather a new possibility to seek a closer and more relational communication?

For this reason, the starting hypotheses are:

H1. In this initial stage of the metaverse, few real cities use it as an innovative alternative in communication, and if they do, they replicate the communication, identity, and branding actions of real life, which does not represent any advantage.

H2. Native virtual cities are scarce, and poorly organized with little investment in communication.

H3. Real cities that are developing initiatives through the metaverse offer few differentiating elements concerning real-life experiences.

To answer and resolve these concerns, content analysis is proposed through a summary table that not only provides a vision of the operational and communicational elements of the cities that are currently participating in the metaverse but also allows a comparison between the cases found to determine more optimally what they offer, in what way and what are the advantages of this strategy in terms of their brand and identity.

Based on the sample obtained, and to proceed with the study, codes have been established to delimit the main categories of contents, proposals, and activities in the metaverse:

- (1) Interaction with the real environment enriched by virtual elements.
- (2) Resolution of challenges and activities
- (3) Gamified experience
- (4) Use of digital assets (NFT)
- (5) Ability to socialize with other avatars and perform a variety of recreational and productive activities
- (6) Replica of the real city in 3D
- (7) Experience that provides free will of the avatars (open world)
- (8) Possibility of boosting business and economic activities by the users.

Likewise, to indicate the intentionality that each city assigns to these virtual projects, the following codes have been established:

- (I) Administration and public services
- (II) Culture, arts, and education
- (III) Sustainability
- (IV) Tourism
- (V) Lobbying and commercial/economic agreements/activities
- (VI) Advertising
- (VII) Space for socialization

The main limitation is the difficulty of direct access to some of the virtual environments proposed for the study, so the data have been collected through the texts and news found.

Finally, the precise objectives of this research are as follows:

- Show through which concrete actions the concept of the virtual city is developed in the metaverse.
- Determine what elements make up the marketing process of cities (real or virtual native) through the metaverse.
- Determine the possible differentiating elements between a real city and its digital twin in the metaverse.

3. Results

The incipient moment that the metaverse is experiencing makes it possible to denote a variety of operational and structural proposals on the idea of the city based on virtual interpretation. As Table 1 shows, there is clear heterogeneity in terms of the platforms suitable for deploying these projects.

Likewise, the same study instrument allows us to observe that up to April 2022, few have ventured to try to replicate real cities in this new scenario, such as building “virtual settlements” in a native way, leaving a question mark whether it is a matter of mistrust, ignorance, or inconvenience, for example.

Table 1. Cities present in the metaverse either natively or as replicas of real cities until the first quarter of 2022

Nº	Year	City	City type	Platform (metaverse)	Access devices	Technology / narrative approach	Main activities or proposals	Intentionality
1	2018	Aetheria	CV	Decentraland	Mobile, PC	3D semi-immersive	4, 5, 7, 8	V, VII
2	2018	Genesis City	CV	Decentraland	Mobile, PC	3D semi-immersive	4, 5, 7, 8	V, VII
3	2020	Sentosa (Singapur)	RC	Animal Crossing New Horizons	Nintendo Switch (game console)	3D semi-immersive	3, 5, 6, 7	IV, VII
4	2021	Los Ángeles (Estados Unidos)	RC	FlickPlay	Mobile	Augmented reality	1, 2, 3, 4, 7	II, IV, VII
5	2022	Benidorm (España)	RC	SIX3D metaverse	Mobile, PC and VR headset	3D immersive/ semi-immersive	3, 4, 5, 6, 7	IV, V, VII
6	2021	Dubai (Emiratos Árabes Unidos)	RC	metaverse Dubai	Mobile, PC	2D and 3D semi-immersive	4, 7	V
7	2022	Mega City (Hong Kong)	CV	The SandBox	Mobile, PC	3D semi-immersive	4, 5, 7, 8	II, IV, VI, VII
8	2022?	Tokyo (Japón)	RC	Decentraland	Mobile, PC	3D semi-immersive	4, 5, 7, 8	II, IV, VI, VII

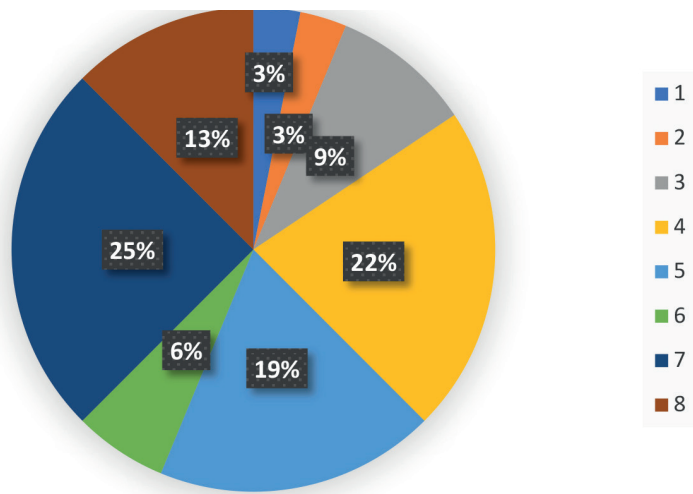
Source: own elaboration

The manifest heterogeneity of metaverses equally evidences a diversity of access devices that determine the typology of the experience, i.e., semi-immersive but with a demand for greater involvement of users with the emerging virtual elements, semi-immersive and even depersonalized through a screen, or immersive to transmit greater protagonism to the user.

The countries that have carried out proposals through these platforms are characterized by having better conditions in terms of access to new technologies, which is not the case in other territories where it costs more for a monetary issue, by impediment in terms of physical access or lack of stable and fast network connections.

However, most of the cases that make up the sample in Table 1 are flexible in terms of access devices, thus allowing for different possibilities.

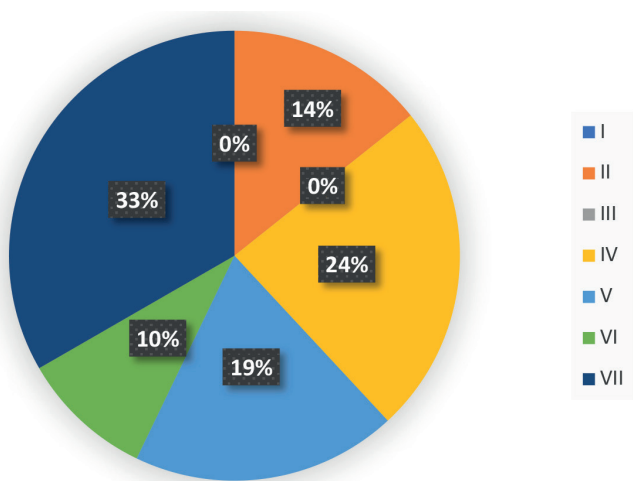
Graphic 1. Activities and proposals most used by cities in the metaverse (up to the first four months of 2022)



Source: own elaboration

From the experiences provided by these environments, as can be seen in Figure 2, most of the focus is on the idea of an open world where users, represented through an avatar, choose what to do and when according to the activities and interactive possibilities available.

Graphic 2. Intentionality of cities to go to the metaverse (up to the first four months of 2022)



Source: own elaboration

Figure 2 shows that most of the cases referenced here are inclined in the first place to socialize through the virtual medium. The reinforcement of tourism promotion is positioned as the second intention to carry out this type of initiative, while the reinforcement and development of new and alternative ways for commercial activities and investment incentives ranks in third place. These three elements, according to the sample obtained, are on average the main motivations for carrying out a venture around the metaverse, although it should be noted that some specific cases focus on only one aspect.

The search process also revealed three additional cases, which are still in the pipeline and therefore could not be included in the analysis table (Table 1) since everything related to them is futuristic. These are the cities of Seoul, Shanghai, and Miami.

The case of Seoul refers to a digital twin that will be called “Metaverse Seoul” and is expected to become operational in 2023, within the framework of the smart cities project being developed by South Korea. Through this initiative, the city administration expects to optimize the processes of collection and procedures related to public services, tourism, and cultural and educational institutions, among others.

The Asian country has already made some concrete progress in the deployment of virtual content applied to administrative procedures, such as, for example, driving tests for the renewal of senior citizens’ licenses.

For its part, the Chinese city of Shanghai, as part of its five-year government plan⁷ included in 2021 the need to promote the use of the metaverse in procedures related to public services, commercial offices, and social entertainment, among other areas.

In the last case, Miami is trying to get ahead as the first U.S. city to resort to the metaverse. It does so through an agreement with the Sister Cities International association, of which it is a member, and through the Miami - Wilder World metaverse. This initiative seeks to energize the sister cities program through educational exchanges, “crypto-institutional” links, digital literacy, commercial exchange, and tourism promotion⁸.

4. Discussion

From the data obtained in the results section, perhaps what is most striking at first glance is the case of virtual native cities (cases 1, 2, and 7 Table 1). If we understand that a city is determined by a group of people settled in a specific place, where they are mainly engaged in industrial and commercial activities, we can therefore affirm that these cases already represent an evolution of the concept.

In Aetheria (No. 1, Table 1), for example, there is a decalogue that establishes the regulations concerning public and private land, as well as an extensive report on the possibilities offered by each one. Through this document, the installation of online commerce is directly incentivized if the commitment to rent land and virtual infrastructure is accepted, with several locations depending on the proposal and strategic possibilities.⁹ The final decisions are made by the governing council. Alluding to the theme of infrastructure, it is worth noting the fact that Aetheria defines its aesthetics according to the “Cyberpunk” subgenre, something that real cities cannot achieve. This more literary approach, while inevitably influenced by theories of urbanism, reaffirms the ideology of power around technological change and global capitalism as pervasive forces.

Authors such as Abbott (2007) argue that it is ultimately about the value of creating opportunities for spontaneous and informal social institutions by loosening building codes, providing low-rent commercial space, and obtaining ubiquitous and inexpensive informational infrastructures. This essence coincides with the Mega-City project (no. 7 Table 1), a vision of Hong Kong as the future product of the heterogeneous amalgam that makes up the developers of this city: politicians, entrepreneurs, actors, artists, and influencers of Hong Kong society, a mosaic of diverse talents and success stories that seek to represent enduring vitality, technological advancement, and vibrant culture.

In other words, Mega-City, and its new project Mega City 2, constitute digital and futuristic extensions of the real city, around cultural elements that allow for new avenues of investment and commercialization based on the socializing capacity that this type of space allows.

7 See cnb.cx/3irVOaM

8 See bit.ly/3tc7u7m

9 See aetheria.io/rentals/

In contrast, the case of Genesis City, another of the native virtual cities, does not seek to adopt a distinctive image, but it does show its significant growth, not only in terms of the number of users involved but also in terms of the commercial operations carried out there through digital assets and virtual currency. A very striking fact is that currently, its extension is already the size of the city of Washington.

Already from the outset, it could be said that the second research hypothesis that native virtual cities are scarce, poorly organized, and with equally low investment in communication, is confirmed.

To find information about these cities you have to go to niche sources of information about video games or the virtual economy. You have to be very involved with the metaverses of Decentraland and The SandBox to end up learning a bit more about them organically.

However, the case of Aetheria makes it stand out as the only native virtual city with a website, which highlights various political, social, and economic data as if it were the website of any city council.

Of the eight cases that make up the sample reflected in Table 1, only two (No. 3 and 5) correspond to the concept of digital twins, i.e., they attempt to be exact or approximate virtual replicas of the real cases.

The island of Sentosa, despite not being considered an actual city, has been part of the sample of this study because of its small size (500 hectares). Located in Singapore, this territory offers a complete tropical experience. Its tourism authority has been concerned about building a high-end tourist experience with all possible amenities through the specific hotel offer of the place.

To promote themselves and try to increase the reach of their message, taking advantage of the phenomenon that constituted in 2020 the title *Animal Crossing New Horizons* on the Nintendo Switch video console (noted by TIME magazine as one of the best inventions of the year¹⁰), they created a virtual replica of the island, exploiting all the recreational activities that can be experienced.

To give visibility to the initiative, they created a specific website where they briefly explain how to proceed to carry out the virtual access, which was severely monitored¹¹. This resource transcended over video game web portals, where presumably the target audience of the campaign was not present.

Figure 3. Example of user activities connected to “Virtual Sentosa” in *Animal Crossing New Horizons*



Source: Sentosa Island Official Website

¹⁰ See bit.ly/3nou3AO

¹¹ See www.sentosa.com.sg/en/campaigns/virtualsentosa/

As for “Benidorm Land”, it is specifically promoted through the tourist portal of the city (benidorm.org) where the mayor of the city in person states that “you can live adventures and experiences in Benidorm in an alternative reality without leaving home (...) an interesting option to inspire and be excited for future travel, know Benidorm before traveling to know how it is, explore our tourism products, walk its streets and even fly”.

The particularity of this metaverse is that it is available on the STEAM platform like any other video game, so it seems to have a very clear intention to target the “gamer community”, which is traditionally composed mostly of highly digitized young audiences. In other words, this branding work seems to be more focused on the potential audience, creating a referential image for the future.

The developers of this project (SIX3D) argue that the sum of all the experiences generated through this proposal is what will materialize the idea of metaverse¹². However, from the outset, it is difficult to pinpoint any outstanding and differentiating element in real life.

Figure 4. Screenshot of the official promotional video
“Benidorm, tourist destination also in the metaverse” alluding to “Benidorm Land”



Source: YouTube youtu.be/71w9yIVLdt8

However, cases No. 4 and 8 (Table 1) do represent innovative experiences, especially because they focus on the idea of the city on the development of a specific area. In these examples, art and culture are determinants and the central axis of the social-virtual experience.

In the case of the Santa Monica district in the city of Los Angeles (No. 4, Table 1), the experience is based on the incorporation of augmented reality technology and not virtual as in all the cases referenced so far. This is done through the mobile app FlickPlay.

This app focuses on the real landscape surrounding the user, closing the gap between physical and digital spaces. It allows people to collect tokens (digital assets) to unlock and show videos through the app using their rare filter-like collectibles, most of which are in a limited quantity, although the user could always monetize their digital collectibles through challenges and actions.

The experience and aesthetics are very similar to the mobile video game Pokemon Go, although, in this one, elements such as the digital economy are promoted (the city can exploit this resource to the maximum and seek a new way of financing) and help to strengthen the relationship of citizens with their urban environment, forcing them to move and rediscover their city based on an incentive.

¹² See bit.ly/3ahB2u0

In the words of the founder of this platform, Pierina Merino, activating disused urban spaces with art helps reduce crime rates. There is no better incentive than building a metaverse ecosystem with solid values and purposes that have a direct impact on the world (Donato, 2021). In other words, the initiative aims to create a valuable experience that has a positive impact on users and the city at the same time. It is a different way to encourage the relationship of people with their real environment, which allows betting on interesting and attracting new segments of the public, especially those more digital and familiar with gamified dynamics, as in the case of the Alpha, for example.

Figure 5. District of Santa Monica (Los Angeles) through the social metaverse app FlickPlay.



Source: FlickPlay

Regarding case no. 8 (Table 1), although the city of Tokyo has been working since 2021 on the design of its global cultural city in the metaverse: "MetaTokyo", which is not yet fully available, this has not prevented them from developing some preliminary experiences to start having an active presence through this environment.

The virtual scenario chosen for this project has been the decentralized metaverse of Decentraland. From the official website of "MetaTokyo"¹³ it is clear, on the one hand, that they have designed and put on sale a set of NFT ('MetaTokyo Pass' through OpenSea) to allow creditors privileged access to events, activities, access to restricted areas, cultural workshops among other benefits associated with the future "MetaTokyo".

While the "virtual works" are being developed, a pop-up museum has been momentarily installed on the corresponding Decentraland site, first exploited in 2021 by the "SPACE by MetaTokyo" project in collaboration with the Japanese musical duo AMIAYA.

In this, Street Snap magazine oversaw the real-life photo shoot of these artists who were then marketed as NFT through OpenSea and arranged at the same time in this virtual exhibition.

The collaboration with this musical duo was also reinforced under the banner of "MetaTokyo" in the "Fashion Week in the metaverse", creating a special collection of virtual clothing and accessories for avatars inspired by the aesthetics of these artists, which were then put on sale in the store of the metaverse itself. This strategy constitutes a disruptive vehicle for promoting contemporary Japanese culture¹⁴.

¹³ See metatokyo.xyz/

¹⁴ See bit.ly/3NN4xC6

Figure 6. Access to the pop-up museum installed by Street Snap on the grounds of MetaTokyo in Decentraland



SPACE by MetaTokyo

NFTを活用したオープンメタバース「Decentraland」でMetaTokyoが所有の土地に建設した、ポップアップミュージアム「SPACE by MetaTokyo」（以下SPACE）を「AMIAYA x STREET」とのコラボ仕様にアップデートし、メタバースならではのイマーシブな写真展示を行います。

[View at Decentraland](#)

Source: MetaTokyo

A second outreach project in 2021 took equal advantage of the temporary and incipient infrastructure of “MetaTokyo”. In this other case FRUITS magazine commemorated its first 1997 photographic exhibition by Shoichi Aoki, with digitization and conversion of the snapshots to digital asset format. As in the previous case, the NFTs were offered for sale through OpenSea and exhibited in this virtual location, allowing transit between both platforms.

The official website of “MetaTokyo” does not specify a date for the official launch of the global cultural city, although they warn that “it could be at any time”.

However, these examples do represent an innovative and disruptive way, not only to promote a city or reinforce its image in the digital sphere but also to seek new scenarios and new activities, especially of a cultural nature, which determine the image of these cities in the minds of the most digital audiences and emerging segments of the public.

In any case, based on these two experiences it is not possible to verify the third hypothesis that the real cities that are developing initiatives through the metaverse offer few differentiating elements to real-life experiences, since there are important signs of differentiation, if not entirely in terms of experiences, then in the forms and themes.

The case of Dubai (No. 6 Table 1) is very particular and paradigmatic as the metaverse resource is reserved only as a way for the transaction of digital assets. The urbanistic narrative seems to be a simple pretext without a clear logic.

Its concept is based on a real-world map of Dubai’s most prestigious areas. It seeks to recreate its aesthetics, geometry, and topography. And although the map can be walked around with complete freedom, the only interaction allowed is the possibility of buying the plots of land that are still available.

Figura 7. Metaverse Dubai



Source: Metaverse Dubai

As an additional comment, it has been observed that most of these initiatives are promoted and maintain active and dynamic communication channels through Discord. This not only has an impact on the creation of a community but also constitutes a new way of resolving problems and doubts.

This is an aspect of great interest if it is understood that Discord is a social network currently widely used by the gamer community, it allows sharing content of any kind, it links very easily with Twitch broadcasts, so there is an evident a willingness to expand the marketing work, from the cities to new segments of the public.

Charts 1 and 2 show that the ability to socialize is paramount in this process. Virtual spaces must allow for constant dialogue among participants and provide a collective but also participatory experience. That said, the first research hypothesis is not confirmed, because there are indeed disruptive communication experiences that attempt to connect with new audiences.

The use of prescribers to boost the promotional or advertising effect, if the term is appropriate, is noteworthy. However, in general terms, it is evident that dissemination strategies -and literacy- are scarce or precarious and this has an impact -and will continue to have an impact- on the scarce interest and demand for this type of initiative from a mainstream perspective.

Conclusions

Although they start with a productive purpose, cities are places to live, foster social encounters, and develop culture and economy. The real cities of the 21st century face the challenge of the metaverse, while the virtual cities of the metaverse face the challenge of obtaining greater prominence through differentiated experiences. This metaverse does not allow users to physically move to a virtual environment, but it does allow them to reach new experiences through an avatar or enrich the ones they already have in the real world.

Undoubtedly, one of the most decisive elements of this process is the possibility of providing interactive and collective experiences of creation, thus allowing the construction of a digital community, as important today as traditional forms of coexistence have been in cities in the past.

We are not only facing a possible redefinition of the concept of the global city in terms of power and terms of social and economic relations but also the opportunity and challenge of creating new native scenarios in correspondence, which would imply a rethinking of governance nodes (Friedmann, 1986; Sassen, 1991).

While real cities highlight these scenarios as new avenues for tourism promotion and commercial exchange, native virtual cities have a greater challenge to be competitive and effectively offer novelty in this regard. Public diplomacy processes will also be further deepened. Just look at the initiatives in Navarre or Barbados. Politics and economics will have the pending task of developing dialogues and relations natively through these virtual scenarios.

However, while this development continues, it is possible to see novelties in the promotional channels. The new social networks, especially those that seek to strengthen the concept of the user community, are emerging as support and meeting channels for new audiences, deeply digitized, already accustomed to the digital economy, and with an idiosyncrasy especially marked by gamification. This is something that Yi and Grünberg (2022) point out in the Chinese case.

The debate and reflection are no longer about the relevance and usability of virtual environments for tourism marketing, public diplomacy, commercial lobbies, etc. The fact that the experience is now collective and involves the same active conversation that takes place in more conventional social networks, implies a new scenario in community building and the relational levels between issuers and the public, considering that the latter, is far from being passive, are prosumers.

The metaverse opens the possibility of exploiting the immersive format to reinforce especially the dialogue with new segments of users, seeking aspirational images from various commercial actors, and providing any participant with a new set of interactive resources, with the caveat that it is a technology that rarely becomes something of great global reach but that does represent an important way to increase the reach, in this particular case, of the identity message of the cities and their main stakeholders.

According to Young and Choukah (2022), the metaverse forces us to rethink physical cities: why make more parks or squares if people will increasingly seek to socialize online? Perhaps the first determination is not to try to replace the city on a virtual level, but to provide it with new functions and global alternatives that strengthen it.

As a final reflection that forces us to think about new communication strategies for the future, today it is difficult to access the real cases replicated in the metaverse (digital twins). This, according to the current "platformization" context, attempts against any attempt of "viralization" or popularity, that is to say, it prevents an increase in reach. As it happens in other technological fields, today prevails a technical advance that is not accompanied by corresponding communication strategies.

Similarly, and perhaps more dramatically, there is less public information about native virtual cities specifically. However, it must also be stated that the communication work is beginning to be done through alternative digital channels to the mainstream, perhaps with a focus on new audiences or more niche segments.

The advance of the metaverse will emphasize the need to accompany the technological development of digital literacy initiatives that allow most segments of the public to intervene in the process, otherwise, we would be facing a deepening of the social gap from the technological transformation.

We will have people displaced or isolated because they cannot understand what these changes consist of and what benefits or alternatives they offer.

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Branding the City through Mediterranean Identity: Local Cosmopolitan Ideologies and Narratives of Exclusion in Napoli, Marseille, and Rijeka²

Introduction

The Mediterranean identity is becoming an intriguing tool for city authorities willing to implement policies of urban regeneration all over the basin. More specifically, all around the Mediterranean coast, independently on the national and local features, many cities are branding their identity as a "Mediterranean one" to promote gentrification projects, attract investments, develop tourism and re-shape their cultural identity for the global scene. In our paper, we are going to investigate the main common characters of this Mediterranean branding process by comparing three cases of very different Mediterranean cities: Napoli, Marseille and Rijeka. These cities are peripherally located within their national territories and although part of quite diverse nation-building process, they are all targets of regeneration policies that exploit their maritime immaterial and material heritage, usually emphasized by "big events" (such as ECOC in Marseille 2013 and Rijeka 2020, or the America's cup in Napoli). Thus, our aim is twofold: on one hand we shall point out the common ideological features of this regeneration-oriented Mediterranean narrative by focusing on and deconstructing the driving concept of local cosmopolitanism. On the other one, we will explore the practices of exclusion hidden behind this Mediterranean narrative by stressing the unspoken discard and removal of some undesired people, histories and heritage from the picture of regeneration. Our investigation is based on the analysis of tourist masterplans, city sponsored cultural promotion materials and audio-visual advertisements of the city. Also, we rely on the visual ethnography of the urban beaches, port-areas and waterfronts aimed at detecting and quantifying landmarks, signs and symbols of the Mediterranean-ess.

1. Theoretical background

Back in 1989, Frank Broeze described the multifold nature of humans relations to the sea through several categories, including the use of the sea for natural resources, transporting goods and people, power projection, scientific explorations, leisure, and cultural inspiration (Broeze, 1989). But the relation to the sea involves deeper implications from the point of view of collective representations, and Stefan Helmreich more recently provided an original insight into the interdependence of nature, culture, and seawater. (Helmreich, 2009) To Helmreich seawater is more than a material asset as it works as a theory machine: namely, water in nature "moves faster than in culture", thus it needs to be channeled and landed. Accordingly, it should be utilized for cultivation, both in the material forms of agriculture and the symbolic aspects of culture. Therefore, flexibility and mutability in nature bring about the same features in the cultural field, providing a common ground for meaning constructions. For example, from this standpoint, what we call globalization could be also named "oceanization," and such a fluid ontology is not "neutral", but it reflects a culturally specific vision. Particularly, it portrays a representation of an unbounded, wild ocean to be closed in cultural forms, which eventually reminds us of colonial projects of keeping the high seas "free", outside sovereign territorializations.

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Such long standing process of cultural subjugation of seawater is clearly identified by Karl Schmitt, who emphasized the practices of discovery, voyage, and conquest of the oceans but in the process of "translation" of society from the land to the sea that is associated with it. In other words, a real dislocation of people, societies, and institutions from the land to the moving space of the ocean, and that is the basis of the modern separation of land and sea (Schmitt, 2001). Namely, Steinberg suggests that the ambivalent status of the sea depends on the fact that seawater is neither established like a political and juridical extension of the land nor as an extra-social space freed of state power. Interestingly, the author states such a status would represent a typical Mediterranean feature because Mediterranean people historically constructed the sea: « as a non-possessable space, but one in which and across which state power legitimately could be asserted in the interest for stewarding its bounty » (Steinberg 2001, p. 61). In this perspective, the Mediterranean Sea is a special case for it does not fall within the two most typical social constructions of the Ocean-sea, the Micronesian model of ocean space as a « place of connection » and the Indian Ocean model of ocean space as a « non territory apart from society » (Ivi, pp. 52-60, 42-43, 45). Actually, the Mediterranean representation of the ocean-sea somehow portrays the ideal-type of territory most compatible with the ideology of globalization because here the sea is imagined as a smooth, flat-field both open to circulation and object of power projections. Within this representation of a Mediterranean-like ocean world, city-ports perform the most crucial function as they enable mobility and dislocations along asymmetric lines of power emerging from land-based political entities. As a matter of facts, city-ports are built, imagined, and lived as hinges between distant worlds (Del Bianco, 1982; Dubin, 199; Dassovich, 2003), hubs for different social world that meet at the border between the land and the sea, and eventually landing areas for «extremely dense, seaborne social networks allowing the circulation of people, ideas, goods and meanings» (Leontidou, 1990; Driessen, 2005, pp. 129-130). However, these encounters are not without consequences, on the contrary bring about specific outcomes in terms of radical social transformations of material and immaterial elements, constantly dislocated and relocated through symbolic exchanges between the sea and the land, and the other way around (Kidwai Atiya Habeeb, 1992, p. 10). In other words, what makes of a coastal city a veritable city-port is its capacity to materialize the "oceanization" of society, that is to say to both express and conceal the ambivalent, "Mediterranean" representation of the ocean space implied in the colonial projects. Accordingly, Mediterranean cities are often representing the best examples of the abovementioned typology as they play the main characters in the narrative of the Mediterranean maritime world described by Braudel. The French historian not surprisingly points out the interlocking role of Mediterranean coastal cities, otherwise named "mirror" cities, which thrive on the movement of people and freight.

In this picture the Mediterranean appears as a moving space produced by the interpenetration of sea-bound and land-bound opposite but concurrent trends. On the same wavelength, more recent studies emphasize the role connectivity among the micro-regions of the Mediterranean Sea, where exchanges and cooperation do not cancel out the importance diversity. Among them all, *The Corrupting Sea. A Study of Mediterranean History* by Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell (2000) has been an inspiration for a generation of new Mediterranean scholars who have focused on the interdependence of climates, languages, religions, food, etc. to the point of suggesting an idea of *Mediterranean-ness* that far from expressing backwardness and nostalgia is instead an analytical tool for understanding the complex dynamics of global society. This understanding of the Mediterranean resonates quite well with the approach of Braudel, who thinks of the Mediterranean as «*an unwieldy, complex, out-of-series character ... It escapes our usual measures*» Such is the difficulty that for some scholars the game is not worth the candle, so much so that his friend and colleague Lucien Febvre does not fail to remind Braudel that the Mediterranean was at the bottom «*a false beautiful theme*» (Fiume, 2016). The concern of Febvre is even more significant when one thinks of the many Mediterranean studies always placing the same categories at the center of their interest: tradition, honor, shame, revenge,

moral vigilance. The result of many of these scholarly investigations, often anthropologically based, is that they have unfortunately end up consolidating stereotypes of “stillness” and “archaicism” of the Mediterranean still present in public opinion and beyond. Plus, the strength of this ambivalent stereotype is such that it also spills over into the tourist representations of the region, in which *dolce far niente* and life made up of misery and hard work. Suffering and exile, at home in the Mediterranean since Homer’s time, end up coexisting with the uninhibited vacation of the consumer society located in ClubMed. In this sense, it is not surprising that for anthropologist Michael Herzfeld, the Mediterranean is essentially a practical sea, i.e., a methodological *passepourtout* for accessing a rich array of fields of study, from the Mediterranean diet to codes of honor and shame (Herzfeld, 1984). Besides the hard-to-die positive and negative stereotypes, the Mediterranean identity is becoming an intriguing tool for city authorities willing to implement policies of urban regeneration all over the basin.

More specifically, all around the Mediterranean coast, independently on the national and local features, many cities are branding their identity as a “Mediterranean one” to promote gentrification projects, attract investments, develop tourism and re-shape their cultural identity for the global scene, and we will do so by comparing three cities, Naples, Marseille, and Rijeka. These cities were chosen, as we will see in the third section, because they share the crucial role played by the maritime element, the presence of a growing tourism industry and a presumed Mediterranean identity narrative although within different heterogenous national contexts.

In this framework, in these cities belonging to a presumed or real Mediterranean identity also plays a role in conveying policies and redistributing social, economic, and cultural capital in according with the theory of tourism gentrification (Gotham, 2005). Kevin Fox Gotham has indeed pointed out that in some urban contexts, touristification drives gentrification and both are supported by economic ambitions and political forces. The urban transformation set in motion by tourism gentrification is often accompanied by ideological justifications and a new identity that refer to the need for redevelopment of spaces, and the construction of new buildings and infrastructure.

The article will be structured in the following order: as we have already seen, the first section introduces the theoretical framework of the research, in the second one the methodology and objectives will be presented, in the third and following sub-sections the characteristics of the three cities, the elements that allowed us to select them for comparison and the analyses concerning them will be explained, in the fourth and final section the conclusions and an invitation to future research will be discussed.

2. Objectives and Methodology

Through the use of the case studies of Naples, Marseille, and Rijeka, we attempt to reflect with an innovative study around the rhetoric on the Mediterranean as a symbolic practice of exclusion, but due to the scarce literature on the subject and the fact that the analytical categories, administrative practices, and laws are different in the three different contexts, the comparison is difficult and it was not possible to collect neither qualitative data such as interviews nor quantitative ones such as questionnaires.

In our investigation we assumed that the best option to compare quite diverse narratives and data on the three cities is the case study methodology, which is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2014, pp. 3-5). Particularly, case studies are the preferred method when (a) “how” or “why” questions are being posed, (b) the investigator has little control over events, and (c) the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context.

Moreover, the more that research questions seek to explain some present circumstances (i.e. "how" or "why" some social phenomenon works) the more that the case study method will be relevant. The method also is relevant the more that research questions require an extensive and "in-depth" description of some social phenomenon.

Therefore, research ranges from using secondary data, such as official statistical data, tourist masterplans, city-sponsored cultural promotion materials, audio-visual advertisements of the city, and policy statements to primary, qualitative data, such as visual ethnography, the use of photographs, and qualitative and urban observations. From this standpoint, the use of a Case Study methodology is more suitable to a situation where there are many more variables of interest than data points, the researcher relies on multiple sources of evidence and benefits from prior theoretical propositions, guiding data collection and analysis. Finally, in answering "how" and "why" questions the case study is preferred in examining contemporary events, but when the relevant behaviors cannot be manipulated. According to Yin, when dealing with case study methodology, it does not matter if research questions are exploratory, descriptive, or explanatory. The important aspect is to have a strong theoretical framework providing guidance and this is making a difference with other similar methods such as ethnography or grounded theory (Yin, 2014, pp. 11-14). Accordingly, the case study method does not urge researchers to rush to "field contact", especially when the distinction between context and phenomenon are not clear and no systematic data collection is feasible. Differently, having a choice (and resources) the multiple case design approach stands out against systematic but careless data collection as it allows for replication and brings about a drastic improvement of generalizability. Theoretical replication is even a stronger argument in this regard because strong theories can be applied to different cases to test their explanatory power. In our research path, the choice of case study was based on two strategic considerations. Firstly, the difficulty of collecting systematic data on cases that are not easily comparable as a unit of analysis. The institutional framework defining the city branding in Marseille, Naples and Rijeka is far too different to be reasonably subject to quantitative or qualitative systematic data collection and comparison. Tourism and cultural policies are in the hands of different institutions, which pursue diverse goals in quite heterogeneous contexts. Such a condition requires deeper insights into the phenomenon before making any other assumption. Secondly, our research represents one of the first attempts to produce an innovative study on the Mediterranean rhetoric as an exclusion device for branding purposes in areas that are quite distant in social, economic, political, and cultural terms. As a result, the Mediterranean category is "biased" by default because it is represented and experienced in quite different ways, thus not easily subject to operationalization in terms of survey or interview.

3. Marseille, Napoli, Rijeka: Port, Sea, Industrial legacy and Tourist booming as common features in diverse cities

Case studies were selected mainly due to the simultaneous presence of similarities and profound differences in their own social and economic landscape. In fact, if the maritime element and the crucial role played by the port in local identity are common factors in Napoli, Marseille, and Rijeka, the same cannot be said for their demographic and economic dimensions, as well as for nation-building processes in the countries where the case studies are situated. Although belonging to different regions, over the last decade those cities have shared a profound process of transformation of their economy, all experiencing a boom of the tourist industry together with the decline of traditional sectors of production. Regarding a first classification of the case studies as urban spaces, undoubtedly there is a clear distinction between two metropolitan areas (Marseille and Naples) and a medium-sized city (Rijeka) even though the Croatian case presents a significant attraction capacity in terms of commuting and service locations beyond the

local dimension: taking into account NUTS3 level units³, the territory where Rijeka is included (*Primorsko-goransko zupanija*) is classified as *intermediate* in *Urban-Rural typology* and as a *Non-Metropolitan Region* in the *Metropolitan typology*⁴. We are clearly dealing with diverse urban spaces both in terms of number of inhabitants and density if we consider that Napoli and Marseille's municipalities represent the center of millions of residents' conurbation.

Tab. 1: Main geographical, demographic, economic data and classification on Marseille, Napoli and Rijeka (NUTS 3 Level, Eurostat)

	Napoli Provincia ITF 33	Marseille - Bouches-du-Rhone	Rijeka Primorsko-goransko zupanija HR031
Urban-rural typology	<i>Predominantly urban regions</i>	<i>Predominantly urban regions</i>	<i>Intermediate regions</i>
Metropolitan typology (Eurostat, NUTS 2021)	<i>Other metropolitan regions</i>	<i>Other metropolitan regions</i>	<i>Non-metropolitan regions</i>
Border typology	<i>Non-border regions</i>	<i>Non-border regions</i>	<i>Land border</i>
Inhabitants (2020)	3.034.410	2.044.355	281.945
Inhabitants ⁵ (only municipality)	948.850	877.095	108.622
Industry occupation (% of total occupation)	12,4%	7,8%	20,5%
GDP per capita, 2019, current price market	20.294	36.823	15.289
GDP per capita, 2019, current price market, with average country value =100	68	102	112
Apartments/Rooms on Airbnb (Iq 2022, only municipality)	5.972	6.523	728
% Entire Apartment on Total offer on Airbnb	67,6%	86,1%	90,9%
Apartments/Rooms on Airbnb on Iq 2022, (only municipality - IVq 2019 value =100)	71	89	78

Source: Eurostat, AirDna

The three cities share an industrial tradition, like most Mediterranean port cities, but the current weight of the industrial sector, as well as the dynamics related to the deindustrialization process are different in each of the three case studies. An overall downsizing has been occurring over the last two decades: Employment in industry fell from 10.4% in 2000 to 7.8% in 2019 in Mar-

³ The NUTS classification (Nomenclature of territorial units for statistics) is a hierarchical system for dividing up the economic territory of the EU and the UK for the purpose of: collection, of European regional statistics and socio-economic analyses of the regions. The 1166 NUTS 3 units are defined as small regions for specific diagnoses.

⁴ Both types are implemented, among others, by Eurostat to classify NUTS statistical-territorial units.

⁵ Values refer to the year 2019 for Marseille, 2020 for Naples, 2021 for Rijeka.

seille; from 23.7% to 20.5% in Rijeka; from 14.2% to 12.6% in Naples. Even in a common context of reduction, there is a different weight of industry in the local economy: still relevant in Rijeka, almost negligible in the Marseille metropolitan area. There is a temporal misalignment between the processes of deindustrialization in the 3 contexts: almost exhausted in Italian and French case; still in progress in the Croatian-Rijeka one. Single national and local dynamics can partly explain this difference. Naples gradually loses its status as an industrial city with a series of crises which start from the 70s favoring the factories' relocation to other areas of the region, outside the city perimeter or bringing them to closure (Becchi, 1989; Moricola, 2021). A turning point is represented by the end of *extraordinary state intervention* for Southern Italian regions' economy (*Cassa per il Mezzogiorno*) which brings to the closure of a significant part of public-owned industries between late 80s and early 90s. Marseille experienced its first industrial crisis in an even earlier period: between the 1950s and 1960s, in the context of the decline of the French colonial empire. The traditional *port-industrial complex* both importing and processing agricultural products then almost collapsed. Starting from the 1970s, new industrial areas outside the city center were realized, planned, and funded by national agencies together with a new port infrastructure (Fos-sur-Mer). The historic urban settlement thus undergoes a long phase of productive void that was partly "filled" until 2010 by projects related to innovation, research, the multimedia industry (Garnier, Zimmermann, 2006). In Rijeka, the start of industrialisation and development of the city is closely linked to the maritime and port dimension, with the proclamation of a *free port* in 1719. After the 'mythical phase' between the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, of Rijeka as a cosmopolitan space and a maritime projection of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the period between the two world wars proved to be complicated for the city's economy. After World War II, having overcome the impact of the exodus and post-war reconstruction, the city revived as the main port of the Yugoslav republic and as a major shipbuilding center. The transition from a planned economy, although traumatic, reduced but did not eliminate the importance of the industrial sector in the life of the city (Grubisa, 2005; Loria, 2005). The industrial history of the three cities has an undoubted effect on their position in the economic hierarchy of their respective countries: Napoli represents the main metropolitan area of the largest area lagging behind in economic development in Italy (GDP per capita in the province is 68% of the national average); the metropolis of Marseille, on the other hand, registers strong inequalities within it (with the area of greatest suffering within the capital city) but is basically included in an economically dynamic area; finally, Rijeka, despite its industrial crises, remains a region that is on average richer than the rest of the country, together with neighboring Istria. The 3 cities all experienced a long phase of sustained tourism growth over the last decade, interrupted by the pandemic crisis between 2020 and 2021: as of Q1 2022, tourism supply had not reached the level of the last pre-pandemic quarter (Q4 2019).

Tourism growth has been 'driven' by the development of short-term accommodations, rather than by a restructuring of the traditional tourism offer. Made possible by the development of 'sharing' platforms, a significant part of the flats in the 3 cities has shifted from the long-term or student/worker rental market to the tourist market. The data on tourist accommodation offered gives us a picture that leaves little room for 'sharing economy' models: most of the advertisements refer to entire flats (around 90% of the total in Marseille and Rijeka), managed from a fully entrepreneurial perspective.

Tourist development has been concentrated - most heavily in Napoli and Marseille - within the historic city centers, close to the old port infrastructures. These are neighborhoods that still present strong pockets of poverty and social marginality (Iovino, 2021), where entrenched communities and new residents of foreign origin coexist. In these contexts, characterized by fragile balances, the impact of the touristification of the last decade seems to have been incredibly profound.

3.1 Marseille

Developed in the late 1980s and declared an Operation of National Interest in 1995, the *Euroméditerranée* urban project was conceived as a way «to enable the metropolis (Marseille) to play its geostrategic role as a hub between Europe and the Mediterranean and to remedy a deteriorating economic and social situation» (*Rapport d'activités 2010*, p. 8). The main goal of the project is to attract tourists and investments in Marseille through the construction of an urban and Mediterranean identity: «developing and building the sustainable Mediterranean city of tomorrow» (Website of *Euroméditerranée. Stratégie*). *Euroméditerranée* covers 480 hectares: *Cité de la Méditerranée*, *Saint-Charles*, *Rue de la République*, *Belle-de-Mai* multimedia pole, *Arenc* and the Northern districts (13th, 14th, 15th, and 16th districts). In the project the port area is central, and everything revolves around the “Mediterranean”: the name of the project “*Euroméditerranée*”, the entire *Cité de la Méditerranée* along the port (3 km from the Fort Saint Jean to the tower of Zaha Hadid ‘CMA-CGM’), the Mucem (Museum of the European and Mediterranean Civilizations) and the *Villa Méditerranée*, which is the Region PACA’s auditorium. This supposed Mediterranean identity is the real protagonist of the project and the contents designed to increase tourist attractiveness are the main channels of communication through which this identity expands and consolidates. It is no coincidence that the area around the port, the *Cité de la Méditerranée* it is responsible for hosting the tourist-entertainment city on the seafront (Bertoncello, Dubois, 2010), especially with the attractions related to the Mucem and Fort Sean Jean. These two spaces have become the symbol of both the city’s Mediterranean identity turnaround and the tourist economy, they often appear in the main tourism promotion videos produced by the tourist office, so much so that it is possible to discern an overlapping of the city’s image with that of the museum: «When we go somewhere to talk about Marseille, we talk about the Mucem» said Dominique Vlasto, deputy mayor in charge of tourism in 2016 (A.R., 2016).

Fig 1. The Mucem and Villa Méditerranée on the esplanade J4.



Source: Margherita Minnucci

The Mucem and the Villa Méditerranée are located on the esplanade J4 (Domaine Public Maritime - DPM) for a long time occupied by port activities, the J4 hangar, then affected by the Euro-Mediterranean project and went from being a port production area to a tourist production area. It is one of the few places in the city, in the central area, where it is possible to have more

direct contact with the sea, which, however, has not been made accessible by public decisions. But as De Certeau taught (1980), the strategies of institutions can be responded to with subversive tactics, deed, even though there is a ban on bathing, it is possible to find young adolescents bathing and trying to access the sea, as can be seen in the photo 1. Why is the Mediterranean so relevant in this urban project? As already highlighted by Brigitte Bertoncello and Jérôme Dubois first (2003), and Claire Bullen (2012) then, and as repeatedly stated in the documents published by the actors involved in the Euro-Mediterranean Project, the need to transform Marseille into a sustainable Mediterranean capital is a project of geographical repositioning. France sought to reposition itself politically by attempting to play a central role in the 1995 Barcelona process, the comprehensive partnership between the European Union and twelve countries (Algeria, Cyprus, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Malta, Morocco, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey and the Palestinian Authority), which had as its aim to make the Mediterranean a common «common area of peace, stability and prosperity through the reinforcement of political dialogue, security, and economic, financial, social and cultural cooperation.» (Barcelona Declaration). Marseille was supposed to precisely serve this political strategy, to the point that the former President of the Republic, Nicolas Sarkozy, insisted that the ministerial summit of the Union for the Mediterranean be held in Marseille in 2008, and so it was. Over the years, the actors involved in the construction of this identity have produced numerous events, exhibitions, audio-visual and touristic products, and publications that have tried to justify the “Mediterranean nature” of Marseille.

The culmination of this narrative transformation was achieved when Marseille was named European Capital of Culture in 2013 and during that year hundreds of events took place on the theme of the Mediterranean. Moreover, in the same year, in the 2013, the AGAM – Planning Agency of the Marseille agglomeration – published: *Marseille et la Méditerranée*, in which it makes an historical, geographical, and economical insights of how Marseille is fundamentally “Mediterranean”. In this text, the Mediterranean history of Marseille starts from its Greek foundation, passing through the characteristics of semi-independence of Marseille in the 13th century that made it like the city-states, in particular the Italian ones, ending by mentioning the different groups of immigrants who arrived in Marseille and made it «cosmopolitan». Missing from this reconstruction are important periods that have conceptually related France and Marseille to the Mediterranean Sea, such as those pertaining to the violent colonisation. For a long time, the Mediterranean was, for the colonised peoples, especially for Algerians, synonymous with invention, and colonisation (Baghzouz, 2009). During the colonial era, a phrase circulated among the supporters and Soldiers of the French colonies: «the Mediterranean crosses France like the Seine crosses Paris». This short but effective phrase indicated the appropriation of the Mediterranean by the French, who legitimised this action by claiming the Mediterranean as a European sea, a crossroads of Greek and Roman culture that had to be “saved” from the North Africans and Muslims. Only after the conquest of the colonies to pacify relations, the Western Mediterranean was transformed from a “great divide” to a “junction sea” in the French imagination (Blais, Deprest, 2012). Indeed, in the Marseille context, there are citizens that are recognised as “Mediterranean”. As Claire Bullen (2012, p. 158) explains in her research «often, the term ‘Mediterranean’ was ‘racialised’, used as a kind of euphemism to refer to immigrants from the South of the Mediterranean basin, most of whom live in the so-called ‘disadvantaged neighbourhoods’». Once again, it is the white and European majority in France that labels the former colonised, imposing on them an identity imbued with colonial stereotypes. France seems to find itself in a continuous cognitive system of colonial conceptual creation and appropriation, which previously, during the age of conquest, had allowed it to invent and appropriate the Mediterranean. Nowadays in Marseille, with the Euro-Mediterranean project, French state recognises the immigrant or non-white citizen as Mediterranean, and appropriates this socially constructed identity, once again, for urban, political, strategic, and economic interests linked to the Barcelona process. It could be concluded that through the Mediterranean identity and the colonial stereotypes, the French state tries to pacify the relationship with other Mediterranean states gaining a symbolic advan-

tage without undermining the colonial symbolic ideals on which they are based and the racial discriminations that are repeated daily in France on this basis. We are faced with an example of how the narrative of a city for tourism and business purposes is never neutral or simply "economic" but is clothed with numerous political and socio-cultural meanings that intersect spaces and structural violence, often exacerbating them for subjectivities discriminated against on grounds of gender, class, and race.

3.2 Naples

The city of Naples has experienced unprecedented growth in tourism since 2011, even compared to the *Rinascimento Napoletano*⁶ era of the 1990s. The growth in terms of both presences and accommodation facilities, is remarkable, the most sustained among the great Italian cities (Iovino, 2021). The growth in the availability of accommodation facilities was concentrated on the Short-Term-Rentals and in a delimited area, i.e., in the Greco-Roman part of the city and in the neighboring districts within the UNESCO area (Iovino, 2021). These are neighborhoods that, although central from a merely spatial point of view, still register important pockets of population in a condition of social and economic marginality, both Italian and foreign (Romano et al., 2022). The impact on the economy and public space in this part of the city has been rapid and intense: in commerce, with the proliferation of food-related establishments and the reduction of neighborhood and artisanal businesses (Viganoni, D'Alessandro, Autiero, 2019); in the real estate market, with an increase in prices of both purchases and long-term rents; and in the displacement of residents from various social backgrounds (Caputi, Fava, 2019). The representation of the city is at the center of this massive urban transformation. If the image during the waste crisis (2008-2011) was incompatible with the mass tourist experience, the new imagery accompanying the boom of the last decade nonetheless refers to an urban space that is not 'normalized', not fully 'pacified' and regulated. Mediating these representations are often products of the film industry (D'Alessandro, Viganoni, Sommella, 2015) or real promotional campaigns of international brands, such as the one carried out by Dolce&Gabbana in 2016, which led to a real temporary closure of public spaces in the city center (Rossini, Nervino, 2019). Authenticity is the common element of all these imaginaries: Napoli as an unique city, more than the others (Caputi, Fava, 2019), where to live different experiences compared to the standard of life of the European and Western city. In this sense, the example of the re-use of the "bassi", the historical settlement of the Neapolitan lower classes as accommodation for tourists, is emblematic (Berritto, Mazza, Punziano, 2019). The aspect of uniqueness is also frequently present in institutional tourism planning documents:

«The value of Naples is not the same as many other cities: Naples is unrepeatable, with a personality of its own that is unmatched anywhere in the world! Let's aim for our diversity: A non-gentrified historic center; Rejection of Disneyization; Global us? No thanks.; A city that's all a show!; A DNA....without equal; It's called NAPOLETANITY»

The attractive aspect of local identity is synthesized in a Neapolitan exception to globality, in which the cosmopolitan, international dimension of the city remains in the background, re-framed by the *genius loci*. The Naples brand thus seems to revolve around its nature as a city of art, not yet mutated into a museum-city that is «characterized by its proverbial and scenic "daily life" of a population that still today, as in past centuries, lives and works within its enormous and beautiful historic center».⁷

6 By this we mean the period of the city government of Mayor Antonio Bassolino (1993 - 2000) and his first attempt at tourist and cultural enhancement of the city's historic center.

7 Comune di Napoli website, Tourism section: www.comune.napoli.it/flex/cm/pages/ServeBLOB.php/L/IT/IDPagina/5802

In the local political debate of the last decade, on the contrary, there is ample recourse to the idea of a metropolis at the center of the Mediterranean, capable of being a place of tolerance and aspiring to reconnect with the sea. This centrality is expressed in radical terms in the discourse of the previous mayor Luigi De Magistris, as for example in the proposal in 2019 of a "Neapolitan fleet" (*Flotta Partenopea*) capable of welcoming the ships of NGOs engaged in rescuing migrants: «Come towards the port of Naples you will be welcomed because [...] to people who are dying you have to welcome them, you have to help them. The port of Naples is open to cruise ships, it is open to fishing boats, it is open to ferries [...] it is open to children who are dying at sea»⁸ From a much more pragmatic point of view, the Mediterranean role of the city of Naples is a central vision also for the new mayor, Gaetano Manfredi: « Naples must resume the role it historically deserves, that of a great European metropolis. To the traditional role of crossroads of Mediterranean cultures and civilisations that it has always exercised by virtue of its geographical location and its millennial history must now, as it has in the past, regain a strong presence in the context of the great capitals of continental Europe»⁹. It is extremely interesting how, in this passage opening the electoral programme, the European identity of the city is to be 'reacquired' and to be combined with consolidated Mediterranean characteristics of exchange and mixing of cultures.

The maritime and port dimension in the promotion of tourism in Naples, however, is still not very relevant. It is significant in this sense that the main tourism planning document (Comune di Napoli, 2017) never refers to Naples as a port city (except for cruise traffic) and to its seaside/maritime nature. The problematic aspect of the city with the sea and the port moves in parallel with an urban transformation that is not fully completed and, from some points of view, contradictory.

Fig. 2 Main interventions realised or planned on the Neapolitan waterfront.



Source: Graphic designed by Dario Fiorentino on authors' elaboration

On the one hand, the two large potential coastlines to the West (Bagnoli) and to the East (San Giovanni a Teduccio) of the city have been awaiting interventions - in both cases for decades - making them suitable for bathing or, at least, for leisure and tourism. In the case of the East coast,

⁸ Statement on LA7 Tv channel, 07/01/2019

⁹ Electoral Programme of Gaetano Manfredi, 2021 p.2: www.manfredisindaco.it/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Programma%20Manfredi.pdf

these visions clash with the expansion of the commercial port (*Darsena di Levante*) and the oil companies' proposals to restore new infrastructure for the storage of hydrocarbons (*Vigliena LNG Depot*). In the city center, the most impactful interventions carried out, such as the pedestrianization of the *Lungomare Caracciolo/Via Partenope* promenade and the reef built for the America's Cup regattas, did not involve the commitment of large economic resources, nor a structural transformation of urban space. The restyling of the seafront, as well as the reorganization of the passenger port, still await the realization of long-planned projects. The difficulty of representing a fully maritime Naples thus seems to follow the difficulty of overcoming the industrial-commercial function that the Neapolitan waterfront had throughout the twentieth century. The denied (or reduced) access to public use of the sea and city beaches in this case seems to represent an obstacle even for the construction of a new tourist imaginary.

3.3 Rijeka

Since the beginning of the 1990s, the post-Yugoslav, independent Croatian Republic addressed quite straightforwardly the revision and dissemination of its national identity in terms of public communication and branding (Kotler, Gertner 2002; Hall, 2002, 1999). Part of the strategy of (re)building a post-Balkan Croatian identity, which was functional to the ambition of EU integration and Western alignment, is a "new" relationship with the Mediterranean. Interestingly, in the public promotion of such a "Mediterranean-ess" there is a strategic removal of historical records, such as the Ottoman, the Yugoslav and, to some extent, even the Venetian identity (when associated to Italian identity and Fascism). It is, in other words, a Mediterranean deprived of its Eastern and Southern poles, negatively constructed through the exclusion of supposedly "non-European" features along an "orientalist" representation where violence, warfare and chaos are relegated to the "Balkans" and the Southern shore of the Mediterranean does not even appear in the picture. Such a representation clearly synthesized by a famous advertisement of the Croatian tourism board reflects a hyper-real image of the Mediterranean. That is to say «the Mediterranean as it once was»: cool, neat, and almost without people. (Fig. 3)

Fig. 3 Advertisement of the Croatian tourism.



Source: The Croatian Tourist Board

In this context, the case of the city of Rijeka sticks out as quite peculiar. In fact, the history of Rijeka is the one of a crisis of a late 19th century industrial and multi-cultural city, which was still the major Adriatic port in Yugoslavia and entered a phase of radical decline following the end of Yugoslavia. Against this present crisis, the local political elite indulge memories of “golden years” of Austria-Hungary, when “Fiume” was a major hub serving a vast multinational inland and connecting it with the rest of the world through ferry lines and cargo ships. That city, the nowadays disappointed elite claim, thrived on the life of industrious diaspora communities, the commercial know-how, the diffused secular mindset, and the widespread cosmopolitan multiculturalism. Even after the end of the Empire, despite the cultural and economic decline experienced with fascism, industry was always a stronghold of city identity. Likewise, in socialist Yugoslavia, the industrial identity of the city was reinforced by an ideological investment in its cultural autonomy and specific identity in the context of a celebration of transnational “brotherhood” based on labour (Svorinić, 2021). Therefore, it is not surprising that the necessary regeneration of Rijeka should have started from a remembrance of its industrial and cosmopolitan past, as the local political elite like to remind. From this perspective, the candidacy, and the fulfilment of the project « Rijeka 2020: port of Diversity » to celebrate the city as European cultural capital 2020 takes a quite special meaning. Likewise, the same representation is recognizable in the way the city candidacy is explained in the official documents: «Nestled between the *Mediterranean*, Central European and Eastern European influences, Rijeka has been part of as many as seven different countries over the past century of its development. A small-scale Europe of sorts, it has become a place for dynamic life, a symbol of the spirit of libertarian and progressive ideas, and a city where everyone is always welcome» (Rijeka2020.eu, 2020). As a matter of fact, the public communication related to the Culture Capital event resonate all quite well with the words of the city mayor, with the official documents and the mainstream media. Rijeka is described as: «Rijeka is today a multicultural and multi-ethnic city, in which *no one's diversity is rejected* and pushed to the margin but rather supported. *Port* and *diversity* are two important determinants of Rijeka in every sense. These two concepts describe us both as a city, i.e., as an urban environment, but also as a society». And finally, from the same source, the: «Port of Diversity is based definitely and naturally on the European Union's motto 'United in Diversity'» Despite the strong narrative set by the port of diversity project, there are also some critical voices and meaningful complains, such as the one of Moreno Vrancich, president of the Assembly of the Community of Italians of Rijeka, that regrets the initial rejection of all the cultural projects submitted by his Community to the Company Rijeka 2020 to be part of the Capital of Culture. Also, Vrancich explains that there is no trace in the narration of port diversity project that more than half of the population of Rijeka was Italian and left the city, in a large and painful exodus. (Osservatorio Causaso, 2020). It comes from the above that despite a powerful and articulated rhetoric of “diversity” as a backbone of urban regeneration, the Capital of Culture narrative especially emphasized a difference between Rijeka and the rest of the country, the latter depicted through subtraction as pervaded by ethnic and discriminatory (Balkan) nationalism. Skillfully using a blend of Mittel-European and Mediterranean rhetoric, local elites of Rijeka seemingly acted to relegate ethnic conflicts and violence to a Balkan imagery, thus producing a local, Mediterranean (Adriatic) de-orientalized urban identity based on a perennial spirit of tolerance and open mindness. However, in doing so, they often forget the place Austro-Hungarian authoritarianism, fascist political violence, partisan retaliation (i.e foibe), tentative ethnic cleansing and forced mass migration, had in the turbulent history of the city. Not to mention the fact that such a Mediterranean, made of laborious transnational European communities, is just a very selected frame out of a much larger picture.

Conclusions

We decided to investigate our cases focusing on the outcomes of some major architectural and/or development projects. This way, the exploration of political rhetoric and public communication connected to projects and/or events allowed for the emergence of meaningful categories to break down the narrative of Mediterranean-ness and its exclusionary outcomes. Particularly, the ambivalent feature of the Mediterranean is played out in the colonial heritage and in the construction of tourism as an asymmetrical practice, based on exogenous, imposed categories. In this perspective, the gentrification process of the port-city displays a “false” neutrality because it plays out a civilizational turn, from deprivation, chaos and uneasiness to beauty, politeness, and domesticated transnationalism. In the case of Marseille, this shift takes the form of instrumentalising the “Mediterranean” dimension for political and economic reasons, without considering the colonial past and the daily racist violence. Similarly, but still with significant differences, also in Rijeka the Mediterranean is represented as a European, or better “Mittel-European” space embedded in the “port-city of diversity” (whatever that would mean) and localized in the Roman, Venitian (but not Italian) and Austro-Hungarian Adriatic version of a continental Mediterranean deprived of its oriental and non European dimension. Finally, in Naples the Mediterranean takes on the appearance of genius, creativity, and welcoming attitude, whilst the relation of the city to the sea is unexpressed. A comparative outlook at the insights into the Mediterranean narratives of the three cases leads us to point out a number of categories, which could work both as tool to operationalize the Mediterranean branding in this first phase of exploration and to start operationalizing the concepts to translate into new research tools such as surveys or interview structures for a next field based research phase. These categories are 1) Localism 2) Geopolitics 3) Lifestyle 4) Nature 5) Cultural heritage 6) hospitality 7) Diversity 8) Cosmopolitanism. Elements of localism, geopolitics, lifestyle, cultural heritage, and diversity can be found in all the three cases, although in different semantic contents. For instance, localism, lifestyle and cultural heritage are exploited not only to describe the characteristics that would make the three cities part of a larger, imagined Mediterranean context, but also to construct a unique image of the city that could be sold to the tourism industry. Geopolitical connotation of the Mediterranean in Naples is evident only up to the Second World War with the role played by the harbor in terms of maritime communication with former colonies in Libia and Eastern Africa and the choice of the city for hosting the Overseas permanent exhibition “Mostra d'Oltremare” in 1940. In Marseille instead the idea of Mediterranean as a tool for the foreign policy of the country is still present, strictly connected with colonialism legacy and the current euro-mediterranean projections of French government. In Rijeka finally this image does possess a local, anti-balkan flavor, constructed also emphasizing a specific period of the city as a free port withing the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Diversely, nature is basically lacking from the Mediterranean imaginary in Naples and is only evoked in terms of absence for the lack of contact between people and seawater for pollution, decaying waterfronts and vehicles traffic. Hospitality, in turn, is not part of the rhetoric in Marseille whereas cosmopolitanism does not have a place in the Mediterranean representation of Naples, where the local notion of “napoletanità” seems to incorporate all other differences. Diversity and cosmopolitanism, on the other hand, seem to feature strongly in the contexts of Rijeka and Marseille to suggest a welcoming and pacified openness, the intensity of the narrative with respect to these two elements seems particularly significant when considering exclusionary practices and symbolic violence in both cities. They seem to be elements mobilised precisely to conceal the dynamics of social and symbolic expulsion of certain groups, and this would explain the strong emphasis. Certainly, the categories of above pave the way for further research action, such as text mining on documents and larger set of data or the organization of focus groups with public decision makers, with the aim to disentangle the complexity of such a “false beautiful theme”.

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The role of Destination Management Organizations in co-creating local territory brand identity: a comparative analysis in Italy and Argentina²

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on all sectors of the global economy, including the tourism industry (Gössling, Scott Hall, 2020; Hall, Scott Gössling, 2020). The challenges that tourism destinations are currently facing emphasize the need to rethink tourism in order to boost competitiveness and build resilience by diversifying products and markets, and promoting domestic and regional tourism (UNWTO, 2020). New trends and models are being proposed taking into account the different stakeholders involved in this multifaceted phenomenon, namely public and private sectors, non-governmental and tourist associations and even the community at large. This scenario of collaboration between multiple stakeholders has become crucial for promoting and branding a place (e.g., a town, region or country) (Rodrigues Schmidt, 2021). Tourist destinations compete among themselves to attract tourists and inhabitants, especially in areas that were struggling even before the pandemic. To be more attractive, destinations need to stand out by promoting their identity (Moilanen, Rainisto, 2009). Therefore, place branding, a process based on the identity and positive image of a place, is a vital strategy within the field of the hospitality and tourism sector (Pedeliento, Kavaratzis, 2019).

To convey a clear and effective message to the various target groups, a place brand must have brand identity characteristics that differentiate the place from other destinations (Morgan, Pritchard, Pride, 2002). «A place needs to be differentiated through a unique brand identity if it wants to be, first, recognized as existing, secondly, perceived in the minds of place customers as possessing qualities superior to those of competitors and, thirdly, consumed in a manner commensurate with the objectives of the place» (Kasapi, Cela, 2017, p. 139). According to Anholt (2006), place branding can be particularly helpful for those places that employ outdated messages or images or that might have a bad reputation, or simply for places that are not well known; at the same time, place branding can also enhance, revitalize, improve, or contextualize perceived images. «The idea is that if all of this works effectively, then the appropriate target markets will be attracted to the place, and the place will develop a competitive (and thus economic) advantage over other places» (Skinner, 2021, p. 177).

In light of this, the purpose of this study is to explore how the actors in a territorial ecosystem interact and understand the process that contributes to the formation of a place's brand identity. In this article, we attempt to answer this important question by analysing the development of destination brand identity through the theoretical perspective of co-creative brand management. In particular, the objective is to understand the ways in which a plurality of actors (public and private) interact with each other also through spatial variables, and thus how the social process arises and how it develops, in order to favor a systemic and integrated tourist offer (destination). Moreover, the study aims at understanding the communication process employed on the websites in order to promote the Destination Management Organization (DMO).

The methodology adopted in this study is the mixed method approach. The collection and analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data will allow to explore diverse perspectives and un-

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2 Received: 10/7/2022. Revised: 22/11/2022. Accepted: 06/12/2022. Although the authors have collaborated in the research work and in writing the paper, they have individually devoted specific attention to the following sections: Coscarello M. – sections 2.2, 3, 4.1, 5; Ruffolo I. – sections 1, 2.1, 3, 4.2.

cover relationships that exist between the intricate layers of the multifaceted research question. In particular, two local case studies of participatory construction of the tourist destination (Place Brand Identity) in Argentina and Italy will be analyzed in an attempt to understand to what extent actors (public and private) can interact and develop a social process capable of fostering an aggregated tourism offer in a territorial context. Moreover, the analysis of the national websites of both countries (Italy and Argentina), was carried out to understand the differences and similarities in the content and communication strategies used to promote the territory. The paper begins with a brief illustration of the theoretical background to the study, followed by the methodology employed in this work. The core of the paper illustrates the results of the quantitative and qualitative analysis. The final section draws on tentative results of this on-going project and suggests further lines of research.

1. Theoretical background

1.1 Place branding, identity and DMOs

Place branding can be defined as «the name, term, symbol or design, or combination of these, that seeks to identify the characteristics of the city and differentiate it from other cities» (Loreto, 2005, p. 6). As stated by Agüero *et al.* (2006), place branding strategy should include the effective communication of the city's essence in order to enhance the cultural, social and commerce values that the brand seeks to address.

When defining place branding, the concepts of identity and image are interconnected. Identity is defined by Calvento and Colombo (2009, p. 266) as «a set of perceptions and associations that immediately characterize spaces, and becomes the main vehicle of differentiation from others». In order to be able to fully promote the identity of a place, it is necessary to understand how the place is defined, know the elements that identify it and with whom it compares itself (López Carmona, 2004).

According to San Eugenio (2013, p. 190), «identity, in a context of emerging competitiveness between territories, turns out to be the most important element of recognition, differentiation and marketing in the communicative process of positioning cities, regions and countries». However, it is not easy to define an area's identity because it is a subjective and intangible concept. Therefore, it can be defined, in part, through images that should be understood «as the set of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person has of his or her territory».

