



# Making Publics, Making Places

Edited by  
Mary Griffiths and Kim Barbour

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# Contents

Preface	vii
Abstracts	ix
List of contributors	xv
1 Making publics, making places <i>Mary Griffiths and Kim Barbour</i>	1
2 The elasticity of the public sphere: Expansion, contraction and 'other' media <i>John Budarick</i>	9
3 'Imagine if our cities talked to us': Questions about the making of 'responsive' places and urban publics <i>Mary Griffiths</i>	27
4 Picturing placelessness: Online graphic narratives and Australia's refugee detention centres <i>Aaron Humphrey</i>	49
5 Reclaiming heritage for UNESCO: Discursive practices and community building in northern Italy <i>Maria Cristina Paganoni</i>	75
6 Find your Adelaide: Digital placemaking with <i>Adelaide City</i> <i>Explorer</i> <i>Darren Peacock and Jill MacKenzie</i>	95
7 Chinese films and the sense of place: Beijing as 'Thirdspace' from <i>In the Heat of the Sun</i> to <i>Mr Six</i> <i>Hongyan Zou and Peter C Pugsley</i>	111
8 Social media and news media: Building new publics or fragmenting audiences? <i>Kathryn Bowd</i>	129

## Making Publics, Making Places

- |    |  |     |
|----|--|-----|
| 9  | The use of Chinese social media by foreign embassies: How 'generative technologies' are offering opportunities for modern diplomacy<br><i>Ying Jiang</i>                       | 145 |
| 10 | An opinion leader and the making of a city on China's Sina Weibo<br><i>Wilfred Yang Wang</i>   | 163 |
| 11 | Public audiencing: Using Twitter to study audience engagement with characters and actors<br><i>Kim Barbour</i>   | 179 |
| 12 | Overcoming the tyranny of distance? High speed broadband and the significance of place<br><i>Jenny Kennedy, Rowan Wilken, Bjorn Nansen, Michael Arnold and Mitchell Harrop</i> | 193 |

# Reclaiming heritage for UNESCO: Discursive practices and community building in northern Italy<sup>1</sup>

*Maria Cristina Paganoni*

## Study design

This research arises from an interest in heritage preservation in the public sector and, in particular, from the awareness of the key role heritage discourse can play as a tool for social inclusion in urban policy and planning. It reflects on the contribution of new media to what could be called 'the invention of heritage' in the line of Hobsbawm's 'invention of tradition' (1983), showing how heritage is discursively constructed to provide not just an objective historical truth, but collective memories. The selected area of analysis is the contribution of new media communication to the making and remaking of a UNESCO World Heritage site.

UNESCO's protection of World Heritage Sites was inaugurated by the *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage*, commonly known as the

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter mentions a number of websites, apps and other internet and social media platforms and sources. For those wishing to access such sources, they are listed at the end of the chapter under the heading 'Links'.



World Heritage Convention (UNESCO 1972), which elevated national symbols into items of 'outstanding universal value' and property of all mankind, thereby corroborating an essentialist view of the past (Paganoni 2015b). Since then the approach has changed, expanding the meaning of heritage from the protection of historic buildings and monuments towards a more general understanding of the wider context and preservation of tangible and intangible cultural forms. This wider approach was ratified first in 1992 by the World Heritage Committee's decision to include cultural landscapes in the World Heritage List (UNESCO 1992) and then by the *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* (UNESCO 2003). In particular, from what Article 1 of the 1972 Convention designated as 'the combined works of nature and man' (UNESCO 1972), the notion of 'cultural landscape' was deduced, a concept that embraces diverse possible interactions between people and the natural environment.

Against this background, the following analysis addresses the discursive practices leading to the inscription of a site on the World Heritage List, one of the most ambitious achievements for localities that aspire to global recognition of the symbolic value of their historic legacy. The time-consuming process of proposing a candidacy through its several steps of preparation can now benefit from the opportunity to promote the identity of a place via the internet, social networks and mobile technology (Webmoor 2008; Buescher & Urry 2009). The potential of new media to both generate community involvement by collapsing the boundaries between the private and the public and to make responsive publics coalesce around projects has attracted scholarly attention not only to the power of networks but also to the 'affective formations' these networks produce, their affiliations, activities and political expressions (Papacharissi 2015, p. 24).

