Learning from Places: Steps to a Geography of Cultural Heritage

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Preview: Definitions

It is not unusual in the life of ideas that a better definition of a concept, or, even, a discipline, be given ‘from outside’ the field of study itself, that is, by someone from outside the discipline. But, as one of the Wittiest contemporary geographers put it: for geography this is the rule, not the exception. Because of its nature and origin, geography is like the Mediterranean Lingua Franca, which any mariner could understand and speak, at the same time, modifying and shaping this language to one’s own mother language.

According to a historian of philosophy, geography ‘makes connections visible’ [sie macht Zusammenhänge sichtbar] (Holenstein 2004:7). Zusammenhang is a multifaceted term, also implying the meaning of ‘context’, referring both to the links and the frame: so borrowing a term coined by Paul Valéry, we could say that geography makes implexes3 visible.

Zusammenhang is also a keyword in Alexander von Humboldt’s theory, the geographer who in the early 19th century was a forerunner of the study of complexity (Farinelli 2009). In adopting, for the first time in Western tradition, an artistic genre like landscape as a scientific tool, von Humboldt meant by the concept of Zusammenhang the third and final step of the translation in scientific terms of the first global impression an individual has about the world after the intermediate step of the analysis (Farinelli 2009). Basically, it is a change of dimensions from the totality represented by the small world of the subject to the totality constituted by the world of scientific knowledge. In this view, geography makes totalities visible so revealing its relation with art. Indeed, both, art and geography contribute to enhancing epistemology, our ways of thinking. What Paul Klee sketched in an exemplary way in 1920 in his Creative Credo [Schöpferische Konfession] could also hold true for geography: ‘art does not reproduce the visible; rather, it makes visible’ [Kunst gibt nicht das Sichtbare wieder, sondern macht sichtbar].

Not surprisingly, contemporary geography, since the 1960s, called to abandon the 19th century separation between the disciplines of matter and spirit. This would mean the end of idiots savants and idiots lettrés; the classic 18th century academic “insults”, which have now come to partition academia (as noted by Enzensberger 2002). The former are the hyper-specialized scientists that avoid communication with colleagues who are not engaged closely in the same research topic; the latter, the so-called ‘humanists’ are uncomfortable or disinterested (unless bored) in front of terms like algorithm, theorem, model. In short, this is the outdated and inadequate division between ‘hard’ and

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2 Franco Farinelli, see interview at: http://www.aiig.it/associazione_convegni_2011_farinelli.html.

3 ‘The abstract idea of a simple earth axis, so natural today, was by no means so logical to the ancients, who always thought of the whole machinery of heaven moving around the earth, stable at the center. One line always implied many others in a structure. So, apparently one must accept the idea of the world frame as an implex (as used here and later this word involves the necessary attributes that are associated with a concept: e.g., the center and circumference of a circle, the parallels and meridians implied by a sphere)’. (Santillana, Dechend 1977: 232).
‘soft’ sciences (and still in use by the would-be reformers of universities).

Geography’s capacity to make contexts and interconnections visible can be more easily shown by means of a famous puzzle: the 9-dots puzzle made famous by Paul Watzlawick. The challenge is to draw four continuous straight lines which connect all of the 9 dots without taking the pencil off the paper.

Figure 1

Watzlawick explains why there are frequent failures in solving the riddle:

Almost everybody who first tries to solve this problem introduces as part of his problem-solving an assumption which makes the solution impossible. The assumption is that the dots compose a square and that the solution must be found within that square, a self-imposed condition which the instructions do not contain (Watzlawick et al. 1974:25).

Figure 2
This is because we tend to see edges, borders, where in fact there are none. This is a faculty (product of natural selection) of all living species that use light to orient themselves in the world. To get our bearings, we need to see borders and margins, even where there are none. This natural necessity leads us to feel places as both material and as mental. It is what allows us to live in the world (Debray 2010).

As von Humboldt taught, in order to understand the world it is sometimes necessary to access a further dimension, as Watzlawick would say ‘think outside the box’; just as to solve the 9 dot puzzle you need to think outside the border that you imagined to see in the figure. Think that the same puzzle can be solved with a single continuous line.

Figure 3

![](image3.png)

Instead of thinking on a plane like we are used to doing when using maps, i.e., in 2D, you need to think in 3D, on a globe, as geography teaches, and then you only need one line to solve the puzzle.

Geography teaches us how to see totalities, to move through contexts and changing dimensions without losing the sense of the whole framework. In 2D you are on the geometrical plane, the typical dimensions of maps, what a geographer calls space, in which all things are taken into account solely from a quantitative point of view. It is the flat world of globalization described by Thomas Friedman: fast, dominated by massive flows of goods, services, information, all playing together by means of standards, and making the economy we know (and suffer from) possible.

On the globe, instead, you have the real world of our lives, full of qualitatively different peoples, cultures, languages, habits: what a geographer calls a world of places.

To attempt to define a possible geography of cultural heritage on the basis of the concepts of place, network, and milieu, it is necessary to define the way information is conveyed by maps, being they still the main visual tools to represent places, even on the Web.

This map of Europe (Figure 4) is a part of the planisphere opening the first modern printed atlas produced in Europe by Abraham Ortelius in 1570.

