

Mapping cities through narratives  
**The Making of “Old Town Centre” and “North Trento”**

Claudio Coletta, Dept. of Sociology and Social Research, University of Trento  
claudio.coletta@soc.unitn.it

Francesco Gabbi, Dept. Urban Planning and Public Policies, IUAV, Venezia  
francesco.gabbi@gmail.com

Giovanna Sonda, Istituto Regionale di Studi e Ricerca Sociale (IRSRS) Trento  
giovanna.sonda@irsrs.tn.it

[Draft – Please do not quote without authors' permission]

**Acknowledgments**

The study is part of the Project Penelope, jointly supported by Fondazione Caritro and Comune di Trento, Italy. Early drafts of this article benefited from discussion within SCOS and EGOS conferences.

## Mapping cities through narratives The Making of “Old Town Centre” and “North Trento”

Our study explores the relationships between narratives and practices and aims at accounting for how parts of the city are shaped through the interplay of narratives and practices. This research situates within the discourse of urban and organization studies, focusing on everyday practices and narratives of urban life. Stemming from the analysis of local news, the article compares and discusses the narratives characterizing the city centre and a suburb of Trento, an Italian medium sized city known for its high quality of life and pervasive presence of the public administration. The study provides two further meanings of what Park meant about the performative role of news: firstly news localize places and make them public, secondly news evoke an imaginary that becomes part of a specific language used by inhabitants to intercept the language of public policies.

**Keywords:** urban narratives, everyday life, administrative practices, local news, public policies, tactics.

### Introduction

What does a city tell about itself? Which stories, legends, myths account for its complexity? Not only practices and policies affect and transform urban domain, but also narratives have a performative role, enacting practices of living the city and influencing the way spaces are represented. This recalls the concept of *episteme* (Foucault, data): knowledge that gets organized. It does not matter then if stories do not correspond to the real practices embedded in the city or to its architecture, because knowledge creates other cities, other practices, other architectures. Moreover, knowledge itself is knowledge in practice.

Discourses are embodied in agency, they tend to produce reflexive accounts and wishful thinking, moreover their performative power enacts different imagery about what the city has been and might be. This suggests that there is a link between the organizational discourse and the urban texture. Institutional rationalities and local news are two discourses that perform different urban settings. These representations emerge as the encounter of narratives, practices and policies. They embody heterogeneous geographies of the city and account for its own multiplicity, made of countless interstices and overlapping patterns.

This article aims at accounting how different part of the city are shaped through the interplay of different narratives, as embodied in local news, maps, institutional plans and regulations, but also through public meetings and citizens' testimonies. As a result, different versions of what a space could be are enacted and interfere. Our purpose is to produce reflexive accounts of how different parts of the city are conceptualized, represented and shaped.

We will present here some remarks stemming from the project “Penelope – the emerging pattern of urban texture”. Penelope consists in a qualitative research on the city of Trento (Italy) based on an evidential approach to investigate the composing fabric of the city. It makes use of press-related, administrative and grounded narratives as clues to grasp less noticed yet relevant phenomena that can orient the public discourse and suggest different and innovative modalities of living and managing urban issues. The reasons for choosing to analyze narratives lay, firstly, in the performative role of news (Park, 1940) and of narratives in general, influencing the way urban space is represented and re-organized. Secondly, newspapers provide tracks to understand on what kind of events public attention focuses on, thus the process of collective construction of urban issue is useful for us not to master what has really happened but to understand how public controversies arise and how they recreate public spaces. While reporting events, news evokes also public imaginary (symbols, common sense, system of values). Hence, review of article offers a sampling of places where to address our attention. In fact, among the multitude of events, the newspapers’

selection to publish some piece of news instead of others and the labels newspapers use to classify urban issues and to locate events in semantic areas represent a sociological datum (Park, 1940).

Thirdly, news is the place where different positions become visible in the form of a controversy. In this respect, collecting and assembling news is both a door to have access to the *entangled nature* of public discourse (Lippmann, 1927) and a mean to orient its own course (Park, 1940). Whereas conflicts involve well-established and negotiating parties, controversies take place in practice and allow to observe public policies in action as *matters of concern* (Latour, 2005), the machinery around which entities are assembled and put to the test. In this perspective a space is public just because it is controversial.

Trento is a city of about 100.000 inhabitants located in the north east of Italy, characterized by a high quality of life and well known for the efficiency of its public administration. This efficiency means often a pervasive presence both in the field of social policies and urban planning. Such a condition discourage spontaneous initiatives, and reminds what Maffesoli (2007) says about the myth of Tebe: “Tebe is run perfectly but has lost its soul”.

“Old Town Centre” and “North Trento” are two labels occurring repeatedly in the public discussion about this city. For this reason a starting point of our research has been the collection and analysis of local news<sup>1</sup>. During our review of newspapers’ articles we recognized some recurring issues related to the use of public spaces in the Old Town Centre and in North Trento. Among the controversies reported by local newspapers, we focus on the “emerging” ones that is on those that have not been classified yet within the realm of public administration. For this reason they are generally managed with police measures which strengthen their character of exceptionality. Particularly, the issues we will discuss here refer to: the controversy of street musicians which led to a new and more restrictive regulation; the issue of noisy ‘happy hour’; the issue about the improvement of the old town; the issue of the animation of the centre through cultural events; the dramatization of North Trento though the Bronx metaphor; the sensuous connotation of suburban landscape; the community ideal it expresses.