Place branding must aim at presenting a positive and appealing image of the place, and this means including particular elements in official messages while excluding others (Johansson, 2012). However, as Johansson explains, it is a complex activity to apply marketing-based branding to places since they are constituted by a multitude of identities and activities. In the place branding planning phase, strategic decisions need to be taken, for instance, taking into account all those responsible for the development of the brand, such as politicians, companies, associations and, primarily, the residents (Kemp, Childers, Williams, 2012). Therefore, it is crucial to co-create the brand among public and private sector, the society and other people interested in the process. Due to the complexity of branding in tourism and thanks to the characteristics of DMOs, the task of place branding of a destination is usually allocated to a DMO (Hanna Rowley, 2008). Indeed, as emphasized by Ind, Iglesias and Schultz (2013, p. 5) «this process [destination branding] brings consumers, managers, and employees together to participate in brand development». In particular, in order to create a sustainable and unique brand to the destination, it is important that the public sector, private sector and local governing authorities collaborate with the place's key stakeholders, that is inhabitants and visitors (Maheshwari, Bamber, 2011).

Indeed, Rodrigues and Schmidt (2021) suggest that a participatory approach to place branding encourages stakeholders to play an active role in the overall place branding process, an approach which is still under-researched. In fact, there are still very few examples of this type of collaboration among stakeholders in co-creating the destination brand identity (Gyrd-Jones, Kornum, 2013; Kavaratzis, Hatch, 2013).

Furthermore, an important feature of the creation of the destination brand identity is the language employed to communicate the brand; indeed, tourists choose the tourist destination advertised if persuasive strategies are successfully employed on tourism websites (Manca, 2016). However, communicating an entire territory is not an easy task, first of all, due to the variety of resources, attractions and opportunities it offers and also because of the set of stakeholders who live and work in the territory. The process is even more complex because communication has to deal with the perceptions (including prior perceptions) of the destination's various stakeholders, primarily the end users to whom it is addressed, namely tourists. Even though tourism communication is generally analyzed with reference to the final users, i.e., the tourists, its effectiveness is rooted in the internal context of the destination (Marzano, Scott, 2009).

The performance of the website can be evaluated using different models. One model is the Attention, Interest, Desire, Action (AIDA) model, which has been widely accepted and adopted among marketing scholars and practitioners in traditional as well as online marketing. According to Garber and Dotson (2002), the AIDA model can prove that increased attention for certain destinations is likely to lead to a certain interest, which might give birth to a desire that may eventually result in a certain action. Therefore, the attention for a place will lead to actions and this is why both public and private stakeholders support efforts of place promotion.

Literature on place branding (Rodrigues Schmidt, 2021; Hankinson, 2004) identifies three key components of place brand identity, which are central to identity development, that is *physics*, *practices* and *personality* (Tab. 1). Table 1 summarises the components of place brand identity as outlined by Rodrigues and Schmidt (2021) and Hankinson (2004).

Table 1. Components of place brand identity

Components of place brand identity		
Components	Features	Examples
Physics	Materiality aspects and physical assets (Kalandides, 2011; Lindstedt, 2011). Tangible attributes (e.g., artefacts) and symbols that stand as both visual representations and the essence of place brand identity	Cultural and sport facilities, hotels, restaurants, nightclubs, transport infrastructures, historic plaques, decorations and sculptures (Florek, Insch Gnoth, 2006; Hanna Rowley, 2011), as well as temporary retail formats that may contribute to urban renewal (Kalandides <i>et al.</i> , 2016).
Practices	Practices that result from competition and cooperation between stakeholders (Martínez, 2016). Activities, behaviours, decisions and rituals (Kalandides, 2011; Florek, Insch Gnoth, 2006)	The place practices include events and rituals such as street parties, ceremonies, parades and artistic performances (Hankinson, 2004; Hanna Rowley, 2011).
Personality	Character of locals, the tourists' profile and the character of the environment (Hankinson, 2004). Symbolic and experiential attributes.	Symbolic attributes: the character of the local residents; the profile of typical visitors (eg age, income, interests and values); descriptors of the quality of service provided by service contact personnel). Experiential attributes: how the destination will make visitors feel (eg relaxed, excited or fascinated); descriptors of the destination's feel (e.g. the city experience, vibrant or peaceful); the character of the built environment (eg historic, modern, green and spacious); Descriptors related to security and safety (Hankinson, 2004).

Adapted from Rodrigues and Schmidt, 2021, p. 22-23 and Hankinson, 2004, p. 116.

A metanalysis conducted by Lucarelli (2011) on place-city branding shows that there is a worldwide geographical coverage in the literature, implying that the phenomenon is studied worldwide. Nevertheless, the majority of articles deal with cities in the western world, focusing their analysis on one city only (107 studies). Thus, the cities studied are by no means evenly spread around the world.

Among the 252 studies dealing with different type of cities in several nations, 90 address cities, in the UK (60), the USA (20) and Canada (8), thus accounting for 35% of the total amount of city studies. Even more striking is the fact that 156 (61%) of the studies deal with European cities, while only five deal with cities in Africa and three with cities in South America. In particular, 2 in Brazil (Rio de Janeiro) e 1 in Argentina (Buenos Aires). Therefore, the aim of this work is to contribute to new scientific knowledge through the comparative analysis of a European and a Latin American city, given the very few studies in the literature (Vuignier, 2016).

1.2 Destination management / marketing organization (DMOs)

According to the World Tourism Organization (WTO) (2019, p. 16), a DMO «is the leading organizational entity which may encompass the various authorities, stakeholders and professionals and facilitates tourism sector partnerships towards a collective destination vision». DMOs can have various governance structures, they may vary from a single public authority to a public/private partnership model with the aim of initiating and managing activities such as implementation of tourism policies, strategic planning, product development, promotion. In Reinhold and Beritelli's 2022 study, an overview of the history of DMOs is illustrated. According to Pike and Page (2014), DMOs date back to a series of private, local organizations, first emerging in Europe in the second half of the 19th century. They were often part of national administrative bodies, unlike local and regional organizations.

Although there are no official statistics regarding the numbers of DMO, Pike and Page (2014) estimate that their worldwide number exceeds 10 000. «These organizations take many different forms, and their overlapping geographical responsibilities are characterized by coopetition – that is, they simultaneously cooperate and compete» (Beritelli *et al.*, 2015, p. 25).

DMOs can function at various levels: (i) at national level, taking care of the management and marketing of national tourism; developing in some cases beyond national borders; (ii) at regional/state/level, having responsibilities of the management and marketing of tourism in specific geographic/historic areas, defined for that purpose; (iii) at local level, being in charge of the development and promotion of tourism in areas limited to a city/town (Negrușă, Coroș, 2016).

As for their governance structures, Wang (2011) identifies four types of structures that are typical of DMOs, taking into consideration governance type, activities, geographic scope and destination type, from the public and private point of view: (i) publicly controlled government agencies which are subject to municipal policies; (ii) non-profit organizations funded by public money, equipped with mandates and global budgets; (iii) public-private partnerships with mixed public-private funding and interest representation; (iv) fully private associations which are dependent on membership contributions and on revenues from business activities. The first three types of structure are community-based and call for stakeholder collaboration. The last type resembles more of corporate-type destinations (Flagestad Hope, 2001), where DMOs are sometimes referred to as destination management companies (DMCs), which focus more local tour-operating (*ibid.*).

Various studies (Volgger, Pechlaner, 2014; Varghese, Paul, 2014; Coscarello, 2020) emphasize the important role that DMOs play in the success of tourism destinations and in land development. In particular, in a study on the review of the literature conducted by Varghese and Paul

(2014, p. 72), the authors claim that «DMOs are necessary for the long-term sustainability of the destination». Moreover, Volgger and Pechlaner (2014, p. 72) affirm that «in order to understand how to increase the competitiveness of a destination, it seems to be crucial to scrutinize what determinates a DMO's success».

The main functions of the DMO are examined by various authors; for instance, Presenza, Sheehan and Ritchie (2005) provide different views of DMOs as a Destination Marketing Organization and Destination Management Organization. In particular, when attempting to explain the marketing and management roles of DMOs, the authors divide the roles into three categories, namely, External Destination Marketing (EDM), Internal Development Role (IDD) and Overall Destination Management (ODM) explaining their specific activities.

More recent studies have focused on the various roles and activities of a DMO. For instance, for Dredge (2016) DMOs are policy tools that serve tourism industry interests by organizing and coordinating tourism activity at the destination and by building industry capacity. According to this perspective, DMOs are responsible for increasing visitor spend and attracting business development to the area. Bornhorst, Ritchie and Sheehan (2010) highlight their leadership and advocacy roles, while Pechlaner, Volgger and Herntrei (2012) emphasize their coordination, communication, and networking functions.

Recent research shows that there is a very important change taking place with respect to the trend of tourism flows as well as how the perspective of travel is created, so we are in the presence of a co-production of tourism demand, contextualized over time (Beritelli, 2020). Moreover, numerous research studies show how Web 2.0 and social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and TripAdvisor) are helping to change the market conditions of DMOs. In particular, such virtual communities are participating in the construction of destination content, context, and co-creation (Oliveira Panyik, 2015). What is becoming important is the process of producing the tourism product, an aspect on which this paper puts emphasis on.

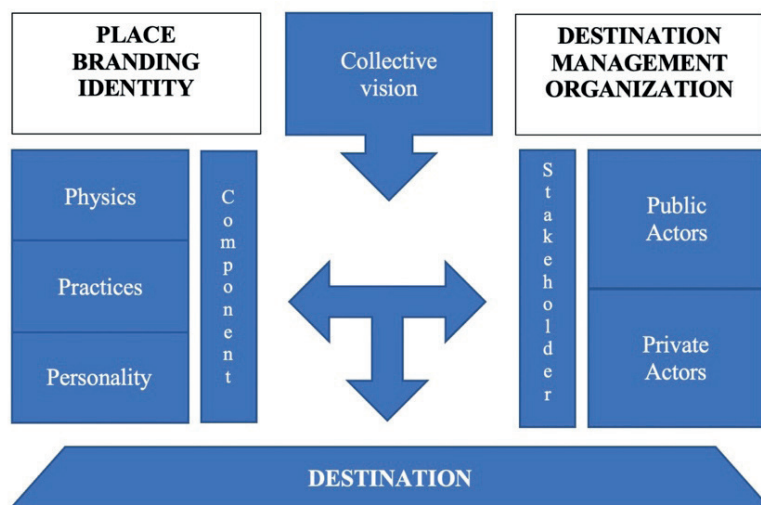
Thus, DMOs propose technological solutions for database cooperation and communication between destination portals and between them and the regional/national portal and other portals (Coscarello, 2020). According to Beritelli's research (2020), the choice of destinations seems to depend on social contingencies and relationships, personal relationships with places and/or attractions or specific offerings. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the variables that contribute to the creation of new flows.

The complexity of destination management is increasing. Keywords in this context are progressive digitization, increasing internationalization, and demographic change. In the future, DMOs can help substantially to deal with this complexity if they resist merely starting from simple standard solutions to simple problems and indulging in the cargo cult and instead critically and constructively question their role and activities in the «system destination» on a consistent basis.

There is not much research that considers the role of DMOs specifically in the co-creation of place-branding. In fact, in many studies only the role of private actors and public actors is considered, but there has not yet to be much analysis of the capacity of DMOs to relate to the three main components of place branding identified by Rodrigues and Schmidt (2021) and Hankinson (2004).

Moreover, the effectiveness of the message in contributing to their territorial brand identity has not been analysed enough. In Figure 1, a new theoretical approach to the study of Place Brand is proposed by the authors.

Fig. 1. A new vision of Destination between Place branding Identity and DMO.



Source: Own elaboration.

In this sense, while there are many studies that recognise that DMOs play a fundamental role in the exchange of information between stakeholders (Reinhold, Beritelli, 2022), recent studies are exploring how elements of DMOs' design thinking can be used to creatively solve problems in the tourism and destination development sectors (Thomas, McNeice, 2021), contributing to the co-construction of Place Brand Identity. The following section presents the methodology adopted to carry out this study.

2. Methodology

This research focuses on the role that DMOs play in co-creating (producing) place branding, according to one of the three perspectives based on research interests (producing, consuming and criticizing city branding) identified by Lucarelli and Berg (2011).

The research question underlying the survey is the following: *how do the actors in a territorial ecosystem interact and what is the process that contributes to the formation of a place's brand identity?* The overall aim is to understand the ways in which a plurality of actors (public and private) interact with each other also through spatial variables, and thus how the social process arises and how it develops, in order to favor a systemic and integrated tourist offer (destination). Moreover, the study aims at understanding the communication process employed on the web-sites in order to promote the DMO.

More specifically, the objectives of the research project are to: (i) investigate the role of local actors in a comparative perspective (two communities, one in Argentina and the other in Italy), for the construction of place brand identity, in terms of tradition, culture and local customs (ii) explore the role that institutional actors play in the construction of a tourist destination; (iii) understand to what extent effective communication can contribute to territorial brand identity. In fact, it is relevant to specify which elements can enable the various actors involved in the dynamics of change in the territory, to identify the fundamental steps needed to create the cultural and structural conditions for the development of a tourist destination (Place brand identity). In this regard, experiences in two different countries, Italy and Argentina, have been identified.

Considering that most studies concern comparisons between Western countries (Lucarelli Berg, 2011), this contribution aims to propose the initial results of an innovative study, which is still in progress. The case studies analyzed concern two local/regional experiences in Argentina and Italy with an in-depth study of the national marketing promotion sites of Argentina and Italy.

From a methodological point of view, the analysis of the Place branding Identity and DMO experiences was carried out by resorting to primary and secondary sources and to the analysis of the literature, as well as by conducting interviews with the protagonists of the experiences. The interpretation is carried out in the light of a path of analysis and research conducted by both authors in recent years (Coscarello, 2020; Sivini, Coscarello, 2022; Ruffolo, Ziccarelli, 2022).

The research was conducted employing the Grounded Theory approach (Guidicini, 2007), with an inductive method in a first phase, followed by the deductive method. In particular, an analysis of the environment was conducted with a socio-anthropological approach. This approach is the most suitable for framing and understanding a social context considered in its relative unity and autonomy, in order to describe thoroughly the various interactions. Thanks to this method, it is possible to examine the environment and the community, grasping as an essential moment those anthropological features that underlie the community under examination. In this way, the focus is on the 'local culture', the stratification of historical facts, and the characteristics of experience that make the community under examination a profoundly different reality from its neighboring contexts.

Data were collected through: interviews, life stories, participatory analysis and direct information collection. The fieldwork in Argentina took place from April to October 2022, in Italy from August 2021 to March 2022. In particular, a total of 22 semi-structured interviews were conducted, specifically ten in Argentina and twelve in Italy, which led to the understanding of the main organizational characteristics, the territorial contexts and the role of the key actors who can help promote these experiences.

In Argentina, the following people were interviewed: (i) two officials from the Ministry of Tourism and Sport; (ii) two participants in national sustainable and community tourism networks; (iii) the Director of the Tourism Incubator of the University of Quilmes' Social Incubation Program; (iv) the Coordinator of the Tourism Incubator of the University of Quilmes' Social Incubation Program, who also carries out extension activities with the realities involved in the survey; (v) two tourism operators; (vi) two tourism agencies. As for Italy, the following were interviewed: (i) three national and international experts, in particular, an expert in consulting and training in digital marketing for the hospitality sector, a lecturer in tourism marketing and a full professor of Economics and Business Management; (ii) the President of a business network (DMO); (iii) five tour operators; (iv) an officer of the Calabria Region, Tourism sector; (v) two tourism agencies. Interviews were conducted in person and online and lasted an average of 40 minutes. A total of nine men and thirteen women were interviewed. As with socio-anthropological environmental research, the object of analysis is the community as a socio-spatial entity. In the semi-structured interview outline, the following points were addressed: (i) the main organizational characteristics; (ii) the territorial contexts; (iii) the role of the key actors (public and private) who can help promote these experiences.

In addition, 35 informal interviews were carried out (20 in Italy and 15 in Argentina) through the technique of life stories with inhabitants of the localities involved in the case studies, economic operators, and tourists present in the places. Through a cross-referenced approach on several people's stories referring to a certain historical moment, it was possible to reconstruct the essential aspects, characters and conditions of the community in the last 10 years. The subjects involved were 19 men and 16 women of different ages, ranging from 15 to 65. These informal interviews lasted between one and two hours.

The outline followed had as its main themes, (i) the reconstruction of the physical components (i.e. things that were there then and are no longer there today, the transformations that have taken place, roads, houses, etc.) and practical components (festivals, friendships, discussions,

traditions, social relations, significant events in the current places); (ii) the reconstruction of the changes in the area over the last 10 years (delimitation of the area); and (iii) an in-depth study of the underlying values of the local area community and the relationship with the institutions. The research material was useful for the reconstruction of the 'socio-spatial' environment with respect to a precise historical moment in the past.

As for the linguistic analysis, the analysis of the Italian (www.italia.it) and Argentinian (argentina.tur.ar) national websites, promoted by the two ministries, was aimed at analyzing the content and communication strategies used to promote the territory and destination. The two websites chosen are examples of DMOs and therefore fit perfectly into the literature of experiences of Place Branding Identity and DMOs. In particular, the linguistic content of the websites was analyzed employing the methodological approach of Corpus Linguistics and the AIDA model. «Corpus Linguistics is based on bodies of text as the domain of study and as the source of evidence for linguistic description and argumentation» (Kennedy, 2014, p. 7); specifically, Corpus Linguistics is a methodology that uses computer software to analyse the language both qualitatively and quantitatively (McEnery, Xiao Tono, 2006). In particular, this study uses Sketch Engine, which is an online text analysis tool that works with large samples of language, called text corpora, to identify what is typical and frequent in a language and understand how language works. The AIDA model is principally used in marketing communication to persuade people to buy the product (in the case of tourism, to choose the tourist destination); in order to reach this goal, it is important to arouse Attention, then engage the Interest of the receiver, then create in the receiver a Desire for the product or service, and then provoke Action in the receiver.

The exploratory character of the presented survey lies in the fact that no other studies were found comparing the experiences of Place Branding Identity and DMOs in Italy and Argentina.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 *Place branding identity and DMO in Argentina and Italy*

This section will present the results of the field research, through the processing of the interviews conducted (life stories, semi-structured), and through a period of participant observation, thanks to which it was possible to reconstruct the socio-spatial context of the two territories. In Italy, the "Destinazione Sila" network of enterprises, which operates in Calabria, Southern Italy, has been identified.³ In Argentina, the case study concerns the Cooperative "Pipinas Viva"⁴. This experience was born in a small town in the province of Buenos Aires, at the northern end of Samborombón Bay, about 160 km from the capital.

In Italy, the interviewees pointed out the peculiar characteristics of the Sila Plateau territory «as large as the territory where we operate is bounded by the area of one of the largest natural parks bordering the Sila plateau, we recognize ourselves in these territories» (Int. IT_19). The territory is the main place where events are held that help create the bond between local actors and foster a tourist offer, indeed «for many years a series of events have been held that are important for tourists, we all collaborate in the realization, for example we participate in the 'Mushroom Festival' where thousands of tourists arrive, usually the hotels in the area are all full at that time [...] by now it is a historical event» (Int. IT_16). Other initiatives, launched only more recently, help strengthen the bond between commercial operators, as stated by an interviewee: «I was the founder of Fattorie Aperte in Sila, it is an event born a few years ago and today it aggregates twenty-eight companies, it is an itinerary in which tourists can choose where to go and what activities they prefer, here there are many opportunities that arise from our traditions, from our peasant culture» (Int. IT_11).

3 An in-depth examination of this network is presented in Coscarello (2020), and for more information www.destinazione-sila.it.

4 For more information www.pipinas.com

In Argentina, a story emerged from a conflicted relationship with institutions, as told by an interviewee who lived through that period «the territorial area of Pipinas was linked to a party, Magdalena, which actively participated in the struggle for southern autonomy. Through this mobilization, the municipality of Punta Indio was created with clear goals, namely to have autonomy based on tourism and food sovereignty» (Int. AR_15). Local people are clear about the importance of natural resources and the need for their preservation: «We are in the area of the 'Parque Costero del Sud,' it is a biosphere reserve, for us the protection of these places is important» (Int. AR_3).

In both case studies analyzed, it was crucial for those who were among the initiators of the initiatives to be able to create networks of relationships based on local identity. In Italy, for instance, the Destinazione Sila network focused on creating a network between local tourism businesses and all territorial stakeholders to define a common path to overcome localism and individualism, to create an area tourism brand, and to build new tourism products capable of enhancing the peculiarities of the area. As one of the promoters of the network explains, «we were only three operators when we started this project, but from the start it was essential to expand to others, [...] the plateau territory is large but we all have the same identity and values, we believe in a revitalization of this territory» (Int. IT_18). In the context of an inland area, where it is often difficult to cooperate, a participatory vision emerged from the very beginning, «from the very first meetings and gatherings among operators, it was clear that only through collaboration among us we can offer better services to the tourists coming to Sila» (Int. IT_15). In fact, in the implementation strategy of the Destinazione Sila project, a «path of construction of the identity system [...], a system that is conceived and designed through the involvement of all the actors of the network» (Int. IT_16) was planned, as the network's President states. With the creation of the business network, the project aims to both improve the travel experience of those who want to visit those specific territories, and build an identity system, as envisaged with the path «Culture of hospitality: new behavioral and relationship styles," initiated within the network, for the benefit of the operators involved to help overcome internal difficulties, coordination, shared management, towards the establishment of a community-type destination. The importance of the local community participation was highlighted also from the Argentine experience, as one of the interviewees underlines, «the area has changed a lot over the past few years, but we always believed that we could organize a tourism offer together, starting with our traditions» (Int. AR_12). Opportunities to create jobs and enhance local characteristics were realized with the creation of the 'Pipinas Viva' cooperative. As one of the protagonists of this experience recounts, «during the political and social conflict for the recognition of autonomy, we thought of creating the cooperative in 2004, specifically to develop the community tourism project» (Int. AR_11). This path involved the entire local community, which was also going through a phase of economic and social crisis, which did not prevent us from starting again from local resources for the creation of a participatory process. From the very beginning, thought was given to making the most of the resources present to carry out the project, «we thought of working with our own strengths to recover the existing sports field and the old village hotel, in addition, we started selling local products such as homemade pasta, meats, cheeses and jams, sweets and craft beer, started selling at the fair, which allowed us to live through this activity» (Int. AR_7).

The relationship with institutions also played a key role for both experiences, although there were two different initial situations, collaborative for the Italian experience, and confrontational for the Argentine experience. In Italy, since the beginning of the experience, there has always been collaboration between operators and local stakeholders. The establishment of the Destinazione Sila network was followed by collaboration with other local actors, such as the local development agency, other networks that were among the promoters of the establishment of the region's first Tourist District. The director of the Local Action Group states that «generating collaboration among local actors is one of our main goals. Helping to create network between private operators and local institutions is one of our priorities» (Int. IT_2). This level of collabo-

ration has generated positive results, many operators satisfied with the path started, which has created a significant network in the area, as one of the protagonists of the promotion of the Tourism District explains «aggregating the tourism offer, making local actors communicate and work together was difficult but we succeeded, there are many administrative aspects that seem complex, but when you reach the goal there is a great satisfaction» (Int. IT_12).

In the Argentine case, following the initial confrontational moment with the establishment of the cooperative, relations with institutions changed. The creation through a community project of the Hotel over the years generated other projects and activities that are the attractions that have become a landmark in the country and even internationally. There are, in fact, popular festivals (Dance and Song Meeting; Pipinas Marathon; Anniversary of the City Creole Festival - Traditionalist Centre of Pipinas), the Open-Air Museum: (MAPI) which is a community-based project (Marozzi, 2006).

Through the initiation of shared planning, a strong collaboration with local institutions was opened. As one member of the cooperative says, «we cooperative members drafted and presented a project to the municipality of Punta Indio, which in the meantime was creating the Directorate of Tourism, and this project was approved, basically they granted us the opportunity to be able to work in the Hotel that we recovered» (Int. AR_14).

Over the years, collaborative relations have been established with other tourist experiences (Barker and La Niña Station), which have helped promote a dialogue with the state on public policy, to find solutions for the small towns that expanded with the railway or the large factory, and that have entered an economic and social crisis with the cessation of activities.

The ability to create collaborative relationships with institutions has continued, in fact as a number of local residents and activists affirm: «a provincial program called 'Pueblos Turísticos' was written in 2008. Today this project involves thirty-five municipalities, and above all it demonstrates that with collaboration it is possible to generate tourism development projects in an area» (Int. AR_10).

The differences between the two experiences analyzed are found in relation to collaborative capacity especially with national institutions, particularly with the case of DMOs. In Italy, despite the involvement of local administrations in the Sila District, stable and long-term planning with the national and regional level is difficult. As one regional official interviewed explained, «it happens that each region has to make a tourism plan every three years, which is sometimes the opposite of what is planned at the national level» (Int. IT_02).

The Italian legislative situation seems to be the cause of the main problems related to the promotion of tourism at an international level, as emerges in a State Tourism Report (2017), released by the Ministry of Tourism, indeed the governance of Italian tourism is instead characterized by excessive fragmentation, regulatory, organizational and managerial uncertainty that has resulted in conflicts between powers and considerable institutional instability, with negative repercussions in terms of the country's competitiveness and attractiveness for foreign tourists and investors.

The local context in Argentina seems to find support at a provincial level, as can be seen directly with local communities, but also through a national project that aims to involve the entire country. The Ministry of Tourism and Sport is launching a project that seems to be able to contribute to tourism promotion, also in light of the recent crisis linked to the Covid-19 pandemic.

In fact, the 'La Ruta Natural' project, born in the midst of the 2020 pandemic by the Argentine Ministry of Tourism and Sport and approved by Resolución No. 3/2021, seems to be heading in this direction. At the basis of this project is a careful analysis of the territory's needs, a clear awareness of the need to enhance the natural territory and, therefore, promote naturalistic destinations for which the country is known worldwide, but at the same time contribute to enhancing domestic as well as international tourism. The objective of working to identify possible solutions through tourism enhancement is clearly explained by a Ministry official interviewed: «During the pandemic we thought and worked a lot on this project, with the aim of finding

the tools to help overcome the severe economic crisis we are going through. There were many meetings, obviously online, to identify a national strategy and try to involve all the actors in the area» (Int. AR_7).

The project is a national development and promotion strategy that proposes an organization of the tourist offer throughout the territory. It is a federal program that takes nature tourism, one of the fastest growing segments globally and a tourism product in which Argentina has a unique advantage, as the vector axis of territorial development planning. La Ruta natural proposes to optimize the quality and safety of destinations, promote efficient governance, improve the environmental management of tourism, facilitate tourism, develop infrastructure, professionalize the sector through support and assistance to product-related suppliers, and other actions aimed at accompanying the productive development of regional economies to ensure the generation of increasingly competitive destinations and products, in order to promote and stimulate the reconversion of the sector's matrix and make a strategic contribution to the country's economic reactivation. On the basis of the analysis of the diagnosis of all the Natural Routes, cooperative strategies were designed with the other actors in the area, which are grouped into the following axes: (i) Infrastructure for tourist use; (ii) Private investment opportunities; (iii) Quality and training; (iv) National and international promotion; (v) Hierarchization of portals for access to the Natural Routes: host cities.

The proposed strategy sees the involvement of all actors in a territory. Underlying this is a territorial approach that, as explained by Clavé and Reverté (2005) concept of region, Natural Routes can be said to organize territories large enough to design comprehensive strategies and, at the same time, homogeneous enough to provide a general vision of the territorial planning pursued. The identified routes, being defined by natural environments, propose cooperative strategies that transcend the political-administrative boundaries of provinces and municipalities. These natural territories, in turn, expand the possibility of articulating national strategies with an integrated regional tourism proposal.

3.2 Content and communication strategies used to promote the territory.

Tourists and visitors change their behaviour by choosing the tourist destination advertised if persuasive strategies are successfully employed on tourism websites (Manca, 2016). The last step of analysis proposed in this article aims to describe and compare the promotional language used by Italian and Argentinian cultures in order to advertise and promote their respective countries as holiday destinations. In particular, the study will focus on the use of adjectives in a domain-specific discourse which is tourism discourse. As stated by various scholars (Dann, 1996; Gotti, 2006; Capelli, 2008; Durán-Muñoz, 2012; Manca, 2016), one of the most notable features of this discourse is the use of appealing and innovative words to attract potential tourists. Adjectives play a central role in promoting tourist destinations and services, and contributing to «persuading, luring, wooing and seducing» (Dann, 1996, p. 2) the reader and potential tourists.

In order to do that, the linguistic content of the websites www.italia.it and www.argentina.tur.ar was analysed and the investigation was conducted on the 300 most frequent adjectives present on the website⁵.

Following Manca's method of analysis (2016), the adjectives identified in the corpus can be classified into different semantic fields. Semantic analysis can contribute to disclosing the

5 The first 15 most frequent adjectives contained in the two corpora are in Italy: 1. ultimo; 2. italiano; 3. splendido; 4. grande; 5. antico; 6. relativo; 7. interessante; 8. speciale; 9. storico; 10. valido; 11. autentico; 12. migliore; 13. piccolo; 14. alto; 15. ricco.

In Argentina: 1. argentino; 2. bueno; 3. útil; 4. grande; 5. santo; 6. nacional; 7. político; 8. porteño; 9. natural; 10. clásico; 11. turístico; 12. cultural; 13. importante; 14. ideal; 15. gastronómico.

relationships between subjects or categories, creating a more conceptual study rather than a merely syntactic one. Moreover, semantic analysis allows a deeper understanding of the meanings of the words and the message in general (Jabreel, Huertas, Moreno, 2015). The semantic fields adapted by Manca are: General Location; Time; Uniqueness; Size; Beauty; Popularity; Activity; Culture and heritage; Environment; Colour.

Both websites contain a message that presents the main features of promotional language, such as the use of specific adjectives to emphasize the high quality of the destination (Saorín 2001), superlative language and words to refer to idyllic places (Saorín 2001; Calvi 2006; Pierini 2007) or cultural connotations (Gotti, 2006).

In particular, the most frequent semantic fields present in the Argentinian corpus are General Location with adjectives such as *nacional* (national), *local* (local), *provincial* (provincial), *litoral* (coastal), *austral* (southern) and are used to illustrate the first three steps of the AIDA Model, that is Attention, Interest and Desire. Another frequent field found on www.argentina.tur.ar is Beauty adjectives, such as *spectacular* (spectacular), *excepcional* (exceptional), *majestuoso* (majestic) and *fabuloso* (fabulous) which are used in the Desire step, as well as the Environment adjectives, that is to say *natural* (natural), *glaciar* (icy), *ecologico* (ecological). Colour adjectives are also widely used by the Argentinian text writers both metaphorically and literally in an attempt to provide the reader with some *local colour*, for instance *blanco* (white), *azul* (blue), *rosado* (pink).

The most frequent semantic category of the Italian corpus is Time, with examples such as *antico* (ancient), *storico* (historical), *romano* (roman), *medievale* (medieval) and *archelologico* (archaeologic), which represent the two steps of Attention and Interest of the AIDA model. Another category which has a high frequency of occurrences on the www.italia.it website are Popularity adjectives, such as *grande* (great), *importante* (important), *famoso* (famous), which are used «both to describe the status of the destination (Attention and Interest) and to persuade readers that the attractions and the destinations advertised are a must-see (Desire)» (Manca, 2016, p. 92). A frequent semantic field in the Italian corpus is Uniqueness, the results seem to show that travel writers are saying that these places worth visiting due to the fact that they are *autentico* (authentic), *incontaminato* (unspoilt), *insolito* and *unico* (unique). These adjectives convey their need for places 'off the beaten track', which can confer authenticity, recalling the Desire step.

Both corpora contain all those positive terms which seem to transmit both a sense of euphoria for the services the website is promoting and a sense of distinctiveness and authenticity. This finding is supported by the presence of adjectives such as *unique* and *local* as well as to the high frequency of the intensifiers *top* and *great*. The Argentinian website appears to make use of copious persuasive language, in an attempt to position the tourism destination in the mind of the tourist primarily through its resources, attractions and unique selling points. The Italian corpus appears to be more informative than persuasive, although there are strong examples of promotional language. Both websites employ diverse communication resources for successful branding. Moreover, the use of thematic language and cultural terms reinforces the diversification of each destination, promoting uniqueness, and enhancing its image. As a consequence, an effective branding strategy leads to the increase of tourism demand and, eventually, economic growth, which is crucial for the tourism industry. Although this small-scale study is not sufficient to generalize results, the findings seem to show that in both cases a strong and evident identity uniqueness is lacking in the promotion of the locations. Moreover, the results of the study show that DMOs, despite using a greater variety of adjectives, do not communicate emotional values, which show that the locations do not have a clearly established brand communication and differentiation strategy.

Conclusion

The aim of the study illustrated in this paper was to understand to what extent the actors in a territorial ecosystem that contribute to the formation of a place's brand identity. In particular, the objective was to understand how the social process arises and how it develops, in order to favor a systemic and integrated tourist offer (destination). The study also aimed at understanding the communication process employed on the websites in order to promote the Destination Management Organization (DMO). To the best of our knowledge, it seems that there are no other studies that compare the experiences of Place Branding Identity and DMOs in Italy and Argentina, therefore this study can make a significant contribution to the literature by filling in this gap.

Two surveys were conducted in Italy and Argentina in order to understand to what extent actors (public and private) can interact in a territorial context. As other research has already shown, local actors manage, through collaborative processes, to interact and develop a social process, capable of fostering a aggregated tourism offer.

In Italy, an institutional and participatory process was initiated with local governments, which led to the establishment of the first Tourist District in the region, based on a sharing of values and identity. In Argentina, an entire community reappropriated tourism resources and was able to enhance the valorization of an entire territory. The establishment of a cooperative made it possible to renovate a Hotel and create a community capable of welcoming tourists who share the destination with residents. Numerous other attractions have been realized over the years, and the experience has been able to involve other areas and even the provincial administration, which has initiated a community program with other neighboring municipalities.

In both cases, the role of the territory emerges as a medium of social interaction, as the outcome of a process between social and spatial variables. In particular, the destination is the result of a co-operative relationship, that is, the space is the object and at the same time the active subject of a process of co-production between public and private actors who only through a collective vision can succeed in building a destination capable of offering a systemic and integrated tourism offer. Although the two countries have similar legislation that gives a decision-making role on tourism to the regions/provinces, two different results are found in the research from the perspective of the National Board. From the analysis of the interviews conducted and the study of the national websites that have the function of promo-marketing, it seems that in Argentina, through the implementation of a study and analysis activity, a project capable of promoting both international and domestic tourism has been initiated throughout the territory through the conception of seventeen tourist destinations that explore the entire country. Although the project sponsored by the Argentinian Ministry is still ongoing, this experience of only two years seems to demonstrate the importance of planning tools, organizational leadership through the participation of government agencies, the private and business sector, and the local community, marketing promotion and branding skills.

National destination planning and management still seems difficult in Italy. However, the role that these national promotion-marketing bodies have is important in supporting local destinations and the co-construction of Place Branding Identity.

Even through the interpretation on the symbolic and linguistic aspects, to the forms by which the territory has been represented and invested with meaning construction, the importance of collaboration between national entities and local realities emerges. The aspects of promo-marketing are for the components of Place Brand Identity and in particular for personality (symbolic and experiential attributes).

The research shows that the challenge for destinations seems to be the creation of a system network that, involving the public and private sectors, can take care of destination development. This may be the only way to implement a collaborative relationship and partnership with local, regional and national institutions for destination enhancement.

Nevertheless, there are some limitations to the paper, for instance, the language analysis concerns only the national case studies, and not the local ones. Moreover, a more in-depth investigation needs to be carried out. Therefore, further research could include the identification and comparison of other Italian and Argentinian experiences. The role of DMOs in the co-construction of Place branding seems relevant, and focus groups could be conducted with the presence of public and private actors to understand how opportunities for collaboration can be further strengthened.

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The rhetoric of development in rural areas: the branding places processes in the earthquake-affected Central Apennines²

Introduction: identifying categories of disaster context

The observations below are based on both personal and collective life and research experiences that began during the central Apennine post-earthquake period in the autumn of 2016, which affected 140 towns and resulted in the displacement of around 50,000 people.

In December 2016, a call for research prompted the Central Apennine post-earthquake survey project led by the research group Emidio di Treviri (Emidio di Treviri, 2018; 2021). Dozens of PhD students, academics and professionals answered the call and started a collective and independent research-action experience that explored and reported on some aspects of the earthquake aftermath (Olori, Menghi 2019). To carry out this research, we conducted in-depth and prolonged participant observation of the context (2016-ongoing), the result of both individual and collective trajectories, alongside other qualitative methodologies mainly concerning semiotic and discourse analysis. We consider it essential to draft these methodological notes in order to introduce the diachronic process, which begins with an examination of what happens during the emergency and ends by outlining the medium-term development horizons. We consider the immediate post-disaster moment as a laboratory of processes that will stretch into the long-recovery phase, drawing a common thread that the actors (inhabitants, visitors, institutions, stakeholders, etc.) consistently follow. The goal is to understand how a disaster may favour or discourage practices in the area under scrutiny, and to give an interpretation with regard to the relations between human groups and fragile areas. While researching the emergency, we recognized the 'time' domain as a useful arena for understanding what was happening. We identified acceleration as an obvious polarity, aided by extensive critical literature that agrees in describing and exploring the exacerbation of some socio-economic trends in the post-disaster period (Saitta, 2015). At the same time, we found that for many people (displaced persons and families in particular), the earthquake meant a 'suspension' of real life, characterized by waiting for the moment when they would regain possession of their lives, consumed in an empty time marked by minimal existential rhythms. A suspension that in many cases corresponded with the medicalisation of discomfort, sometimes justifiable but aligned (in perspective) with a 'governmental' view of the subject. We posited this as a second polarity mirroring acceleration. At the same time, the earthquake aftermath has brought about a rush of events: processes that were already underway were caused to accelerate by the actions implemented to respond to the crisis. This is the case for the pre-existing pattern of the depopulation of mountains in favour of cities and coastal areas, which the emergency management irreversibly hastened. This is also the case for other trends affecting the fragile area of the central Apennines, i.e. population aging and impoverishment. The impacts of recovery actions in material and financial support of the primary sector play no lesser role on this front. In a context already marked by a progressive divide between small family-run agro-pastoral businesses and medium-large companies (Sotte, 2016), post-emergency measures rapidly widen the gap between those who are able to tap into national and EU tender market opportunities, and those who lack the means and sometimes even the formal qualification to access them. Emergency management aggravates impoverishment,

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aging and depopulation in the areas under consideration. Alongside the duality between acceleration and halt, which will also be useful in understanding place-branding processes, the second time-related duality we identified is the one between precariousness and durability, which interprets the classic ambivalence of public emergency management choices. On the one hand, precariousness points to an uncomfortable but flexible condition, on the other hand, durability means comfort but also stillness and costly restoration. This is what happens with the physical reconstruction of damaged heritage, but also with the management of temporary solutions and earthquake victims' trajectories. The dilemma intensifies the longer precariousness lasts, manifesting itself as a now classic issue for Italian earthquake victims³.

Besides the time domain, we also identified the spatial domain, which encompasses the categories of proximity and distance. Many of the issues our research reveals stem from the centralised and bureaucratic management of recovery action, which, both at the regulatory level and in technical solutions, has shown little consideration for the peculiarities of places and situations. 'Local know-how' is bypassed (Pellizzoni, 2017) in favour of top-down planning. Spatial polarity is also key to understanding the relations between places and situations and more or less 'distant' entities such as regions, ministries, technical bodies and large corporations involved in supporting specific initiatives. Despite the variety of actors involved, what stands out is that in planning actions, the abstract or functional logic that prevailed is one that is more oriented to the needs and goals of the proponents rather than to those of the recipients or to the features of the implementation contexts. These categories of analysis will also be fundamental to the understanding of place-branding processes.

In addition to these two domains (space and time) which are useful to interpret the fractures generated by the earthquake in the Central Apennine area, there is the social organisation side. Whether they preferred to take direct action or to transfer resources that the beneficiaries could freely manage, the prevailing logic was that of the watering can principle: the uniform treatment of situations standardised by formal or easily formalised indicators. Thus, post-emergency actions based on the presumed equality of all citizens facing disaster have resulted in a repetition and amplification of existing inequalities. On this level, the research approached the concepts of vulnerability and resilience in a dynamic rather than static way, thus understood them not as inherent features of the subject per se (individual, groups, community), but as dynamic and relational factors of a process involving the pre-during and post-disaster period.

Besides being the basis of the scientific and political work of the research group⁴, we think that the space and time polarities that were identified can be considered as useful categories to analyse post-earthquake place-branding processes.

1. After the disaster: the frictionless development paradigm

The analysis of top-down emergency management has proved fundamental in understanding what is happening in the recovery stage, where the topic of development has merged with that of 'reconstruction'. The resource and responsibility distribution model in the economic recovery stage, in fact, has become similar to that of the emergency stage, where the issue of governance action being managed by a nationally appointed commission distanced local communities from self-government even further. The status of exception, as a prominent feature of emergency regulation, extended and permeated the long-term post-disaster period.

3 This imperishable nature is precisely the one that puts the problem at the community sovereignty level, and thus to the level of agency and to the subject, rather than to the socio-technical level of the so-called shelter phase, which has meanwhile largely improved and gained experience.

4 With this approach, the research team, albeit from a marginal position, contributed to the scientific and local discussion by using the results of field research to show the limits of the top-down model adopted during the emergency.

During disaster management, decisionism usually prevails (Bonaccorsi, 2009), and it sometimes results in a status of exception, a moment in which law self-suspends and is in force without being enforced, giving way to sovereign decision-making. However, what we gather from the post-earthquake experience is not the suspension of law per se, but its exceptional proliferation, under the sign of bureaucratisation and technicalisation instead of genuine political action. It is not the decision that conforms to the law, but the latter that blends in with the former. Of course, depoliticization is a political act in itself, since it conceals the element of choice underlying even the most technical issue. This dispersion of recovery measures into a thousand singularly rational and justifiable but altogether headless trickles (or rather headed by the 'need-oriented' logic that has gradually imposed itself everywhere in the governance of things and lives) combines post-emergency management with long-term recovery marked by government action for local development. This process of 'commissioning the future', which is the result of governmental contingency that spells long-term disaster, is reinforced by the concurrent destruction of the local subject. Power centralisation and social fragmentation (Barbera, Rees 2020), which have affected Italian society over the last 20 years and have been particularly fierce in fragile areas of the country, become unavoidable in the Central Apennine crater. Here, they have overlapped and intensified, with the weakening of local communities due to post-emergency displacement processes and the jungle of regulatory measures that invalidated attempts to re-assemble the social infrastructure. The local community also disappears from the great public and private hegemonic narratives, that concur in imagining the future of the earthquake-affected mountains: an example of this is the Merloni Foundation, which in its report *Save the Apps* imagines an Apennine animated by stakeholder categories (commuters, smart-workers, etc. categorised into «tribes») (Spacca, 2019). No less, the design of governance tools (starting with the extraordinary SNAI areas, launched specifically in the crater, up to the Nuovi Sentieri di Sviluppo (New Development Paths)) never achieves a real change of pace in the involvement of local stakeholders, moving more and more towards target-based policies.

This has favoured the creation of a kind of clean slate. An ethereal space where power balances and imbalances between centre and periphery, between capital and labour, between profit and environmental sustainability seem to disappear. The reality of fragile areas (in truth very complex and full of tensions, historical trends and rooted errors) is depicted as a blank sheet of paper. This leaves ample room to design large-scale projects, for those who are capable and have the resources to imagine (Appadurai, 2012): this opens up scenarios for pilot cases (embodied by the recent Piano Borghi), for target-based strategies proposed by star architect firms and industrial foundations, for public policies dedicated to social innovators, etc. Developing the narrative of the clean slate is the condition that makes these areas functional to the construction of futuristic scenarios, dense of interpretations and answers to problems coming from outside the mountain (Reolon, 2016). This is where narratives play a major role. If this is generally the case, it is even more so (because it is happening at an increased speed) in the Central Apennine crater, where the void to be filled is deeper, more evident, and the resources available are greater. It is precisely this greater wealth of suddenly available resources and development opportunities that gives an unprecedented acceleration to development policies. Now the commission structure (which works, as mentioned, with large room for derogation) is in charge not only of reconstruction but also of economic recovery, by appropriation of a package of resources and mechanisms which is far greater than any expectation (in the NRRP, the item 'Crater development' accounts for all the resources allocated to the entire Italian mountain). This massive mechanism, which suddenly begins to plan the development of those fragile areas through unprecedented capital injections, is easily implemented without friction (Tsing, 2005). Indeed, the humanscape on which the gear of commissioned development hooks itself, is one of capitalism and earthquake rubbles, among which the true subjects have practically disappeared. As previously stated, during the emergency, governmental mechanisms had rationed resources and processes, leading to sharp accelerations in some areas and extensive dilations of

the suspended time in others. The time of the capital accelerates and stalls on this topography of smooth and striated spaces (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980), moving among different but no less violent extraction practices.

On the one hand, we see the consolidation of classic, almost pre-capitalist extractivism dynamics: hoarding primary resources (forests, pastures, lands, springs), predatory practices on public funds (Klein, 2007), and hyperbolic infrastructuring (Simpson, 2014). On the other hand, the extractive capabilities of enrichment economy (Boltansky Esquerre, 2020) are strengthened: these processes are easily moulded around the emerging paradigm of the de-territorialised mountain as the theatrical setting for experiential activity. A mid-mountain (Varotto, 2020) now perceived, narrated and sold without its human-environment co-evolutionary dimension. In this framework, the creation of the metropolitan-mountain brand and the attempt to revive the appeal of earthquake-ridden areas through policies focused on tourism and the outdoors play a key role.

2. Gastro-politics of the emergency

Understanding the dynamics of the tourism industry requires considering the importance of place branding processes (Medway *et al.* 2021). These processes are also increasingly relevant in the socioeconomic development dynamics of inner and rural areas (Gulisova 2021) and contexts that are marked by conflict and disaster (Seraphin *et al.* 2018, Gotham, Irvin 2017). In the Central Italian territory, contrary to the general trend, tourism was identified as one of the few growing sectors in the pre-earthquake period (Cerquetti *et al.* 2019). As much as insiders' perceptions were still those of general disorganization, lack of infrastructure and attractiveness, between 2010 and 2015 the number of people employed in accommodation services had increased by 50 percent in the crater area, above the regional (48 percent) and national (43.5 percent) averages (Cutrini, Cerquetti 2020). This relative gap can be read with more breadth within a historical trajectory that sees the replacement of agro-sylvo-pastoral methods of use of the territory, with those of tourist use (Dematteis, Gioia 2020, Varotto 2020). Taking the Sibillini Mountains district (one of the areas of interest in the 2016 earthquake crater) into consideration, the loss of 19,566 residents in the 1951-1981 thirty-year period (equal to over -47.8 percent since the beginning of the time frame considered) counters a considerable increase in the building stock. In other words, faced with an average decrease in population of 30.5 percent per decade, there is an average increase in built-up area of 280.2 percent (a massive infrastructural build-up, with the construction of accommodation facilities, second homes, and ski slopes). This is evidence of a change in the use of housing: seasonalized, flexible and no longer residential, as well as no longer directly involved in activities with the ecological system.

Consistently, the new settlement pattern marked a consolidation of the loss of employees in the agricultural sector, which in the 1971-1981 decade reached 18.2%, with peaks especially among the youngest (while the elderly were engaged in the primary sector for 41.3% and in the tertiary sector for 46.4%, for the young these values were 9.4% and 55.1%, respectively). This historical trend, where we recognize a transformation in the use and enjoyment of the mountainous territory, forms the ideological basis of tourism branding of the territory. Through the exaltation of certain characteristic features, this process is understood by social actors as the most valid, if not the only, viable option in the field of possibilities.

To understand the way in which the process of branding is implemented in the earthquake-affected mountain territories, it is necessary to specify that there are some specific vectors invested with material resources and symbolic capital. These certainly include food, air quality, rurality and, more generally, the metonymic idea of the national imagery that, even before

the disaster, associated rural central Italy with features such as authenticity, genuineness and peasant spirit (Sabatini, 2020). It thus becomes possible to better understand what happened to those identity vectors during and after the socio-natural disaster affecting the territories in 2016.

As Saitta (2015) notes, the ways of intervening in disaster-affected contexts and relief for the damaged (ranging from the more institutional, «scientific charity» (Ibid., p. 203), to the more spontaneous forms) are deeply dependent on the prevailing ideology. One of the isotopies⁵ (Bertrand 2002) that stands out from an analysis of public discourse in the post-earthquake Central Apennines is that of «reconstruction not only physical, but social and economic».⁶ Due to the aforementioned growing trend in the tourism sector, “social and economic” reconstruction is primarily understood as the ability of territories to position themselves in the market of tourism flows. The symbolic capital of material resources plays a central role in affirming this syllogism. According to Dickie there is a close relationship between disasters and the socio-historical construction of imageries. The «semiotic overload» (Dickie, 2008, p. 21) that occurs in the aftermath of a disaster generates not only an empathic and compassionate movement, but also a series of «cognitive challenges» (Ibid.) related to the subversion of the social order caused by the disaster (De Martino, 1977). In the case of the Messina earthquake (1908) these cognitive challenges concerned the nation, which is «symbolized» and placed within «narrative scenarios» in which it appears as a contested concept, that is, at the same time as an «axiomatic common value» and «controversial weapon» (p. 43). We can put forward the hypothesis that, in the case of the crater in Central Italy, gastronomic cultures fulfil the function of pacifying subversions within a potentially conflicting imagery like that of living in an inland area in the post-disaster period. The idea of the presidium of earthquake victims in the difficulties of the emergency was accompanied by widespread resentment (Rodriguez-Pose 2018) and claim of «inequality in recognition» by institutions (Barca, Casavola, Lucatelli 2014). In the dramatic and critical post-earthquake scenario, gastronomic cultures are a symbol that resisting and continuing to inhabit the crater is a real possibility. Thus, it becomes possible to trace the direction of some of the dynamics related to the sphere of food and nutrition that have been existing in the crater since the first emergency. Some elements in particular are summoned within the discourse, such as a widely circulated slogan: «we will recover with vincisgrassi, ciauscolo and Varnelli». It is an example of a semi-symbolic construction that holds much broader socio-cultural significance than mere slogans (Pozzato 2001). Gastronomic cultures endure, and they consolidate processes of recognizing a common identity despite the devastating effects of the earthquake on the territory as a whole. People (as opposed to buildings destroyed by the earthquake) can (and in a sense, consequently, must) withstand the trauma suffered, materially symbolizing the resilience of gastronomic culture. The latter is attributed not only with the power to connect (economically and socially), but also with the power to act as a guarantor of the “tough bark” of the earthquake victims: «Not just symbols, but an explicit declaration of belonging and mutual recognition. Those who utter that motto know what they are talking about, what territory, what common history» (Giovagnoli 2018, p. 120).

In addition to processes of symbolization, gastronomic cultures are able to activate practices of socialization and sharing. In the post-earthquake emergency period, these practices represent a kind of “topicality” capable of «relating victims and spectators» (Boltanski 1993) and directing the broad voluntaristic afflatus in the aftermath of the disaster. In fact, the Italians’ solidarity takes

5 By isotopy we mean the recurrence of semic categories, whether they are thematic (or abstract), or figurative, along a syntagmatic chain that ensure its homogeneity to the enunciated discourse. Greimas, Courtés 2007, pp. 171-173; see also Bertrand 2002, pp. 27-34.

6 An online search was conducted via tags (reconstruction, housing, central Italy earthquake) of articles that came out between August 25, 2016 and November 30, 2021. We selected news published by six nationwide newspapers and two news agencies: La Repubblica, Corriere della Sera, Resto del Carlino, La Stampa, Il Fatto Quotidiano, Agi, Ansa, Huffington Post. The choice of audiovisual contributions, found online through the same tags, meets the same criterion of identifying isotopias.

the form of organizing a series of initiatives that fall under the heading of «solidarity amatriciana in the post-earthquake period», organized far beyond the borders of Amatrice throughout Italy. These benefit events provide a form of concrete action that can channel and agglutinate the enormous emotional energies mobilized in the aftermath of the disaster. Inside and outside the crater, proximity to earthquake victims combines civic engagement and gastronomic tourism. Several case studies show how food and gastronomic cultures constitute key elements in place-branding processes that occur in rural contexts (Lee *et al.* 2015, Blichfeldt, Halkier 2014). In our case, food constitutes a preferential channel for thinning the distance between the *here* of the media narrative and the *there* of the disaster, capable of coordinating collective commitment to the territory and the earthquake victims. The latter are released (temporarily) from the status of victims so they can rise to that of representatives of a tradition and, more generally, of the character of an entire territory.

In this emotional afflatus it becomes plausible to trace the reasons for the institutional intervention that identifies providing temporary infrastructures that guarantee the continuity of commercial activities (for essential services such as food, tobacco, etc; but especially for eno-gastronomic businesses) during the emergency as a priority action.

3. Material and symbolic architectures on the branded Apennines.

The construction of temporary commercial areas, mainly aimed at hit and run eno-gastronomic flows, takes off within a discursive environment, in which the solidaristic afflatus and the hopes that the emergency will turn into an opportunity (the so-called *building back better*, Esposito *et al.* 2017) are stifled by the slow bureaucratic mechanisms governing reconstruction. The widespread feeling is one of immobility and «suspended time» (Emidio di Treviri, 2018; Granata, De Lettera 2020): what is described as the liminal condition experienced by earthquake victims, which sees both the traumatic past and the horizon of the possible collapse on a stalled present. The first of the commercial areas, «Il Polo del Gusto», rises precisely in Amatrice and is supported by the *Un aiuto subito* campaign promoted by two of the leading media actors in the telling of the Amatrician drama, Corriere della Sera and La7. Temporary commercial areas necessarily operate «figurations of taste», modes of transposition and staging (Boutaud, 2011) that assume, in the case of Amatriciana and other typical products (such as Castelluccio lentils) the dual role of economic carriers and representatives (of certified quality) of the territory.

But the controversy over the actual temporariness of facilities that require urbanization works impacting the landscape and not having decommissioning plans emerges in another case, that of the «Deltaplano» commercial area in Castelluccio di Norcia, which opened in the fall of 2018, and where 11 restaurants are located.

The debate is squeezed between two factions: on the one hand the «parlour environmentalists», and on the other, a front that saw the leaders of the Umbria Region and the few remaining residents, mainly devoted to commercial activities, agree. Those who wanted to «defend» the Piana di Castelluccio (the largest karst plateau in Italy, included in the Natura 2000 Network and therefore affected by SPAs, Special Protection Areas, and SACs, Special Areas of Conservation) from «the ecomonster that will destroy it forever» were antagonistic to the territory and to those who, through commercial activities, were trying to restart after the earthquake (Federici, 2017).

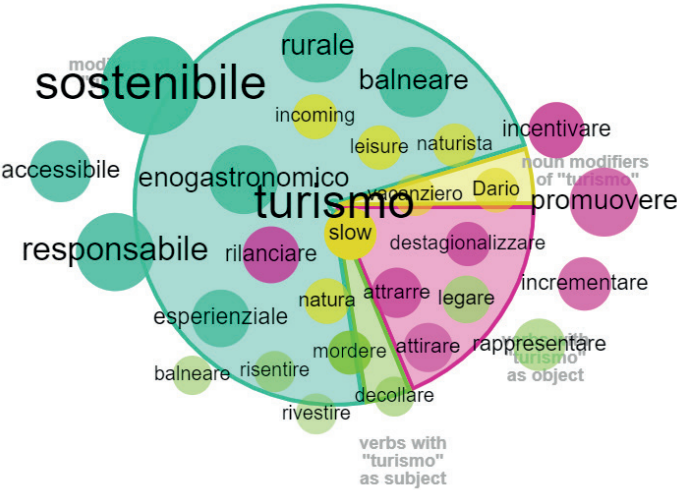
The fruition practices of the «Il Polo del Gusto», the Castelluccio «Deltaplano», and other commercial areas are (especially in the post-emergency period) inscribed within a set of socially and culturally defined meanings such as the ethical valorisation of leisure time, the goodness of typical product, and solidarity mobilization. An ethical valorisation of the tourist-gastronomic experience in the post-earthquake era is defined: doing something for the earthquake victims is also right because of what I receive in return (quality products, experience of healthy natural environment,

quality of relationship with locals). Commercial areas equip the competencies (knowhow and can-do) from which a range of possibilities become available to realize performance (Bertrand 2002). From the perspective of institutional communication in public discourse, the isotopy of «re-birth/restart/resumption» sees a unified and cohesive entity, the «community», moving toward «pre-earthquake» conditions. The «full house» of the weekend is one of the elements that, summoned in speeches, functions as a guarantee of the start of such a process: «Tourists are choosing our lands even outside the weekend and this is a very positive sign, especially for our merchants» (Ansa, 2020).

The planning of tourism infrastructure makes it possible to optimize the visitor experience and secure rents for tourism operators. The production of an axiology, which occurs through the euphorisation of the positive term of the basic oppositions on which discourses are based (Pezzi, 1991, Greimas, Fontanille, 1996), is produced through the uncritical assumption of the territorial benefits of tourism development. What is actually a socio-culturally oriented value system becomes, in this way, common sense. Analysis of public discourse highlights some basic semantic oppositions: full/empty; visible/invisible; revival/decline. The positive valorisation of one of the terms in the category gives absolute positivity to infrastructures that will allow the area to revive and promote itself. Through these interventions, the territory will be full of visitors once again, and therefore also inhabited, because of the attractivity of certain components (typical products, outdoors, «good people»). Thanks to these, the reasons for *fullness* find their own argumentation: it will have to be developed from certain models that guarantee a possibility of modern, equipped and functional fruition.

The *emptiness* that the powerful nature of the earthquake threatens to amplify sees its antidote in tourist accommodation. Through this semiotic mechanism, the full is euphorised and becomes one of the main axiologies of public discourse in the post-earthquake period: the choice between the absence of prospects and the implementation of the tourism development model is a fake choice, which sees no real alternatives. Thus, commercial areas constitute the necessary prerequisites for «rebirth/restart/resumption». The idea of nature is proposed as a resource that lies inert, unexpressed, waiting for someone who knows how (through certain skills) to enhance and sell it. This way, the necessitating logic of the tourist monoculture becomes one of the main forces at play in the field of emergency, able to influence the imagery of territories, and to motivate and legitimize the choices of emergency urbanism.

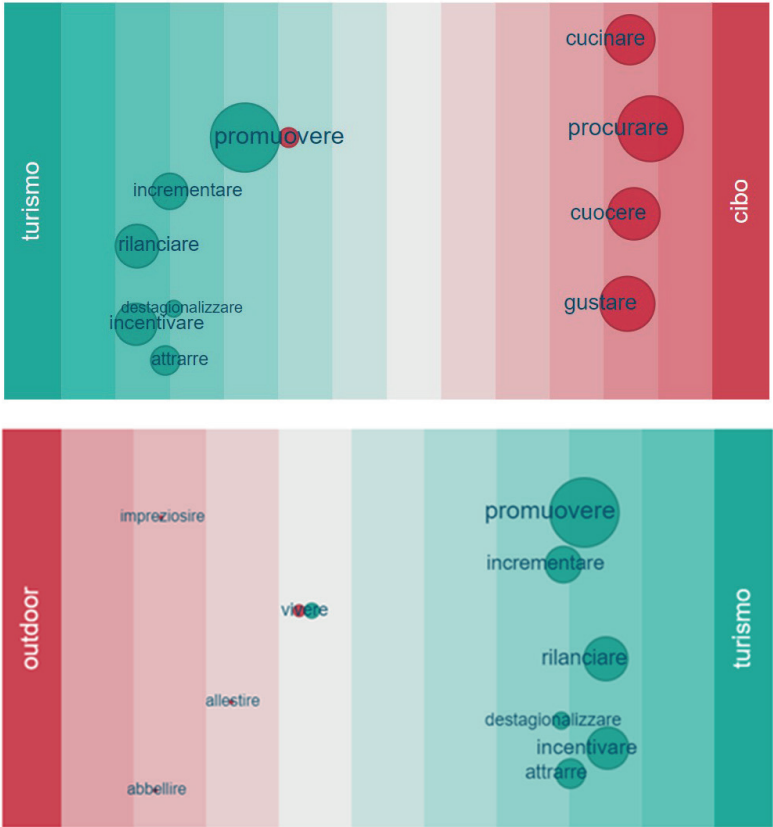
Fig. 1 - Words with the highest number of common occurrences with the word “tourism”. Translation of main occurrences: sustainable, rural, food and wine, experiential, nature, revitalize, promote, incentivize, deseasonalize, attract.



Source: original

The discourse analysis performed through Sketch Engine⁷ returns us to the intertextual dimension of this debate (texts from media, institutions, social networks, and interviews that constitute an Italian-language corpus) and, at the same time, to the mechanisms of common-sense construction, based on some particularly recurrent lexical usages. By entering the headword “tourism” in the Word Sketch function (through which we trace the words that record the highest number of occurrences with the chosen word), the words that emerge are “enogastronomic,” “experiential,” and “rural” along with those that become real trends in defining contemporary tourism in the crater area, such as “responsible” and “sustainable” (Fig. 1). The Word Sketch Difference search function, on the other hand, allows one to compare the resonance between two words and their respective occurrences. By comparing three words that, according to the reasoning so far, connote the semantic area of tourism (food, outdoors, tradition) we realize how they have common occurrences with the word “tourism” in correspondence with the same verbs: “revitalize,” “incentivize,” “attract,” “promote,” and “increase”. (Fig. 2)

Fig. 2 - As the words associated with the word tourism change, the verbs remain the same. Through Sketch Engine we obtain a visual rendering of the words through which the tourism isotopy is articulated in different discourses. Translation of the main occurrences, consistently present as the association of the three keywords (tourism, food, outdoor) changes: increase, promote, deseasonalize, attract, incentivize, revitalize.



Source: original

7 The research is based on the manual insertion within Sketch Engine of a corpus made up by the authors, consisting of newspaper articles, communiqués, and texts from major local and national Italian newspapers. The corpus also includes 30 interviews with key witnesses, collected during the field research periods. The period of relevance of the material is from September 2016 to May 2022.

By drawing a thread between a certain idea of the environment (good mountain air), traditions (typical products) and people (resilient mountain people), an axiology is produced in the public discourse, understood as a shared value system (Marrone, 2011) that will become the ideological basis of public and public-private intervention. This consists in a reassuring scenario both on the side of the inhabitants (for whom it is a matter of resuming work with tourism, in continuity with the pre-earthquake) and on the side of the outsiders (for whom gastronomic tourism allows them to put a form of mobilization in favour of the earthquake victims into practice). The axiology of tourism produces, within this framework, a pacifying and unifying imagery, and is articulated in some kinds of discourse that are prevalent in public debate. The conditions of possibility of such a discourse are rooted in the history of the recent development of the central Apennine area, but they see an acceleration as early as the post-earthquake emergency, which is consolidated in the development strategies that will design the future of the devastated mountain.

4. Toward a conclusion: deterritorialized mountains and non-inhabitant economies

In the year following the earthquake, about 2,000 of the tourist activities in the seismic crater were closed and the local area witnessed a 29% drop in incoming numbers. In addition to the damage sustained by the hotels, B&Bs and similar (that do not allow to structure an offer that goes beyond hit-and-run tourism), operators report a real and ongoing “reputational damage” of the area. The sharp decrease in flows is made evident by comparing Umbria’s data, which are clearly in decline, to those of Marche and Abruzzo, which are only stable because they are sustained by coastal resorts (Bank of Italy, 2017). Still referring to the Marche region, particularly to the territory of the Sibillini Park (which takes an exemplary portion of the area), it is important to point out that the agro-sylvo-pastoral sector is among the least affected. It was precisely the sector of «typical local productions» that was identified in a Park Report as being «in close relationship with tourist flows» and able, because of its «potential, being in close contact with the natural environment with which it has always coexisted, to restart more quickly and with less invasive structural interventions» (Sibillini Park, 2022).

Following the earthquake that struck Marche in 2016, the European Union made more than 400 million euros of resources available to the affected areas. The Marche ROP ERDF (European Regional Development Fund⁸) 2014-2020 can count on an additional 248 million, including 124 million in state co-financing, with the aim of «supporting the path of economic-social reconstruction» and «contributing to the return of socio-economic conditions prior to the earthquake».⁹ Axis 8, «Seismic and hydrogeological prevention, improvement of energy efficiency and support for the socio-economic recovery of areas affected by the earthquake», which is in addition to the 7 previously identified, sees the allocation of 24.3 million in the «culture-tourism» sector.¹⁰ This includes the «Ciclovía Mare-Monti» project, which, in the region’s intentions, is intended «to make the Marche a more sustainable place, to reduce harmful emissions, to implement slow tourism, which is the future of our economy, and to connect the inland areas». Controversy over the actual impact of this operation on the earthquake-affected areas escalated following the release of the promotional campaign *Marche: infinite beauty*, also funded by Axis 8. In the tight editing of the commercial, the most representative places (and landscape elements) of the Region are seen appearing in rapid succession: hills, agricultural landscapes, historic villages, the

8 The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) is one of the main financial instruments of the EU’s cohesion policy. It aims to help even out existing disparities between the different levels of development of European regions and to improve living standards in less-favored regions. Special attention is paid to regions with severe and permanent natural or demographic handicaps, such as the northernmost regions with very low population densities and island, cross-border and mountain regions.

