

CULTURAL HERITAGE IN THE DIGITAL ECOSYSTEM Matera 2019 European Capital of Culture

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Abstract – The article intends to highlight the role of multi-semiotic representation in the branding of cultural heritage in the digital ecosystem. The case study is represented by the city of Matera in Southern Italy that has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1993 and is now one of the two 2019 European Capitals of Culture (ECoC) with the Bulgarian city of Plovdiv. Among the reasons why the Italian city was awarded the title at the end of an intense competition were the visionary quality of heritage branding and the strategic use of digital media for citizen engagement. In order to illustrate these winning features, a critical analytic approach to discourse will be applied to key project documents to detect salient linguistic patterns and discursive strategies that encode the socio-cognitive features and core values of Matera 2019’s programme. The analysis will then continue with a selection of verbal and visual materials published on the English version of the Matera 2019 website. The multimodal discourse analysis of these materials will observe how the municipality and its stakeholders have managed to embody a convincing heritage narrative and propose a model of social entrepreneurship in which semiotic choices play a key role in incorporating the city’s vision and values that were first articulated in the documentation supporting its candidacy.

Keywords: cultural heritage; social entrepreneurship; Critical Discourse Studies; multimodality; Matera 2019 ECoC.

1. Introduction

The paper intends to reflect on the role of discourse and multimodality in the branding of cultural heritage in the digital ecosystem. To this purpose, it will focus on Southern Italy and the successful example of the city of Matera – both a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1993 and one of the two 2019 European Capitals of Culture with the Bulgarian city of Plovdiv. The reasons why the city was awarded the title on 17 October 2014¹ included the inspiring vision for the future of its heritage and the strategic use of digital media for citizen engagement by means of a bottom-up approach that facilitated participation and collective creation (Paganoni 2015b, c). The approach stood out as truly innovative, somewhat unexpectedly from a city of “crumbling beauty” (Tondo 2018, n.p.), burdened with an unflattering image that had been constantly associated with backwardness throughout nineteenth-century Italian history.²

The following analysis is inspired by current redefinitions of culture in EU policy discourse as a driver for social cohesion and community development, whereby “the issue of cultural capital [*works*] as the basis of a new paradigm for entrepreneurship and

¹ The five other finalists were Cagliari, Lecce, Perugia/Assisi, Ravenna and Siena.

² Matera’s appalling conditions were narrated in *Christ Stopped at Eboli* (1945) by Carlo Levi, exiled to Basilicata by Mussolini. After the war, “in 1952 Italy’s prime minister, Alcide De Gasperi proclaimed a state of emergency in Matera, described by Rome as ‘a national disgrace’, relocating the Sassi’s inhabitants” (Tondo 2018, n.p.).

innovation research in the European context” (Jenniskens *et al.* 2011, p. 40). Within this research scope, the main focus here is directed at the relationship between cultural heritage and place branding through a critical and multimodal discourse-analytic approach that investigates Matera 2019’s project documents and a selection of visual and verbal materials published on the official website dedicated to the event.³ The Matera 2019 website was launched by the Matera-Basilicata Foundation when the city’s candidacy was still underway and, as such, it provides an accurate record of its several steps and turning points. The recognition of the value of cultural capital is weighed against the EU’s intent to harmonise different identities through cultural policy actions and the risks of commodification intrinsic to place branding as a form of marketing.

In common parlance, a place’s cultural capital can be defined as a multidimensional and dynamic asset that tangibles and intangibles, private and public stakeholders, government and citizens all contribute to shaping through promotion, investments and dedicated actions. EU policy documents generally agree on the positive contribution of heritage to cultural capital for the achievement of “smarter, more sustainable and more inclusive growth” (Dümcke, Gnedovsky 2013, p. 4). At the same time, however, they register an awareness of 1. the political implications of heritage in an age of revamped nationalisms and, therefore, the need to invent inclusive narratives while safeguarding local identity; 2. the difficulty to combine heritage preservation and valorisation with economic development when the public sector is affected by severe budget cuts; 3. the limited impact of traditional tourism marketing strategies in rekindling entrepreneurship at a local level and in participatory ways.