In newspapers’ accounts, these issues are related to each other and refer in their turn to wider issues concerning the representation of the city centre and north Trento. We will describe and discuss these issues and their connections both within them and between other artefacts in order to get an insight into the process of construction of places. These issues suggests that “Old Town Centre” and “North Trento” do exist, first of all as they are named and so made different through these labels, and, secondly, in the extent that they are peculiarly maintained as such through practices.

The article develops in three parts. The first gives account of the issues involving the city centre; the second one refers to the formation of north Trento as a suburb. The last part aims at discussing the emerging urban texture by comparing the tactics and narratives used in both areas.

## 1. Making The Old Town Centre of Trento

### 1.1. Making old town centre silent and decorous: the street musicians' and “happy hour” controversies

One of the controversies involving the city centre deals with the problem of the music performances in the streets. Here noise shapes space as well as actors and contributes to define what a public space in the centre of the city should(n't) be. Aroused by the protests of people working and living in the historic centre, such controversy had visibility in local newspaper for twenty days between February and March 2008. Complaints urged public administration to revise the previous regulation introducing more restrictive norms in order to organize street music performances within the city.

<sup>1</sup>“Believe me, listening to 'O sole mio' for hours below the office isn't pleasant at all”<sup>2</sup>

The new discipline of street art, effective since the 29<sup>th</sup> March 2008, identifies 27 areas out of the town centre recognizable by specific signs. In these areas, musicians are allowed to play their music without restrictions in the numbers of days and hours and without previous communication. Most of the areas are already defined while others are still under experimentation:

“areas have been chosen following criteria that respect artists, but also residents and retailers. The regulation takes into account both the commercial interest of performers, by choosing squares and crosses where there is a good passing of stroller (pedestrians) and the size of places, that is the adequacy to host performances”<sup>3</sup>

“In detail the new regulation provides for musicians to perform within the limits of what is the so called ‘living room of the city’. [...] Also, free areas have been localized. They share the peculiarity of being not too close to flats or shops, so that the disturb for residents and retailers will be minimum”<sup>4</sup>

Selected areas are located out of the Limited Traffic Zone (the so called ZTL), that is the area dedicated to pedestrian traffic and where only residents’ cars have access and circulate. Generally, ZTL provides urban police with a frame to manage the traffic, but in this case it also contributes to define practices and functions that exceed the regulation of traffic. In this sense, ZTL map produces a conceptualisation of what is meant for city centre: an institutional artefact that has been addressed to manage pedestrians and cars, affects also the organization of shopping, leisure, cultural events street performances, even the historical memory. In fact, the map used to identify the so called “old town centre” and to manage the presence of street musicians corresponds ZTL.

In the city centre the performances of street musicians are subject to more restrictive rules<sup>5</sup>. In fact the city centre is the place where street musicians tend to perform most since there are more people passing by; in other words, more audience. One of the new rules that most affects street performances is the notification to the urban police of the time and place chosen to perform. According to street musicians, it compromises the improvisation, which is the main feature of their performances. On the other side, notification is the device that enables city police to get the control of urban space, because in this way they know in advance where the music performances will take place and they can verify on the notification the time assigned for the performance. In other words, ZTL and notification are the devices for urban police to “coordinate the use of the streets” in general:

“we coordinate the use of street. We have a precise control. We can know from the office which are the streets already busy and which artists are occupying them. On the plan arranged by our secretary's office we can immediately determine whether a street is already busy or if it is available partially because, for example, an artist occupies it in the morning but in the afternoon it is still available. It is the artist that chooses” [vice captain of urban police<sup>6</sup>]

In the attempt to negotiate the obligations of the new regulation, buskers need to build their own position not only stressing that they do not create disturb and they are innocuous, but also underlining the artistic value of the performance. Their respectful manner occurred also during the manifestation against the new regulation. Interviewed by journalists, buskers who were demonstrating outside the city hall defined themselves as having a peculiar, playful style of manifestation: “No uproar, it's not our style. Just some of our games” they said. According to an appeal subscribed by both by some town councilors and street artists: “their presence fills streets with vitality and joy”<sup>7</sup>.

“Innocuity” and “disturb” are the topics through which newspapers orient the public discourse about the new regulation, operating a specific emplotment of street art practice, complains, protests, rules, collective imaginary. The performative action of news lays in the echo effect that turns news into discussion about news. The initial focus of public discussion on the events themselves then drifts to the political issues they evokes: around the terms of “innocuity” and “disturb” positions are

enacted and the controversy takes place and is fostered both in informal and in institutional discourse. Here the discourse drifts from the episode of street musicians to the wider issues of adequacy of places and practices. News act not only orienting the public perception, to say it with Park, but also participating to the material construction of urban space.

In this sense, newspapers act as regulator of diverging position, and offer a device of image construction through practices of differentiation and identification (Czarniawska, 2008). In Czarniawska's terms, buskers build their image through allomorphy, namely they make themselves different in opposition to an undesirable entity (the beggars)<sup>8</sup>. On the other side, residents and professionals present themselves according to an automorphic mode of organizing identity, based on the priority of work and sleep in the use of old town centre.

Buskers insist on the pleasure to play and perform inside what they call the “beautiful frame”, made of old palaces and squares, which is considered the natural scene for their shows.

“It is much more beautiful – is the comment of a busker – to see an accordionist playing in front of a historic monument rather than in a post-industrial or suburban area”<sup>9</sup>

The narrative of the “beautiful frame”, “innocuity” and “the artistic value”, as well as the frame provided by ZTL, shape the monumental, decorum based and silent nature of Old Town Centre. Another issue reported by local newspapers and linked to this controversy, and more extensively, to the silent nature of Old Town Centre, is the one of ‘happy hour’. ‘Happy hour’ is a practice, common in many cities, especially in University cities, of selling beer and *spritz* (an typical Italian drink of aperitif-time) at a discounted price for a limited time.

