



Research article

Global images vs cultural images: mixed methods to deepen territorial representations

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Abstract: This paper aims at investigating images of places as a narrative element. In particular, dichotomous reference will be made to the global images of places that arise from dominant narratives versus the cultural images of places that arise from sensorial and experienced life.

Starting from theoretical reflection on the role of images and narratives with respect to the perception, imagery and experience of places, this contribution will focus on the sense of place and the influence of direct experience on its formation. The work deepens critical issues and capabilities of the digital visual methodology combined with sensory ethnography. The research, from an empirical point of view, was carried out as a teaching laboratory during the Geography for Tourism Science course at the University of Insubria. The students were invited to direct observation of their own place of life, with the aim of analysing its cultural image, and also to mediated observation of a known place not known directly but known through famous images and representations, with the aim of analysing its global image. This exercise outdoor allowed students to compare the theoretical concepts learned in the classroom with their perceptions of their everyday geographies, transferring the study of theory to everyday life as a tool to better understand their own and daily experience.

Keywords: geography teaching; sensory ethnography; digital visual methods; narrative geographies

1. Territorial Identities through media

When territoriality is narrated, territorial action is nourished by emotions, and such is the importance of the narrative phenomenon for geography that we can agree that the narration of territory is an essential enterprise for understanding social dynamics [1]. This leads us to recover that hypothesis, put forward in the 1980s, of extending to geography the concept of narrative turn that we read about at length in Ryan, Foote and Azaryahu [2]. In the first reflections on this narrative turn, the spatial variable was not included: Ricoeur, in one of his most quoted statements affirmed that time is that structure of existence that is expressed through language and narration, and in turn narration is that structure of language that finds its ultimate referent in time [3]. In the same years, Bal [4] and Chatman [5] tried to change their approach and make the role of space in narratives explicit. Bal considered location as an essential element of the fabula because it is true that events have to be located somewhere. Chatman, on his part, always discussed the presence of a prominent role of space in narratives, focusing his attention mainly on the film medium. The latter, in fact, elected a typically spatial conveyance of images. Even in the field of verbal narrative, Chatman introduced a major innovation: the distinction between story space and discourse space. The story space and discourse space, the former was identified as the space in which events unfold, while the latter was identified as the space that becomes known to the narrator, his vision of the world that is channelled into the story, constructs a new memory, new symbolic values, new meanings. With this conceptual perimeter Chatman was able to transpose the established distinction in narratology between story time and discourse time into the spatial domain.

In this way, the importance of the geographical dimension in the analysis of narration was introduced, but in a not yet fully mature sense. In the 1980s, in fact, the multiple concepts of space proposed by the most varied disciplines, even for media other than the written text, tended to give space a merely metaphorical aspect. In this way, the explanation of the physical existence of characters, objects, and the geographical location of the plot and events was omitted. The election of the metaphorical connotation of space resulted in the great success of Gilles Fauconnier's approaches of mental spaces [6], Susan Friedman's [7] spatial reading of narrative, and Mark Turner's [8] spatial stories. Conceptions united precisely by the abstraction of spatial discourses in narratives. In Marie-Laure Ryan's interpretation, space has long been neglected as a topic in narratology because of the large number of meanings it can have within a story [9], the space that can be read on many levels and that serves the story to make more sense of it (Geronimo Stilton's maps, for instance), the inescapable space.

In addition to these concise reflections on space and narratives, there is the contribution of Alicia Lindón [10] that is fundamental for interpreting the educational workshop that will be recounted later. Lindón proposes to include the spatial experiences of the inhabiting subject at the centre of geographical reflection. In particular, the author elects subject, subjectivity, languages, images, signs, as a substantial part of the territorial context. Here we openly choose to move into the realm of ontological territoriality. Ontological territoriality is, in its essence, a factory of meaning. Between reinterpretations of the past and anticipations of the future, between memorial practices and design practices, it produces narratives of the possible, which exclude determinisms that are as natural as they are historical and teleological [11]. Thus, we are interested in narratives, the narrative of the territory, because narratives, trivially, make the territory. But which narratives to investigate? Only those