9 <https://www.regione.marche.it/Entra-in-Regione/Fondi-Europei/FESR/Programma-Operativo-Por-FESR>

10 <https://www.regione.marche.it/Entra-in-Regione/Fondi-Europei/Sisma>

sea, the Sibillini mountains, typical products.¹¹ The actors present render the idea of a vacation model suitable for everyone, with great availability of outdoor spaces. Not a single sequence is shot indoors. The beauty of the outdoor scenery transfers to the beauty of the experience lived by the tourist. The outdoor experience is a narrative element that intervenes secondarily, we could say in the background of the Region's cultural attractions. In the case of *Marche: infinite Beauty*, we see instead a decisive shift where the beneficial properties of the outdoors and typical products are proposed as a distinctive, leading element of the entire campaign. The strategic shift fortunately aligns with the wave of attention received by inland areas during the pandemic, with the increasing urban demand for open spaces and environments (Bindi, 2021). The growing presence of proposals focused on wilderness and outdoor experiences, for that matter, benefits from a number of public funding proposals that are also directed at the «recovery» of the territory as a whole (as in the most recent cases of the PNRR and the Borghi Plan).

The emergence of cultural tourism in the crater area is, in an accelerated way, the local reflection of a systemic transition that, starting from the explicit rejection of mass circuits, is declined within paths aimed at new forms of intermediation in the contact of tourists with the territory and its inhabitants (Sedda 2011). Some aspects that were traditionally less considered in the proposal and the programming of itineraries, linked to the «authentic» character of territories, become instead the central stimulus for trips motivated by experiential desire. The search for «outdoor experience» and «authentic» is articulated through practices that, in the wake of the locals' daily lives, construct a doing-tourist inhabitant (Finocchi, 2013). If tourism practice was by definition something different and exceptional compared to everyday life, experientiality produces identity negotiation processes (Simonicca, 2016).

The integration of the «different elements that make up the identity of a place» (Ibid.) goes to substantiate the way a certain area presents itself in the market. MIBACT's *Strategic Tourism Plan 2017-2022* argues that an integrated enhancement of landscape, natural resources, cultural heritage and food and wine products can help boost the economy and strengthen emerging destinations such as parks and protected mountain and rural areas.¹² Several initiatives (promoted by Airbnb in collaboration with ANCI) moved, and still are moving, in this perspective, such as Cammini d'Italia (2016), Anno dei Borghi (2017), Cibo Italiano (2018), and the Borghi Italiani (Italian Villages) plan. These same guidelines are taken up within a research project that saw the four Marche region's universities collaborate in the elaboration of a tool directed to policy makers titled *11 Paths of Development for the Central Apennines* (Cerquetti et al. 2019, pp. 217-248), with a strong neo-liberal vocation (Macchiavelli, Olori, 2019). Despite the turn-over of regional and commissarial governance, the strategies implemented by public and public-private actors insist on the socio-economic planning of the crater starting from the metro-mountain brand.

The pacifying imagery of «restarting through tourism» is so well established in the most recent historical trajectory that it is not associated with a partisan or transient strategy. Through major symbolic and material investments, it appears as the most plausible option in the field, which is accelerated in the post-earthquake period. Together with particular socio-historical conjunctures, it experiences a real explosion with the unprecedented injection of public capital of the PNRR-Complementary Earthquake¹³, anticipated by the Interinstitutional Development Contracts¹⁴. In both cases, a considerable percentage of resources emerges for experience-focused development projects. According to some estimates, projects allocated to infrastructure for outdoor activities reaches 43% of the total funds allocated to the restart of earthquake areas (Bonardo, 2022). Despite criticism, skepticism and opposition¹⁵, the machinery of public and public-private

11 <https://tinyurl.com/TurismoMarcheSpot>

12 <https://www.ministeroturismo.gov.it/il-piano-strategico-del-turismo/>

13 <https://sisma2016.gov.it/pnrr-area-sisma-2009-2016/>

14 <https://sisma2016.gov.it/tag/contratto-istituzionale-sviluppo/>

15 See in particular the case of the «Disneyland of the Apennines» in Sarnano (Legambiente, 2022); the lawsuit against the Lazio region for the hotel in the Accumoli Pantani (salviaioipantani.blogspot.com); the case of Rubbiano (M. Di Vito - ilmanifesto 30.12.2021), etc.

vate governance chooses to clearly invest in a strategy based on non-inhabitant economies. In fact, the economies of the outdoors, experience, carbon credit markets, etc. become immediately compatible with the absence of inhabitant-communities as much as hyperbolic infrastructuring or resource hoarding, i.e., the classic ways in which capital puts extreme value on complex crisis situations. None of these economies, from flow tourism to carbon-counting, in fact, have a need to inhabit, coexist with, or regenerate ecological resources: the relationship with nature is fundamentally extractive. This shift enshrines the ultimate reversal of the human-environment relationship as it had historically been given in fragile territories, a re-invention of the anthropogenic presence in the middle mountains. In a sense, the concept of oikonomia is overturned, understood no longer in the Illichian sense of the art of dwelling, that is, of «well building the shelter that provides the home», but in the Agambenian sense of the modern triumph of «pure governmental activity that aims at nothing but its own reproduction».

Ultimately, we believe it is possible to say that development strategies based on the branding of mountain territories revolving around the outdoor/tourism proposal implicitly convey an economic model that relinquishes the relationship with natural resources. To accompany this ultimate disconnect, this model commits public and public-private resources, and mobilizes public discourse. This device has assumed mammoth proportions, amplified quantitatively by the post-disaster and the extraordinary mobilization of resources due to the both general (PNRR) and particular (reconstruction, CIS, PNRR-Complementary etc.) conjunctures, and qualitatively by the commissarial architecture of governance, which bypassed participatory processes and deprived local bodies of significant shares of self-governance.

When the device grafted onto the territories, it encountered a local subject dispersed by emergency management, uneven in post-disaster trajectories and interests. This produced very slight friction dynamics (Tsing, 2005), and sudden major alignments to the Central Apennine branding place strategy, in the name of an economy that promised a win-win strategy, without reckoning with the ecological issue.

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Family storytelling and local development²

Introduction

It has been evident for many years now that the economic and social development of urban areas, whether small or large, has been closely linked to the presence of the tourist phenomenon diffusive. Indeed, there is an intense international competition.

For example, more than thirty years ago, the Fordist Italian cities in crisis, in order to recover, had identified in the tourist phenomenon the sector in which to invest and, therefore, started processes of urban regeneration that also included the conversion, reorganization and reuse of abandoned urban areas, along former industrial sites (a known case is the one of Genoa; Gazzola, 2005).

In this context, therefore, the awareness that competition is now played at a *transmedia* and global level (Jenkins, 2007), also throughout the design of projects that, will offer services and solutions that add value to the quality of local life (Nuvolati, 1998) and the promise of the "tourist experience" (Augé, 1999).

The need to intervene with a public governance is even more stringent now specially in cases where urban areas have lost relevance, due to an economic and social structure that has not been able to adapt promptly to the changes experienced by society (Harvey, 2010).

In these cases, it has been experienced the issue of the public governance reorganization that aims to recover centrality and/or visibility to the place, in the increasingly widespread belief that it is useful to implement place branding processes, also useful for strengthening the sense of belonging and territorial identity of people (Rizzi *et al.*, 2018).

In this context, place destinations that intend to compete on the tourist market, national and international, understood that at the traditional actions must necessarily add those aimed to the construction of what is usually called *place branding*. Indeed, they must activate a public governance mechanism capable of bringing out the emotional and experiential qualities of places, which can be summarized in a system of values with a well-identifiable meaning (ie brand identity).

In this paper, we will work with a "tool" that we consider unique for building the *brand image of the place*, which is called a "*family storytelling*".

Initially, we intend to highlight the relevance that "family storytelling" plays, or could play, in the formation of place branding and then consequently how worked in the local development of the destinations through the so-called "roots tourism".

We will take in consideration a specific study case of this particular type of tourist demand that regards an Italian-Americans family who travel to the places of its family origins.

1. Narration and Storytelling

Storytelling is an activity that has always been used in the history of the human being in order to attribute meanings, beyond the shared norms, everything happened around him and to the living experiences; it represents a way that the human being possesses to present himself to the world, telling the happening of its own story.

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In the modern era Narrative had found its moment of crisis, however, for some year now it has been taken more spaces and relevance among social science scholars: collecting stories, studying and interpreting them has become a frequent way to study some aspects of society, to attribute and communicate concepts and contents, to produce memory, to reflect on the processes of social change.

According to some scholars, we are the result of the stories we have heard and experienced (Taylor, 1996), we express thoughts orientations that are connected with the narrative of events meaning and what actually surround us (Kaneclin, Scaratti, 1998). Throughout the storytelling we dispose, and govern what we know about the world (Bruner, 1991).

In fact, the act of narrating is generally considered as the most used way by people to describe life experiences, which concern the past and present of their family, friends, known places and facts. As well as to renew the memory of significant moments in our lives and the world around us, thus also helping us to become aware of how we see ourselves and others. The narrative maintains and sends real knowledge that affects the behave of human beings and, therefore, draws a relevant means of transferring knowledge and acquiring it in those who receive it.

For these qualities, "narration" is again a conceptual and methodological reference *tool* for understanding social action. Wilhelm Schapp (1953) considered people as radiating centers of different stories in which they were daily engaged, and which continually changed their way to be and behave.

Alfred Schütz (1974) also argued that studying and knowing people's actual experiences with a view to understanding social action (phenomenological approach), considering the narration, made by persons with life experiences, a skilled and trusted source of reliability.

In any case, as we have already written above, the value of storytelling in the study of social transformations is growing that the scholar starts to talk about a narrative breakthrough in the social sciences (Kohler Riessman, 2001; 2008). Especially as a tool for scientific investigation (mainly in qualitative research) that enhances the point of view of those who, enunciating clippings of their history and everyday life, simultaneously transfer information to subjects involved in a given space-time context (Poggio, 2004).

We follow then the definition that a "narrative" is such when the reporter connects events in a consequent succession for subsequent stories to influence the meaning as the speaker wants to communicate to those who will listen to it (Atkinson, 1998). There are several examples of thematic areas of application and analysis in which the narration is used by the scholar and among them we concentrate on the emigration studies, of the memory and identity stories.

The research context to which we refer here is the one where the scholar acquires the narration directly from the narrator. In this way, therefore, it will assume primary qualitative information collected by itself, which it will elaborate and analyze for its own research purposes.

When, on the other hand, the narratives used by the scholar are those reported or made available by other people, the narration assumes the character of "secondary information" and in this context, it is relevant to know the narrative source and the purpose for which the narrative was produced/used.

This is a methodologically and reflection-relevant aspect on narrative content, as the narrative process involves not only a narrator, but also the presence of different ways of narration. Precisely this last aspect recalls the technique of *storytelling*, which is a way of constructing or communicating stories that in recent years has found relevant space, and that, in common language, and in certain circumstances, we mistakenly tend to use as a 'narration' synonym.

In fact, the term storytelling must be understood as a "persuasive way" of telling a narrative, that is, a communication technique that targets the emotional sphere of the listener, stimulating the imagination of the recipient sometimes also using non-real and fantasy stories. Therefore, while storytelling is an art that uses storytelling to persuade, push, motivate, someone to perform an action, narration on the other hand, is a way through people tell how they see themselves in relation to the world they live in being the writer of the narrative.

However, in this work we evidence that the narration may have the same role of storytelling. As a matter of fact, the person who is directly narrating its story is nevertheless an interpretation of itself and even it is narrated by seeking objectivity and balance, the result obtained, perhaps unconsciously, will be to direct the recipients of the story towards their own way of seeing and interpreting the world we live.

Eventually, telling the own story life personally to others can represent the art of storytelling, that is, when those who tell a story (consciously or unconsciously) still aims to recognize their behaviors, their actions, the relationship with their loved ones, their beliefs and their experience, even their way of seeing reality. This is, for example, the case of the emigrant that when tells his own life story to his family and friends tends to highlight the virtues of the place of origin (food and wine and cultural practices, folk traditions and religious rites, environment and natural qualities, etc.). In this way it keeps the memory alive and stimulates the need for knowledge, even among those who, in the family, have never personally lived or visited the narrated place of origin: this is the case of what we call *family storytelling* and on which our paper work wants to propose an attentive reflection.

2. Family storytelling

Considering what it has been analyzed above, we would like to confirm that with the expression *family storytelling* we mean the fact that *narration* and art of *storytelling* together represent not only a methodological tool that can be used to understand the society in which we live, but also a valid technique to support the economic and social growth of the territories, which can be declined in different ways, and in particular in the development of *place branding* and also on the local tourism.

Indeed, it has been known for a long time now that the general point of view from which we start is that the economic and social development of places and territories, small or large, is closely linked to the presence and level diffusion of the tourist phenomenon diffusive. Therefore, for public governance (Romita, Perri, De Ruggiero, 2020) becomes extremely important to create and build situations that enables the territory capable of encouraging adequate tourist flows (Semi, 2015).

In this regard, we can evidence that while in the past the tourist competition was played out, almost exclusively, on landscape qualities and above all on the services and products available in the touristic destinations or aspired to be touristic, today this is no longer enough. In fact, in contemporary society the greater or lesser tourist performance will depend, also and above all, on the real qualities of the places, that is, on the ability to express emotional values, to communicate them and to satisfy them with honesty and responsibility. This means that for a local place development must be added the necessary processes of cooperation and change that lead to generating a plan for the resources revaluation present in the territory.

In this context, an important role is played by the governance not only by telling a story specially how to communicate the places. It is quite evident that narratives and storytelling can have a significant role in the processes of local communities growth, including tourism!

In this work, we intend to assert that *family storytelling*, with exclusive reference to the one generated by Italian communities emigrants residing abroad or in other places of the Italian country, plays a decidedly interesting role. In fact, it is known that the members of these communities have been very active in the continuous storytelling of their memories such as the constant exaltation of the places of origin (Romita, 2015).

In this way they produce storytelling that generously contributes to stimulating in others, family and non-family members, the interest in the knowledge (even direct) of their roots places. The potential for local development attributable to this situation has also been intuited by the Italian

government which, for some years now, has been promoting actions aimed at facilitating the so-called "roots tourism" (Perri, 2017; Romita, 2017;) (among other things, a specific action has been dedicated to this theme within the so-called National Recovery and Resilience Plan - PNRR). The social and cultural mechanism by which family storytelling produces positive effects for local development and for the strengthening of personal identity confirms what we have previously briefly highlighted in the written above.

Transferring stories about one's life to others, through narratives, has a dual function: "transmitting individual and collective experiences and memories" and "connecting past, present and future" (Poggio, 2004, p. 19).

Their role is, therefore, not only to transmit the experience, but also to make people reflecting on themselves, as unique subjects, considering that it is also through narratives that the individual builds his own identity and "learns to recognize the world and to name it, elaborating representations of others and of himself" (Poggio, 2004, p. 11). The mental representations of the emigrant on the country of origin are manifold, and the nostalgic image (Paerregaard, 1997) of a "...place immune from the negative influences of modern society" (Arace, Occelli, 2007, p.188) represents of some relevant importance.

These stories often do not stop only at the events that happened directly to those who tell them, but they are feed on elements that reduce space for time, indeed narrating what is remembered of the stories heard by parents and grandparents, thus creating a bond between generations, a glue that unites the family network.

Telling about the own life to children, grandchildren and/or great-grandchildren creates a deep bond with them, as in addition to presenting themselves and own life experiences, sharing with others everything that has significantly marked one's life, and is done by presenting it through procedures typical of the culture to which they belong (Poggio, 2004). It should be remembered that in this way a bond is also created with places, with people, with material (Romita, 1999) and intangible goods protagonists of the stories.

This type of narrative mainly concerns autobiographical memory (Rubin, 1986; Goodman, Melinder, 2007), which has, in fact, the function of creating and maintaining a social and emotional bond with people and places of the past. This leads us to think that there is some relationship between "reminiscing" (Fivush, Vasudeva, 2002; Reese, 2002) and attachment to the place of origin, with the people who live there, with the immaterial and material resources, constituting the latter "a concrete and palpable testimony of the personal and family past" (Leonini, 1991, p. 53).

These stories regard an interpretative process, a construction that relates events by attributing meaning to it; the same emigrant tells himself stories by choosing the elements and aspects he wants to highlight and leaving others out, based on what he wants to communicate. If the attachment to the place of origin is "very strong", the stories will have elements and aspects that will highlight the place, the people who live there, the events, the traditions, leaving out, or overshadowing the negative experiences and unpleasant memories doesn't want to face it. The emigrants will choose what and how to narrate, transferring not only the emotions but also the representations has of themselves and of the others.

3. Working hypothesis and methodological framework

In other words, this work considers *family storytelling* a decisive *tool* for maintaining the specific cultural characteristics of the places of origin and, consequently, a relevant factor in the local development processes of these places. The object of the research is, however, the path of social construction of personal identity.

The main theoretical area of reference is partially the one indicated so far above. Actually, it has been the one that has stimulated further research activities that questioned the effects had, and/or that they had, the narratives of the emigrant (family storytelling) on their families, as well as on the identity and cultural level, also in the process of pushing towards direct contact with their country of origin. However, the process that led to the formulation of working hypotheses and the consequent field activity, is the result of a path that has provided for further conceptual insights.

In other words, it was taken into account that, in literature (Perri, 2020), it is highlighted that, on the basis of family stories, descendants conceive an "idyllic" image of the family's place of origin, and also that stories, tell of places under a special narrative, mythologize them, inserting them into the topography of the imaginary (Albertazzi, 2006, p. 17). This mental representation is therefore indicated as a possible factor that pushes the emigrant to visit the places related to narratives and the family past, thus reviving the weakened relationship over the years with the social and cultural world of origin, with a strong motivation for travelling, and with a predominantly tourist approach that (Cohen, 1974; Dall'Ara, 1995), however, does not go towards the only sightseeing.

In addition, of what analyzed until now, we emphasize another important aspect of the family narrative, which consists of the transmission of daily gestures and traditions of the places of origin. In fact, emigrants in their current daily lives tend to maintain behaviors typical of their own tradition (for example, culinary and linguistic models), to mitigate "nostalgia" and thus maintain links with the land of origin (Perri, 2020). These types of "narratives" are also handed down from generation to generation, undergoing, of course, few changes, as they are contaminated with the culture of the country that hosts them, and, in any case, tend to disperse over time (Perri, 2019). The preparation of typical dishes in a given period, just as it happens in the country of origin, is a concrete example of how you can tell the territories with their traditions, customs and traditions, to your children, grandchildren and/or great-grandchildren.

Finally, it was observed (Perri, 2020) that the family storytelling that is generated within the cultural associations of emigrants, represents a social and cultural space of growth and comparison for families, and at the same time the strengthening of their original individual and collective identity, through the comparison of the different elements that make up the story about the places of origin (lifestyles, experiences, relationships with relatives and family friends, traditions, traditional cuisine, etc.).

Finally, it has been considered that the current condition of society, what we mainly call post-modern, even if it is not possible to assign a unique meaning to the latter term (De Masi, 1985), profoundly affects the organization of a personal identity model. Bauman (2003) emphasizes this concept reasoning on the "identity" concept, believing that the uncertainty and indeterminacy that characterize today's society are reflected in the construction of people's identity and their relationship with the collective.

Consequently, the general hypothesis arose from this study and that underlies this work, the "family storytelling", represents a powerful basic tool for conveying and strengthening the personal identity of the emigrant, and post-modern society enhances its effects.

We also add that, in literature (Lawton, Windley, Byerts, 1982), is highlighted the presence of a relationship between strong affective bonds and people's life cycle, that is, the fact that those are determined with the places "lived" in childhood and/or adolescence, while on the other hand, are much less "stronger" of the bonds that are determined from places "lived" in adulthood.

Moreover, and as a corollary of the current presentation, the narratives shared with the family, since they are transformed into family stories, bring closer to the knowledge of one's family tree to the most significant experienced moments, traumas, joys, places, etc. (Demetrio, 1996). Each member of the family participates in the social construction of their origins by telling each other (Bruner, 1991), linking the past with the present, a journey from generation to generation of the family memory, which often reaches the (re) discovery and enhancement of its roots.

These further assertions support the second working hypothesis we thought of, which consists in believing that, depending on whether you emigrated from the first or second and third generation, "family storytelling" produces different effects both in "emotional" and "motivational" terms towards effective knowledge of the place of origin (Romita, Perri, 2009).

The hypotheses advanced have been subject to control through field research activities that have adopted a qualitative / interpretative methodological approach, or through "biographical interviews", that is, with a low degree of structuring, based essentially on the narration of the life story of the subjects interviewed (D'Ignazi, 2013), aimed at bringing out the different dimensions of life (cognitive, affective, value).

More precisely, the field activities started in 2012, in this phase application form, minimally structured, have been handed to Italian-Americans residing in New York, who could boast a common characteristic identified prior to the interview, in the returning, albeit occasional, to the family's places of origin more like "tourists" side (by behavior and expectations).

More specifically, the interviews were carried out in three months directly in the field with the support of the "The Italian Cultural Foundation at *Casa Belvedere*" Foundation in New York (which also provided the address book, identified according to the criteria indicated by the research group). As result, 28 interviews were conducted, 27 in Italian and one in English. Of the 28 interviews carried out, 16 concern first-generation Italian-Americans (mainly women over 70 years old) and 12 concern second-generation Italian-Americans (equally divided by gender and with a higher age between 40 and 50 years old).

The narration by the interviewees, residing abroad, was organized with the aim of studying the way of life and perceiving the relationship with the community of the Italian-American citizens place of origin (first and second generation). The story should still have concerned the following: the reasons for emigration, their life in the USA, relations with the Italian community of origin, changes and life prospects, as well as some basic information about the interviewee and his family.

Particular attention was paid to the choice of the interview place. In fact, choosing the home of the interviewee, it was possible to put him at ease, and in this way the interviewer was able to control it and guide its completion through deepen questions for further study.

In addition to the above, part of the research has been carried out in the form of "participating observation", that consisting in sharing relevant parts of everyday life with some families of Italian-New York emigrants of first and second generation. The experience has been done from December 2012 to March 2013, consisted in living with them inside their homes and participating in each of their events. Every moment has been registered in notes, in a diary along a photographic reportage.

4. Results

The research activities have widely confirmed the conceptual framework about the usefulness of storytelling in the construction of personal identity and places such as the methodological value of the use of narration. This finding also applies to the researcher mentioned at the start of this article,

which explore different aspects of social action, accumulate memory, and analyze processes of social change

We also strongly think that the proposed theme of *family storytelling*, an expression used to indicate the narration of the life of the emigrant life, has been proven suitable as an effective communication tool for telling places and life stories throughout the construction of personal identity.

The results of the research have shown as the effectiveness of family storytelling depends precisely on the fact that when the emigrant telling the story himself initiates a "convincing" communication process, that reflects on the transfer and maintenance of his identity and therefore of the entire family, meantime stimulating the need of second and third generation family members to know more about the places of their origins.

The results of the research have shown as the effectiveness of the storytelling family depends precisely on the fact that when the emigrant himself tells the history, he initiates a process of "convincing" communication, who reflects on the transfer and preservation of his identity and thus of the whole family, stimulate the need for second- and third-generation people to learn more about their origins.

In fact, in the majority of the cases studied, interviewees who tell their stories tend to proudly manifest their Italian origins.

The associations they join, settled in the places of their actual residence, include people of Italian origin. Sometimes they are organized based on the same city of birth, and representing the nucleus around which they tell their life, their biography, thus taking shape and/or strengthening their identity. In fact, their strong identity is presented at The Christmas dinner where all the traditional dishes which originate from their Italian places are cooked and served, the pastries are the strongest representation.

The dinner itself is also a very long-awaited moment by the sons (and the children of the children), the same ones who then continue the traditions inherited by their parents, albeit with some concession to marginal curvatures determined by the cultural influence of the place where they were born and live. Even the language spoken daily in the family sometimes sees the Italian language as the protagonist, but more often you can hear the dialect of the place of origin, which over time tends to take on the connotations of a new slang.

Hence, a world in the world, made of nostalgia and pride, in continuous defense of their origins, even when this has created difficult living conditions forced the Italians to emigrate. In fact, the told pieces of life story such as the observed facts during the researches, showing the existence of a cultural bubble of origins, handed down from generation to generation, and which has continuously nurtured over the years through family narration.

Accordingly, of what analyzed, there is a substantial confirmation of the general hypothesis advanced, that "family storytelling" represents an important basic tool for the purpose of conveying and strengthening the original personal identity of the emigrant.

In this regard, it should be pointed out that "oikophobia" often manifests as a silent, creeping and omnipresent contempt for everything that represents its identity and history. The result of negative stereotypes generated by the counter narrative on migrants abroad and on lifestyles Italians also in the foreign filmography: Italians are all mafia, pasta and pizza, mum employees, seducers, etc...

This feeling is particularly strong among first-generation immigrants and in the first stage of integration into the cultural and social contexts of immigration.

However, the research has also led to relevant results regarding the formation of personal identity. In particular, the family narratives produced by Italian emigrants take an important role for the construction of the places identity and towards local development, whose effects are different depending by which type of emigrants has been told, first or second and third generation. The different effects can be summarized both in "emotional" and "motivational" terms towards effective knowledge of the place of origin.

Starting from the first-generation emigrants, family storytelling helps to build one's identity and communicate it to others, to remember places, people, situations, events that arouse that nostalgic feeling that will partly be filled by visiting the country of origin: emotions, flavors and scents that imprinted in the memory are a trace of a past that they try to find and retrace it. In the case of this type of narration, the value that is reflected in the places identity and the local development (i.e. the community of origin) is emotional, and the identity of the place is strengthened

as it is more directly associated with the construction of the narrator's personal identity. The narrator will continue to personally take care of social relations with the community of origin. Those results are clearly evident from the information acquired in our field research, through interviews carried out on Italian-Americans, on first-generation emigrants for whom, residing in places very distant from those of origin, the "regular" attendance of native places is problematic. However, thanks to new technologies, that allow visual communication in real time and at almost no costs (Skype, Whatsapp, etc.), emigrants can relate with friends and relatives who live in the city of origin continuously, in some cases daily.

Other ways to stay close to their community are invitations to weddings and sacred religious rites, participating in events dedicated to the Holy Patron City.

There has been also the economic remittances sent to the places of origin made in various capacities, some of them intended for the maintenance of the homes in which they born and lived, very often inherited, or built from scratch with the idea of the definitive return which, however, only happens in very rare cases. It has also been inferred that the return in a tourist key, mainly done during holidays or summer periods, generates economic flows that take on interesting aspects especially when the destination communities are small and / or located in inland areas.

Instead, in regards of the second and third generation emigrants, the family storytelling aims to making the family history known, but also represents the tool to push towards the knowledge and attendance of places of origins. In fact, in this case has been observed that the family storytelling has contributed to build in these types of emigrants an "idyllic" image of the place of origin, thus arousing further curiosity about these territories. This image pushes them to visit and get to know personally the places left years earlier by their family members to live directly those experiences, emotions and sensations, which they have heard of and transmitted through these stories.

As it has been pointed out, every time they return to those places, even if the appearance of the communities previously visited has undergone objective transformations, the perception will always be that of a social, physical and cultural space of which parents and/or grandparents have dreamed and talked.

Conclusion

Accordingly, the outcomes of the presented research, shows that "family storytelling" produced by people of Italian origin, emigrant, relatives of emigrants in their family environment, has taken on a relevant meaning.

The subjective representations of one's own history and places of origin told through "family storytelling", nourish the positive memory of people and, more generally, of a whole series of emotional contents pertaining to the place of origin of the narrator. Therefore, they appear a valid tool, in order to deepen the study of personal identity and also for use in local development and site marking processes.

In fact, the usefulness of this type of narration of stories, facts and places lies in the fact that the narration is carried out by bearers of strong family values, reliable witnesses, without external mediators and essentially oriented towards its reflection in the family sphere. When the stories concern the phase of the first socialization of the migrant at the place of origin, they are "soaked" with the identity of the place and the attachment of the place (Perri, 2021).

Moreover, these accounts, in addition to maintaining and reinforcing the sense of belonging to the migrant and his family to the social context of his roots, help also to stimulate the need for knowledge of other family members who are born and have lived in other territories.

Children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, from generation to generation, continue to proudly keep traditions and cultural events alive over time, passing them on to the next generation.

The return to the places of origin of the family for some emigrants is a mere aspiration because the presence of objective difficulties.

However, for the first, second and third generation the journey of the roots represents a reality especially because motivated by nostalgia or knowledge of places have been told through storytelling or already visited.

Obviously, that the return of the emigrants or their descendants represents a significant opportunity for the local development. This opportunity regards the growing of the identity collective of the place, but more over in terms of economic growth and social capital.

Finally, this type of travel done as tourists, is not conflictual and actually aims at a need for knowledge and would involve an important potential catchment area.

According to estimates from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, these tourists represent over 60 million Italian descendants.

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Place Branding in the Gastro-populist Age. Navigating through Giorgia Meloni's and Matteo Salvini's exploitation of the symbolic nature of food²

Introduction

The role of gastronomy in the establishment of collective identities and communities has been a prolific research focus for researchers approaching the topic from many different theoretical perspectives. Thanks to works like Mennell's (1996) history of English and French food consumption habits spanning from the Middle Ages to the present, or to Simmel's (1997) sociological analysis of food consumption habits and their impact on popular customs, gastronomy has been kept in high regard as an insightful unit of research for social scientists. Place branding scholars are no different, and the study of gastronomic place branding contributed substantially to better understand the processes shaping place-brands. Still, place branding scholars tend to focus on how stakeholders in local or national communities exploit gastronomy to successfully establish place-brands.

This article shows how two right-wing populist leaders (Matteo Salvini and Giorgia Meloni) exploit the local gastronomies of Italy to fuel their populist narrative of the people as a monolithic community. My main contention is that this phenomenon results in a politicisation of gastronomy, as these leaders present food as a symbol connected to conservative, right-wing political values. Arguably, given the reach and fame of these politicians, their usage of food for campaigning influence the public perception of the relation between gastronomy and identity. The article is structured as follows. First, I introduce the key elements underpinning the empirical study. Specifically, I explain the relation between food, politics and place branding processes. Second, I describe the long-standing relationship between gastronomy and political communication. Most importantly, I focus on the studies showing how nationalist and populist actors have been using national and local gastronomy to fuel narratives of their constituencies as monolithic communities. Third, I outline the key elements useful to better understand the context in which the two Italian populist leaders Giorgia Meloni and Matteo Salvini operate.

However, a premise on the reasons underpinning this unintuitive connection between a case study focused on political campaigning and gastronomic place branding is necessary. The individuation of the semantic elements composing the methodological framework and framing the analysis of this article is grounded in the literature on gastronomic place branding discussed in the first section. Nonetheless, the empirical analysis focuses on the visual self-presentation of two Italian populist leaders on their official Instagram profiles as politicians who value Italian gastronomic products for their socio-economic capital. For what concerns the focus on visual messages, it has been already shown that images and their analysis are a proficient approach to disentangle and better understand complex social phenomena (Perez, Lombardi, 2020). Another field sharing the same interest for images is that of visual diplomacy (Manor, 2022). Moreover, the interdisciplinarity of this article has much in common with visual diplomacy studies (for example Constantinou, 2018).

It is important to clarify that the individuation of this empirical focus was based on two reasons. The first is that place branding and campaigning tend to share many thematic and strategic elements when it comes to their usage of gastronomy in communication. Most importantly, this article shows how analysed leaders use gastronomy to build communities, just as successful

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models of gastronomic place-brands do. The second reason is grounded in all the case-studies exposed in the first section. Synthetically, they all stress the variety of external, multi-levelled factors that participate in shaping a place-brand. Arguably, the exploitation of local gastronomic products as performed by party leaders Giorgia Meloni and Matteo Salvini crucially influences the symbolic meanings attributed to food products in Italy. The public personae of high-visibility politicians like Meloni and Salvini often overlap with those of celebrities, and the archetype of the celebrity politician developed by Street's (2004) is a well-established trope in the Italian political landscape (Alomes, Mascitelli, 2012; Mazzoni, Ciaglia, 2014; Wood *et al.*, 2016). Additionally, Simon Anholt's (2007) influential theory of competitive identity considers celebrities and public figures to be actors shaping the image of a territory. Thus, it is arguably necessary for place branding scholars to consider the role of gastro-populists in shaping food related identities. In a nutshell, the analysis provided in this article can help place branding stakeholders and researchers better understand the influence that highly influential media figures like party leaders can play in shaping the public perception of gastronomy and of its territoriality. Moreover, I provide some key elements that policy makers can follow in their use of gastronomy to effectively strengthen place-brands in a politicised context such as the one covered in this article.

1. Place Branding, food and politics

1.1 Gastronomic place branding

The establishment of a place-brand involves an effort to control and influence the image of a geographically defined community. Place branding was first conceptualised as a process of commodification that capitalizes on the uniqueness of local territories to attract tourists and generate revenue. As a result, place branding initially mainly concerned mainly the marketisation of local territories by economically driven stakeholders (Kavaratzis *et al.*, 2014; Kotler, Gertner, 2002).

However, recent studies explore alternative approaches to this phenomenon. Specifically, they give more centrality to the social aspects related to the establishment of a place-brand. For example, Ren and Blichfeldt (2011) argue that place-brands benefit from their multiplicity and should not be subject to the simplification principles typically applied to company branding processes. Another example is the notion of landscape branding developed by de San Eugenio Vela, Nogué, and Govers (2017), that expands on established understandings of place-brands. With an innovative approach, the authors analyse the centrality of aesthetic and symbolic elements in place branding phenomena. Another example is Hansen's (2010) analysis of nationwide articles on the Danish town of Bornholm, that conceptualises place-brands as stories: narratives of a geographically and culturally defined community. According to Hansen, place branding policy-makers seeking to reform a place-brand should build narratives based on the territorial and cultural elements characterising that place. The methodology of this study draws from Hansen's conceptualisation of place branding as a narrative process. Specifically, this article builds upon the idea that place branding narratives should be built upon externally determined factors, that can resonate with targeted audiences. These elements generally have little to do with traditional branding strategies, and are rather rooted in the historical and cultural imprinting of a place.

This article builds upon this more sociological approach and contributes to the scholarship on gastronomic place branding, showing the influence of high-visibility politicians on the symbolism of local and national cuisines in Italy. This choice is in line with numerous other gastronomic place branding studies, as they often investigate the non-economic nature of place-brands, and the role of cuisines in shaping cultural and territorial identities beyond economic aims (Berg, Sevón, 2014; Montanari, 2006). An example is Rabbiosi's (2016) analysis of local food shops in

the Italian town of Verucchio. Their main contention is that place-brands can only be established based on the limited local elements that can resonate with tourists. Most importantly, the author focuses on the non-economic and unpredictable nature of the performances that end up shaping the image of a place. Thus, Rabbiosi suggests that the classic top-down approach of place branding strategies clashes with the bottom-up process that actually shapes a place-brand. Blichfeldt and Halkier (2014) analysed how the establishment of food related events helped the Danish town of Løgstør establish its brand not only externally but also in the eyes of local citizens, fostering a sense of community. Most importantly, the authors argue that food festivals played a key role in negotiating the tension between conflicting ideas of what the community of Løgstør is and how it should project itself externally. These are two examples showing the strict relation between food and community. This connection makes gastronomic place branding a topic that cannot be analysed without considering the political and identarian dynamics connected to it. In other words, gastronomic place branding studies show that there is a strict connection between gastronomy and politics.

1.2 From food culture to food politics

To better understand the connection between food and politics, we have to look at how food consumption habits are closely tied to the establishment of collective identities. An example is provided by Muñiz-Martinez and Florek (2021) as they explored this topic in the Basque Country. Specifically, the authors observed the key role played by local gastronomic products in establishing a place-brand resonating not only externally but also within the local community. This allowed the Basque Country to project an image of their community that was appealing to foreigners and could benefit from their location within Spain despite a long history of conflict with the Spanish government. Similarly, Donovan (2018) observed the key role of culinary practices in the ways Canada self-projects, both internally and externally, as a country of “uncontaminated” wilderness. Most importantly, the author analyses the strong resonance that wild food products have in the Canadian people, as they see it as a manifestation of the uniqueness of Canada. According to Donovan, this idealised image of Canadian wilderness helped unite a fragmented political community, providing a uniting identarian element.

Another example of the strong ties between food and identity is provided by Capuzzo (2020), who shows that a variety of gastro-alimentary Italian companies have shaped their branding strategies to appeal to the nostalgia, widespread among Italians, for culinary traditions rooted in the history of the country. Moreover, the author argues that these companies banalize this history, proposing an idealized and simplified version of it to their audiences. Surely, this expands the potential audience to Italians who may not have strong ties with these histories. Still, it limits the resonance of these brands among consumers that value such history. Similarly, Pujol (2009) described the complex interactions and setting that brought traditional cuisine in Catalonia to symbolise a globalised local identity. According to the author, this mixture is representative of the radical changes in the socio-economics of the region, whose economic growth is connected to global economic trends. Interestingly, Pujol argues that Catalan cuisine has become a symbol of the model of citizenry that Catalan nationalists support. Thus, in Pujol's study gastronomy is at the epicentre of radical socio-economic changes. However, it is also representative of the identarian struggles that those participating in the shaping of the image of Catalan cuisine share. Hence, gastronomies can be a shaping force in the formation of collective identities, just as they can become symbols of these developments.

In other words, scholars looking at gastronomic place branding have shown that the connection between gastronomy and identity is pivotal. Most importantly, the authors mentioned above describe food as potentially representative of the complex mixture of various socio-economic

and political factors that can play a role at local and national levels. Hence, for these authors gastronomic products are not just empty signifiers filled with carefully picked identarian elements. Rather, they are units of analysis useful for reaching a better understanding of how all these elements conflict, mix and build on top of each other. As I show in the following sections, in the Italian context, right-wing populist party leaders greatly influence how their audiences perceive food and its symbolical connection with local and national identity. Still, before exposing the case-study a few observations on the state of the art on food politics are necessary.

2. Gastronationalism or Gastropopulism? Food as fuel for political narratives

2.1 Building bridges between place branding and politics through gastronomy

When it comes to the relation between food and politics, researchers in the field have been able to build their studies on solid analytical and theoretical frameworks for more than twenty years. In particular, the scholarship on food politics has been largely influenced by Bourdieu's (1984) topical work on the sociology of taste. Synthetically, Bourdieu observed that food production and consumption makes it intrinsically connected to the public sphere, and that food related habits are strong indicators of and contribute to the establishment of communities. Hence, it should not come as a surprise that a prolific sector within food studies focuses on its political dimensions. Resultingly, scholars have used Bourdieu's writings to develop empirical analyses of gastronomy products used for political aims (i.e. Colás, 2018). Many studies on the topic share an object of interest with place branding actors: local cuisines, and their potential as tools to build and strengthen communities. Hence, cuisines are important to political scientists and to place branding scholars for the same reason: they can symbolise and shape collective identities (Ferguson, 2004; Mennell, 1996). In other words, gastronomic products can be powerful symbols, helping those who identify with them connect and relate with communities whose definition may otherwise be unclear or conflictual.

Interestingly, for political scientists the interest in local gastronomy also lies in its exploitation as performed by institutional actors or politicians to gather consensus and promote a politically defined (often) national community (Ichijo, 2020). Hence, it should not come as a surprise that a key notion in recent studies in the field is gastronationalism. Gastronationalism was first defined by Michaela DeSoucey as *"the use of food production, distribution, and consumption to create and sustain the emotive power of national attachment"* (2012, p. 1). Initially, studies employing gastronationalism did so to reach a better understanding of how institutional actors shape national identities. However, the recent success of Billig's *"Banal Nationalism"* (1995) and Fox and Miller-Idriss' *"Everyday Nationhood"* (2008) influenced gastronationalism researchers to focus more on how high-visibility characters influence the public perception of local and national cuisines. Notable examples are: Leer's (2019) focus on how cooking shows hosted by celebrity chefs contribute to shape culinary identities, stressing the divisions shaping different culinary identities or presenting them as part of a multicultural environment; and Stagi's (2016) broad reflections on the impact of the increasing attention to food aesthetics (namely food porn) on our society include insightful reflections on the dual role of gastronomy in Italy, as it can codify differences but it can also become a symbol of unity among groups with different socio-economic statuses. In a nutshell, recent gastronationalism studies focus on how some actors exploit food to substantiate their depiction of the Nation as a monolithic community (i.e.: Baron, Press-Barnathan, 2021; Colás, 2018; Ichijo, Ranta, 2016; Karaosmanoglu, 2020). Crucially, their usage of local and national gastronomies can support their division of the people between a righteous national community and supranational, globalist actors, presented as a threat for food traditions and the national community.

Particularly relevant for this article is Iocco *et al.*'s (2020) analysis of how the Italian public debate on migration and food production is deeply influenced by the narrative on the exceptionality of Italian gastronomy on a global scale fuelled by one of the two party leaders this paper focuses on: Matteo Salvini. According to the authors, Salvini re-framed the debate on the state of Italian gastronomy as a crisis. Specifically, he depicted the European Union regulations on food production as threatening traditional processes of production and conservation of traditional Italian foods. Hence, Salvini's depiction of the EU as a threat for the "exceptional" made in Italy food perfectly fits the Eurosceptic stance of his party and its construction of Salvini as a stark defender of the Italian people and their traditions.

Arguably, these studies on food politics and media share two key elements with the place branding studies mentioned above. First, both fields consider food to be a particularly interesting object of study because it influences the establishment of collective identities. Second, they share a need to look at how this exploitation of cuisines as social and political symbols is materialised and constructed by influential actors. Arguably, these processes of symbolisation of food contaminate each other. In other words, both place branding and political actors influencing the public perception of gastronomies and cuisines shape how the public understands gastronomic place brands and food politics. Consequentially, it is crucial for the two fields to share a set of tools in their research designs to reach a deeper understanding of the processes that influence the symbolization of cuisines. This study wants to provide a starting point, by showing the consequences of gastro-populism as performed by the Italian party leaders Giorgia Meloni and Matteo Salvini.

2.2 *Gastro-populism and Italian populism*

Iocco *et al.*'s study frames Salvini's public persona as a gastronationalist. However, most studies frame Matteo Salvini as a right-wing populist leader who exploits ethno-nationalist elements to foster his people-centrist agenda (Albertazzi *et al.*, 2018), in line with other European right-wing populist leaders (Alomes, Mascitelli, 2012; Biorcio, 2015; Wodak, 2015). I focus on the reasons underpinning this framing in the next section. For now, suffice it to say that in line with this trend, Paolo Demuru's (2021) article on Salvini's and Bolsonaro's digital personae defines them as gastropopulists, rather than as gastronationalists. Synthetically, the author describes how these two politicians "*manage not only to corroborate their people-centrism, anti-elitism and praise of national mythologies, but also to communicate right-wing populism as a soft, fun and enjoyable political ideology*" (Demuru, 2021, p. 523). Specifically, Demuru argues that the alternation of posts related to ordinary activities with content related to the extraordinariness of the life of a high visibility politician softens the nationalist element and strengthens the claim to be one of the people, typical of populist leaders.

Hence, according to Demuru Salvini is a gastro-populist and not a gastro-nationalist because he does not use food to stress the horizontal divisions typical of nationalism. Rather, Salvini uses food to give substance to his definition of the People. Hence, gastronomy is used to strengthen the element of unity typical of nationalisms, rather than its opposition to foreign communities. Nonetheless, many of the observations and studies focusing on gastronationalism that I just exposed are still relevant for the case-study and some of their insights were crucial in the development of the methodology. That is because populism and nationalism share some key ideological elements (Stewart, 1969) and throughout their respective evolutions they have contaminated each other (De Cleen, 2017). My empirical analysis builds on these premises, framing both Meloni and Salvini as (gastro)populists. Still, their usage of right-wing values and ideas is to be measured and taken into account to fully understand the scope of their gastro-populism.

3. Italian populisms: from Berlusconi to Giorgia Meloni and Matteo Salvini

The Italian political system has experienced a popularisation in the last 30 years, which is strictly connected to a process of mediatisation of the political debate in the Country (Biorcio, 2015). Specifically, the corruption scandal “Mani Pulite” crippled a party system that had governed the country for almost fifty years (Vannucci, 2016). One of the most influential political characters in this transition was the businessman turned politician Silvio Berlusconi with his party Forza Italia. Berlusconi implemented marketing principles in his campaigning strategies (D’Agresti, 2008). Resultingly, he constructed a public persona with a strong populist element seeking to represent the Italian middle class. The businessman turned politician relied mainly on visual media to present his personal story of a successful businessman, reducing the space dedicated to the party agenda and to his role as a party leader (Alomes, Mascitelli, 2012; Cosentino, Doyle, 2010). In particular, the centrality of television in his public performances makes him one of the first examples of mediatised populism in Europe (Campus, 2010). In other words, Berlusconi’s public performances, the language he used and even the policies he proposed, were adapted to the affordances of an increasingly commercialized media (Mazzoleni, 2008). In fact, Berlusconi’s mediatic appearances have largely influenced not only the public debate, but also popular culture (Boni, 2008), which he often referred to in his speeches (Ginsborg, 2005; Mancini, 2011). Hence, it is no surprise that elements of Berlusconi’s campaigning strategies and dialectics have been observed to be present in other politicians’ careers. The former leader of the left-wing Democratic party, Matteo Renzi, and the founder of the 5 Star Movement, Beppe Grillo have been observed by scholars to share some elements with Berlusconi’s style of communication (Bordignon, 2014; Castaldo, Verzichelli, 2020; Ruggiero, 2012). As a result of this spread of populist rhetoric, the Italian political landscape has undergone processes of polarization and popularisation. Bracciale and Martella (2017) defined Italy as a country of endemic populism, as they observed that even non-populist politicians adopt a populist rhetoric.

Within this setting, Giorgia Meloni and Matteo Salvini are no exception. Salvini successfully turned Lega, his party, from an ethno-regionalist force into an ethno-nationalist one very quickly (Albertazzi *et al.*, 2018). His rhetoric relies on the populist division between a righteous, ethnically defined People of “true” Italians and the corrupt, liberal elite. Most importantly, he self-presents as the embodiment of this People, an ordinary Italian man who shares little with other professional politicians (Carone, Cavallaro, 2019; Mazzoni, Mincigrucci, 2020; Starita, Trillò, 2022). The agenda of Fratelli d’Italia and the communicational style of its leader Giorgia Meloni have much in common with Salvini’s (Mazzoleni, Bracciale, 2018). Still, it is more strongly tied with its right-wing component as many members of Meloni’s party, herself included, started their political career in neo-fascist groups (De Giorgi, Tronconi, 2018). Hence, despite some peculiarities differently characterising the two parties, Giorgia Meloni and Matteo Salvini are exponents of what Mudde and Kaltwasser (2013) define as exclusionary populisms. According to the authors, exclusionary populists tend to focus their agendas on two elements: the defence of traditions, and the ostracization of the Other. These two elements were empirically measured in this article to verify their presence, discerning their articulation in the visual communication of these two leaders. In conclusion, these elements motivate the framing of the two leaders analysed in this case-study as populists, thus I define their usage of gastronomy gastro-populist.

4. Methods

Phase 1: Data gathering and cleaning - Through the python-based package *Instaloader* (instaloader.github.io), I retrieved the metadata of the posts published on Giorgia Meloni’s (@giorgiameloni) and Matteo Salvini’s (@matteosalviniofficial) Instagram accounts during the year

2020 (1 January - 31 December). Then, I selected all the self-portraits and portraits published by the two politicians, resulting in an unclean dataset of 1027 images, 267 for Meloni and 760 for Salvini. Thereafter, I filtered the dataset further, and selected only the portraits showing the leaders with food. The clean dataset comprises 39 portraits of Giorgia Meloni and 111 portraits of Matteo Salvini.

Phase 2: Coding - I proceeded with an informal coding of the selected sample based on the key elements individuated in the previous sections as proper of both place branding and gastro-populist processes. A detailed codebook is attached as an appendix, the key elements are:

- The food types present in the images;
- Their importance for the message channelled by the Instagram post;
- The presence or absence of a reference to the national or localised origin of the products;
- Where the reference is present, if it was in the caption, in the image itself or in both;
- What narrative is constructed in these images and the related captions;
- If any, what elements typical of populist stances are present.

Another methodological tool used in the development of the codebook is Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2006) "Reading Images". Specifically, their reflections on how composition and framing shape visually coded messages in images were central in my determination of food as cosmetic or a central element in the analysed images. Additionally, I referred to Kress and Van Leeuwen's work to identify the visual references to food as a political symbol. Due to the differences in the datasets of the two politicians (the analysed portraits published by Salvini are almost 3 times those published by Meloni), I also analysed Meloni's gastro-populism separately.

Phase 3: qualitative focus – Based on the coding results, I identified 4 key posts useful to identify the logic underlying the analysed gastro-populist posts, and to show the potential influence of these images on the symbolisation of gastronomic products in the Italian context. This qualitative analysis was based on Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2006) analyses of how hue, location, composition, modality, and colour shape visually codified messages.

Additionally, I enriched the analysis with Itten's (1970) reflections on the meanings codified by colours and with Ravelli and Van Leeuwen's (2018) study on multimodality, to analyse the textual elements present in the images and captions.

5. Analysis and Discussion

In this section, I focus on the dominant elements shown by the coding results synthesized in Tables 1 and 2 below. These results should be analysed together with the 4 examples of gastro-populist posts I provide in the next section. The results represented in Table 1 partially seem to confirm the fact that food is generally (88.7%) a central element in the visually coded messages that Meloni and Salvini's portraits channel. Moreover, almost half (49%) of the analysed photographs show the leader with locally produced, fresh products. This is also a key part of the local identity and thus of the establishment of place-brands of many communities (Karaosmanoglu, 2020; Lee *et al.*, 2015). The second most common type of food present in the sample is beverages, and within this category the recurring (72.8%) element is espresso or cappuccino cups. As I will show with two examples, this is a crucial element to fully understand how gastronomy is repurposed by leaders as a tool to fuel their claim to be part of the People.

Table 1 – Total results

Role of food in the picture	Food type	Geographical reference of the product	Method of reference	Narrative	Right-wing component
central 88.7%	fresh products 49%	national 16%	textual 38%	personal	defining Us 24%
	beverages ¹ 36.7%	local 26.7%	visual 4%	78.67%	contrasting Them 5.3%
cosmetic 11.3%	desserts 13.3%	local & national 1.3%	textual & visual 2.7%	politicised	absent
	other 17.3%	no reference 56%.	none 55.3%	21.3%	70.7%

¹ 26.7% of the total sample is showing coffee or coffee related products

Nonetheless, there are some strong indicators that many portraits do not have a strong connection with the elements constructing place-brand narratives. First, only 28% of the images make a direct reference to the locality of the food, whereas 56% of the analysed sample contain no reference to the local or national origin of the products. Second, there is a visual reference contributing to the narrative fuelling the message only in 6.7% of the analysed sample. Third, the narrative constructed by these images is mostly based on the personal, ordinary aspects of the politicians' everyday life. Fourth, the right-wing element is absent in 70.7% of the analysed images. Those images in which this right-wing populist element is present, mostly contain (24%) visual and textual statements to define the People these leaders seek to represent, and fuel their self-presentation as embodiment of the popular will. Hence, they seem to be more connected to the populist internal division between the People and the elites. In other words, gastronomy is used to strengthen the definition of the "authentic" Italian community that the politicians seek to represent.

Table 2 – Meloni's results

Role of food in the picture	Food type	Geographical reference of the product	Method of reference	Narrative	Right-wing component
central 82.05%	fresh products 41.03%	national 17.95%	textual 58.97%	personal	defining us 51.28%
	beverages ¹ 28.21%	local 43.95%	visual 2.56%	71.79%	opposing them 2.56%
cosmetic 17.95%	desserts 23.08%	local & national 0	textual & visual 0	politicised	absent
	other 7.69%	no reference 38.46%.	none 38.46%	28.21%	46.15%

¹12.8% of the total sample is showing coffee or coffee related products

Meloni's communication is slightly different from Salvini's, even though it shares the same overall trend. Interestingly, desserts are more present in Meloni's visual communication. Comparatively, the presence of coffee in her pictures is negligible (12.8%). Additionally, there is often a reference to the national (18%) or local (44%) origin of the product. Most importantly, a political element is present in a significant portion (28%) of Meloni's portraits. Connectedly, almost half of the pictures contain an implicit or explicit reference to the Italian People. Nonetheless, most images still show an element of reference to the locality of the gastronomic product. In other words, Meloni's often refers to the local origin of a product and makes appeals to her ethno-nationalist community in the same post.

5.1 Salvini: the ordinariness of Made in Italy



Image 1 (Source, Instagram: @matteosalviniofficial)

Image 1 is a clear example of the capitalization performed especially by Salvini of the symbolic element of Espresso, a coffee-brewing of Italian origin that has strong ties with Italian history and identity (Morris, 2010). In the picture, the leader poses as he shows an Espresso (plastic) cup to his audience. This symbolical offering is strengthened by Salvini's eyes directed towards the camera, as if he was looking directly at his followers. In the caption, Salvini addresses his audience informally, calling his followers friends and informing them he will attend to a radio broadcasting that same day.

Additionally, the picture shows Salvini wearing a t-shirt with the writing "Itali' amo", a made up word that works as a pun to communicate the politician's love for Italy and at the same time stating his belonging to the Italian population as an individual. This is a crucial element for my

analysis for two interconnected reasons. The first is that Salvini is making here a visual reference to coffee as a national symbol. From a compositional point of view this reference is powerfully exposed: the colourful writing on the black background of the rest of the clothing item, together with its positioning at the centre of the framed space and right next to the coffee cup, brings the viewer to put these elements in relation with one another. The second is that this image shows on one hand the power of visual statements, and on the other how often these references tend to be purely cosmetic and of little relevance for the political debate. Resultingly, this image ends up being more a statement of Salvini's adherence to everyday Italian customs.



Image 2 (Source, Instagram: @matteosalviniofficial)

Image 2 is an example of how Salvini exploits Italian local gastronomic products to fuel his political agenda. In the picture, the leader holds a panettone, a traditional Italian cake generally consumed during Christmas (the post was published on Christmas eve). He figuratively offers the panettone to his viewers, as he looks towards the camera. Salvini's smile and the bright, warm light present in the photograph stress the goodwill of his symbolic offering. In the background, there are two references to Salvini's socio-political values and to the conservative agenda of his party. In this case, the stance is substantiated by a crucifix, a Catholic holy card, and a photo of Salvini with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Looking at the caption, we can see that the symbolic offering is connected to a real one. First, Salvini opens his caption with an informal greeting to his followers. The senator calls them friends, wishing them a merry Christmas. Then, Salvini explains that the cake was a gift from an Italian pastry chef, specifying his native region. Subsequently, Salvini frames the explanation within his political narrative, explaining that he will donate this panettone to agents of the Penitentiary Police.

This gesture, if analysed out-of-context may seem more a message of institutional solidarity than one with an underlying right-wing agenda. However, this post was published by Salvini on Christmas of 2020, as the Penitentiary Police was under public scrutiny due to

past events (Zamperini *et al.*, 2017) and rumours of more recent mistreatments of inmates during the Covid-19 pandemic³. This is in conformity with the defence of traditional values and patriotism that is proper of Salvini's agenda. Most importantly, this post is an example of Salvini's attempts to mix his self-presentation as an ordinary Italian citizen, who values local gastronomies, with the extraordinary elements of his life related to his high-visibility as a national party leader.

5.2 Giorgia Meloni: establishing a nationalised gastronomic place-brand



Image 3 (Source, Instagram: @giorgiameloni)

Image 3 shows how much the border between gastro-populism and gastronomic place branding can blur. In this image, Meloni shows a local product: the red kiwi from Agro Pontino, a valley to the south of Rome. In the portrait, the fruit is the main represented object, as it occupies the centre of the framed space and is held by the leader in her hands. In the background we can observe an Italian national flag, strengthening the connection between the national dimension of Meloni's political role and the local gastronomic product she is showing. A key role in this case is played by the caption which frames the visuals in a precise narrative. After an introduction on the origin of the product and its importance in the Italian economy, Meloni made a plea to the government to support the red kiwi producers due to their importance for the local and national economy and identity. Hence, in this post Meloni advocates for the protection of a local Italian product, stressing its importance for Italy as she defines its production as part of an "Italian excellence". The leader frames this Italian fruit as a resource

³ For further information see: La Rivolta Delle Carceri a Marzo, Chi c'era Dietro i Disordini. Ansa.It, May 8, 2020. www.ansa.it/canale_legalita_scuola/notizie/2020/05/08/la-rivolta-delle-carceri-a-marzo-chi-cera-dietro-i-disordini_9b-c30fe7-c189-4e82-b567-ad422a00719d.html; Giuffrida, A. (2021, July 1). Italian prisons under fire as video footage shows guards beating inmates. The Guardian. July 7, 2021. www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jul/01/italian-prisons-under-fire-as-video-footage-shows-guards-beating-inmates.

that is under threat, which the public should prioritise. This is part of a populist trope that is more explicitly expressed in Image 4. Still, Image 3 is an example of Meloni's exploitation of the strong ties between local cuisines and identity in Italy, giving substance to her ethnically defined People.



Image 4 (Source, Instagram: @giorgiameloni)

Image 4 depicts Giorgia Meloni as she shows to the camera a bunch of grapes. Similarly to the other examples, in this picture the leader is making a metaphorical offering of fresh fruit to her followers. Moreover, Meloni's smile and the light colours in the image strengthen the positive feeling connected to this symbolic offering. The caption adds a reference to the territorial origin of the grapes, as Meloni writes that it comes from a city in Sicily. Then, Meloni closes the caption with an appeal to her followers to buy "Made in Italy", specifying that she means local *and* Italian products.

This is an example of how the localisation of gastronomy and the national dimension connected to the broader category of "Made in Italy" food, including both local, unique products and nationally produced, globally exported products, are mixed by both Meloni and Salvini to fuel the nationalist element of their agenda. These are posts advocating for a peculiar *glocal* identity already pushed by Salvini in local elections (Mazzoni *et al.*, 2020). Here, the locality of food is used to strengthen the nationalistic claim, bringing forward the idea of a national identity as composed by a variety of local communities. In other words, both local and national gastronomy are used by Meloni as a tool to strengthen her definition of the Italian People and to mark her belonging to this group. This mechanism is reinforced by the depiction of Made in Italy as something that is under threat and needs to be defended from an unidentified enemy in the caption. This abstract oppositional element and Meloni's appeal to defend Made in Italy further foster the idea of gastronomic products as strictly connected to her ethnic definition of national identity.

6. Discussion and conclusion

Based on the analysis above, I argue that Meloni's and Salvini's consistent usage of gastro-nomic products to fuel their populist narratives inherently politicises food as an identarian element connected to the traditional values typical of populist, right-wing parties. Moreover, it is important to stress that the two leaders compose their gastropopulist pictures differently.

Looking at Salvini, his connection with local gastronomies tends to be rather loose, rooted in some key elements that underpin the politician's public persona. The leader uses food more as a tool to appear relatable in front of his constituency, stressing his belonging to the People by showing that he consumes the same Italian products that most Italians consume. This ordinari-ness has already been observed by other scholars to be a key characteristic of Salvini's public persona (Mazzoni, Mincigrucci, 2021; Terracciano, 2019). These elements are part of an *aesthetic of ordinari-ness*: a visual narrative where the represented subjects other than the high-visibility character mainly contribute to fuel a narrative centred around their seemingly ordinary life. In Salvini's case, this aesthetic is composed by images of ordinary and iconic Italian foods. Their consumption and the social rituals connected to them contribute to associate this idea of ordinari-ness, that many Italians can relate with, with his conceptualisation of what "true" Italians look like.

This *aesthetic of ordinari-ness* may not influence the ties between iconic products like coffee or Panettone and the Italian national identity. Nonetheless, place branding actors may have to confront themselves with Salvini's aesthetics given the strong ties of some gastronomic products with local and national identities in Italy. Moreover, Salvini's gastro-populism fuels his self-pre-sentation as one of the People. Place branding actors mimicking such a personal narrative, may be incorrectly reconnected by viewers to that ethnically-defined community, alienating those not adhering to the conservative values attributed to these concepts. Thus, place branding actors seeking to distance themselves from a politicised narrative of gastronomy should tell stories that defy the rules of this *aesthetic of ordinari-ness*, or exploit them to provide a substantially different narrative. For example, if place branding actors seek to tell the personal history of a food producer, they should frame it as the narrative of a professional in the sector, ensuring that the personalization does not build the apparent intimacy of Salvini's posts. Focusing on the aesthetic element, place branding actors should make an active effort to systematise the production of visuals connected to gastronomies. For example, they could alternate shows of ordinari-ness with the depiction of the extraordinary, coordinated efforts required for many food productions, in terms of labour and resources. Another element of extraordinari-ness could be channelled depicting big public events connected to the economics of gastronomies and to their consumption (e.g. fairs, international expositions, community gatherings). Moreover, with a high standard in terms of visual production, place branding actors can distance themselves from the amateurism and apparent spontaneity proper of the analysed gastropopulist pictures.

Differently, Meloni's gastro-populism is more often connected to political messages. More precisely, the leader uses gastronomy to substantiate her representation of the producers and consumers of these products as part of a monolithic, ethnically defined national community. Almost half of Meloni's gastropopulist pictures stress her definition of the People. Meloni's mix of gastropopulist pictures with calls to the People to defend their gastronomy substantiate in the captions. In the text, the leader mentions the geographical origin of these foods, followed by a connection to her nationalist stances or agenda. In other words, Meloni fuels her definition of the People exploiting the identarian elements of these foods. The consistent presence of these key elements shows how Meloni builds narratives that are localised, and framed within the rhetoric of a monolithic national community that these local identities are inherently part of.

Crucially, the captions of Images 3 and 4 present a narrative focused on two local Italian products. In these images, the politician associates the made in Italy brand with a public concern for the economic situation of the country. In other words, Meloni reframes made in Italy and local

gastronomies within what Moffitt (2016) defined as the performance of a crisis, that populist leaders undertake to strengthen their positioning as true defenders of the People. Arguably, Meloni's performance of crisis cannot be ignored by actors aiming to exploit the identarian element tied to local gastronomies. Specifically, it puts all actors involved in gastronomic place branding processes in front of a potential public perception of their communities as in a general state of emergency. Moreover, Meloni's gastropopulism may influence the public perception of food as a "community builder" symbol in ways that are tied to its potential use as tool for place branding policies. The framing of Made in Italy as something that needs to be actively defended by the People as performed by Meloni is another key element. For example, place branding actors that want to project a different image of their Made in Italy product will need to stress the consolidated role of their product on the market. Another example is the possibility of providing data on the importance of a determined gastronomic product for the local economy. In a nutshell, place branding actors can focus on constructing and fostering narratives that focus on the positive impact of food related practices on local and national economics. This strategy should not be hard to implement, given the centrality of the agricultural industry in the Italian economy (Farinella and Moiso, 2021)

In conclusion, this article provides indicators that the political phenomenon of gastropopulism has much to say about gastronomic place branding. Most importantly, high-visibility characters in general can play an influential role in shaping the public perception of local (and national) identity and of the symbols attributed to elements that can also play a key role in the establishment of place-brands. The methodology and case-study provided want to build bridges between two apparently disconnected disciplines, that share a need to disentangle the relation between food and identity. Nonetheless, there are inherent limits to the approach of this article to the covered topic. First of all, the study of only two right-wing, populist politicians does not provide insights on the relation between populism as a broader phenomenon and gastronomy. Moreover, the focus on Italian gastropopulism does not allow broader theoretical reflections on the origins of the phenomenon, and how it may impact place branding actors in other countries. Hence, I invite future researchers tackling topics tangent to that of this article to engage with the provided framework, and to build upon it by addressing these limitations.