The dispute of happy hour, usually bounded with the one concerning *aperitifs*, arose because of the crowd gathering around a pub of the city centre that on Tuesday evening, between 6 and 9 p.m. sells beer and *spritz* at the price of 1 euro. This event creates an agglomeration of students which spend long time outside the bar, in the central Via Calepina, talking and drinking. As a consequence, at the end of the evening that street is covered of plastic glasses, cigarettes and broken bottles because some students have started to bring their own bottles bought at the supermarket before joining the crowd.

Such a mess could not last invisible for long in the ‘tidy’ city of Trento. Some residents informed local journalists about the disarray caused by the ‘happy hour’ of the Tuesday evening:

“We feel abandoned. On Tuesday evening this place seems to be a battlefield, and often we don’t see anyone cleaning for days and days.”<sup>10</sup>

The major replied in an interview on the same newspaper the day after:

“it is a real mess because the young people can’t find a point of equilibrium and are not able to have fun without exaggerating.”<sup>11</sup>

The people of ‘happy hour’ arise another issue. This is the comment of a university student :

“if residents complain about us they are really hypocritical, with the rents so high that we pay for a room they should only keep off talking. They first get rid of the music and now they want to take out the “happy hour”. You cannot have your cake and eat it”<sup>12</sup>

This position recalls the conflictual relationship between the city and university students, especially concerning their leisure practices. On the one hand, students are a resource for a city. In fact, the public administration is working to make Trento more and more attractive<sup>13</sup>. On the other side public administration’s attitude aims at organizing and regulating the presence of students. This is, for example, the purpose of the campaign announced by the mayor himself to educate young people to the respect towards the city and its inhabitants. The slogan was: “*meno volume più a lungo*”<sup>14</sup>. The campaign had the support of the association gathering commercial concerns of the

city centre. The title of the campaign is: “*Trento e qualità. Aiutaci a mantenerla*”<sup>15</sup>. In other words, this issue has been located under the umbrella concept of the quality of life. Quality of life is connoted by quiet and absence of disturbing practices.



Fig. 1: "Lower, longer" campaign of Trento Municipality

## 1.2. Making Old Town Centre “attractive”: cultural events and city marketing

Despite of the insistence in the silent and decorous rhetoric, the historic centre is also the *place of entertainment* – as a public manager said to us – *where all the people from other parts of the city converge*<sup>16</sup>. During these events the city centre turns into an attractor for people living in the surroundings of the city and for tourists. How to make sense of the Janus faced city centre, both silent and lively? It seems that silence and decorum serve as a background for exceptional events, such as concerts of famous artists, “*la Notte Bianca*”, and the “*Festival dell’Economia*”<sup>17</sup>. They mobilize the attractive potentiality of the city in terms of marketing and business and counterbalance its ordinary way of being. Differently from buskers, extraordinary cultural and entertainment events can make use of institutional visibility being part of a city marketing plan:

“The ‘*Notte Bianca*’ is an occasion to make the city centre alive, underlines the president of the Consortium ‘*Trento Iniziative*’, decided to make visible the presence of the shops of the centre. (...) As about possible protests for noise the president of the Consortium is not worried: ‘I believe that in the end there won’t be any complain. And in any case they would be out of place: the city shouldn’t be caged within the same schemes’<sup>18</sup>

In this case, city marketing and the opportunity of business for local traders put the issue of disturb at a lower level of priority:

“Fear of protests for the music late in the night? No. We asked for the authorization. And for a day we confide in the goodness of citizens, underlines the organizer of the *Feste Vigiliane*”<sup>19</sup>

“The fact that an international artist of the calibre of Bob Dylan may come to sing in Trento is absolutely relevant. The prestige of the city and the commercial meaning of this operation justify even an economic balance not exactly positive” [The Mayor of Trento]<sup>20</sup>

While buskers' controversy is an example of negotiation of public spaces in everyday life and has been managed through a city police regulation, the organization of exceptional events is a matter tackled also in the strategic plan<sup>21</sup> of the Municipality. Such events function as counterpoints to everyday practices and can shed light on the different meanings and uses assigned to places and on the meaning of adequacy.

“To host in Trento one of the dates of the concert of Bob Dylan would be a great thing for the image of the territory (...) If the project would be approved with choice of Piazza Dante [the main square], I would not hesitate to give the use without any problem” [The Mayor of Trento]<sup>22</sup>

“I really would like that this event will have place. I'm not speaking nor as the president of the Province, nor as a fan, but as a person living in a territory that has invested a lot on music as an impulse for youth policies and for fostering aggregation” [The president of the Province of Trento]<sup>23</sup>

Noise and chaos are tolerated when they become a 'planned exception', as part of institutional cultural events. By confronting everyday controversies and exceptional ones we can see how places are conceptualized and shaped by collective imaginary and urban practices. These narratives suggest that the city is conceptualized and used mainly as a stage for events and as a window for its promotion.

### **1.3. Making Old Town Centre “old”: the invented tradition of shops against modern franchising**

A further issue occurring in newspapers involves the redevelopment of the old town centre. Particularly it deals with the role of shops, pubs and restaurant in making the centre lively, hospitable and pleasant for tourists, according to the value of tradition.

In these terms, even the presence of buskers do characterise the “Old Town Centre” as actually old. In fact, despite the complains and the restrictions of the new regulation, buskers can be seen as part of the city centre, an ingredient that, if measured out well, contributes to shape the image of a centre that recalls the middle age tradition of bards. Needless to say, buskers themselves prefer the centre as stage for their performances as says the petition street artists signed against the new regulation: “music and theatre and even poetry are arts born in the street: then they entered royal palaces and courts, but the street was not only the genetic place of every form of art, it was also the suited space to its full and free expression”.