Figure 4

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In the map we recognize place names, cities like Ausburch (today Augsburg), Danzica, Vienna, Lyon, Paris, Istanbul, Ragusa (today Dubrovnik), but also Italy, Corsica, Sicily, the river Danube. There is also Vissegrod, today Vyshhorod, the fortress and residence of the monarchs of the Vikings, the Scandinavian merchant-warriors, well-known in Constantinople. In the Western Europe they were known as the ‘Normans’ and in East Central Europe as the ‘Varangians’, from the first confederate core in the state of Novgorod-Kiev, the *Kievskaia Rus’,* whose cultural heritage is claimed by Russians, Ukrainians, Belorussians. We can also see on this map the name of Buda, the city that will have to wait until 1873 to become a substantial component of the historic core of the Hungarian capital, Budapest. The lesson we draw is that without an understanding of the cultural contexts (including writings and languages) all these names and symbols would tell us very little. This is evidenced by the fact that Europe in its entirety is represented by cities that are still considered important in some respect, such as Paris or Vienna. Others, such as Ragusa or Vyshhorod, are not considered as equally important today, and cities like London or Rome are absent from this map. The cartographer at the time *has chosen* what to represent and what not to represent. The choice was made in relation to the contexts and cultural codes of the time, and driven by the intention of the map drawn. This relationship is all the more necessary because the map is also a fragment, a portion of a world map (the part circled in yellow is the area occupied from the previous image once brought back to the original scale).

Figure 5
Maps are the privileged tool for conveying a specific, albeit basic, kind of information: spatial information. But, since the concept of information will be repeated in the present essay, it is useful to refine the sense in which it is used and applied to notions of place, network, and milieu.

In general, for the hard sciences (although recently the distinction from soft sciences’ is less sharp), information means ‘the reduction of uncertainty in a communication system’ (Headrick, 2000: 3-4). This implies that a human subject must interpret information patterns in order for them to become human information.

Information is not the same thing as knowledge, though the two concepts overlap. Knowledge refers to ideas and facts that a human mind has internalized and understood: how to fix a flat tire, the name of a really good dentist, speaking French. Acquiring knowledge means absorbing a lot of information – for example, how to use French irregular verbs correctly. Often, the mind acquires and organizes such information in a spontaneous and even subconscious fashion, the way a child learns to speak or a taxi driver knows her way around town. At other times, the acquisition of knowledge requires studying, a slow and difficult process (Headrick, 2000: 4).

Knowledge involves putting in place practices, because knowledge requires time. It is embodied and - since it is mainly tacit (that is, not formally expressed) - can hardly be transferred, conveyed, without changing its structure. For example, for a long time information was transported by people: in the form of letters, messages, and so on; or it circulated “in nature” as an embodied knowledge, such as craftsmanship. As a kind of heir of the former guilds born in the 8th century, the French companionship was founded in the XII-XIII centuries, mainly in the context of the construction of cathedrals (Dombauhütte, lodges of a cathedral). An integral part of the apprenticeship and the primary means to obtain training and experience - impossible to have them only within a single workshop - was the tour
de France, a journey through the affiliated cities; a network, which was supported by the association. European history is full of examples of great works by masters belonging to the diverse nationalities. The artisan’s knowledge was enriched by the possibilities offered through the networks of associations (network of networks), and this explains the complex geography of architectural styles that can still be admired contemplating beautiful examples of European Gothic style. In connection with the construction of cathedrals, in fact, existed the main building laboratories of the industrial revolution of the 13th century (Turnbull 2003), where the role of tradition is revealed in the transmission of knowledge, knowledge that was not yet separated from practices (see par. 3 below). The transmission of this special knowledge was assured directly (and almost exclusively) through human cooperation in actual work, not through just a “separate flow” of information. To get knowledge certainly needs information which has to be “digested”. The production of knowledge is always a collective process, and this is why knowledge (and health or the environment likewise) is a social good (Cohen 2005).

In the following, intensional (connotative definition) will be referred to in the production of knowledge – requiring a shared infrastructure (i.e., not only a common standard of communication, but also a common access to the procedures for changing the standard itself, like in Middle Age workshops). Extensional (denotative definition) refers to the production of information that requires a high degree of formalisation and abstraction in order to be generalised and diffused outside the local context. One must bear in mind the crucial role of the information's support (the kind of a physical medium, used to convey information) which makes plain the distinction extensionality/intensionality.

Information, to manifest itself, to be processed and conveyed, needs a material medium. According to information theory, the success of an operation of transferring information from one support to another is directly related to the degree of invariance that information keeps in the process. In other words, the more invariant the information (the less altered) in the course of the operation, the result is a more successful coding. The fact is that there is just a single, specific case in which the conditions to obtain the highest degree of information invariance occurs (and not without exceptions): the case of digital, binary coding. Using this tool the highest degree of invariance is guaranteed (then, of extensionality) of information, since binary logic, grounded on the oppositions of contradictories not of contraries, makes information univocal, fully abstracted from the context (so, with an almost non-existent problem of meaning and interpretation). But in all other kind of supports (conveying media) this previous statement doesn't hold true. Unfortunately, usually the kinds of support in which higher degrees of invariance occur are of a minority.

When you go to a closer look at the process, it turns out that there is always a level of observation to which the information is inseparable from the support (as well as, according to some, human intelligence is inseparable from his biological support). So it is impossible to reproduce that information on a different medium because you cannot separate the information from the original support if not provided to impoverish and distort it (Longo 2004: 224).