The overcoming of such a standstill seems to be the undercurrent of recent European guidelines that emphasise the *economic* impact of cultural heritage and the *social* value of entrepreneurship in cultural undertakings that are conducive to inclusion beyond profit generation (Dümcke, Gnedovsky 2013). These outlines on the management of cultural capital in EU policy discourse may help interpret the success of the Italian city of Matera – first a UNESCO World Heritage Site and now the 2019 European Capital of Culture. From the start, the reinvention of heritage carried out by the city of Matera, and especially its committed web team of young people, has relied on the strategic use of digital communication to facilitate participation, share ideas and draft the ECoC project (Matera 2019 Committee 2014). In the years of hard work that led to the award, the web team managed to reach and inspire the majority of citizens in Matera and throughout the Basilicata region, inaugurating new urban practices that will hopefully continue after the event.

In what follows, a social semiotic inquiry, keen on reading the traces of social and cultural processes as they are inscribed in cultural artefacts, will focus on a number of distinctive linguistic, discursive and semiotic aspects that best illustrate Matera’s ability to rebrand the uniqueness of its past as vibrant and open to the future. In particular, the analysis intends to prove the following hypothesis, i.e. that the use of multimodal discourse on the Matera 2019 website has managed to convincingly incorporate the city’s values as they were previously elaborated in its “project discourse as an object of linguistic endeavour” (Sambre 2017, p. 217) through documentation prepared to support and complement its candidacy.

³ Matera 2019 European Capital of Culture, <https://www.matera-basilicata2019.it/en>.

2. Data Set and Methods

Given the tight thematic connection between Matera 2019's project documents and the official website's contents, a suitable methodological toolkit has been identified in the combination of Critical Discourse Studies (Hart, Cap 2014; Flowerdew, Richardson 2018) and Multimodal Discourse Analysis (Kress, van Leeuwen 1996; Kress, van Leeuwen 2001; Iedema 2003; Kress 2010). Critical Discourse Studies espouses an interdisciplinary approach to the interpretation of linguistic phenomena, placing the accent on context, societal processes, power structures and ideology. Multimodal Discourse Analysis adapts Halliday's three metafunctions to semiotic resources other than language that are similarly scrutinised as to their ideational, interactional and compositional levels of meaning.

Accordingly, the first step of this investigation involves the discourse analysis of the final version of the bid book that goes under the name of *Open Future (OF)*,⁴ the European Commission selection panel's final report, motivating the award, and the Matera-Basilicata 2019 Foundation's competition call for the logo. These three documents are all archived on, and retrievable from, the Matera 2019 website. The aim is to detect and discuss salient linguistic patterns and discursive strategies that encode the socio-cognitive features of Matera 2019's branding project and its core values of co-creation, social inclusion and new forms of social entrepreneurship (Paganoni 2015a; Sambre 2017).

The second step addresses a selection of verbal and visual materials published on the Matera 2019 website. A multimodal discourse-analytic approach will be directed to elicit which values and identities are promoted on the website, and how, by the synergy between different modes. Identifying how the three metafunctions of multimodal discourse work in context will shed light on the construction of meaning and the connections with the programmatic statements presented in the project documents. Finally, in adherence to the guiding principle in social semiotics, i.e. the constant interlocution between semiotic modes and societal practices in meaning-making processes, the aim is to show how the municipality and its several stakeholders have managed to embody a convincing narrative of "heritage entrepreneurship" (Pfeilstetter 2015) through their digital communication strategies.

3. Branding Matera's Cultural Heritage

The following sections will first focus on the project documents and then on the official Matera 2019 website. From the start, it should be underlined that the kind of cultural heritage celebrated in the ECoC programme aspires to the successful integration of European ideals, values and history. Such a perspective overrides the more or less nostalgic celebration of the past and its traditions and urges instead the creation of new synergies between the local and European dimensions (Paganoni 2015c). Moreover, it emphasises the contribution of young Europeans to the making of the common house. In the ECoC programme, in other words, the use of cultural heritage is expected to ignite the innovation of discourses and practices.

⁴ Submitted in 2014 by the Matera 2019 Committee, the *Open Future* bid book reworks a prior one that had appeared the year before.