In other words, the efforts required of a UNESCO World Heritage Site [WHS] may help gauge the potential of new media in the invention and reinvention of heritage, an activity whose political implications have been firmly established in the scholarly investigations dedicated to this subject (Tunbridge & Ashworth 1996; Smith 2006; Graham & Howard 2008). As Smith claims (2006, p. 13), 'the discursive construction of heritage is itself part of the cultural and social processes that are heritage'. If heritage can be dissonant and divisive — for example, when its preservation becomes a pretext for gentrifying historic districts that favour social elites — it can nonetheless contribute to fostering a new sense of belonging at the local level, adding social value to both the material and the intangible heritage of a region as a driver of cultural creativity and urban regeneration. This culture-inclusive and socially sensitive approach reflects a very recent trend in urban policy and planning, which aims to articulate heritage discourse with community involvement and economic development. This is spelt out by the '5Cs' strategic objectives reiterated in UNESCO's *Strategic Action Plan for the*

*Implementation of the Convention 2012-2022* (2011): credibility, conservation, capacity building, communication and communities.<sup>2</sup>

The most populous region in Italy, a country that itself boasts more UNESCO World Heritage Sites than any other country (fifty-one as of 2016), Lombardy alone hosts nine. They include prehistoric rock art, Renaissance towns, the church of Santa Maria delle Grazie with Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper*, religious architecture of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and industrial archaeology in Crespi d'Adda. Other Italian localities have been placed on UNESCO's tentative list — an inventory of those properties that each state party intends to consider for nomination.

For the purpose of this analysis, a virtual trajectory has been traced to connect three relatively close places in Lombardy which are involved with UNESCO world heritage. Each place — the town of Crespi d'Adda in the province of Bergamo, the city of Bergamo itself, and the city of Sesto San Giovanni in the province of Milan — is involved differently by reason of its different status. While Bergamo is included for its built historic environment dating back to the sixteenth century and Venetian domination inland and along the Adriatic coasts, Crespi and Sesto are powerful expressions of the industrial heritage of the last two centuries. Despite the evident differences between them, all three locations ultimately chime in with the kind of mainstream heritage discourse that is deployed at the European level to favour the construction of a pan-European identity — for example, prioritising transnational projects, or highlighting the legacy of industrialisation all over the continent. It is worth noting here that the Council of Europe declared 2015 as European Industrial and Technical Heritage Year, while recent scholarly research has underlined the rediscovery of the industrial culture in Italy in the 1980s and 1990s, with the birth of a remarkable number of both corporate and collective industrial museums focusing on local economic and manufacturing cultures (Martino 2015).

Crespi d'Adda is located on the Adda river, a geographical divide between the provinces of Milan and Bergamo; it is halfway between the two, alongside the A4 highway and within the administrative boundaries of the municipality of Capriate San Gervasio. It was named after its founder, Cristoforo Benigno Crespi, and became a World Heritage Site in 1995, when its textile factory was still operational. Crespi is a well-preserved model workers' housing settlement that dates back to 1878. The village housed the cotton factory workers and their supervisors and is still inhabited to

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2 Credibility describes what should be a general consensus on the outstanding universal value of inscribed places. Conservation has to do with safeguarding and management. Meanwhile, capacity building involves the role of state parties; communication affects information sharing and awareness raising; and communities play a central role in the implementation of the World Heritage Convention.



this day<sup>3</sup>, even after the company ceased manufacturing in 2003. The adjacent factory building, however, is dilapidated and needs massive regeneration interventions, with current stakeholders struggling to find a viable project that will satisfy the private investors who purchased the factory site in 2013 as well as local citizens and tourists. As a result, the regeneration plan seemed to come to a dead end in 2015, threatening the survival of the abandoned manufacturing areas, which became neglected and plundered, though the plan has recently been taken up again. While demanding major renovation of the site, a non-profit citizen association, Associazione Crespi d'Adda, nicknamed CrespiLove, is meanwhile committed to counteracting further deterioration and obsolescence in several ways, leading guided walks, organising evening tours with open-air performances of what life was like in the village, and promoting the use of an app to discover the surrounding natural areas. The case of Crespi d'Adda clearly illustrates both how being a World Heritage Site does not prevent the place from damage and how communication of the historical and cultural meanings of heritage needs to be constantly reinvented in order to warrant its protection.

The Venetian walls of Bergamo were listed on UNESCO's tentative list in 2006. Other Venetian fortifications built between the fifteenth and the seventeenth centuries under the Republic of Venice's rule, located in the Italian regions of Veneto and Friuli and in the two Eastern Adriatic countries of Montenegro and Croatia, were later added to the candidacy, while Greece and Cyprus did not join it.<sup>4</sup> Though the project may seem incomplete from a strictly historical point of view, its outcome is a transnational site along a journey of over 1000 kilometres, from the hills of Bergamo to the coast of the Balkans. In January 2016 the Italian National Commission for UNESCO submitted the nomination file of the site to the World Heritage Centre [WHC] in Paris, with Bergamo as the leading city. The nominated property is now awaiting review by the advisory bodies in charge of its evaluation. Since 2012, the City Council of Bergamo has joined with other public and private stakeholders to found the 'Terra di San Marco'<sup>5</sup> association, whose aim is to raise awareness of the candidacy and promote cultural events to seek citizen engagement.