**What is a Place?**

Places and maps seem self-evident. Everybody knows (or is supposed to know) what they are, although there are as many different descriptions as there are respondents to the question, what are maps? As Robert Musil summed up in 1927 with his usual cleverness,

> Anything that endures over time sacrifices its ability to make an impression. Anything that constitutes the walls of our life, the backdrop of our consciousness, so to speak, forfeits its

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5 This is based on 1/0 opposition, that is to say on 1/non-1: e.g., white/non-white implies an univocal individuation of the first term excluding all that is not white, while white/black is an opposition of contraries, implicating a relation but also a gradation, i.e., in this case, the gradual passing from one tint to the other through all tones of grey.
capacity to play a role in that consciousness (Musil 1978: 62).
Musil was speaking of monuments, of the kind of landmarks we usually associate to urban places as one of their distinctive signs. The network of places and paths linking them are customarily considered inherent in the sense of belonging to a determined community as well. For this reason, they are taken for granted by insiders, because of their overfamiliarity, which makes them, in a sense, invisible.

Indeed, places are full of time. If we pay attention to them, they reveal different «time layers» (Zeitschichten) – to use Reinhart Koselleck’s metaphor (Koselleck, 2002). They make sense to us as a concretisation (Simondon, 1958) of people, activities, relations, ideas, words, images, and so on.

The physical places we live in every day make sense for us because we feel them through sensations, thoughts, memories (unconscious mostly), that reveal their concreteness. According to the definition given by French geographer Augustine Berque, places are concrete because concretus, in Latin, was the past participle of concrescere: to grow together. Actually (…) people, words, and things have grown up together; they have a shared story (Berque, 2000: 18-19).

For this reason places can be interpreted as a kind of collective, social memory of a group or community.

The bounded places of our everyday lives – the streets of our town, workplaces, homes, squares, monuments, and so on – are naturalised by cultural habits, routines, meanings acquired by education or social relations. Our feelings for places, our knowledge of them, are like a mat woven from both adopted pasts and personal experiences. They belong to the dialectics between individual and society. Leroi-Gourhan keenly outlined almost fifty years ago:

Individuals at birth are faced with a body of traditions that belong to their ethnic group; a dialogue takes place, from childhood, between the individual and the social organism. Tradition is as biologically indispensable to the human species as genetic conditioning is to insect societies. Ethnic survival relies on routine; the dialogue taking place produces a balance between routine and progress, routine symbolizing the capital required for the group’s survival and progress the input of individual innovations toward a better survival (Leroi-Gourhan, 1965: 228).

From this perspective, modern age historically marked the beginning of a new experience of places. As transport and communication systems gradually evolved, the relationship between places and knowledge changed.

This means that for a long time social situations and places were considered closely connected, and escape from the constraints of a place’s boundaries could only be made through one’s imagination. The relationship between physical place and social situation still seems so natural that we continue to confuse physical places with the behaviors that go on in them (…) Before electronic media (…) places defined most social information-systems. A given place-situation was spatially and temporally removed from other place-situations. It took time to travel from situation to situation, and distance was a measure of social insulation and isolation (…) Communication and travel were once synonymous. Our country’s communication channels were once roads, waterways, and railroads. Communication speed was limited to the speed of human travel (…) A place defined a distinct situation because its boundaries limited perception and interaction (Meyrowitz, 1985: 116).

Spatial information is embodied in the form of spatial referential frames in places (Tversky, 2005), which Yi-Fu Tuan sketched en géographe:

The mind learns to grapple with spatial relations long after the body has mastered them in performance. But the mind, once on its exploratory path, creates large and complex spatial
schemata that exceed by far what an individual can encompass through direct experience. With the help of the mind, human spatial ability (though not agility) rises above that of all other species. Spatial ability becomes spatial knowledge when movements and changes of location can be envisaged. Walking is a skill, but if I can "see" myself walking and if I can hold that picture in mind so that I can analyze how I move and what path I am following, then I also have knowledge. That knowledge is transferable to another person through explicit instruction in words, with diagrams, and in general by showing how complex motion consists of parts that can be analyzed or imitated (Tuan, 1977: 67-68).

The relevance of a place's 'invisibility', that is, their orienting role for insiders, is even more underlined by the role of time according to the two main spatial referential frames represented in most cultures: the egocentric (spatial information organised from organism's position) and the allocentric (spatial information as independent of organism’s position) (Berthoz, 2005). This is why Edward Casey (1993, 2001, 2002) focussed on the notion of *habitus* to characterized the nature of places.

All this considered, recent attempts to define the nature of places, that is, what makes a place singular and distinct from the others, using the resources of ICT technologies, are doomed to failure. For instance, trying to find ‘what makes Paris look like Paris’, that is, to use the resources of geo-coded information to make Benjamin’s aura (Benjamin, 1968) computable through ‘a large repository of geotagged imagery’, seeking ‘to automatically find visual elements, e.g. windows, balconies, and street signs, that are most distinctive for a certain geo-spatial area’ (Doersch et al. 2012), means to reduce places to visual information, so leaving out the role of the others senses, and, above all, of time.

**What is Cultural Heritage?**

“Milieu” must be here understood in a twofold sense: the milieu as the (physical) environment that any living being structures, composes (just like plants or animals), but also as what this physical complexity mediates - in a technical sense, as a means - so creating a real in-between world (Tagliagambe 2008).

Indeed, in geography, the basic sense of *information infrastructure* can be traced back to the notion of milieu (Neve, 1999). The first monograph concerning the philosophy of technique was written by a geographer, Ernst Kapp, a disciple of Carl Ritter (Kapp, 1877), and his work was introduced in France by Georges Canghilhem.