contained in books? Elena Dell’Agnese [12], in more recent years than the works mentioned above, investigates the aspect of critical geopolitics, typical of the Anglo-Saxon world, which approaches the analysis of all the representations that contribute to the geographical discourse. Dell’Agnese thus introduces, in the analysis of territorial discourses, not only the formal channels of geo-historical knowledge, such as maps and school books, or the practical channels of politics, such as the speeches of statesmen, but also all those forms of popular culture, such as the cinema, the mass media or celebratory monuments, that prove in some way capable of conveying a “political” representation of reality (Dell’Agnese, 2007, p. 4). We anchor ourselves to this thought in order to try to open up to some other types of mediaspace as well, and in particular to the new spaces created by digital media, which Couldry and McCarthy [13] speak of at length. In support of this hypothesis, it is only worth mentioning that back in 1997 Janet Murray [14] identified spatiality as one of the main properties of digital media. In Aharon Kellerman, one of the greatest referents of the relationship between virtual and real space, a few years later we find an in-depth and conscious theorisation of Internet space that portrays its main features and the inevitability of the study:

“Real space can be experienced bodily and mentally using all the senses. Similarly, cartographic maps drawn for real space territories constitute material paper documents, which are, therefore stable entities of information. Cyberspace, on the other hand, is a most flexible and instantly changing mode of information presentation, sensed by its users in rather restricted ways, normally visually or audio-visually” [15].

Thus, also in the Internet, as in the other more traditional media through which narratives and perceptions unravel and influence each other, we can recognise a factual place, a fictional place and a renamed place, resorting to Lennart Davis’ spatial tripartition [16]. In each facet, the narrative flowing through the network of digital media or, we will use indifferently, new media is rich in those emotions (sentiment) that enrich a designator of realms. In this way, paraphrasing Westphal [17] the properties expressed through a story—which in the new media is easily translated into a brief commentary—will be added to the properties progressively actualised and made close to the truth, realistic, in the referent. The construction of ontological territoriality, therefore, cannot disregard, willy-nilly, the voice and emotions that in the new media follow one another without temporal barriers and with few spatial barriers.

Culture and everyday life feed and intertwine in a fluid space that includes digital and tangible space. Every moment there exists mobile places in which social and cultural meaning becomes a discourse, a trace.

2. Global images and cultural images

In geographical space, the narrative element has therefore become fundamental, coexisting with the other functional elements of the territories, consolidated and unavoidable, and reinterpreting their images. The modern jungle of communications, mediated by the new virtual environments of socialisation, returns us to spatial contexts increasingly contaminated by images, information and signs distributed by social media. Images and narratives spread through the ether territories filtered by the entirely subjective perceptions of individuals or, from an economic perspective, of communication and marketing men. These same places, filtered, leave a powerful stimulus in the perception of those who receive the message, seduced by the power of storytelling and vision. In this way, a fertile breeding

ground is prepared for the dissemination of images of places that are defined as global. The global image of a place is an attempt to pre-package the image of the world [18]. It is possible that it was not the video that took over in the formation of knowledge, but rather something larger and more encompassing: it is a new perceptual mode through which knowledge is consolidated and which can be agreed upon as non-alphabetic, thus including the attitude of looking at everything that appears on the video, not reading or reading the bare minimum. Storytelling through images conveys new perceptions, the eye transposes and influences cognitive maps, and this is also the case when the subject of the narration is the territory. Real places are incessantly replaced by places made up of ever-changing, ever-new scenarios. Imaginaries and narratives no longer relate to the real as its different aspects or as its external parts: the scenarios shared in a photograph, in a commentary, in a film, are built on perceptive bases (imaginaries) and, in the cognitive process of those who absorb the message, they themselves constitute reality. The difference between the real and the image, between the real and the conveyance of the real, between the real and the virtual has become ever more subtle. In the beautiful and illuminated places, places of events and advertising, the invisible places imaged through communication materialise on the ground, and if the network materialises on the ground and the virtual inhabits and changes the physicality of spaces, cyberspace takes on the connotations of real places, while it already has its own iconography and spatial representation [19].