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Appendix

Category	Definitions			
<i>Food type</i>	Fresh Products I identified as fresh products the following foods, unless there was a clear reference to their frozenness: vegetables, meat, fish, milk, milk-derived products, fresh pasta, pizza	Beverages Any type of drink	Desserts Any type of sweet, solid food	Other All foods not included in the previous categories
<i>Geographical reference of the product</i>	National A reference to the Italian origin of the product	Local A reference to the specific region, city, or geographical area of the product		Local & National Applied when both categories are relevant for one picture
<i>Method of reference</i>	Textual Used when the geographical reference was present only in text form, even if the text is part of the image	Visual Used when the geographic reference was codified in the visuals of the image, without textual references		Textual & Visual Used when both previous categories applied
<i>Narrative</i>	Personal The picture and attached textual messages tell a story focused on the politician's ordinary life or to their private sphere		Politicised The narrative constructed in the image is strictly connected to the politician's profession, to their political stances or to their party's agenda	
<i>Right-wing component</i>	Defining Us Any reference to the constituents the leader appeals to; any reference to their definition of the People; any appeals to their followers/constituents		Opposing Them Any reference to the opposition of the leader to a certain category, political class or social group	Absent No reference to populist or nationalist stances or policies
<i>Role of food in the picture</i>	Central The gastronomic product is central in the image produced and/or in the text attached. Without the food the photo would have a significantly different meaning or would be deprived of its significance		Cosmetic The presence of the food in the photo is only accessory, and when participates to the visually codified messages, it does not so in a crucial way	

Appendix 1 – Codebook guidelines

Neighborhood branding and residents' engagement: evidences from NoLo - in Milan - to TomTom - in Istanbul²

Introduction

City branding and place marketing strategies have become key factors in generating cultural and economic development worldwide as practical tools to create attractive urban images in cities.

Cities have been increasing their effort to attract creative people, creative industries, investors, inhabitants, tourists, daily users, and consumers. Creating and establishing a city brand on the global creativity map requires combining arts, culture, technology, and entertainment. Therefore, cultural events, festivals, landmark buildings, and social life have critical roles in this branding process. Many authors have underlined the significant risk of city branding, stressing the phenomenon of gentrification related to the housing market, the expulsion of the most vulnerable residents from the city, and the negative effect of over-tourism. However, a recent tendency is a shift from city to neighborhood branding that, operating at the local level, tends to reproduce and redefine the macro-dynamics on a smaller scale.

This paper will explore the creation of a neighborhood brand in two areas; the NoLo district in Milan and the Tomtom district in Istanbul. Both are more than a neighborhood with their cultural events, art galleries, designers, and social networks, and they are in the process of rapid growth and transformation. They are located in the city center and close to the urban megaproject areas. Within five years, the whole NoLo district has been affected by a massive change, led by a cohesive and young group of residents who decided to invest energies in reinventing this area. On the other hand, the creative cluster at Tomtom started as a real estate investment firm's effort to revitalize the neighborhood to create a new cultural center in Istanbul. These events created momentum in bringing together different neighborhood actors and constructing a neighborhood branding process.

The paper aims to investigate how the leap in scale from city branding to neighborhood branding translates into the inhabitants' real life and the place's regeneration process. Furthermore, the research aims to understand whether the presence of an efficient and consolidated structure of bottom-up activism is sufficient, in itself, to avoid the risk of gentrification that often occurs in some city branding processes, not sufficiently integrated into the local neighborhood dimension.

1. From city branding to neighborhood branding

Remaining competitive is a mantra for planners and urban developers investing in cities. The new millennium has been driven by the idea that cities need to develop entrepreneurial strategies to foster local growth (Harvey, Mirowski, 2007; Brenner, Theodore, 2002) and to set the conditions by which territories could constantly compete with each other. Part of the literature has insisted on the idea that the competition must be played on the level of attracting new lifeblood. In a neoliberal frame, this means new and international investors and companies as well as new populations such as tourists, new citizens, and qualified human capital – so-called talents (Zenker, Eggers, Farsky, 2013; Bayliss, 2007). Based upon Florida's triple T

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model (2002), cities, to become more global and attractive, had to attract the creative class by providing soft and hard urban conditions, and city branding is one of the means with which this can be showcased. A large part of the debate has revealed that this approach has exacerbated urban inequality both in social terms by creating severe forms of poverty and racial segregation (Gotham, 2007; Boland, 2013) and in spatial terms by creating forms of physical and cultural commodification (Zukin, 1996; 2002) generating the process of gentrification (Zukin, 1987; Lees, Slater, Wyly, 2013).

In other words, city branding has become the (in)visible hand that has boosted territorial competitiveness and fostered urban attractiveness. The image of the city, which according to Ashworth and Kavaratzis (2009), depends on the effective definition, communication, and management, is one of the main factors that influences a city's competitiveness (Darchen, Tremblay, 2010), and investing on it has been seen to pave the way to success.

However, the term brand has never been neutral; Bastos and Levy (2012) stressed that the etymology of the term brand indicates the act of marking materially and metaphorically something to identify and show its possession. The term "brand" originated in a Germanic word meaning "to burn", which also has negative implications. Branding the cattle with the fire helps the breeders to identify them, but at the same time, produces an indelible scar. In the same vein, branding the city creates extraordinary light and simultaneously, a multitude of shadows that have been deeply explored. In the first place, one of the limits of the place branding debate is that it is deeply embedded into the corporate branding framework, as Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2005, p. 191) argue, the place brand should be treated as "the whole entity of the place products, in order to achieve consistency of the messages sent". In this way, the city's complexity (as heterogeneity and diversity) dissolves into uniformity and homologation. In particular, city branding tends to reduce place identity to essentially a single-faceted image created directly as a result of urban design interventions (Bonakdar, Audirac, 2020). The phrase 'place branding,' which refers to the 'forging of associations' between a location and some desired attributes that resonate with specific target audiences, has become more common in practice-oriented literature. Physical interventions in the city's landscape and communication tactics that pick specific components of local 'identity,' 'history,' and 'culture' can be used to produce the 'forging of associations' (Colomb, 2013). In other words, it might help to obscure the real city through a monolithic urban imaginary made for consumerism purposes (Greenberg, 2000).

Besides, depending on the scale of intervention it might be difficult to develop a place identity which arises from below, through the local community. In fact, the place might be on different territorial scales: place marketing has become commonplace in countries, regions, and cities. Moreover, different scales might imply and trigger different branding strategies and outcomes. Developing, for example, a country's place branding might help to overcome stereotypes and increase the country's reputation, which might be helpful to attract international investors or develop the tourism sector. In particular, the GMI Nation Brands Index designed by Anholt (2002) measures the power and appeal of a nation's brand image. Indeed, using the hexagon model - formed by six dimensions; tourism, culture and heritage, people, export, governance and investment, and immigration - "consumers" around the world see the character and personality of the brand. Differently, it could be the promotion of a regional branding which might help to forge new regional identity in transnational territories (Pedersen, 2004). In both cases, however, the process of creating a place identity is the outcome of a top-down approach that rarely involves the community's voice. The large part of the literature on place branding is particularly focused on the city scale, and this depends in part on the relevant role that cities have in urban competition and in part, as Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2005) argue, this territorial size seems to be more suitable for applying successful techniques for promoting place branding. The Authors, in particular, identify three different assets upon which to build up city branding: identify famous and prestigious individuals that have been born, live or work

in the city -personality branding-, giving attention to icon buildings, and thirdly, highlighting events and festivals that are particularly important for the city. In this way, the place's image that might come up will be more closely related to the citizens.

Very recently, however, a limited number of publications have been produced that paid particular attention to a smaller scale of interventions: the neighborhood. It can be argued that this new small-scale approach to place branding might depend on different factors. First of all, neighborhoods are increasingly gaining importance in urban competitions, both in terms of supporting and leading the urban attractiveness and competing with each other in boosting the housing markets. Cities are increasingly a mosaic of attractive neighborhoods that create their own image and brand. This is nothing new under the sun; neighborhoods such as Greenwich Village in New York or Soho in London have existed for several decades. What is relatively recent is the multiplication of these neighborhoods across the cities. The list of neighborhoods undergoing a gentrification process in almost all cities is getting longer and longer. Indeed, in large part, gentrifiers are staunch advocates of neighborhood branding, particularly in growing cities where the place of consumption has superseded the place of production (Bonakdar, Audirac, 2020), endorsed by governmental strategies to intervene in the urban political-economic arena.

Secondly, a larger number of academics and policymakers are increasingly aware that place branding can no longer be understood as devised to support predetermined economic goals but should also include a social dimension (Johansson, Corneise, 2010). In this perspective, the neighborhood scale might be more suitable for the involvement of the local community in branding creation.

Thirdly, but not less significant, a smaller scale might be more favorable to meet citizens' participation in building the image of the territory. In place branding, specific local cultures, histories, identities, and aesthetics are picked, sanitized, commodified, and promoted for consumption by target groups such as tourists or high-income locals. The gentrification literature has demonstrated that this process may have severe effects on the locations and social groups involved, as it can result in a loss of authenticity or outright displacement (Colomb, 2013).

There is a growing possibility that branding manipulates the place's culture, history, and social meaning and supports the economic and financial interests of urban elites (Hannigan, 2003). Citizens' participation at the local level is seen as a counterattack against the process of gentrification, city brandification, and other strategies to sell the city. Under the slogan "small is better than big", place branding is rescaling at the neighborhood level to reinvent itself in a more social prospective: more concerned with diversity, more attentive towards local history and culture, more aware of urban complexity.

Understanding if this is only a process of scaling down or a paradigm shift is crucial. As Johansson and Corneise (2010) have argued, neighborhood branding might encounter the risk of reproducing similar neo-liberal dynamics at a micro-level, and might undermine the right to the city (Lefevre, 1968) under the guise of locals' participation. Many local actors in almost all cities are working in co-creating a particular atmosphere and performing a neighborhood 'vibe'. Two different, though not opposite, forces are operating to change the image of the neighborhood: one force is more related to the creative and cultural industry, such as the opening of new shops and activities (especially related to the food industry and leisure), and promoting events and cultural performance, the other force is more focused in reclaiming communal gardens, rehabilitating public spaces, creating good opportunities and services. It is unclear if this synergic force is opening a pathway for the re-democratization of the city after a long period of neoliberal urban capitalism or if it's speeding up this process.

2. Methods

In light of the theoretical frame, the paper aims to study the dynamics and mechanisms activated at the neighborhood level to reshape the image of the place, revitalize the local economy, and transform the urban fabric.

Montgomery (2003) has pointed out that neighborhoods can be studied by analyzing three main dimensions:

- the economic activities (which include, for example, the extent and variety of cultural venues and events, presence of an evening economy, including cafe culture)
- the built environment (which includes, for example, fine-grain urban morphology, variety and adaptability of building stock, and the permeability of streetscape)
- the meaning (which includes, for example, important meeting and gathering spaces, area identity, and imagery knowledgeability).

These three dimensions can be seen as the starting point from which the two fieldworks have taken off and can then be used as the skeleton to present the result of the comparative research.

The fieldwork is based on ongoing research conducted through a mixed approach, using both qualitative and quantitative investigating tools. On the one hand, institutional documents and data have been consulted. On the other hand, qualitative research has been developed, built on the basis of participatory observation and interviews made with significant qualified witnesses (in particular, residents, real estate, commerce and local associations enterprises in the neighborhoods).

In the case of Tomtom, the fieldwork started in 2017 with the data collection, observations, and mapping studies. Furthermore, qualitative data analysis, including semi-structured in-depth interviews, was conducted in the following years with 30 design studios and art galleries that have moved to Tomtom in the last decade. The age range of the interviewees varies between 25 and 50, and the gender distribution is approximately equal. More specific, in-depth interviews were done with artists such as architects, ceramic artists, fashion designers, antique dealers, and art galleries that have moved in the last years, recently established, or gone out of business. These interviews were held in three separate temporal phases; the first was in September 2018, following the start of the Tomtom Designhood Project; the second was in August 2019, and the last was in June 2021. In the first two periods of study, the interviewees answered questions such as: how long they have been in this neighborhood; where they moved from; why they chose this neighborhood; their predictions about Tomtom for the next five years. In 2021, the neighborhood was revisited. This time, owners of newly opened design shops in the neighborhood and designers who are still there were interviewed again.

In the case of NoLo, the fieldwork has started in 2018 and, as well as for Tomtom, the temporal dimension played a central role for the development of a diachronic analysis, based on the progressive evolution of the perception of the place with respect to different temporal phases, compared to each other. The first research phase has been developed in 2018, with a fieldwork that led to the elaboration of 32 interviews³. The following phases have been developed from September to December over three academic years (2019-2020; 2020-2021; 2021-2022), leading to the definition of 80 more interviews⁴ and surveys.

The temporal analysis has clearly revealed the importance and intensity of changes that NoLo has gone through in the last 4 years. The fieldwork has been developed involving different kinds of actors, mainly related to inhabitants and third sector, non profit and voluntary associations (among them, Giranolo, Off Campus and others).

³ This first phase of research was conducted by F.A. Gavezzotti and developed with an ad hoc Master's Dissertation.

⁴ These interviews have been conducted during the Urban Marketing study course of the university Milano Bicocca.

With regard to the different associations, the main research tool used to investigate their actions and perspectives of the place has been the focus group, useful to involve at the same time different actors. Regarding the inhabitants of the NoLo district, the main tools used for the research have been the semi-structured interviews and the surveys, submitted to several social groups: among them, the old and historical inhabitants of the place, the foreign inhabitants, kinds of city users as for example tourists coming from different Countries, the Lgbtq+ community living in NoLo or frequenting the place, homeowners and tenants, non-resident students between 18 and 30 years old.

Among the many covered topics through surveys and interviews, there were questions regarding the perception of residents before and after tourism development, the presence and perception of services in the area, its level of hospitality and attractiveness, the different perceptions of borders and the different identities of the wider area of NoLo, the different levels of satisfaction with life, regarding the relationship with the place and its inhabitants, the different phases of transformation, regeneration and gentrification of the place.

The surveys have been developed using the Web survey (CAWI – Computer Assisted Web Interview) method, based on questionnaires provided to the respondent with a link, in a panel, or a website and disseminated electronically. Some of the surveys, mainly focused on foreign people and on tourists, have been written in five different languages (Italian, English, French, German and Chinese). To this end, the access to the closed Facebook group of *NoLo residents Social District* has been a fundamental tool that allowed to reach a wider and more specific user base (the total respondents were 312 people). Furthermore, a significant opportunity concerned the collaboration with *RadioNoLo*, the official radio of the neighborhood.

3. NoLo TomTom: the creation of new identities

The two investigated neighborhoods have been going through a process of renaming. The process of labeling a place is strongly connected with creating a new identity. However, the creation of a new identity, as it has been argued, might risk manipulating the culture, history, and social meaning of the place. It would be naive to say that residents' engagement might solve the problem; probably, it might instead reduce the risks. However, reconstructing the process that has led to the new name might help understand how this new identity is shared within the local community.

The area now acknowledged as NoLo (Figure 1) was historically affected by a significant industrial development, which has led to considerable demographic and residential growth due to the migratory waves of workers from all over Italy. In the 1930s, this part of the city was thus characterized by workers' houses, railing and small factories, warehouses and restaurants, artisan workshops, and recreational clubs. In the second half of the 1960s, this Milanese neighborhood strengthened its identity as a working-class neighborhood, hosting new migratory flow from east and south of Italy in new public housing. In the last twenty years, new migratory flows from non-European countries (35% of the total residents, Istat, 2011) led to a radical change, creating a melting pot of cultures that today represents, at the same time, one of the characterizing elements of the area but also the cause of increasing perceptions of fear, danger, and insecurity among its historical inhabitants. The same happens with children, as demonstrated by the 30 and over nationalities coexisting in the same school located within the *Trotter* park, which has become a significant cohesion place in the area.

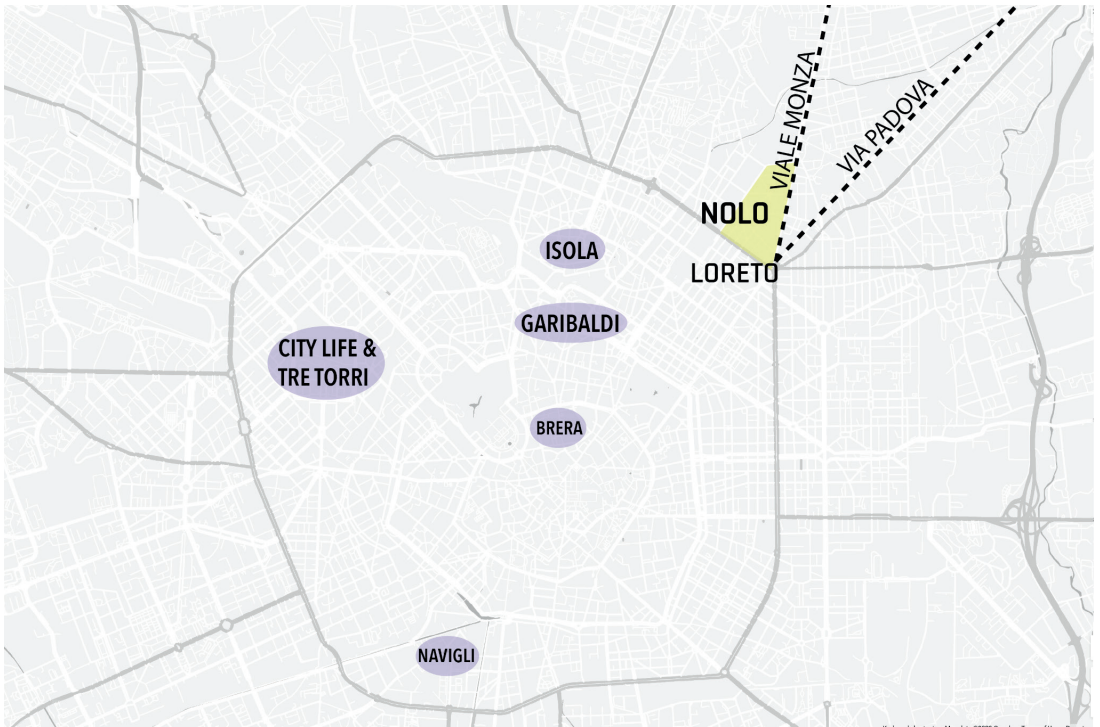


Figure 1: The location of NoLo in Milan

The process of deindustrialization, together with the different migration waves, has caused the consequent collapse in residential prices. However, the significant architectural value of the area and its strategic location, close to the city center and very well connected, have contributed to activating a gentrification process. In fact, the area has gradually begun to attract new categories of inhabitants, including young students, artists, hipsters belonging to the creative class, turning the area into a fertile ground for developing innovative projects and events.

«The change of clients is due to the fact that many rental contracts belonging to foreign residents have now expired without being renewed. So real estate agencies have started to renew all the empty apartments, sending or renting them especially to employees working downtown. NoLo, for them, is a convenient area because they can reach the center of Milan very quickly. The preferred target of inhabitants is thus made by young people of 25-30 years old, with 60% of the gay community» (NoLo, commerce, 2018).

As a result, in five years, the entire district has undergone a massive change, initiated spontaneously, going from an anonymous suburb to one of the trendiest neighborhoods in Milan, ideally responding to the emerging “City of 15 minutes” that, based on functional and relational proximity, allows to generate social relations, producing shared identities and communities (Manzini Ceinar and Mariotti, 2021).

This social, economic, and physical transformation that has occurred has been marked and supported by the creation of a new name: NoLo, an Acronym for “North of Loreto”. In 2012 the name NoLo was invented by a group of architects of the area, hence the definition in English “NOrth of LOreto”, coined for fun in the wake of the SoHo (South of Houston Street) district of New York and becoming in 2016 a recognized label, until its official approval on 2019 with the PGT (Piano di Governo del Territorio). Due to its innovative solid charge and the ongoing urban regeneration process, NoLo has begun to attract the attention of the media, showing itself as a

multi-ethnic and inclusive place, as well as a reference point for the Milanese nightlife and the LGBTQ+ community, counting the presence of numerous gay-friendly clubs. In the case of Tomtom (Figure 2), the neighborhood branding process, although being the outcome of real estate-led gentrification work, is in practice strongly connected to its historical background, cultural richness, and being a point of attraction from the past to the present. This neighborhood takes its name from the Tomtom Kaptan Mosque, built by Tomtom Mehmet Kaptan in 1592. The neighborhood's name, formerly called "Tomtom Kaptan", changed later to being just "Tomtom". Instead of creating a new name for this neighborhood, as in NoLo, the investors introduced the neighborhood's own name as a strategic tool for urban regeneration. This strategy strengthened the idea of a comeback of the neighborhood, which the project aimed to return to its lively old days, by a real estate company. The investors and creative community of Tomtom have been involved in promoting the branding process, thus reinforcing and consolidating the neighborhood's name.

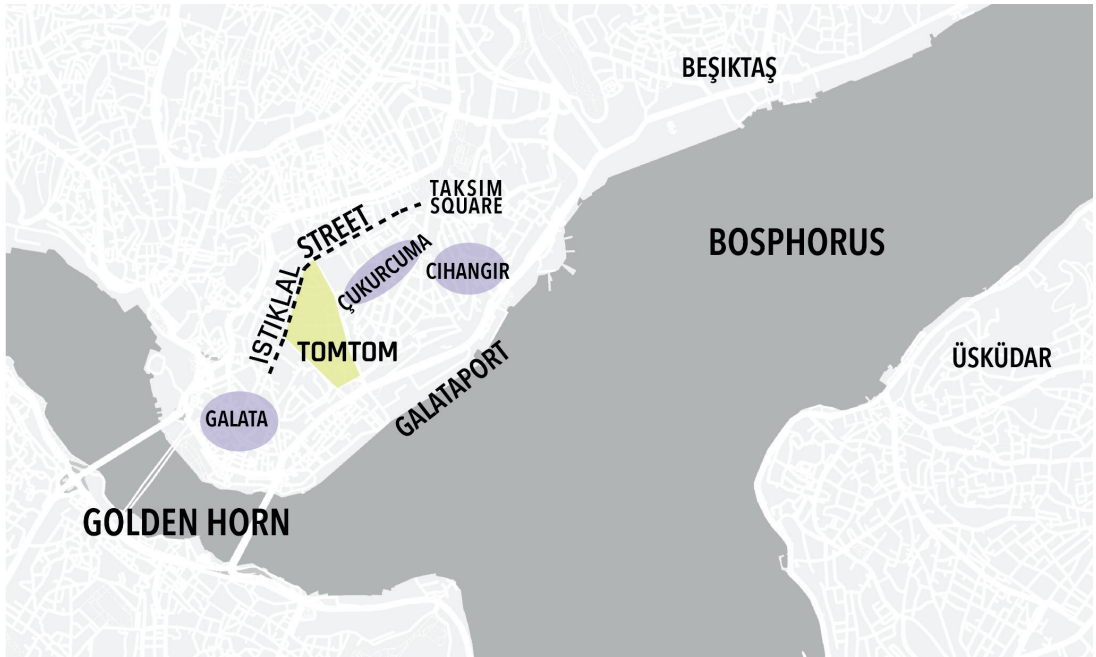


Figure 2: The location of Tomtom in Istanbul

The different strategies used to name the place might be connected with the different socioeconomic backgrounds of the area. Tomtom is located in Beyoğlu, one of Istanbul's most historical and touristic spots. It has hosted many embassies, consulates, churches, monasteries, foreign schools, hotels, and buildings as the first examples of European-style apartment buildings. Considering the population of this district, it is seen that Italians, Greeks, Jews, Armenians, and a small number of Turks lived here in the past. In the 19th century, in parallel with the modernization of Istanbul, businesses, shops, and banks began to take place in Galata and Beyoğlu. Due to the population increase observed in Beyoğlu during this period, housing shortages and land prices increased. This situation caused the Muslims to move to other places, and as a result, non-Muslims started to settle in Beyoğlu. During this period, the wealthiest neighborhood in Beyoğlu was Tomtom, where Europeans lived. Since the 19th century, a rich social and cultural life began to develop in Beyoğlu; coffee houses, casinos, and restaurants were opened; performances such as theater and concerts and entertainment such as parties and balls were organized. The rich social and cultural life that Beyoğlu offers and its "modern" atmosphere have gradually changed

due to various social, political, and economic reasons. First of all, in the 1950s, the non-Muslim population living here went abroad for various reasons, and the collapse began in this district. Thus, the days when Beyoğlu was a center of commerce, art, and culture were long gone. As the attractiveness of Istiklal Street decreased, the population structure of the neighborhoods started to change completely. By the 1980s, ways to stop this collapse began to be sought, and efforts were made to make this place a center of trade, art, and culture again.

The branding process, in this case, was linked to the restoration of many historical buildings in the area by the Krea Real Estate company which put them into use with various functions such as luxury residences, event spaces, design stores, and pop-up galleries. This company had developed a project, Tomtom Designhood, which initially started as a real estate investment project when Krea Group invested in 2013. Then it evolved into creative neighborhood projects such as Marais in Paris and Soho in London with the discovery of the region's creative potential. The chairman of this real estate company, expressed the project with these words;

«When we started investing five years ago [2013], the neighborhood was full of old, run-down, abandoned buildings. (...). We have come to this day by collecting 17 buildings one by one around three different courtyards» (Tomtom, real estate, 2017).

In the last decade, Tomtom Designhood has held multidisciplinary design events and invited everyone to come and discover this creative area through pop-up events, food, drink, and art and design exhibitions.

3.1 Symbolic dimension and conflict

The first dimension identified by Montgomery (2003) as a strategic tool in order to analyze a neighborhood is related to the "meaning" of the place and its identity.

For its particular history, the rhetoric of naming the place with the acronym NoLo has played a central role in the construction of landmark images associated with the area, transforming its own name into a strategic tool for urban regeneration. Today several projects developed in the neighborhood are named after "NoLo", such as the BienNoLo Design Event project, the neighborhood voice RadioNoLo, and the university project Off Campus NoLo. Tomtom also is going through a similar process of turning into a brand. In recent years the name "Tomtom" is mainly used in the projects, building names, and design events held in the neighborhood, such as the Tomtom Designhood project, Design on Tomtom Street event, Tomtom Red, Tomtom Corners, and Tomtom Suites buildings to recreate itself as a desirable place due to investments. Furthermore, it is widely promoted by designers and real estate investors on social media.

Within this approach, it becomes crucial to define the borders. Identity expectations, perceptions, and sense of belonging might differ from street to street within the same neighborhood, and invisible lines might divide the area into different parts. In the case of NoLo (Figure 3), the neighborhood's core is shaped like a "diamond"⁵ plus a more significant extension⁶. These territorial delimitations identify two different worlds that travel at two different speeds, inhabited by different populations, one more wealthy and the other socially weaker: "In NoLo, there is a part called NoLo Malibù, beautiful, liveable, prettier, where many clubs have opened, and a certain positive and cool image of the place has settled in; on the other side of Viale Monza, from Via Pietro Crespi to Via Padova, there is NoLo Beirut, where such image doesn't exist." (NoLo, commerce, 2021). Viale Padova, in fact, is highly multi-ethnic and characterized by a strong identity,

5 The Diamond is centered in Piazza Morbegno, between Brianza Avenue for the south, the railway tracks for the west and the north part, and Leoncavallo Street for the eastern boundaries.

6 It includes Viale Monza to the west and Viale Padova to the east, reaching the Martiri della Libertà and Cimiano park to the north.

hardly comparable to that of NoLo, considered the beating heart of the neighborhood:

«There are two contrasting visions: Via Padova on the one side and NoLo on the other. At NoLo, there are cultural and creative activities and designers. While Viale Padova is also known for integration problems, urban conflicts, etc. Some inhabitants of Via Padova say: “why should we get together with those of NoLo, who do not need anything; it is Via Padova that most needs help; we cannot waste our energies; we should work just on Via Padova». (NoLo, commerce; 2018).

This dimension causes evident consequences on the perception of social and spatial exclusion concerning specific parts of the city and social categories. The strict division between the two parts is also clearly evident through the associations active in the area, such as those of traders, one for Viale Monza and one for Viale Padova, rather than the initiatives of social streets, divided between the “NoLo Social District” and “Via Padova Viva”. According to some interpretations, such a duality could represent a risk for the strength of the neighborhood brand, based on a conflictual vision on “what is NoLo” and “what is out of NoLo”. Anyway, this paper argues that such a duality, showing a plural dimension of different identities and representing more social forces active in the area, should instead be considered as an opportunity for the neighborhood, countering a simplified approach of the city branding which sees complexity not as an asset but as a threat.

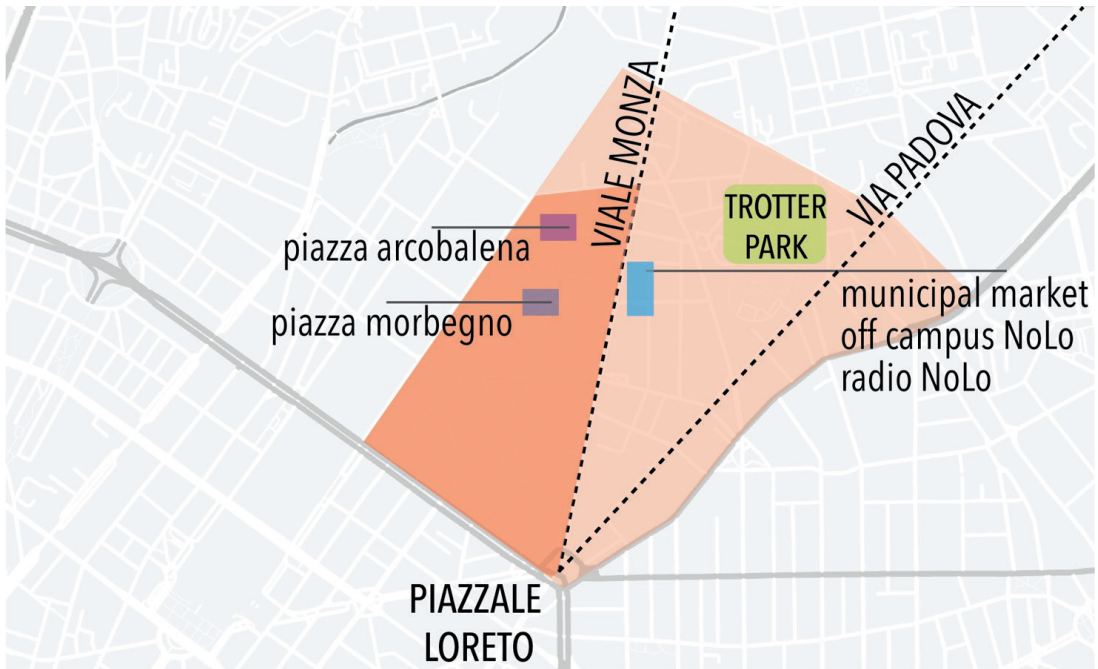


Figure 3: The case of NoLo

The case of NoLo shows how the rhetoric of a place could be subjected to over-narration phenomena, with the consequent risk of losing control between the vocation and the characteristic identity of the place, as well demonstrated by some “symbolic places” of the area, such as Piazza Spoleto, now renamed as Piazza Arcobalena. As for “NoLo”, the name Arcobalena is charged with symbolic meanings, from the symbol of the whale (Balena), the logo of the district, to the reference to multiple colors (Arco- for the rainbow) and therefore to diversity in its multiple dimensions. As part of the “Open Squares” municipal project, the Arcobalena square was transformed in 2019 from a dangerous unregulated crossroads into a pedestrian area, a meeting place

to encourage social connections, with ping pong tables and benches and colors. A similar story has happened with the outer surface of the Tomtom Corner (Figure 4) building, which was used as one of the event venues and was being renovated according to the event's theme. In this way, it became pretty remarkable for both event participants and the residents. However, as Tomtom Corner was designed as a new living center within the scope of the Tomtom Designhood Project, it was demolished in 2019 and, therefore could not continue to be used for activities and social connections. Then, the Tomtom Red building started to be used for different events, special promotions, and fashion, art, gourmet, culture, and music parties in 2016, after the restoration process was completed. It is located at the entrance of Tomtom Kaptan Street, a public street just in front of the Italian High School. This street was also used as a public event area.

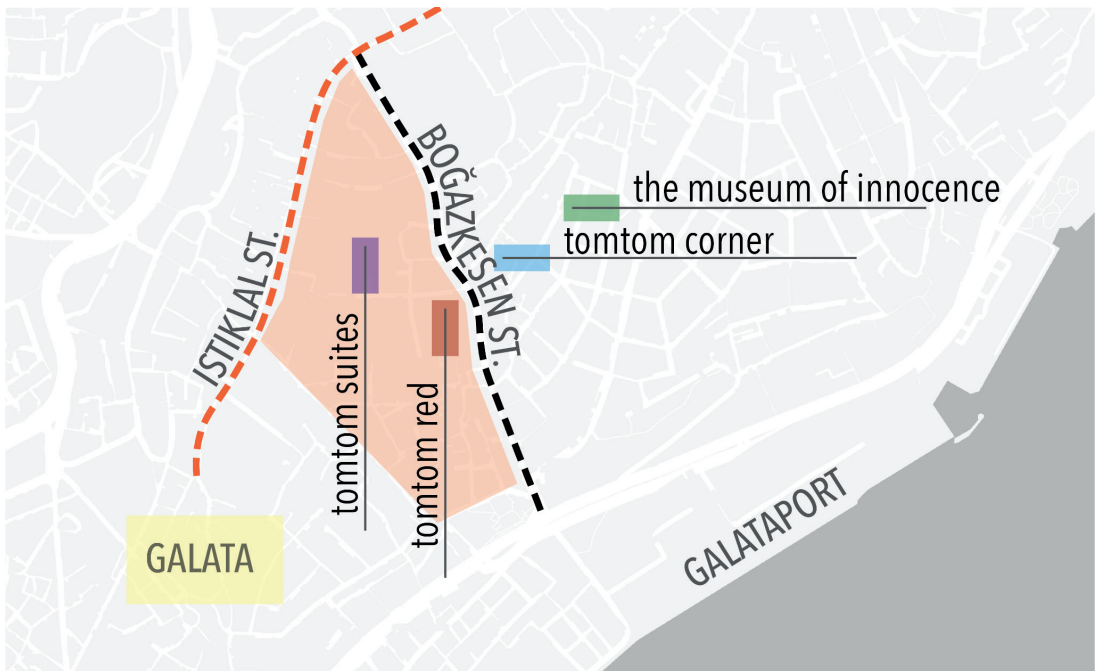


Figure 4: The case of Tomtom

In addition to the substantial symbolic value of the square in NoLo, inhabited in different ways by different populations, piazza Arcobalena also represents a place of contrasting tensions, passing from an "attractive" to a conflicting place. While NoLo represents a place where attractiveness risks becoming the main cause of the crisis, taking a problematic drift to control, Tomtom went through similar challenges at the beginning of the branding process. Because it was open to everyone, anyone could enter the Tomtom Corners building and participate in the events without control. Thanks to this strategy, Tomtom could be announced as a new brand. Nevertheless, since 2018, ticket sales have started participating in these events. Moreover, as a result, the number of participants in the events decreased as well, as the inclusive spirit of the neighborhood started to fade. Various individuals and institutions have criticized these design events, which were put forward with the idea of "accessible art for everyone", due to the purchasing tickets to visit the exhibition.

«Suddenly everybody must come to have a beer in Piazza Morbegno, which is happening in many other parts of the city». (NoLo, Commerce, 2018).

As clearly emerged from the participatory observation and interviews in both cases, this tension is expressed in the different use of the public spaces, related to the different moments of the day and the different populations that pass through it. Each of them gives different meanings to the place, directly related to the sense of belonging and community dimension. During the day, the places are experienced by families - due to the presence of the schools - as well as by workers and traders, offering opportunities for exchange, mutual knowledge and interaction between different inhabitants and cultures and also generating a spillover effect of expansion of the phenomenon to surrounding areas. In the evening and at night, however, the square becomes the hub of the nightlife and the central point of aggregation and meeting, also causing negative effects that could be compared, in some way, to these related to over-tourism risks. In Tomtom, there are no such squares or nightclubs open at night, like in NoLo. However, in the case of Tomtom, it is possible to talk about a more serious risk of over-tourism. Since Tomtom is the strongest pedestrian connection between Galataport and Taksim - Istiklal Street, almost all tourists commuting between these two areas pass through Tomtom. With the completion of the Galataport project in 2021, cruise ships started to dock at the pier. For example, the capacity of a cruise ship arriving in April 2022 is more than five thousand. Moreover, more than 200 cruise ships are scheduled to arrive at the port annually. Considering that Galataport is only a 10-minute walk from Tomtom, it is inevitable that Tomtom will soon face the danger of over-tourism, like NoLo or even more.

3.2 Economic Dimensions: from regeneration to gentrification

Montgomery (2003) highlighted the second dimension for investigating a neighborhood regarding its economic activities, including the extent and variety of cultural venues, events, presence of an evening economy, café, culture and more.

In this regard, the urban transformation of NoLo was perceived in a very different way by the various social actors involved: the interviews, in fact, highlighted how a large part of the residents previously settled in the neighborhood, as well as non-resident workers, experienced these transformations as a positive process of urban regeneration (except for some complaints about excessive night-time disorder); for the inhabitants who settled later, this transformation would have represented, instead, the beginning of a complicated and exclusive process of widespread gentrification, caused by an initial settlement of a new creative class, followed by a relative increase in places of consumption, an increase in the price of real estate set by real estate agents and the subsequent establishment of a new class of wealthier inhabitants. As emerged from some interviews, many "aspiring inhabitants" who work in the neighborhood and who have tried to rent a house following its transformation have not been able to find affordable houses for rent due to the rapid increase in the cost of living housing and the consequent expulsion of the most vulnerable residents.

«NoLo, for me, represents a concern because those who started did not imagine that it would come to this, and I fear that NoLo will become more and more like Paris» (NoLo, enterprise, 2018).

Some people also denounced the perception of a change in the settled population of NoLo in recent years, characterized by younger inhabitants and a higher percentage of Italians. None of the foreign residents interviewed, in fact, settled in after the neighborhood transformation, which made it more expensive and less accessible, especially to immigrants. The residential gentrification process is also the cause of severe changes in the urban fabric of the place: an example is the ex-factory Giovanni Cova amp in Via Popoli Uniti, a space of great architectural value that, following the transformation process of the neighborhood, was demolished by the owner for the construction of new residences, certainly more profitable.

In recent years, especially after the announcement of megaprojects and investments, Tomtom has shown signs of early-stage gentrification by comparatively cheap real estate values and its proximity to main touristic spots in Istanbul. In the interviews held at Tomtom, it was determined that various social groups interpreted this transformation process differently. The current Tomtom neighborhood appears as a complex area with traces of the past and the creative class that moved here with the investments and transformation process in recent years. The effects of the urban transformation and renewal processes carried out recently, especially around the district within the borders of Beyoğlu, such as Galata and Cihangir, spread to Tomtom. The residents who could not hold on in these gentrified neighborhoods saw this area as a place of refuge. In 2004, with the government's announcement of the Galataport Project, a vast price hike was seen in the real estate in this neighborhood and its immediate surroundings. While this situation generally results in gentrification in urban spaces undergoing renewal or transformation in many districts of Istanbul, an unusual process can be observed here. With an interesting paradox in the face of rising real estate prices due to the urban renewal process, neighborhood residents have managed to hold on to the neighborhood while they were expected to be excluded from the area. One of the reasons for this situation can be interpreted as the continuity of a strong neighborhood culture in this area, especially in Tophane, dating back to the Ottoman period. In addition, another reason can reside in the fact that the neighborhood's people are property owners, not tenants. The residents, whose properties are valued by the rising real estate prices in the neighborhood, want to keep their properties; the constant appreciation of their property is adequate.

It is possible to explain this situation because the old residents were not separated from the elite/bohemian people coming from outside. With the tensions that started due to this, several cultural, ethnic, and class space-sharing problems emerged between the old and new residents in the neighborhood. In this process, the residents reacted to the art galleries opened in this area and to the consumption of alcoholic beverages, and there were even events that required police intervention during the opening events of some art galleries.

In Nolo, from a commercial point of view, the structure of the place reflects the social changes taking place, where various African, Asian, and South American communities and shops offer an international and multi-ethnic dimension, with products from all over the world. At the same time, however, a progressive change in commercial activities occurs, where the Egyptian baker, the Middle Eastern pastry shop, the Chinese tailoring, and the kebab seller are joined by the emergence of new design shops, art galleries, cafes, showrooms, etc. Some traditional commercial services are transformed into trendy "concept stores", where instead of clothes, "sensory experiences" are sold; instead of flowers or bicycles, both are also sold in pairs, promoting alternative lifestyles and consumption, which become new builders of community, in particular for the "young creative" classes (Ley, 1996). The transformation of the real estate market is thus directly linked to a commercial-led gentrification process (Zukin *et al.*, 2009). In this context, buzzwords such as "creativity" and "social community" become central tools of urban "attractivity", able to activate new regeneration programs and relaunch new territorial marketing policies.

3.3 Between urban policies and micro-projects

Finally, the third and last dimension pointed out by Montgomery (2003) is related to the neighborhood's built environment. To this proposal, the process of urban regeneration that has transformed the image of NoLo in the last ten years represents an exciting case study as it started almost entirely through the bottom-up activism of its inhabitants, especially young people attracted by low rents and a lively atmosphere. Starting from a rooted proactive associational fabric of informal groups, a driving element has been the creation of the online platform known

as NoLo Social District, an enlarged Social Street born in 2017 that today counts over 11,000 subscribers, which defines NoLo as an open, inclusive place, based on social cohesion and solidarity, creating connections and new relationships between the inhabitants.

«Behind the Facebook community, there are also people who actually forge relationships in a very genuine, authentic way and, actually, I like this area very much because it feels like living in the countryside. I am from Milan and I have always suffered from not even knowing the name of my neighbor. Here you say hallo to everyone and we also help a lot in opening the business, even similar businesses have never been antagonistic but have always been very careful to help». (NoLo, commerce, 2018).

Through NoLo Social District, multiple locally-based micro-projects, proximity initiatives, and participating processes such as enhancement of festivals, cultural events, and design events coming from local actors, cultural associations as well as individual entrepreneurs have been activated. Such events are hosted in various abandoned spaces (factories, workshops, warehouses) that have now turned into shops, venues for events, and innovative “third places”, defining a transition from online virtual knowledge to an offline physical human dimension.

Among them, WeMi, an urban project spread across the city for local welfare with a base also in NoLo, aimed at enhancing human relationships and local resources; the “diffused neighborhood concierge”, developed on an example of a Parisian newsstand aimed to offer useful services to the inhabitants and developed in NoLo through several bars, restaurants, markets that offer different services; the “spesa sospesa” a voluntary initiative aimed at helping the most fragile families by offering a weekly shopping with products coming from the Municipal Market in viale Monza 54; “Radio NoLo”, a non-profit neighborhood radio born in 2017, hosting also the project “Neighborhood vocabulary”, which organizes discussions between different social and professional actors on key words central for the neighborhood, such as space, decay, sense of belonging, memory, in order to trigger concrete transformative actions for the neighborhood through co-design fiction; more events are added, such as neighborhood gardens, night bike rides, neighborhood breakfasts, open-air cinema, GiraNoLo (a group that organizes guided tours), “NoLo for kids” and more. At the base of these dynamic realities are key winning elements such as the proximity dimension, density, and diversity of activities. A number of such bottom-up projects have been submitted to municipal calls becoming collaboration agreements (patti di collaborazione), participatory budgets (bilanci partecipativi), or district plans (piano dei quartieri).

To such spontaneous realities, more structured interventions are added, such as “NoLo Off Campus”, a container of activities born in 2018 to strengthen the presence of the Politecnico in the city of Milan, offering skills for the territories, activating collaborations with local realities and multidisciplinary partnerships with other universities.

One of the main reasons Tomtom has become so popular and has gained brand value and increased rental prices in recent years is that there have been speculative discourses about Galata-port and Tomtom Designhood Projects. The most important feature of the district is that it hosts the dock where the city carried out the shipping trade with Europe throughout history. For many years, it has been discussed what functions should be given to the historical Galata Port and the area around it, how to use the area in line with the principles of public interest, and how and by whom the actors here will be shaped.

According to the results of the interviews, the negative effects of this bottom-up process, which can be described as different from NoLo's, can be seen. This branding process takes place at Tomtom in an elitist and restrictive manner, completely under investors' control, affecting upper-class users and tourists. The designers in the neighborhood complain about this situation; they especially mention the lack of public support:

«Tomtom Designhood project was performing well, but they commercialized it a lot; of course, they moved in a different direction. This went beyond social purpose. Therefore, they could no longer achieve the old efficiency. They started selling tickets and raised rents. I advised them to involve the municipality and open a place for designers who cannot afford to rent a place. However, it didn't happen; unfortunately, Beyoğlu Municipality did not show enough care. The first two years were good, yes. It has also brought us good relations commercially. Then, unfortunately, it crashed. What is the purpose of Krea now? They aim to be able to sell the residences they created at Tomtom» (Tomtom, commerce, 2021).

NoLo, however, is also placed in a central urban area of Milan directly related to wider urban regeneration dynamics, defined by a Program Agreement signed in 2017 among the Municipality of Milan, the Lombardy Region, the Ferrovie dello Stato Italiane Group for the redevelopment of the seven disused railway yards existing in Milan (Farini, Porta Romana, Porta Genova, Greco-Breda, Lambrate, Rogoredo, San Cristoforo), which together cover an area of 1 million and 250,000 square meters, of which about 200,000 will maintain their railway function. This is Milan's most extensive urban regeneration plan for the next 20 years and one of the most significant projects to regenerate and enhance the territory in Italy and Europe. One of such railway yards is close to NoLo (Greco-Breda) and its development will thus directly influence the neighborhood. Another significant project that will play a central role in the further transformation of NoLo, coming from "Reinventing cities", the international call launched by the Municipality of Milan together with "C40" for urban regeneration in a sustainable way, will be the transformation of the nearby Piazzale Loreto, the most chaotic traffic hub in the city that will become a green square, the symbol of the 2026 Milan Olympic Games. The 2030 Territorial Governance Plan (PGT) also focuses on enhancing the polycentricity of the city, through various tools, including that of "Tactical urbanism", aimed at transforming the public space into a place really belonging to its inhabitants through a new shared dimension, promoting cheap, fast, temporary and easy to implement interventions.

Nevertheless, the boundaries between bottom-up and top-down approaches are still not always clear and sometimes controversial:

«There is no doubt that this NoLo thing has brought back a vision of attractiveness and positivity to the neighborhood. However, this has also represented a threat for some: someone arrives and puts a new name on a territory by dropping content from above as if it were an invasion». (NoLo, local association, 2018).

Conclusion

The paper has explored specific urban dynamics on a lower scale: the neighborhood. Tomtom in Istanbul and NoLo in Milan, as well as many other identifying urban areas of the new millennium, have, in a brief period, undergone rapid growth and impacted urban transformation causing an increasing cost of living, as well as significant changes in the commercial structure of the areas. A central aspect of micro-level neighborhood branding that emerged through the comparison of the two different case studies, is related to the critical tension existing between two opposite forces working simultaneously: from the one side, the existence of small-scale projects, usually promoted by local actors through the typically bottom-up process; from the other side, the role played on the local contexts by large-scale urban strategic projects, embedded into broader top-down dynamics. Both cases analyzed showed how this constant tension in constructing a new brand for a place has actively contributed to creating and consolidating new local identities and new narratives that have rapidly and deeply consolidated in both areas. In symbolic terms, this transformation has meant the creation of new storytelling, often built on

new rhetoric of the place. At the same time, the research has shown how the presence of structured activism, built on an almost entirely bottom-up participatory process, couldn't avoid raising the risk of destructive gentrification processes currently occurring in both neighborhoods. From a theoretical point of view, this study aims to determine whether a well-organized bottom-up activism structure is sufficient per se to prevent the risk of gentrification that frequently arises in city branding processes that do not sufficiently take into account the local neighborhood dimension. Because gentrification is not just a housing issue but a process in which new investors change the social class and, therefore, the character of the neighborhood. For this reason, it is necessary to think about this re-identification process of neighborhoods beyond their geographical and political roles. Vital capital forces such as big companies or real estate offices impact the branding process of neighborhoods. However, this should not cause the role of local people in the neighborhood to be overlooked. Different social groups are active cultural and economic actors that must be considered in this branding process. For further research, the necessity of prioritizing the demands of the local people with a participatory and inclusive approach should be prioritized. In this way, the branding process will be more vital, and therefore, the positive feedback in the neighborhood will increase.

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“Damn, Norway”: Place Branding as a Function of Local Campaigns and Global Actors²

Introduction

Place branding has become a diffuse task. Various and uncoordinated actors in transnational digital networks can now contribute to what the public associates with a place (Ingenhoff *et al.*, 2021). One of the key questions in place branding is which messages become dominant in the local–global sphere and especially, *who* is responsible for these messages. The aim of this paper is to better understand the role that global actors take – that is, those once considered the *targets* of campaigns – in crafting a place’s brand in the transnational media ecosystem.

Previous research has considered the role of the public, mainly focusing on citizens as “ambassadors” (Braun *et al.*, 2013) and “co-creators” (Hereźniak, 2017). Yet so far less attention has been devoted to the role that international networks and foreign citizens play. It has also been suggested that the role of global media and news events is not sufficiently studied in place branding literature (Bolin, Ståhlberg, 2015; Rasmussen, Merkelsen, 2014). This paper thus takes 1) a transnational approach, premised on the idea that place brands are built at the crossroads of local and global fields of power; and 2) an events-conscious approach, reflecting the rapidity of today’s social media environments (Bruns, Burgess, 2015).

The paper focuses on the social media platform Twitter, which has more than 200 million daily active users worldwide (Twitter Inc, 2021, p. 43). It is among the top sites used by place brand practitioners, both as a means for disseminating campaigns, and for monitoring user-generated content about a place (Curlin, 2019, p. 103). Twitter is also heavily used by celebrities, journalists, and other opinion leaders (Burgess, Baym, 2020, p. 4) and Twitter communication has been found to have a wider geographic reach than, for example, Facebook (Ghemawat, 2016, p. 40). Empirically, the paper draws on a year-long collection of what Crescentini *et al.* (2021) call “spatial–temporal Big Data” (p. 131). Twitter data on Norway was collected from June 2019 to July 2020, effectively all tweets mentioning the country in that time. As previous literature has suggested, place branding is a long-term, cumulative effort (Volcic, Andrejevic, 2011, p. 599). Moreover, Norway offers a useful case study because of its status as a relatively small and remote European country, making it less subject to traditional word-of-mouth from tourists and more reliant on mediated publicity.

Methodologically, computational text analysis methods are used to understand the topics and sentiments people associated with Norway. These discourses are further explored through the use of location and linguistic metadata to identify “locals” and “internationals” – that is, actors inside and outside Norway. To help flesh out the data, a qualitative analysis is applied to the tweets that drove temporal peaks in attention over the course of the year.

The findings suggest that, rather than challenging place brands, global publics may largely reinforce them. Counterintuitively, even news coded as “negative” may reflect positively on Norway, though users frequently use or exploit Norway’s brand in discussions of cultural conflict and political economy. The single most popular tweet in the data is one in which a foreign user highlights the contrast between Norwegian and American welfare infrastructures, remarking “Damn, Norway”. Thus, the paper contributes to the growing literature on how online media rapidly shape places through various lenses – including those that may distort the way local events are viewed. This is particularly relevant as attraction, aesthetics, and perception become more intertwined in international relations (Manfredi-Sanchez, 2022, p. 230), further blurring the line between politics and place branding.

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The article is structured in five sections. First, I investigate the existing knowledge on place branding, particularly in reference to social media, the involvement of the public, and the role of events. Following this, I set up the particular case and data studied here, and describe the methods used for analyzing that case. The results of the analyses are followed by a discussion and conclusion that summarize the contributions and limitations of the study.

1. Literature review

1.1 *Place branding and 'networks of associations'*

A place brand has been called the “defined DNA of a place, that is, its unique, distinctive character, marked by what we perceive as its personality and identity” (Kaefer, 2021, p. 7). It sets a city, country, or region apart from other places, or what Anholt (2007) has called “competitive identity”. Place branding as a professional practice and concept emerges from marketing and tourism in the 1990s – billed as a necessity to compete for tourists, workers, and investment in a globalized world (Kaneva, 2018, p. 634; Kaefer, 2021). However, it has taken on a wider scope. “Place branding is increasingly viewed as a public management activity and governance process” writes Hereźniak (2017, p. 129), having implications for local development (Boisen *et al.*, 2018), and even citizens’ perceptions of national identity (Aronczyk, 2013; Bolin, Ståhlberg, 2015; Hanna, Rowley, 2015). Thus, place branding goes beyond logos, slogans, and color palettes; it is meant to not just sell a locality, but to instill a mediated image of that place and its identity in the minds of people who have never visited the place (Boisen *et al.*, 2018; Szondi, 2008, p. 16). Scholars of place and nation branding emphasize that places do not stand alone, but are part of a constellation of other locations, people, products, and corporate brands (Andéhn *et al.*, 2014; Hanna, Rowley, 2015, pp. 88-89; Medway *et al.*, 2015, p. 66). Braun *et al.* (2013) call this the “network of associations”, formed through both cognitive and affective associations in the consumer’s mind. These are networks that connect different visual, verbal, and embodied associations, contributing to a visceral understanding of a place (p. 19). Governance, exports, tourism, investment, culture (especially films, music, and books), and famous people all contribute to this network (Anholt, Hildreth, 2004). Scholars argue this network of associations creates a brand that can be transported from one arena to another (Pamment, Cassinger, 2018), such as when *Lord of the Rings* fans visit national parks in New Zealand, or as Bergvall writes, “in the heyday of Nokia ... it was almost enough to be Finnish to get money from U.S. investors” (p. 195). Prior to social media, scholars emphasized a top-down creation of these networks of associations. Kavaratzis (2004) theorized that place brands were formed through three forms of communication: the physical experience of a place (primary); marketing campaigns (secondary), and finally, news media and word-of-mouth, considered tertiary forms of image-formation. Szondi (2008) suggested place branders have “control over the message”, and that this message “tends to be simple and concise and leaves little space for dialogue and interactions” (p. 16). Not surprisingly, then, the foreign target audience were considered “passive” (p. 13). Present media dynamics are a different story. Particularly on social media, messages are no longer simple nor controlled, nor are audiences passive, as the next section explores.

1.2 *Place branding and Twitter*

Digital platforms have given people new means of interacting with place brands and presenting their own positive or negative views of a place – in a way that’s accessible to a huge audience (Hanna, Rowley, 2015, pp. 92-93). This raises questions about the role of these new

technologies in crafting a place brand (Acharya, Rahman, 2016; Andéhn *et al.*, 2014; Govers, 2015). Barnett *et al.* (2017) suggest that social media are not only a source of insight into how the public perceives foreign places, but are now also part of the media environment that help *shape* the image itself (p. 38), potentially enabling “a more open and bottom-up” creation of place brands, writes Hereźniak (2017, p. 137). For example, Ingenhoff *et al.* (2021) find that on Twitter, independent opinion leaders “play a more dominant role than states or other political actors in creating and disseminating content related to country image” (p. 1).

Twitter lends itself to recreating people’s networks of associations described by Braun *et al.* (2013), due to the largely public nature of communication on the site and the huge number of topics (Burgess, Baym, 2020). Twitter is distinctive from sites like Instagram and Flickr, which are foremost photo-sharing sites; while users can share photos on Twitter, it is foremost a text-based platform. This arguably allows a wider breadth of content, including from users who have not visited a place, as found by Tenkanen *et al.* (2017). They argue that while Instagram invites users to share personal experiences (and the photographic evidence), Twitter is for circulating “thoughts and ideas” (p. 5). Andéhn *et al.* (2014), in their study of Stockholm, Sweden, document how these thoughts and ideas connect to place brands. Through an analysis of concept “assemblages” (p. 7) – a semantic manifestation of Braun *et al.*’s (2013) network of associations – Andéhn *et al.* demonstrate the importance of not only topics related to travel (“hotel” and “museum”) but also famous figures (“ABBA”) and more indirect conceptual associations (“Stockholm Syndrome”). In this way, the authors argue Twitter serves as a highly public arena in which the meanings attributed to a place are generated by users (p. 2).

Practitioners have sought to harness this new form of electronic word-of-mouth through “co-creation” and “curatorial” approaches – that is, campaigns that invite public participation (Braun *et al.* 2013; Govers, 2015; Hanna, Rowley, 2015; Hereźniak, 2017). Examples include #IAMAmsterdam (Govers, 2015), the “B-Berlin project” (Hereźniak, 2017, p. 137), and the @sweden Twitter account, aka “the world’s most democratic Twitter account” (Christensen, 2013). Hereźniak (2017) suggests that such efforts using new communication can make place branding more inclusive and increase the legitimacy of the brand (p. 136).

Yet scholars have noted Twitter and other social media have also enabled challenges to brand hegemonies by consumers who wish to “tell a different story about the brand to that which the brand owners seek to disseminate” (Hanna, Rowley, 2015, p. 93). For example, in response to Rio de Janeiro’s branding efforts in advance of the 2016 Olympics, a group of residents launched a “counter-branding” campaign to draw attention to the lack of local infrastructure, with the slogan “Rio Olympic City – Champion of Urban Immobility” (Maiello, Pasquinelli, 2015, p. 122). Similarly, residents of Amsterdam have responded to “I Amsterdam” with “I AMsterdamned” (Braun *et al.*, 2013, p. 22). Moreover, it is not just the expected celebrities, journalists, and politicians who act as opinion leaders online. Research on Twitter finds that ordinary users are also able to exercise influence through viral moments and the native features of the platform (Andéhn *et al.*, 2014, p. 5).

Such developments have added weight to the line of literature that is critical of the underlying commercial values of place branding (Christensen, 2013; Pamment, Cassinger, 2018). Volcic and Andrejevic (2011) suggest place branding is a form of “commercial nationalism”, turning national identity into a strategic asset (p. 614), and even constraining place identity so that it is always positive and profit-oriented (Aronczyk, 2013, p. 163). Kaneva (2018), drawing on Baudrillard, describes nation brands as “*simulacra* which exist within a transnational media system for the creation, circulation and consumption of commodity-signs” (p. 633). Scholars have critiqued the strategy of co-creation like the @sweden campaign as one that draws on the labor of citizens to help reproduce commercial symbols (Christensen, 2013; Lury, 2004; Pamment, Cassinger, 2018). They suggest further investigation should be done into the *uncoordinated* circulation of images and associations by residents of a place (see also Acharya Rahman, 2016).

To this I would like to *non-residents* of a place. Word-of-mouth from friends, family and fellow

tourists has always been influential in the impression people have of foreign places (Kavaratzis, 2004). But now word-of-mouth is on transnational platforms (Kaneva, 2018). These platforms include review sites and travel blogs, but also sites not ostensibly oriented around travel, such as Twitter, but on which impressions of cities and nations become part of the ambient flow of information. This raises the question of how *foreign* publics contribute to the processes of place branding. The role of foreigners is hinted at to some degree in Andéhn *et al.*'s (2014) study of semantic assemblages and Ingenhoff *et al.* (2021) investigation of opinion leaders (p. 7). Even so, in much place branding literature foreign publics tend to still be viewed solely as *targets* of place branding campaigns.

Given that news coverage and media have also been traditionally considered part of word-of-mouth (Kavaratzis, 2004), it is also necessary to consider the temporal and sporadic nature of brand-formation. In the final section here, I discuss the role of news events.

1.3 Place branding and news events

Place branding literature has become more interested of late in the connections between place image and news events. One focus is mega-events like the Olympics, Eurovision, and the World Cup (Bolin, Ståhlberg, 2015; Govers, 2015; Maiello, Pasquinelli, 2015). These events draw attention to the place in question and practitioners often work closely with organizers to ensure that attention is positive. However, these are *planned* events. Here I am thinking of *unplanned* events, which may be local or international in scope, that have bearing on how a place is perceived.

Scholars have taken up this thread through examinations of scandal, such as Bigi *et al.*'s (2011) study of Silvio Berlusconi's negative impact on Italy's brand. Recently, several studies have considered the crossroads of place branding and crisis communication, such as Rasmussen and Merckelsen's (2014) study on the Danish Cartoon Crisis, Vaxevanidou's (2017) investigation into Greece's rebranding following the Euro crisis, and Ketter's (2016) research on Nepal's efforts to restore its image after the 2015 earthquake. Often, crises are associated with negative sentiment, particularly if they fit national stereotypes and dominant media narratives (Avraham, Ketter, 2017, p. 785). However, Lee and Kim (2021) point out in their study on South Korea during the Covid-19 pandemic that crises, if handled well, can improve a country's image.

Twitter is especially attuned to such unplanned events (Bruns, Burgess, 2015; Mitchell *et al.*, 2021), allowing users to follow user-generated reactions in real time. Research demonstrates tweet volume is highly reactive to events, though these variations are not always in line with traditional news coverage. Govers' (2015) analysis of tweets about Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Qatar, and Bahrain found that diplomatic summits, while generating a large amount of press coverage, produced relatively little Twitter response, while protests generated enormous amounts of online attention. Twitter allows unfolding events to be easily blended with more stable associations with places. For example, Ingenhoff *et al.*'s study on #Austria, #Switzerland, and the #Netherlands found a third of the influencers' posts referred to what they called "functional" themes: the economic, political, and educational systems of the countries, including references to news events (pp. 6-7). However, research examining unplanned events and temporal aspects of place branding is still limited. To some degree, this may be due to a perception of place branding as a depoliticized economic endeavor (Aronczyk, 2013, p. 128; Szondi, 2008). Bolin and Ståhlberg (2015) argue place branding scholars should move away from *campaign analysis* – typically analysis of official materials and interviews with consultants – and consider the role of media and current events in shaping place brands (p. 3068; see also Rasmussen, Merckelsen, 2014), a thread I seek to take up in this study. In the next section, I detail the particular case and research questions to be investigated.

2. Case background: Norway, the brand

Norway is a northern European country of 5.4 million people. Despite its size, the country has amassed considerable soft power according to Nye, thanks to involvement in peace talks and the Nobel Peace Prize (2004, p. 112). Norway comes in at 11th place on Simon Anholt's Good Country Index, which ranks countries based on their contribution to the global good (Anholt, 2022) and in 2019, was No. 3 on the World Happiness Report (Helliwell *et al.*, 2019). In Norway's current 10-year place branding strategy document, planners propose focusing on Norway's dramatic landscapes, *friluftsliv* (outdoor activities), and its commitment to climate-friendly initiatives (Innovation Norway, 2021). These themes are reflected in posts by the country's official Twitter account, @visitnorway.

Norway is part of the Nordic Region, which also includes Finland, Iceland, Denmark, and Sweden (Denmark, Sweden, and Norway comprise Scandinavia). While not an official administrative demarcation, the Nordic countries share similar culture, history, and strong welfare states. Pamment and Cassinger (2018) note that the Nordic countries have been especially attuned to nation branding, due in part to their size, remoteness, and wealth (pp. 565-566). Cassinger *et al.* (2021) write that the Nordics have a long tradition of associating their brand with the regional geography, akin to the Mediterranean countries, in which national identities are framed as "endogenous to a confined geographical or cultural context" (p. 257). Nordic countries have used a contrast between wild, snowy landscapes and modern innovation, progressiveness, and openness (Pamment, Cassinger, 2018, p. 566), acting as examples of the "power of these ideas" (Ingebritsen, 2006, p. 101).

Among these ideas is the "Nordic Model", which during the Cold War became known as a "third way" between capitalism and socialism (Ingebritsen, 2006, p. 101). The model has taken on other meanings in recent years, including in the United States where some politicians have argued for a Nordic-style health care system. At the same time, the Nordic region has also become a focal point for cultural conflicts arising from immigration (Colliver *et al.*, 2019; Robinson, Enli, 2022), which poses a challenge to the region's self-presentation as tolerant and open (Rasmussen, Merckelsen, 2012).

2.1 Research questions

In light of the previous literature on place branding, social media, and events – and taking inspiration from the research gaps identified by Acharya and Rahman (2016, pp. 308-309) – the following exploratory research questions are posed:

RQ₁ (A) What thematic "network of associations" does Norway evoke on Twitter, and (B) are the associations positive or negative?

RQ₂ What is the role of news events in bringing attention to Norway?

RQ₃ What are the roles of international users in contributing to Norway's brand on Twitter?

These questions will be answered using a year's worth of Twitter data on Norway and a mixed-methods approach, as detailed in the following section.

3. Data and Methods

A data collection of 5,726,683 tweets were captured in real time from June 13, 2019 to July 7, 2020 using the DMI-TCAT tool, which accesses Twitter's Streaming API (Borra Rieder, 2014). Tweets were captured using the case-insensitive keywords *norway*, *norwegian*, and *norwegians*. This method finds both words in hashtags (as employed by Ingenhoff, *et al.* 2021), as well as in the normal text of tweets and URLs in the tweets. English-language keywords were chosen because, as noted by Mocanu *et al.* (2013) English is the unofficial lingua franca of Twitter; it is also the language used by @visitnorway; and it is spoken by most Norwegians in addition to the Norwegian language (Education First, 2019).³ Initially, the collection period was scheduled to be a year, from June 2019 to June 2020, but because of greater activity following the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, the period was allowed to run into July (see Leetaru, 2021, on the rise in Twitter use in 2020).

Given that this represents a relatively new area in place branding research (Bolin, Ståhlberg, 2015; Ingenhoff *et al.*, 2021), a mixed-methods approach was selected. The methods employed are as follows.

Geoparsing. Because this paper seeks to understand the role of non-residents, it was necessary to develop subsets of what Crescentini *et al.* (2021) call "spatial-temporal Big Data" (p. 131). The temporal dimension is already contained in the metadata of each tweet. The spatial dimension was found using geoparsing – that is, natural language matching of place names or toponyms (Crescentini *et al.*, 2021, p. 133).