Finally, on the outskirts of Milan, Sesto San Giovanni is a former heavy-industry district of the twentieth century which has shifted to a post-Fordist development model and aims to promote socially inclusive knowledge economy patterns. Sesto was once imaginatively nicknamed Italy's 'little Manchester' or 'former Stalingrad', after its

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3 Gasparoli and Ronchi (2013) reported 'a community of about 400 people, mostly former workers or their descendants' (p. 362).

4 Greece backed out of the project for economic reasons; as for Cyprus, the island's divisive political situation, which involves the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities, is presumably hardly conducive to the making of a common heritage.

5 That is, 'St Mark's land', from the patron saint of Venice.

working-class culture and political identity. Somewhat in the wake of Crespi d'Adda, which is only thirty kilometres away, it is applying to be recognised by UNESCO as an organically evolved cultural landscape for its tangible and intangible heritage; however, it is not yet on the tentative list. The municipality can be taken as an exemplary case study of a city committed to enhancing its industrial heritage, which saw the localisation of five major made-in-Italy companies in the last century — Breda, Campari, Ercole Marelli, Falck and Magneti Marelli — without neglecting the working-class and collective ethos of its material and intangible heritage. For Sesto San Giovanni, the UNESCO candidacy may act as the catalyst for an overall reassessment of its heritage. For this purpose, the city brand for the twenty-first century will hopefully combine corporate narratives into new forms of participatory storytelling from multiple urban stakeholders, addressing the potentialities for cultural heritage tourism against evolving European and global cultural action frameworks (Kaminski, Benson & Arnold 2014; Panzini 2015).

### Study design methodology

The contribution of new media to the opening of social spaces can be explored through different perspectives that address social imaginaries, discourses and practices in turn (Langlois 2013; Georgakopolou & Spilioti 2016). While attentive to all interdisciplinary insights, this research nonetheless prioritises the impact that new media have on the discursive interpretation of heritage, exploring how they can innovate its understanding and uses in the social, political, economic and cultural life of communities. For this reason it draws on both discourse analysis and heritage studies (Harrison 2013), keeping an eye on the declared values of the UNESCO World Heritage Site. Qualitative analysis is applied to the types of linguistic evidence that can be retrieved on the digital platforms on which a given location is described and experienced, from institutional websites and tourist information sites to social media and mobile apps.

The textual selection is mostly comprised of website material, social media status updates (like Facebook posts and tweets) and mobile app content. Only part of it is translated into English since the main publics are local communities of Italian native speakers. In this context the main function of digital platforms, and especially of both Facebook and Twitter, seems to be that of keeping up interest in a place by engaging local stakeholders in an ongoing, co-constructed conversation. We can regard social media as bulletin boards on which events are announced and media content circulated and, simultaneously, as resonance boxes of largely affective and mercurial publics (Papacharissi 2015).

As for storytelling in the heritage sector as a means of cultural transference (Giovagnoli 2013), it is not hard to see how (re)scripting narratives across media

platforms may turn into an opportunity for local communities to regain the *genius loci* from a more demotic and inclusive historical perspective that will hopefully surpass the scope of mere informative descriptions. Precious memories (a part, in themselves, of intangible heritage) and creative insights into the uses of heritage in the present can be shared across different groups (for example, cultural heritage tourists), who are thus invited to participate in the discursive making and remaking of a locality (Paganoni 2015a) and in its preservation. The emergence of these new social formations and networks has an impact on real communities and on how they interpret their material and intangible heritage to the world and future generations (Kalay, Kvan & Affleck 2008). Finally, engaging stakeholders in heritage protection and promotion gives rise to 'new civic vernaculars' (Papacharissi 2012), in which the renewal of communicative practices should mirror the delisting of heritage as an elitist form of cultural consumption and, thanks to the appeal of a vital notion of what heritage means for the present, reach much wider publics than previously.

Whenever necessary, this chapter provides the relevant translation from the original Italian. The textual selection is nonetheless indicative not only of the bilingualism that characterises the institutional arena of a non-English speaking European country but also, at a deeper level, of a discrepancy between different social imaginaries as this manifests itself in discourse. Local administrators are required to use English to communicate with supranational bodies like UNESCO, and to connect with global networks and brand cities for international tourists, investors, talent, sports and cultural events. However, civic interaction with, and within, local communities takes place in Italian and pursues intents that need to be connected or reconnected with the official urban management discourse. The influence of these intended publics on the ways in which the meanings of heritage are discursively constructed and negotiated with global and local stakeholders will be illustrated in what follows.