The wink to the past through “the good shape, the memory, the consolatory architecture” (Biondillo, 2008, p.106) involves the whole process of image construction. That can be interpreted, for instance, as the an endeavour to re-invent a tradition (Hobsbawm, 1983) or to set and protect local market against the modernization and the spreading form of franchising.

“Nothing lefts of the old square Pasi as it was thirty years ago. An impoverishment of the square, the centre should have maintained a style to distinguish from the department stores. Whereas if you walk in the city, you can see only chains stores”<sup>24</sup> [The proprietor of the herbalist's shop comments]

Within the theme of the redevelopment of the city centre, the focus on tradition goes on with the aesthetic factor. In this respect the measures adopted by the public administration show a double tension: on the one hand such measures are meant to improve the image of the city centre; on the other hand they aim to conserve the traditional aspect of the main squares and the central streets of the city centre by supporting historical shops against the competition of the chain stores and the prices of the rentals. To better understand the significance of this operation, it is worth noting that historical shops (those recognized by law for having at least 50 years of activity) in Trento are very few.

“The plan for the redevelopment of the historic centre points the finger at the image often untidy and thus less attractive of the heart of the city and it suggests some interventions”<sup>25</sup>

“Among the purposes of the plan there is the protection of the historical shops of the centre, more and more ousted by chains of stores, banks and insurance agencies that can afford to pay high rentals. The municipality wants to bind the destination of use of the most significant commercial activities, ‘the historical shops’ that have made the history of the city in order to avoid that the old town centre lose its identity”<sup>26</sup>

The celebration of Old Town Centre tradition against modernization interacts, as well, with the map of Limited Traffic Zone. The distance of cars from Old Town Centre needs to take into account of commercial issues. What is the right distance to allow successful business while not compromising the image of the Old Town centre?

“Retailers won’t hear about the enlargement of the ZTL anymore. Where they accepted it they demanded a redevelopment of the decoration of city structure and a set of initiatives to be to citizens’ advantage”<sup>27</sup>

Another mechanism of inclusion or exclusion are the prices of the rental. They work like an invisible wall that filter the access to the city in some way as the ZTL does. It is curious to remark that the intervention of the public administration in defence of the traditional shops plays almost the same function: to enclose, to exclude in order to maintain a specific identity.

“The Consortium ‘Trento Iniziative’ returns to re-launch the core of the problem about the redevelopment of the city centre. Among the strategic conditions there is the idea of constituting a semi-closed real estate fund (...) meantime in the last few days the municipality has allocated funds for 112.300 euro to the Consortium for the activity of animation of the city within 2008”<sup>28</sup>

“To defend historical shops (in Trento they are 6 or 7), those that can boast at least 50 years of activity, the Municipality intends to create a register, to establish a constraint in the destination of use and to give concessions on the tariffs”<sup>29</sup>

Some of the proposals suggested by the retailers of the centre are: the definition of an exclusive hall mark exploiting the identity of the city centre; a calendar of events aiming at avoiding overlaps between cultural exhibition, trade fairs, and other tourist events; architectural improvements related to the image of the old town centre such as shop windows, colours and size of signs, arrangement of outdoor café tables. These attempts to create a unique, recognizable and immutable city centre is once more constructed on the idea of adequacy: as if there were practices and artefacts that do not fit with a shared definition of city centre. But is there really a shared image of the city?

The rhetoric embedded in the newspapers, such as in the statements of delegates of local trading and entertainment associations, in the maps and in the administrative regulations builds identity upon immutability to contrast mixture and hybridisation. But which identity? What kind of old town centre are we talking about, of which period?

Cities tell us about change, not about immutability. A city, like a living organism survives thanks to mutations. And mutations are not one-way. “City is not dead, it continues to live welcoming inside the impure, prosaic parts, that change sign and reformulate it” (Biondillo, 2008, p. 105)<sup>30</sup>. Hence, urban spaces are plural, different, not simultaneous in relation to the multiple and discontinuous uses overlapping and intertwined (Crosta, 2003). In fact, despite the strategic measures of public administration, spaces are re-defined each time practices assign them a new shape.

## 2. Making North Trento

### 2.1. Making North Trento dramatic: being like “The Bronx”

Recently the rethoric about unsafe cities and the focus on security and fight against crime has reached also restful places like Trento. Often the opportunity to tackle these issues comes from episodes related to the disturb of peace and acts of vandalism such as the controversies regarding noisy students at aperitif-time or buskers' use of public space. Despite the chasm between those episodes and the issue of security there have been positions comparing the deterioration of the city life in Trento with the Bronx. Thus, we investigated this metaphor through a review on local newspapers. In the last two years, about sixty articles used the word "Bronx" to qualify different parts of the city, mostly the northern ones.