The new forms of communication have had two opposite effects: on the one hand, they serve to consolidate global images of territories rarefied in their own stereotype, and on the other hand, they allow radical processes of deconstruction of signifiers and meanings that, through disorientation, liberate the subcultures and aesthetic forms of urban reality, leaving space for the cultural images of places that are expressed with a great wealth of shades of meaning and are written (represented, communicated, imagined) with all the multiple meanings they have. The cultural images of places are traversed by personal perceptions, the semiology of landscape, everyday practices, and the sense of place. Identity and otherness, personal space and social space are summarised in cultural images; these elements are developed through the perceptive and cultural conquest of spaces in which to orient oneself, to confront rules and values, to express one's needs by negotiating them with the needs and projects of others (this justifies the methodologies chosen for the analysis of the cases: sensory ethnography and digital visual methodology). The construction of a cultural image is based on the anthropological perception of a landscape, which is mediated through the use of symbolic superstructures, which are not real, but realistic and, for this reason, are cultural superstructures, full of meanings that are the synthesis of both human action in places and all related sensorial and perceptive aspects. All these elements, combined with everyday practices, life experiences and the political and social context, summarised in images, become the cultural image of a place and, in this becoming, these images are responsible for the production of the sense of place. The various forms of reproduction of the world's places have enormous identity potential because they summarise in images the relationship of creation and representation of people and their culture exercised in places. Place is the construct of this existential complexity between place, individual and environment, cultural images are conveyed through various practices of artistic reproduction including film, photographs, paintings etc. and mediated through media, to an enormous extent they are conveyed through social media.

A fundamental element emerges from this reasoning and from which the study that will be presented later on originated: when the experience lived in a given place produces emotion, wellbeing,

social relations, memory and planning, places become part of the cultural and emotional history of the people who experience them and, unexpectedly, these emotions and the habit of lived and repeated practices mean that places, even those that are not known, even those that are small and very small, become ideal matrices of vital values including beauty, serenity and planning. The cultural image welcomes all those aggregated in the same locality who thus discover themselves defined by a complex system of relations, an element of collective connections that link people and places from the smallest, family and local scale to the global scale. Thus, by expanding one's scale from the community in which one is embedded, cultural images move from the personal, typically egocentric space towards a social space that accommodates values generated outside the home, in which one fits in and feels part of a common project. In this process of signification, the communication of the territory is an essential part of the culture of contemporary cities, since it assigns a key to the interpretation of territorial identities, which are increasingly fragmented but more and more united and contaminated by the idiomatic language of the place.

A very clear differentiating element between global images of territories and cultural images concerns temporality. Global images are the result of a monolithic communication, neatly conveyed mainly by the market actors of the cities, therefore it is synthetic, it is fixed around some fixed elements and these elements are repeated cross-medially and trans-medially: pasta and tomato for Italy, for example, or the apple for New York and so on. These simple, synthetic, iconographic and repeated elements are easily fixed in time, become symbols and persist unchanged for a very long time. Exactly the opposite happens with the cultural image of a place: it has no stable meaning and is, instead, the privileged container of the many meanings and identities that, like indeterminable flows, cross spaces. These two images are not antagonistic, they can coexist, where the global image is truly capable of capturing the true and most manifest essence of a place, they will be able to coexist as a base of stable values, sedimented over time, and a base instead in continuous becoming, fluid, mutable together with the styles, the subcultures that alternate in a territory. Conversely, where the global image captures elements that are only valid for the purpose of commodifying the territory, the two images will live independently of each other, attracting different audiences, stimulating different interests and different relationships between people and places.

3. Material and methods

These reflections on global images and cultural images, framed in the scientific context of digital communication of the territory, determined the digital visual and sensory geography workshop conducted in the classroom with the students of the teaching course Geography of Tourism at the University of Insubria, Como (Italy), during the spring 2022.

In order to deepen the synergy of mixed methods in geographical teaching combining fieldworks and social media-based sensory and digital visual methods [20], a laboratorial and didactical activity was carried out, inside and outside of the class. The first part of this workshop was addressed by classroom lectures in which the essential concepts just described were explained, also the twofold research objective: to recognise a global image and to interpret one's own cultural images of territories.