### **Cultural heritage and new media communication**

The analysis in this chapter will concentrate on the ways in which the three selected locations in Lombardy — Crespi d'Adda, Bergamo and Sesto San Giovanni — promote their heritage through new media, with a special focus on the linguistic devices, discursive strategies and rhetorical patterns being employed. While UNESCO's assumptions about the timeless value of world heritage and cultural landscape form the most consistent and conventional rhetorical refrain, this chapter will also pay attention to the theme of economic development and social inclusion. This theme, which is often incorporated in heritage discourse, seems to provide a reality check on the 'aestheticisation' of the past. It is also important to be aware of the financial burden that heritage preservation represents today for local administrations constantly struggling with dwindling budgets.

On the UNESCO website, the World Heritage Site of Crespi d'Adda 'has conserved much of its integrity as all aspects of the industrial town remain well preserved including factories, housing and services' (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, n.d.). The visitor's appreciation of its beauty is enhanced by the grid pattern of tidy streets and the modular architecture of buildings. Hierarchical roles are clearly inscribed in the spatial organisation: the workers' detached houses are identical, all with a garden and an orchard, while supervisors and the director were assigned creatively designed villas in a more elevated position and the Crespi family lived in a castle-like mansion. Current residents and occasional tourists seem to appreciate the site's layout, which does not generate the panopticon effect of surveillance but rather a sense of nostalgia for bygone days. At the far end of the village we find the cemetery, dominated by the mausoleum of the Crespi family in the shape of a pyramid decorated with the three statues of Faith, Hope and Charity, thus ideally embracing all the deceased. At the entrance of the cotton textile factory, the clock over the door was stopped when the last work shift ended on 20 December 2003.

Whenever the incompatibility between timelessness and disruptive change cannot be reconciled, the narrative, almost reluctantly avowing the inevitability of history, adroitly conjures up positive change to counteract dereliction:

Although the village remains *intact*, *changing economic and social conditions*, particularly a declining population, pose a *potential threat* to its continued survival. This *threat* might be contained and mitigated by *recent positive changes* with a demographic and socio-economic plan. (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, n.d., emphases added)

Unlike other company towns that were closer to big cities, Crespi d'Adda's surprising stability as a time capsule throughout history was warranted by its 'isolated setting', its geographical encapsulation at the confluence of the Adda and Brembo rivers. Nonetheless, 'some change has occurred' and 'the alteration in industrial practice has resulted in a change of use for many buildings' (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, n.d.). By replacing subject + transitive verb constructions with abstract nouns ('change', 'alteration') in the subject position followed by intransitive verbs ('occur', 'result'), the narrative glosses over a more detailed account of the site's recent history and elides agency, especially on the workers' part. Ultimately, the main actors are Crespi's enlightened founder, Cristoforo Benigno Crespi, and his son Silvio — a role as protagonists that the UNESCO WHC website makes explicit by indexing them as agent complements in passive constructions or subjects in active sentences.

The village was founded *by Cristoforo Benigno Crespi*, to house the workers in his textile factory and its final form was developed *by Cristoforo's son, Silvio Benigno Crespi*, who had studied the functioning of German and English cotton mills. *He* developed the town to provide comfortable housing and services in order to maintain a stable workforce and prevent industrial strife. (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, n.d., emphases added)

The celebration of the founder's exceptional personality is echoed in a blog post on a local tourism website only partially translated into English: 'Il genio dell'industria cotoniera, probabilmente fattore genetico [The genius of the cotton industry, probably a genetic factor]' (Milano da Vedere, n.d.).

A more complex presentation of the Crespi owners is provided by Crespi d'Adda UNESCO, the institutional website managed by the municipality of Capriate San Gervasio, of which Crespi d'Adda is a neighbourhood.<sup>6</sup> Despite the less cursory historical recounts that the website offers, the dominant place narrative nonetheless continues to minimise not only historical change but also the 'decline' of the site and the current controversies as to regeneration plans, which risk compromising the promise of its 'rebirth'. The narrative perhaps aims to sound consensual, but the overall effect is not totally convincing. The rhetoric of timelessness would seem to imply a lack of bitter social conflict which does not reflect the true scenario.

Crespi d'Adda is the most complete and *best-preserved* company town in Europe. It has a soul of its own, *essentially untouched by time*. A visit can transport you out of the boundaries of time and space. Crespi d'Adda *hasn't changed* from the 1930s — the houses, the urban structure, the boundaries are *all the same*. (Villaggio Crespi, n.d., emphases added)

The same discursive stance, realised by an impersonal voice addressing a general 'you', is apparent on *Villaggio Crespi*, a website maintained by the Crespi Cultura Association, which runs guided tours of the site for international tourists and is translated into French, German and Spanish, besides English, with the addition of Portuguese and Japanese.