First, all users providing a location in their profile were identified. Then, a set of "locals" was created by matching users' Location-field data against a list of Norwegian toponyms developed by Bråte (2021). Additional locals were added to the set by finding toponyms and Norwegian language markers (å, ø, and æ) in the Description and Realname fields, as well as selecting users with a Norwegian country domain (.no) in their personal URLs, if provided. Users who were not identified as locals using this method, but who did provide location data in their profile, were termed "internationals" (Users: $N_{\text{locals}} = 38,209$; $N_{\text{internationals}} = 1,689,756$). Of course, there are undoubtedly locals in the international set and vice versa, but Bruns *et al.* (2014) have found geoparsing to be effective on an aggregate level for large amounts of Twitter data.

Topic modeling. The "network of associations" as described in the literature is operationalized through concepts identified through topic modeling. This is a computational text analysis method that uses unsupervised machine learning to identify "topics" or groups of words based on probabilistic combinations – that is, words that frequently occur together. The Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) model from the Scikit-learn Python library was applied (Pedregosa *et al.*, 2011). While computational, this method requires the researcher to have knowledge of the data in order to program the algorithm (including how many topics to select) and then interpret those topics (Müller, Guido, 2016).

It was discovered during testing that, due to the "rich get richer" dynamics of attention on Twitter (Lu *et al.*, 2014), keeping retweets resulted in topics based solely on the text of popular tweets. Duplicate text was therefore removed so that highly retweeted tweets did not overwhelm the results (URLs and @mentions were also removed). This decision means the results capture repeated themes and ideas, regardless of viral content. Viral content will be accounted for in the temporal analysis.

3 This is different from *geotagging*, a Twitter function that marks the latitude and longitude of a tweet. Users must opt in to this feature and only an estimated 1% of users have done so. Geoparsing is also different from *geocoding*, in which text data is matched to a list of places with known latitudes and longitudes. Since the purpose here is only to locate users in and outside of Norway, this level of precision was not necessary.

Computational sentiment analysis. Sentiment analysis assesses the positive–negative valence of messages, based on word lists that have been assigned positive or negative connotations. Because positive sentiment is a key goal of branding, this method has also been used frequently in branding literature, including by Lee and Kim (2021) and Govers (2015). This paper uses the open-source Valence Aware Dictionary and sEntiment Reasoner or VADER tool (Hutto, Gilbert, 2014), which is designed for social media text. In addition to English-language words, VADER’s dictionary includes emoticons, emojis, acronyms, and common slang. VADER measures the degree of negativity and positivity, returning a compound score between -1.0 (negative) and 1.0 (positive), with 0 being neutral. Because of the computational toll of this calculation, a representative random sample of tweets is used ($N_{\text{sample}} = 250,000$).

Temporal analysis. The timeline of tweet volume was constructed in the analytics program Tableau using the date and time collected on each tweet. For the purpose of this analysis, the time-series data is grouped by daily frequency. The year is then divided into *ambient* and *peak* days, where a peak day has 30,000 or more tweets, or one standard deviation above the mean ($M=14,742$; $SD=12,055$); these peak days comprise about 20% of the data. For each peak day, a manual analysis of the underlying data is then performed: the tweet text for the peak day is arranged in descending order by frequency of occurrence – effectively identifying the most retweeted text. The top text or texts – up to 15% of the total tweets for that day – are then examined. The event is then qualitatively identified and labeled as 1) *planned* event, such as a promotional event; 2) *unplanned* news, such as a disaster; or 3) *viral* event, meaning it is the tweet itself that is the source of the peak. The original user(s) responsible for the top tweet(s) was/were also examined and labeled *local* or *international*.

The findings from these analyses and are presented in the following section.

4. Findings

4.1 Network of associations (RQ1-A)

The first task was to summarize the network of associations in the year’s worth of data. After testing the topic modeling algorithm on a random subset, the number of topics was set to 15. Figure 1-A shows the output for the full set of data. As seen here, associations include the adjectives “good”, “beautiful”, “love”, and “great”. Tourism-related terms such as “cruise” and “travel” are also in several topics. Notably, *other* countries are also frequently mentioned – more so even than the capital city, Oslo. Further inspection of the underlying data indicates that Norway appears frequently with other countries for a number of reasons, including people tweeting out the results of their genetic ancestry tests, the ranking of happiest countries (the number 10 seems to be due to top 10 lists), and the comparative cost of social services in other countries.

Based on Inghenoff *et al.*’s (2021) findings that foreign and domestic audiences have different interests, the topic modeling algorithm was also applied separately to subsets of tweets from the locals and internationals (figures 1-B and 1-C). In general, the topics are similar to those described above. However, the term “travel” for internationals is associated with “cruise”, while for locals it’s associated with “coronavirus”, reflecting incoming vs. outgoing flows of tourism. (Although as we will see later, “cruise” may be only tangentially related to Norway.) We also see a difference in the associations to other countries: the internationals reference more far-flung countries like Australia and Canada, while the locals reference neighboring Finland, Sweden, and Denmark.

4.2 Sentiment (RQ1-B) and news events (RQ2)

To further understand the underlying sentiment in the data, the VADER tool was applied (Hutto, Gilbert, 2014). As foreshadowed by the positive words found in topic modeling, the average sentiment score was positive ($M=0.271$; $SD=0.45$), though locals ($M=0.43$; $SD=0.39$) were more positive than and internationals ($M=0.26$; $SD=0.46$), and had less variation than internationals.

Next, the temporal data for the entire year is graphed in Figure 2; labels summarize the findings of the manual analysis of peak days. The peak days are further detailed in Table 1. In Figure 2, the events have been labeled for type of event: *planned event*, *unplanned news event*, and *viral Twitter event*. Six out of the 14 events are Twitter events. One, the Christmas tree given to London by Norway, was labeled a hybrid between a planned event and an event native to Twitter: On the one hand, the tree itself is an annual tradition, honoring the role of the British in defeating the Nazis. However, the peak is largely due to Twitter activity making fun of Katie Hopkins for her comments about the tree. As noted in the timeline, in two cases, the peak is due to several events (see Dec. 1, 2019 and June 17, 2020).

To understand the role of sentiment over time, the results of the VADER analysis are graphed against the time-series data in Figure 3. As suggested by the cumulative results above, we see most of the content is classified as neutral or positive. However, as suggested by previous literature (Govers, 2015) peak days tend to be more negative ($M=0.19$; $SD=0.52$) than ambient days ($M=0.28$; $SD=0.44$), though there's much more variation on peak days. Interestingly, the most negative day, Oct. 22, 2019, is not a peak day; on this day, an armed man and woman hijacked an ambulance in Oslo and injured several pedestrians, including a family with children. The man later testified that he planned to deliver narcotics. However, at the time, Rita Katz, a terrorism analyst in the U.S. with 60-thousand followers, tweeted:

#BREAKING Both alleged perpetrators of today's attack in #Oslo #Norway have been arrested, w/ police confirming both the man and woman were known to have ties to far-right extremism. A shotgun and Uzi were found with the suspects.

The VADER tool gave this tweet a score of -0.863.

4.3 Role of international users (RQ3)

Finally, to better understand the role of international users in the flows of information about Norway, the time-series data is segmented between the locals and internationals subsets. In Figure 4, the daily tweet volumes have been calculated as percentages of each group's tweets, in order to account for the fact that there are many more international users than local users. Figure 4 shows that international users are largely responsive to events, while the local users have a more constant level of tweeting about Norway, at least in English. The implications for this will be discussed further in the Discussion section.

A. All data

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Topic 1	did	right	europe	italy	does	spain	france	switzerland	ireland	germany
Topic 2	countries	way	really	iceland	switzerland	better	denmark	sweden	eu	canada
Topic 3	time	live	years	10	2019	home	air	better	2020	year
Topic 4	think	today	yes	better	years	got	time	uk	country	10
Topic 5	oslo	going	government	beautiful	2020	travel	home	2019	work	better
Topic 6	english	news	make	canada	ireland	10	better	world	read	denmark
Topic 7	finland	sweden	uk	germany	denmark	2020	australia	netherlands	canada	france
Topic 8	good	need	look	better	work	like	really	want	time	uk
Topic 9	people	day	free	better	work	home	want	country	live	sweden
Topic 10	like	sweden	denmark	better	countries	country	iceland	want	canada	switzerland
Topic 11	know	oil	coronavirus	said	better	uk	did	country	new	want
Topic 12	country	world	cruise	got	read	work	better	best	2020	home
Topic 13	just	wood	man	better	read	got	want	like	love	home
Topic 14	new	love	year	want	best	2020	coronavirus	better	10	time
Topic 15	eu	great	say	come	travel	uk	switzerland	better	want	iceland

B. Internationals

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Topic 1	country	year	today	live	uk	english	best	10	eu	countries
Topic 2	time	think	right	need	news	2019	best	countries	uk	10
Topic 3	want	years	really	did	got	better	home	work	best	countries
Topic 4	sweden	denmark	finland	countries	germany	canada	france	netherlands	italy	australia
Topic 5	just	world	great	does	ruusia	ireland	best	countries	canada	look
Topic 6	good	know	day	eu	say	deal	come	best	canada	uk
Topic 7	like	way	beautiful	iceland	switzerland	countries	eu	look	best	uk
Topic 8	new	oil	love	wood	2020	look	europe	best	australia	canada
Topic 9	people	cruise	travel	coronavirus	10	make	line	best	countries	2020
Topic 10	oslo	free	going	air	said	man	read	government	best	countries

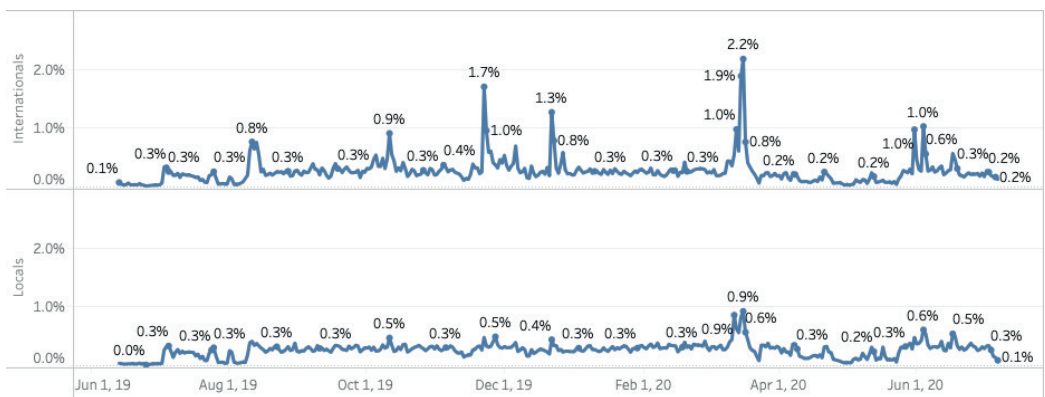
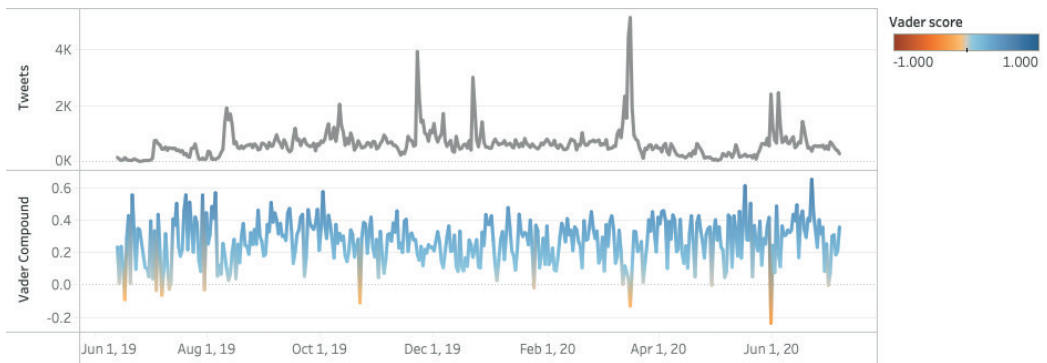
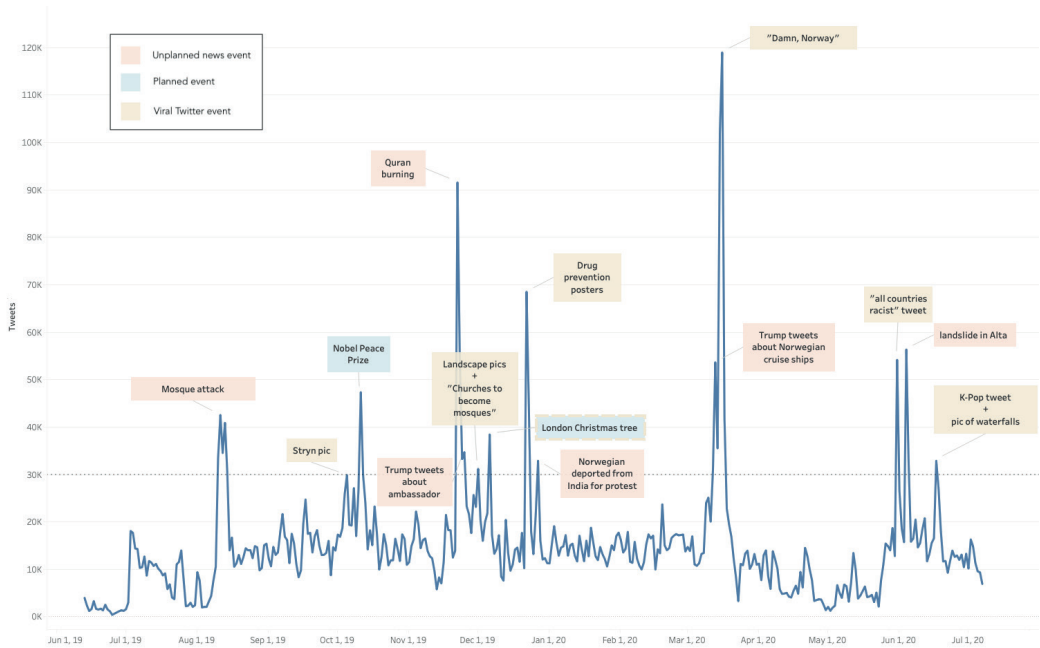
C. Locals

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Topic 1	like	world	years	er	week	look	winter	really	old	countries
Topic 2	live	sweden	hope	thank	lot	northern	really	countries	time	great
Topic 3	work	travel	norge	coronavirus	news	use	denmark	sweden	winter	countries
Topic 4	just	new	think	really	got	week	old	make	say	countries
Topic 5	people	best	happy	want	did	days	countries	big	really	know
Topic 6	today	day	know	going	make	2019	really	yes	happy	did
Topic 7	love	english	need	10	beautiful	read	really	old	know	good
Topic 8	way	right	home	og	say	på	oil	better	im	old
Topic 9	year	country	2020	government	uk	finland	sweden	denmark	countries	old
Topic 10	oslo	time	good	come	great	got	free	really	week	old

Figure 5. Topic modelling ($N_{A\text{-tweets}}=5,726,683$; $N_{B\text{-tweets}}=3,664,740$; $N_{C\text{-tweets}}=209,066$)

Table 1. Peak days analysis

Date	Event
Aug. 11, 2019	An armed man opens fire in a mosque near Oslo
Oct. 5, 2019	A photo of Stryn, Norway, goes viral
Oct. 11, 2019	The Nobel Peace Prize is awarded to Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali by the Norwegian Nobel Committee
Nov. 22, 2019	An anti-Islam group clashes with counter protesters during a Quran-burning in Sandefjord
Nov. 24, 2019	U.S. President Donald Trump tweets that he's appointed the ambassador to Norway to be Navy secretary general.
Dec. 1, 2019	Several landscape photos from Norway go viral (See Figure 6) Also on this day, a far-right commentator in Norway tweets about the Norwegian government funding the conversion of church buildings to mosques
Dec. 6, 2019	Far-right British commentator Katie Hopkins accuses London's Muslim mayor of erecting an ugly Christmas tree in Trafalgar Square, not knowing that it's an annual gift from Norway. A number of tweets pointing out her error go viral.
Dec. 22, 2019	A tweet praising Norwegian drug prevention posters goes viral. "Look at these drug prevention posters from Norway. That's it. That's how you freaking stop people from dying", the tweet reads. (The posters explain what to do in case of an overdose rather than trying to dissuade people from using drugs.)
Dec. 27, 2019	A Norwegian woman is asked to leave India after protesting a citizenship law that excludes Muslims
March 13, 2020	Trump tweets about halting cruises (including Norwegian Cruise Line) due to Covid-19
March 16, 2020	A viral tweet shows a screenshot of a Norwegian university asking students abroad to come home, "especially if you are staying in a country with poorly developed health services and infrastructure and/or collective infrastructure, for example the USA", the message reads. The American user who tweets the screenshot comments, "Damn, Norway". (See Figure 5.)
May 31, 2020	Six days after George Floyd is murdered, an account with around 2,000 followers tweeted "the uk is racist. italy is racist. france is racist. norway is racist. every country is racist. if you say 'but my country isn't racist' you're choosing to ignore the obvious racism that is present within every country. no country is innocent"
June 4, 2020	A landslide in Alta, Norway, destroys eight houses. The disaster is captured on video.
June 17, 2020	An account called @Locat1ons tweets an image of waterfalls supposedly in Norway. (As replies to the tweet point out, the waterfalls are in Iceland.) Also on this day, a fan account for the K-pop group Stray Kids tweets the countries where the band is topping the iTunes charts, which includes Norway



4.4 Summary of main findings

Regarding the networks of associations formed around Norway on Twitter (RQ1-A), the results indicate that these include happiness and high quality of living. As the sentiment analysis confirms, these are largely positive associations (RQ1-B). Although travel related concepts are an element of the network of associations, they are not the dominant theme. As has been suggested in the literature (Andéhn *et al.*, 2014; Hanna, Rowley, 2015; Medway *et al.*, 2015), Norway is also connected to other brands, for example other Nordic countries. However, there is a difference between how locals and internationals configure the network of associations with other nations, with internationals making not just geographic connections, but also connections related to political economy, such as Switzerland and the Netherlands, and more distant Canada and Australia. Regarding the role of news events (RQ2), six of the 14 peak days were driven by news events (see Figure 2), although it could be argued that Trump's appointing a new secretary of the Navy (Nov. 25) and halting cruise ships (March 13) were only tangentially connected to the country of Norway. Moreover, only two peaks were responses to *planned* events, but as noted, the London Christmas tree is a debatable case. The rest of the peaks were driven by viral events native to Twitter. A border case is the drug prevention posters on March 16; they were released online in English by a drug reform advocacy group in Norway and are presumably a case of intended virality. Finally, regarding the role of internationals (RQ3), the findings show users outside of Norway play a bigger role than locals in circulating content about Norway - not surprising, given their numbers - but also in *creating* content. Of tweets analyzed on the 14 peak days, only two of the peaks appeared to be driven by content from a user in Norway. The first was a tweet on Dec. 6, 2019, about churches being converted to mosques; the second was a tweet on June 4, 2020 featuring video of the landslide in Alta.⁴ Most important, Norway's official branding account @visitnorway did not drive any peaks. In fact, of the most retweeted accounts in the data, @visitnorway ranks 50th.

In the following section, I will discuss what these findings mean for the way social media, and especially foreign users on social media, contribute to the circulation of brand associations, as well as the role of events these constructions.

5. Discussion: Networks of associations, created by globalized networks

Place brands - their reputation and image - have traditionally been seen as the outcomes of place branding campaigns (Kavaratzis, 2004; Szondi, 2008). However, cause and effect are blurred online. The brand is not only the outcome that a place evokes in the mind of the public; the public can turn the image they have in their mind into pictures and text, further shaping the place's identity (Barnett *et al.* 2017). However, the findings suggest that online, the interpretations of the consumer are potentially more wide-reaching than the messages of the official marketers. This throws into question whether consumer word-of-mouth is still a "tertiary" source of communication (Kavaratzis, 2004).

Overall, the findings highlight the wide-ranging nature of networks of associations made possible on social media, and especially Twitter. This is hinted at in the three-month study of Stockholm by Andéhn *et al.* (2014), but further underlined in the year-long collection of data presented here. Associations include those related to tourism to Norway, yes, but also the country's welfare state structures, quality of life, and similarities to other countries - and not just nearby countries, as emphasized by regionalist approaches to place branding (Cassinger *et al.*, 2021, p. 257)

4 The official @NobelPrize account was also highly retweeted on Oct. 11 when the Peace Prize was announced, but this account is run by the Nobel Foundation in Sweden.

Importantly, attention to Norway is also highly driven by *unplanned* events – both news events, as well as viral moments native to Twitter. A fifth of the tweets about Norway in a year occurred during the 14 peak days. And the most visible tweets were largely created and recirculated by the international audience. Yet while peak days were more negative than ambient days, they were still positive on net. This is in contrast with the negative effects of news described in crisis-focused literature (Avraham, Ketter, 2017; Bigi *et al.*, 2011; Vaxevanidou, 2017). International users shared news stories that reflected positively on Norway, even as they may reflect negatively on another country (the United States, India) or a person (Katie Hopkins). In this way, the content is largely consistent with Norway's stated branding goals – even when, counter-intuitively, the underlying sentiment is negative.

As an example of several of these findings, let's take a closer look at the "Damn, Norway" tweet, which prompted the biggest peak in traffic in the period studied. (See Figure 5.) The tweet was a screenshot of a Facebook message from the Norwegian university NTNU in Trondheim. For NTNU, this was a case of what Brabham (2012) has called "unexpected publics"; and in fact, the university later edited the post. The story behind this tweet is revealing of how word-of-mouth works online. In personal communication with the American Twitter user who wrote the viral tweet, I was told by him that the screenshot came from a Mexican friend studying at a college in Molde, Norway, who had himself discovered the screenshot on Reddit. "I tweeted it, not thinking much of it. I think some famous person retweeted it very early, which was why it took off," wrote the tweet's author. The attention was unplanned, in other words.

The sentiment of this tweet was coded as negative by VADER (-0.40) due to the word "damn". And for the United States' brand it indeed probably is negative. However, in pointing out the differences in welfare state services between the U.S. and Norway, the tweet in effect highlights one of the long-time selling points of Norway, and its "power of ideas" (Ingebritsen, 2006, p. 101). Thus, events spur moments of activity and attention, and also moments of *reinforcing* Norway's place brand.

Other tweets have a similar theme. The tweets making fun of Katie Hopkins highlight Norway's role as a diplomat. The tweet about drug prevention posters highlights Norway's progressive approach to social problems. And of course, the tweets with photos of Norwegian landscapes and wooden homes highlight the picturesque qualities of the country.

From a critical perspective, this might be a further sign of the way place brands have become simulacra (Kaneva, 2018): they are reproduced by audiences who have never been to the place. As Pamment and Cassinger's (2018) argue, place brands become media objects that can be transformed and transcoded from one context to another (p. 562; see also Lury, 2004). When Norway's tree is besmirched on Twitter, international users jump in to defend Norway and the history of its arboreal gift. "Norway gifts the United Kingdom a Christmas tree every year to say thank you for supporting them in defeating Nazism 75 years ago," one highly retweeted tweet explains, "It's a staple of Anglo-Norwegian relations and history." The dustup in effect helps circulate a brand, enlisting both locals and international as "ambassadors" for an identity Norway has sought to convey (Braun *et al.*, 2013).

At the same time, it is not always clear the network of associations about Norway, though positive, are maintaining a *competitive* identity, or at least not a unique and specific identity (Anholt, 2007). Often Norway acts as a stand-in for a political ideal – a happy, wealthy, and wise country with picturesque landscapes and free college tuition. Norway is deployed as a useful symbol in messages that are more about politics in *other* countries than it is about Norway, such as the "Damn, Norway" tweet, when the commentary is more on the U.S. In another example, a British user tweeting about the 2019 happiness rankings writes:

Top 3 happiest countries in the world: 1. Finland 2. Norway 3. Denmark. All three use a political model very similar to Labour's current manifesto with sensible policies like public owned railways, decent housing for all free education. Just saying

This message is more about the U.K. than Norway. In these cases, Norway becomes a political tool in a separate national debate. To borrow from Aronczyk (2013), Norway's brand becomes an "amorphous figure" (p. 169), its competitive identity turned into a generic product enmeshed with other countries' politics.

Finally, the results also make clear the relevance of cultural conflict to Norway's network of associations: four of the peak days revolved around Muslims and Islam. This may reflect the major events of the year – the 2019 attack on a mosque was certainly big news – but also reflects what international users found salient. As Manfredi-Sánchez (2021) writes, the present moment is characterized by a move toward "deglobalization" – diminished global cooperation and increased resistance to outsiders. The rise of anti-immigration sentiment in the Nordic region, whose brand is openness, has attracted global interest (Robinson, Enli, 2022). Thus, attacks on Muslims and Islam may be particularly attention-grabbing exactly because they *challenge* Norway's brand. Or, more perniciously, for those sympathetic to nativist politics, these events may represent a threat to their perception of Norway as a Christian, ethnically homogenous country. As the right-wing commentator remarking on the conversion of churches to mosques (Dec. 1 peak) wrote, "Looks like we are getting new culture!" Because the Nordic region relies so heavily on its mediated reputation (as opposed to the direct experience of tourists) this presents a delicate set of associations for practitioners to navigate (Rasmussen, Mercksen, 2012).



Figure 9. The most popular tweet (source: Twitter). See Table 1 for the complete text.



@VSCOblog

...

Norway



3:06 AM · Nov 30, 2019 · Twitter for iPhone

6,532 Retweets 130 Quote Tweets 9,409 Likes

Figure 10. Popular tweet (source: Twitter)

Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated how foreigners, the former *targets* of place branding campaigns, have become *participants* in place branding. Drawing on a year's worth of tweets mentioning Norway or Norwegians, the study took a spatial-temporal approach to place branding. Computational and qualitative methods were used to identify the location of users, and analyze the topics, sentiment, and temporal patterns of the attention to Norway. Though some previous literature suggests that the diffuse and chaotic nature of social media pose a challenge to the hegemony of place brands (Hanna, Rowley, 2015; Maiello, Pasquinelli, 2015), the main findings here are that the "network of associations" around Norway were generally positive, and bought into Norway's official branding strategy. However, international users are much more responsive to news events and viral tweets than local users, providing more support for the idea that foreign and domestic audiences have different agendas (Ingenhoff *et al.*, 2021). In particular, the international users may be particularly interested in using Norway's brand as a symbol in political debates.

The study contributes to the understanding of how digital global publics participate in shaping place brands, particularly for small countries, and underlines the importance of considering news coverage and unplanned events in place branding studies (Bolin, Ståhlberg, 2015). For practitioners, the good news is that foreigners may help reinforce the place brand rather than challenge it; the bad news is that most of the peaks in attention could not have been anticipated.

Particularly on Twitter, place branders must be nimble enough to navigate huge fluctuations in response to unplanned news events or viral tweets, often created by users with little connection to Norway.

The empirical material presented here is limited to one country and one social media platform. Moreover, the country is a wealthy one in a region with a tradition of place branding, predisposing it to a positive image. Further research could investigate other platforms and other countries. Instagram and TikTok, for example, are more visual and less news-oriented than Twitter, and may reflect different networks of association. The literature on social media and place branding also lacks documentation of the cumulative effect of online chatter on nations' global reputations, if any. Finally, it is interesting that Norwegians' tweets were overall more positive than internationals – at least in *English*. It may be that locals are more negative in their national language, preferring to put forward a happier face to a global audience. The dual role that locals occupy online, as both citizens and de facto brand ambassadors, warrants future inquiry.

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Visual narratives for local development. understanding local development through local place branding: an Italian case

Introduction

Considering communication as an essential activity for an effective local governance has been widely discussed already. The rhetoric of Postmodernity, while arguable, triggered a lively discussion on different theoretical fields, leading many States and authorities to modify their territory communication and ruling style, along with their law and organisational structures. Academics from different disciplines debated about this theme, sharing positions or outlining new theoretical discrepancies. Despite the variety which characterises such a debate, this paper will try to test once again the heuristic capability of certain visual methodologies when applied to the local development topic, basing itself on concepts borrowed from Place Branding and Tourism Sociology scopes.

In this first part of the essay, some of the basis of the idea of Place branding as a complex governance practice will be addressed. According to this point of view, Place branding will be depicted as an across-the-board attitude in relation to all the different administrative actions, crucial for local development and going beyond the mere advertising.

In the second paragraph, instead, the connection between Place Branding and marginal areas will be explored.

The third paragraph, furthermore, will explain why and how this topic has been studied, for this research, using a visual methodology.

Results and conclusions will be shared and discussed in the last two paragraphs.

1. Place Branding as development tool

The bedrock laying under the concept of Place Branding as a local development tool, enhanced during the last 40 years, states that operating on local reality representations corresponds to operating on the local reality itself. That is: modifying the way in which a place is described will mould the place itself, in the end.

About the concept of social representations Hall (1997) suggested that they can be defined as the outcome of a socially negotiated process. Hall especially highlights how this process should be considered as a political one, overall, since it contributes to create a storytelling which endorses some actors and their interests rather than others. Considering a certain local reality representation as expressions of its local identity, scholars belonging to different fields pointed out the processual profile of such social dimension (Banini, 2013). This perspective spreads light on territorial representations' political and conflicted side, which are continuously describing balances of power and actors' relations starting from visual elements, which are often given for granted or not considered as landscape representations (Barnes, Duncan, 1992; Cosgrove, Danieis, 1988; Darby, 2000; Duncan, Ley, 1993; Duncan, 1990).

This idea was recalled by Amendola (2016) in a recent work, where he reiterates a concept he already expressed before (2013). According to Amendola, the contemporary city is centred on the different city users' demand, regardless of whether they are individuals or groups. Considering this idea, he brings some examples of how the apparently abstract parallelism between

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territorial representation and reality can tangibly affect the structure of a settlement. One example Amendola makes to support this theory is the widening of urban belts around city centres during the 80's due to the spreading of contact with nature, authenticity and social homogeneity rhetorics, which led many people to buy gardened detached houses at city borders.

Although the parallelism connecting representations and reality has been developed across disparate domains, the marketing field seems particularly effective in describing how regularly it is turned into practice. This belief derives from the combination of several social, economic, cultural and political inputs. Braun (2008), for instance, clearly listed some which refer to globalization, ICT evolution, media society, terrorism threat, geo-political changes and the possibility for regions to develop better transport connections.

Despite the causes and the theoretical fields this theme stems from, however, the result is a growing conviction about the crucial role of communication in place development (Acuti *et al.*, 2018; Kavaratzis, 2012; Vuignier, 2016), so much that someone stated that image is everything for a place (Green *et al.*, 2016). This statement sounds more convincing within the frame of a highly competitive context, in which territories are struggling to pursue their purposes (Thiard, 2009).

The idea that communicating effectively is fundamental for places' development is mainly based around the existence of a certain competition between places. Simon Anholt's competitive identity theory (2007), for instance, is an effectual synthesis – maybe too simplistic, under some points of view – of the communication-strategic aspect of place branding policies with the cultural one. It comes from the communication field and, according with the paradigm shift experienced in this branch of studies during the last decades, it reflects more the growing attention towards strategic place branding elements closely linked with local development rather than its mere commercial side (Oguztimur, Akturan, 2015; Rolando, 2021; S. Zenker Braun, 2010). This theory considers the worldwide competition between territories to gain more attention, investments, know-how, residents, tourists and cheap labour (Mihalis, 2004; Oguztimur, Akturan, 2015; Thiard, 2009) and states that this can be achieved by a place only if it is able to build and share a definite and precise identity.

Place Branding field's openness towards a much more product-oriented approach – the place, in this case – rather than a customer-oriented one, paved the way for more inclusive policy suggestions and research. The role of residents and local liveability has been increasingly involved with the local promotion issue, for some time now (E. Braun *et al.*, 2013; Hudak, 2019). Many relevant reflections are being carried out about the citizens' role in place promotion and development, in which they are gradually seen as actors to be involved systematically in place branding decisions with structured participatory practices. This branch of studies led to the formulation of new theoretical and practical concepts like Participatory Place Branding (Lambert, 2013; Sebastian, Zenker, Erfgen, 2014). This paper aims to develop a participatory approach to place branding. In doing so, it offers guidance on how to implement a participatory place branding strategy within place management practice. Design/methodology/approach – The paper is based on theoretical insights drawn from the combination of distinct literatures on place branding, general marketing and collaborative governance. Findings – The paper highlights the importance of residents in the place branding process and argues that their special functions as ambassadors for the place constitute the most valuable assets in place branding. Thus, a participatory place branding approach involving residents is needed. To implement this approach, three stages are necessary: (stage 1 and the more recent Public Branding (Rolando, 2021).

These proposals are focused on three main directions: analysing inhabitants' role in Place Branding, suggesting practices to involve them constantly in the branding process and underlying the most civic, public, social and cultural elements of branding activity. This way to think about Place Branding interposes a certain distance between the older top-down and market-oriented approach and a fresher concept, more development and residents-oriented. A closer look at the literature can provide different examples of the development of these ideas. Many authors

(Erik Braun et al., 2018; Govers, 2011; Skinner, 2008), for instance, pointed out the difference between the outside-in approach of traditional Place Marketing strategies and the more up to date inside-out Place Branding trends. The first are more aimed at humouring the market demands, while the second at strongly defining the local resources and selling points to address better-targeted clients. In the same way a wide literature review from Vuignier (2016) carried out a progressive shift from a concept of local promotion as a matter of image and reputation to a more identity-centred idea of branding. Not long ago, Rolando (2021) summed up many premises of these theories suggesting to consider Place Branding as a policies front in which the community vision of a place is shared, discussed and described connecting local values, ethics, participation and culture.

As Hudak (2019) describes, Participatory Place branding theories already anticipated such understanding, shedding light on the relevance of the potential active involvement of local stakeholders. The stakeholders involved in place branding processes are quite a lot (Hankinson, 2009; Kavaratzis, Ashworth, 2005; Zenker, Braun, 2010), and they can contribute far more effectively than be merely consulted in order to take information from them, as it often happens with the "classical" approach (Bennett, Savani, 2003; Sebastian, Zenker, Erfgen, 2014). According to the above-cited Lambert, Zenker and Erfgen, participatory Place Branding Processes are possible and can both empower communities and make governance actions more efficient.

1.1 Place Branding, fragile areas and tourism: the storytelling space left for marginal spaces

Once recalled the potential relevance of Place Branding practices for local development, we will try to make clear if they have any special relevance for rural, marginal, socioeconomically fragile and developing places.

Amendola's work (2016) is useful, once again, to frame precisely how, generally, local place branding is urban-centered. In fact, when observing the academic debate about Place Branding, regions appear promoted almost exclusively by points of attraction located within the urban fabric. Several essays are centred on Citytelling and Urban Storytelling (Perissinotto, 2020; Rolando, 2021) as they would constitute the Place branding itself. By the urban context, however, the place storytelling contents are provided along with the actors, the rules and the style with which they are led.

What is the storytelling space left for other territories, then?

Such questions appear particularly significant in the Umbria region's scenario. In this part of Italy – like in many other Italian Regions, actually – the storytelling of the mountainous and rural world seems relegated only to the tourism field. Outside the tourism sector, very little is told about Umbrian marginal areas except in specific and highly specialized circles like, for instance, the agriculture management, developing and funding sector. These latter rhetorical sectors, however, are reserved to politicians and technicians, who often are not able to open a breach in their field's boundaries to reach the public debate and the public decisions areas.

In addition to the economic growth and redevelopment occasions provided to these areas by tourism, they can also be used as important drivers for place promotion. The lack of other communication flows about these places outside tourism makes it important for local development and makes it, basically, the only storytelling line actively participated also by external content authors like tourists. Tourism, thus, presents itself as a highly strategic field for marginal and fragile areas (Musella, D'Isanto, 2018), because it offers them their main development opportunities and gives the local governments the occasion to talk about their local qualities and points of attraction. Under this light, the social and political mediation process which characterizes the place branding dynamics becomes even more important, because there are some aspects of tourism itself which accentuate it (Larsen, 2014).

Only the places which pass this social, political, cultural and media process appear on the tourist's map. Institutions, moreover, also have such a fundamental role in this mechanism (Cheong, Miller, 2000; Dann, 1996; Hollingshead, 1999; McGregor, 2000), as local communities have, especially where active storyteller actors producing their own narrative are missing. However, the representations' self-reproduction mechanism is still in place, repeating over and over again what has already been told about the place. This process avoids innovating the image of these places and is the so called "Representation spiral" (Parmeggiani, 2016).

This is the same dynamic already mentioned by authors like Urry and Larsen (2011) and MacCannell (1975), where the pictures of places keep repeating the same image, encouraging tourists to reach the represented place (D'Eramo, 2019; Gemini, 2008; Urry, Larsen, 2011). New tourists, in turn, will confirm their actual presence on the place reproducing it once again, trying to reproduce the same pictures as described in the sightseeing theory. Such course of action, which the Place Marketing world has acknowledged for quite some time (Ejarque, 2015), is considered, here, as a place development matter. Sure enough, this representation circle seems pushing the places themselves to indulge the image that all tourists are apparently looking for (Andéhn et al., 2014). This doesn't just affect the places' self-communication, but also the places themselves. In fact, local governments, tourism actors and DMO's will try to surround the tourists with the setting they already experienced through photography.

To sum up, it is possible to state that visual narratives produced within the tourism field are an interesting research object to address any development issue regarding rural and marginal areas. For this reason, further research on visual narratives about places is needed to compare different points of view and to try to get some new hints about local development.

2. Promoting and understanding territory through pictures: a methodological exercise

Up to this point we stated that we can identify a recent Place Branding approach that is more inclined to develop the place and to involve the wider number of stakeholders in the branding process than a mere "marketing-oriented approach" aimed at attracting the highest number of visitors and "selling" the places. According to this point of view, inhabitants should have the main role in structuring and, at last, owning the local brand. Moreover, if the aim is attracting people, knowledge and investments, the starting principle of this theory consists primarily in developing the place to make it more attractive. Attractiveness, in this way, comes after improving the residents' quality of life. We also saw that (Umbrian) marginal areas are interested only by the tourism storytelling. What we are going to do, now, is narrowing the Umbrian case to understand which promotional model the local government adopted, in order to better define how studying this region could be useful to give a research contribution.

The Umbria regional government has worked hard, in these years, to modernize its promotion strategy, reaching remarkable quantitative results, actually. In fact, the visits, the nights spent in accommodation and the clicks on the website increased considerably². From our point of view, the Umbrian branding approach, however, still embodies a "traditional marketing model", apparently, which is not updated to the latest inputs provided during the last decade by Participatory Place Branding scholars.

The Umbria Region, in fact, entrusted the marketing management to marketers and to a third party, that is a partially public-held company. This body is appointed to customize the regional brand so that it can be promoted within and outside the regional borders. The company uses

2 Good results both in terms of virtual and real visits to the Umbria tourism website and territory have been reported by local government in December 2019 and good performances in terms of nights spent in accommodation are shown by official statistics about the summer period also during the pandemic crisis (<https://www.regione.umbria.it/turismo-attivita-sportive/statistiche-turismo-2022>).

many different tools, among which the main one is the umbriatourism.it website. This process takes place without the activation of any participatory mechanism, with consultation practices that are involving some specific stakeholders only, although their opinion is not binding. The Regional Tourism Observatory, for its part, restricts itself to only analysing quantitative data collected from hoteliers and tourism offices, publishing merely descriptive reports. Great attention is given to tourists' perception and preferences, which are currently being analysed with web analytics tools and, in previous years, with dedicated surveys (that are no longer used now). As stated above, the most modern approaches to Place Branding remarked that a not-inclusive branding strategy risks to overlook important regional resources, opening discrepancies between place representation and reality. Neglecting a wide stakeholder involvement, indeed, could present several problems like a sort of discomfort experienced by places lacking a definite characterization (La Foresta, 2018); the place commodification and trivialization (Ashworth, Voogd, 1990; Kavaratzis, Ashworth, 2005; Kotler *et al.*, 1999); damages to place authenticity (Aitken, Campelo, 2011); disappointing the visitors who are not discovering what the website promised them, hostility (Gainsforth, 2020) and what someone defined a mere "show-place" (Baule *et al.*, 2014). Considering the differences between Participatory Place branding and the purely market-oriented approach and the risks connected with this last one, we can hypothesize that, following a non-inclusive approach, the Umbrian government promotion strategy will present some problems and rifts between places representations and reality. On one hand, this potential incongruity might be a serious problem for a region where 57 municipalities on 92 have been classified as marginal by the Italian Government in 2014, according to the National Strategy for Inland Areas³. On the other hand, moreover, it might be also a useful index to understand how these marginal places are depicted and perceived. As previously stated, in fact, tourism storytelling is the only kind of organized communication constantly dedicated to these areas and has the potential to define their prosperity or their further descent into fragility and marginality.

3. Case study and methodology

This research aims at comparing different visual contents about a specific place produced and shared by different actors. The goal is understanding if the visual content analysis can explain something more about the connections between place representations and local development. Searching for an innovative approach to study the rural and marginal areas development is the main reason why this research is mainly based on the visual content analysis. Not to dwell on the theoretical phase, if not in the paragraphs concerning to the photo elicitation technique description, only the two main reasons why visual contents have been chosen for this research will be discussed. The first one is the lack of tourism studies confronting different stakeholders' points of view (Piva, Prats, 2021). Piva and Prats argue, basing on other scholars' work (Qu *et al.*, 2011; Wagner, Peters, 2009) that in many researches the place image and the place identity concepts have often been mixed up and rarely compared to each other.

The second one, instead, is the necessity to produce further research on development studies based on User Generated Contents or UGC (Acuti *et al.*, 2018). UGC, especially visual UGC, have been definitely underused by social research on local development (Acuti *et al.*, 2018; Goodchild, 2007; Loda, 2010).

The selected place for this study is the municipality of Sellano, in the Italian region of Umbria. This region represents not only the most common kind of rural and mountainous Italian area (Carver, 2017; de Salvo, Pizzi, 2020), but also the typical landscape that characterises this re-

3 The National Strategy for Inland Areas (SNAI) is an Italian government's initiative to identify and restore the socioeconomically weakest parts of the country. It started in 2012 with a mapping action that showed a widespread situation of isolation characterising many municipalities along the entire Country (almost 60% of the territory).

gion, the “medieval villages on top of the hills”. This specific municipality, moreover, has the peculiarity to host an interesting restoration process which is taking place in the hamlet of Postignano. This village has been completely restored after having been abandoned during the Sixties. The village is entirely owned by private citizens, now, who are trying to revitalise it as a scattered hotel and as residential space for potential new buyers. Therefore, an effective place branding strategy is vital for such a place. The visual storytelling set by this actor will be compared with the regional government’s one concerning the same territory, with the tourists and with the surrounding inhabitants.

Tourist-produced pictures have been obtained with an Instagram scraping operation⁴. Many pictures posted by public profiles and georeferenced within the Sellano municipality have been collected with this method. The period selected for the picture gathering is the entire month of August 2020. This month, in fact, presents unique features for this kind of research. By that time, the law setting dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic was allowing the opening of almost all the tourism activities but limited the access to the country for foreign people. Such situation implies a more solid certainty that the tourism regional offer was enjoyed by a more homogeneous public, that year. This characteristic of the picture sample is really important due to the relevance attached by several studies to the tourists’ cultural background during the production of images (Deng *et al.*, 2019). The individuals’ cultural framework, in fact, seems able to affect contents and meanings linked to touristic pictures. Furthermore, August 2020 was chosen as a good period to consider touristic pictures since it was also an Umbrian record-month for nights spent in accommodation and visits⁵. This fact encouraged us to think not only that the Umbrian territory has been massively photographed, but also diffusely. The need for safe and healthy places to visit, in fact, appeared as one of the main reasons for choosing secondary and isolated destinations to spend the holidays. These areas were perceived as safer (Izzo, 2020). Choosing this sample, then, is supposed to ensure high probabilities to deal with pictures produced by culturally homogeneous tourists (Italians) and by a more consistent number of tourists in comparison with the previous years. The final sample is a picture series composed by 66 pictures.

Along with this photographic series, moreover, an inhabitants-produced one has been analysed. These pictures have been collected using the photo-elicitation technique, which consists in interviewing the dwellers surrounding Sellano about some self-produced pictures. In this case we chose to make the inhabitants produce the pictures according with Beilin’s (2005) approach, since this makes it possible to work on pictures better connected to the interviewee’s point of view. The inhabitants’ point of view has often not been considered within the territorial planning. Participatory Place Branding theorists, thus, started laying the groundwork for the regular listening of the residents’ opinion for the place branding strategies design. The path for inclusiveness and participation to become a standard in this field is still long, however (Hudak, 2019). This has been recently restated referring to the tourism field and especially to the Italian context (Piva, Prats, 2021; Rolando, 2021), but further research to strengthen this concept and integrate practices and policies is still required.

The photo elicitation technique is an interesting research tool, speaking of place branding strategies development. As explained by Parmeggiani (2006), the Visual Sociology perspective has many features that make it suitable to carry out a local development study. According to this scholar, in fact, places are research objects characterised both by a tangible and an intangible dimension. Photography, then, is a powerful media to make connections, symbols and meanings connected to objects emerge, due to its capacity to bridge the physical world

4 We used a software called “4KStogram” to collect pictures, taking inspiration by Acuti *et al.* (2018). Despite its wide diffusion (1,074 billion users in 2021), Instagram is an underexploited source of pictures, according with the above-mentioned study.

5 August 2020 saw a +7% increase of visitors compared to 2019 (<https://www.regione.umbria.it/turismo-attivi-ta-sportive/statistiche-turismo-2020>).

with the cultural one. Place pictures, in fact, not only depict the society which inherited those places and which is continuously modifying it, but also represent different subjects' and social groups' gazes (Collier Collier, 1986; Curry Clarke, 1983). Many studies about rurality based on a photo elicitation technique, to conclude, demonstrated how this method can be useful to communicate the local identity characteristics (Panelli *et al.*, 2003). Concretely, Photo Elicitation consists in asking different actors to take pictures about their territory, in order to interview them about what they chose to show. For this research, 15 interviews to inhabitants have been realised, for a total amount of 96 pictures. The final sum of pictures analysed for this study, then, is 518 (96 from the inhabitants, 66 from tourists⁶, 91 from the local government website and 265 from the village of Postignano).

3.1 Coding procedure

As anticipated, this research consists in comparing multiple visual narrative strands about one territory led by various actors. To compare polysemic languages such as those of images, the most accurate and structured coding procedure has been adopted. The main references for the preparation of the phases we are about to describe were the works of Bell (2001), Parmeggiani (2006, 2010), Frisina (2016) and Konecki (2011). The evolution of these techniques and approaches will not be recalled, here, but we can suggest the above-mentioned works in order to get some wider insights about the application of visual methodologies in sociology. We want to reaffirm, however, that the main reason to adopt a visual approach for this kind of study is its potential in comparing different points of view with many related benefits. It is not necessary to directly contact the tourists to have their pictures, since they spontaneously shared their visual contents online taking part in a collective Digital Storytelling of a place (Gubrium, Harper, 2016; Gubrium, Turner, 2011; Oliveira, Panyik, 2015; Perissinotto, 2020); the self-production of pictures has been a good excuse for establishing a contact with local inhabitants, overcoming their distrust (Bignante, 2010; Harper, 2002; Stedman *et al.*, 2004); an organized and structured storytelling like that of the local government and private enterprises is based right on this kind of language to promote territories. Let's see what the steps to code the pictures have been in order to compare them to each other. The first step has been the pictures collection from websites ("web scraping") and using the photo elicitation technique without rejecting the pictures not related to this study, yet.

Table 1 The categories used to classify the pictures

VALUE	LABEL	DESCRIPTION
Landscapes/green environment	green	Nature appears conspicuously (landscapes or backgrounds, generally naturalistic contexts)
Urban fabric	urb	Urban landscapes, not villages (streets with non-historic inhabited areas, cities, urban fabrics)
Water	wat	Predominant water element

6 The 66 pictures selected for this study where all the pictures available scraping only Instagram public profiles – that are social profiles whose owners have allowed access to all users registered on the same platforms – within the 1st-30th August 2020 timeframe.

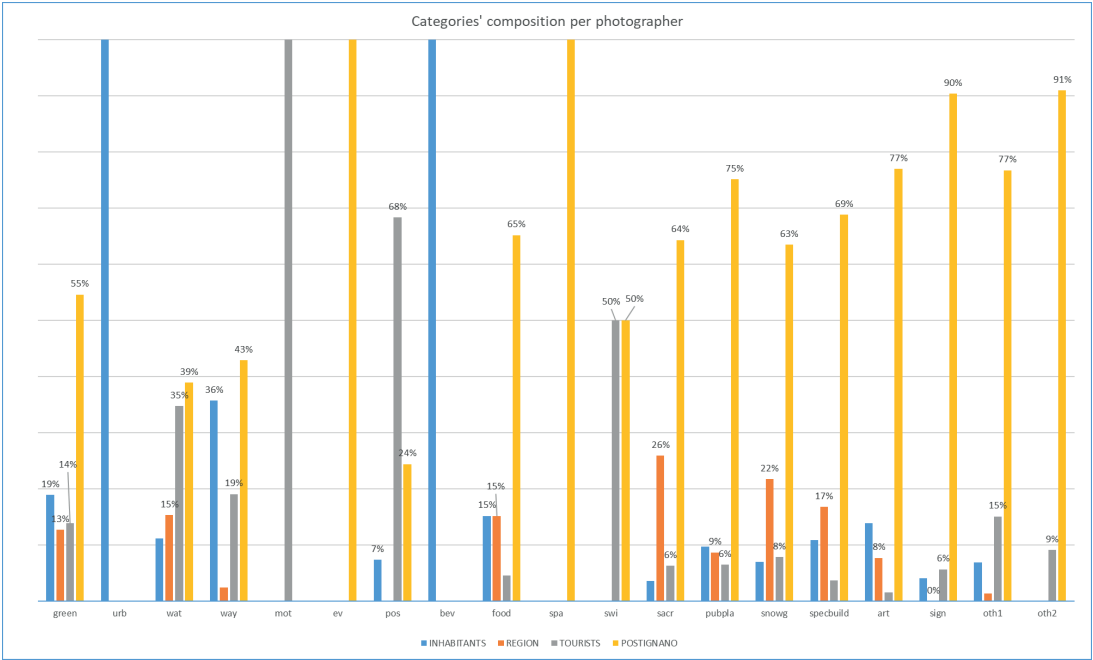
Walking, cycling, pathways	way	The infrastructure itself, but also the walking and cycling activities
Motors	mot	Motorcycle or car as the main object of the representation
Events	ev	Concerts, festivals, sporting events
Pose	pos	Selfie in front of the landscape or other contexts. The subjects do nothing in particular: they pose in front of the camera and are the main subject
Wine, liquors, local beverage	bev	The focus is on the wine, on the drinking
Chocolate	choc	The element of chocolate is present as the protagonist of the photograph
Food	fd	Any other food related product, but also dinners and the act of eating, even without food appearing
Sport	sprt	Sports activities represented as the main subject
Wellness	spa	Scenes set in spas or similar places
Swimming pools, bathing	swi	The subjects represented in swimwear near ponds or swimming pools (also photos of the subject dressed, but next to a swimming pool)
Wellness - other	freet	Any other activity that has to do with body care, recreation and tourism
Fiction	fict	Everything concerning movies and fiction production
Sacred places and objects	sacr	Churches or other sacred places as the main subject, including relics or costume jewellery linked to religion
Sacred - other	sacr2	Any other thing related to religion
Streets, squares, villages, public spaces	pubpla	Open spaces within villages
Villages - Snowglobe	snowg	Villages represented externally in full figure
Specific buildings	specbuild	Architectural details of villages or historic buildings also outside the villages as the main subjects
Artifacts and artworks	art	Ancient artifacts, artworks in their context
Signs, graphics, newspaper articles, drawings	sign	Signs, writings, information material
Other 1	oth1	Photography linked to the representation of the territory but which does not fall into the previous categories; Selfies that occupy the entire figure and in which it is not possible to determine what one is doing
Other 2	oth2	Not concerning the representation of the territory

The public papers describing the regional government's strategic plans for place tourism promotion have then been analysed to understand what the Region wants to be known outside its borders. First categories to classify the pictures have been created, basing on this first desk analysis.

A portion of each photographic series (about 10% each) has been chosen for a first look, extracting the picture randomly for this preliminary phase. For each of these pictures a brief description (no more than 100 words) has been noted, in which the coders tried to describe the contents they were able to catch as precisely as possible. Once the notes completed, they have been ana-

lysed looking for key-contents which could allow to define new categories of objects contained in the pictures (table 1), in addition to those created previously. Basing on them, all the pictures have been classified separately by the two coders. For each picture a maximum of only 4 elements have been recognised, to force the coders to identify inside the frame only those elements that they considered relevant. These two different classifications have been compared using the Pearson's R, to verify how deep the differences were, if any, and to discuss them. The different actors who produced the pictures, then, have been crossed with the content categories obtaining this distribution (chart 1):

Chart 1



Note that, as suggested by Konecki, all those contents which did not appear in any pictures are not displayed in the chart (like "chocolate", "sport", "fiction").

4. Results

After coding and analysing the contents of all the images we were able to observe how much each actor contributed to the composition of each contents category. Below we will analyse the main contents of the visual storytelling actor by actor, trying to understand what are the characteristic elements of each approach to the visual side of Place Branding. We have summarized the main contents of our analysis within the following framework (table 2):

Table 2 The pictures' content summary-scheme

ACTOR	REGION	TOURISTS	POSTIGNANO	INHABITANTS
MAIN CONTENTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Landscapes/ green environment • Villages - Snow-globe • Food • Sacred places and objects • Specific buildings • Streets, squares, villages' public spaces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Landscapes/ green environment • Water • Walking, cycling, pathways • Motors • Pose • Swimming pools, bathing • Signs, graphic, newspaper articles, drawings • Other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Events • Spa • Bathing (swimming pool) • Streets, squares, villages' public spaces • Villages – Snow-globe • Artifacts and art-works • Signs, graphic, newspaper articles, drawings • Other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Landscapes/ green environment • Walking, cycling, pathways • Beverages • Food • Specific buildings • Artifacts and art-works
LABEL	PICTORESQUE, POST-CARD POINT OF VIEW	SIGHTSEEING AND LOISIR	INFORMATION AND PERFORMANCE	INSIGHTS AND INVESTIGATION
NOTES	Life, actions, performance and services missing.	No museums or guided tours, experiences or activities (except bathing). Visual and aesthetic relation with landscapes with the environment.	Information about what is happening, about their activities and potential experiences to be done in Postignano.	The objects depicted are mere pretexts to describe aspirations and problems about the territory.

The narrative attitude of the regional government has been labelled by us as “Aesthetic, symbolic, postcard-like and picturesque”.

The regional government visual narrative, in fact, seems to insist a lot on the amenities and aesthetic resources present within the territory. Elements such as landscapes, villages, buildings are often represented from an external point of view, with an apparently documentary and descriptive attitude. The goal, apparently, is to create a sort of regional catalogue in which the different points of interest are described in a realistic way: according to this representation style, giving the idea of the object means making it appear in full within the picture. This can be found both in the visual representation of specific points of interest, such as buildings such as churches, castles or monuments in general, and of entire settlements. The absence of actions, performances and service delivery representation is another evident aspect of this actor visual narrative style. To make an example, food is not represented showing people who eat it, food production steps, or photos constructed to trigger emotional reactions, but is rather represented with photographs of the ingredients or the spaces in which it can be consumed.

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make an example, food is not represented showing people who eat it, food production steps, or photos constructed to trigger emotional reactions, but is rather represented with photographs of the ingredients or the spaces in which it can be consumed.

The regional government's visual narrative style, therefore, can be described as a picturesque catalogue of the places and the salient sights present within the territory.

The visual contents of the region also seem to correspond perfectly with those proposed by tourism communication strategies, with great emphasis on the sphere of the Sacred, the Green and the Middle Ages.

The tourists' visual narrative, on the other hand, can be defined as that of "Witnessing and sight-seeing". According to this pattern, the tourists testify to their presence in places by associating their image with the place's icon that attracted them there.

In this case, the photographers seem to welcome some of the region's tourist attraction proposals, often photographing themselves in front of religious buildings and green landscapes. There are, however, some elements that characterize the tourists' gaze on the territory.

The first element is the introduction of photographic themes almost exclusively participated strongly by them such as motors, of which they represent 100% of contributors, bathing and, in general, of the relationship with water (50% in the category "bathing" and 35% in the "water" category) and posing (68% of the pictures representing people posing in front of the camera is given by tourists). Tourists represent themselves through a visual connection with the landscape. They do not represent themselves in the act of performing actions such as playing sports, eating, attending a concert or listening to a guide, but they enter directly into the photo (posing) simply communicating that they have been in the presence of the specific sight.

The need to resort to the "other" category, albeit in a reduced way (15%), is another characteristic element of the tourist view and demonstrates that here there is some greater thematic variety than the visual narrative of the region, whose contents, instead, are all classifiable within 8 content categories out of the 19 used for the classification of the images⁷.

The Castle of Postignano (or Postignano Relais), for its part, adopts a visual storytelling attitude that we have defined as "Information and performance".

The main objective of this type of communication seems informing the website users about what is happening inside the village and providing insights on what surrounds it. The marketers' gaze, in this case, emphasizes the performative and emotional aspect much more than other actors analysed. This emerges not only because this actor is the only one feeding the "events" category, but also because it also dominates the "infographics" category, in which newspaper articles referring to the territory and graphics relating to events are also collected.

The intention to create a catalogue of architectural, historical and cultural resources present in the area is very apparent, as in the case of the regional government (see for example the surroundings representation through the photos of villages in its entirety), but this time with greater attention to specific artifacts and objects of interest.

There is also the need to analyse this actor's penchant to make an abundant use of the "other" category. This, as mentioned about tourists, denotes a certain variety of contents and a communicative dynamism.

Finally, the inhabitants' case is certainly the one of greatest interest.

The inhabitants, in fact, seem to describe the territory with the same content and stylistic attitude of the regional government, leading us to think that the mapping of territorial resources by the regional government has been efficient and exhaustive.

The elements of greatest characterization of this actor are certainly the proposal of the theme of beverage and of roads and paths, which are two themes on which the region has proposed to insist in its strategic plans, but on which they seem to contribute a lot more (36% and 100% respectively).

⁷ The regional government pictures have been analysed using 10 categories, actually, but we are not considering two of them here, because the actor's contribution was lower than 2%.

The narrative of the inhabitants, therefore, is apparently divergent from that of the local government only due to the presence of these two content strands which, in our opinion, do not mark a clear separation between the two ways of describing the territory.

The most significant points of separation, in fact, emerge through the interviews carried out with the photo elicitation technique. The commentary on the images taken, in fact, reveals how they are used as a pretext to tell the limits, inefficiencies and problems of the territory, even if the places represented and the style with which they are depicted are similar.

According with the interviewees, among these problems, the following four are the main ones. The disaffection of the inhabitants towards their own residence areas, firstly. The interviewees report how the historical, artistic and cultural heritage does not receive the due attention from the local community. Secondly, the local administrators' inability to understand and exploit the attractiveness of the territory, as well as to attract and manage funds to enhance it, and their inconsistency in maintaining it. Thirdly, the disparity between the visual narration of the territory within the regional official site and the services actually provided. Several examples have been made of how there are no road signs to the places represented on the site, or of how public funds have been spent to restore cultural sites which then fall into disuse because they are not connected to any activity that keeps them alive. Lastly, some tourists' disappointment when they found themselves faced with a reality different from that represented on the web.

Conclusions

Places can be represented in many different ways. The differences between some of them can provide us some glimpses on the marketing field, while others are able to describe the Place Branding capability to affect local development.

Comparing the regional government visual storytelling with the Postignano one, for instance, could give some inspiration to local administrators so that they could update their way to depict the territory. Also representing people and appealing details could be the way to enhance local promotion, to make an example. Moreover, the comparison with the tourists' perspective could be an interesting occasion to move some steps forward. Exploiting more visual UGCs, in fact, is an innovative way to build a sort of "regional map of tourists perception" to be compared with the local government promotional strategy. Comparing the regional government way to depict the territory with the inhabitants and the tourists ones, in fact, highlights how the Place Branding field is a multidimensional ground with a certain heuristic capability on local development field. The main conclusion this study is inclined to reach is that this region – for which the tourism industry and its storytelling are crucial, as mentioned before – is mostly depicted basing on its aesthetic virtues and this, in our opinion, is an index of low vibrancy and passiveness.

Presenting such a thematic density in various independent storytelling is a promotional strength, for sure, but some specific features of this narrative should start a debate. About 89% of the pictures considered have been included within the 19 categories used. Only 10% among them were representing people and we can hypothesize that this is the first clue of the under-representation of services, performances and activities present in the region. The inhabitants interviewed never chose to represent their territory photographing their workplaces, the streets and the roads they use daily, or the community's meeting points. This is leading us to think that their way of seeing their region is getting closer to the tourists' one, so that their perception of the territory is more connected with the amenities and the aesthetic rather than with aspects like jobs and productivity, for instance. This thesis, moreover, is supported also by all the similarities between the official regional tourism website and the inhabitants' pictures.

Despite the common ground of contents that draw these two points of view nearer, however, the problems with local promotion emerged during the interviews confirm once again how the local

inhabitants' involvement in the place branding promotion should become a standard, as should the place development itself as a form of promotion.

Further research should address more widely the diversity mentioned opening this conclusions paragraph, anyway. In general, places and territories can be very different from each other. In addition, this is even more true and significant in the Italian context, which is densely inhabited and can most likely contain highly characterizing peculiarities even in relatively small areas. A study like this, therefore, should be reproduced on a larger territorial scale, using more material and classifying even more precisely the different types of users who create the visual content to be analysed for the study.

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Attractiveness and Coastal Cities in Southern Italy. Flows and Consumption of International Tourists in Naples, Bari, Cagliari, Messina and Reggio Calabria²

1. The socio-territorial complexity of coastal cities.

The article begins with a historical-sociological, territorialist analysis to highlight how much the relationship between coastal locations, particularly in the Southern Mediterranean, and touristic practices has changed between the 18th and 21st centuries. Subsequently, remaining central to the interest in this relationship, the results of empirical research on international touristic flows and consumption in some coastal cities in Southern Italy from 2009 to 2019 are problematized, the analysis of which was conducted with the support of cartographic data representation techniques (*Geographic Information System*). Southern Italy is a privileged "scenario" for studying the dynamics of tourism and the different responses of the territories to the global tourist demand. The focus is directed at the main changes in the international touristic demand by highlighting the new trends that characterize Mediterranean cities and, more in detail those of Southern Italy, through the analysis of data from the Bank of Italy's archive. On the one hand, the study is oriented to analyze the numerosity and composition of flows (by age group, origin, reason for travel) in order to detect the specific attractiveness of destinations; on the other hand, the dynamics of consumption behavior patterns of international tourists, with attention to the average daily expenditure, articulated in the different items that compose it: transportation, accommodation, food, entertainment (shows, excursions) and culture (museums, theaters). The essay concludes with some reflections on tourism in Southern Italy's coastal cities between rhetoric, critical issues and hypotheses for territorial planning.

Reflecting on tourism, moreover, evokes the need for an articulated territorial vision. Attention needs to be paid to the connections and synergies between issues that are too frequently treated separately, such as environmental protection, land consumption, urban rent, the real estate market, mobility, quality of life, tertiary professionals and services, touristic demand and communication. Of course, it has not been possible here to argue all these issues, but on some of them an attempt has been made to propose a socio-territorially oriented problematization, in order to point out that the touristic offerings of some coastal cities (Naples, Bari, Cagliari, Messina and Reggio Calabria) are dependent on a certain way of seeing and conceiving the city and landscapes. These are local realities that would need to develop a strategic design with general interest objectives that do not neglect the relationship between socio-cultural, economic and environmental elements. Many cities, especially in the South, seem to have lost the relationship with the land and landscape on which they are settled, which generates a constraint for sustainable development of tourism, but also of other practices of socio-economic action. What is needed is an overall vision that puts territories and the environment at the center as decisive infrastructures also for the development of tourism; an overall vision that, with reference to the cases under study, seems rather latent and deficient.

The 53rd *Censis Report on the Situation of the Country 2019* delivers a picture on tourism in Italy as a «great container of employment and a fundamental driver for the national economy » (Censis, 2019, p. 168), it highlights a close link between tourism and culture and reiterates the importance

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2 Received: 09/02/2022. Revised: 07/10/2022. Accepted: 30/11/2022. Although the essay is the result of joint reflections by the two authors, paragraphs 2, 6 and 7 are attributable to Carlo Colloca; paragraphs 3, 4 and 5 are attributable to Licia Lipari. Paragraph 1 is the outcome of joint work.

of food-and-wine and the sea in the potential orientation of supply and demand. It should give pause for thought about incoming processes to Italy, especially after the coronavirus emergency. It will take time for touristic demand to generate economic and employment values similar to those before the pandemic, but they will probably be able to grow only if there is the ability to spread an image of efficiency and safety, to propose itself with a well-structured organization of services and with a high professional quality of operators, capable of generating opportunities for touristic supply, even in coastal contexts, connected with moments of production (for example the convention industry). So, a management of the touristic offer that can reconcile the quantitative dimension with the qualitative one, making use of professionals whose skills know how to enhance the environment and contain the undesirable impacts of tourism.