The concept of milieu emphasises the dynamic character of places, not as static containers of things and beings, but as nodes of forces, actions, desires, values. A group of human beings, living in a particular environment, process their own world in which territory is the techno-symbolical medium. Territory represents, at the same time, their tradition based and/or creative solution used in order to meet the needs of the group with respect to environmental factors, and the materialisation of the idea allowing to elaborate that response, and to develop it or reject it later. Every human generation is born within a given techno-logical horizon which constitutes the technical milieu of reference – similarly as the way of the water to fish: living environment yet not perceived (Aristotle, De Anima, B 11 423 a 31-423 b 1).

There is a passage from the *Odyssey* telling the prophecy of the soothsayer Tiresias that Odysseus hears during his pilgrimage to Hades, and then later repeats to Penelope (*Od., XI, 119-137*): Tiresias tells Odysseus, after having killed the Suitors, that he shall

*pick up a shapely oar and travel on till you come to a race that knows nothing of the sea, that eat no salt with their food, and have never heard of crimson-painted ships, or the well-shaped oars that serve as wings. And let this be your sign, you cannot miss it: that meeting another traveller he will say you carry a winnowing-fan on your broad shoulder. There you must plant your shapely oar in the ground, and make rich sacrifice to Lord Poseidon.*
One may designate the same object belonging to a culture of the sea, like an oar, or to a culture of the land, or maybe a shovel to separate the chaff from the grain, that marks the border between techniques and technical marine objects and techniques and technical objects of the mainland. Of course, the shape of the oar is not helpful. Indeed, it is precisely the fact that it presents no unique information, that the form is ambiguous, that makes it possible to mistake the oar for another object. The shape can be tricky. Objects that crowded the world before the industrial revolution (and live on in the form of versatile successors) lent themselves to more than a single use; after all, an oar could be mistaken for a winnowing-fan because it could also be used as a winnowing fan. The mere presence of a new technical object defines a spatiality which becomes an orienting milieu for subsequent generations. The object is memory, retaining in its praxis a knowledge that is part of the history of the places that it has individuated. You cannot separate the winnowing-fan from wheat fields, from the seasonal rhythms of cultivation and climate, from ownership contracts and the trade of products, from warehouses, from the inns, from harvest festivals, from the prayers of thanksgiving and curses, dialects and dishes.

This ancient example not only reminds us that borders are always cultural borders, but can also reveal the ironic side in the tragedy of a natural disaster.

Figure 6

A flooded restaurant with a picture of Poseidon - "God of the Sea" by the bank of the Sava river in Srem, Serbia, Saturday, May 17, 2014. Record flooding in the Balkans leaves at least 20 people dead in Serbia and Bosnia and is forcing tens of thousands to flee their homes. Meteorologists say the flooding is the worst since records began 120 years ago. (AP Photo/Darko Vojinovic)

In this perspective, how does human adaptation to the environment work? It is based on the mismatch between perception and action.

We exist as we do not coincide with ourselves (...) we are local and located by biological and
cultural necessity and global by socio-historical evolution (Morelli 2011: 80 and 55).

From an evolutionary point of view, the human animal, since it does not live in an ecological
niche, is constantly pressed by a surplus of informational stimuli that always exceeds the amount of
information strictly necessary for self-preservation. This is why the human milieu is characterised by
uncertainty and the potentiality of meaning. One must interpret and, therefore, choose a path, because
the pressure of information overload doesn’t result in a well-ordered list of vital priorities. All this
implies a necessary distance of the human animal from the environment. In other words, human
actually don’t use instincts like the other animals, instead they use culture as a learned way to behave
even in extreme situations of danger. Culture is what allows us to avoid to be overwhelmed by
information overload and have a conduct. This means that culture is our distinctive trait as a species
from the biological point of view, even influencing in the long run our genetic mutations (Cavalli-
Sforza, Menozzi and Piazza, 1994 ; Stone, Lurquin and Cavalli Sforza, 2007). In this sense, we are
naturally artificial, cultural beings. Such distancing from environment also seems to have been proved
on a neurological basis (Libet, 2005). The resulting representation of reality not directly correlated with
perception, is validated by a meta-representation, ‘which is the substitute of the stimulus, by assuming
the orienting function that it does for other species’ (Virno 2010: 31).

However, from the fact that the human animal – due to its own natural artificiality – lives in an
excess of information, does not follow that there is a simple opposition between the human (cultural)
world and the (natural) environment. Indeed, there is a sort of an evolutionary spiral pattern (Volk,
1995) which can be detected in this complex relation that produces our milieus.

Culture is what stands between us and the environment, so creating our world, with all its
hierarchies, priorities, values. We constantly try to reduce the informational indeterminacy to orient
ourselves, producing ‘historical social niches’ (Virno, cit.: 39), that is, milieus in which cultures play
the role biology plays in the environment, assuring a relative stability of conducts.

In this way, human beings contrive habits and practices, and codes; in other words, the human
being actualises the world (reducing the potentiality of meaning), to ensure the proper ratio between
information and actions. But this ratio, in turn, is not stable, because it is the product of historical and
social choices, and a crisis of informational reliability is still possible. This crisis manifests itself as a
virtualisation of the environment, in a word, a deterritorialisation, that often puts back on track paths
denied by previous choices (increasing potentiality again).