"In Bolzano<sup>31</sup>, the *casus belli* is represented by noisy pubs crowded till the late night in the centre of the city. In Trento is a dark park and thus full of shady characters. Trifles, maybe, for some busy and troubled metropolis, but not for our cities, built on a long tradition of order, cleanliness and discipline. [...] It is by the way well-known that if we start to tolerate facts of minor criminality - the trifles, which cause troubles - it will be much more difficult to face major crimes. [...]"<sup>32</sup>

Despite the fact that the NY 'real' Bronx, is not the dangerous place that was in the 1970s, when the district was characterized by a sharp decline in population and quality of life that culminated in a wave of arson, 'Bronx' has become a word of everyday use to indicate those places, usually suburbs, connoted by high levels of violence and degradation. The stigmatization not only stresses the whole district, although the problem interested some parts of it, but it is a mark of infamy that persists even though in recent years the Bronx has shown significant signs of revival and the area is even booming.<sup>33</sup>

Our attempt to deepen the use of the 'Bronx' metaphor to connote some neighbourhood of Trento led us to interview some of the residents of "*Magnete*", a functional mixed unit,<sup>34</sup> who defined their place as "*The Bronx*". The image they convey sets up the stage for social disintegration and actions that can be nothing but deviant: the 'Bronx' of North Trento results as a mix of violence, crime, rubbish, concrete, pervert sexual habits.

"Ugly mugs hang around the self service laundry in the corner. That Kebab, fortunately closed, was the meeting point for pushers. Drug addicts take their dose of heroine in the daylight, close to families apartments. That residential block is almost empty, waiting for buyers, the other one is for volleyball players, who don't care about the neighbourhood. The one at the bottom is the 'transgender block', where trans do their jobs. You find prostitutes in the corner and in the so called park, and no police around"<sup>35</sup>

The "Bronx"-based narrative of north Trento can be referred, as Wacquant (2007) to a form of territorial stigmatization, through the continuous dramatization of "urban violence", which involves also political claims about the war against the crime, intensification of control by police and through electronic surveillance, repression of micro crime and of - as we saw above - the so called incivilities. But, as Dal Lago and Quadrelli (2003, 62) point out, stigmatization is not a feature of suburbs and slums, and involves as well the historic centres since "[all] neighbours, as a background and support for local relations, have moral codes that forgive certain illegal forms and stigmatize others". In fact, not differently, such issues have interested another part of Trento located between the city centre and the northwards suburb, but actually part of the administrative district of the old town. Here, almost in the same period of the article about urban micro-criminality, a group of inhabitants organized a public meeting to discuss on security, to define the main problems of the neighbourhood, to elaborate proposals and to constitute a district committee in order to be more visible towards the Municipality. During the meeting, the neighbourhood has been portrayed as a degraded periphery with unsafe parks abandoned by the public administration, occupied more and more by immigrants' shops.

The situated character of stigmatization led us to think about neighbourhood and zones of the city according to what Czarniawska (2008) calls processes of differentiation and identification in

city management: the construction of the suburban image is given by the interplay of identity and alterity narratives. Comparing the narratives of the district committee with those of the inhabitants of *Magnete*, it is worth noting how, with their descriptions, they both wish to achieve the position of the most troubled place as if they should be located within a rank of the worst peripheries. This suggests to think about the “Bronx” metaphor both as a key to understand how parts of the city present themselves and as a language of pragmatic negotiation of public policies and services between citizens and institutions. In this respect we report part of the interview we made with some women living in the ‘Magnete’.

[Interviewee] They have thrown away every kind of rubbish below my balcony. And we were throwing away correctly our rubbish. Then, when somebody started refurbishing its own apartment, he left, you know, a container full of discarded stuff. Everything. We started with discarded stuff of the apartments till and we ended up to bumpers of cars!!! Absurd, it wasn't possible. We called everybody. Nothing to do. At the end we thought, “Ok, let's use another method, let's say that there are rats, let's say terrible things, that it is a risk for health, and so on”. Fortunately we found a policeman very careful to this.

[Researcher] So you were forced to use another language to.

[Interviewee] Yes. To make people aware of the situation and make them come here. Otherwise, they said “No, you have to ask that people, not me, you have to call another person, you have to do a formal and written request”... And we had this rubbish that was growing and growing. When we saw the bumper, we said “enough is enough”<sup>36</sup>.

An example of this interplay of identification and differentiation based narratives can be recognized in local news. To qualify the setting of that near suburbs, a newspaper evoked another N.Y.C. ghost, namely the former major Rudolph Giuliani, as the *deus ex-machina* cleaning the city from barbarity:

“Rudolph Giuliani, the former and inflexible major of New York, tested successfully his method claiming that he made the city safe starting from fines for throwing away papers and can”.<sup>37</sup>

The inappropriate comparison between the city of Trento and New York City – which is eighty times bigger and much more complex – responds to the process of image construction mentioned above (Czarniawska 2008): for not to end up becoming like the undesirable “Bronx” (allomorphism), some neighbourhoods of the town ask for the desirable therapy of the former NY major (isomorphism). Thus, whereas “The Bronx” stands for the issue rather than for the place, Giuliani embodies not the individual but the public policy that should be adopted in order to face the problems<sup>38</sup>. Nonetheless, a resolute leader and an unlucky suburb provide the setting for a well-known narrative in organization studies, where the hero struggles against disturb to restore happiness in the country. You can call it “fairy tale” or “problem solving”: yet we want to take very seriously heroes and happy countries, leaders and urban issues, as well as historic centres and suburbs, and try to investigate the elements holding up those narratives.

## 2.2. Making North Trento sensuous

Why northern Trento is like “The Bronx”? Which are the elements through which this narrative is plotted? What do that entail?

“Welcome to the “Magnete”, the so called Bronx of Trentino by people living there, mounting anger for the situation of decay they suffer. Ugly and narrow barrack-like building above a dry esplanade of concrete, bounded between Tax Agency and Revenue Guard Corps building. The Magnete lays even aside the railway. [...] Hearing hardly gets used to noise of freight trains. Once the threshold of the

subway below Brennero street is crossed, the geometrically cleaned shape leaves the scene to disgusting smell of rotten rubbish amassed around the bins which lay under the green container of recycling material. Ripped rubbish bag let go out long bowel of garbage, where rats are trotting happily and wasps have their own vespiary<sup>39</sup>”

The gaze on Magnete's Bronx is sensuous. While the experience of the Old Town Centre is reduced to the sight, purified from car pollution and annoying sound, North Trento offers a much more articulated portray that produces images and impressions related to all senses.