As a conclusion to this phase, working deliberately without providing methodological elements, the Pixar film *Luca* was visualised, set in Italy and with an Italian director, Enrico Casarosa, but

produced in the US, in 2021 and distributed by The Walt Disney Company. The reason for this choice lies in the fact that Luca is a film that talks about Italy to an international audience and therefore articulates the narrative on all the stereotypes linked to the global image of Italy, reinforcing and supporting them. At this stage the didactic methods used is: *peer education*.

This is an actively involving methodology with the aim of developing experienced life skills. In this educational methodology, peers would be models for the acquisition of knowledge and skills of various kinds and for the modification of behaviour and attitudes, generally relating to being well in everyday life. The peer has to manage the relationships between the students in a mediating role and is therefore perceived as part of the group. One of the strengths of peer education is the reactivation of socialisation within the class group, which is useful for dealing with the next part of the workshop in which group work is required. The peer alone does not transform anything, but is itself a stimulus for participation: the class, during the interventions, is involved and encouraged in the elaboration of experiences and experiences in order to understand, through the didactic tool of the film, how a global image amplifies stereotypes, conveys them widely and creates disturbance in the local society, which feels misrepresented. Peer education shows how the learning experience can be useful to better confront one's own experience and everyday life, becoming a tool not only for cultural growth, but also for improving well-being. In addition, the students involved have the perception of experiencing an informal moment of life within the normal course of teaching. This fosters confidence and an attitude of active and cooperative learning.

After preparing the class with the appropriate theoretical foundations and an open attitude to participative teaching, the second stage of this teaching activity was initiated. In this second stage, the pupils were given the task of analysing a global digital image of some known territory of their choice in small groups. In addition, they were given the task of investigating a cultural territorial image, working individually. The reasons for this choice lie in the fact that the global digital image of a territory is the same for a huge number of people, whereas the cultural image, springing from the sense of place, personal perceptions and emotions, is completely variable from individual to individual and cannot be analysed by a group of people. This also highlights the salient characteristic of these images: one is so rarefied and stereotyped that it is identical for everyone, therefore, necessarily fallacious. How does one realise that this uniformity of global territorial images is fallacious? This can be understood with the second fieldwork: discovering that the cultural image of a place is imbued with subjective elements, helps to understand how difficult it is to trust stereotyped images.

The methodology with which the students analysed the global digital images was digital visual methods [20]. Geography has long been characterised by the visual element and several Progress reports in Human Geography on the presence of the visual in geography have highlighted how knowledge production in human geography has been anchored in representations of various kinds for a very long time [21]. As Leszczynski wrote:

“It is now difficult to think of visual things without conjuring thoughts of simultaneously digital things: mobile screens, streaming video, Snapchat. These digital visual phenomena saturate and mediate the spaces and practices of our everyday lives. They accompany and surround us as we make our ways through the urban spatial fabric. We contribute visual content to any number of digital platforms. These relatively recent proliferations have unique implications for geographic methodologies that attend to the visual” (Leszczynski, 2019, p.1143)

Some communication tools are more useful than others for the semiotic and visual codification (narration, representation) of territorial action, among them, we certainly recognize visual communication. Visual narrative/representation holds a share of the symbolic control of processes of configuration of territories, facilitated by the use of synthetic messages, reinforcement of symbols, aesthetic syntheses. E.g., the sense of place is often reverberated by images that draw on the same color palette and icons that penetrate the imaginary and situate themselves in identity sentiment. For these reasons, the fluid relationships between narrative/representation and territory are simultaneously investigated by both socio-semiotic and geographical research.

In the current communicative context, characterized by media convergence, narratives/representations of the territory are often conveyed by social media, which, due to their pervasiveness, contribute to the circularity of the relationship linking territories to their communication. In this light, territories should be interpreted as semiotic objects and, therefore, as polysemous objects since they are made up of a layering of meaning and significance, a layering of relationships and a succession of narratives/representations that give them a very wide range of meanings. This polysemy endorses the analysis of territorial communication and the resulting mythopoiesis that in some cases, such as the one analyzed here, is being reinforced.

Indeed, these are the basic considerations that gave rise to the analysis of local and global narratives/representations by students of the Geography course at Insubria University.