In this sense, the focus is on dynamic relations and the role of the technical milieu in translating
(not simply conveying) feelings, memories, expectations, into actions and beliefs.
Indeed, we can think of territory in relational terms, as a set of relations concerning times and places,
relations which often cannot be properly mapped. Thinking in terms of territoriality enables us to
reconsider contemporary fragmentation of the experiences of places, rethinking conflicts in a broader
framework.

The archaic Italian expression comune sentire, which was once a synonym for public opinion, can
therefore be understood as: ‘common sensing’, as a common perceptual sphere. Urban space
synthesizes insofar as it builds a space of common sensitivity, a space of feeling together. It is the
materiality, the reified ideas, and cultural traits (Stone, Lurquin and Cavalli Sforza, 2007) that make
possible the sharing of experience. Cultural characteristics materialize the relationships among
individuals and constitute a social memory. As summarized by Hannah Arendt:

To live together in the world means essentially that a world of things is between those who have
it in common, as a table is located between those who sit around it; the world, like every in-
between, relates and separates men at the same time (Arendt, 1958: 39).
Let's take the example of traditional knowledge, which is still part of peoples’ daily practices in
many countries, though often concealed or marginalised by the processes of modernization: the oases of the Sahara, the reservoir systems of Yemen, the Iranian *qanat*, the irrigation systems in China, up to the Ligurian terraces and ravines of Puglia and Basilicata.

What radically distinguishes the landscapes we see today from that of, say, Lorenzetti’s cycle of frescoes of *Good Government* in Siena, is the gap between places and information. Traditional knowledge, which has produced landscapes like the one pictured by Lorenzetti, belongs to periods that maintained the overlap between knowledge and practices that ensured consistency between the produced territory and territoriality as a system of relations. Under these conditions, territoriality was still, in part at least, strongly marked by relations that gave great importance to such places as sources of identity. There was consistency between territory and territoriality because there was consistency between the action of a society and the *semiosphere* it referred to (Raffestin 1986: 183).

This is what made culture, or, if you prefer, tradition, a *land factor*, which was the real filter, the true boundary between different areas: a geographical feature already well known to the merchants and the trade networks of antiquity. The fact that modernity separated the two paths has resulted, on the one hand, in an exponential growth of scientific and technical knowledge, particularly through colonialism and industrialization (Livingstone, 2003). On the other hand, it gradually devalued traditional knowledge, and focused on the possibility of long-term development planning that new knowledge enabled.

To account for the real novelty represented by the so-called Geo-Web and its revealing effect on the ways we consider territories as cultural heritage, we must pay attention to the first mentioned separation between *knowledge* and *practices* as a character of modernity, being it responsible for the predominance of extensional media over intensional ones.

In order to avoid confusion and apparent internal contradiction needs to be clarified from the beginning. The definition of knowledge previously given, as in a way opposed to information, does not seem to match the following one, based on another approach in which the knowledge is presented as something opposed to social practices.

Taking into consideration the fact that such oppositions are not to be regarded as absolute (knowledge is also “made of” information); the difference between the two definitions does not affect our argument. What is at stake here is not the complexity of knowledge itself – dependent on ‘being in a world that is inseparable from our bodies, our language, and our social history – in short, from our embodiment’ (Varela, Thompson and Rosch, 1993: 149). It is rather an historical threshold, which is responsible for implementing the dichotomy between *explicit* (extension-biased) and *tacit* (intension-biased) knowledge (Polanyi, 1958; Wenger 1999), while enhancing the former (‘knowledge that’) to the detriment of the latter (‘knowledge how’) (Varela, Thompson and Rosch, 1993: 148).

Claude Raffestin and Mercedes Bresso summarizes it highlighting the historical rupture between knowledge and practices.

According to tradition, the “practice” is actualised; while “knowledge” ensuring its consistency is potentialised (…) In the past we lived everyday life relying on the traditions of the body, of nature, and society. Traditions that fuelled action and framed work (…) Yet such tradition mobilised by work was closely linked to conditions determined by the eco-logic and socio-logic of a place, a time, and a group. Changes occurring in these “logics” could make tradition ineffective, and practices hitherto successful came into crisis (…) In other words, tradition made it difficult to cope with unexpected events, the territoriality torn asunder in its depths could only result in a tragic everyday life… until things go or find a new balance. The confusion of knowledge and practices prohibited to imagine new practices from explicit knowledge (…) The explicit knowledge or if you prefer the dichotomy between knowledge and practices is
precisely what characterizes modernity which can be defined as a process of fission characteristic of Western thought (Raffestin and Bresso 1982: 188).

The massive and still growing development of knowledge since the Scientific Revolution owes mainly to such dichotomy, with an unprecedented production and dissemination of ‘everyday technologies’ made available even to ordinary people thanks to the hook-up of technology research with industrial production, which radically transformed the meaning itself of “everyday life” (Kelly, 2010). In fact, such development favoured mutually compatible standards and information infrastructures in order to allow different inventions to take place in constituting ‘techno-geographical milieus’, i.e., territorialities (see the example of railroads, in which mapping and time coordination strictly co-operated with each other (Galison 2004).

As a matter of fact, tacit, local knowledge was not eliminated, as it is the very ground on which knowledge is generated, even in the case of scientific inquiry:

Scientific knowledge gleaned in laboratories is thus less about the local instantiation of universally valid facts than about what one writer calls ‘the adaptation of one local knowledge to create another’ (…) To put it another way, the reason a person gives for behaving in a certain way is setting dependent. This means that standards of practical rationality – what passes as a good reason for believing something – are spatially referenced (…) Rationality is always situated rationality. And it is always embodied rationality (Livingstone, 2003: 142 and 184). Predictability is the great power gained by humans in enhancing explicit, formal knowledge. It is a power by which they could overcome many of the uncertainties that the logics of local lore were unable to face.

