



## **Participation, geography and social media. Discussing method**

*Gaetano Sabato*<sup>1</sup>

### **Abstract**

The chapter, from a cultural geographical perspective, offers a reflection on the research methodology used to study some social media. More particularly, starting from the case of the Facebook group “Palermo di una volta” (“Palermo of the past”), subject of a previous study, the results achieved through the analysis of the research process are retraced. The group, in fact, for the many members (hundreds of thousands) who are part of it, is an opportunity to reconstruct the geography of places in the city, both in their contemporaneity and in their historical context, in an intertwining of individual and collective narratives. Regardless of the formal correctness of the information the group members reach, free participation in this reconstruction produces shared knowledge, giving value to interactions, albeit mediated, within the social network. It is a form of spontaneous “participatory geography” which, however, poses an epistemological problem to the researcher: joining the same group to study it, making the social network an object of study but also a means of study. In this sense, it is described how becoming a member of the same online community is a useful option for observing the interactions that take place within it (posts, comments, etc.) and establish a first contact based on trust with the informing members. In this process we cannot forget the positioning of the researcher “in the field”, even if virtual.

**Keywords:** Cultural Geography, Participatory Geography, Research Methods, Social Media, Space

### **Works cited**

- Amin, A. and Thrift, N., 2002, *Cities. Reimagining The Urban*, Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Crawford K., 2010, Listening, not Lurking: The Neglected Form of Participation. In: Grief H.; Hjorth L.; Lasén A. (Eds.), *Cultures of Participation*, Peter Lang, Berlino 2010, 63-74.
- de Certeau, M., 1990, *L’Invention du quotidien, I : Arts de faire*, Gallimard, Paris.
- de Certeau, M., 2002, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, University of California Press, Berkeley.
- Duranti, A., 2007, *Etnopragmatica. La forza nel parlare*, Carocci, Roma.
- Elmes G., 2005, *From macrogeography to microgeography and back: Emerging issues for geographical information handling across scales*, Acts of the conference AGILE, Estoril.
- Foucault, M., 1975, *Surveiller et punir : Naissance de la prison*, Gallimard, Paris.
- Foucault, M., 2004, *Sécurité, territoire, population* (Ed. Michel Senellart), EHESS, Paris.
- Geertz, C., 1977, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Basic Books, New York.
- Hinton, S. and Hjorth, L., 2013, *Understanding Social Media*, Sage, London.

---

<sup>1</sup> Department of Psychological, Pedagogical, Exercise and Training Sciences, University of Palermo, Italy, e-mail: gaetano.sabato@unipa.it.



**Information Technologies and Social Media: New Scientific Methods for the Anthropocene**  
*Gaetano Sabato, Joan Rosselló (Eds.)*

Jakobson, R., 1980, *Essais de linguistique générale*, Éditions de Minuit, Paris.

Kindon, S., Pain R. and Kesby M. (Eds.), 2007a, *Participatory Action Research. Approaches and Methods. Connecting people, participation and place*, Routledge, London-New York.

Kindon, S., Pain R. and Kesby M. (Eds.), 2007b, *Participatory Action Research. Origins, approaches and methods*. In: Kindon S., Pain R. and Kesby M. (Eds.), *Participatory Action Research. Approaches and Methods. Connecting people, participation and place*, Routledge, London-New York, 9-18.

Kozinets, R.V., 2010, *Netnography. Doing Ethnographic Research Online*, Sage, Los Angeles-London-New Delhi.

Kozinets, R.V., 2015, *Netnography. Ridefined 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*, Sage, Los Angeles-London-New Delhi.

Kozinets, R.V. and Gambetti, R., (Eds.) 2021, *Netnography Unlimited. Understanding Technoculture Using Qualitative Social Media Research*, Routledge, New York-London.

Lefebvre H., 1991, *The Production of the Space*, Blackwell, Oxford-Cambridge, MA.

Lowenthal, D., 1985, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Harvey, D., 1989, *The Condition of Postmodernity*. Blackwell, Oxford-Cambridge (Mass.).

Messina, G. and Sabato, G., 2018, *Città memoria e social network*. In: Mercatanti L. and Sabato G. (Eds.), *Geografie digitali. Spazi e socialità*, StreetLib, Milano, 55-77.

Pain, R. and Francis, P., 2003, "Reflections on participatory research", *Area*, 35, 1, pp. 46-54.

Sisti, L., 2007, *L'isola del tesoro*, Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli, Milano.

Soja, E.W., 1996, *Thirdspace. Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*, Wiley-Blackwell, Cambridge (Mass).

Soja, E.W. and Hooper, B. 1993, *The Spaces that Difference Makes. Some Notes on the Geographical Margins of the New Cultural Politics*. In: Keith M. and Pile S. (eds.), *Place and the Politics of Identity*, Routledge, London-New York, 180-202.

Van der Hoeven, A., 2017, *The Mediatization of Urban Cultural Heritage: Participatory Approaches to Narrating the Urban Past*. In: Driessens O., Bolin G., Hepp A. and Hjarvard S. (eds.) *Dynamics of Mediatization. Institutional Change and Everyday Transformations in a Digital Age*, Palgrave Macmillan, Londra, 293-312.

## Sitography

*Palermo di una volta* Facebook group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/palermodiunavolta> (last visit 7th May 2022)