During the summer, when dogs piss everywhere in the hill, you can die for the smell, and you have to make a slalom to avoid the shits on the pathway<sup>40</sup>.

According to Corvellec and Risberg (2007) we can define the operations we are describing (making silent, traditional, attractive, dramatic and sensuous) as a *mise-en-sens*: they all set up the stage and provide orientation for further action. It also matches the study of Gagliardi (1991) about objects as pathways and remains of organizational culture. Practices described in this paragraph lead to add a third use of the French word “*sens*” – along with ‘meaning’ and ‘way’ – which is related to the body and its senses. This sort of synaesthetic echo between accounts of residents and local news is produced both by narratives and sensory experience.

### 2.3. Making Northern Trento like a *Gemeinschaft*

Each year, in June, people living in the social housing buildings at the Magnete organize a barbecue open to the residents of the unit. Among the organizers there are some women we interviewed. They told us about the preparation and how much they care about the participation of the neighbours in that event. They personally try to involve people living in the blocks because they consider it an opportunity to strengthen the sense of community in the neighbourhood. The durkheimian and tönnesian ideal of organic solidarity and *Gemeinschaft* is embodied and reproduced in practices that connote and make visible the life of the neighbourhood. According to them, the relationships of good neighbours are helpful to overcome the difficulties of the place and to make up for the lack of policies:

Everyday I say “I have to go away from here”. Then I think to the people I knew in this place, we socialized deeply, and that saved us. [Interviewee 1]

I come from a little village in Trentino, a place where you get to know everybody. Here we tried to recreate the life of the village, even though [the “*Magnete*”] is neither a neighborhood. I struggle inside to remain here, and anyway I feel better than other place where I don't even know who lives close to me. [Interviewee 2]

Following Bauman, “‘Community’ is these days the last relic of the old-time utopias of good society. It stands for whatever has been left of the dreams of a better life shared with better neighbors all following better rules of cohabitation; for the utopia of harmony slimmed down, realistically, to the size of immediate neighborhood.’ (Bauman, 2001, p.16)

The sense of inhabiting “Magnete” as a community needs to be continuously renewed: it can be bringing children to the school bus stop and meet with other families; bringing other families' children when parents cannot do it; collecting newspaper articles talking about the issues concerning their unit, writing their own *cahiers de doléance* to town councilors and administrator for public attention; creating shared space of identity distinguished from other communities living in the area but indifferent towards the problems and the efforts of making the place safer and pleasant.

### 3. Conclusions

In the attempt to trace and connect the issues reported by local newspapers we focus on the following questions: How does the city centre and North Trento come out? How do they define themselves? Which issues characterize them? The study suggests that the polarization between the two parts of the city, the downtown and the suburb, are enacted by subtle tactics and narratives rather than open conflict.

Through the review of articles, it became clear that there were some issues recurrent in the suburbs and other recurring in the old town. News and other accounts are local not because they refer to the ground, but in the extent they localize and orient the issues and bring places out of their anonymity. Who knew about the Magnete before? Investigating the way an urban space is made public can shed light in many obscure places whose destiny is to remain unknown but for crime news. During our research we have recognized two further meanings of what Park meant about the performative role of news narratives: firstly news locate places and make them public, secondly news evoke an imaginary that becomes part of a specific language used by inhabitants to account for the place where they live and to ask for policies.

The connection of practices of localization we described – making silent/traditional/attractive, making dramatic/sensuous/*gemeinschaft* – provides the Old Town Centre and North Trento with specific optical consistency (Latour, 1990), a device setting of internal invariance that frames Old Town Centre and North Trento as two specific and different entities. It suggests that localization happens together with visualization and produce specific positioning: accounts, visualizes and localizes centres and suburbs, portrays and bound them, joins imaginary and spaces in a specific narrative.

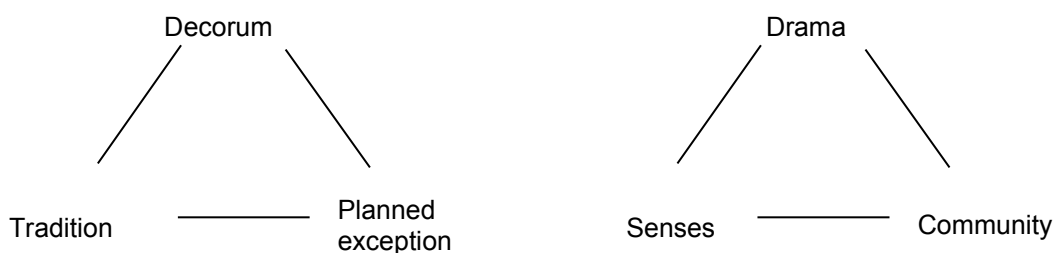


Figure 2: The two narratives that shape North Trento and Old Town Centre

Furthermore, the two narrative settings are also devices to grasp public policies. The metaphor used by local newspapers to define the area of North Trento has been used also by inhabitants to describe the place where they live and to underline the lack of policies. It is a way to be recognizable and to orient the public discourse; a language to intercept other languages and to operate a translation, to enable negotiation.