The Crespi Village was effectively a *complete and self-sufficient microcosm*. (Villaggio Crespi, n.d., emphasis added)

The Crespi Village is *a place where time has stopped*: in fact, Crespi d'Adda has perfectly preserved many signs of its past. A careful visitor will notice how *this place* — together with its history, its houses, its factory and its river — *can bring you back in time*: to the times when the founders of the village — the Crespi family — succeeded to give birth to an ideal company town, where they combined the workers' needs with the entrepreneur's needs. The factory, which ceased to operate in 2003, is closed for public [*sic*]. Today the building that used to be a cotton mill is not equipped as a *museum*, but it has kept its *fascinating architecture*, which *you can admire* from the main street. (Villaggio Crespi, n.d., emphases added)

This kind of language sounds oblivious not only to the passing of time but also to the class divide that connoted the organisation of factory work and the ways in which contemporary publics experience Crespi today, impressed by its beauty but also aware

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6 The municipality of Capriate San Gervasio runs the information point open inside the village, from Thursday to Sunday.

of its decline.<sup>7</sup> The choice of words and phrases such as 'museum' and 'fascinating architecture' (and elsewhere, 'enchanted', 'extraordinary', 'ideal', 'idyllic', 'superb') promotes the characteristic disembodied tourist gaze ('you can admire') which is recurrent throughout. In fact, navigating the website allows users to retrieve a few pages (in Italian) that illustrate meetings and cultural activities carried out with local residents in order to breathe new life into the village, but the predominant impression is that of a kind of storytelling deeply steeped in the past. Crespi Cultura has no Facebook page, while Crespi d'Adda UNESCO publishes status updates on its Facebook and Twitter pages which mostly proceed from, or include the participation of, institutional sources and the mainstream press. The main actors in this top-down narrative are the municipality of Capriate San Gervasio, the Lombardy regional government, the Italian Minister for Culture, politicians, artists, art critics and journalists. Crespi d'Adda UNESCO also has an official channel on YouTube, where a few educational videos in Italian and in English are uploaded. However, traffic on all these social media is still very low.

By contrast, the communicative exchanges on CrespiLove's website and social media pages are intended to align themselves with a different audience, made up of ordinary, mostly young citizens. The official CrespiLovers are all people with very close links to the region, mostly though not exclusively in their twenties or early thirties, whose motto is: 'We don't recount history, we live it!' The first-person-plural narrator is a collective fictive subject whose outspoken commitment reveals that the debate about the future fate of the site concerns the citizens of the area and looks beyond the maintenance of the place as an open-air heritage museum towards the 'sustainable tourist and economic development' of Crespi.

The association, which is painfully aware of the frail beauty of the village as well as of its current decline despite its WHS status, is networked with the most significant transnational heritage bodies — the European Federation of Associations of Industrial and Technical Heritage [E-FAITH], the European Route of Industrial Heritage [ERIH], the International Committee for the Conservation of the Industrial Heritage [TICCIH]. Through a well-designed website and social media pages, it promotes events but also gives space to the memories and voices of the village's citizens, especially older ones. The videos of these interviews are uploaded to a playlist on YouTube. Subscription to an e-newsletter is available and the use of a state-of-

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7 This post, published on 16 November 2014 on *Italian Notes*, a travel blog kept by a Danish couple (see <http://italiannotes.com/unesco-world-heritage-lombardy>), is quite frank in its perception of the place: 'We had gone out of our way to visit this "remarkably intact" shrine for industrial history, and were more than a little disappointed to find the place half dead and deserted. Company owners caring for their employers by providing housing, shops, doctors and child care is obviously a thing of the past'.



the-art downloadable app<sup>8</sup> is recommended to explore the surrounding areas along the Adda river. Quite understandably, social media traffic is higher for CrespiLove than for Crespi d'Adda UNESCO. Of special interest are the updates on the ongoing negotiation between the municipality and the private investing group that bought the factory ground and has drafted a regeneration plan. The project still lacks general consensus but is nonetheless regarded as a vital infusion of money, creativity and opportunities into the Crespi community which local powers alone would be unable to provide.