It would also be necessary to break free from the habit of travel as an inescapable deadline and an obsessive ritual of consumption. This is the effect of the transformation that travel has undergone in post-industrial society, so from being an adventurous experience it has become a package planned in detail by the tour operator, with the risk of becoming as alienating as assembly line work was in the past (De Masi, 2018, pp. 30-31).

2. Vacations on the Mediterranean coasts: places, people and cultures.

It is difficult to trace a precise date to indicate when the Mediterranean became a destination for summer vacations: it can be assumed that it happened in the period between the two world wars of the twentieth century, and then it takes shape as a mass phenomenon from the 1950s and 1960s onward. It must be said, however, that a «collective awakening of the sense of shore» (Corbin 1990, p. 81) - which seems to re-establish the relationship between the man and the sea, as it had been in the ancient world - can be traced back as early as the mid-Eighteenth century, when 'going to the beach' was reinterpreted from a therapeutic point of view, unlike the Sixteenth and Seventeenth centuries, when a Judeo-Christian representation prevailed that identified the sea with a dangerous place and a source of misfortune.

English physicians would be among the first to prescribe cold bathing in seawater as a remedy for states of mental and physical distress. The custom of spending winter vacations there will continue well into the mid-Nineteenth century: Empress Eugenie, wife of Napoleon III, was prescribed by her doctor to spend a period of rest in Antibes on the French Riviera. These were the same years in which the famous Casino opened in Monte Carlo, and Nice became the winter "branch" of the Parisian Belle Epoque. Slowly from being an exclusive fashion of the aristocracy, the practice of cold bathing will also spread among the bourgeoisie, aided by the advent of railroads. At the beach, location longly thought as a landscape to be contemplated from shady avenues, people would also go swimming.

With reference to the southern Mediterranean, «the tourist attractiveness of the coastal landscape [...] attracted the interest of urbanized populations well before the tourists of the Grand Tour». Already in the late republican and imperial period, there are «phenomena of summer mobility of the urban population, particularly to the Phlegraean Fields, to Pozzuoli and Baia, in search of recreation and entertainment, with the process of urbanization of the Campania coast and the birth of a new building typology, the maritime villa» (Mazzino, 2009, pp. 160-161). Since the early 19th century, it is mainly the British people who favor the Mediterranean: not only the merits of cold water are thought of, but above all the benefits derived from the quality of the air and the sun's rays are extolled. The French Riviera of the Côte d'Azur, Liguria and Versilia became the main destinations (Löfgren, 2006, pp. 165-166). Poets George Byron and Percy Bysshe Shelley chose Portovenere, Lerici and Viareggio to immerse themselves in the Tyrrhenian Sea.

The vogue for winter vacations on the Mediterranean spread around 1925, when writers and wealthy U.S. businessmen began to frequent the French Riviera mainly in the summer months,

staying at the elegant *Hotel du Cap*, also in Antibes. The climate of those years is well described by Francis Scott Fitzgerald in his novel *Tender is the Night*, which can be taken as a reference for the transformation of the Mediterranean's tourist offerings, namely it became the "beach of Europe" and no longer for isolated travelers alone. It is interesting to note that on the boost of literary travel in the mid-Eighteenth century – i.e., the Goethe's *Journey to Italy* – a culture of vacations to "see the world" or "get away from it all" also developed in the nineteenth century, which found a destination on the Mediterranean coasts, also to delve into the ancient histories of the peoples who inhabited them (Brilli, 2006). People passionate about archaeology, wearing colonial helmets and with rudimentary tools, following the traces left by historians and poets, began to rummage and dig up countryside and hills that slope down to the sea. It happens to those who came to Italy to find the traces of Magna Graecia. Just to name a few: the Frenchman François Lenormant (1881; 1883) whose works inspired the Englishmen George Gissing (2004 [1901]), Norman Douglas (1915). They all wrote travel narratives born out of a desire to learn about southern Italy and, in particular, its coasts, as well as expressing the seductive power of places. Alexandre Dumas (1999 [1841]; 1999 [1865]; 2000 [1865]) who set three of his works in the city of Naples when he left Città del Golfo in 1864 coming back to Paris, he wrote that: «he was seized with tenderness and affection for this idle and heedless Sultanah whose life is all a party and whose only occupation is happiness». It is with the mid-nineteenth century, especially the 1950s and 1960s, that seaside tourism becomes established in the southern Mediterranean, aided by the spread of mass motorization as well (Colleoni, 2019, pp. 51-58). The tourism of the "3 s" takes shape: sun, sea, sand. A tourism with little interest in the natural and cultural values of places, while the main involvement seems to be represented by a real cult for the body and tanning. This is the period of the boom, from one hand of the second houses inhabited only in the summer season and from the other hand of the towns increasingly inhabited by the elderly and children, for the obvious advantages of the mild climate and healthy air (Secchi, 2006). The landscape remains in the background, with negative effects on its preservation and conservation, as exposed below. This dive into the past of "doing tourism" highlights how much, in contemporary society, the destination of travel, even to the southern Italian coasts, is increasingly the amalgamation of locations, people and communities, as opposed to an almost exclusive magnetism of places and landscapes, typical of tourism between the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries. Today it seems central to enhance a continuous cross-reference between socio-cultural and territorial components, and the same goes for fostering consumption. The quality of a food product, for example, - in addition to its hygienic, chemical-nutritional and organoleptic aspects - lies in the ability to propose it in its links with the territory, with local history, with the characteristics of processing, and with the quality of life that characterizes that place. This is the "origin quality", basic aspect of some systems, codified at the European level, used to promote and protect agri-food products³.

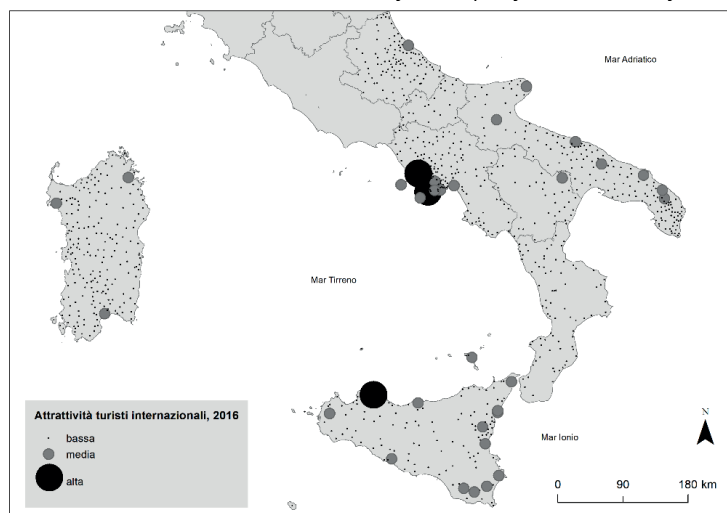
3. Composition of the international flows in Southern Italy: an overview

The ability to attract tourist flows has become a relevant condition for both traditional and emerging destinations in order to maintain a good position in a global scenario with increasingly competitive traits (Ritchie, Crouch 2003; Russo *et al.*, 2013). Moreover, the numerous practices of historical and artistic heritage recovery, image renovation, and conversion of use for recreational and cultural purposes of abandoned and functionally emptied urban spaces are implemented by contemporary cities with the main purpose of attracting both new residents and new temporary populations of consumers, including city users and tourists (Mazzette, 2013). Among the latter, international flows have gained great importance not only because of their increasing numbers but especially because they have a greater spending capacity (UNWTO, 2016). With attention to

3 Think of the trademarks: PDO, Protected Designation of Origin; PGI, Protected Geographical Indication; TSG, Traditional Specialty Guaranteed.

Southern Italy in the period between 2009 and 2019, the number of arrivals has increased significantly (from about 4 million 500 thousand to 8 million 900 thousand) compared to the Center and North⁴. Despite this, however, it must be remembered that in both referred years the South receives a share of international arrivals below 15% of the Italian total, in contrast to the 60% arriving in the North and 25% in the Center. It is not the lack of endowment of tangible and intangible resources that influences this gap, but rather a weak capacity of territories in their management and activation (Casavola, Trigilia, 2012). Faced with a highly competitive global scenario with a high degree of complexity, Southern Italy, as we have seen in the previous paragraphs, manifests the fragilities related to a modernization process most often characterized by planning and re-development interventions distant from territorial specificities⁵ (Perna, 1994; Salvati, 2000; Lipari, 2019). This is followed by a marginalization in the global dynamics of which tourism, especially the international one, it is a representation. A number of factors then influence the degree of competitiveness of southern destinations, including the lack of transportation infrastructure that limits accessibility to destinations and an often sloppy professionalism in service (SVIMEZ, 2006; Doxa *et al.*, 2008; Lobina, 2016). With reference to presences in 2019 there was a decrease of 4.6% compared to 2006 although the average stay of international tourists is 9 nights - greater than Italy's 7 nights - as the South is a favorite destination for beach tourism, usually characterized by longer stays (Savelli, 2013). The complexity of the analysis of international tourism in Southern Italy emerges from this overview. From the distribution of arrivals, with the exception of Foggia in Puglia and Matera in Basilicata, there is a greater number of attractive destinations located along the coasts. This is dictated by the greater ease of accessibility and, as already specified, the seaside vocation of touristic development in the South⁶ (fig. 1).

Fig.1 – Attractiveness of international tourists⁷ By municipality in Southern Italy. Year 2016.



Source: our processing of Bank of Italy data, Italy's International Tourism.

- 4 In the text, tables and graphs, references are made only to tourists staying overnight for personal reasons--vacation or otherwise--and for work/business reasons excluding border workers, in accordance with the classification used by the National Observatory of Tourism in Italy (www.ontit.it).
- 5 For insights into the socioeconomic and political processes that affected Southern Italy see Perna, 1994; Salvati, 2000; Lipari, 2019.
- 6 In 2016, 33.5 percent of international overnight tourists indicated the sea as the main reason for their vacation, followed by those who indicated art (27.1 percent).
- 7 To measure attractiveness, an index was constructed based on the number of arrivals in individual municipalities. The low-grade class includes municipalities with at most 50,000 arrivals per year; the medium grade class includes municipalities where there are more than 50,000 arrivals to a maximum of 500,000; the high grade class includes municipalities with more than 500,000 arrivals.

Only three cities exceed 500,000 arrivals per year: Palermo in Sicily and Naples and Sorrento in Campania. Along the Adriatic coast, Bari emerges (with more than 300 thousand arrivals in 2016), followed by the Sicilian destinations of Syracuse, Catania, Taormina and Agrigento, Alghero in Sardinia and Lecce in Apulia (more than 200 thousand, see Tab. 1). The top ten destinations are characterized by a general increase in arrivals compared to 2006 that exceeds 50% in the cases of Syracuse (+210%), Sorrento (+79.6%) and Agrigento (+71.5%). Presences also follow a positive trend with the exception of Lecce (-59%), Catania (-41.0%), Taormina (-25.2%) and Bari (-13.3%).

*Tab.1 – Attractiveness of international tourists: top ten destinations in Southern Italy.
Absolute values and ratios, years 2009 and 2019.*

	Arrivals 2019 (*1.000)	% Variation of ar- rivals 2019/2009	Presences 2019 (*1.000)	% Variation of pre- sences 2019/2009
Napoli	2.271,6	76,7	8.711,1	50,3
Palermo	1.108,2	162,2	5.458,0	115,6
Sorrento	776,1	182,3	3.541,6	200,4
Catania	625,3	103,2	2.812,4	-5,9
Bari	542,8	11,5	2.714,3	30,2
Siracusa	402,7	232,8	2.108,0	220,4
Taormina	335,1	169,6	1.269,9	30,5
Positano	251,6	252,4	990,4	221,9
Amalfi	250,4	191,8	1.097,4	207,5
Olbia	247,3	149,3	1.308,2	64,2
South and Islands	8.952,3	95,2	76.411,6	53,9
Italy	64.512,9	49,2	398.963,1	29,5

Source: Our elaboration on Bank of Italy data, *Italy's International Tourism*.

4. Coastal cities and international tourism

The composition of flows shows a marked heterogeneity in the attractiveness of Southern Italian destinations to international tourists. With a focus on coastal cities, five representative cases of different degrees of attractiveness and patterns of touristic development were compared: Naples, Bari, Cagliari, Messina and Reggio Calabria. These cities are united by their mercantile and cruise vocation⁸. Naples is among the highly attractive cities of the South (over 1 million arrivals) and among the most sought-after destinations in Italy (Lipari, 2019). Among the alleys of the historical center, the tourist is immersed in an urban dimension where «the past [...] overflows the rational riverbanks», bestowing both a magnetic and a contradictory charm (Chambers, 2007, p. 98). Bari and Cagliari are united by the regeneration processes that since the 1990s have been aimed at image renewal, enhancement of cultural resources and strengthening of transport infrastructure (Zito, 1993; Madau, 2009; Mininno, Novembre, 2011; Amendola *et al.*, 2016). While the positive effects of these interventions are tangible, the two cities still hold less international visibility than other Mediterranean cities (Cassano, 1997; Salaris, 2011). Messina and Reggio Calabria are cities that face the same coasts, those of the Strait. They share a more

⁸ From the cruise traffic data, except for Reggio Calabria which still holds a more recent history in the sector, Naples, Bari, Cagliari and Messina in 2018 ranked among the top twenty cities in terms of passengers handled. Naples and Bari recorded more than 500,000 passengers per year, also gaining a good ranking among the top Mediterranean ports, while Cagliari and Messina exceeded the 300,000-passenger threshold (Tourism Answers, 2019).

recently built urban plan because much of the historical and artistic heritage was destroyed by the 1908 earthquake and World War II bombings (Coco, 2011; Ziparo, 2016). However, the cities follow different tourist routes. Messina benefits from the cruise industry, which has allowed it to gain visibility in the international touristic scene. Reggio Calabria, on the other hand, holds a still marginal position that is confirmed by the low share of international tourist arrivals in 2016 (under 50,000 per year) with a significant drop since 2006 (-68.3%, see Table 2). Looking at the trend of arrivals in the medium term, a general increase emerges, especially for Bari and Cagliari (over 20% compared to 2006). This figure seems to confirm the positive impact of the policies implemented in the two cities to enhance their touristic image and accessibility. On the contrary - in line with the trend of southern destinations (tab.2) - presences follow a negative trend, with the exception of Naples (+7.8%). If the scenario for Reggio Calabria is linked to the city's weak attractiveness, for Messina the lack of *ad hoc* policies aimed at strengthening and managing tourism risks making the city of the Strait uncompetitive with respect to important neighboring destinations (including the Aeolian Islands and Taormina) and, therefore, destined to become a place of transit of flows and not of permanence (Lipari, 2019). With attention to the profile of international tourists, some differences emerge both by age group and country of origin. The composition of arrivals by age group shows how in general the South, compared to Italy, is marked by greater attractiveness to younger tourists (age groups of 15 to 24 and 25 to 34) and to those over 65 (Table 3). Comparing the distribution in the five cities by age group with the same distribution of Southern Italy, it emerges that Naples and Reggio Calabria stand out for a higher share of international tourists aged 15 to 24 respectively: 43.8 % and 43.7% compared to 37.6% in the South). Messina is the only city that stands out for its attractiveness to both tourists aged 35 to 64 (60 %) and those over 65 (12.1%). For Cagliari and Bari, there is a similar distribution to Southern Italy.

Tab.2 - Composition of international tourist arrivals by age group. Absolute values and percentages. Year 2019

	Arrivals (*1.000)	Age classes		
		15-34 (%)	35-64 (%)	65 and over (%)
Napoli	2.271,6	47,7	47,9	4,4
Bari	542,8	49,2	38,7	12,1
Cagliari	235,2	34,1	54,4	11,5
Messina	79,0	41,7	52,0	6,4
Reggio Calabria	23,8	59,9	39,5	0,6
South and Islands	8.952,3	36,2	55,6	8,2
Italy	64.512,9	31,3	61,2	7,5

* Row percentages.

Source: our processing of Bank of Italy data, Italy's International Tourism.

Analysis of the attraction pool in 2016 shows that southern Italian destinations are the favorites for tourists from Germany, the United Kingdom, France and Spain. These account for 60% of the total arrivals⁹.

The comparison with the five cities shows that Naples and Reggio Calabria present the same catchment area as Southern Italy, with a predominance of arrivals from the same four countries, while Messina differs only in the presence of Spain replacing France. As for Cagliari and Bari, unlike the other cities, they present a catchment area of arrivals exclusively from countries on

⁹ In detail from Germany come about 1.9 million tourists; from the United Kingdom about 1.4 million; from France about 1.2 million; from Spain about 700 thousand.

the European continent. In Cagliari, the component from overseas is replaced by the Swiss component, while in Bari it is replaced by the Greek and Spanish components.

5. Consumption behaviors and specific attractiveness of destinations

In the tourist experience, consumption in terms of entertainment and leisure includes other complementary activities - such as shopping, food, interest in art and culture - through which being immersed in places from both a material and a symbolic and perceptual point of view (Hannigan, 1998; Di Vittorio, 2010; Colleoni, Guerisoli, 2014). Therefore, the analysis of consumption allows from one hand to understand the specific attractiveness of destinations and, on the other hand, to identify the behaviors widespread among international tourists by highlighting the aspects they favor during their vacation.

With attention to daily consumption in 2016 for southern destinations it is possible to detect a lower per capita spending than in whole Italy (83 euros compared to 98), a trend that is confirmed in the five coastal cities under consideration (tab. 4). This figure may be influenced by the lower average cost of living compared to Central and Northern Italy, a tangible aspect especially with regard to food goods (Bank of Italy, 2009).

Looking at the composition of daily spending, this differs from Italy mainly on accommodation, with a 5 percentage points higher share (48.6% vs. 44.3%). Given the prolonged stay in southern destinations (of about 9 nights), it is not surprising that among international tourists there is a tendency to favor a comfortable vacation style that involves a willingness to devote more attention to accommodation.

Tab.3 - Composition of per capita daily expenditure of international tourists by item type.
Absolute values and percentages. Year 2019.

	Total daily expenditure (€)	Shopping (%)	Culture/leisure (%)	Food (%)	Accommodation (%)	Transportation (%)
Napoli	111	17,9	7,8	22,5	42,0	9,8
Bari	50	15,6	5,9	20,6	46,0	11,9
Cagliari	80	10,8	3,9	13,6	67,1	4,5
Messina	60	12,0	5,3	9,4	70,1	3,1
Reggio Calabria	99	22,5	6,7	23,8	26,7	20,3
South and Islands	85	15,0	9,1	16,6	51,9	7,5
Italy	105	14,6	7,2	22,2	47,0	9,1

* Row percentages.

Source: our processing of Bank of Italy data, Italy's International Tourism.

A heterogeneous scenario emerges from the comparison among coastal cities. Compared to the Southern Italian context, Naples stands out as the only destination where higher spending shares are detected on three items: cuisine, shopping and cultural and entertainment offerings confirming a high attractiveness on international tourists. Bari holds the record in 2016 for the highest spending budget share in the area of culinary offerings (26.7% vs. 19.4 percent of Southern Italian destinations) while Cagliari for accommodation (50.9% vs. 48.6%). Two different specific attractiveness profiles emerge for the two cities of the Strait: Messina stands out for shopping, culture and entertainment, while Reggio Calabria for more structural aspects of the tourist vacation, namely the accommodation and the share devoted to transportation. From an overall look it is

possible to say that a composite touristic offer, as found in the Naples scenario, follows a greater attractiveness for international tourists also increasing their propensity to spend (Lipari, 2019). The analysis of international touristic flows describes a South with critical aspects compared to other macro-areas of the country. Despite the endowment of historical, cultural and landscape capital, in 2016 the southern part of Italy holds only three destinations capable of attracting more than 500 thousand arrivals. In particular, coastal cities are still very much tied to the development of forms of beach tourism, which is highly seasonalized and more exposed to strong competition from some Italian and foreign Mediterranean destinations (Alverini *et al.*, 2013, Emanuelli, Lobosco, 2017). The fragmented nature of policies in tourism exposes Southern Italy to marginalization on the international scene, combined with a lack of transportation infrastructure that undermines its accessibility.

6. Tourism in the coastal cities of Southern Italy between rhetoric, critical issues and hypotheses for spatial planning.

What has emerged so far allows for some more general reflections, even going beyond the reasons for the fragility of the touristic offerings of the five case studies - with a few exceptions, e.g., Naples - as well as advancing some hypotheses for containing the decline of the most peripheral coastal areas and initiating their redemption.

It is necessary to assume that institutional, economic and social actors will mature the ability to foster greater connections between the territory as heritage and the territory as a project, showing skills in recognizing the characteristic elements of a place and the different populations that live there, as well as in promoting projects with attention to the consequences of an excessive flow of visitors that can make the relationship between guests and hosts problematic. This is the challenge that awaits coastal landscapes as settings for sustainable tourism offerings.

The aura of Italy's Mediterranean coastal territories is the result of the amalgamation of a number of elements, e.g., a glorious ancient past - made of myths and legends - the epopee of the protagonists of the Grand Tour, the uniqueness of the landscape, naturalistic and archaeological resources, a specific food-and-wine sector and the healthiness of the climate. Together these factors generate an alchemy capable of fueling fascinating local narratives and stories that emphasize the identities of places, making them particularly attractive. The feeling is that this "socio-cultural and environmental capital annuity" is running out, particularly for certain coastal areas in the South of Italy: this is also evident from the analysis of the five cases mentioned above. The reasons for these critical issues can be traced to a multiplicity of factors. First of all, in the intangible and material infrastructural deficiencies: the hospitality, in fact, also passes through the care of a culture of respect for rules and the ability to know how to transmit a concrete sense of hygiene and order. Having a greater awareness of touristic culture means working to ensure that the tourist is considered a customer to be cherished and valued, not exploited. Then there is the sphere of transportation, which evokes problems in the horizontal traversal of the peninsula, favoring almost exclusively vertical routes; while in local contexts, especially in the south, there is a lack of bicycle lanes, car-sharing and bike-sharing, appropriate traffic signs and the possibility of widespread use of credit cards. And again, there is a rarefied seasonally adjusted offer to be recorded¹⁰ which forces many territories into a temporally too circumscribed protagonism, as well as the unprofessionalism of some of the personnel involved in touristic services, who frequently improvise in activities that represent a secondary involvement (also as a result of deseasonalization).

10 The tourist offer must also consider the "interstitial tourist", that is who is in search of "still free intervals in the universe of travel, whether they are spatial or temporal" (Urbain, 1991, p. 226). The "interstitial tourist" prefers to move "out of season", taking holidays when colleagues are working; looking for little-known destinations; routes among the least beaten down and forgotten exoticisms (Savelli, 2004, pp. 22-23).

Added to these factors is the rhetoric in exalting the *Genius Loci* of some places, which is reduced in the staging of one's social-self in the presence of the tourist, to the point of triggering processes of "folklorification" that are not an expression of the real experience of a community, but rather fulfill two antithetical functions, namely to please the expectations of guests by proposing an image of "authenticity" or to reproduce traits that are also characteristic of other territories, so as to "reassure" the tourist who knows how to orient himself. Finally, the growing competitiveness in the tourism market of Dalmatian coastal territories, North Africa and the Middle East should be emphasized.

There is a coastal tourism that is characterized by overly globalizing traits; it seems to be aiming at a certain uniformity of offerings valid for different locations. It is enough, in fact, that three basic elements are present: sun, sea and the beach.

In fact, although we are in a phase of post-industrial tourism - characterized by an increasing fragmentation of vacation styles - the typical enjoyment of mass tourism is still widespread in many areas of the globe including the Mediterranean, as revealed by the analysis of the case studies.

This homogenizing approach in touristic supply, with reference to the coastal areas of Southern Italy, has coincided with an unprecedented consumption of land and landscape, resulting in spatial transformations with a strong environmental impact. To indicate this process of artificial homogenization, countless neologisms have been coined: "rapallization", "marbellization", "balearization", all of these are examples of «building processes without urbanization» (Battigelli, 2007, p. 29) that have affected coastal areas, even in Southern Italy. Rarely guided by a planning process, they have fostered uncontrolled development, interested exclusively in the combination of marine horizon research and real estate income. An urban tsunami (Forman, 2010, p. 265) has been consuming, which has favored a cementification of the coastlines, with poor quality infrastructure and predominantly tourist-residential character. This process of litoralization has been matched by an exodus from inland rural areas, as well as a rift between those and the coastal areas. The resulting critical implications affect environmental as well as identity and socio-economic aspects. Such processes can also be seen in the five case studies. These are densely populated areas where landscape and nature values are significant; the urban framework is historically consolidated and evolved and, as a result, obsolescence phenomena and transformation processes under the banner of the aforementioned cementification are observed.

Restoring the «state of nature along the coast has become an important element of any good regional planning project» (Mumford, 1999, p. 333). There is a need to recover the awareness that coastal landscapes are a cultural and natural heritage, so it is necessary to connect landscape protection with measures to promote the well-being of settled communities, in the spirit of the European Landscape Convention, adopted by the Committee of Ministers of Culture and Environment of the Council of Europe on July 19, 2000, and signed in Florence the 20th October 2000. It would be necessary to overcome a constraining vision of landscape assets, in favor of protection tools for active landscape management, sanctioning the shift from a conformist-vinculative approach to one based on the construction of a coherence framework, against which potential transformations can be assessed, according to an extensive consideration of the landscape, that is not limited to emergencies and exceptional values (Marson, 2016).

It is a matter - to quote the well-known typology proposed by Max Weber (2003 [1922]) - of imagining the coastal cities of Southern Italy as «consumer cities» where the needs of touristic populations in search of consumption exclusively aimed at relaxation can be met, without neglecting, on the other hand, the needs of those who nurture the expectation of a combination of training and work activities with moments of leisure, such as sports, events, art, shows and shopping. In both cases, it is a matter of diversifying a cognitive-experiential offer that involves local cultures and, therefore, the relationship with the sea and, consequently, the relationship with the goods and services that can be derived from the touristic offer.

The non-establishment, if only partially, of this "type" of city has been affected in the South by

the prevalence of an economy based on “redistribution rather than the market”, thus an «*un-balanced modernization*, that is, a gap between the improvement of material living conditions (such as conditions of income, consumption, access to educational and social benefits) that has moved forward rapidly and the socio-cultural and political infrastructure that has instead lagged further behind» (Trigilia, 2012, pp. 136-137), which has affected the responsible use of resources. In order to find a successful innovation in the coastal touristic offerings (and not only in that), it is necessary to start again from the places and socio-cultural and political-economic specificities, as happened in the past with the industrial districts of the *Made in Italy*. It is a matter of anchoring to the cultures and knowledges of the territories, but also to the «ways of relating to the environment that allows the self-reproduction and the continuous enrichment over time» (Magnaghi, 2015, p. VIII).

7. To conclude: toward a territorialization of policies.

It is necessary to think of strategic policies that strengthen the factors capable of indulging the touristic vocations of the coastal territories of Southern Italy, investing in the definition of brands so that the link between standardization and commercialization can be overcome, but without jeopardizing the resources, especially the environmental and cultural ones, while also avoiding the risks of saturation and dissipative use of places. Designing business formation in the area of cultural heritage and coastal tourism can be linked to the development of the green and blue economy. In this direction also goes the increased attention to the strengthening of intangible infrastructure (e.g., broadband internet connection or the wi-fi) and material infrastructure (airports, roads and ports), as well as the training of professional profiles specialized in cultural and environmental tourism, also to meet a more demanding and selective demand in the use of leisure time. The establishment in coastal areas of parks, nature oases and protected areas must be followed by the role of local tourism development personnel who know how to design and implement their services.

Messina and Reggio Calabria are proper examples of the aforementioned dynamics, where the increased touristic attraction triggered by cruise tourism (especially to the benefit of Messina), leaves the cultural tourism that could result from it fairly untapped. In the scenario of Messina, it is a matter of enhancing the Regional Museum that holds the works of Caravaggio, who, during his stay in Sicily, also, and above all, left his traces in this city. In the scenario of Reggio Calabria, it is worthy of consideration the time it took to reopen the viewing of the Riace Bronzes: it took ten years and the Archaeological Museum (not considering the impact of the Bronzes), is among the most important museum on the Magna Graecia and it could be imagined as a destination or starting point of a route that passes by the Ionian ridge and leads to the archaeological parks of Locri Epizephyrii and Sibari. It would be a worthy experience for the tourist, at first for the scenic beauty, as well as for the many local realities worthy of a visit along the longer than two hundred kilometers of path. Reggio Calabria also suffers from inefficient transportation infrastructure, particularly its airport risks the closure.

A “creative tourism” could also be triggered as a subset of the broader cultural tourism (Pearce, Butler, 1993, Richards, Raymond, 2000; Galvagno, Giaccone 2017) - the enhancement of resources such as monuments, places of historical and artistic interest, can be associated with an experiential offering of active consumer participation in the creation of the “touristic product”. This involves and implies the capacity of learning knowledges and getting involved in workshops, both practical and creative, promoted by local communities, in order to live authentic experiences through which lasting social relationships with natives’ people can be established. For example, let just reflect on what could imply the involvement of tourists in the very ancient swordfish fishery, an activity that is still practiced from May to early September in the Strait of Messina and

which has been handed down for generations and that still has an economic importance for some families on the Messina and Calabrian shores.

What is needed, then, is active land management for the benefit of the landscape and the touristic economy, those are aspects that cannot be separated from each other. In coastal areas, the settlement pattern is characterized by divergent dynamics (Hadley, 2009) that should be contained and stitched together. On one hand, there are local opportunities at the origin of settlements and infrastructures related to the sea (port-cities, landing cores, sighting, and defense structures). On the other hand, it is possible to find settlements and structures that are the result of an agrarian territorial organization that benefited from the marine climate, but leaned inland, locating places along the coast that could serve as centers of exchange. Over these processes, the divergence has been accentuated in recent times, when vast portions of coastal areas have been invested by industrialization - which has identified locational advantages for many productive activities on the coasts- and especially by tourism, particularly in its coastal nature. New settlement fabrics were formed, similar to enclaves intended to, almost exclusively, fulfill functions of tourist-receptive nature. Coastal areas increasingly characterized by fragmentation, porosity and discontinuity have taken shape. The sea and the coastal strip resources are seen from an exploitative perspective and, as a result, virtuous and self-sustainable processes (related to agriculture in the coastal area, fishing, production and exchange of local products) are often marginalized, if not suppressed, by the new processes of touristic or productive colonization.

So that Mediterranean coastal cities continue to put forward their "seductive repertoire", there is a need for a territorialization of policies that can capture problems and opportunities of individual places, through an integrated assessment methodology that can identify critical heritage conditions, indicate measures to improve landscape management, and provide guidelines for redevelopment projects for the benefit of tourists and local communities. Of course, this approach is conditioned by the effects that the coronavirus will have on various contexts in Italy and elsewhere. In the post-pandemic period many socio-cultural, economic and political issues, capable of significantly affecting the morphology of touristic supply and demand, will have to be addressed.

To conclude, to deepen the study of the attractiveness of Southern Italy in relation to an increasingly varied tourist demand, from a methodological perspective it could be useful to expand research through the use of qualitative techniques of social research. This would allow us to grasp aspects, otherwise elusive, on the development of the tourism phenomenon, on the one hand, and allow us to think about tourist attractiveness taking into account the socio-territorial heterogeneity of the South, on the other hand.

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The UNESCO Serial Property of Arab-Norman Palermo. An Assessment from a Sustainable Development Perspective²

Since the earliest times, Sicily has been a land subject to various dominations due to its geographic location right in the heart of the Mediterranean sea and its significant natural resources. Sicily features about 20 percent of the world's biodiversity and all these riches have been contended by the countless peoples who have inhabited Sicily and left their vestiges in its cities, along its shores and in its valleys. Palermo is a multifaceted and diverse city that is a living narration, through its monuments, churches and urban fabric, of the life and history of the ancient city, as well as of the ethical and cultural values on which it was founded, and which are still preserved among the pieces of its mosaics.

The serial property "Arab-Norman Palermo and the Cathedral Churches of Cefalù and Monreale", included in the UNESCO World Heritage List (WHL) in 2015 for its Outstanding Universal Value, is an expression of a unique style of cultural heritage and is representative of tangible and intangible aspects that embody extraordinary beauty and precious values. The monuments, built by the finest masters during the period of Norman rule between 1071 and 1194, are characterised by different styles and different elements that fit together to become one and are a priceless cultural testimony and an expression of peaceful coexistence among peoples. It is precisely the blending of tangible and intangible heritage, the expression of a profound sociocultural syncretism, that makes the UNESCO Arab-Norman heritage of Outstanding and Unique Universal Value (see, Piano di gestione, 2018).

«Two palaces, three churches, a Cathedral, and a bridge are in Palermo, the capital of the kingdom, and two Cathedrals are in the municipalities of Monreale and Cefalù [...] (They) are an outstanding example of a socio-cultural syncretism between Western, Islamic, and Byzantine cultures. This interchange gave rise to an architectural and artistic expression based on novel concepts of space, structure, and decoration that spread widely throughout the Mediterranean region» (Nomination dossier, 2018, p. 206). The name of the UNESCO serial property refers to the pairing and entwining of Arab and Norman culture and art, that is, the multiple styles that permeate the buildings and give «a conscious and unique combination of elements derived from the architectural and artistic techniques of Byzantine, Islamic and Western Traditions. This new style contributed to the developments in the architecture of the Tyrrhenian side of southern Italy and spread widely throughout the medieval Mediterranean region». (Nomination dossier, 2018, p.168).

Sicily, and the City of Palermo in particular, became the crossroads of flourishing cultural, artistic and architectural activity under Arab domination: the Normans then commissioned the best Byzantine and Islamic master craftsmen to build the city's iconic landmarks. The result of this cultural mixture constitutes the richness of the texture of colours, materials, and styles as well as the elements that each culture brought to the monumental models in question. The blending of different styles of artistic magnificence is mirrored in the dimension of sociocultural syncretism in the city of Palermo, which is still cherished and handed down in the soul of Palermo's civilization also through its vocation as a welcoming and hospitable city to others, a city in which the culture of tolerance and integration among peoples persists as a cultural, artistic, historical and social identity.

Today, the city of Palermo bears witnesses and fosters coexistence between local citizens and citizens of different origin, culture and religion, and citizens experience this diversity as an element of richness and social redemption, constantly nurtured in all its forms. The efforts made by civil society and local politicians led in 2015 to the Palermo Charter-International Human Mobility,

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which was approved by the municipal council of Palermo. The chart aimed to be a starting point of a cultural and political process to recognize human mobility in the international law. The Chart of Palermo aimed to cross the permit-of-stay system thanks to a new law about citizenship. In 2018, Palermo also hosted the Palermo Conference on Libya, a conference organised by then Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte before UN and EU institutions and U.S. representatives in order to guide the stabilisation process in Libya, building a possible road to peace. The choice fell on Palermo as the venue for the conference for its symbolic value: a Mediterranean city on the border between Europe and Africa, in addition to being a city with deep cultural and historical values and a vocation as an open and cosmopolitan city.

The worldwide recognition of the Outstanding Universal Value of the serial property “Arab-Norman Palermo and the Cathedral Churches of Cefalù and Monreale” by UNESCO has profoundly affected the sustainable and durable development of the cities concerned and the effects of nomination as a UNESCO World Heritage List has inevitably spilled over into the local area in economic, sociocultural and environmental terms. This study assessed the economic, social and environmental impact that inclusion in the WHL has had in the four years since nomination — from 2016 to 2019 — on the city of Palermo, which comprises seven of the site’s nine monuments. The analysis of tourist flows was used to assess the trends in tourism economy following UNESCO nomination, while the sociocultural impact on the area was studied by evaluating the effects of the increase in the number of travellers on the resident population. Third, the effects of the anthropogenic load on the environment was examined, considering in particular some environmental indicators, in order to establish a relationship between tourist concentration and resident population and determine whether the increase in tourist flows was matched by a higher quality of life of resident citizens and whether tourism development as pursued by local stakeholders was in line with the UN 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development. The latter aspect was particularly important, as the risks associated with excessive pressure due to *overtourism* are not to be underestimated.

UNESCO’s prestigious recognition of the serial property is a multiplication factor for tourism. The UNESCO brand is a “magnet for visitors” in that it is globally identifiable and recognisable, evidence of a place’s distinctive identity and unique characteristics that are a guarantee of a tourist destination’s quality through recognition of its Outstanding Universal Value. The UNESCO brand is recognised by 90 percent of travellers although at times they are not fully aware of the meaning of this prestigious recognition. Only 55 percent of travellers knows that UNESCO, in addition to protecting the existing tangible heritage, is also committed to foster the intangible heritage, that is, those precious traditions handed down over time through many artistic forms.

The designation of a UNESCO property, being a UN organisation, contributes per se to the sustainability of an area; however, despite this, the commitment to achieve the SDGs as part of UNESCO recognition is at times underestimated by visitors. Only 36 percent of visitors is aware that UNESCO designation contributes to sustainable development (see Conti *et al.*, 2020). Similarly, a study by the Libera Università di Lingue e Comunicazione IULM in Milan on UNESCO’s image showed that 98 percent of the sample surveyed has basic knowledge of UNESCO’s role and have a confidence rate of 75 percent, while the percentage of those who know UNESCO more deeply has a more specific role, such as promoting sustainable development and protecting biodiversity, drops to 39 percent. (ABIS, 2011). After all, implementing sustainability strategies through tourism is an ambitious goal and not without obstacles as it requires a strong commitment on the part of local authorities, the resident population and even the tourists who visit a place.

With regard to Italy, the intangible heritage recognised by UNESCO comprises fifteen elements, including, for example, the Mediterranean diet, which became part of the WHL in 2013 following joint candidacy by a number of countries in the Mediterranean basin, including Italy, Spain, Greece, Morocco, Cyprus, Croatia and Portugal.

UNESCO’s Intangible Heritage of Humanity aims to protect and pass on oral traditions and expressions, arts, social customs, practices and knowledge in order to contribute to «preserving

cultural diversity in the face of globalisation and social transformation processes» (UNESCO, 2003) especially with a view to making young citizens aware of the bond between human beings through intercultural understanding and dialogue, encouraging mutual respect for different ways of life and peace. Intangible heritage retains specific characteristics within the tourism sector, in that it plays a crucial role in choosing one tourist destination over another: intangible heritage deeply affects the experiential dimension of tourists and may, moreover, contribute to an eventual return trip to the same site, whereby a traveller's very experience may be a factor in reinvigorating the tourism sector over a longer time span. Thanks to its thousands of years of history, Palermo is rich in intangible cultural assets and that intangible heritage preserves the identity and uniqueness of this city. Today, however, this wealth appears to be jeopardised by certain factors.

In 2015, the introduction of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the UN 2030 Agenda marked a change in the international political agenda and resulted in a potential paradigm shift toward a more sustainable world. Sustainable development, as outlined in the report "Our Common Future"³, is the strategy for environmental protection and fair and equitable access to resources globally; this development model is only feasible by holding the three dimensions of sustainability together: economic, environmental and social (see Angelini & Giurrandino, 2019). Tourism, which is a prime economic factor for the world economy, falls under at least three different SDGs, impacting aspects concerning the promotion of employment, culture and the local area.

The 2017 Berlin Declaration, undersigned by ten different countries, also aims to promote a different idea of tourism that can contribute to achieve the SDGs in order to build a fairer world, able to take into account not only the economy, but also the social actors in the environmental context, as the Berlin Declaration states. Similarly, the Declaration recognizes as mandatory the transformation of the current consumption model, which conflicts with Sustainable Development, by promoting, as the Conference named, "Transformative Tourism." «Only tourism that contributes to the improvement of the well-being of local people, the dignity of workers, the integrity of the environment, as well as the elimination of exploitation, inequality and poverty is a meaningful option for Sustainable Development» (Berlin Declaration, 2017). The central idea of the Berlin Declaration is transformative tourism as a community-building and environmental well-being element. According with this point of view, tourism is understood as a cross-cutting dimension of an area's sustainable development and, at the same time represents a critique of the current Western model of development and consumption.

Determining the direct effects of inclusion in the WHL on the local community of Palermo, also considering the tangible and intangible heritage that the city represents, is a complex task. It is necessary to consider not only the economic impacts on the local area, typical of Western mainstream culture related to growth and development, but also the contextual impacts in sociocultural and environmental terms in order to better fitting the implementation of a strategy of sustainable and durable development in the city of Palermo.

From an economic perspective, the direct impact of tourism on local economy can be measured separating tourism industry sectors such as restaurants, hotel chains, and local trade. A recent Regional Department of Heritage and UNESCO Sicily Heritage Foundation report about the accessibility of the assets that make up the Arab-Norman serial property, shows that thanks to UNESCO nomination, the number of monuments users recognised for their Outstanding Universal Value had a significant increase. After the initial attendance spike in 2015, the year of inclusion in the WHL, for example, the number of tickets to the Zisa Palace doubled from the previous year, from 40,000 to 80,000. The figures for the Palatine Chapel and the Royal Palace also follow an upward trend: the 400,000 tickets in 2014, were doubled in 2019. Similarly, the other UNESCO property experienced a sharp increase in visitors in the years following the nomination.

3 The report "Our Common Future" was drafted by the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development, chaired by G. H. Brundtland in 1987. The report set out the principles of sustainable development.

The positive trend in tourist fruition is not a phenomenon limited to cultural heritage, but also spills over to local economies. There are indeed numerous benefits that cultural heritage produces in its territories by driving the tourist economy that acts as a monetary multiplier (see Angelini & Giurrandino, 2019, *op. cit.*). According to the data provided by ISTAT on tourist accommodations, the capacity of non-hotel facilities in the four years that were taken into account remained unchanged in the years after 2015, while the capacity of non-hotel facilities such as B&Bs and “entrepreneurial rental accommodation” saw a gradual increase from 8,000 beds in 2015 to 130,000 in 2019. The B&B category appears to be the favourite choice of tourists and, in particular, foreign travellers as it better meets the needs of tourists of our time. Compared to classic hotel accommodations, B&Bs allow for a better quality experience and promote a sense of well-being as they offer personalised experiences, such as in the choice to serve a breakfast with typical and traditional local products, whilst the experience offered by anonymous places, such as hotels, offer large number of users a standardised and abstract hospitality. Compared to hotels, B&Bs fit better into a sustainability vision, as they help generate widespread benefits in the local area by fostering the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises. In this sense, the UNESCO nomination of the Arab-norman serial property has resulted not only in an increased tourist presence throughout the city, but also in the creation of new businesses that contribute to the city’s sustainable development by generating new economies (see Angelini, 2021).

The UNESCO brand also contributes to the growth of tourism in the territory, but the extent of its impact is a highly debatable matter since defining exactly what the direct and indirect economic and social effects are on the territory is a complex task. It is estimated that the WHL nomination has only a partial effect on the trend of tourism flows and only in a tiny percentage ranging from +2% to +4%. This is because the most significant impacts on the territory will occur over the medium and long term. Data from the monitoring of Palermo’s tourist flows in the pre and post-UNESCO nomination period show that after 2015, although there is evidence of strong growth, these do not follow a linear trend but rather fluctuate. Such irregular tendency is the result of many factors: marketing policies that are able to attract tourists from a certain geographic area rather than another, socio-political factors that can affect, for example, the seasonal adjustment of tourism, increase in the average length of stay of tourists, as well as in the choice to diversify the offerings for users. The UNESCO brand has the power to significantly attract international tourists, rather than domestic tourists. In fact, at the national level, the UNESCO nomination will merely attract “niche” tourism, that is quality tourism rather than indiscriminately attracting visitors (Moreschini *et al.*, 2016).

There is also a number of secondary factors that affect the tourists flow toward a UNESCO property, such as the properties’ management in the medium and long term; local and national territorial policies related to the provision of services; the quality of mobility within and in connection with the city, as well as properly functioning infrastructure such as roads, ports and airports, and the enhancement of recognition through marketing tools at national and international levels.

Considering the above, within an integrated and complex view, the assessment of the economic effects resulting from UNESCO nomination is far greater than the range of 2% to 4%.

In the impact assessment, it is also necessary to take into account all aspects related to the social context: the players interacting within the tourism industry, the expansion of the job market produced by the growth of the tourism and related sectors, as well as the evaluation of the effects on territorial and local well-being. Third, it is necessary to assess those effects of tourism growth that spill over to the city in urban and environmental terms.

The social transformations that have occurred over the past two centuries globally have seen a rapid growth in the international tourism industry and globalisation has bridged great physical distances with the help of means of communication and transportation such as airplanes, trains and ships, which appear to be getting faster and cheaper. This has allowed the number of tourism service users to grow, transforming tourism from an elitist and niche activity into a popular phenomenon. The moment a place becomes popular, through an emulative process,

congestion sets in and conflict over natural and cultural resources ensues. Mass tourism, typical of the consumer society and the consumerist model, is that type of tourism which, because of the excessive anthropogenic load on the surrounding environment, exerts great pressure on host environments and societies. Mass tourism is therefore the exact opposite of sustainable tourism, that is, the tourism pursued by those who are eager to preserve humanity's tangible and intangible heritage for future generations and who wish to build a fairer and more equitable world. The serial property "Arab-Norman Palermo and the Cathedral Churches of Cefalù and Monreale" must therefore be framed, analysed and assessed within a sustainability perspective, that is, within the idea of not «compromising the right of future generations to enjoy the cultural heritage in equal measure and under equal conditions (Angelini & Giurrandino, 2019, p. 61, *op. cit.*) The implementation of sustainability is a controversial issue because of its complexity: neoliberalism and hypercapitalism continue to advocate linear economic growth as the only viable model within the current global context. Conversely, economic growth and related consumption is correlated with growth in consumption of natural, environmental, social and cultural resources. The correlation between economic growth and the deterioration of local territorial contexts is typical of *consumer societies* and affects every aspect of the daily lives of individuals and businesses.

The tourism industry in the global context plays a primary role. According to data provided by the World Travel & Tourism Council in 2019, tourism accounted for 10.3 percent of global GDP, i.e., \$9.6 trillion. Contextually, tourism impacts cities in sociocultural and environmental aspects. While businesses in the tourism industry internationally, as well as locally, continue to pursue the model of economic rationality, contributing to the quantitative growth of the domestic economy, everything related to sustainability in socio-environmental terms delays implementation because the economy and the environment continue to be two areas pitted one against the other due to the prevalence of the model of the standard economy over nature, the environment and society. «The capitalist economic model, in its narrowness, does not consider the economic value of natural resources, such as the health of ecosystems or biodiversity, or the economic value of social resources such as the quality of justice, the good relations between the members of a society, the degree of equality, and the democratic character of institutions» (Angelini *et al.*, 2015). The road to sustainability appears to be long and winding, and only recently has it seen the introduction of national political strategies that see the circular economy and green transition as an opportunity for innovation that would allow the economy to be reconciled with the environment (and consequently with society) in a perspective of each being functional to the other to allow the "carrying capacity"⁴ to be observed as well as energy and food independence. The transition to a sustainable society requires a profound overhaul of the relationship between humans and nature, rethinking lifestyles and thus all the "logistical" aspects of daily life and holidays (see Angelini & Pizzuto, 2021).

Mass tourism, which embodies the holiday-making face of consumer society and a hyper-productive model aimed at hyper-consumerism, through the aid of homologation and capitalist standardization contributes to the deterioration of local cultural heritage. Modern culture, subservient to the economic model of global consumption, is itself consumed by tourists through a process of cultural loss or destruction in which the model of economic rationality leads consumers to choose standardised products, consequently eliminating any peculiarity, authenticity, and diversity, i.e., local crafts, foods typical of a place or a city, which are bound to make way for what modern consumer and tourist demands. Local traditions and social expressions are, instead, part of the intangible heritage of local culture, but where they are not protected or are distorted to please the tourist, they become part of a process of cultural obsolescence. The willingness on the part of local politicians to pursue incontrovertible economic growth by indiscriminately accommodating the culture of globalised consumer goods in their own cities and, in particular, brands

4 Carrying capacity refers to the Biosphere's capacity to sustain life on the Earth. According to Ecology, carrying capacity refers to the number of people in a population who are able to substantiate their resources.

such as McDonalds, Burger King, Zara, and H&M make it possible to witness the hoarding of the city through depersonalisation and homogenisation. Local manufacturing, artisanal, culinary and cultural traditions will inevitably be eclipsed by the pressing demands exerted by the mass tourism market.

The historic centre of Palermo, following UNESCO nomination, introduced pedestrianisation as a safeguard by «establishing a perimeter around monumental complexes and their appurtenances identified as areas subject to protection constraints as cultural heritage» (Piano di gestione, 2018, p. 27, *op. cit.*) transforming the main streets into places of consumption, with a high concentration of businesses related mostly to the food and beverage sector, clothing, and footwear as a response to consumer society and mass tourism (see Cusimano, 2019). This category of tourism differs from cultural and hedonistic tourism, the kind of tourism that aims to give a unique, authentic and individual experience, an experience that is better combined with the Sustainability Paradigm. On the contrary, mass tourists consume the place they visit, following an already established model, a standardised model that sees tourists behaving in the same way: traveling by the same means of transportation, dressing in a certain way, eating the same way, seeing the same landscapes, and visiting the same attractions. This type of tourism creates narrow circuits in which the economic benefits produced by tourism are concentrated only in the hands of tourism majors at the expense of small businesses and the community, which instead suffer the effects and “costs” of tourism. This touristic development model is asynchronous to the current time. Indeed, the current ecological and identical crises require a switch in the natural and urban resources used as better protection.

For example, Palermo is a city within the cruise tourism circuit, an industry that generates 4 billion euros annually and allows 1,700,000 passengers to travel. However, this tourism model impacts the affected cities more in environmental terms than in economic and employment terms, since cruise ships, once they reach the port, release waste, air and sea pollution to the city. This impacts the citizens’ quality of life, which also assists in reducing urban space due to the increased tourist presence. The pressure of over-tourism has resulted in less clean and more polluted cities, where citizens’ quality of life is reduced. On the other hand, at the Berlin Conference, there was highlighted to shape urban policy toward Sustainability to ensure environmental pressures; this means also comprised those generated by over-tourism to requalify urban contexts and improve citizen’s life.

If one considers cruise tourism in the city of Venice, there is also the issue of landscape disfigurement and the alteration of the ecological balances typical of the Lagoon. This type of tourism is a manifestation of mass tourism as it brings same-day visitors without bringing at the same time the tourism and economic benefits to the city. In 2011, Engelbert Ruoss, head of UNESCO’s branch office in Venice, expressed his concerns about the state of health of the city of Venice for having reached its tourist carrying capacity causing irreversible damage to the city. Ruoss himself suggested specific sustainable development strategies for the protection of cities recognised as World Heritage properties by balancing the huge tourist flows, also resulting from cruise ships, in order to protect cities in the World Heritage List (see Tattara, 2013).

Overtourism, a phenomenon that is occurring also because of cruise tourism, contributes to the process of stripping away local cultures and traditions as well as to the impoverishment of the social and cultural identity of the city of Palermo, all of which contrasts with the idea of sustainable tourism advocated for the city of Palermo at the time of its UNESCO nomination at the session of the World Heritage Committee, which met in Bonn in 2015.

The exponential increase in the presence of tourists and an urban management that is not based on strategies aimed at absorbing the impact of tourism through appropriate policies, produces a cultural impoverishment of the city of Palermo, as a natural consequence of the dual process of globalisation and the failures of local policies aimed at the protection of the local cultural, traditional and artistic heritage as well as the poor enhancement of the intangible heritage that has characterised the city. To guarantee the conservation and fruition of the environmental and cul-

tural sites inscribed in the WHL, UNESCO requires a specific management plan shaped to protect and ensure Sustainability, in the long term, of the development of the extended area where the site is. Local policies adopted by the government appear to be mostly anachronistic, inadequate, and inefficient. The lack of compliance actions planned in the management plan, which would have better managed the development of the area by avoiding the overload of the carrying capacity during summer months, would have also implemented touristic promotion policies by encouraging tourism in different seasons. This strategy would prevent the overload of the carrying capacity in the city but also would originate, Thank the activation of a more efficient and efficacy touristic system, a more solid economic model, in other words, the implementation of Sustainable Development.

The lack of administrative and regulatory constraints, of adequate land use planning, and of consistent public and social policies in line with the sustainability paradigm, understood in its complexity, appears to be an obstacle to achieving the goals of sustainable development and also risks turning the opportunity arising from inclusion in the WHL into a potential threat to the city. This occurs because UNESCO properties are able to attract, as we have seen, a greater number of visitors than other potentially competing cultural and architectural assets that, though not belonging to the WHL, are relevant assets located in areas adjacent to UNESCO assets. Having to choose a destination for a vacation in a city where there are UNESCO properties, as in the case of the city of Palermo, tourists tend to visit first the assets that are part of the WHL, because as explained above, the UNESCO brand is identified as a "seal of quality" that confers a good reputation, and only secondly will the tourist visit other assets of cultural interest. In this sense, the 'primacy' of UNESCO assets makes them top-ranking attractors compared to other tourist destinations in the same city that experience a decline in attendance. This way, the establishment of the UNESCO property generates punctual tourist pressure on certain areas of the city through redistribution and for concentration. The five UNESCO monuments located in the historic centre of the city of Palermo, such as the Royal Palace and Palatina Chapel, the Cathedral, the Church of San Giovanni degli Eremiti, the Church of Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio and the Church of San Cataldo have contributed to extending the length of stay of tourists in the historic centre as well as to increasing the concentration of tourists in the city centre. According to data provided by the Statistical Directory of the City of Palermo, the average stay in the city in 2016 was 2.1 days, while in 2019 it increased to 2.2 days. Prior to WHL nomination, tourists would spread across the broad area of the city instead of concentrating in the UNESCO brand places. Consequently, anthropogenic concentration within the urban centre has increased consistently, as have urban pressure factors. This modifies the previous urban and citizen equilibrium.

For an analysis as accurate as possible, it was necessary to limit the analysis of the data to the tourism-related businesses in the city of Palermo over the period covering the four years following official inclusion in the World Heritage List (WHL), i.e., 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019, as the years 2020 and 2021 were affected by the Covid-19 health emergency and consequently by the related lockdown that did not allow full fruition of either the city or its services, as well as hitting, inter alia, the tourism sector. Consequently, the data collected in the period after 2019 would not be representative of the ordinary trend of tourist flows in the city. According to ISTAT data, reprocessed by UNESCO Sicily Heritage Foundation, managing body of the serial property "Arab-Norman Palermo and the Cathedral Churches of Cefalù and Monreale" UNESCO, Palermo recorded, after an initial peak in 2015, a slight decline in 2016, while the following years recorded a gradual increase in tourist presences from both Italy and abroad, rising from one million presences in 2015 to 1.2 million presences in 2019; in particular, the percentage of foreign presence in the city increased by +13% in just four years (see Angelini, 2021, *op. cit.*)

While tourist presence contributes to the local economy, it also generates pressure on the territory. The tourism pressure index, which determines the capacity of an area to bear the anthropogenic load by measuring both the presence of tourists and the population within individual municipal boundaries, suggests that at times when there are greater tourist flows, the infra-

structure and services are overloaded and consequently there is overcrowding and disservices to all city users with sometimes irreversible consequences. Indeed, the concentration of tourism contributes to increasing pressure within the city and amplifying urban issues. The sudden development of the tourism industry in the city of Palermo in recent years has consistently impacted the city's carrying capacity in terms of tourism pressure, laying bare its pre-existing issues: the increased load of municipal solid waste, sewage disposal, increased traffic and related air pollution.

Air quality data for the city of Palermo, for example, show a deterioration of air quality over the four-year period. In August 2016, PM10 reached an average of 15.3 ($\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$), not exceeding the daily allowable limit for human health, while in August 2019, this limit was exceeded eight times, testifying to the deterioration of air quality. Land consumption has also seen a sharp increase: while in 2016 the percentage of land consumed within the city of Palermo stood at 39.3 percent, with a density of 2.5 Km^2 , over the following four years this percentage rose to 39.5 percent, recording a land consumption density in the area of 6.8 Km^2 . Similarly, waste production, as shown in the ISPRA report data, confirms an increase in production from 597,216.7 tons in 2016 to 603,248.7 in 2019. If the current trend of tourist expansion continues to rise, there is a risk of transforming Palermo into another Venice, in other words, in a city where the accessibility to the historical center should be limited to the number of visitors to remain within the carrying capacity system and not to damage the quality life of residents.

The lack of readiness in managing flows by tourism operators produces overcrowding within accommodation facilities, resulting in damage to the quality of services offered, compromising the quality of satisfaction perceived by tourists and thus damaging tourism in the medium to long term. A second set of problems, related to the management of hospitality in Palermo, is determined by the seasonal nature of tourism, which begins in May and lasts until October, so the utilisation rate of hotel and non-hotel facilities is reduced to 30 percent, causing substantial economic loss during periods of non-utilisation (see Angelini, 2021, *op. cit.*). Conversely, the month of August recorded the peak of presences and degenerative phenomena due to the systems reaching the carrying capacity to support life⁵.

The concept of carrying capacity is linked to the need to stay within the ecological limits of a given area as well as within the economic and social limits. It is possible to apply the concept of carrying capacity theorized by Rees and Wackernagel (1994) to tourism in that, just as in nature resources are limited and therefore their use should be rationalised, even in cities, and particularly those recognised for their Outstanding Universal Value by UNESCO, are exposed to deterioration and require greater efforts in terms of conservation and protection, since where cities are not adequately monitored they risk being overwhelmed by tourist pressure, deteriorating the quality of life of resident citizens and their well-being, as well as that of tourists.

In conclusion, the UNESCO nomination of "Arab-Norman Palermo and the Cathedral Churches of Cefalù and Monreale" represents an extraordinary opportunity in terms of sustainable development, for its inhabitants and for tourists who will visit this Universal Heritage of Outstanding Value. Conversely, the UNESCO nomination requires a constant commitment on the part of local governance, economic and social partners and all stakeholders so that tourism development policies and not only are implemented from a sustainability perspective, that is, in the promotion of quality tourism, in which resident citizens can also benefit from the positive effects of tourism, not only in economic terms or the creation of jobs but also by following a model that pursues a process for the promotion and safeguard of the city, while continuing to identify themselves with their own territory through social ties and local identities. This would offer a better quality of life, such as a re-organization of urban viability or liveability or by providing urban decorum in the city.

5 According to the World Tourism Organization's definition, "tourist carrying capacity" is the maximum number of people who can visit a tourist destination without damaging the physical, economic, and sociocultural environment and without causing a deterioration in the satisfaction that the visitors themselves can derive from it.

In this sense, the political strategies put in place in the city of Palermo appear to be inadequate and anachronistic and at times even in opposition to the UN 2030 Agenda. The lack of adequate and timely sustainable planning for the city throughout political tools such as municipal deliberation or political acts, as well as proper management of tourist flows poses a potential threat to the future of the city and its artistic, cultural, social and environmental assets; WHL membership, if not wisely managed and monitored, can overwhelm the city and its integrity, as is happening in other Italian cities that are UNESCO World Heritage property.

The Management Plan of the serial property “Arab-Norman Palermo and the Cathedral Churches of Cefalù and Monreale” can be the political and social compass for the implementation of sustainable development in the city of Palermo. Starting from monitoring and a SWOT analysis, it will be possible to implement and adjust socio-political strategies to improve weak points, as well as prevent looming threats in order to field appropriate and long-term policies.

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SEZIONI A 3T

LETTURE FUORI LUOGO

Levine, Myron. A. 2020. *Urban Politics*. New York: Routledge

Contemporary global governance tests the state-centric thinking of politics through multiple dynamics and different perspectives. One of these challenges is the position of the cities as strategic actors in implementing global agendas (Climate Change, Migration, Sustainable Development Goals, and others). Acuto states that today cities are seen as «critical engines driving the global economy, global information flows, and the worldwide mobility of goods and people» (Acuto, 2016, p. 510)

The relevance of cities as strategic spaces to govern global agendas calls for a rising interest in studying cities' abilities to assume global governance capacities. In the book *Building and Dwelling*, Richard Sennett (2018) mentions that city means two different things: on one side, the city is a "physical space"; on the other side, the city is a "mentality compiled from perceptions, behaviors, and beliefs." This review defines cities by the everyday dynamics and processes fed by the inhabitants.

Following a collaborative approach to the design of cities, this review questions the importance of asking oneself about cities' inclusion capacities in the face of their contemporary designs. This approach is necessary when a multiscale global context promotes multiple exclusions of people by race, origin, gender, religion, or nationality.

What role are the cities playing in an unequal multiscale global context? In a multiscale political environment where cities are critical spaces where every day global dynamics materialize, the 10th edition of the Handbook *Urban Politics* is required more than ever. *Urban Politics* studies politics in cities and suburbs in the United States and seeks to clarify how inequalities and injustice have emerged in urban contexts and cities of the United States.

With a "pragmatic" approach, this Handbook draws on an interdisciplinary dialogue between political science and interconnected urban studies. The discussions offered in this Handbook contribute to understanding how power interacts between private actors with public authorities in urban issues. Also, the Handbook focuses on contemporary controversies between private and public "powers" in the urban political arena.

The key argument of *Urban Politics* states that the United States is a "suburban nation in terms of population, economic activity, and political power." In this sense, *Urban politics* offers a typology to understand how the United States is turning into a "Suburban Nation." The author says the labels "denote complexity, a mix of progress and continued decline" in the urban condition of cities and suburbs of the United States. The proposed brands are Global City, Tourist City, and Bankrupt City.

Following the key argument, the 10th edition of *Urban Politics* develops a critical approach to clarify how globalization has negatively impacted cities and suburbs in the United States. The book also advances a few subthemes to understand how public and private powers interact in cities and suburbs in this country. *Urban Politics* is organized into 13 chapters. The following issues are the subthemes offered in the chapters included in *Urban Politics*: The author reflects on the ongoing relevance of the set of rules and structures of urban governance; the author also discusses the interrelationships and tensions between the Federal government, States, and cities to resolve the challenges of urban agendas; besides, the Handbook questions the predominance of economic rationality such as the crucial perspective for the sustainable development of cities and suburbs in the United States; as well, the Handbook highlights how the political activism of mayors has increased in the last years at the local and global level; finally, the author puts special attention to the political relevance of race and ethnicity in the management of cities and suburbs in the United States.

The book is concerned with the pedagogical dimension. *Urban Politics* offers a set of contains that guide students into the discussions provided in each chapter: Message-oriented section titles and subtitles, boldface terms, key terms, photographs, boxed case studies, and boxed references to classic and current urban films and TV shows.

This handbook highlights the diverse repertoire developed by ordinary people to achieve empowerment in the city as residents, business owners, and community organizations pushed for transformative change in urban contexts. Following the question that oriented this review, what role are the cities playing in an unequal multiscale global context? We follow a critical discussion that invites us to reflect on how communities and cities challenge the exclusion and inequalities in the United States.

To exemplify the challenges of exclusion and inequality in urban contexts, on one side, there are paradigmatic cases that help to understand how neighborhoods struggle against gentrification in many cities in the United States (Houston, Chicago, New York). On the other side, we consider the last violent events in Uvalde, Texas, as evidence of the urgency of rethinking how youths are experiencing their future possibilities in a declining Global North.

In the face of the gentrification processes and the tragic event in Uvalde, the Handbook *Urban Politics* offers at least the following four key lessons that teachers, students, policy-makers, and citizens interested in the contemporary challenges in the urban context of the United States need to be considered.

Firstly, the author invites us to study the notion of power in everyday urban dynamics; the formal rules and institutional processes are insufficient resources to understand how power operates in urban politics. Secondly, the Handbook invites us to analyze the private actors' power in designing and developing cities and suburbs. Thirdly, this Handbook invites us to examine more seriously and in-depth how each city and suburb has a specific situation in the face of inequalities and power. Fourthly, the author highlights the inequality in the urban situation as the main challenge for the metropolitan areas in the United States.

We close this review by arguing that it is relevant when studying urban politics and its controversies and challenges to draw on beyond the state-centric perspective. This Handbook of power in urban politics calls upon us to rethink society and state's challenges under globalized societies regarding contemporary urban agendas. Even though this Handbook focuses on power, cities, and inequality in the United States, the discussion offered in this Handbook could be a starting point to rethink how to observe the broader phenomenon of power and its multiple challenges in the Urban Global North and the Urban Global South.

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Antonio Alejo

Bill Baker. *Place branding for small cities, regions and downtowns: the essential for successful destinations*. Independently published, 2019

Bill Baker è considerato uno dei pionieri del place branding ed è riconosciuto a livello internazionale come studioso innovativo e leader nel campo del *branding* turistico. Da anni lavora come consulente nel campo del marketing turistico e si occupa di sviluppare il marchio di luoghi e di costruire strategie ad hoc per la crescita turistica e culturale di numerose località e città statunitensi. In particolare, la sua attività si è concentrata negli ultimi anni sulla promozione e valorizzazione dei piccoli centri e piccole città che spesso, in tutto il mondo, vengono considerate come luoghi "minori", lontani dal turismo dei grandi attrattori, e quindi fuori dagli investimenti pubblici e privati in materia di marketing turistico e culturale delle destinazioni.