On the other hand, as already said, the production of knowledge remains localised, and could not be otherwise.

The differences between the building of Chartres cathedral, for example, and modern techno-scientific practice lie not in the possession of some secret or mysterious skill nor in some essential difference between science and technology on the one hand or between theory and practice on the other. Both science and technology, now and in the past, are the product of local and tacit knowledge. The differences between them lie in the social and technical means by which local and messy knowledge and practices are made robust, coherent, and mobile, that is, in the ways in which the site-specific or even problem-specific products are added to the work of previous individuals or groups of workers or transmitted to another site (Turnbull, 1993: 317).

It is not by chance that recent insightful views on the organisation of teamwork (not only for research) draw upon the dialectics between reification and participation (given that, as for knowledge and practices, they are not mutually exclusive):

Explicit knowledge is (…) not freed from the tacit. Formal processes are not freed from the informal. In fact, in terms of meaningfulness, the opposite is more likely (…) In general, viewed as reification, a more abstract formulation will require more intense and specific participation to remain meaningful, not less (Wenger, 1999: 67).

In our societies, the space of media (particularly, taking into consideration the global convergence to digital) intensifies, at a continually increasing rate, the complexity of places’ relations.

But it is the declining role of the ‘land factor’ of culture which is our main concern here. The fact that the bond between places and cultures has been put in crisis at first by the extension of transportation systems during 19th century, and almost cut later by the electronic media of the 20th and 21st centuries, foreshadows a situation of cultures circulating globally with no links with their
generating contexts.

It is the phenomenon that Elmar Holenstein describes as the ‘giving out of the mediation in intercontinental connections’ and ‘de-regionalisation of cultural differences’ (Holenstein, 2004). Due to the pervasive and growing presence of ICT (especially mobile) technologies, today you can have access to cultural differences virtually from any place. The encounter with other cultures that once meant travel, it is now practised in browsing the Web, joining social networks, and so on; but we must pay attention to what means, in the electronic media, “to be” or “to get in touch”.

“Culture-from-anywhere” does not mean “culture-as-a-whole”, since, the price to pay is the loss of any local feature, any characteristic, and virtually untranslatable, trait of people, places, and cultures, brief, almost any meaning that face to face interaction usually produces. It is like the passage from local idioms to a national language, which allows much more people to communicate with each other, provided that are eliminated all elements too connected to specific contexts. Employing the terminology introduced above, this cultural phenomenon gains in extensionality while losing intensionality.

As a matter of fact, as noted by Olivier Roy with regard to religions:

If religions are able to extend beyond their original cultures, it is because they have been able to "deculturate" themselves. The religious marker circulates without cultural markers, even if it means reconnecting with floating cultural markers – halal fast food, eco-kosher, cyber-fatwa, halal dating, Christian rock, transcendental meditation (…) The deculturation of religion has some fundamental consequences: first of all it transforms the gap between the believer and the non-believer into a barrier, since now they no longer share either religious practice or common values (…) Deculturation is the loss of the social expression of religion (…) On the other hand, the simultaneous presence in the market of different "religious products" results in both competition and standardization, not of theology but of religiosity (Roy, 2011: 7-8).

So the debate on cultural heritage still suffers from the cleavage between, on the one hand, the overenthusiastic praises for the great possibilities that the Web can offer to enhance territories and, on the other hand, the almost exclusively defensive reactions of the humanists, disgusted by the commercialization they foreshadow.

The point is that the debate is undermined by the frequent use of ‘binary thinking’ - that is, a way of arguing that works by means of pairs of concepts in clear opposition, such as local / global. Although useful and effective in the accounts of the media, it is rarely an adequate theoretical tool. Above all, it proves important to overcome the temptation to polarize in dualisms that are not very justified by the facts. Contemporary geographical studies have widely demonstrated the inconsistencies of such arguments (Neve 2004), and the need of new stances (Cosinchi and Cosinchi 2009). Such a dualistic trend could only be justified if the reductionism induced by the standardization of the cognitive processes through information technology should actually turn us into “binary beings”. A reversal in which they are individuals, living and knowing both rationally and emotionally, to adapt over time to an urban environment requiring formalization and communicative abstraction.

If information theory ‘rediscovered’ again the centrality of meaning (Gleick 2011), the tension remains between the dogged attempts to find solutions to communication issues through computing and the epistemological evidence of the impossibility of a correlation between logic and meaning, an impossibility well known since the 1960s (Melandri 1968: 831, 835). Since the highest degree of extensionality can be ensured only by logic, by inferential computation, the crucial trait of the ‘digital revolution’ consists in the fact that digital support makes possible the separation among data, information, and form (Tagliagambe 2008: 79-88), by implementing a vast and expanding information infrastructure that allows a massive convergence of heterogeneous objects and processes (visual, acoustic, textual, and so on). The Net, thereby reducing all communication on the quantitative plane of
computing, represents the highest degree of extensionality ever reached by a medium. It generates a milieu in which any local feature, any characteristic, and virtually untranslatable, trait of a place needs to be previously typified in order to spread along the network: this is the reason why places easily become stereotypes when presented on the Web, e.g., for the purposes of promoting tourism.