By means of dramatization, which consists in emphasizing the situation of decay and danger, public utilities arrive to the Bronx under the label of 'safe-keeping' practices. Lights, public transports, green areas maintenance, school buses represent the answers to satisfy the demand of security. In another sense, safety becomes the key word to ask administration to take care of an urban space presented and reduced to a metaphor: "The Bronx". As far as security<sup>41</sup> is concerned, public policies tend to assume literally the tactical requests of inhabitants, putting fences, lights and closed-circuit television to control the area. In this sense, what Bauman (1998) argues critically against Auletta's study can be referred also to public policies: "Criminal, poor and drug addicted are

put on the same level, without explaining nor showing, because they are collected in a unique category as cases of a generic antisocial behavior. Thus, we do not even need to say explicitly that pushing drug or having social assistance are the same. It is just suggested through a merely linguistic strategy” (Bauman, 1998). The same happened, looking for *decorum*, with the issue of the *aperitifs* within the city centre. Both residents and retailers used tactics of dramatization, as well as newspapers do. The former complaining for noise and rubbish, the latter for feeling abandoned in the struggling to maintain the image of the centre. Public administration replies to those tactics of dramatization according to strategies of normalization. All these processes trace connection between several urban practices on the basis of a specific *mise en sens*. This *mise en sens* is the decorum and discipline for the historic centre, while for the suburbs it deals with insecurity and degeneration. In this way the city centre is portrayed as the place of order, which has to be maintained against the ‘strangers’ (students, musicians, commercial chains), while for North Trento order exists as a narrative tension, a demand for transformation.

In both cases the exception become a spectacle, in the first case emphasizing the contrast between the “drawing room” of the city and the presence of noisy and dirty practices within it, and in the second case dramatizing the hygienic and safety issues in a suburban neighborhood. The purpose is the same: increase their visibility in order to intercept public policies.

Things are *connected* and *connotated*. Connotations, such as the decorum of Old Town Centre and “The Bronx” character of North Trento operate a precise engagement (Thevenot, 2001) between space, practices and policies. Within this perspective, when we look at the many specific maps and regulations regarding the city centre, we are not primarily interested in the object, but in what people do with that and how these objects permit an engagement with the environment. Following this methodological approach will not lead to find just one centre; not even an hypothetical least common denominator between the different kind of centres would provide a satisfactory representation of centre. We do not offer a definitive explanation bounding objects which can univocally indicate the city centre, North Trento or another place. Rather, analysing the issues tackled by the local newspapers, we gather heterogeneous and overlapping images. Furthermore, to conclude, the Old Town Centre and North Trento become protean entities emerging as the sum of these different practices, narratives, artefacts and regulations.

## References

- Bauman, Z. (1998). *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Bauman, Z. (2001). *Uses and Disuses of Urban Space*. In B. Czarniawska & R. Solli (Eds), *Organising Metropolitan Space and Discourse*, Malmö: Liber
- Bricocoli, M. (2005). Insicurezza, Città e politiche in affanno. In L. Bifulco (Eds), *Le politiche sociali. Temi e prospettive emergenti* (pp. 173 -190). Roma: Carocci.
- Biondillo, G. (2008). *Metropoli per principianti*, Parma: Guanda.
- Corvellec, H. & Risberg A. (2007). Sensegiving as mise-en-sens — The case of wind power development, *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 23 (3), 306-326.
- Crosta, P.L. (2003). Reti translocali. Le pratiche d'uso del territorio come politiche e come politica, *Foedus*, 7, 5-18.
- Czarniawska, B. (2008). Alterity/identity interplay in image construction. In D. Barry, & H. Hansen, (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of new approaches in management and organization*, London: Sage, pp. 49-62.
- Dal Lago, A. & Quadrelli, E. (2003). *La città e le ombre: crimini, criminali, cittadini*, Milano: Feltrinelli.
- Foucault, M. (1966) *Les mots et les choses - une archéologie des sciences humaines*, Paris: Gallimard; eng. tr. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, London: Routledge, 2002.
- Gagliardi, P. (1991) (ed) *Symbols and Artifacts*, New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Hobsbawm, E. (1983). Introduction: Inventing Traditions. In E. Hobsbawm & T. Ranger (Eds.), *The invention of Traditions*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, pp. 1-14.
- Latour, B. (1990). Drawing Things Together. In M. Lynch, & S. Woolgar, (Eds.) *Representation in Scientific Practice* (pp.19-68). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Latour, B (2005), 'From realpolitik to dingpolitik', in Latour, B. e Weibel, P. (eds), *Making Things Public: atmospheres of democracy*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005.
- Lippmann, W. (1927) *The Phantom Public*, New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers.
- Maffesoli M. (2007). The architectural of society. In *Contro l'architettura* (pp. 46-53). Records of the Symposium, December 2006, Trento: Curcu & Genovese.
- Park, R. (1940). News as a form of knowledge. *American Journal of Sociology*, 45, 669-686.
- Schatzki, T.R. - Knorr-Cetina, K. - Von Savigny, E., (2001) (eds) *The practice turn in contemporary theory*, Routledge: London
- Wacquant, L. (2007). Territorial stigmatization in the age of advanced marginality. *Thesis Eleven*, 91, 66-77.
- Wacquant, L. (2000). *Parola d'ordine: tolleranza zero*, Milano: Feltrinelli.

<sup>1</sup> We made a review of articles on the three local newspapers *Trentino, L'Adige, Corriere del Trentino* for three months (February-April 2008).