Il volume è ben scritto e affronta un tema molto *appealing* nella nostra società in trasformazione e in un'epoca di forze drammaticamente in conflitto tra loro. Restituisce una importante riflessione circa il rapporto tra rigore nella produzione di conoscenza, sua utilizzabilità nella pratica e conseguenze derivanti dall'applicazione di specifici approcci manageriali e strategici in tema di place o touristic destination branding.

Il libro ha un taglio essenzialmente divulgativo e di conoscenza, ma può avere la valenza di un manuale per studenti e studentesse post-graduated, che intendono approfondire la tematica in un modo meno *mainstream* e più *critical*. I quesiti riepilogativi alla fine dei capitoli permettono agevolmente di verificare la comprensione e l'apprendimento di quanto letto. Tuttavia, bisogna sottolineare che il libro non presenta un percorso logico sempre omogeneo. Infatti, non sempre la lettura appare chiara e semplice, non per i contenuti, ma per la struttura che non è sempre lineare, rendendo poco accessibile la comunicazione (differentemente da quanto l'autore dichiara nell'introduzione) ad un pubblico nuovo all'argomento e che non conosce a fondo le tematiche.

L'autore affronta il tema, riportando decenni di esperienze e pratica. Interessanti sono le sette principali dimensioni di analisi, che definisce "step". Questi step si sviluppano attraverso un percorso ben definito, come un "touristic business plan" delle "small cities". L'autore spiega che sono uno strumento, un vademecum innovativo che ha lo scopo di trasformare una città in un luogo attrattivo che il turista vuole visitare, se non anche viverci almeno per una parte dell'anno.

La prima parte del libro illustra le modalità per gestire una destinazione sostenibile o un marchio di luogo. Fornisce gli elementi essenziali e spiega come si trasforma il turismo, lo sviluppo economico, quali sono le principali strategie per la creazione di luoghi e il *wayfinding*, in termini di identità e immagine, delle piccole città e regioni. Il libro semplifica l'ambito e le dinamiche del marchio locale, fornendo un approccio graduale alla ricerca, alla definizione e implementazione di una strategia di marchio vincente per luoghi soprattutto di dimensioni più contenute. Ogni capitolo è ricco di idee utili a practitioner e amministratori pubblici per stabilire un marchio comunitario e per fornire un vantaggio competitivo. Il file rouge dell'intero volume è rappresentato dal supporto e dal ruolo partecipativo e bottom up dei cittadini, che sono i primi fruitori dei luoghi in cui vivono, sono il primo pubblico target. Tale file rouge rappresenta la principale differenza tra il place branding delle piccole città e il place branding dei grandi attrattori, dove spesso sono coinvolte istituzioni pubbliche e aziende private che sponsorizzano.

Leggendo il volume viene spontaneo riflettere sulla quarta rivoluzione industriale che stiamo vivendo, e che, differentemente dalle rivoluzioni passate, sta aprendo la strada a cambiamenti che stanno investendo radicalmente quasi tutti i settori aziendali e a sfide politiche, economiche, organizzative e sociali che possono essere affrontate e gestite se, e solo se, si assume la consapevolezza del ruolo sociale che hanno le imprese turistiche e culturali moderne. Tali imprese, oggi, più che in passato, agiscono come attori sociali, *driver* di inclusione economica e sociale per le persone e i territori in cui esse nascono e operano. In particolare, i processi che derivano da questo rinnovato ruolo, sembrano riportare in auge l'importanza dei territori, della prossimi-

tà e delle comunità, concetti di economia civile e circolare, che la competizione derivante dalla imperante globalizzazione della terza rivoluzione industriale sembrava aver fatto scomparire. Da questo punto di vista, per far fronte alle sfide proposte oggi a livello sociale ed economico, è necessario rilanciare un sistema imprenditoriale turistico inclusivo, che parta dai cittadini e dalle piccole comunità, nel senso che la gara competitiva per essere giocata deve, in ogni caso, tener conto e considerare i fabbisogni dei territori e delle comunità dove tali imprese operano. I molteplici attori pubblici e privati coinvolti nel processo di place o destination branding, intesi in una prospettiva che privilegia le relazioni tra le unità componenti una struttura, piuttosto che le componenti in quanto tali, devono apprendere un rinnovato modo di fare impresa turistica, imparando a muoversi in un sistema imprenditoriale che parta proprio da quei territori e comunità che si vogliono brandizzare, attraverso un meccanismo costante di ascolto, per essere inclusive e competitive allo stesso tempo. L'autore lo spiega bene. In tal senso, è diffuso ormai il concetto di competizione, che individua precise scelte strategiche (per ragioni legate all'innovazione sociale e tecnologica, al risparmio dei costi e alle economie di scala) volte a creare organizzazioni collaborative e multi stakeholder, che condividono intenti, obiettivi, risorse, competenze (normalmente concorrenti), al fine di ottenere vantaggi comuni. Dunque, se un territorio "fallisce" dal punto di vista turistico, falliscono anche le imprese che in quel territorio operano e viceversa: il successo turistico di un territorio e delle comunità è legato a doppio filo al successo delle imprese che in esso insistono.

Un ulteriore ultimo aspetto molto interessante affrontato dall'autore riguarda gli impatti e gli effetti delle strategie di branding sulle comunità che spesso non sanno nulla di marketing, pubblicità, comunicazione, ecc... Tali impatti hanno natura economica e sociale e sono oggetto di dibattito tra gli esperti appartenenti a diversi ambiti. I sostenitori, in prevalenza esperti di economia e marketing, ne vedono le ricadute positive in un'ottica di sviluppo e benessere per la popolazione; i detrattori ne avvertono i pericoli e l'evoluzione in senso negativo. L'interdisciplinarietà del fenomeno deve generare punti di incontro che possono proprio arricchirsi di queste prospettive diverse e che affondano in diversi campi di specializzazione: sociologia, economia, organizzazione aziendale, architettura, psicologia, urbanistica, ecologia, scienze ambientali, non solo marketing.

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Trejo Nieto, A., Niño Amézquita, J.L. (2021).
Metropolitan governance in Latin America. Abingdon: Routledge

The world's population is organized around cities as the result of a process known as "planetary urbanization" (Brenner, 2014). At present, more than 50% of the world's citizens live in urban areas, a rate that is expected to 70% by 2050 (World Bank, 2020). The case of Latin America is paradigmatic. In this area, 80% of the population is already resident in cities. This is largely due to the intense growth of the region in the 1950s. For example, Buenos Aires, Mexico City and Sao Paulo are among the most populated cities on the planet. An increasing number of inhabitants are flocking to neighbourhoods in other big cities in the region, such as Lima, Bogota, Santiago de Chile and Rio de Janeiro, which are developing into megacities. Population growth, however, has not been accompanied by an increase or development of infrastructures and the public policies needed to meet the social, labour or economic demands required for the well-being of citizens.

Alejandra Trejo and José L. Niño Amézquita, the editors of this multi-author book, present a coordinated and interesting analysis of the different realities that coexist in the big cities of the region, highlighting the different practices that enable us to understand the developments in each of the cities included in the study. The book addresses the five large Spanish-speaking metropolises of Bogota, Buenos Aires, Lima, Mexico City and Santiago de Chile. The main aim is to determine how government structures are developed in these cities and how they work in coordination with other municipalities, other state structures and other external agents to manage public services. The first part of the book introduces the context of urbanization and metropolization in Latin America with a special focus on the challenges of governance and, in particular, the provision of public services and the inequalities in access to such services. Emphasis is here placed on the role played by the process of decentralization or fragmentation that occurred between the 1980s and 1990s, which led to the separation between production and provision of services. This phenomenon, for some municipalities, led to the assumption of new responsibilities, and demonstrated the need to cooperate in a scenario marked not only by the dearth of resources, but also by the socioeconomic and socio-spatial inequalities generated by governments, authorities and economic elites that have hindered the accessibility of the city for other actors, such as the peripheral populations that lack adequate public services.

The second section of this book includes the participation of authors who present five case studies in urban areas of Latin America. Each one highlights the problems, challenges, and institutional context of this new urban scenario and, in addition, offers an overview of how to solve the shortcomings in services that most affect the population. In this sense, the authors describe highly diverse experiences around this phenomenon which, in some cases, results in practical solutions to the problems, while, in others, acts as a primary source of harm for the inhabitants. This second part is a clear example of the main purpose of the book, namely, to frame the discussion of governance in an empirical approach, operationalizing this in concrete variables and specific cases without delving too deeply into new theories on the concept of governance.

Finally, the third part showcases the main reflections and conclusions arising from the comparison of the different cases. It focuses on identifying characteristics, practices or types of horizontal and vertical cooperation of the different actors involved in shaping the cities. The configuration of an urban area as a metropolis means it can be considered an active entity in constant movement, the main objective of which is the management of services. Large cities are characterized by a multiplicity of structures, as well as by strong competition among them, especially in terms of investment, talent, resources and, in short, in the generation of wealth. The emerging nature of this new reality is a threat to traditional structures. The usual players involved have no intention of innovating, nor of ceding autonomy or power. Nevertheless, the challenge lies in innovation in terms of metropolitan governance, the complexity of which can be seen in the times and rhythms of governance.

The principal idea underlying the argument is the inequality prevailing between the current conception of a city, understood as an emerging metropolitan development, and the institutional configuration that characterizes these areas, the structure of which appears to remain anchored in the past. Efforts have been made towards cooperation among cities, states and countries on models of knowledge, infrastructure and services, but these are marked by the slowness of their response to an emerging reality. This mismatch is the central thread of the discussion and emphasizes social inequality as the starting point for the analysis. Understanding these inequalities makes it possible to anticipate the future, to hamper or to favour solutions. The book highlights diversity and ecology as the best mechanisms to effectively manage public services in the region.

As regards aspects to be criticized or future research avenues, it can be mentioned that the development of comparative work is always complicated in these terms as it addresses most complex issues. The urban question is one of these, representing the greatest challenge of governance at global level: the governance of large metropolitan areas. At the present, the great challenges of society are urban and so involve cities. This is even truer in the case of Latin America, where urbanization process is extremely extensive. The Latin American metropolis is a socio-spatial and institutional phenomenon. The challenge is firstly institutional and is rooted in the importance of the political and demographic processes that are taking place in the region. Together with the aforementioned urban needs, these processes exceed the capacities of the institutions tasked with resolving these issues. For this reason, reading this book helps better understand the enormous complexity of the socio-political settings in which these cities are located.

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SEZIONI A 3T

INCONTRO FUORI LUOGO

Territorial Governance and Place Branding. Interview with Olga Kolotouchkina

In the age of globalisation, the risk of a homogenisation of production processes as well as of structuring of world business and markets, of the determination of the same lifestyles, of the construction of critical thoughts uniform to the dominant mentality is actually present. In such new historical conditions, not devoid of criticality and profound differences and singularities with respect to the past, it becomes particularly important to preserve the originality and specificity of specific territories, their history, culture, the typicality of the resident population, and local life experiences. Achieving these objectives proves particularly complex and difficult in some circumstances, due to the loss of identity of places and to the standardisation of the lifestyle of their inhabitants. It is in this context that the practices of Place branding assert themselves, i.e. the activation of a complex communication process capable of addressing a broad target audience, in an attempt to create (together) a competitive identity of places, states, regions, cities, capable of highlighting the authentic characteristics of a place, its history, its culture, the areas of excellence, or potential excellence, the mentality of the people who inhabit it, their lifestyle, the organised forms of widespread sociality.

The aim is to create a new territorial "vision", or to strengthen the existing one, in order to enhance the individual places of reference, so as to activate a process of systemic reflexivity and a consequent shared planning of the future development of a territory, so that it will be planned, designed and implemented in governance, with public, private and third sector actors present and active in the territory itself. In this sense, the involvement of citizens, considered strategic stakeholders from which to operate successfully, becomes fundamental. Citizens, in this sense, are understood as bearers of historical memory, repositories of government experience and practices, holders of strategic information, actors interested in structuring forms (old and new) of political participation, as well as primary consumers and users of the place where they live. If asked, no Italian, Spanish or Japanese citizen would reduce their country to pizza and mandolin, sun, sea and fun, or technological industrial district as some stereotypes might clumsily represent Italy, Spain, or Japan. Identities are always complex, plural, sometimes even contradicting each other. The challenge to which the actors of governance are called is to compose a unitary project that can represent the different local specificities, thereby restoring a coherent vision of a given territory.

The main aim of Place branding is actually to build "competitive identities", capable of bringing together material elements - space, natural resources, industrial facilities, transport routes - and intangible, cultural, emotional and artistic identity elements, to build a shared image of the territory. Everything is played out around a sort of triangulation between the "reflected" image of places, the "perceived" local identity and the activation of "strategic" public policies aimed at enhancing, promoting and developing these places. Many cities, regions or states hold many resources, sometimes known and sometimes not perceived, which must be discovered and narrated in a coherent, non-chaotic and non-random manner. Knowing so many singularities and drawing a single prevailing identity is a very complex task, which cannot be reduced only to good food, good sea, good sun, pleasant music, governmental effectiveness or technological modernity. Places are complex and must be told and described with the same complexity. This is what Place branding must deal with.

Place branding policies must be conceived in a "sustainable" form, avoiding representing the territory as a mere market product. They aim to express a relevant degree of government effectiveness and therefore must be able to respond to these critics directed at such experiences, understood by some as neo-liberal practices of producing tourist and commercial goods

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and services on the showcase of international markets. The sustainable branding of a territory has an interest in restoring the idea of participatory government, whose objective is to provide identity (or new identity) to any territory inhabited by a community of active citizens and non-citizens, interested in the place that (even transitory) they decide to live in and “use” to draw benefit and material and immaterial sustenance for themselves and their families. In implementing the principles of Place branding, making a place attractive to those who inhabit it, to those who work in it, to all the people who visit or pass through it, becomes a mission that the governance of any city, of any territory, of any region will have an interest in pursuing and realising.

Given the centrality of these issues, we want to explore them in depth with Olga Kolotouchkina, a scholar and expert on the subject in question and a profound connoisseur of Place branding practices. A short curriculum of Olga Kolotouchkina and a short interview with her will follow.

Olga Kolotouchkina holds a PhD in Communication Sciences. She is a lecturer and researcher in Communication and Branding at the Faculty of Information Sciences at the Complutense University of Madrid. Kolotouchkina is a member of the American Academy of Advertising, the European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA) and the International Place branding Association. Her research interests include place branding, social inclusion, forms of political participation and active citizenship, and public diplomacy. She has been a visiting researcher at The Institute of Culture, Communication, and Information Technologies of the University of Toronto and at Waseda University of Tokyo. Kolotouchkina has many years of well-established professional experience in multinational advertising and branding companies such as J. Walter Thompson (WPP Group) and Saffron Brand Consultants, in addition to her experience in her own branding company, STUFF design consultants.

1. Place branding has recently become a topic of interest in Italy and it is often stigmatized by observers and policy makers juxtaposing it with all the activities of “selling,” commodification and commercialization of a territory. Territory thereby becomes a consumer good like many others, at the free disposal of economically profitable activities. Actually, international literature suggests that Place branding is something else, with other goals and functions. What are in your opinion the benefits that can be obtained when it is properly applied?

First of all, I would argue that there are important differences between places and consumer goods. A place cannot be priced, packaged, sold, or discontinued as a soft drink or a car. Places are complex social and economic constructs, shared and owned by many stakeholders, citizens being the most important. While a formal organization of different places may be similar in terms of their key operating systems, governance and infrastructures, each place is unique in its history, culture, local experience and in the lifestyle of its people. In the context of the widespread economic, technological, and financial globalization, many places preserve their singularity and authenticity. While some places might not need to reaffirm their uniqueness, as they are already well-known icons and powerful magnets for tourists, new residents, companies, and organizations, other territories may face specific challenges in terms of their reputation and perceptions. In this regard, Place branding is a consistent strategic tool enabling visibility, fostering positive reputation and the engagement of relevant targets in the place experience.

2. When referring to Place branding, one cannot but refer to the process of building territorial identities (or new territorial identities). As if to say that through the tools of Place branding one can come to provide an identity, or a new identity, to a specific place. In this regard, what is the relationship between “past” and “present” and between “reality” and public “representation” of an individual territory? How far can Place branding go and how much are its effects related to the assumed, perceived, experienced or recognized reality of a given territory?

With the exception of brand-new smart cities that emerge around the world to become futuristic labs of the most advanced technologies (e.g. Masdar City, UAE; Woven City, Japan; Konza City, Kenya), all territories have their historical and cultural roots that shape their place experience and reputation. This place legacy cannot be erased and rebuilt from scratch overnight. The formation of place's reputation is a medium-long term cumulative process of a series of direct and virtual experiences with the place by all relevant stakeholders, from occasional visitors to exchange students, local residents, tourists, international companies, investors and media. Place branding tools are useful and valuable when a territory needs to adjust its external and internal reputation to a new place vision, to enhance the relevance of the place within specific targets, or to strengthen specific place values. But this process should be strategically articulated from a standpoint of the place's critical needs and challenges, prevailing legacies and relevant opportunities, considering always a medium-long time-frame for the expected outcomes.

3. What relationship can be defined between Place branding and local governance? With reference to the identification of shared development models, can the involvement of actors, stakeholders, users within co-design actions aimed at a more inclusive and participatory line of development also be facilitated by the tools made available by Place branding? Or, are the two not compatible?

The leading role within the Place branding strategy is usually assumed by the local government as the main promotor, coordinator and implementor of the strategy. However, the government cannot work isolated from its citizens. Places are owned, shared, and enjoyed by their residents; therefore, their role in defining places' priorities is essential. Furthermore, the role of citizens as places' formal and informal ambassadors should not be underestimated. Proud citizens enjoy sharing positive news and comments about their places, becoming a trusted source of meaningful insights about the place. Check "The Swedish Number" campaign for a great example of the successful engagement of residents in the international promotion of their country. In democratic societies, a wide range of consultative and engagement actions exist to effectively involve citizens in the decision-making process and the co-design of specific actions (e.g. Participatory budgeting, Citizens councils, Citizens labs, Public consultations, Online communities). The increasing presence of digital media channels for interaction of local governments with citizens makes citizens engagement a common and relevant practice of Place branding Strategies.

4. Starting from the reflections on how to promote an area, Place branding could also have spillover effects on national politics. For example, Italy can use Made in Italy to develop new soft power strategies, at the economic level with the intention of placing its products on a global scale, at the political level to increase the country's credibility in diplomatic and international relations, and at the cultural level to enhance the characteristics of Italian excellence. From this point of view, could Place branding tools also push toward the enhancement of new forms of political sovereignty?

Place branding strategies can be applied to all kinds of places, from urban districts, villages, and towns to cities, regions and countries. However, depending on the type of territory, its structural complexity and its specific challenges on the local, regional or global arena, the degree of the complexity of the Place branding Strategy may vary significantly.

5. Place branding has very often been used to plan the governmental action of cities and urban spaces, so much so that the expression "city branding" has even been coined. However, those same tools could also be effectively used to review rural development processes, the enhancement of peripheral areas, or bearers of different structural fragilities. One possible example is what can be grasped in contemporary Spain. The urbanization process of the past decades has left large "empty" spaces (Spain's "vacía," which in Italy corresponds to territories similarly defined as "inland areas," less developed than urban centers). From this point of view, will Place branding also be able to target the suburbs and marginal areas, or do you think it will continue to be a tool mainly used for urban governance policies?

All kinds of places can successfully develop their Place branding Strategies to address specific needs of their reputation management or transformation goals. However, to achieve the expected results, the strategy should be effectively implemented and constantly monitored over a significant period of time. In addition to a consistent articulation of the strategy, the allocation of human, technical and financial resources should not be neglected. In this regards, local governments need to have a clear vision of what they expect from a Place branding strategy and how they are going to implement it effectively, to avoid talking the talk, but to walk the walk of the place transformation.

SEZIONE FUORI LUOGO

University, Peripheral Neighbourhoods and Social Innovation: the Case of 'Rete 3B' in Milan²

Introduction

This study aims to address the issue of social innovation by focusing on the role played by universities as activators of social innovation. The long tradition of urban studies has highlighted the importance of spatial and environmental dimensions in influencing social outcomes, highlighting the role played by the uniqueness of each territory. As suggested by a substantial body of literature (MacCallum, Moulaert, Hillier Vicari-Haddock, 2016; Moulaert, 2009; Nuvolati, 2018; Ramella Trigilia, 2010; Van Dyck, Broeck, 2013; Vicari Haddock, Mingione, 2017), even social innovation phenomena can be framed within a spatial framework, favouring a broadening of the interpretative framework as a result of the inclusion of the spatial-territorial dimension.

Here, the concept of social innovation is defined as the development and implementation of new ideas that can satisfy social needs by creating new relationships and forms of collaboration, and enhancing existing alternatives (Howaldt, Schwarz 2010; Murray *et al.*, 2010; Busacca, 2013). Social innovation is a context-dependent (Montanari 2014), path-dependent and place-based concept (Baker, Mehmood, 2015; Kagan, Hauerwaas, Holz, Wedler, 2018; Moulaert, Martinelli, González, Swyngedouw, 2007). It depends on previous experiences and the sociocultural background of the context in which it develops (Caroli, 2016).

Territorial dimension, social innovation, and quality of life, in their interrelationships, shape the guidelines that articulate the reinterpretation of the role of a cultural actor such as the university. The theoretical framework this article starts from is the work of Benneworth and Cunha (2015), who theorised the increasing centrality of universities in the diffusion of a knowledge-based approach to urban development. Busacca (2018, p. 114) states that

«the University occupies a privileged position to contribute to social innovation practices as a provider of knowledge [...], material resources [...] and experiences setting up a scenario in which it plays three roles: producer, certifying actor and disseminator».

By considering the research perspective proposed by Bagnasco (1992), who considers Italian cities as local societies (and therefore analysable in terms of models that allow for the connection of different levels of society), we examine the role of the university as an activator of social innovation and potentially an engine of territorial development. More specifically, we adopt the scale of the urban neighbourhood since it constitutes the basic unit of the city and the first engine of development of sociality and proximity in the urban context. The case presented in this article, 'Rete 3B', focuses on three neighbourhoods in Milan, considered 'peripheral' and decentralised, to which little attention has been paid by urban populations.

'Rete 3B' constitutes a legacy of the 2019 edition of URBANA, an initiative promoted by the Department of Sociology and Social Research of the University of Milano-Bicocca, to stimulate scientific and public debate on various sociological urban issues: welfare, mobility, quality of life and local identity. The first edition in 2017 aimed to bring Bicocca University closer to the central areas of Milan, bringing the 'peripheral' university to the inner city. The 2019 edition instead adopted the polycentric approach, increasingly typical of the city of Milan (Dell'Agnese, Anzoise,

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2011; Zajczyk, Mugnano, Borlini, Memo, 2005) and involved universities with similar experiences to Bicocca in a joint reflection on the role of the university in the territorial dimension. Starting from its peripheral positioning in the urban tissue of Milan, Bicocca University, the promoter of the initiative, involved Politecnico di Milano and Libera Università IULM within the event since they are located in two traditionally peripheral areas of the city, Bovisa and Barona, respectively. The sharing of the same territorial experiences led to the birth of a network between the three universities. This experience, which is now at the embryonic stage and further slowed down by the COVID-19 pandemic, took the name 'Rete 3B', recalling the three initials of the districts involved (Barona, Bicocca and Bovisa).

1. Neighbourhoods as a field of social development

Neighbourhoods can be considered as urban subsystems, something extremely similar to the cells of an organism that make up the structure of a tissue. They are the smallest spatial dimension of scientific relevance for study as portions of the territory endowed with their own identity and urban features. This aspect of specificity that neighbourhoods bring with them represents perhaps the most relevant aspect that has always inspired urban sociological research. A neighbourhood is distinguishable through two essential elements: sociophysical morphology and usually well-defined and recognisable identity. On the relationships that exist between different populations within cities in their neighbourhoods, urban sociology has adopted an ecological paradigm that allows us to better frame the types of social interaction between different groups of individuals who share urban space (Mela, 2018; Osti, 2010). There are many phenomena that sociologists can observe at the neighbourhood level, such as phenomena related to types of consumption, mobility styles or, again, residential and housing satisfaction. In urban studies, the neighbourhood's vitality is traditionally considered as a key aspect of urban community life (Jacobs, 1961). The vitality and socioeconomic innovation that takes shape within the neighbourhood is, of course, conveyed and stimulated by a variety of factors, but at the base of all the premises, there are substrates and actors that, more than others, possess a peculiarity necessary to push society towards innovative practices and phenomena. The topic of urban social innovation is very present in the literature. In particular, some authors associate this phenomenon with the dimension of cultural production and the attractiveness of cities (García, Eizaguirre, Pradel, 2015). Other scholars place more emphasis on the purely social dimension and transformative capacities of the individual and collective level of urban social innovation practices (Wagner, Wilhelmer, 2017). Still, other researchers focus on the role of territories with a strong vocation for technological and economic innovation as a substrate to foster practices of social engagement and urban regeneration (Corbisiero, Esposito, 2020; Esmaeilpoorarabi, Yigitcanlar, Kamruzzaman, Guaralda, 2020). The typical vitality of urban centres represents the ideal spatial context in which to study social innovation practices, how they evolve and which forms they may take over time (Pradel-Miquel, 2017; Wittmayer *et al.*, 2019). The degree of vitality and sociality of a neighbourhood urges the formation of micro-social initiatives because of the high population density and presence of services and functions. This microenvironment is suitable to solicit the exchange of information and experiences among individuals; in this sense, the role of proximity in neighbourhoods is fundamental as a driver of innovation (Ganesan, Malter, Rindfleisch, 2005; Osti, 2010). These factors are certainly relevant to increase the likelihood that social innovation initiatives will occur at the neighbourhood level, but it is worth remembering how a more general look at the health of this urban territorial portion is an unavoidable element to make a more complete analysis of the phenomenon. The social vitality and the climate of cultural ferment that may be present in a neighbourhood are associated with certain levels of quality of life. Extensive literature has been devoted to the theme of urban quality of life, focusing on the neighbourhood dimension (Marans, 2012; Sirgy, Cornwell, 2002).

Quality of life, whether related to residents' socioeconomic conditions or in terms of subjective residential satisfaction, is not a negligible factor in the construction of a psychological climate of widespread social vitality. Finally, attachment and the community participation contribute to increasing familiarity with the neighbourhood, in fact making it a natural extension of one's own home. In addition to these factors, both contextual and individual, there is also the role played by the institutions (Piva, Vivarelli, 2005), in particular those involved in research and education and especially universities, which, by their mission, also have a vocation for territorial development through various training and public engagement initiatives. The so-called Third Mission presents one of the objectives that Italian university institutions are supposed to pursue, formally documenting which and how many activities they carry out to foster ties with the territory and, in the final analysis, stimulate processes of local social innovation.

A further aspect to be considered concerns the declination of the territorial dimension at a peripheral level. As mentioned above, the object of investigation concerns an experiment in social innovation born from cognitive actors located in the suburbs of the city. And the suburbs, today, as Maurizio Carta (2012) states, have gone from being carriers of marginality and criticality to new components of urban polycentrism. Where peripherality existed today, new centrality is experienced (Bucci, 2003); centres are multiplied in a patchwork (Petrillo, 2018) that makes the city polycentric, shifting it from its primary centrality (Kloosterman, Musterd, 2001; Slach, Ivan, Ženka, Sopkuliak, 2018).

2. Universities as drivers of local development

As mentioned in the introduction, university campuses are not only centre for the production of knowledge and training separate from the territorial reality in which they are inserted, but exactly because they are in a socio-physical environment, universities are also strictly connected to the space and local stakeholders. This peculiarity, together with their role as producers of new knowledge, increases their interest when we discuss the interrelationship between social innovation, urban development and cognitive institutions. In this triangulation, the university assumes a crucial role in the process of territorial social innovation.

This is a field of study that has recently begun to attract the interest of scholars and recognise in this triple interaction the crucial role of the university in activating processes of knowledge production that contribute to territorial development (Huggins Johnston, 2009). We are in the context of the so-called knowledge-based urban development (KBUD) models, to which the university seems to be able to contribute with growing force (Benneworth Cunha, 2015; Benneworth, Hospers, Jongbloed, Leiyste, Zomer, 2011; Perry, 2008). As such, over the years, the university has seen its involvement in the socioeconomic development processes of the territories' growth, often operating as a bridge between science and society, fostering the emergence of new networks and supporting local knowledge, learning and innovation (Colasanti, Frondizi, Huber, Bitetti, 2017). As anticipated, the reference is to the so-called Third Mission, which envisions the engagement of universities, in addition to the traditional missions related to teaching and research, in other activities capable of facilitating relations with civil society, the public and businesses and giving new inputs to production processes (Boffo, Moscati, 2015). According to ANVUR, the Italian National Agency for the University System Evaluation, the Third Mission indicates 'the set of activities by which universities enter into direct interaction with society' (ANVUR, 2013, p. 559). In the literature, Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff (2000) frame the Third Mission within the so-called triple-helix model, according to which businesses, universities and the state interact to create an innovative environment that includes university spin-offs, trilateral initiatives for knowledge-based economic development and strategic alliances between businesses and university research groups. According to Busacca (2018), universities manage to hold a privileged

position in nurturing social innovation practices, as they act in the triple role of producers of knowledge, material resources and experience; certifiers and disseminators. Third Mission activities, therefore, not only foster new relationships with the territory (Carlesi, 2016) and enter the widely studied dimension of urban regeneration but also strengthen the role of the university as a social actor. Universities also act as mediators, facilitators and activators of social innovation processes on the territory (Colasanti *et al.*, 2017), promoting actions in favour of social integration processes (Savino, 2015). The Third Mission also reduces the contrasts which emerge in the local community, supporting the construction of best practices, appropriate public policies and projects useful for the resolution of situations of social emergency (Secchi, 2013).

3. Case Study: URBANA and 'Rete 3B'

3.1 Methodology

The case of the 'Rete 3B' network is now proposed as a way to explore the process leading the three universities to be partners for a common territorial innovation project. The network was the result of an official agreement resulting from the URBANA 2019 event. The project is now on hold because of the pandemic. Since data are not available to make an ex-post evaluation of the project, we chose to focus on the analysis of the process that led first to the interaction between the components of the triple helix and then to the birth of the agreement between them, generating a new form of social innovation. To carry out this analysis, we have analysed the documents that emerged from the working tables which took place during URBANA 2019. It is believed that this way allows for an account of some elements to investigate how the actors involved in the event have related to each other and subsequently reached a concrete step of realisation of a new social product. The discussion between the universities started by focusing on three social phenomena which could connect all territorial contexts: local identity, urban mobility and quality of life. These three strands of research have guided the work of interaction between the actors who were involved in the working tables, the outcome of which will be presented below. The neighbourhoods Bicocca, Bovisa and Barona are three neighbourhoods that have undergone vast historical changes. Although they are located in the marginal areas of the city, they have played an important role in the industrial history of Milan. Bicocca and Bovisa, in particular, have had, more than Barona, an identity strongly associated with the manufacturing sector and heavy industry. Pirelli's settlements within Bicocca and the many factories present in Bovisa have instilled in people's minds the idea that these two districts were the spots of Milan devoted to manufacturing activities, that is, the daily destination of thousands of workers who came to Milan to work in large manufacturing companies. Barona, meanwhile, constitutes a different experience compared with the two neighbourhoods mentioned above since its location at the southern side of the city and in close contact with the beginning of the Parco Agricolo Sud Milano has allowed the neighbourhood to preserve a green soul with a strong presence of greenery and waterways. This way, Barona has had a history of industry and work, but it is linked to the agriculture sector. Three neighbourhoods, or Nuclei d'Identità Locale (Local Identity Nucleus), take up the zoning provided by the Municipality of Milan, in which the concepts of innovation, production and work have crossed for over a century the spaces, the culture and the entire imagination of the neighbourhood. This deep identity marked by work, which has been stratified over the decades, has, however, had to reckon with the change of socioeconomic paradigms of the Second World War, the effect of which was that of an inexorable transition from manufacturing to services. It was the global post-Fordism revolution to push the divestments of large factories and a radical change in the urban landscape. The physical and visible legacy of this transformation has resulted in disused areas, often characterised by degradation and abandonment, which have been followed by obvi-

ous problems of deviance and security. The initiative was to develop in these areas new university campuses: in 1989, the Polytechnic of Milan in Bovisa was built followed by IULM University (1993) and University of Milan-Bicocca (1998). The opening-up phase of three universities in less than a decade was a factor that contributed to triggering a process of redefinition of the neighbourhoods, urging a new identity, social and cultural development.

3.2 The *URBANA* initiative

URBANA was based on the stimulus of the Department of Sociology and Social Research of the University Milano-Bicocca bringing the activities of the department closer to the territory of Milan.

The 2017 edition, titled 'Quality of Life and Social Innovation in Milan', represented the first important opportunity to consolidate the relationship between the university and the city, physically bringing the knowledge produced by the social scientists of the university to the citizens at the city centre. Four days and more than 20 appointments open to the public, in iconic locations at the centre of Milan, enabled important discussions on welfare, innovation, territory and society. These topics had been limited to specific issues, such as health, mobility, security, sustainability, domestic violence, public safety, new professions, food and more, using different languages (theatrical, musical and artistic performances; photographic exhibitions; seminars and debates) with a focus on the most vulnerable groups of the population in terms of gender, age group and social condition.

The very title of the initiative has an interesting symbolic meaning: 'urban' refers to the territorial dimension, to the study of social phenomena that concern Milan and its metropolitan area. 'Quality of life' entails the current objectives of public administrations in responding to the primary as well as the secondary needs of the population. Finally, 'social innovation' emphasises the need to address urban challenges by adopting novel solutions and strategies that pass through new practices of reciprocity, participation, collaboration and cooperation between civil society and public administration to raise the overall liveability of the city (Nuvolati, 2017).



Fig. 1 – The map shows the peripheral positioning of Barona, Bicocca and Bovisa within the city of Milan (Source: Authors' elaboration on Open Data Comune di Milano)

In order to have a look at the social structure of these urban areas, the following table shows some sociodemographic data and indexes useful for this goal. As can be seen, the gender composition of residents is fairly balanced except in the case of Barona where the female population significantly exceeds the male. The elderly population index (EPI), which measures the percentage proportion of the elderly (over 65 y.o.) on the young population (0-14 y.o.), is below the level recorded for the entire city of Milan, while in the case of the Barona it is possible to note a value well above the overall urban figure. In all three neighbourhoods, however, the youth population index (YPI), which measures the percentage proportion of young residents (0-24 y.o.) on the total population living in the neighbourhood, is a few percentage points higher than the value measured for the city. Finally, Bicocca University and Milan Polytechnic University had the largest share of enrolled and prospective students present in the neighbourhood as of 2019, presenting several tens of thousands of enrollees. These populations are a considerable factor both in increasing the offer of local shops, amenities and services and in rejuvenating the neighbourhoods and enhancing the vitality of the local communities.

<i>Neighbourhood</i>	<i>Total Population</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>EPI</i>	<i>Milan's EPI</i>	<i>YPI</i>	<i>Milan's YPI</i>	<i>Male students</i>	<i>Female Students</i>	<i>Total Students</i>
Bicocca (Università Bicocca)	8691	4437	4254	106,9	179,7	23,7	17,5	20253	12885	33138
Bovisa (Politecnico)	14145	7263	6882	132,6	179,7	21,6	17,5	14857	29789	44646
Barona (IULM)	16842	7920	8922	288,7	179,7	20,5	17,5	4454	1797	6251

Table 1 – Population data and number of enrolled students at the three neighbourhood Universities
(Source: Authors' elaboration on SISI Comune di Milano and USTAT Miur data - 2019).

Barona, Bicocca and Bovisa not only share a location that is in some way decentralised from the inner city, but all these cases have also undergone a process of redevelopment over time that has led to a transition originating from an industrial past to immerse itself, finally, in contemporary society based on services and knowledge. Among the drivers of development, to solicit a general social change, there was the opening of three university campuses: IULM University at Barona, Università degli Studi di Milano-Bicocca in the homonymous district and the Bovisa Campus of Politecnico di Milano.

In these three areas of Milan, the relevance of the KBUD model takes shape as a key to the interpretation of territorial development driven by the presence of cognitive institutions. In the case of Bicocca, the 'Bicocca District' was established as an initiative which connects the university to other local private companies to develop joint projects for the sociocultural development of the neighbourhood. The Bicocca District is a plastic example of the KBUD model in action since all the institutions involved (university, government and industry) interact with each other. The initiative has been able to leverage already vivid attention to the relationships with the territory and on an already active network of relations, and from this, it has been able to open itself to the city. At the macro level, it has been able to consolidate the relationship between the university and the city, get closer to citizens and share knowledge to bring back to the centre a territory often perceived as peripheral. At the micro level, instead, it has represented an opportunity for collaboration and cooperation between the teachers and offices of the department and between these and the institutional actors of the university, embodying in this way an important innovation also of an institutional nature.

The 2019 edition, 'University and Peripheries', instead focused on contexts that we would define as 'peripheral', namely, the neighbourhoods of Bicocca, Bovisa and Barona; also involved in the initiative were Politecnico di Milano and the Free University of Languages and Communication IULM. Like many other European cities, Milan is gradually developing an urban configuration less rigidly dependent on the 'centre-periphery' scheme and more towards a 'polycentric' model. Although this has been the emerging trend for several years now, also as a result of the major urban regeneration interventions that have involved the city since the end of Expo 2015, the centre-periphery model is not yet completely outdated. It is from this evidence that the URBANA 2019 edition has moved its steps, that is, placing at the centre of the debate the state of health of the neighbourhoods of Bicocca, Bovisa and Barona where the three universities are located, to investigate the role that these institutions can play in the processes of social innovation in the area.

The 2019 edition was held in two days: a full workshop day and the second day dedicated to 'urban exploration'. On the first day, reflections on the role played by the universities were guided starting from three typically urban social phenomena: local identity, urban mobility and quality of life. Through the tool of the working tables, the different representatives of the three neighbourhoods, not only academics but also free citizens, representatives of associations, businesses and the municipal administration were able to interact with each other. All the participants to the tables were encouraged to ponder on the relationship between universities and their neighbourhoods and were also asked to make an effort to identify and describe how the three universities have contributed to changing the neighbourhoods in terms of local identity, quality of life and mobility. This made it possible to explore the role of the universities in the processes of socioterritorial innovation, highlighting both elements in common or new ones. The first day ended with a plenary session in which the results of the tables were presented and a final debate was opened in the presence of the institutions. Meanwhile, the day of territorial exploration saw the realisation of guided walks that made it possible to immerse oneself in the neighbourhoods in the face of the reflections that emerged and visualise the potential and problems of each territory, starting from its 'university fulcrum'.

3.3 The process of interaction among the universities: the work phase at the technical tables

As anticipated, the heart of URBANA 2019 was the collective work that involved 10 actors for each of the three working tables. The topics covered were: Milanese suburbs and local identities, the role of mobility in peripheral contexts and quality of life in the suburbs. The participating actors came, in addition to the university world, from the three neighbourhood civil society, and from the institutional world (representatives of the administration of the NIL³ involved). The choice of these figures made it possible to select the main souls of the three Milanese neighbourhoods and thus encourage interaction and a lively debate that would lead to the emergence of relevant issues on which the three universities can contribute to improving local development and foster processes of social innovation. We will address in three subsections what emerged from the work at the tables.

3 NIL are the Local Identity Units introduced in Milan by the PGT (Territory Government Plan) as a set of areas, connected to each other by infrastructures and services for mobility, greenery. They represent areas that can be defined as neighbourhoods of Milan. They are systems of urban vitality: concentrations of local commercial activities, gardens, meeting places, services. For more information: www.pgt.comune.milano.it/psschede-dei-nil-nuclei-di-identita-locale/nuclei-di-identita-locale-nil.

3.3.1 The role of the universities in the development of local identity

In the first roundtable, the discussion focused on residents' perceptions about the presence of universities in their neighbourhoods in terms of local identity development. What emerged in the three urban areas, Bicocca, Bovisa and Barona, is the existence of potential improvement in the connection with citizenship; often this connection is perceived only near the university, for example, the Bovisa neighbourhood for the Polytechnic but not the Dergano neighbourhood not far from the university. Since all three campuses are located in former hard-manufacturing places, citizenship has perceived strongly the symbolic passage from a Fordist economy to one based on knowledge and services through vast urban renewal. This was particularly significant in Bicocca, where the extensive process of urban redevelopment, which took place between the late 1990s and early 2000s, helped replace the economic actors present in the neighbourhood, giving rise to a completely renewed area of Milan. For Bicocca and Bovisa, the presence of the universities has helped initiate a process of change in the urban landscape, from being characterised by factories, heavy pollution and huge flows of workers to a panorama of new buildings and flows of employees, city users and students. Regarding Barona and its relationship with the Free University IULM, the table showed that, in this case, the university has been able to fit into an urban context with a predominantly green and agricultural character without affecting the landscape but rather integrating harmoniously. The presence of the university in the case of Barona has also allowed for the renovation of some infrastructures typical of the landscape of this neighbourhood, such as some farmhouses traditionally linked to Milanese agricultural life. All the actors involved at the table agreed on the richness of associations and social activities in the neighbourhoods. Universities act within the neighbourhoods as an additional factor that can give vitality and energy to the local system. Since culture and creativity are two fundamental factors in the development of the contemporary city (Zukin, 1995; Semi, 2015), the university institution fits in as an actor capable of strengthening the presence of expert knowledge by helping to influence the very identity of the neighbourhood.

The strong bond among residents provides an ideal working ground to generate and constantly regenerate the link with the three universities. At the same time, citizens also requested a greater dialogue between university and territory regarding the exploration of the possibility of creating new forms of collaboration and interaction to further increase their sense of belonging to the place (among the others: Cognetti, 2013; Pasqui, 2021).

3.3.2 The role of universities in local mobility

The second working table was an opportunity to stress the positive and negative sides of urban mobility within the three neighbourhoods. The role played by the universities is to be a driver in the spatial transformation of the neighbourhoods. The regeneration interventions that have been involved, especially in Bicocca and Bovisa, have not only changed the urban landscape but have also brought with them an increase in the attractiveness of the places and therefore an increase in the daily flow of people, either as city users or as businessmen (Martinotti, 1993). This meant a transformation of the availability of mobility infrastructure and a change in vehicular traffic and public transportation onsite. The universities, therefore, have been an engine of change for the neighbourhoods, going on to modify mobility practices and citizen perceptions. From the discussion, issues emerged that tied all three contexts together, namely, the need, perceived by all players at the table, for greater public intervention to improve the quality of existing transportation infrastructure and an increase in local mobility offerings. An issue perceived as relevant to the three contexts is the presence of rail infrastructure that produces real fractures within the neighbourhoods, disconnecting the different internal areas and creating

spatial divisions between residents and therefore making free mobility within the neighbourhood less fluid. Universities, in this sense, strong in their role as drivers of urban regeneration processes, can play an important role both in proposing solutions, being careful also with the necessary and gradual energy transition, and urging local governance to take virtuous measures in the field of mobility within the neighbourhoods.

3.3.3 The role of universities in influencing quality of life in the neighbourhoods

In the third and final table, the debate focused on the role of the universities in improving the quality of life of the residents. The most critical aspect that emerged in the interaction between universities and civic representation was the perceived distance between them. The actors highlighted the need to open the universities more to the public, providing a tangible sign of presence and closeness of such a culturally relevant institution to the citizenry. The lack of participation of the universities in the life of the neighbourhood, along with the rigid scanning of the daily rhythm of opening–closing for staff and students, does not help reduce the distance between citizens and universities. On the contrary, in this sense, the universities are perceived as promoters of the ‘emptying’ of the neighbourhoods beyond working hours, when students and staff return to their homes and their areas of residence. In this sense, the comparison brought out a limited role played by the universities in improving the quality of life. Meanwhile, the very possibility of bringing out these issues in the work conducted at URBANA 2019, placing universities and representatives of civil society face-to-face, has helped unlock a latent need present among the residents of the neighbourhoods that otherwise would have been extremely complex to do. On this issue, therefore, a general dissatisfaction emerges, and the universities are asked for a greater presence, interaction and attention to neighbourhood life so that their presence is not limited to being a passive actor but also an active one on the territory to improve and facilitate social welfare in the citizenry (Bordogna, 1975; Benneworth, Cunha, 2015).

3.4 The final output: the birth of the 3B network

The working tables have made it possible to bring the three universities face-to-face with each other, opening up a constructive dialogue that has brought to light crucial issues related to the peripheral dimension. Moreover, these have also allowed for a demonstration of the potential for social innovation inherent in the indirect interaction itself. The reduction of the distance between universities and territories has taken the form of an agreement involving the three universities. Starting from the work of interaction between universities and citizenship at URBANA 2019, the intention of Bicocca University, the Polytechnic of Milan and the Free University IULM is to give life to a network of collaboration. The network, called ‘Rete 3B’, aims to improve interaction in the reference neighbourhoods and serve as a model that may be replicated in other areas of Milan; it also represents a pilot social innovation project that starts from these three universities in Milan established from peripheral urban contexts. The network will be configured as a stable form of cooperation inspired by the principles of promotion and enhancement of free initiative and fair synergy. The interventions which, at the moment, the three universities intend to work on are

- organising exploratory walks in the neighbourhoods of reference of the three universities to strengthen the link between the universities and their neighbourhoods;
- consolidating the link between the university libraries and the local area through ad hoc initiatives aimed at citizens to make the universities more present in the neighbourhoods;

- promoting specific events;
- promoting common research paths.

Regarding the first point (implementation of exploratory walks in the three neighbourhoods of the universities involved), on the second day of the same event, the three neighbourhoods saw the implementation of three walks guided by experts to explore the territory. In the context of 'Rete 3B', the activity related to the walks will be configured as a training course offered to students of both bachelor's and master's courses, in a coordinated but differentiated way, to provide ad hoc knowledge related to the neighbourhoods based on the specific approaches that characterise each university. This type of training can directly affect territories, such as the approach of the Milanese population towards the knowledge of the neighbourhoods through guided explorations. The initiatives coordinated by the three universities through the library structures will allow the sharing of university spaces and know-how with the citizens, reinforcing the active presence of the universities at a local level and restoring value to the social role of the universities. The ultimate goal is to improve the quality of life of residents in the three districts through the transformation of university libraries into multifunctional facilities that can respond positively to the needs of different local audiences without losing their institutional function as a place intended to support research and university teaching (Bordogna, 1975; Cognetti, 2013).

4. Discussion and conclusions

The work has highlighted the crucial nature of the relationship that universities have with the territories in which they operate, especially in terms of social innovation. More specifically, the 3B network embodies a dual level of innovation. It can be considered a form of social innovation itself, the result of the involvement of the three Milanese universities mentioned, with a strongly peripheral connotation. At the same time, the network has the potential to foster the development of social innovation ecosystems in the peripheral areas where the three universities are located, as literature on the topic suggests.

This contribution has first framed the role played by territorial factors in influencing social phenomena, highlighting how the proximity typical of the neighbourhood dimension favours the stimulation of innovative microinitiatives. The neighbourhood unit, by promoting territorial attachment, sense of identity and participation phenomena, becomes an extension of one's own home, a known and knowable space, where vitality and socioeconomic innovation are naturally conveyed and stimulated as a result of the interaction of many different territorial players (Ganesan *et al.*, 2005). The URBANA initiative, in particular the 2019 edition, has highlighted the importance and peculiarities of the neighbourhoods in which the three universities are located, certainly peripheral units but within the framework of the new polycentrism that is characterising the city of Milan. The areas of Bicocca, Barona and Bovisa, described in section 4.2, with their industrial past, have welcomed the settlement of the university complexes, allowing themselves to be redefined by their presence, which has prompted a new development of identity both social and cultural. Among the various social outcomes found, we have identified the practices of social innovation specifically conveyed by the universities. Because of the Third Mission initiatives they carry out, they have transformed themselves into new actors of local governance capable of promoting local development processes within the model defined as KBUD. The usual reference to the triple helix as a regulatory practice of innovation processes in cities, typical of this model, however, immediately appeared reductive. In previous research, Busacca (2018) highlighted how university initiatives similar to the one presented here, based on the triple helix approach, had to deal with several limitations. These include the difficulty of defining the quality of the actions and relationships between the various actors involved; the fragmentation of the initiatives that, although focusing on the relationship between research, knowledge production and social impact production, fail to promote homogeneity and the lack of attention to the ac-

tors and the context. URBANA and its outputs open a possibility to overturn the considerations about the limits. The extension of the initiative to three other universities, in addition to assuming a dimension from the department to the university, foresees a synergic and prospective work of three important Milanese universities ready to reason and act together in the face of the local development of the territories in which they exist. The second important aspect is the polycentric dimension duly considered by the three universities, which refers to the need to provide broader governance, in which organised civil society and the non-organised public (Rose, 1986) become new elements of the model. The theme of governance becomes crucial in the definition of innovative processes that can benefit the territories. Recent studies (Iaione De Nictolis, 2016) have proposed an expanded model, the so-called quintuple helix, in which the role of universities remains crucial along with the enabling role of public actors and the presence of business. But other drivers, in this case, organised civil society and the so-called unorganised public, which includes all those who act collectively to share and/or collaborate around a common resource and are willing to contribute to local economic and institutional development, actively come into play as subjects capable of promoting, stimulating and accompanying innovation processes (Ibid.). Considering this approach, it should be underlined that the working table adopted inside the event, have allowed to engage all the five helices here mentioned, confirming the importance of expanding mainstream models and putting universities inside extended networks.

The case study we have presented, although a preliminary analysis because of the lack of data, has made it possible to confirm what has already emerged in the literature on the increasingly important role assumed by universities in their ability to 'make the city'. The methodology of the working tables has allowed for a reduction in the distance between university institutions and citizens, creating the ideal terrain for the activation of forms of collaboration among the universities. The outcome of the initiative was the commitment made by the three universities to start a collaboration between universities and different local stakeholders. All the five helices mentioned above were therefore represented although it was clear what Busacca (2018) defines as the role of 'leavening agent' of university institutions in social innovation processes. The resulting sharing allowed three different urban realities to come together within a container of thought that would otherwise be difficult to achieve and to bring out common values, criticalities and aspirations among the different interlocutors. The result was the mutual commitment to the foundation of a university network between the three universities to apply practices of territorial innovation to the neighbourhoods of reference. The outcomes that emerged from the working tables of the 2019 edition of URBANA thus represented a propaedeutic substrate and indicated the future orientation of the network. In particular, in terms of local identity, the main indications to follow are: strengthening the dialogue between university and territory, in order to create new forms of collaboration and interaction that reinforce the sense of belonging to the place. In terms of local mobility: identifying and proposing solutions to make greener and more fluid the mobility in the neighbourhood, advancing virtuous measures. In terms of quality of life: as university becoming more present, interactive, open and inclusive, making spaces and resource available to the public, thus reducing the "distance" and improving/facilitating social welfare in the citizenry.

However, the case study presented here had to deal with the spread of COVID-19, which slowed down the processes and initiatives planned within the network; therefore, this study, while representing a potentially interesting experimentation in the framework of what was presented, could not yet provide evaluable outcomes. At this stage, therefore, we are not able to offer a concrete evaluation of the real effects that this initiative has produced on the territories of reference, precisely because the project has not yet found a space of full manifestation. Furthermore, only starting from autumn 2021 have Italian universities been able to return to carrying out teaching activities in presence. Only an evaluative analysis of the network would make it possible to trace the outcomes envisaged upstream and the organisational processes imagined to understand whether or not they confirm the network's capacity to create/strengthen a local ecosystem of

social innovation. A possible development of this pathway could provide more robust quantitative and qualitative data to evaluate over time the actual effectiveness of the project on the three Milanese neighborhoods in triggering processes of social innovation, improving quality of life and strengthening local identity.

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Participatory practices in energy transition in Italy. For a co-productive, situated and relational analysis²

1. Notes on the 'great transformation' of energy transition

The aim of this paper is to analyze public experiences of participation in energy transition processes using a co-production, situated and relational approach (Chilvers & Kearnes, 2016; Chilvers *et al.*, 2021). Interest in this area of research is part of a general phenomenon brought about by the recent acceleration in both national and European energy policies, that favour the diffusion of decentralised systems for the production and consumption of clean energy. These policies are also aimed at regenerating vulnerable or marginal areas (cf. Italian PNRR) and at promoting the community-based participation of citizens in energy governance. In Italy, some of the most relevant innovations in recent years undoubtedly include the introduction of legislation to support energy communities and collective self-consumption schemes (Law No 8/2020 and Legislative Decree 199/2021). All this has prompted an increasingly rich debate in the scientific community, transversally involving different fields of study and research. However, the processes of change in the energy sector, with all the implications related to the involvement of citizens, as well as the processes of urban regeneration and, more generally, of attention to territorial fragilities and areas at risk of depopulation, have been underway for some time.

In particular, as far as the energy sector is concerned, over the last two decades, the global energy system has undergone a significant process of transformation. First of all, this involves the effects of a widespread policy of liberalisation of the energy market, which has allowed for a wider range of services to be offered in correspondence with the plurality of market players. This situation has, in turn, increased competition in the sector. On the other hand, the profound transformations that have swept through the energy sector are also due to a series of technological innovations, first and foremost those linked to the spread of energy produced from renewable sources (solar thermal and photovoltaic, wind, but also bio-mass, geo-thermal, hydrogen, etc.), which have made it possible to rethink and potentially restructure the system on different levels:

- (a) in relation to production (with the affirmation and increasing possibility of access to widespread production systems from renewable sources);
- b) in relation to consumption (with the implementation of increasingly safe, reliable, durable and affordable renewable energies, which have triggered the trend towards total electrification);
- c) in relation to energy supply (which has enabled the diversification of players within the market, including providers exclusively linked to clean sources);
- d) in relation to the possibility of storage (with the development of lithium batteries, despite their high cost).

Along with these transformations there has been a growing awareness and scientific interest in the problematisation of ecological issues and climate change (Latour, 2015), which have been accompanied by increasing pressure in favour of green transition-oriented policies. This has led to an increase in the number of studies on renewable energy sources and more generally on issues related to energy transition (Monaco, 2021; Arrobio, Sciuillo, 2020), which is becoming increasingly important, and is contributing to experimentation and technological advances.

In the field of social sciences, one of the most debated and studied issues in relation to these rapid changes in the technical and scientific field of energy is related to the emergence of forms of participation, energy democracy (Feldpaush-Parker *et al.*, 2021; Osti, 2017) and energy citizenship (Campos, Marín-González, 2020; Lennon *et al.*, 2019a, 2019b; Ryghaug *et al.*, 2018). More

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specifically, then, three main macro-phenomena, that are strongly transformative in character have emerged (Barnes, 2021). These trends are still influencing the energy system quite strongly, both in terms of physical and infrastructural change and, especially in terms of governance, in close relation to the increasing adoption of energy plants using renewable sources for energy production. As Barnes points out (*ibid.*):

- 1 The first trend is related to the process of Decarbonisation, which has been adopted and supported by global and national policies. The main response from institutions has been to deploy renewable energy policies, which have been accompanied by processes and campaigns to raise awareness and consciousness in the public sphere at the citizen/consumer level, and a set of economic incentives. In addition, stricter climate limiting regulations aimed at companies have been implemented.
- 2 A second megatrend relates to Digitisation (the so-called 'ICT revolution' that started in the 1970s). In general, digitisation has created new ways and opportunities for citizens to connect to the energy system and market, and thus also new opportunities and tools to multiply forms of participation in this sector through, for example, the daily use of smart meters, smart technologies and energy demand response systems, the introduction of distributed clean energy generation systems (Chilvers *et al.*, 2021: 250), 'material participation' (Marres, 2015), which implements citizen participation in energy management as well as in the public decision-making sphere through the mediation of technological devices, the use of digital platforms (as in the case of the creation and global spread of social movements, including the 'gilets jaunes' or 'Fridays for Future'), and so on.
- 3 The third major trend is Decentralisation, which concerns how energy is produced and where, and consumption and supply systems, which stand in stark contrast to the traditional centralisation of the energy system in the hands of nation states. In fact, this process has also produced new forms of more widespread and decentralised involvement, precisely in terms of the management and control of energy production and consumption, as well as its distribution (e.g., energy cooperatives, but also the ownership and management of energy plants by municipalities or the more recent energy communities, van der Waal, 2021; van der Waal *et al.*, 2018; van der Schoor *et al.* 2016; van der Schoor & Scholtens, 2015). In Italy, this process is clearly associated with the liberalisation of the energy market that was implemented in the late 1990s, but only fully achieved in 2007.

In light of these large-scale processes, that are further called into question by the current energy crisis caused by the war in Ukraine, the focus of the analysis proposed here concerns participation processes in the emerging energy transition in Italy, and in particular the recent phenomenon of community energy. The analysis is carried out according to the relational STS approach, which envisions participatory practices in the field of science and technology as situated, relational and co-produced processes with regard to the normative and social contexts and power relations prevailing in the sector of reference. The research questions we address, therefore, are: what are the emerging forms of participation in the energy sector in Italy (what), which actors (public, who) mainly drive these forms of participation, which procedures or practices (how) are adopted to develop them (Chilvers & Kearnes, 2016: 33; Chilvers & Longhurst, *op. cit.*, p. 586)? The paper, therefore, presents in paragraph 2, a critical analysis of the theoretical-methodological approach used, and the relational STS, in paragraph 3, an analysis of the emerging forms of community energy in Italy, according to the main research questions, and finally, section 4 presents a case study based in Southern Italy (in Messina), of community energy processes within a broader project based on the socio-territorial regeneration of a peripheral urban area. The Conclusions (section 5) focus on future expectations for Southern Italy.

2. A theoretical framework of participation models in energy transition

The theoretical framework adopted to carry out our analysis is the relational STS, proposed by the 3S (Science, Society & Sustainability) research group at the School of Environmental Sciences, at the University of East Anglia. In general, this approach addresses the study of forms of participation concerning issues and sectors related to science, technology, environment and society. In particular, the authors who are more interested in energy studies have focused their analysis precisely on participation forms and practices in this field.

More generally, this interpretative and analytical approach arises from a fundamental assumption, which states that forms of participation (also) in the energy field are to be considered and conceived as a phenomenon co-constructed by the local, cultural, social, economic and political-regulatory context. It is therefore a situated, relational, constructivist and performative approach. This differentiates it from other main theoretical-methodological approaches, for example the more critical ones, which consider forms of citizen participation and engagement in the fields of science, technology and environment, in a 'discrete' form, i.e. as single events or in any case not as part of a process. According to these visions, the technical procedures of citizen engagement are pre-established externally by technical or institutional actors, who link and connect them directly to success in terms of consensus to the proposals and issues presented. In essence, participatory forms are analyzed and evaluated as alternative forms of control over issues regarding technological and scientific innovation, according to a vision that separates the actors involved in participatory processes and the participatory processes and procedures themselves, as well as these latter and their contexts. In other words, the very collectives of people involved in these forms of participation are conceived as actors who are external to participation (Brown, 2009), and not in fact as collective actors but rather as groups of individuals (Proctor, 1998) and according to pre-determined ideas of participation (Rowe, Frewer 2000), without a processual vision (Chilvers, Kearnes, 2016: 10-12). In a certain sense, critical strands represent a power centre that directs and controls so many mini-publics by means of inclusion/exclusion procedures, participation modes and even pre-established outcomes. Conversely, the relational STS approach considers the organisational forms of participation, including the publics involved, as the constantly changing outcome of a process of mutual influence, which they define in terms of co-production between science, technology and society. All elements and actors involved in participatory processes in these fields are constantly transformed and, in turn, transform the other components. On the other hand, this dynamic of co-production affects the very forms of participation, which are also in continual transformation:

The realities of participation, the public and public knowledge-commitments do not pre-exist, but are instead the outcome of collective participatory practices. In this view, rather than simply being composed of discrete formations of mini-publics, with linear relations with centres of power and calculation, multiple situated sites and forms of participation are continually being made, unmade and remade (Chilvers, Kearnes, 2016, p. 13).

We should further highlight that the actors participating in these processes are not only human actors but also non-human actors, according to the Actor-network Theory (Callon, 1986a, 1986b; Latour 2005a, 1999, 1996, 1991; Latour, Callon, 1992; Latour, Woolgar, 1979), which underlies relational STS. Thus, in the co-production of publics and practices of participation, it is necessary to take into account that the publics themselves are heterogeneous, because they are composed of individuals, organised entities, institutions, etc., but also of devices, technologies, scientific knowledge, expertise, political and social theories, normative objects and devices, etc. This makes process being studied even more complex, wide-ranging, heterogeneous and situated and, consequently, it is even more urgent to analyze it in its making. In this perspective, moreover, every form of participation is recognised and observed as partial, subject to uncertain-

ties, and producing mechanisms of exclusion. However, the researcher should not analyze these processes with a pre-established ideal or model of participation in mind, because this does not allow them to observe the participatory dynamics in their making and transformation, except in relation to that ideal, to which they will evidently never correspond.

In order to operationalise the relational STS perspective, therefore, it is necessary to separate three main assumptions, corresponding to the three dimensions that are always present in every form of participation:

- 1 the subjects (participants/publics: "who");
- 2 the objects (the issues: 'what');
- 3 the participation models or procedures (or political philosophies: "how") (Chilvers, Longhurst, 2016, p. 590).

These elements or dimensions are co-produced through the enactment of forms of participation: "The who (publics), what (issues), and how (procedural formats) of participation do not externally exist in a natural state but are actively constructed through the performance of collective participatory practices" (Chilvers, Longhurst, op. cit., p. 586). In particular, then, our authors explored two central aspects in relation to participatory processes linked to energy transition, taking up two central concepts and phases of the ANT translation process (Callon, 1986a): "enrolment" and "mediation". The former relates to the way in which enrolment is organised: 'Enrolment refers to the way in which different (human and non-human) actors are drawn into a particular form of participatory collective practice and definition of the issue at stake' (Chilvers, Longhurst, 2016, p. 591). Mediation refers to the forms or technologies that mediate relationships between actors: "Mediation refers to the way in which a participatory collective is held together by different devices, processes, skills, or technologies of participation" (Chilvers, Longhurst, op. cit., p. 591).

These regulating principles have been applied to various fields in which the relations between society, science, technology and the environment are relevant, both with reference to more specific cases, although still connected to general networks and contexts (Chilvers, Kearnes, 2016, pp. 31-260), and to sectoral participatory phenomena from a national perspective. With regard to these latter studies, analyses of forms of participation have been elaborated through the use of different tools, such as certain mapping methods: multi-criteria mapping (MCM) and deliberative mapping (DM) (Chilvers, Kearnes, 2016, p. 296; Chilvers *et al.*, 2021), which have allowed for an 'ecology of participation'. In fact, the latest evolution of this approach has reached a more systemic perspective by arriving at the so-called "Ecologies of participation", first and foremost in the energy sector and in the U.K. (Chilvers *et al.*, 2021, 2018), with the intention of providing a systemic and plural mapping of the participation models in place, even beyond previous categorisations or the more canonical and pre-established ones. Alongside the aims of a scientific nature, these studies are also intended to achieve more pragmatic and political objectives, which consist mainly of identifying conditions of inequality and imbalance in the involvement of citizens in relation to the different social strata to which they belong, but also in indicating those participatory experiences which, for various reasons, are not considered by institutional actors.

3. Emerging forms of participation in energy transition in Italy. Energy communities.

Here, we are not concerned with elaborating an ecology of participation in the energy sector in Italy, but rather with undertaking an initial analysis of a particular form of citizen involvement and participation in the energy sector, namely community energy. The analysis will be guided by the regulatory principles and methodological steps of relational STS, as outlined above.

The materials and research tools used for the general analysis of RECs in Italy are mainly qualitative and consist of: the main regulatory documents on the subject introduced at a European and national level (EMDII, REDII and Clean Energy Package; Law n.8 /2020 and legislative decree 199/2021); observations resulting from participation in workshops, seminars and public meetings on RECs over the last two years; the collection (not yet completed) of semi-structured interviews (24 up to the time of writing) with community energy promoters and RECs in Italy (mainly in Sicily and Trentino-Alto Adige), accompanied by the drafting of an ethnographic diary.