3.1. The Project Documents

The *Open Future* bid book summarises Matera 2019's vision, placing a major emphasis on the rebranding of heritage. The six occurrences of "cultural heritage" are discursively associated with "collective experimentation" (p. 2), "civic innovation" (p. 21), "internationalization" (p. 30), "innovative models of citizen engagement" (p. 37), cultural creativity, accessibility and "future collaboration and exchanges with other European institutions" (p. 51). Moreover, the overarching principle of "radical openness" is linked to "universal sharing" (*OF*, p. 36), underlining the importance of citizen-led innovation, grassroots initiatives and networking in the co-production of knowledge. These core values, which prioritise social power and cultural capital over the aestheticisation of heritage, were recognised in the European Commission's final report that praised the city's willingness:

- (1) to use culture as a propellant for conceiving an open future; strengthen the breadth and diversity of citizens who actively participate in culture; increase Matera's capital of personal relations; engage in a capacity-building programme for socio-cultural operators; build useful and sustainable cultural infrastructure; enhance the city's international visibility and tourism potential and consolidate its leadership in open-data. (European Commission 2014, p. 6)

The last point – "leadership in open-data" – takes a step forward towards the strategic role of digitisation in innovation. In fact, Matera's young and committed web team, which started as a group of volunteers (Paganoni 2015b), was a decisive factor in making the city win the award.

In a nutshell, Matera 2019's project discourse strives to raise up the energy needed to discard binary, and ultimately stereotypical, juxtapositions that have relegated the city and its citizens to a marginal role throughout history, such as *small/great, frugality/wealth, survive/thrive, isolation/connection, backward/progressive, ordinary/elitist*.

- (2) This opportunity is vital for the future of a great many European cities like Matera which, throughout the twentieth century, found themselves on the margins of cultural production. If cultural events of great value can be initiated by the nascent cooperation of a large number of connected citizens, then smaller cities are able to survive and thrive on the markets of culture without being squashed by major cultural capitals. The future will not be won by concentrating major institutions in a handful of cities, but by leveraging existing institutions to mobilise the greatest possible number of people and motivate them to generate culture. (*OF*, p. 1)

Against all odds, social entrepreneurship is made possible by the networking power of the digital ecosystem, the reconciliation of heritage branding with innovation, and the resilient presence and dedication of a number of different actors.

- (3) new paradigms of entrepreneurship (*OF*, p. 2)
- (4) the fastest growth of youth enterprise in the field of culture (*OF*, p. 3)
- (5) teachers, students, artists, academics, entrepreneurs and policymakers (*OF*, p. 5)
- (6) a deep legacy of knowledge, entrepreneurship and spirit of initiative (*OF*, p. 6)
- (7) artists, creatives, innovators, and social entrepreneurs from all across Europe (*OF*, p. 25)
- (8) bolstering innovative entrepreneurship (*OF*, p. 36)
- (9) a community of more than a hundred creative-industry enterprises and associations from Basilicata (*OF*, p. 81)
- (10) The city and region's ability to attract enterprise and investment (*OF*, p. 108)
- (11) a system of co-creation, co-production and artistic/scientific innovation (*OF*, p. 110)

At the cognitive level at least, the socio-cultural and the economic dimensions of heritage are no longer construed as antithetical (i.e. creativity versus growth) but as complementary (Utrecht School for the Arts/HKU 2010). A textual cue is the use of the verb *leverage*, borrowed by the language of economics, when its object references intangible values and cultural assets: “openness” (OF, p. 4), “heritage” (OF, p. 8), “receptiveness” in the reuse of historic buildings (OF, p. 29), “capacity-building activities” (OF, p. 37), “creativity” (OF, p. 86) and “knowledge and experience” (OF, p. 88).

More generally, the core values mentioned in the *Open Future* bid book are in line with the discursive developments of the concept of heritage and the renewed focus on social and cultural entrepreneurship that are endorsed at the wider European level. With regard to this, the main pledge in the bid book is that Matera 2019 will manage to be culturally innovative and reinvent social entrepreneurship in a supranational perspective (Auclair, Fairclough 2015). Since Matera – one of the oldest cities in the world and among the poorest in Southern Italy before its renewal in the nineteen-nineties – has largely been known for its “frugality, courage and resilience that derive directly from its marginality” (OF, p. 20), this intended achievement acquires a special significance. In sum, “[t]oday Matera needs Europe, but Europe also needs Matera” (OF, p. 20).