<sup>2</sup> Quotations, here translated by the authors, come from the analysis of articles collected from the three local newspapers. *Il Trentino*, 27<sup>th</sup> February 2008, p. 17

<sup>3</sup> *L'Adige*, 6<sup>th</sup> March 2008, p. 22 reporting the Mayor's statement

<sup>4</sup> *L'Adige*, 12<sup>th</sup> March, 2008 p. 25

<sup>5</sup> Street musicians must give communication to the urban police within the three days before the performance. Each place can be occupied by musicians for at most four hours a day: two between 9-12 a.m. and the other two between 3-8 p.m. (in winter time), 3-10 p.m. (during summer time) in order to guarantee a pause early in the afternoon. Finally, the new city police regulation establishes that musicians can perform for at most 40 days a year and for a maximum of four hours a day. Buskers who do not observe the regulation have to pay a fine.

<sup>6</sup> Interview 29/05/2008. Urban Police wrote the draft proposal of the new discipline for use of public spaces.

<sup>7</sup> *Il Trentino*, 24<sup>th</sup> February 2008, p. 18.

<sup>8</sup> Newspapers reporting the positions of town councilors and inhabitants compared street musicians to beggars. On the 27<sup>th</sup> February 2008 on page 11 *Trentino* reports the reply of a street artists with the title: "No one should call us beggars".

<sup>9</sup> *Corriere del Trentino*, 6<sup>th</sup> March 2008, p. 6.

<sup>10</sup> *L'Adige*, 17<sup>th</sup> September 2007, p. 15

<sup>11</sup> *L'Adige*, 18<sup>th</sup> September 2007, p. 20

<sup>12</sup> *L'Adige*, 20<sup>th</sup> September 2007, p. 31

<sup>13</sup> In 2008 Trento is still one of the top ten Italian Universities. It is the fifth in the National Classification of the best Italian Universities

<sup>14</sup> "Lower, longer: If we make less noise we can have fun for longer"

<sup>15</sup> "Trento and Quality. Help us to maintain it"

<sup>16</sup> As in the words of a Public manager, during a meeting, old town centre is an attractor in opposition to other places of the city.

<sup>17</sup> 'Notte Bianca' is an initiative that recalls the Long Night of Museums, a cultural event during which the establishments remain open late in the night. This concept characterizing the first edition of Berlin has been adopted by other cities, such as Paris (*Nuit Blanche*) and Rome. Now many cities, even the small one use this concept to gather people in the centre all night long keeping shops and museums open and organizing entertainment events. The 'Festival dell'Economia' is a cultural initiative aiming at promoting a discussion about topics related to Economics inviting important scholars to meet the public. This initiative has been successful since the first edition in 2006. It takes place within the city centre, both in historical buildings and in the squares. The concept imitates those already used in other Italian middle-sized cities such as Mantova with its famous 'Festival Letteratura' started in 1997.

<sup>18</sup> *Corriere del Trentino*, 30 March 2008 p. 4

<sup>19</sup> *Corriere del Trentino*, 29 March 2008, p. 3. "Feste Vigiliane" are a series of events, displays, concerts etc. in occasion of the patron saint of Trento (S. Vigilio)

<sup>20</sup> *Corriere del Trentino*, 22 March 2008 p. 3

<sup>21</sup> The Strategic Plan is a document of the municipality of Trento acting as standard for public policies: it aims at defining the administrative orientation about the future (2001-2010) development of the city.

<sup>22</sup> *Corriere del Trentino*, 22 March 2008 p. 3

<sup>23</sup> *Corriere del Trentino*, 23 March 2008 p. 3

<sup>24</sup> *Trentino*, 16<sup>th</sup> March 2008, p.11.

<sup>25</sup> *Trentino*, 6<sup>th</sup> March 2008, p. 15

<sup>26</sup> *Trentino*, 5<sup>th</sup> March 2008, p. 17

<sup>27</sup> *Trentino*, 12<sup>th</sup> February 2008, p. 18

<sup>28</sup> *Corriere del Trentino*, 29 March 2008, p. 3

<sup>29</sup> *Trentino*, 6<sup>th</sup> March 2008, p. 15

<sup>30</sup> Biondillo, analysing the increasing hegemony of the private space over the public in the name of security, observes that contemporary spaces is becoming an indistinct sequence of *enclaves*, each one against the other. "As if we locked up in the comforting panorama of our history full of homesick. This is now the function of the old town centre. It is the scene for the representation of a collective identity often fictitious. In these terms the city centre is much more false than other spaces we live every day. But the representation of identity is reassuring. It is the idea of a reassuring immutability of the past, compared to the irresistible mutability of the present" (Biondillo, 2008, p. 104)

<sup>31</sup> Bolzano is the other autonomous city of Trentino Alto Adige region.

<sup>32</sup> *Corriere del Trentino*, 15<sup>th</sup> May, 2008, p. 1

<sup>33</sup> In 1997, the Bronx was designated an *All America City* by the National Civic League, signifying its comeback from the decline of the 1970s. [[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Bronx](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bronx)]

<sup>34</sup> This group of buildings located in the northern area of Trento was born to offer social housing facilities. It includes the tax agency and the provincial section of Revenue Guard Corps, plus six residential blocks with two bars, a drugstore, and an art school section.

<sup>35</sup> Note from the interview 6<sup>th</sup> April, 2008

<sup>36</sup> Interview 04/06/2008

<sup>37</sup> Corriere del Trentino 15<sup>th</sup> May, 2008, p. 1

<sup>38</sup> For a critical study about the international diffusion of “zero tolerance” see Wacquant (2000).

<sup>39</sup> This way *L'Adige* described the area the 6<sup>th</sup> of October 2007

<sup>40</sup> Interview 04/06/2008

<sup>41</sup> For a reflection on the concept of security as attractor of other issues see also Bricocoli [2005].