So, in addition to the visual turn, already long established in geography, the digital turn has entailed a further specialisation of visual methods. Rose, in his numerous works dedicated to digital geographies [22] writes that digital and visual research methods must include digital visual art as *part of the process of generating evidence to explore research questions*, and with them must also be considered all methods that use digital technologies and computational techniques to collect, explore and analyse visual media or to visualise data.

In this context of the growing importance of digital-visual methods for geographical research practices, work has begun on the visual analysis of global images of places through digital media.

In this part of the research, the students received these instructions:

1. Do an image search with digital tools and find digital media in which there are images about a place of your interest, which you do not know directly but which you also feel you know from indirect sources.
2. With reference to the chosen place, note down which images are present. What message/emotion/perception they convey?
3. Write down your thoughts: are the images mainly used to communicate what emotions? What values? Is this an appropriate use? Do they communicate what you expect? Why?
4. Try to understand, from different sources (e.g. social networks, blogs etc.), whether this narrative corresponds to the autonomy of the autochthonous.

Cultural image analysis, on the other hand, was approached with a mixed-methods approach. Digital visual methodology was used as the methodology for producing cultural images and then sensory ethnography provided the tools to understand the sense of place of the images produced. Sensorial ethnography [23] relates the researcher to multisensory experiences that include memories, perceptions, the specific culture of the observer and *observed*, practices and imagination. This method also includes moving ethnographies to examine empirical knowledge arising from the experience of places.

Students were asked to work according to this scheme:

- I. Choose a place you have lived in or live in
- II. Walk through that place, mentally or actually, taking the route you are most familiar with and at the end describe in a short written text what you have observed (max. 250 words)
- III. Walk the same route and this time try to describe it using images (photo, video, drawing)
- IV. Think back to the process of producing the two descriptions. How do they differ? Which one was more complex? Why?

4. Results

In order to examine the results of the empirical work, it is necessary to divide the considerations with respect to the two projects, the project on global images on the one hand and the project on cultural images on the other hand.

4.1. *Digital and Global Territorial Images*

Eighty university students participated in the work presented below.

As just discussed, the first empirical part of the work was aimed at the digital visual analysis of global images of territories that the students felt they knew, although they had not visited them. Thus, the students' territorial knowledge was to be based exclusively on digitally mediated knowledge. At this stage, the class could divide into groups and freely choose which places of the global imaginary to work on. The territories selected were:

- Mexico (Team 1, T1)
- Canary Islands (Team 2, T2)
- Portugal (Team 3, T3)
- Alaska (Team 4, T4)
- Paris (Team 5, T5)
- Capetown (Team 6, T6)
- Cuba (Team 7, T7)
- Dubai (Team 8, T8)
- Saint Tropez (Team 9, T9)
- Dubai (Team 10, T10)
- Sicily (Team 11, T11)
- London (Team 12, T12)
- New York (Team 13, T13)

Teams were spontaneously heterogeneous in terms of gender otherwise teams are very variegated in terms of number of participants: we have the biggest team, Team 1, with 6 students, and the smallest, Team 13, with one student. All of the teams worked in the classroom under my (lecturer) supervision according to the peer education methodology already discussed, and then, once the project was almost ready, they met freely outside the classroom to refine the presentation.

During class work, space was devoted to the choice of digital sources.

A growing strand of geographic studies investigates digital-visual artefacts to build analysis methodologies that include digital technologies in their visual quality.

These methodologies are useful for collecting, producing, analysing and synthesising data derived in various ways from computational technologies. The digital-visual method used in this case, is able to capture secondary data, for analysing digital global images of places.

Given the pervasiveness of visual digital media in our daily lives and practices, digital visual media must now be categorised as objects of research in many fields, including geography. There are now numerous methodologies used in geography to accommodate technological and computational tools both as objects of analysis and as tools for reporting the results of research [24]. In particular, digital images improve autoethnographic methodologies by allowing scholars to deepen their own perceptions and images of the same place they are in front of. As an ethnographic medium, digital images shared on social media are particularly useful for recording the data, results, opinions and reflections of scholars, but also place branding politics that are very often built on the same territorial stereotypes with a profoundly distorting effect between the perceptions of locals and the territory performed for its sale.