The same topics are reiterated in the Matera-Basilicata 2019 Foundation’s mission statement,⁵ as reported in the *Open Future* bid book:

- (12) the Foundation is keen to leverage creativity to attract and make the most of new talents and investments; to implement a new model of European-wide cultural citizenship based on co-creation, coproduction and sharing artistic and scientific practices; to foster social inclusion through art and culture; to enhance competencies and broaden the network of international cooperation accessible by the local cultural scene through capacity-building initiatives; and to promote social, technological and cultural innovation across all sectors (including tourism). (OF, p. 86)

Once again, the narrative of progress underpinning Matera’s ECoC project is discursively interwoven with the lexis of participation (*co-creation, coproduction, sharing, inclusion, cooperation*) and that of cultural creativity that coalesce into an “experiential future” promoted by means of “multisensory marketing” (Sambre 2017, p. 217). It should be mentioned at this point that it was “Matera’s bold and visionary proposal” (OF, p. 24) that captured the appreciation of the European Commission’s selection panel.

- (13) The panel appreciated the strategic analysis of Matera, as a small to medium sized European city, with a relatively passive audience for culture brought in from major cities. Its aim of being at the forefront of a movement stripping away the barriers to culture, especially through new technologies and learning, is *visionary*. (European Commission 2014, p. 15, *emphasis added*)

What is promised is an “extraordinary visual and sensory punch” (OF, p. 70), where “collective experiences will be co-constructed along not only traditional visual perception but also including auditory and emotional sensations” (Sambre 2017, p. 227).

⁵ The Matera-Basilicata 2019 Foundation was set up in 2014 as the governing body of the Matera 2019 European Capital of Culture project, together with cultural operators, local administrators and citizens. In consonance with the *Open Future* mission, its activity will be extended to the year 2022, as the renewal brought about by the 2019 event is expected to generate further positive developments. It is to be noted that the Foundation was established before Matera’s victory was announced.

3.2. *Matera 2019's Official Website*

In light of these discursive insights gleaned from Matera 2019's project documents, the analysis will now turn to the semiotic features of the official website that has been promoting the event since the first steps of the ECoC candidacy. Such is the wealth of multisensory and immersive activities carried out in the city and elsewhere, in partnership with a number of European actors, that the focus on the website alone may appear too narrow. Nonetheless, the project documents and the Matera 2019 website's multimodal contents are closely related, as they draw from the same original inspiration and share the same socio-cognitive discourse models. In particular, both are shaped by volitional future orientation and spatio-temporal conceptualisations (Moore 2014; Sambre 2017), whereby a new, more positive relationship with future time is inaugurated by a renewed experience of place. Through "a metonymy-metaphor continuum" (Moore 2014, p. 221) Matera manages to condense the whole of Europe in itself.

- (14) The history of Matera, like the history of Europe itself, is a story of adaptation to disruptive change. Through Continuity and Disruptions, Matera offers itself to Europe as a place of collective meditation on the burden of shame as a positive impulse – a process of collective self-examination, self-criticism and self-improvement, which can lead to a new strength and optimism for the future. (*OF*, p. 65)

Among the distinctive elements of the website special attention will be paid to the dynamic logo, the "Themes" section, and the "Join the Community" page as most emblematic of the semiotic choices that were carried out to brand Matera's cultural heritage in an innovative way.

The most effective graphic interpretation of Matera 2019's *Open Future* theme (again a spatial metaphor of time) is expressed by the logo (Figure 1). The current one, which won the Foundation's call in February 2016 and superseded a previous static icon, is abstract, dynamic (changeable according to the context) and presented in saturated colours. In the homepage, where it first appears above the navigation menu, the logo is also animated as a sequence of flashing green, purple, blue, pink and red rectangles. Quite interestingly, it was developed from a stock postcard view of the city with its earth-hued stone houses, doors and windows. Five rectangular shapes were extrapolated, coloured and given such proportions as to fit within an invisible golden spiral (the so-called Fibonacci Spiral), a shape that provides a sense of harmonious proportions. An instance of conventional spatial visuality, beautiful but otherwise doomed to immutability and decline, was thus turned into a vibrant metaphor of a changing and creative future. Each rectangle, besides, has been associated with one of the five main subthemes, "Ancient Future", "Continuity and Disruptions", "Reflections and Connections", "Utopias and Dystopias", "Roots and Routes".