**Creative Communities: Networking, Cultural Heritage, and Development**

The fact that the world population is predominantly urban now, for the first time in human history, is no longer a novelty. What is less known is the fact that statistics that refer to a concept of the city are outdated. In reality, people no longer live in dimensions and relations once exclusive to the city.

In 2000, William Mitchell saw the impact of the Web on urban life, using the catchphrase ‘Urban Life, Jim – but Not as We Know It’ for the subtitle of his bestselling *E-topia*. The meaning of “city” indeed changed dramatically, not only because of the impact of communication and information technologies, but also, and possibly above all, due to the worldwide spread of lifestyles and expectations that cannot be exclusively associated any more to the city as meant in Western culture, i.e., the European or American city. The issue of urban cultural heritage itself concerns more and more countries of all continents, partly due to the pressure exerted by globalization, partly to the growing economic exploitation of cultural assets (with the correlative bottom-up emergence of stances concerning the community dimensions of those assets).

The theme of «creative cities» has been very developed and articulated since it was formulated, in particular by Charles Landry, in the 1980s. The same Landry, taking stock of the experience in 2009, says that the theme has undergone many detours and is still a subject of debate. In any event, according to Landry, there are a number of shared themes which may be summarized as follows:

1. ‘Within the strategic vision of most cities it is important to develop the creative economy sectors;
2. new iconic cultural facilities can help cities get on the radar screen and can at times help generate civic pride;
3. attracting knowledge nomads and the research community is vital;
4. reusing old buildings for new economy activities often creates a lively buzz and blending old and new is often important;
5. it is important to shift focus on the physical environment of cities to create places for sociability and conviviality, and so encourage a creative milieu.
6. Importantly though now increasingly decision makers are looking too at their complete urban environment as a creative system’ (Landry 2009: 7).

Programs like the European Capitals of Culture certainly belong to this field, which are still a great ambition for many municipalities since 1985 (http://ec.europa.eu/culture/key-documents/european-capitals-of-culture_en.htm).

This theme, in a broad sense, also applies to other phenomena, less visible but no less important like an increasing willingness, resulting from the crisis, to assume a more active and participatory citizenship role. The spread of ‘mash-up’ urban lifestyles, mostly due to access to interactive media like the Web than centralized media like television, favours the emergence of specific forms of urbanism analogous to those Melvin Webber saw almost sixty years ago: the ‘non-place urban realm’ (Webber 1964).

This means people do business, invent services, promote joint initiatives that once would have been classified as typical urban functions, while in fact not residing in a city. These people live ‘as if’ they were in a city regardless of the size of the town or the population level. They put into practice, often unwittingly, the original meaning of the word *civitas*, that in Latin is derived from *civis*, ‘citizen’,
because it is the togetherness of citizens that makes the city, and not the other way round. *Civitas*, then, is the set of relationships among individuals who behave as *cives*. The form mostly taken by such phenomena is the *network*.

Today networks are very popular. The fact is, however, that networks have always existed, and the Euro-Mediterranean area is probably the best documented example of long standing networks playing a vital role in the survival of political domains, like the Maghrib’s networks that extended the action of coastal ports all over the Sahara. In addition to hosting a prominent cultural heritage over a vast area, it is considered today as a benchmark for development (UNCTAD-UNDP 2010). Since cultural heritage’s definition has been enriched with the inclusion of *traditional knowledge* (Ipogea 2012) (FIG. 7), the issue of *knowledge transfer through networking*, usually studied the production-oriented knowledge (Antonelli 2013) that has acquired new relevance and sense, since networks mostly share *embodied* knowledge (Wenger 1999; Sennett 2008). This implies *practices, time* – so being mostly *tacit*. Actually, this kind of knowledge can be hardly transferred or conveyed, without changing its structure. This this means that the ‘matter’ of which these networks are made cannot really be grasped and fully evaluated solely by quantitative approaches, no matter how sophisticated they are.

These networks, designated ‘*creative communities*’ in a preliminary survey funded by EMUDE programme (Meroni 2007, Jégou and Manzini 2008) are interesting not only because of their ‘bottom-up’ character, but also because they combine the qualities of cooperation, civic sense, attention to the needs of both individual and collective (as necessary for building the sense of European citizenship), with creativity. Their nature requires an approach that takes into proper consideration their complexity, weighting appropriately both their explicit and tacit sides.

Notwithstanding the growing impact of ICT, it is still true that ‘all experience is local’
(Meyrowitz in Nyíri 2005) and knowledge is also made of social practices that make possible specific applications of an innovation, and above all constitute the primary sphere in which workers are trained and further knowledge is developed. Electronic media can disseminate the expert knowledge, with precise procedures, but can hardly replace the practices, which always involve some improvisation, creativity, and shared time. Creative communities combine places, needs and techniques in an interesting mix that uses local lore as a social resource and reinterpret technologies (both traditional and newer). In fact, it should be considered that they cannot be sorted out as merely reactive phenomenon, marginal, or even as a side-effect of the crisis. They could be assimilated into the role once played by the informal sector, but with remarkable differences.

These bottom-up networks, representing a new evolutionary phase of European construction of sense of community, could provide a perspective on the redefinition of European citizenship through participation and responsibility. They could also prefigure a model for the transfer of knowledge (in the sense of skills, crafts, and similar): an appropriate and sustainable model in times of crisis, unemployment, and decline of welfare state. Such networks, meeting real local needs and being based on cooperation and on taking care of places, could sustain a true shared sense of European citizenship. Besides, they could even foster the development of a cooperative Euro-Mediterranean area in spite of the new cleavages which seem drawing a new map of European power (the multi-speed Europe topic's revival is there to prove it) (Beck 2013).