In general terms, community energy consists of renewable energy communities (RECs), collective self-consumption schemes (AUCs), and energy cooperatives. In the literature, we find a certain plurality of definitions of these forms of participation in energy transition (Barroco Fontes Cunha *et al.*, 2021; Devine-Wright, 2019), which emphasise certain dimensions that are considered as priorities for an understanding of the phenomenon: community renewable energy (Walker & Devine-Wright, 2008), community-based grassroots innovations (Seyfang & Haxel-tine, 2012, Seyfang & Smith, 2007), grassroots initiatives (Magnani & Osti. 2016), community energy (Seyfang *et al.*, 2014 Hargreaves *et al.* 2013). Here, we will elaborate in more detail on RECs, understood as socio-technical configurations that share the production and/or consumption of energy from renewable sources and may consist of individual citizens, small and medium-sized enterprises, and public entities. The EU has introduced two definitions of energy communities. In the first they are referred to as Citizen Energy Communities (CECs), in the Internal Market for Electricity Directive (EMDII), and in the second they are referred to as Renewable Energy Communities (RECs), in the Renewables Directive (REDII), later merged into the CEP - Clean Energy Package of 2020. The two definitions of energy communities emphasise two different aspects: the definition of CECs emphasises the central role of citizens in the objective of transforming and reconfiguring the electricity market towards its systemic decentralisation, while that of RECs identifies the use of renewable energy sources as one of the central aspects for achieving objectives related to fighting the climate crisis. In both cases, however, the European Union intends to place the active and direct role of citizens and local communities at the centre of the processes of ecological transition to massively increase the use of energy from renewable sources and decentralise its related governance.

The CEP itself indicates the main objectives to be achieved by 2030 and 2050 as the three paradigms of electrification, decarbonisation and digitisation of the electricity system at a European level, which can be achieved through the progressive but rapid decentralisation of the energy production system. Energy communities are considered one of the preferred configurations for accelerating these transformation processes. For this reason, the EU is strongly supporting the dissemination of CEP within member countries, while soliciting all scientific research sectors to further investigate their strengths and weaknesses and, above all, to facilitate the deployment of their potential (Blasch *et al.*, 2021). Consequently, member states' policies have also accelerated their support for these participatory forms of energy transition, implementing regulations and economic incentives that favour their diffusion. Thus, these two institutional actors (who) have problematised the question (issue) of citizen participation in energy transition, also defining the details (how) at a general level. For its part, Italy has, in fact, introduced two laws to transpose European provisions (law no. 8/2020 and legislative decree 199/2021), the last of which has still not been implemented at the time of writing. In addition, the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR) has also allocated over €2 billion to forms of self-production and collective self-consumption, confirming the high degree of attention, also in terms of financing, that is planned for these configurations. In this framework, it is extremely interesting to understand how participatory practices are developing in Italy, taking into account the high expectations, the funding, the expected objectives and the very positive narratives accompanying the development of these configurations. With law no. 8/2020, which partially transposes European directives, the Italian legislator has imposed on RECs and self-consumption schemes, the principle that profit must not be a motivation, since their objective is to achieve economic,

social and environmental sustainability both for the benefit of their members and of the local community (Art. 42, c.3 b).

This first regulation also allows individual citizens, SMEs and local authorities to be members of RECs. Basically, therefore, these are community-based aggregations that should arise from a bottom-up initiative and restore greater decision-making power to citizens/consumers and local communities in terms of governing the electricity system, helping to restructure it in an increasingly decentralised, distributed and democratic key. It is important to remember two technical criteria imposed by this first law: one is the technical constraint of the secondary transformation substation (i.e. the substation for transforming energy from medium to low voltage) which has been indicated by many stakeholders as too restrictive, because it greatly limits the perimeter within which each REC can be set up; the second refers to the maximum power of 20 KW that can be used by each REC in the energy plant only if the plant is new, which is also considered too limiting. The second regulation (legislative decree 199/2021), in fact, in fully transposing European directives, not only extended these two parameters, but extended them to such an extent as to make a potential leap in scale for the RECs: indeed, both the extension to the primary transformer substation and the increase in the maximum power to 1MW have projected the size of each REC to, potentially thousands of PODs - and, therefore, thousands of members. However, they are awaiting the implementation of the law in order to make it fully operational, so at the time of writing there are still no RECs established in accordance with this second law, but only projects in the pipeline. Nevertheless, these two regulatory devices have an important weight in the general configuration of these forms of participation, especially with regard to the technical parameters imposed, which influence the forms of construction, emergence and the very creation of RECs in Italy. For this reason, they will be given due consideration in our analysis as non-human actors.

From the perspective of relational STS and Actor-network Theory (ANT), from which the first derives, energy communities are a network of human and non-human actors which form the participatory practices and procedures that take shape there, but which are also formed and transformed by them. In more detail, we can primarily consider the contexts in which these participatory configurations are activated. As we have pointed out above, RECs in Italy are co-constructed in terms of participation. together with and in relation to the non-human actors that contribute to defining these contexts, such as normative devices (European and national), political cultures, infrastructure, expertise, etc.

3.1 Non-human actants

Of course, the introduction of regulatory devices that permit the formation of RECs in Italy play a central role in the enrolment and, therefore, in the definition of the actors (human and non-human) that make up the network. This phase is highly significant to the translation process (Callon, 1984), since it defines the specific role attributed to and played by each actant, especially the non-human ones. Indeed, the two Italian laws already referred to introduce technical constraints which allow for the enrolment of specific non-human actors, which are, as we have already pointed out, different according to the two laws.

A) Indeed, Act No. 8 of 2020 introduces the constraint of the secondary substation and a maximum power of 20kW per installation. These constitute two non-human actors that co-construct the network and the methods of participation (enrolment and mediation) within the network. In fact, they impose smaller dimensions on the RECs that were set up in response to this first regulation, and also limit the human actors that can take part as they must be present within the area that is delimited by the non-human actant, the secondary substation itself. This has an effect not only in quantitative terms, but also in qualitative terms, because the various human actors, (for

example, ordinary citizens or organised groups or companies that would potentially have joined and supported the establishment of an REC, motivated by interests of a social, cultural or economic nature, but are not present within the perimeter of the secondary substation) cannot be part of that specific alliance. Due to the action of this specific non-human actant, this condition has, in other respects, generated in the promoters and members of these RECs, an expectation regarding the possibility of building a renewed sense of trust and belonging to the local community around this network, by virtue of the necessarily reduced spatial dimensions that such configurations assume. This vision is clearly expressed by a member of an REC in Riccomassimo, a hamlet in the mountain municipality of Storo (province of Trento, North of Italy):

The strong point of this initiative was the relationship of trust (with CEDIS³) and also the desire to prevent the depopulation of the village. Certainly, our first objective was to stop depopulation in the village, and I believe this is very important (...). In my opinion, especially in this post-Covid period, having a love and passion for your community is very important.

Moreover, as far as management of the energy plant is concerned, the necessary delimitation of both the area and power of the plant makes it more sensible to call on the expertise of those already present and operating in the area, from the network promoters' previous acquaintances and partners, as is the case in some already operational RECs (see also Magnani & Cittati, 2022). In other words, the non-human actors enlisted on a national level by the 2020 legislation favour those local experiences that can count on the proximity or connection with various expert subjects (technical, managerial, organisational, legal) and on a broad social capital. Possible examples include the RECs in Ferla (province of Catania, Southern Italy), Fondo Saccà, in Messina, and Naples EST, but also in Riccomassimo in Storo (Trento) and again in Magliano Alpi (province of Cuneo, Northern Italy). In all these cases, they are networks promoted and set up by human actors with the power, albeit dimensionally limited to the local community, to involve citizens or organised actors. In many cases, they are institutional actors (local authorities) with strong roots in marginal or inland areas, often revolving around a personal relationship of trust (in some cases the mayor), which makes it possible to define a small network where there is also sufficient technical expertise for the managerial implementation of these kinds of configuration. In the case of Riccomassimo, the entire technical and management part of the REC is managed by the CEDIS Electricity Consortium, which has the legal status of a historical energy cooperative, with more than a hundred years' experience in the sector. In Naples EST, on the other hand, a specialised company was involved to manage all aspects, while in Messina, as will be discussed in more detail later, a social ESCO (Solidarity & Energy) is in operation. The latter coordinates the research and management activities of the REC with other research centres, first and foremost a highly specialised institute in the renewable energy sector of the National Research Council - CNR (Advanced Energy Technologies Institute - ITAE) located in the city; in Magliano Alpi, the network was promoted in a collaboration between the mayor and the Turin Polytechnic Energy Centre.

B) Law 199 of 2021, on the other hand, allows potential REC membership to be extended to all those who are connected to the same primary transformer substation, as well as increasing the maximum plant power of each REC to 1MW. These two new non-human actants enlisted by the most recent regulatory device have pushed (but only in power, since the publication of the implementation decrees is still pending) forms of participation, for example RECs, to another level. In fact, the primary substation actant makes it possible to enroll potentially thousands of PODs and, in correspondence also human actants (the users corresponding to each POD), generating, as a dimensional effect, much vaster networks that can extend to significant parts of even medium-large cities or municipalities. This condition, in turn, necessitates enlisting human actors (organisations, experts, specialised agencies, etc.) who are more capable of managing broader

3 CEDIS is an energy consortium with the legal status of a historical energy cooperative, established in 1904 in Storo (province of Trento).

socio-technical configurations, both from the point of view of the material structures needed to satisfy the demand for energy generated in this way, and also more directly related to the expertise and management of such large networks. In other words, the networks most likely to emerge in correspondence to the enrolment criteria and procedures stimulated by the new regulatory framework are alliances characterised by the centrality of medium- and large-sized expert organisations, which can count on much larger material, technical and managerial infrastructures than those put in place by the first networks that arose thanks to the 2020 regulatory framework and which, therefore, appear almost as a sort of initial small-scale experiment. However, the possible scalability of RECs is also referred to by one of the promoters of an REC set up under the latest legislation, and which is planned for the city of Brixen (South Tyrol, Northern Italy), using a cooperative-type organisational model. In the following extract, we find the reasoning behind the management design for this initiative:

In Brixen, if I am informed correctly, we have 15 thousand PODs, so in theory, I can imagine that if we start, we will have an immediate one to two thousand applications (to enter the REC) which we will no longer be able to manage as we do now, with an Excel file! So, I think we have to prepare for automated membership management and we are also considering the best way to log in, with a SPID perhaps, etc.

3.2 Political and participatory cultures

The two main ways of setting up the RECs analyzed thus far are mediated not only by the action of the human and non-human actors that have already been considered (local authorities, locally organised actors, regulatory devices, primary and secondary substations, maximum power of facilities, local or more extensive expertise, etc.), but also by the action of the so-called 'political cultures' which contribute to making their situated, co-produced and relational character even more evident. We should emphasise that, within the scope of the issues addressed by STS studies, the mechanisms of legitimation, production and participation in knowledge processes and decision-making vary in relation to national contexts, corresponding to their sedimented cultural and political features (Chilvers, Kearnes, 2016, p. 52). Jasanoff (2005) has shown these differences in his comparative study between European states and the USA, noting how some forms of participation are more likely and others less so, with reference to the institutional contexts and political cultures prevailing in each state, including the relationship between science, technology and society. However, as far as the Italian case is concerned, although the national context is undoubtedly relevant, the regional or local level of political cultures emerges just as strongly, and is perhaps predominant. In fact, in our analysis of the organisational structures and participation procedures in the RECs, local political culture asserts itself as an actant directly involved in the co-construction of the modes of participation and internal governance for each initiative. Indeed, if it is true that for the RECs set up in response to the first national legislation, the associative structure was the most commonly chosen, for reasons dictated by their small size and the non-commercial nature imposed by the regulatory device, it is equally true that the organisational modalities of participation in associative form were influenced by the political cultures sedimented at a local level. This emerges most clearly in those areas characterised by widespread and sedimented cooperative practices in various sectors of activities and services, such as some areas in north-eastern Italy, and in particular Trentino and South Tyrol, where the cooperative form has historically played a central role in the provision of energy services in the absence of both state and market actors. In these areas, the construction of methods of participation and the decision-making for RECs has followed a trajectory corresponding to the participatory and political practices mentioned above and has found in the existing historical cooperatives an indisputable actant to enlist, insofar as they are already strongly legitimised at a local level for the re-investments they make in the local community. This same political culture

of participation is also co-constructing, even more directly, the idea for the organisational structure to be given to a number of RECs being developed in South Tyrol on the basis of the second regulation of 2021. In particular, there are two projects: one is a historical cooperative in Val di Fleres and the other a recent community cooperative (b*coop) based and operating in Brixen (a small city of about 22.700 inhabitants). For both, the promoters intend to recruit their members by proposing a co-operative structure for each of the two RECs in order to guarantee continuity with the participative and political practices characterising the history of this area.

Part of the revenue (deriving from the distribution of economic incentives) goes to a community like ours and is used exclusively for community projects, as defined by the general assembly of members (b*coop representative, REC promoter from Brixen).

Many are proud and happy to be members and they also see the value of the cooperative for the valley and this definitely creates a sense of community (...). During the last assembly, some members stood up and asked why we shouldn't have an REC here too. X told me that a cooperative similar to ours, CEDIS, has already done this in Trentino (cooperative representative Fleres, Val di Fleres, South Tyrol).

Therefore, in Italy, there is a plurality of participatory forms and structures that diversify and can diversify further in relation to the different laws, but even more so on the basis of the technical, social and economic infrastructure within each territory, and the network within which the actors promoting the REC are included, the availability of expertise in the area, the dimensions chosen for this socio-technical configuration, and the political and participatory cultures and practices sedimented in each region. These are the main human and non-human actors that co-construct the different forms of participation in the REC in different areas of the country. In the next section, again from the theoretical-methodological perspective of relational STS, we analyze a very particular case study, which identifies itself as an experimental model of an energy community, understood as a form of participation in a broader sense for the promotion of the local community and the most vulnerable segments of the population.

4. Socio-technical participation and regeneration in Southern Italy. The case of a marginal area of Messina

This particular case study presents some interesting elements regarding different forms of participation in the energy field:

- 1 the enrolment process for the establishment of an REC existed prior to the implementation of the first law of 2020, to which it was subsequently adapted, and was partly co-constructed, albeit with the intention of adopting a larger scale later on;
- 2 it integrates the type of participation promoted by civil society actors with a planned and integrated project and strong internal leadership;
- 3 it places the REC within a broader concept and participatory process, both in terms of the activities carried out within the territory and in terms of time span and overall objectives.

The complexity of this participatory experience will be analyzed by applying the main categories of the relational STS theoretical framework.

This case study concerns the process of social and urban regeneration in a highly marginalized area of the city of Messina (in Sicily, southern Italy) and is one of those interventions that intend to integrate the experimentation of solidarity-based energy communities in order to promote energy transition processes and the empowerment of vulnerable populations (Sen, 2010, 2000) in a shared and participatory form. More precisely, it regards an area of slums dating back to the

post-earthquake period, which re-formed after the Second World-War⁴. The Fondo Saccà slums are located near the city centre, close to many basic services (hospitals, transport, schools, etc.), and until recently, housed 70 families, who have now either acquired a house (49) or have been assigned a rented flat by the municipality. The current condition is the result of a wide-ranging intervention conducted over the last eight years, consisting of two separate but interconnected operations: the first is an experimental pilot project for social and ecological cohousing that is still being completed on two plots that were cleared in 2015; while the second operation, 'Capacity', is a much broader and more articulated urban regeneration project, adapted from the pilot scheme, and which is, in essence, a development of this on a larger-scale. The Messina Community Foundation has been partly responsible for the conception and implementation of these two projects, building up and coordinating a dense network of cooperation with various public and private actors.

The social and ecological cohousing project consists of six completed flats with two more still under construction. The adjective "social" indicates the primary purpose of this housing, which has been designed to accommodate vulnerable people with social and/or psychological difficulties. They are to be housed in four of the flats, while the other two are already occupied by the Civic and Educational Centre (CeCE), with the aim of building social cohesion in the area through educational activities for children. This experiment is highly innovative, both on a socio-technological and energy level, and these two aspects have been integrated in order to help regenerate the area. The socio-technical dimension includes different types of technology: the use of bio-architectural materials for the construction of the flats (wood for the load-bearing structure, straw and mortar for thermal insulation), home automation systems, a mechanism for recovering and recycling grey water for irrigating gardens and urban vegetable gardens, areas in which to set up neighbourhood workshops for children, and energy production and consumption systems from latest-generation photovoltaic systems, to which a storage system has been added. It is, above all, the socio-technical configuration linked to energy that acquires particular relevance, because it is associated with a predefined mechanism, known as the 'social algorithm', which makes it possible to redistribute the energy produced and the costs of its consumption not only in relation to the amount of energy used by each individual, but also on the basis of the characteristics and social-health needs of each member, which may, for example, involve the constant use of energy-intensive machinery for health care. The regulating principles of this algorithm are to be defined by an internal agreement between the inhabitants of the social cohousing, with the help of the FdC operators, all of which will contribute to outlining the participatory profile of a true energy community (Bawens, Devine-Wright, 2018; Magnani, Osti, 2016) based on solidarity, and which is already registered with the GSE⁵. Thus, we already find a very specific form of enrolment and mediation: non-human actors (technologies) are enlisted with the aim of reducing the gap in terms of access to energy (affordability) and relative comfort, which have so far characterised the histories of the human actors/beneficiaries involved in this intervention. The realisation of this experiment has actually helped to physically redesign this former slum, but it also represents a model that needs to be scaled up. Overall, the current form of the intervention is the result of the reprogramming of the initial idea, through a process of population involvement set up between 2014 and 2016, which operationalised the enrolment phase through a social survey of the local inhabitants. It is possible to consider this citizen involvement practice as an expression of the deliberative participation model. In fact, the survey method was the one normally used and patented by the FdC in Messina: the TSR® or Socially Responsible Territories research, whose objective is to map the principles/desires of the population inhabiting the area of interest in order to understand what their social and material priorities are (Giunta *et al.* 2006) and how they would like the territory to be modified (Musolino, 2017). The subject here, about and with whom

4 For more on the long history and spatial segregation dynamics of this marginal area, see Farinella, Saitta 2013; Gina-tempo 1976; Musolino, 2021; Musolino, Tarsia, 2019; Zampieri, 2018.

5 GSE is the energy services operator in Italy.

the TSR® research is conducted, is the “community of inhabitants”, and the intervention or policy is addressed to them. The social research undertaken in the Maregrossa neighbourhood initially carried out a socio-demographic analysis of the chosen area, based on 2011 ISTAT census data. A survey of principles/desires was then carried out on a sample of inhabitants (437 - 110 of whom were between 8 and 14 years old and 326 between 15 and 85 years old - out of a total population of about 8,000 residents) using an action-research perspective, which intended to return the data, expressed in terms of the population’s priorities regarding the reprogramming of the interventions, to the FdC (Lewin, 1980; Dolci, 1987)⁶ In accordance with the methodological approach and the aims of the TSR®, a variety of survey techniques was used, depending on age, gender, living conditions, level of education, etc. The following survey tools were used: semi-structured interviews, cognitive maps (Lynch, 2010), workshop-type interventions in schools and the neighbourhood parish, socio-ethnographic observation, and QGIS mapping of spatial perception. It is evident that, from this point of view, mediation consists of a set of interview/collection techniques, which show an exclusion/inclusion polarity. In fact, on the one hand, mediation includes only some of the total number of inhabitants, even though a reputational sampling method by areas was adopted, which has its own degree of representativeness; on the other hand, it has an inclusive capacity in terms of social variety and diversity. In reality, the type of (public) citizen co-constructed by this form of participation is clearly a ‘deliberative citizen’, with consciously broad and diverse characteristics, people who inhabit the local neighbourhood or area, both in the residential sense of the term and in relation to their constant presence, whether it be daily or habitual (either for work, use of public spaces, services, etc.). In addition, if the classic definition and characterisation of the deliberative citizen is someone who implements their participatory actions through predominantly discursive skills, then the mediation tools of the participatory form are much broader, as seen above, allowing further targets from the population to be included in the process. The reason (issue) for proposing this type of citizen for the project is thus well-defined by the process: the redevelopment of a marginal area and adjoining territory, with a view to ecological and energy transition. The resulting vision (vision) oscillates between two poles: one is linked to the socio-economic and cultural factors that characterise the area, and the other is represented by the strong centrality attributed to technological and management factors. These two poles reference each other, since the socio-political dimension of the vision is conceived and used in the practice of participation as a constraint that must necessarily be taken into account due to the fact that the intervention must be included in this reality, but it is also seen as the independent variable that indicates the general direction that should be taken in order for the inhabitants themselves to intervene effectively and comprehensibly. For its part, the technological innovation dimension has an educational role for the population or - to put it in terms of the approach adopted by the FdC - from an empowerment perspective: the vision requires the promotion of knowledge about new technologies involved in ecological and energy transition, as well as their more conscious and active practical use by citizens.

Thus, a circular movement emerges between the social/population and the technological and innovative dimensions. This allows us to add another characteristic to the profile of the deliberative citizen: that is, a citizen who must act in order to become more informed and aware (Chilvers, Longhurst, *op. cit.*, p. 594), but also more autonomous in the practical use of technological innovations and of consumption behaviour, and this has an impact on the ecological dimension. Actually, in this respect, the participation process entrusts the citizen with the role of consumer, causing his/her deliberative profile to hybridise with that of citizen/consumer, but more considerations and more effective observations can be made on the ground once the energy community is fully operational. As things stand, however, what can be noted is that the design of this specific technology is intended for a temporary specific and limited target: a small number of individuals and families who present difficult conditions from a socio-economic and psycho-

6 For a more in-depth look at the approach and methodological tools used, see Musolino, 2021.

logical point of view and who will therefore need the support of professionals with specific skills (educators, social workers) in order to understand and use the technology more consciously. In the analysis perspective adopted here, it will certainly be very interesting to verify whether and how the participation relationship mediated by the technological devices (Marres, *op. cit.*) used by the residents will change over time and be achieved in terms of greater awareness and autonomy, taking into account that support for these people will be maintained and adjusted according to their situations and receptiveness. This dimension is of great interest because normally, the most advanced technologies in the energy field are accessible only to medium-high population groups (Ryghaug *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 297), as they usually have higher economic and cultural capital, and often a keen ecological and environmental sensitivity, and more easily invest money in the purchase of renewable energy technologies, while also spending time increasing their own knowledge and training on these issues. Conversely, the experimental project in Messina aims specifically to reduce the gap between the social strata as far as knowledge and access to both material systems and socio-technical configurations from renewable energy sources and the promotion of energy transition are concerned.

The participation set up with the cohousing project was adopted on a larger scale in the 'Capacity' project, firstly, with the intention of completely clearing Fondo Saccà and secondly, the housing emancipation of its inhabitants. For the sake of space, suffice it to say that the intervention actually led to the elimination of dilapidated housing in the area and the relocation of families according to capability and participatory modalities (for an in-depth study, cf. Leone, Giunta, 2019, p. 50 *et seq.*), adopting the deliberative modality so as to involve in the decision-making process precisely the type of citizen who is normally excluded from policy-making processes. This increase in the scale of urban regeneration was also accompanied by the idea of making a corresponding leap in scale in the level of participation in energy transition processes, through the possibility generated by the second legislation and the new non-human actors introduced by it (primary substation, etc.), which make it possible to enlist other actors (and PODs) from a wider area. In the case of Messina and the specific form of participation selected, the extension to the primary transformation substation would make it possible to enroll larger numbers of REC members, by following particular principles for their enrollment. These criteria are currently being elaborated, but they tend towards the inclusion of the most fragile families in the neighbourhood; more specifically, those families benefiting from the Capacity project are those who have decided to remain in the neighbourhood, while on the other hand, the criterion of exclusion concerns families belonging to the wealthiest segments of the population. The rationale behind this form of participation is once again related to the involvement of citizens, in this case the more vulnerable ones, who are included in a capacitation process in order to extend the network of ecological and energy transition processes according to "energy justice" (Hanke *et al.*, 2021) and "just transition" criteria (Wang, Lo, 2021), from the broader perspective of the regeneration of territories and the empowerment of vulnerable populations.

Conclusions

The main objectives of this contribution are to stimulate reflection and also to analyze the multiple forms of citizen involvement and participation in energy transition processes, paying particular attention to emerging energy communities. The relational STS theoretical-methodological approach adopted to analyze the creation process for these participatory practices in the energy sphere in Italy, indicates a plurality of forms located and co-produced at a local level, but also a series of human and non-human actors acting transversally at a national level, co-constructing enrolment procedures and the inclusion/exclusion mechanisms related to this. Some initial evidence has emerged concerning the definition of organisational forms influenced by institutional settings and political cultures sedimented at a local level, which co-construct

partially different forms of participation, albeit within similar or the same regulations. Indeed, in some areas of the country, which are more directly the subject of our ongoing research, such as Trentino and South Tyrol, the inspiration and support or clear choice for defining participation procedures in RECs corresponds to a cooperative type, with some differences, connected mainly to the urban and rural location of the socio-technical configurations. These initial results clearly suggest that in some contexts, the general and historical conditions are more favourable to the reception and development of these participation practices regarding energy transition, both for infrastructural reasons and for historical reasons linked to the sedimentation of the local community's culture of self-organization, in a more cooperative key.

On the other hand, the case study of the REC in Messina is clearly an experience co-constructed in relation to a type of local community with specific infrastructural characteristics and a political culture that is very different from those mentioned above, and also presents different meanings and objectives associated with the REC due to the difference in the local context. In fact, this form of participation integrates the socio-technical dimension in the energy field with that of social and urban regeneration, representing a possible direction to focus on in the coming years. In particular, we are referring to a series of interventions emerging in southern Italy, linked to the spread of energy communities, which are part of much broader processes of resistance and regeneration within vulnerable areas. The central element of these (currently few) cases is the experimentation of community energies as a function of a socio-economic and territorial rebalancing among the inhabitants of the South, and of a fairer interpretation of energy transition. Therefore, one of the trends that seems to be emerging, although not yet supported by consistent numbers, is related to the creation of community-based configurations aimed at redistributing the costs and opportunities of green transition in favour of the most fragile groups, and improving physical, structural, infrastructural and service aspects in marginal areas in southern Italy. This interpretation of energy transition and territorial transformation places the local area at the centre, in the sense that its participation is autonomous and the energy system decentralised, laying the foundations for a future redefinition of the map of local territories in a more polycentric key.

A number of initiatives that have already been set in motion in the South of Italy support this hypothesis (De Vidovich *et al.*, 2021). One of the best-known cases is certainly that of the 'Energetic and Solidarity Community of East Naples' in the S. Giovanni a Teduccio district, that was set up thanks to a private partnership between Legambiente Campania, Fondazione Famiglia di Maria, which has been working in the district for several years, and Fondazione con il Sud, which has granted funding. In this case too, the REC stands as a tool for contrasting energy poverty and achieving a fairer ecological transition, in the wake of a commitment to social regeneration and to combat poverty, in a neighbourhood with very specific features. In addition, two other energy communities with social goals are planned for Messina, one of which ('REC Lelat') will be located in one of the city's most problematic neighbourhoods, and the other ('synoikeo Messina') aims to integrate an REC into a collaborative living experience (*ibid.*).

As far as rural locations are concerned, on the other hand, the 'National Recovery and Resilience Plan' has committed substantial funding (2.20Bn €, 'Investment 1.2 - PNRR', p. 127) to support the diffusion of renewable energies through support for creating energy communities and collective self-consumption, in order to consolidate widespread and decentralised energy systems. This measure is targeted in particular at municipalities in inland areas with a population below 5,000 inhabitants. Again, this is a broad perspective intervention - at least, on paper -, which aims to use community energies to counter depopulation, isolation and the growing social and economic fragility of our country's small inland centres, promoting the conditions for local development and the digitization of economies, starting more precisely from the energy sector. The community matrix for these interventions should also produce greater social cohesion through forms of participation and direct involvement in the definition of these local initiatives and their internal regulations. Social cohesion is, in fact, another of the major objectives of PNRR policies

(*ibidem*, p. 129) to help fragile and rural areas. It is clear, therefore, that the socio-technical configurations of energy also have a dual function in the intentions of the political decision-maker. On the one hand, there is certainly a strong aspiration towards the expansion of renewable energy infrastructures in terms of the multiplication of decentralised systems, but this incentive is also aimed at social and territorial reinforcement, in terms of energy self-sufficiency (or rather, maximising self-consumption) from renewable sources and, thus the rediscovery of a local and community-based economy. However, these expected goals involve very different local contexts which - as is amply highlighted in this paper - co-construct forms of participation, even in the field of energy transition, projecting towards different REC 'models' or practices, both in terms of physical and geographical characteristics and internal governance structures. Therefore, by adopting the pragmatic perspective of relational STS, on which our analysis is based, it would be appropriate also for the more central institutional levels to take into account this plurality of possible and existing formations in order to formulate more appropriate and effective public policies.

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Perceptions and Attitudes Towards the Use of Treated Wastewater in Agriculture a Case Study from Beit Dajan Community, West Bank²

Introduction

We all generate waste, but where it goes next is frequently overlooked. For many of us, what happens to our waste once we have thrown it away has little bearing on our everyday lives. Little thought is usually given to where our waste ends up, or what impact it might have on the planet and on our lives: we could call this a sort of denial of waste. At the same time, the huge volumes of waste we produce pose major problems in terms of our ability to collect, treat, and manage it without endangering human and environmental health. Since waste management is so readily overlooked, treatment infrastructure is often neglected, and the global disparities in exposure to waste contamination are ignored. The use and reuse of waste, as a means of managing it, is becoming increasingly paramount.

Given that water is a scarce resource, this article focuses upon the reuse and treatment of wastewater, especially in semi-arid and arid contexts, such as Palestine. The area of Beit Dajan (Area B³, Nablus Governorate, West Bank) is taken as a case study. Treated wastewater reuse is currently deployed here, and this area is part of a number of European Union programs at increasing the use of wastewater for agricultural purposes in Mediterranean countries, as a means of enhancing sustainable, clean, and environmentally friendly solutions to cope with water shortages. Wastewater treatment is a process used to remove contaminants from wastewater so that it can then be returned to the water cycle. Once returned to the water cycle, the decontaminated water can safely be used in agricultural environments or is reused for various other purposes.

Within the context of the project *ARPA - Wastewater for Agriculture (Acque Reflue per l'Agricoltura)*⁴ - we conducted research to analyze the local community's perception and attitude towards treated wastewater in Beit Dajan (West Bank), where treated water available for agriculture has the potential to minimize freshwater extraction and, as a result, water stress in the area of the Nablus governorate. Here, environmental, political and social constraints, as well as the deterioration of water quality and a lack of effective water management exacerbate water stress. We adopted an applied sociological study, drawing upon sociological skills and knowledge with the aim of improving the well-being of a community in a policy-oriented and action-directed manner (Steele, Price, 2004).

The area of the Middle East, like many countries and regions throughout the world, is progressively facing severe water shortages, as well as wastewater contamination challenges, due to rapidly growing populations, increasing water consumption, climate change, rainfall distribution imbalances, and economic development (Bodin *et al.*, 2019; Chen *et al.*, 2018). One-fifth of the world's population lives in water-scarce areas, while one-third lives in areas with moderate to severe stress (International Organization for Standardization, 2019).

Water resource management is a controversial topic among parties sharing the same resources in the Middle East's semi-arid to dry climate. Water is both an object and a tool of conflict due to the

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2 Received: 16/11/2022. Revised: 29/12/2022. Accepted: 30/12/2022.

3 The Palestinian Authority exercises administrative control over Area B but shares security control with Israeli authorities. Interactive map: <https://tinyurl.com/49c5wn6f>

4 The research is part of the project *ARPA - Wastewater for Agriculture (Acque Reflue per l'Agricoltura)*, funded by Emilia Romagna Region, in synergy with the project 'MENAWARA Non - Conventional Water Reuse in Agriculture in Mediterranean countries', funded by ENI CBC MED program of the European Union.

tension between the demand for water and its limited availability (European Parliament, 2015). The treatment of wastewater has been a circular solution to both water scarcity problems in times of climate change and to avoid direct discharge of untreated wastewater in the environment (Salem *et al.*, 2021). The critical increase in human demand for water has led to the use of treated wastewater (TWW) being identified as the main water resource in different parts of the world, and, interestingly, for national water resource management plans in the Mediterranean area.

The global and local freshwater scarcity in the world is exacerbated in the Palestinian context. It is estimated that about 1.35 million Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip are in immediate need of humanitarian assistance due to public health concerns related to limited access to WASH services (OCHA, 2021). In this context, the reuse of TWW for agricultural irrigation would contribute to reducing pressure on freshwater, especially since 60–70% of clean water in the West Bank is used for irrigation purposes, forming approximately 160 MCM/yr (ARIJ, 2007; World Bank, 2009; Salem *et al.*, 2021).

Drier seasons and political obstacles to water access mean that Palestinian farming families face major challenges to their way of life and their livelihoods. The agricultural sector employs 13.4% of the population in the formal sector and over 90% of those who work informally (Mizyed, 2013; ANERA, 2020). While the World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that residential water consumption be kept to a level of 100 liters per person per day (lcd), available water resources for domestic consumption in the West Bank is only 62 lcd (World Bank, 2018). 600,000 Palestinians in the West Bank reside in areas that are not connected to piped water services or are poorly supplied; they consequently consume less than 50 liters of water per capita per day, well below the 100 liters recommended by WHO (OCHA, 2021).

Water scarcity and inadequate water management, low soil fertility, a lack of financial resources and low agricultural investments, unstable crop prices, and high risk owing to droughts and land fragmentation all pose challenges to agricultural development in the West Bank (Shadeed, 2013). Water scarcity is likely to be the most difficult of these issues.

As the agricultural sector is responsible for more than half of the total available water for Palestinians, during the summer, West Bank farmers experience regular cuts in piped water service. Villagers who still own agricultural lands mostly plant it with olives, citrus, and other trees and plants that do not require a lot of irrigation, while less land is planted with vegetables, grains and other local and traditional crops. Hence, in the West Bank, treated wastewater can be of substantial value to the agriculture sector and can complement rainwater harvesting and rainfed agriculture. However, there are several potential obstacles, owing both to the geopolitical situation and to cultural and religious concerns.

The right to water and sanitation is a fundamental human right enshrined in international conventions, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) – signed by Israel in 1990 and ratified in 1991 – and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) – signed by Israel in 1966 and ratified in 1991 – (Beshtawi, 2020). As Israel is a signatory to these conventions, it is obliged to uphold this right in all the territories it controls. Since 1967, Israel has occupied and militarily administered the West Bank through the Israeli Military Governorate and then the Israeli Civil Administration (ICA), including direct control over water infrastructure. Since the Six-Day War, water has remained a symbol of the Israel–Palestine conflict. Even though inhabited Palestine is historically rich in fresh groundwater, all water resources in the newly captured regions were taken over by Israel in 1967 (Awad, 2020). With the exception of a small stretch of the coastal aquifer that runs under the Gaza Strip, Israel holds exclusive control over all water resources between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea resulting in a lack of water provision to the residents in the West Bank and in water unsafe for consumption in the Gaza Strip.

Water scarcity in the Palestinian territory, in addition to land confiscation and armed attacks against farmers, leaves Palestinians at risk of having to abandon their lands and lose their inherited culture, which is mainly related to agriculture. Surviving farmers, in fact, confront unfair

market competition from Israeli products, which are cheaper and more marketable also due to the recruitment of low cost migrants and Palestinian labour (Salem *et al.*, 2021).

The 1993 Oslo Agreement, which was designed only to last for a short period of time, restricted the amount of water used by the Palestinians West Bank population in 1995⁵ (Boatman, Martin, 2019).

A recent Oxfam report, published in 2019, stresses that although the population in the West Bank has nearly doubled, the amount of water provided by the Israeli side remains the same as that agreed on in 1995, as the agreement did not include any provisions for amendments to reflect new realities.

The water regime established by the Oslo Agreement (Trottier, 2019) reveals the strategic advantage gained by Israel by maintaining its hegemony over the mountain aquifer (UN, 1980).

"Water domination", "water hegemony", "water deprivation", "water politics", "hydro-politics", "water militarization", "water strategies", "water pollution", and other terms have been used to describe Israeli absolute control of Palestinian legal water resources (UN, 1980; Isaac, Salem, 2007; Zeitoun, 2011; Zeitoun *et al.*, 2013; WCC, 2016; EJA, 2019; Salem, 2019). As a result, Palestinians only have access to a small portion of their legitimate water resources.

International law and human rights treaties set out that the Israeli occupation is responsible for providing Palestinians with enough water for domestic, agricultural, and industrial consumption (Salem *et al.*, 2021). According to a report issued by UNHRC in March 2017 (Jaramillo and Restrepo, 2017) the agricultural sector has been affected by the denial of access for farmers to agricultural areas, water resources, and domestic and external markets. As such, our case study can be read within the framework of environmental (in)justice, intended as «the right to remain in one's place and environment and be protected from uncontrolled investment and growth, pollution, land grabbing, speculation, disinvestment, and decay and abandonment» (Anguelovski, 2014, p. 33). Exploring the (re)uses and distribution of water resources in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip inevitably draws attention to «the ethical and political questions of 'who gets what, why, and how much'» (Bullard, 2001, p. 153), unveiling some of the processes that have contributed to produce unequal protection from environmental degradation or deprivation, and calling for remedies.

Given the above, the objective of this paper is to investigate perceptions and attitudes on the use of treated wastewater for agricultural purposes in Beit Dajan. We use these two terms respectively to mean the way in which treated wastewater use is regarded, understood, or interpreted, and the emotional or behavioral disposition of local people with regard to it, within a given family or social environment.

The article commences by contextualizing the use of TWW in agriculture in the West Bank. It then delves into local stakeholders' perceptions and attitudes to the use of treated wastewater for agricultural purposes by reporting the results of a qualitative research based on six semi-structured interviews with farmers, traders, and policy-makers and two focus groups with a total of 30 end-buyers of products and farmers using TWW. We conclude by evidencing how the fieldwork results point to the need for research teams, international NGOs, local institutions and technical units to plan actions aimed at increasing local people's understanding about the use of treated wastewater in agriculture whilst also providing them professional assistance and training.

1. The Use of Treated Wastewater in Agriculture: Focus on Beit Dajan

Water can be considered a "total social fact" as it connects multiple domains of social life (economic, political, religious, etc.) to each other rendering them interdependent (Orlove, Caton, 2010). Water concerns thus cannot be divorced from territorial disputes or the pursuit of agricultural livelihoods (McKee, 2021). Water is both a common component of daily life and a

⁵ The Gaza Strip and the Jordan River, as well as the 60 percent of the West Bank (Area C) that remained under Israel's direct security control, were not included in the deal.

precious resource in the communities of Beit Dajan and the surrounding areas, where its ebbs and flows follow socioeconomic and political lines. The occupation of the West Bank and control of basic resources as a result of settlement development has left Palestinians with a wastewater crisis, with many areas unable to connect to the main sewage system (Jaramillo, Restrepo, 2017). Between 2012 and 2015, the cost of wastewater treatment in the West Bank topped USD 90 million for clean water that was not reused by Palestinians (ARIJ, 2015). To a certain extent, then, wastewater treatment in the West Bank is needed so as to prevent exorbitant expenditures for the already impoverished Palestinians.

In addition, the use of treated wastewater in agriculture could benefit human health, the environment and the economy. The most well-known benefit is the decrease of pressure on freshwater because treated wastewater can be used as an alternative irrigation source since agriculture consumes 60-70% of available water. Secondly, the reuse of treated wastewater can reduce the cost of groundwater extraction. Thirdly, treating wastewater can reduce water pollution when disposed of in seas and rivers and landfills. Fourthly, agricultural wastewater reuse can contribute to the justification of suitable investment policies and financing mechanisms for pollution control and prevention. Finally, it also reduces the use of artificial fertilizers in agriculture (Jaramillo, Restrepo, 2017).

Indeed, the use of TWW in agriculture reduces the use of fertilizers in water including organic content that can replace chemical fertilizers, and can reduce costs. In 2017, Barghouthi led experimental work in the West Bank and Gaza to study the effect of TWW on olive trees (Barghouthi *et al.*, 2017). that the study concluded that TWW has an added-value for the soil when compared to soil irrigated with fresh water for the presence of carbon-based content and cation-exchange capacity the measure of the soil's ability to hold positively charged ions - a very important soil property influencing soil structure stability, nutrient availability, soil pH and the soil's reaction to fertilizers and other ameliorants (Hazelton, Murphy, 2007).

However, improper agricultural irrigation with TWW has the potential to harm public health, the environment, crop quality, and soil conditions (Ashraf *et al.*, 2017). Some severe consequences of the improper use of treated sewage water range from soil salinization and chemical and biological contamination of crops to poisonous materials that may enter the food chain, damaging the food consumed by humans and animals (Faryal *et al.*, 2007). However, salt and wastewater tolerant crops, such as trees, shrubs, and fodders, can be irrigated with TWW. Management measures that can lower hazards to human health and the environment are thus fundamental in order to decide which crops may be irrigated with treated wastewater, and to establish the criteria to check its quality (i.e., periodic laboratory testing) (Salem *et al.*, 2021).

In the West Bank the importance and efficiency of TWW for reuse in integrated water resource management, as well as its role in water cycle management, water shortages, climate change adaptation, and water in future cities, are enormous. To boost water availability and reliability, treated wastewater reuse is a cost-effective and energy-saving option. It is a tried-and-trusted water scarcity solution that increases water availability and thereby mitigates climate change.

Currently, along with small-scale treatment units, the main and larger treatment facilities are those of Jenin, Nablus, and Al-Bireh. This is in addition to a facility that is about to start up in Tayaseer (Tubas Governorate) and two more plants planned for the east Nablus (northern West Bank) and Hebron regions (southern West Bank). It is estimated that the West Bank could potentially produce over 50,000 m³/d of treated wastewater, which could be reused to irrigate over 20,000 dunums (20 km²) of high-value crops and animal feed. To date, treated wastewater reuse has been limited to the Jenin area, as well as a few demonstration uses in Nablus.

Beit Dajan is a Palestinian village in the Nablus Governorate in the north-central West Bank [Fig.1], located 10 kilometers (6.2 miles) east of Nablus, and after the 1995 accords, 38% of the village land is defined as being in Area B, while the remaining 62% is Area C.

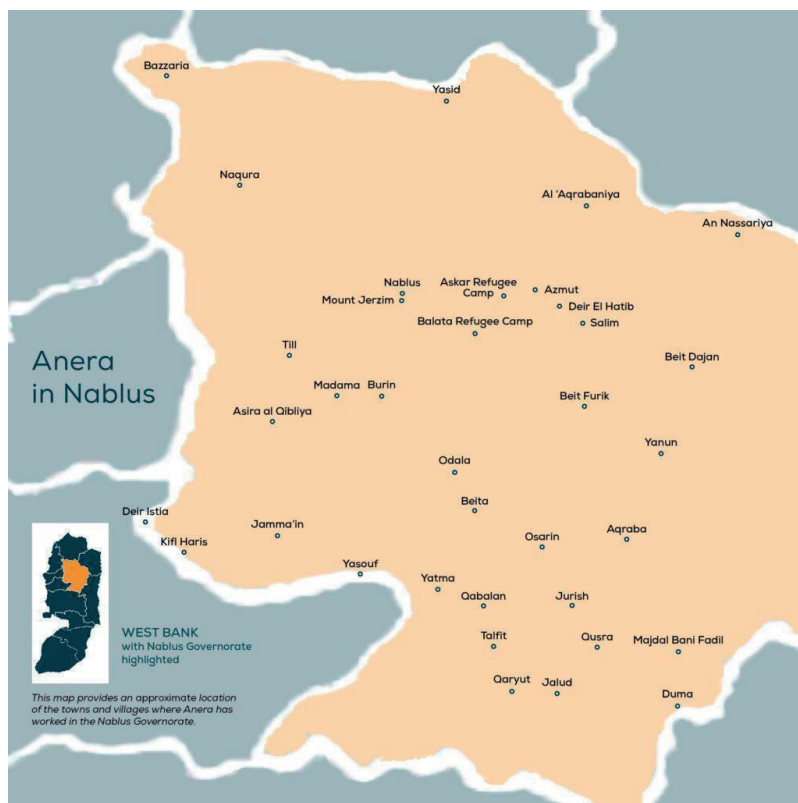


Fig.1: Map of the West Bank, with Nablus Governorate highlighted.

Source: ANERA: <https://www.anera.org/stories/nablus-palestine-history-helping-palestinian-villages/>

Beit Dajan and its environs have long been one of the most important agricultural zones in the Levant, shipping the best of its produce to cities throughout the region and beyond. In an industrialized world, the development of borders, the expropriation of agricultural areas, as well as water shortage issues and market competitions have generated major food security issues in the Palestinian territory. Initiatives to address the problem of water shortage and the neglect of agriculture in the designated region have run into financial difficulties and have lacked a long-term strategy. In Beit Dajan, a wastewater treatment unit was created as a solution to the collected grey and blackwater. While greywater is the water leaving sinks, bathtubs, washing machines, and floor drains, which doesn't contain organic substances, blackwater refers to wastewater containing faeces, urine, latrine water, and toilet paper. Blackwater is distinguished from greywater, as the result of human domestic activity from washing utensils and clothes and from showering. In developed contexts, blackwater is usually separated from greywater in private residences, for example, in order to facilitate later treatment and then use the appropriate method for water purification. This is not common in many areas, including in Beit Dajan in Nablus Governorate. 70 percent of the Beit Dajan village was connected to the sewage system. According to the interviews conducted with the local council, the sewage connection project was funded by the EU, for political and geographical reasons. The idea was the reuse of sewage water after its treatment in agriculture, especially for agricultural lands being located in the lowest area. Some parts and constructions, especially regarding the secondary filtration, were missing or not implemented fully for the treatment unit to fully function. Nonetheless, treated wastewater has been in use for agricultural purposes since 2012. Several follow-on projects were instigated to inform and train farmers and support them with a piping system to help them plant and benefit from the system.

In the village, the historical shift in land use from wheat fields to trees could have an impact on the ecosystem and bird migration. Lands have been abandoned due to a lack of water and the risk of wild animal damage to agricultural fields. Planting wheat and conventional crops is no longer economically viable due to the elevated risk of agricultural pest infestations and competition with Israeli occupation products. A complete shift in agricultural culture with no plantation diversification available would affect the soil and increase the risk of infectious disease spread. Traditionally, in the Palestinian culture, crops are irrigated mainly with rainfall. To avert future environmental, human, and agricultural land disasters, the methods must be thoroughly tested. Moreover, global warming is having a significant impact on the region of Beit Dajan, which is predicted to experience greater drought in future decades. Research in the area includes examining which trees can thrive in the location and what diversification planting plan should be implemented.

Agriculture in Beit Dajan, and in the OTP, is not heavily industrialized, but rather still carried out with the use of rudimentary tools and the cooperation of all family members. Palestinians have a strong relationship with the land, and it is a family activity in which all members of the family participate in planting, irrigation, and harvesting.

During long days of work and harvest season, meals are prepared and shared on agricultural property or sent by Palestinian families living elsewhere. The olive harvest is a national holiday celebrated by family members. The *Ouneh* method is linked to agriculture in historic Palestine, a source of pride for Palestinians as part of their rich legacy. In times of construction or harvest, *Ouneh* refers to humanitarian assistance and support. The *Ouneh* concept in the West Bank holds social and cultural activities and perspectives that are difficult to change as they are rooted in the culture. In the case of Beit Dajan, heritage proved to be more powerful than new restrictions for working on agricultural lands, taking into account health precautions. It is then important to explore the perceptions and attitudes that local people have towards treated wastewater in agriculture before proposing or evaluating any policy in this area.

2. Methodology

This research aimed at exploring local stakeholders' perceptions and attitudes towards treated wastewater in Beit Dajan, West Bank, in order to provide multi-layer recommendations (from policy to community practices) for improving local agricultural production and food security. Given the exploratory nature of the research, which aimed at stimulating the exchange of opinions and facilitating the elucidation of the perceptions of the local population and policymakers towards the issues mentioned above, a qualitative methodology was chosen.

Initially structured around in-person fieldwork trips to Palestine, the research had to be significantly redesigned due to the COVID-19 pandemic, forcing the European-based research team to outsource the conducting of interviews and focus groups to a local team on the ground. The initial team, composed of researchers in the Sociological field, then welcomed three professionals with backgrounds in Water and Environmental Studies, Agricultural Heritage, and Development Studies, already working on comparable funded projects in the West Bank. One of the added values of this collaboration was that it allowed us to collect data directly in the local languages and only subsequently translate them into English for analysis.

Different methodologies have been adopted in order to capture a broader range of people's perceptions and attitudes toward TWW.

As a first step, a literature review was conducted on the impact of the reuse of treated wastewater on agricultural production and food security, and on existing scholarship on environmental justice and water management in the West Bank.

Secondly, 6 semi-structured interviews with key informants - 2 farmers, 1 lemon trader, 1 representative of the Village Council, 1 representative of the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA), 1 represen-

tative of Palestinian Water Authority (PWA) - were conducted. Semi-structured questions were adopted in order to allow participants to explain in greater detail their opinions and perceptions of treated wastewater and to better explore the other factors that influenced their attitudes towards it.

In addition to interviews, two focus groups were conducted: the first with 10 members of the village (end-buyer of fruits produced with treated wastewater), all women; the second with 20 members of the Farmers' User Association, all men. The Farmers' User Association is formed by a group of farmers in Beit Dajan that intend to benefit from the treated wastewater in their village and reuse it in irrigating suitable crops. The association is responsible for managing the water irrigation network connected to the wastewater treatment plant in collaboration with Beit Dajan Village Council and by an *ad hoc* treated water tariff system that will financially complement the operation and maintenance of the wastewater treatment facilities by the Village Council.

Focus groups questions revolved around participants' general and technical knowledge about TWW, TWW user's acceptance, local agricultural production methods, food processing and consumption practices.

Interview' questions revolved around local irrigation methods and their impacts, management and water governance, food quality control, concerns, experiences and opinions towards TWW use.

Both focus groups and interviews were conducted between November 2021 and January 2022. Participants were recruited through a convenience sample, following the interest and willingness expressed by members of the local community in response to a call circulated to the Farmers User's Association. Interviews and focus groups were then transcribed, translated and thematically analyzed following an inductive process that allowed us to identify the core issues to be discussed.

3. Research results

Focus groups and interviews enabled us to identify three main factors that, according to local stakeholders, have so far prevented and sometimes continue to prevent TWW use from being adopted successfully: mismanagement of the treatment unit; misleading (or lack of) information; and socio-cultural and religious aspects.

3.1 Mismanagement of Treatment Unit

The Palestinian Water Authority (PWA) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are the main supporters of the West Bank's water and sanitation sector, with projects mostly supported by international funding. Al-Bireh, Ramallah, Jenin, Tulkarm, East and West Nablus, and Jericho are among the West Bank's seven centralized urban wastewater treatment facilities. The creation of a treatment unit and the support to use TWW in agriculture, as well as its sustainability and quality, is fully dependent on funded projects implemented by different stakeholders over a short period of time. Our interviewees identify limited funding and no long-term plans as the main factors that prevent TWW use from reaching a satisfactory level of functionality. A representative of the Ministry of Agriculture explained:

«Currently there are many treatment unit projects implemented in the West Bank each funded by a different NGO and with various objectives. Mostly TWW is reused for agricultural purposes, while TWW treatment level in occupied Palestinian territory does not allow many options» (Interview 3, December 2021).

A representative of the Village Council, farmer and financial officer, observed:

«The treatment unit was first established with a project funded by the EU, but the initial design was not completed and the tertiary filtration was absent. Poor maintenance of the sections of TWW installed caused further problems. Different NGOs and INGOs provided support through small projects targeting different components and providing awareness on different topics. Overall, little continuity, sustainability and ownership was ensured leading to lack of general awareness in the community and technical problems with TWW units» (Interview 2, November 2021).

The Beit Dajan Village Council is responsible for the management of the unit, hiring qualified employees to manage the unit. The Village Council tends to collect money from the users so they can pay salaries and cover small maintenance issues. Each house pays up to 12 shekels (3,42 euros) per month. The economic situation in Beit Dajan does not allow an increase in fees payment. Therefore, the Village Council together with the PWA water office expected to plan a different strategy to ensure greater sustainability of the system and budget availability for its running and maintenance.

Many interviewees underlined the importance of periodical tests to measure the quality and efficiency of the wastewater treatment facilities as well as data and better communication and coordination between farmers and the Village Council for increasing awareness both among the farmers and the local community. Other studies conducted in the West Bank showed that TWW users feel local monitoring and oversight are insufficient (Dare and Mohtar, 2018).

The interviewees claim that a system is to be adopted for the work at the treatment unit. A small shop owner, farmer and land owner, and TWW user said:

«I always had concerns about TWW quality where I don't think there is good management at the treatment unit. [...] I visited the units at different times and found out that tests are not regular and are not even sent to laboratories to be checked so I decided to install another filter on the main pipe coming from the treatment unit as I have a significant need for water to use for irrigation» (Interview 1, November 2021).

Underlining the importance of not mixing rainwater with black water at the treatment unit, a member of the Village Council observed:

«We have a major issue of flooding during wintertime and rainy days. Sewage water mixes with rainwater and the treatment unit pools cannot handle this huge amount of water which causes flooding into nearby agricultural lands» (Interview 2, November 2021).

Many interviewees stress the ambivalent value of depending on international organizations (European, American, United Nations, and so on) for funding TWW units. The reliance on external international funding has contributed to the work of Palestinian governmental institutions (such as the Palestinian Water Authority, the Environmental Quality Authority) as well as Palestinian academic institutions (universities and research centers) which has helped tackle various elements relating to the use of TWW (geopolitics, technicality, finance, socioeconomics, climate change, public health, culture, etc.). Nonetheless, different donors with divergent aims and strategies are perceived as setting up plans that are not sustainable in the long run.

3.2 Misleading and inadequate information

During focus groups and interviews, most of the participants expressed satisfaction with the wastewater treatment unit's functioning as a solution to a key difficulty the hamlet faced with sewage water. However, they underlined that the local community, especially farmers, have a

lack of awareness and inadequate information regarding the use of TWW in agriculture. Farmers are not well-informed about plantation, irrigation, fertilizers, and economic feasibility in investing in agriculture and most importantly the consideration of health precaution in the use of TWW. This lack, as noted by a representative of the PWA, is made even more complicated by employee turnover and the hiring of unqualified personnel, both of which can lead to the treatment units being damaged.

The Water Council highlights how important it is to train employees who work in treatment units, and that it is their responsibility to do so through study tours to local treatment units in Jordan and Spain. A member of the Village Council explains:

«Each of the field programs featured a milestone for raising awareness. We posted posters on the Village Council walls for everyone to read, and we held lectures on many topics» (Interview 2, November 2021).

In relation to daily practices, participants reported that there was an outright rejection to utilize TWW for agriculture at first, particularly from individuals who lived on or near agricultural grounds. Elderly participants, particularly, during focus groups, refused to accept that TWW can be used and is used in irrigation. As a housewife said:

«Despite the fact that our land is so near to the treatment unit, my mother refused to use TWW to irrigate trees on our land, and this costs us a lot of money to bring fresh water trucks and irrigate olive trees» (Focus Group 1, November 2021).

However, following the success of a few farmers with their plantations and new companies, the majority of the farmers petitioned the Village Council to have access to TWW for agriculture.

During focus groups' discussion, we observed that the users' organization had no technical grasp of the wastewater treatment process or the health precautions that need to be followed while utilizing TWW for agricultural uses. Farmers and the surrounding community have been asking for additional information on how to assess water treatment levels, if it is safe to use treated water, what kind of trees may be irrigated with TWW, and whether it is safe to eat fruits from TWW-irrigated trees.

Farmers who took part in tours and talks on the topic of TWW usage for irrigation expressed a strong desire to engage in agriculture in the use of TWW because of the foreseen advantages and lower costs envisaged. Some farmers are very interested in using TWW in agriculture whereas others are quite opposed, and the different attitudes between the two appear to be related to the amount of knowledge they have been able to acquire on this topic and the experience they have already had in the use of TWW.

Farmers do not take health and safety precautions into account when utilizing TWW on agricultural grounds. Rumors have been circulating in the hamlet and during interviews about how people water their vegetables with black, untreated water, which is illegal under Palestinian law:

«There is no full understanding of the risk of TWW to irrigate veggies or even water grass surrounding the house on which children play» (Focus group 2, December 2021), explained a farmer.

The spokesperson from the Ministry of Agriculture emphasizes how harmful this might be in the long run. The Ministry of Agriculture has been sending alerts to the Beit Dajan Village Council to take action against persons watering vegetables using black water. Participants do not have the knowledge on how dangerous TWW may be if precautions are not taken. The first projects on TWW have been focused on the importance and encouragement of TWW consumption without emphasizing its proper use and hazards.

Resistance arose as a result of new changes in the area, such as the adoption of new agricultural techniques that differed from what was previously practiced. The more they learn about TWW,

the more confident they are that it can be used in agriculture. Nonetheless, work must be done to improve trust in the current system, such as how many of the required tests are performed on the plant's TWW, what methods are safe to apply, and so on.

«Usually, I have a hard time finding labourers to cultivate the land since trees are irrigated with TWW, or so they think» (Focus group 2, December 2021), farmer of the users' association. Another farmer interviewed answered:

«It is not because of TWW they refuse to work at your place but because the rates for working in agriculture are very low in addition to the hard work that is required in comparison to working in the city» (Focus group 2, December 2021).

All of the aforementioned variables contributed to spreading inaccurate information about the safe use of TWW to consumers and the local community. One of the farmers interviewed declared:

«He was the one who persuaded me not to use TWW, but now I'm thinking about using it exclusively to irrigate olive trees» (Focus group 2, December 2021).

3.3 Religious, social and cultural aspects

It is an integral part of Palestinian culture and inherited customs to reuse water till the last drop due to water shortages. Water from the kitchen sink or bathroom sink/shower, as well as water from the laundry, is collected and utilized to clean the outside spaces and water the trees in the garden. A woman in the focus group declared:

«Up until today, my husband linked the kitchen sink and bathroom shower and sink to a particular conduit with water used to irrigate garden plantation» (Focus group 1, November 2021).

Despite the sensitivity of the issue, little attention has been paid to the study of socio-cultural (religious) viewpoints. Several *Fatwā*⁶ have been expressed by Saudi Arabia and local *Sheikh*⁷ allowing the use of TWW in agriculture in the West Bank, according to the representative of the Ministry of Agriculture, as well as farmers interviewed. The Sheikh's invaluable contribution made it easier for TWW project partners to work in the field, providing much-needed infrastructure and public awareness campaigns. According to the representative of the Ministry of Agriculture, the problem was fixed from the start through *fatwas* given by Muslim holy men in Nablus and Saudi Arabia:

«I don't see why TWW shouldn't be used in agriculture. Farmers and landowners are also pleased with the price reductions, as they have received TWW for free up until now and have reduced fertilizer payments» (Interview 3, December 2021).

Since 2012, one of the Beit Dajan farmers has been using TWW to water almond and lemon trees and has petitioned the Nablus Sheik for *ifta*⁸ on the use of TWW to irrigate olive trees. When questioned why he chose olive trees in particular, he explained that they are sacred plants referenced in the *Quran*, thus he had concerns prior to obtaining religious approval.

A farmer confirmed the concern:

6 *Fatwā* is a nonbinding legal opinion on a point of Islamic law given by a qualified jurist in response to a question posed by a private individual, judge, or government.

7 *Sheikh* is a man authorized to teach, initiate, and guide aspiring dervishes in the Islamic faith.

8 *ifta'* means elucidating an unknown legal ruling on a certain issue with the aim of conveying its legal ruling.

«I planted and irrigated grape and lemon plants with TWW directly after being convinced and even given trees to grow by one of the programs. Nonetheless, I did not use TWW to irrigate my olive trees until I received a *fatwa* from a *mufti* in Nablus, as olive trees are considered sacred trees and are referenced in the Holy Quran» (Focus group 2, December 2021).

In the focus group, several women expressed concerns about consuming TWW-watered items: they referred to TWW-watered products with the word "*Betsed AlNafs*", a cultural expression meaning you no longer have the appetite to eat something.

There also seemed to be a difference in attitude towards TWW-watered products depending on whether they are bought or offered.

«Relatives and neighbors never purchase from me» declares a farmer «but they don't mind eating the fruits I give them as a present». He added: «Because I utilize TWW in my land, which I visit regularly, I have never had any social difficulties with the people in my community. People desire products as gifts, therefore my wife constantly gives out lemons and grapes to her neighbors, who are aware that it is irrigated with TWW» (Focus group 2, December 2021).

The fact that fruits are irrigated with TWW is not indicated in the market. Nevertheless, more than 93 percent of Israeli agriculture water is treated, thus the Palestinian population in the West Bank should be aware that they have been eating fruits and vegetables grown on trees and plants watered with treated wastewater. Instead, they attempt to dismiss the idea. Farmers and dealers tend to avoid disclosing that the fruits were grown with TWW, and women avoid asking questions: «I'd rather not know that the crops are irrigated with treated water» (Focus group 1, November 2021), one woman in the focus groups remarked, adding that she buys fruits and vegetables considering shape and price evaluations. On the contrary, other women from Beit Dajan expressed being proud to have a treatment unit in the community and to be more inventive in this regard compared with women from neighboring villages.

Working with and travelling to agricultural fields in Israel irrigated with treated wastewater, as well as introductory visits from farmers and traders, helped to garner an understanding of the system and make significant advances in (welcoming) the business. According to a senior and former teacher:

«I was involved in several initiatives related to TWW and agriculture since I am highly educated and had the time after I finished teaching. I went to observe other treatment centers in the West Bank and Israel with the Ministry of Agriculture and learned a lot. The program combined lectures and field trips in one visit to Nazareth to better grasp the idea and how treatment works in one location, and the engineer swam in the treatment pool to demonstrate how pure the water was» (Focus group 2, December 2021).

4. Concluding remarks

As a result of the peasant majority in the West Bank and the Levant, local populations place a high value on land protection, seeing it as a need and duty, especially after the loss of land and ongoing occupation by Israel. This value was passed on despite the neglect of agriculture owing to water scarcity and globalization, which drove more people out of their villages in search of work in cities. As a woman denounced during a focus group:

«Agriculture in the village has diminished in recent years owing to a lack of water. Not every household has the financial means to purchase freshwater to irrigate their plants» (Focus group 1, November 2021).

Nonetheless, the connection to the land and the process of agriculture using traditional methods are still present and expressed through songs and sayings such as "*لفضراع لفضرا*", meaning

«your land is your honor». The research project we conducted in this area was invested by unexpected issues and obstacles that led us to have to modify original assumptions and research strategy. Firstly, as the research was conducted during the global COVID-19 pandemic, the research team was forced to conduct research remotely in the case-study country instead of via in-person fieldwork trips. This situation precluded a first-hand exploration of the environmental and social context of analysis and the investigation of spontaneous issues that arose during interviews. Secondly, while in-depth interviews helped to achieve important results, the sample size is still somewhat small to be considered representative and insufficient for results to be generalisable. Thirdly, there may have been “lost in translation” issues, especially related to the linguistic equivalence of original words with their cross-cultural translation, as the interviews were carried out in Arabic and we analyzed them in English. For the same reason, we preferred not to over-interpret the perceptions that emerged with reference to the socio-cultural and religious aspects that mediate the use of treated wastewater. We are aware, for example, of the deeply cultural aspects that exist with respect to the conception of purity or pollution of objects such as wastewater (Douglas, 1966), but we have not been able to explore these dimensions within this research. These aspects would be interesting to explore in future research.

Participants in focus groups reported some religious, cultural, or social concerns in the application of TWW in agriculture. However, these barriers do not seem to be an obstacle to the use of wastewater or the purchase of products treated with it. The Palestinian population is not fully aware that they have been ingesting fruits and vegetables irrigated with TWW of various treatment levels for some time, and this is a common claim made in interviews and focus groups:

«I buy veggies and fruits based on the quality of the product and never think about how they were produced, not even irrigation with TWW» (Focus group 1, November 2021), one woman remarked in the focus group.

Most of the interviews, focus groups and workshops revealed a lack of awareness and understanding about the use of treated wastewater in agriculture among the local population, particularly among farmers. Farmers are not guided in terms of planting, irrigation, fertilizers, economic feasibility in investing in agriculture, and, most significantly, health precautions while using TWW. More awareness is needed on methods on how to maintain and sustain the treatment plant. Lack of accurate information is one of the three major factors that appear to prevent TWW use from being adopted successfully. A second factor is the mismanagement of the treatment unit, as the establishment of a treatment facility and support for the application of TWW in agriculture is entirely reliant on well-funded projects completed in a short period of time. The research emphasizes the necessity of professional assistance in developing knowledge on the use of TWW in agriculture as well as in an effective wastewater treatment plant management system. Interviews with farmers of the user association underlined the need for learning from the success of other farmers’ organizations recently created in the West Bank and training in order to organize and administer themselves.

Finally, focus groups stress the importance of taking into consideration perceptions, attitudes, and other cultural aspects of the end buyers: the local community.

The usage of TWW encouraged landowners to return to their grounds and grow trees instead of relying on rain for crops, increasing the value of the lands and deterring urbanization of agricultural regions. Few landowners began fruit-growing enterprises and found them to be lucrative. The research emphasizes the necessity of learning more about how TWW may be used to irrigate agricultural areas and develop small companies in relation to the planted area. As we have seen throughout the words of the interviewees of this study, it is essential to raise awareness of safety and health precautions for TWWs, as well as to provide guidance measures regarding agriculture. International NGOs and local institutions may be able to work to establish new treatment units, but for the cultivation of fruits and vegetables, it is essential to cultivate awareness of the field.

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