Figure 1
Matera 2019 logo (© Matera-Basilicata 2019 Foundation).



At the ideational level, the logo emphasises the intention to reinvent and rebrand the city of Matera by going beyond the surface of the image (and commodifying vision) to perceive a deeper geometrical structure. Rooted in the laws of geometry and steeped in tradition, Matera's hardcore values are revealed as pliant to change. A case in point is the spiral, which can lend itself to being read as a visual image of cyclic time but is open-ended. Interactionally, the animated sequence of shapes and mathematical symbolism engages viewers' attention unconventionally and invites an exploration of the website and its contents that will manage to go beyond stereotypical notions of Matera. Compositionally, since the colours are taken up in the website's different sections, the logo acts as a cohesive device around the "Open Future" theme.

Modular spatiality is also perceivable in the rectangular image occupying the lower part of the header below the logo (Figure 2).



Figure 2
Matera 2019 header (© Matera-Basilicata 2019 Foundation).

In this case, the spiral is repeated three times as a thin white line that is inscribed in the main visual narrative. Centre-stage and advertising the visitor pass, aptly named "Matera Passport", is a curly-haired young man wearing goggles and seeing the old (the Lanfranchi Palace Museum of Art) and the new (a young woman opening her arms) simultaneously. This young man is facing viewers at a horizontal angle, a semiotic strategy that should increase engagement. However, because of the anti-mimetic character of the visual composition, it is evident that the young man is not actually seeing his viewers. This deliberate lack of interaction makes his split vision more inward-looking and metaphysical, in line with the spiral. Arguably, this multi-layered artefact resemioticises the core values of Matera's project into a symbolic "low modality" image (Kress, van Leeuwen 1996, p. 160)⁶ that invites viewers to discard preconceptions and decommodify vision to espouse alternative, even divergent ways of seeing. The concept expressed by the logo and elaborated in the project documents – an open future for Matera as a result of the community's radical reinterpretation of the meanings and potential of cultural heritage – is thus connected with the website's contents.

The five subthemes occupy a dedicated page (Table 1, *emphasis added*). Although each has its own specific goals and is marked by different pictorial elements and a distinctive colour palette, the page can be read as a whole multimodal narrative. Like the project documents, this narrative is committed to the discursive negotiation of opposite values, represented by way of oxymorons ("Ancient Future", and in the body of the writing "*Festina lente*") and antithetical binomials ("Continuity and Disruptions",

⁶ According to the two scholars' discussion of visual modality, which can range from a high to a low level, images shift from higher to lower modality when they discard naturalistic criteria of representation in the attempt to favour more abstract ones.

“Reflections and Connections”, “Utopias and Dystopias” and “Roots and Routes”). The same topics intertwine across the five sections, going back to Pythagorean mathematics and cosmology to reach today’s “young people”. Emerging from a distant past, Matera’s heritage is still anchored to, when not burdened by traditional habits, a stance which is linguistically realised by the combination of the present perfect with adverbs of time and frequency (“have often hindered”, “has always been”, “recently [...] has had). However, Matera is not resigning to the present (“Matera’s relationship with modernity is conflicting”, “the city is still trying”). The ECoC event is expected to propel the city into the future (“for the coming decades”). The spatio-temporal conceptualisation of the city turns Matera into a political lab for forms of active citizenship and social entrepreneurship that will inspire best practices across Europe (“at the European level”, “the inability of many European countries”, “throughout Europe”, “many other rural regions of Europe”).

