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**SOCIEDAD DIGITAL**  
**ESPACIOS PARA LA INTERACTIVIDAD**  
**Y LA INMERSIÓN**

Dirección:

**Francisco García García**

Coordinación:

**Manuel Gértrudix Barrio**

**Felipe Gértrudix Barrio**



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Línea 2

La Sociedad Digital  
que crea redes

# Networking democracy. A social media framework to enhance political reactivation in bottom-up environment

**Matteo Ciascellardi**

Researcher

IN3 (Internet Interdisciplinary Institute). Universitat Oberta de Catalunya.  
c/Roc Boronat, 117, 7th floor (Barcelona) 08018 Spain. Tlfn: + 34 93 450 5282  
Email: [mciascellardi@uoc.edu](mailto:mciascellardi@uoc.edu)

**Valentina Widmayer**

Ph.D Candidate

Department of Sociology and Social Research. University of Milano-Bicocca  
Via Bicocca degli Arcimboldi, 8 (Milano) 20126 Italy. Tlfn: 7506/7532/7583  
Email: [v.widmayer@campus.unimib.it](mailto:v.widmayer@campus.unimib.it)

## Abstract

The multiple cases of dissent and revolution emerged in the Mediterranean area (Egypt, Tunisia, Libya), the collapse of political consensus (Italy, Greece) and all the protests that have received media attention since the late of 2010 have shown the key-role of social media in a new, bottom-up, culture of political participation. These movements that aggregate millions of people are born spontaneously. They reflect the expansion of narrow networks of everyday-life (friends, family, colleagues) triggered to express their conditions to a broader audience. The social media represent the first resource to give them voice, to create a real reactivation that was not possible with passive media like television and press.

Moving from the experiences of some Mediterranean cases this paper will explore the experimental experience to design bottom-up and self-managed frameworks to help local communities to adopt social media as multi-level channel to defense (and to discover) their rights and to reactivate many peers as possible of their territorial network. The paper will define the differences between a social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook, a blog, a streaming system, etc.) and an operative framework, based on the mashup of different practices oriented to the needs of the communities. It will define the best practices to re-activate the sense of citizenship by the meaning of social networking for a public, shared debate: the principal hub of convergence between the peer-to-peer analysis of problems, the territory it covers and other national and international realities connected by a virtual (online) sphere of public attention.

## Key words

*Digital democracy, political reactivation, bottom-up governance, social media, narrow networks*

## Introducción

The present research will explore the experimental experience to define bottom-up and self-managed frameworks in order to help local communities to adopt social media as multi-level channel to enhance participation in political life, to defense (and to discover) their political rights and to reactivate many peers as possible of their territorial network. The paper would also trigger a reflection on the idea of political network framework in the digital society, even before the exploration of the mashup tools to adopt, to deepen analyze the concept of bottom-up governance. The framework becomes the principal hub of convergence between the peer-to-peer analysis of problems, the territory it covers and other national and international realities connected by a virtual (online) sphere of public attention.

## Objetivos

The objectives of the research are mainly: 1. to reflect on the idea of political network framework in the digital society, in order to deepen analyze the concept of bottom-up governance; 2. to define an atlas as a toolkit to design bottom-up and self-managed frameworks to help local communities adopting social media as multi-level channel to enhance participation in political life; 3. to draw specific guidelines to help the communities to correct the missteps and to focus the blindspots during the process of information networking, both online and offline (virtual and real world).

## Metodología

This paper propose a resume of an experimental research based on Social Network Analysis and RPA (Replication Protocol Analysis). Both these methodologies allowed to define a protocol of intervention in narrow networks (small communities), in order to map out some specific features and habits of the actors of these networks. The creation of the framework is based on the RPA approach with specific in-depth interviews to better understand the different needs of different networks.

## 1. Two layers, one dimensión

Since the beginning of 2010 the Mediterranean area is the scenario of protests and demonstrations across many countries and different populations. On one hand the eyes of media showed us multiple cases of disents and revolutions in the "Arab Spring", from Tunisia to Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Algeria and so on, also even if not all the participants in protests identify themselves as Arab; on the other hand, the economic crisis fastened the collapse of political consensus in different contests, like Greece and Italy. What emerged clearly was the global attention to the geopolitical implications of these protests and the common drivers of political (re)activation arisen in a so heterogeneous landscape: internet and social media platforms as powerful tools able transform the "digital seeds" of online communication into real practices, into concrete actions able to directly connect the web to the real life and vice versa.

According to the events and to the media diffusion of their details, there are several interpretative positions about all these facts. We would emphasize two main lines that sustain different analyses: the first one is the

line of the enthusiastic supporters of social media and online networks as turning point to define a new process of democratization<sup>1</sup>; the second one is the line sustaining that the Arab Spring (and the other events of protests and revolutions) are not driven by social networks but only by real-world activism<sup>2</sup>.