Turning now to the transnational site that sees Bergamo as the leading city of the UNESCO nomination project, it can be observed that communication via new media is still very limited. Though the Terra di San Marco association's website introduces all the localities involved in the nomination, content is only partly translated into English, while the association's Facebook page does not seem to attract a lot of users and is not even networked to the website. A Twitter profile has not yet been opened. Besides other city-related blogs (for example, 'The City Hub'), mention of the UNESCO nomination is also found on the city's official tourism website, which uses mildly ironic language about Bergamo's pronounced Catholic identity to date: 'Building them caused eight excommunications by the local clergy, but it was worth it: today the massive defensive Walls of Bergamo were nominated to become a UNESCO World Heritage site' (VisitBergamo, n.d.).

The entire discursive construction of the nominated property is quite interesting, in the sense that the amount of knowledge it demonstrates about local history, with its interregional and transnational connections over the centuries, vastly exceeds the ordinary citizen's competence. It also challenges parochialism, in particular a kind of self-complacency with the city's heritage which is too often the dominant discourse on VisitBergamo.

Bergamo wouldn't be the same without its *impressive* Venetian Walls. This *spectacular* circuit is over six km long: it's the *perfect* place to take a romantic walk and enjoy *wonderful* sunsets, and it has been enclosing the beauties of the Upper Town for more than four centuries. (VisitBergamo, n.d., emphases added)

Much more daring in its scope, the UNESCO candidacy is better articulated but also complex and sophisticated, especially for its involvement with Croatia, a recent European Union acquisition (1 July 2013), and Montenegro, a country which is currently applying for EU membership and is somehow off the beaten track of mass

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8 The name of the app, 'Addentrarsi', plays with the name of the Adda river and the meaning of the verb 'addentrarsi', which is 'to go deeply into'. Images were acquired by drones and combined with 3D modelling of historical buildings, appropriately georeferenced and inserted in an orthophoto map. In this way, app users are able to take georeferenced pictures of anything within the natural and historic area and report problems, thus actively contributing to heritage and environmental preservation.

tourism. The network is 'the focus of a project of transnational integration' (Comune di Bergamo 2016, p. 322), announced by all the mayors involved in the candidacy in the very first pages of the nomination dossier, where the theme of European integration is foregrounded.

The distinctive feature of the Serenissima was the organization of a multinational state, made up of several varied peoples united in their diversity. A preview of Europe to come? We like to think so. (p. 3)

Invented by a local web design agency, the logo aims to provide a visual equivalent of the making of this transnational set of localities.

*A trait d'union* that ideally combines the Venetian fortifications built between the 15<sup>th</sup> and the 17<sup>th</sup> century in nine cities between Italy, Croatia and Montenegro. An application that tracks an invisible line from Bergamo to Kotor, connecting these states united by the presence of the precious works of defence of the Republic of Venice. (Woodoo Studio, n.d.)

At a thematic level we can observe that, throughout the nomination dossier and with respect to the variables of each locality, cultural heritage is related to key concepts like sustainable tourism, economic development and investment. In urban management parlance and in the policy discourse of the European Union, it is common to regard heritage as a driver for the economy, which is still recovering from the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis. In the case of Bergamo, the contribution of new media to the effective implementation of the project's goals through actions of citizen empowerment will need to be tested by time and in the plurality of geographical, social and political contexts connected by the UNESCO nomination. At the time of writing, the municipality is still enjoying the success of the 'Abbraccio delle Mura' ('Embracing on the Walls') initiative on Sunday 3 July 2016. This event called up 11 507 volunteers along the perimeter of the Venetian fortifications, a 4 kilometre-long human chain — a feat that set a new Guinness World Record. Social media were highly instrumental to the success of the effort.<sup>9</sup>

A dense and irregular settlement numbering 82 000 inhabitants, Sesto San Giovanni lies to the northeast of Milan, to which it is well connected thanks to major roads, railways and an underground train line that goes straight to Piazza Duomo (Cathedral Square), the heart of the Lombardy capital. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Sesto quickly became a major industrial centre in the steelmaking, mechanical engineering and electromechanical sectors, ranking as the fifth-largest manufacturing town by the end of the Second World War. Its landscape of sprawling factories was nonetheless interspersed with architectural attempts to provide some kind of urban

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9 See 'L'Abbraccio delle Mura — Bergamo è nel Guinness dei Primati', the press release published on 6 July 2016, on the municipal website (<https://www.comune.bergamo.it>).

design and decent housing, like the Falck workers' village, the first example of a Fordist village in Italy, and the adjacent church, San Giorgio alle Ferriere (at the iron mills).