<i>Subtheme</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Image</i>
Ancient Future	The cultural projects contained in the “Ancient Future” section allow for a careful reflection on the millennia-long relationship of humanity with space and the stars. By retracing the steps of Pythagoras, one of the region’s most illustrious residents, it explores the ancient universal beauty of mathematics. At the same time, the infinite possibilities of dialogue between man and nature <i>will be analysed</i> , through concerts and visits to spiritual places – such as rock-hewn churches – or places of cosmological interest – such as the Space Geodesy Centre. Very old practices and new life models <i>will be put</i> on trial, hypothesizing new development models for the coming decades.	<i>An observatory dome at the Matera Space Geodesy Centre.</i>
Continuity and Disruptions	As in many other European cities, Matera’s relationship with modernity <i>is conflicting</i> . Twenty-five years after the inclusion of the “Sassi”, once a “national shame”, in the UNESCO World Heritage list, the city <i>is still trying</i> to come to terms with its physical identity. The section of the program called “Continuity and Disruptions” represents an opportunity to develop a collective therapy and the possibility to face not only the shame of the city itself but also its multiple forms at the European level. These range from increasing social inequalities, to the resurgence of racism, the inability of many European countries to offer a future and hope to their youth and the drama of the exodus of desperate people fleeing the ongoing wars in Africa and Asia. Matera 2019 <i>will be</i> an opportunity to witness the beauty of the city, not only in theatres and museums, but also in the spaces <i>we live</i> in everyday.	<i>A woman walking underground on a suspended catwalk.</i>
Reflections and Connections	The theme “Reflections and Connections” starts from the classic Latin motto, later adopted by Lorenzo de’ Medici, “ <i>Festina lente</i> ” (make haste slowly). <i>We must rediscover</i> the value of time and slowness, distance ourselves from the hegemony of the immediate present and take a step back from the accelerated pace that marks life in the 21st Century. The cultural program also intends to prove that art, science and widespread practice of cultural citizenship can represent, throughout Europe, the catalysing elements of a new, revolutionary model of community rooted in the “practice of daily life”. The physical environment of Matera encourages <i>us</i> to rethink things “ <i>ab initio</i> ” and to consider crucial questions and fundamental values.	<i>A woman holding a vase with a plant sprout.</i>
Utopias and Dystopias	Starting from the irrepressible utopian tension in the history of Matera, the theme “Utopias and Dystopias” intends to test new innovative schemes that represent a challenge to preconceptions about the cities of the South including that tourism is the only way to achieve economic stability, technology is the only model of mediation possible for relationships, industrial monoculture is the only opportunity for development and that food and wine are the main identifiers of a territory. There is a need for a profound change of mentality, which goes beyond fatalistic attitudes, amoral familism, and the opacity of information and management of public	<i>A young man on a skateboard under a concrete bridge.</i>

	affairs, which <i>have often hindered</i> the renewal of Southern Italy. Through a series of urban and rural games and sports, Matera <i>will be transformed</i> into a terrain on which <i>we can imagine</i> possible alternatives to the realities that <i>we take for granted</i> .	
Roots and Routes	The “Roots and Routes” section precisely explores the extraordinary possibilities of the mobility culture that unites Europe. The instinct for movement is rooted in the daily life of Matera, ever since the tradition of “transhumance”, which every year sees the herds of cattle move across the Murgia plateau. Mobility is the lifeblood of the region: from Magna Graecia to Rome, or from the age of the Byzantines and Longobards, Arabs, Swabians or Angevins, Basilicata <i>has always been</i> a place of meeting and convergence. <i>Recently</i> , like many other rural regions of Europe, Matera <i>has had</i> to face devastating migratory diasporas, to then see the recent beginning of a return of a generation of young people, attracted by the values rooted in southern Italian culture.	<i>A baker carrying a typical bread loaf in one of Matera’s old streets.</i>

Table 1

“Open Future” Subthemes and Their Description (© Matera-Basilicata 2019 Foundation).

The lexico-grammatical resources deployed in the above descriptions include a few occurrences of deontic modality, but with a different use of person indexicals and agentivity. *Will*, which is endowed with commissive force, appears in third-person, passive constructions, or with the stative *be*, in which Matera and the concomitant ECoC projects are in thematic position and become the proposed objects of change (“infinite possibilities will be analysed”, “practices and models will be put on trial”, “Matera 2019 will be an opportunity”, “Matera will be transformed”). In this way, the forceful and inspirational rhetoric that is a typical discursive trait in Matera 2019’s project documents finds an apt linguistic realisation that fits in with the city’s vision.

As for the one occurrence of deontic *must* (“We must rediscover”), it serves to encode volitional agency, attributed to a collective subject *we* that indexes a resilient community of young insiders, the quintessential human capital that has been rejecting Matera’s decline over the years (“now more than fifty years ago”).