In the light of these considerations, another useful element of reflection was added to the choice of digital sources: e-wom (electronic Word of Mouth). WOM develops in online communities even more than in social communities in the strict sense, i.e. offline. Online word-of-mouth, also known as e-WOM, differs from traditional word-of-mouth precisely because of the high credibility it enjoys, since it includes all forms of informal communication between consumers about the most diverse characteristics of a product/service, and is perceived as independent of influences of market players [25] Although this is an unrealistic perception, the effects in terms of building shared imagery is realistic. Added to the power of word of mouth is a characteristic of web generated content, unique in the world of communication, which is the virality of messages. Therefore, when searching for stereotype-generating content that spreads widely and is, therefore, global, digital media such as videos, films, promotional images, TV series and specialised blogs were selected as sources.

After data collection, the research teams technically analysed the images, points 2 and 3 of their instructions. In all cases, the students noted that the images they collated all show the same message, provoke the same emotions, trigger the same perceptions. And, above all, none of them were surprised by the messages implicit in the images because they corresponded exactly to their own idea of those places, never visited, yet known, pre-imagined and pre-packaged.

It is well known that the power of the images conveyed by digital media has a global dimension, in fact, consumer-based societies use a digital and capillary conveyance of global, i.e. stereotyped and stereotyping, images of territories to instil or even manipulate ideas of places to manage their senses and meanings from above. Studying stereotyped territorial images is useful for deconstructing them and restoring to places their own sense, their own identity, which are changeable, which cannot be uniform and cannot be imposed.

In order to understand through an autochthonous how much they agreed with the global images of the territories analysed, the various teams used different strategies.

T1 decided to respond to item 4 on the list with an analysis of a scientific article [26] involving Mexican chefs and consumers interviewed to probe their perceptions of Mexican cuisine. They answered the following research questions

- RQ1: What is the social representation among chefs and consumers towards the concept of gastronomy and the cultural domain of Mexican cuisine?
- RQ2: Are there differences in the social representation of how chefs and consumers define the concept of gastronomy and the cultural domain of Mexican cuisine?
- RQ3: Are there differences in the social representation of the concept of gastronomy among consumers according to their socio-demographic characteristics (gender, age and educational level)?

More interesting than the result obtained, which is already reported in the study cited above, was the methodological choice of the group, which carefully researched qualitative work carried out on the natives.

Another original hypothesis for analysing the perceptions of natives came from T6: in order to understand how stereotypes about Cape Town were perceived by locals, T6 chose to analyse the music tracks of South African hip hop bands and found very interesting and critical elements. An example came from the lyrics of song: *Dis Iz Why I'm Hot!* (by Die Antwoord):

*“South Africa, man I heard that place is f***n’
wack
When you say South Africa
The first things that come to mind
Is yup, racism, apartheid and crime”*

4.2. Cultural territorial images. Exploring sense of place

The second strand of research is focused on the visual analysis and sensory ethnography of students' well-known places.

Fewer students participated in this project, because they stated that they felt too difficult with the interpretation of their emotions using the scientific method. This aspect was of great interest to me. My initial expectation, in fact, was exactly the opposite: based on the reflections developed by Wenger [27] on situated learning, I believed that the prospect of learning aimed at deepening places, identities and everyday practices would be more attractive. If, in fact, quality learning comes through direct experience, involvement and participation, this seemed to me to be an excellent opportunity. However, the deterrent was found in the transcription of the experience, and even the students who chose to carry out the empirical analysis exercise commented that the greatest difficulty for them was found during the transcription of their own feelings, point IV. Indeed, the challenge implicit in this exercise is to reflect on one's own emotionality and connections with concrete situations in one's daily life. The students who chose to continue with this second empirical project explained that they were curious to learn more critically and in depth about their local contexts, in order to carry out authentic activities afterwards. The main purpose of situated learning, in fact, is precisely to encourage educators to place students in environments that are as close as possible to the contexts in which their behaviours and skills will find application, and what better place to do this than at home?