However, the industrial decline that took place during the second half of the century and led to the closing down or downsizing of its major factories by the mid-1990s forced the city to turn from a heavy-industry district into a postmodern network city, rooted in the global flows of information technology, knowledge and people. Though painful, this change has made Sesto aware of the tangible and intangible value of its industrial heritage, an increasingly mainstream trend in Europe where, for example, the Council of Europe designated 2015 the European Industrial and Technical Heritage Year. Now a part of the local government of Greater Milan, Sesto San Giovanni is an interesting embodiment of labour culture within yesterday's factories and today's service industries. The municipality is fully committed to urban regeneration; protected green and recreational areas; the creative reuse of industrial archaeology; and the creation of museums, libraries and archives documenting its past, without forgetting the connections with the present and the need to involve the local community in the remaking of the place and its recollections (Mah 2012). Memory becomes a resource to deploy when attempting both to heal the wounds of the past and, hopefully, to bridge the gap with the present:

With the closure of the large factories, the idea of collecting, organizing, highlighting and handing down the memories of industrial and working-class Sesto began to make headway. Not just to preserve the history of the past, but to strengthen the community of Sesto San Giovanni's feeling of belonging to a cohesive body, so that the townspeople could share the stages covered, take new steps and reorganize themselves for the re-launch of their town and its area ... The town has started to tell its story, its history and present-day relevance. A process of regeneration has thus been set in motion, the generation of a collective awareness, a highly vigilant, active and receptive awareness, as you will discover in the initiatives we describe in this section. (Sesto San Giovanni per l'UNESCO, n.d.)

The application process to become a UNESCO World Heritage Site in the 'Organically Evolved Landscape' category began in April 2006. As a result, the candidacy has greatly encouraged the municipality to improve its digital presence in order to raise awareness about the project.

Sesto San Giovanni's web portal is in Italian, with the exception of the pages dealing with the UNESCO candidacy, which are only partially available in English and are explicitly dedicated to the branding of its industrial heritage. 'Sesto San Giovanni per l'UNESCO' on Facebook is also only in Italian, but the descriptions of heritage places in the photo galleries have been translated into English. With the progress of the bid for World Heritage Site listing, the municipality intends to translate other sections of the promotional material. The Facebook page is an active platform, used to announce cultural and leisure events (for example, guided walking tours of the city's

industrial heritage, group bike rides, photo contests and so on). However, at present, it addresses a mainly local public and does not reach international visitors and heritage tourists, who could help Sesto gain international visibility rather than continue to be included in descriptions of Greater Milan on tourism portals and guidebooks (Provincia di Milano 2008).

The interactive map of Sesto San Giovanni shows the five industrial areas the municipality can be divided into, based on the presence of the factories that were the backbone of the city throughout the twentieth century. These were: Breda, Falck (with two main sites) and Marelli (three industrial groups active in the mechanical engineering, steelmaking and electromechanical industries, respectively), as well as Campari, founded in 1860, a leading company in the global branded beverage industry. By clicking on each name, users have access to a more detailed map of that specific area, with its main heritage sites and a brief description of them. While this taxonomy mirrors the municipality's commitment to mapping and listing its heritage in view of the UNESCO bid, a more interactive and customisable version of Sesto San Giovanni's heritage can be experienced by downloading the free 'Sesto City of Factories' and 'North of Milan Urban Metropolitan Museum' apps. Users can also contribute to a participative geoblog ('MappaMI') or enjoy the psychogeographical map of the area, which is progressively growing.<sup>10</sup>

Among the initiatives to collect public memories to support Sesto San Giovanni's nomination as a World Heritage Site, special mention should be made of Sestopedia, a sort of municipal Wikipedia or online encyclopaedia (at present, only in Italian), which is co-authored by citizens willing to share their stories and memories. As with other rebranding initiatives launched by the municipality, the project intends to build a new identity for the city by giving voice to its citizenry, especially those ordinary people and workers that made Sesto what it is today, often through tragic periods in the history of the nation (like Fascism and the two World Wars). This is promoted as the true spirit of place branding versus mere urban marketing: 'authenticity versus image — basically, the content of collective memories and human work, not simply the preservation of the container' (Fossa 2015, p. 77).

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10 'Psychogeography developed among European and American avant-garde revolutionary groups in the late 1950s and 1960s. It was later taken up in a range of cultural contexts and has come to be associated with creative, intimate and historically attuned explorations of hidden places and narratives of place. Its rediscovery in the 1980s has "continued into the 2000s with the emergence of Urban Explorations"' (Bonnett 2013). In June 2014, together with the board of PMVL, Parco Media Valle Lambro, a green corridor 6 billion square metres in area along the Lambro river, the municipality of Sesto San Giovanni joined the *Exercises in Psychogeography* (<https://esercizidipsicogeografia.wordpress.com>), whose participatory mapping could be found on GoogleMaps Engine before this web service was discontinued. The *Exercises*, with their explorations of land and water paths in the metropolitan city, were repeated on 1 and 2 October 2016.