- (15) The age-old tradition of Matera, which is based on the ability of its people to live in rather inhospitable places and invent techniques for fetching water, the primary element of life, and for distributing it to every inhabitant, inspired groups of young people, now more than fifty years ago, to reject the idea that Matera was destined to decline and die. (*OF*, p. 2)

The irrepressible tension that animates the hidden recesses of the hypogean city, granting rebirth and renewal, is well conveyed by the five corresponding pictorial elements described in the third column of Table 1. After looking at the sky and into its depths, Matera and its citizens have come back to life, propelling the city into the future and reinventing its heritage.

The final part of the analysis is dedicated to the “Join the Community” section of the website. Accessible from the “Get Involved” link in the top menu bar, the page is central to the reconceptualisation and rebranding of the city of Matera as the ECoC. A keyword in the *Open Future* bid book,⁷ “community” is the symbolic horizon within which processes of collective creation take place. For Matera 2019 co-creation has resulted in the design and implementation of many of the projects included in the winning *Open Future* bid book. Co-creation is repeatedly associated with the notion of collective

⁷ The bid book counts 87 occurrences for the lemma (*community/communities*).

intelligence and citizen engagement, especially the younger population. This ideational meaning is expressed with great clarity by the pictorial representation provided in Figure 3. Seven young people, or rather, that viewers imagine as young because of their casual dress and familiarity with digital technology, are sitting next to each other on a wooden seating area, using and sharing laptops, tablets and mobile phones. Although we do not see their busts, we imagine them engaged in a creative conversation. The aim of this section is that of

- (16) creating an ecosystem of cultural processes put forward and implemented by themselves. Any projects that the citizens submit must be community projects and have to be designed and accomplished by the citizens and for the citizens. They should encourage collaboration and the sharing of ideas and work activities. (Matera 2019, “Join the Community”)



Figure 3

Matera 2019 website – “Join the Community” section (© Matera-Basilicata 2019 Foundation).

The dynamic and enthusiastic group of young people that formed the first web team of volunteers and kick-started Matera 2019’s candidacy by sharing visionary ideas receives an ideal tribute in this image, after being introduced in the first page of the bid book.

- (17) For many years, Matera shared the fate of countless small- and medium-sized European cities whose role was as consumers of centralised culture originating in the great centres of cultural production. In recent years, however, a sea change has taken place. A movement is emerging that has systematically stripped away the barriers to culture: it wields new technologies and adopts open licensing strategies to forge a model in which cultural production is participatory, horizontal, democratised. (*OF*, p. 1)

In sum, we observe how Matera 2019’s core values have been successfully translated from their first encoding in the programmatic documents drafted to enhance the city’s candidacy to the multimodal discourse of the official website. This is thanks to a set of semiotic strategies that have managed to capture and interpret the main socio-cognitive features of the project: the intended disruption of stereotypical ways of seeing, the notion of space intersecting with time and affected by history, a deep-rooted volitional orientation towards renewal, and irrepressible positive energy to build a different future.

4. Concluding Remarks

The joint analysis of the main linguistic and discursive strategies in Matera 2019's project documents and of a selection of verbal and visual elements on the Matera 2019 website has shown how key topics were framed from a socio-cognitive viewpoint, textually encoded, and convincingly resemiotised in the transposition to the digital medium. Especially in light of the city's difficult history, it is indeed worthy to mention how the Matera-Basilicata 2019 Foundation has been able to fully exploit the democratising potential of digital media, from networking and active citizenship to co-creation, social inclusion and intercultural dialogue.

To conclude, the array of linguistic, discursive and semiotic processes at work illustrates a thought-provoking, non-conformist use of cultural heritage that highlights its political potential as in EU policy discourse. Undoubtedly, the ECoC project has stimulated the city to reinvent its heritage within a viable future-oriented roadmap that felicitously combines innovative and creative cultural management with sustainable forms of social entrepreneurship for the twenty-first century. By contesting the globalised logics of cultural supremacy and instrumental heritage commodification and by being energised by a unique human capital in the shape of committed young people, Matera 2019 has thrust the city into the European spotlight and, hopefully, into a future that will redeem its 'shameful' past.

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