Adequately studying such networks provides the chance to shed new light on the results of the current crisis by envisioning the possibility to implement strategies which can support and boost these networks, in order to share the solutions and knowledge developed inside them. They could be a common ground for a European sense of belonging not merely based on sharing a currency or a passport.

As widely shown by many scholars (Arthur 2009, Antonelli 2013) innovation is endogenous factor. Although knowledge is always local, most studies concerning the transfer of knowledge focus on highly formalized technological knowledge (so more extensional, explicit, information-driven), often ICT based. If we take into account the kind of knowledge developed and used by creative communities instead, which is mostly and deeply local, a twofold approach is needed. First, one concerning the quantitative, formalized, structural aspects of networks which can be analysed and evaluated by means of the research tools provided by information and communication’s geography studies. Second, one focused, by means of qualitative analysis, on the locally differentiated but comparable sets of procedures that delineate successful models of organization (step-by-step instructions of what to do to replicate it in different contexts, tangible and intangible instruments conceived and produced to make a specific task easier, and so on).

The two kinds of knowledge might be finally composed as a whole within a theoretical framework based on the idea of urban cultural heritage as a space of shared sensibility: a space of feeling together. In this sense, the emphasis is placed on the ways networks employ tangible and intangible urban cultural heritage in their functioning, because it is the materiality (the reified ideas) of cultural traits that condition the possibility of sharing. The cultural traits, such as ‘social objects’, materialize the relationship between individuals and constitute their social memory.

The study of two of the three components of knowledge – propositional knowledge (knowing-that, or what) and the prescriptive (knowing-how) (Mokyr 2002) – has quite a long tradition. The attempt to combine these analyses with the framework of urban cultural heritage and the role of creativity requires the inclusion of the third component, theoretical knowledge (knowing-why). In fact, while routine procedures are content to stay within the boundaries of know-that, creativity, as implied for instance in craftsmanship and traditional knowledge (Sennett 2008, Ipogea 2012), should, to a degree, consider the know-why as well.
To reach this aim, the present research proposes to adopt the tools of analysis developed by the geographical theory of TDR (territorialization-deterritorialization-reterritorialization), elaborated by Claude Raffestin (Raffestin 2004). To summarize it, according to such theory the territory is the material manifestation of the set of relationships (territoriality) that are the social basis of the settled community, and each territorialization produces a new territoriality that is both the product of a previous territorialization – which, in some respects, continues to be part of this territory – and the milieu in which to cope with current challenges. Employing this framework could provide a consistent and dynamic picture of the networks at different levels of analysis. This picture should be finally made available to follow developments and discussions employing the tools of cognitive mapping (Wood and Fels 2008).

Of course, to be feasible, they should overcome the limitations of the heterogeneous nature of the data and their absence from the main official databases. The existing data in the recent growth in the field of social innovation can be mainly found on different platforms, still often on a national basis (like NESTA: http://www.nesta.org.uk/project/centre-social-action-innovation-fund). The collection of statistics about structures, functions, data of creative communities, could follow the model outlined in the main report on the subject (Meroni 2007, Jégou and Manzini 2008). This model, modified in the light of the subsequent debate that led to the definition of the ‘creative economy’ (UNCTAD-UNDP, 2010), has the advantage of being formal enough to be used along with the tools provided by the science of networks and the knowledge economy. Interesting developments could come from the ongoing project called Transition (http://transitionproject.eu), which is promoted by the authors of the first report, which elaborates and refines the previous model.

The second step could be the classification of the results obtained within the framework provided by the TDR theory (Raffestin 1984 and 2004), which allows researchers to locate all the case studies within their original milieu, to relocate them to the places from where all these networks have originated and from which they have had influence and impulse. At this stage the relationship is highlighted between the knowledge developed by the network and the urban cultural heritage in which the network has developed. In the case of the use of traditional knowledge, the relationship with the places will be analyzed by using, where possible, the database and classification of UNESCO’s Traditional Knowledge World Bank (Ipogea 2012): www.tkwb.org. From this step should emerge an explanatory framework of the geography of the creative community networks, or at least, if the quality of the data available is sufficient, the main evolutionary features of these kinds of networks, identifying the possibilities of ‘translation’ and knowledge transfer between the networks themselves.

Finally, the results should be displayed by means of the tools of cognitive mapping that allows researchers not only to display the results in a dynamic way, but also to make them available for further analysis, discussion and development on collaborative web platforms (wiki).

Of course, and en passant, to remain faithful to the spirit of such bottom-up communities and promote a vision which overcomes the unsustainable idea of cities that most planners still support, it is not enough to claim less urbs and more civitas. It is also necessary to avoid, in dealing with cultural heritages, what Giacomo Marramao (Marramao 2012) points out in referring to a Borges’ poem. Such attitude, which is typical of fundamentalisms, refers to the past as a nostalgic claim for a way of life that in reality, since it was never given but always re-created and acted, it was not ever lost. So, whether we speak of Europe, bottom-up communities, creative cities, or, above all, cultural heritage it is essential to avoid the ‘nostalgia for the present’.

Nostalgia for the present (J.L. Borges)\(^6\)
At that precise moment he said to himself:
What would I not give for the joy
of being at your side in Iceland
in the great immobile day
and partake of now
as one partakes of music
or the taste of fruit.
At that precise moment
he was together with her in Iceland.

(transl. by Ch. Mulrooney)

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