A successful initiative in this direction was launched in December 2012 with the intriguing title of '16 no(n)ni per l'UNESCO' ('Sixteen grandparents for UNESCO', a title that also contains an allusion to '16:9', the common high-definition video size, as video production was a central part of the project). In a city where almost all of the inhabitants 'have elderly relatives who worked at the large factories that have since been abandoned' (Fossa 2015, p. 64), the project won a Lombardy Region grant for culture and social cohesion and succeeded in making the landscape of memories alive and meaningful for the young generation, building a bridge of empathy between real actors in the past and in the present (Paganoni 2015a). In 2016 a more recent project, entitled 'I racconti del villaggio Falck' ('The Falck village's tales'), also subsidised by the regional government, saw first the exhibition of the old photographs collected by female residents and then the publication of a booklet of memories and pictures. The project is now continuing with footage and interviews of the village's residents, involving Sesto's middle-school students.

Though the municipality also encourages citizen engagement through the use of participatory media like social networks, wikis, locative media and apps, the future of Sesto seems to be considerably beyond ordinary people's control. In May 2016 Renzo Piano, the world-famous Italian architect who designed one of London's iconic skyscrapers, the Shard, announced that he would withdraw from the regeneration plan of the former Falck area, one of the largest urban brownfields in Europe, located in Sesto but privately owned. Though the municipality has denied it, the national press has alleged that this is due, first, to the entrance of Saudi Arabian investors, the Fawaz brothers, into what was originally conceived of as a much praised 'City of Health and Research' and, second, to alterations to Piano's original project with the addition of a huge shopping and entertainment mall. The latest news (Bettoni 2016) has it that Piano is back in the project and in charge both of designing the train station that will provide access to the City of Health and of the regeneration plan of the nearby square. The political debate about the fate of heritage and heritage sites thus still remains open.

### Concluding remarks

The description in this chapter of how three Italian localities in the Lombardy region — Crespi d'Adda, Bergamo and Sesto San Giovanni — promote their cultural landscape as present, future and potential World Heritage sites and communicate with local communities intends to exemplify the several ways in which new media can mobilise and engage networked publics (Papacharissi 2015). In the three cases here investigated, both institutional/public actors and private/third-party stakeholders have resorted to new media, especially to the social web and mobile technology, in order to gather publics around places that are being discursively reinvented in line with UNESCO's guidelines.

In the case of Crespi d'Adda, the analysis shows how new media communication could be used in more meaningful and participatory ways and how, instead, heritage promotion often falls back on the moves of Authorised Heritage Discourse (Smith 2006), which is an essentially expert-led and managerial kind of discourse. By contrast, we have seen that a local civic association, CrespiLove, has been able to breathe new life into the community, by means of effective communication on the internet and social networks. Having won the nomination process and now awaiting evaluation, the transnational site of the Venetian works of defence, which includes the city of Bergamo as the leading centre in the project, appears to be an 'invented place', still quite at a remove from ordinary citizens' experience of their region, thus obliging them to think of themselves as Europeans rather than as locals. The extent to which the project will effectively involve ordinary citizens from local communities, promote social inclusion and offer job opportunities to people (especially young ones) beyond the privileged niche of politicians, academics and professionals who traditionally control public discourse in what continues to be quite a conservative city, is still to be tested.

With the UNESCO nomination still underway and the several complexities that affect its urban regeneration plans, Sesto San Giovanni has nonetheless seriously invested in new media communication to promote citizen participation in the reinvention of the city's identity through its industrial heritage. Whether the recent turn of events with the announced infusion of Saudi Arabian capital will polarise the political debate is still to be seen, but it is a sobering reminder of the fact that the so-called collapse of the public and private spheres in new media communication still keeps the most important decisional processes in the city away from citizens.

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## Making Publics, Making Places

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### Links

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European Federation of Associations of Industrial and Technical Heritage [E-FAITH], <<http://www.e-faith.org>>.

European Route of Industrial Heritage [ERIH], <<http://www.erih.net>>.

The International Committee for the Conservation of the Industrial Heritage [TICCIH], <<http://ticcih.org>>.

World Heritage Centre, <<http://whc.unesco.org>>.

#### *Lombardy*

In Lombardia (the region's official tourism website), <<http://www.in-lombardia.com>>.

Navigli Lombardi, <<http://www.naviglilombardi.it>>.

#### *Crespi d'Adda*

Associazione Crespi d'Adda [CrespiLove], <<http://www.crespidadda.it>>.

Crespi d'Adda UNESCO, <<http://crespidaddaunesco.org>>.

On Facebook: <<https://www.facebook.com/CrespidaddaUNESCO>>.

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