The students who participated, individually, in the second work placement, decided to study these familiar and, in various ways, familiar places:

- Kerry (Ireland, S1)
- Bellagio (Italy, S2)
- Bellano (Italy, S3)
- Lecco (Italy, S4)
- Seveso (Italy, S5)
- Seveso (Italy, S6)
- Valencia (Spain, S7)
- Valle Sant'Antonio (Italy, S8)
- Varese (Italy, S9)
- Cannes (France, S9)
- Osnago (Italy, S10)
- Cantù (Italy, S11)
- Cernobbio (Italy, S12)
- Annone Brianza (Italy, S13)
- Vanzago (Italy, S14)
- Valmorea (Italy, S15)
- Fuerteventura (Canarie, S16)
- Como (Italy, S17)
- Grandate (Italy, S18)

Valle di Sant'Antonio was a particularly interesting case. From the transcription in digital images of the route usually traversed by the student, the emotional component associated with the route emerged powerfully. The textual analysis, phase II, is intentionally quite objective and less personal than the visual analysis, which follows, because from the analytical description of the route it is possible to imagine the places. At the contrary, the visual dimension, if decontextualised and without captions, makes it more difficult to identify an exact signification of the places: in fact, the more detailed a photograph is, the less easy it will be to understand the context from which it has been extrapolated and, in this case, to imagine the route that the owner of the same image has taken.

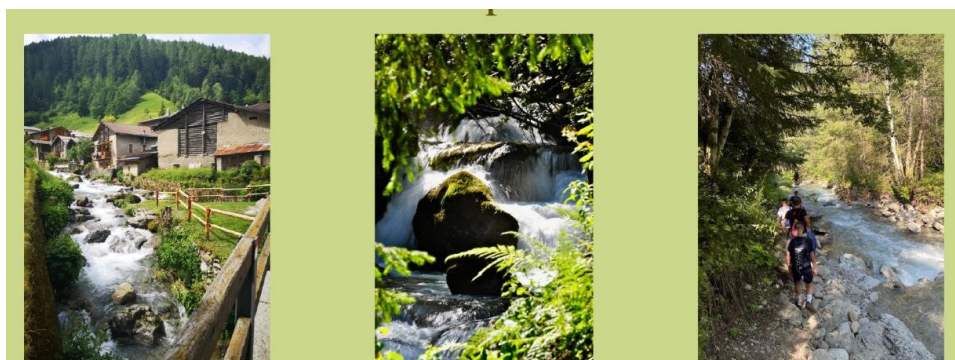


Figure 1. Parte del percorso di S8 in immagini. Source: S8's processing, 2021.

In phase III, the choice of a specific shot contains personal motivations linked to it that are not intelligible to the observer. Therefore, within the freedom of interpretation of the referent, the freedom

of imagination, perception, emotion with respect to a local image is expressed. Although images are linked to an expressive value with greater cognitive and perceptive effects, elaborating an evaluative text relating to the chosen place, which the student has frequented for a very long time with her affections, posed a difficulty for her: “elaborating an evaluative text relating to the chosen place, which I have frequented for 16 years with family and friends during the summer, was much more complex, especially if I consider the quantity of details that are personally relevant, but superfluous for the reader” (S8).

This is the descriptive text prepared by the student:

“I load my rucksack on my back and walk down the stairs to the pits to get the car. It is very hot, but I trust in the fresh forest air: on the other hand, the path is only passable in summer, when the ground is dry and beaten.

After a couple of kilometers along the hairpin bends, I take the first diversions to the right signposted Sant’Antonio and follow the road. After about ten minutes, I spot the car park and sigh: for the past couple of years, the municipality has redrawn the parking lines blue, with the excuse of discouraging an excessive concentration of people in the valley.

I get out of the car to take the path to my destination and I feel a different air, fresher and cleaner. I cross the bridge and, on the left side, I notice the houses of the locals perched on the river, but I decide to continue further. The path is not impassable and takes half an hour to walk uphill through the forest, skirting a stream. I catch sight of the first wooden bridge halfway along the path and cross it to continue: the last stretch is missing, but in about ten minutes I know that I am descending into the valley.

From the darkness and rustling of the forest, I begin to glimpse the first rays of sunlight and the first dwellings: in front of me I finally have the Sant’Antonio valley, embraced by the surrounding peaks still covered in snow, the wider river bed, the chimneys of the smoking refuges and the farmers preparing hay to feed the pastures. I continue on to the bivouac area and, as soon as I see the fence, I make sure to close it properly: from here on, the pastures are free and care must be taken not to disturb them. I continue for another ten minutes or so and cross the bridge to the islet to set up the tent. Before I start putting it up, I sit on the grass in silence: all around me is silent except for the cowbells and chirping crickets, the sun is warm and I feel relaxed.”

In this text, it is possible to retrieve elements of visual analysis, and sensory ethnography, there is a richly emotional description of the course with which emotions related to the student’s experience are associated. As in the work of Sunderlanda N, Bristedab H, Gudesu O, Boddyc J, Da Silva M [28] sensory ethnography used as a methodology to study everyday experience because it encourages researchers to set their senses in motion to identify how previously ignored or unknown sensory experiences shape local well-being. So, it can be highlighted the emotionality that binds like a common thread all the elements of the text, which ends, not surprisingly, with a feeling: relaxation.

5. Discussion and conclusions

The first strange of the workshop exposed, is about digital visual analysis considering the powerful and viral place image digitally disseminated. An attempt was made to understand how, the images of places transmitted through digital tools, are harbingers of stereotyped and stereotypical content and how, the ubiquity of the new media, can favour the flattening of imaginaries and perceptions with respect to global images of very famous places.

The web space is a cybernetic space which definitively blurs the boundaries that wanted it, until the end of the last century, in antithesis with the real one and that instead overflows like a river in flood into the tangible space with which it communicates, trades, influences and is influenced by. By now the distinction between the real world and possible worlds has been definitively cracked [29] and if, as Franco Farinelli [30] argues in the afterword to Soja's *After the Metropolis*, it is necessary to recognise the character discontinuous, heterogeneous and anisotropic character of cities, then we can try to grasp in the complex system of relations mediated by the web the new sense of inhabited space. Soja codifies spatiality as a dynamic process [31] allowing us to thus allowing us to assume the interactivity of relations as a point of conjunction and assimilation between real and virtual. The virtual world constitutes itself precisely as a supranational web that produces a new spatial geography drawn by the lines of connection between material points physically embodying the representation of the modern social [32]. Dynamic forms of textuality and new modes of interaction, personal and collective, have contributed to the affirmation of the spatial qualities of the territorial representation. The decoded places through images, depending on the case, refer to specific aspects: sensitive and visual above all. The mythopoietic force of cyberspace has long influenced the description of places as the ultimate representation of an imagined and hyper reality. Such representativeness reveals that virtual space has very little to do with the concept of the abstract or the complex skein of wired networks by Augè [33]. It is, on the contrary, a place that multiplies the relationships that constitute the inhabited part of the Internet, affects identities and is certainly an expression of an anthropologically dense place [34]. Anthropological density manifests itself mainly with the development of Web 2.0 and the spread of new media that configure the Internet as a real social space, a telematic square within which experience is realised in ways and forms similar to the real square, albeit with well-defined and non-similar characteristics.

Given the pervasiveness of the web's messages and images with respect to our perceptions, the classroom experiment and this paper sought to strengthen a critical approach to space and spatiality in human geography, in line with the seminal contributions of Simandan [35–37], Cosgrove [38–40], and Gregory [41–43].

It led the students to realise how much their own vision of imagined cities, i.e. cities known only through external, so-called global narratives, did not lead to a true knowledge of the territory and local reality, and indeed, as the students themselves pointed out in their work, relying on an uncritical acknowledgement of images of territories only leads to the reinforcement of stereotypes concerning them. In most cases, these stereotypes have turned out to be fallacious, have been disavowed by the natives or even overturned, as in the case of Alaska, for example.

Similarly, analysing the origin of the personal sense of place, through reasoned, non-random sensory and experiential knowledge, led the students to understand their own places, to re-traverse them, with a participatory mobility and with the eyes of the geographer, in order to derive their sense and essence and provide a personal and structured elaboration of the sense of place. According to all students, the global project taught them to ask questions and not passively absorb information, the global project taught them to understand the many pieces of lived life and emotional experiences that taught them to love their places.

This exercise provided an example of how to stimulate criticality in the observation of places and, more implicitly, made them realise that there is no objectivity when talking about places, because it is the practices we do with them that determine the meaning and the sense of a place.

Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest in this paper.

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