Clearly, there are articulated reasons to sustain with different arguments both the positions; what is evident is the configuration of the phenomenon: the two lines could be defined as two different overlapping layers. The first one is based upon the rise of the network society, as online resource to spread the real conditions of living in a participative, shared way; the second one is based upon the real life, the everyday experience of the social tissue and its problems. The overlap of these two layers opens a unique dimension towards an objective phenomenon: the movements in the Mediterranean area aggregate millions of people in a spontaneous, emergent way; these movements reflect the expansion of narrow networks of everyday-life (friends, family, neighbors, etc.) to express their conditions to a broader audience. In this contest, social media represent the first resource to give voice to people, to create a real reactivation that was not possible with traditional media like television and press, because they are a one-way communication system, while the actual process depends on the interaction between the sender and the receiver in the interpretation and diffusion of the message.

The digital divide<sup>3</sup> in the Mediterranean area seems to decrease, because of the growing number of people who possess material resources – i.e. computer and broadband connections – and immaterial resources, the e-skills, that is to say the set of competences that actually enable people to use technologies. One consequence of this process is the increasing relevance of the political use of the Internet. We are witnessing a growing number of platforms where people can read the news and debate on public issues: mailing lists, forums, institutional websites, alternative blogs, on-line newspapers and social networks.

If we consider all the different scenario, with inequalities and very heterogeneous situation in government, economy and social conditions, we can notice, for example, that the dissidents in Bahrain, Libya and Iran are not only following the footsteps of their counterparts in Egypt and Tunisia by assuming a pro-democracy stand, but they have also adopted the same tools to mobilize the revolution: internet and the social media application. Besides aiding the protests, the web and all its related social tools have also emerged as an information hub for the traditional media and all the people across the globe.

This different system of communication, participation and interaction allows to be inside the scene, and not only in front of the news: a simple “tweet”<sup>4</sup>, a quick video report, a shared post are, in a small scale, the digital variant of the traditional activism. These simple actions made more responsible the people, and move their consciousness to take part to the events, by different level of contributions, from a basic digital

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<sup>1</sup> A possible example, oriented in this direction, could be related to the position of Clay Shirky in Shirky, C., *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations*, 2008, Penguin Press.

<sup>2</sup> This position is clearly sustained, for example, from Evgeny Morozov: “It’s been extremely entertaining to watch cyber-utopians – adherents of the view that digital tools of social networking such as Facebook and Twitter can summon up social revolutions out of the ether – trip over one another in an effort to put another nail in the coffin of cyber-realism, the position I’ve recently advanced in my book *The Net Delusion*. In my book, I argue that these digital tools are simply, well, tools, and social change continues to involve many painstaking, longer-term efforts to engage with political institutions and reform movements” (*Facebook and Twitter are just places revolutionaries go*, URL: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/mar/07/facebook-twitter-revolutionaries-cyber-utopians>; last verified: 2011, Sept. 13. See also Morozov, E., *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom*, 2011, PublicAffairs.

<sup>3</sup> The meaning of Digital divide here comprehends not only the gap between individuals with access to digital and information technology and those without access, but also the differences of technological uses among individuals.

<sup>4</sup> A “Tweet” is a post on the Twitter system, with a limit of 140 characters.

gesture in a social network, to the more extensive actions to take to the streets. This reconnection between digital information (as “prosumer”<sup>5</sup>) and real environment is associated with a diffused peer-to-peer reactivation: taking part to the different initiatives, promoted and sustained in online networks, although as passive reader (occasional surfer, lurker, etc.) as such as active user (blogger, UGCs<sup>6</sup> producer, etc.) is an emergent process that trigger new relations and new forces also from people not directly engaged in these initiatives.

The personal sphere of influence is enlarged and empowered in the online channel by social media and it allows to reach not only a broader audience, but to create a more trusted environment in the small group that represent a point of synthesis between the real world, the Net and the self. Before the advent of social media technologies and without a real engagement of people by the means of sharing their personal social tissue related to their communities, the perspective was oriented towards a bipolar opposition:

People increasingly organize their meaning not around what they do but on the basis of what they are, or believe they are. Meanwhile, on the other hand global networks of instrumental exchanges selectively switch on and individuals, groups, regions, and even countries, according to their relevance in fulfilling the goals processed in the network, in a relentless flow of strategic decisions. There follows a fundamental split between abstract, universal instrumentalism, and historically rooted particularistic identities. Our societies are increasingly structured around a bipolar opposition between the Net and the self (Castells, 2000: 3).

Due to this reason, also the political engagement and the re-activation of interest in the public sphere, was under a possible communication failure:

In this condition of structural schizophrenia between function and meaning, patterns of social communication become increasingly under stress. And when communication breaks down, when it does not exist any longer, even in the form of conflictual communication (as would be the case in social struggles or political opposition), social groups and individuals become alienated from each other, and see the other as a stranger, eventually as a threat. In this process, social fragmentation spreads, as identities become more specific and increasingly difficult to share (Castells, 2000: 3).

Social media allowed an evolution of this process, decreasing the fragmentation without influencing on the power of identities. The possibility to overcome the risks of a break down were triggered by the new pattern of communication introduced by social software as mashup systems constituted by different instances of dialogue and participation. Social platforms, online networks, portable devices, always on connections and geo-located peers of distribution have provided a revolutionary contribution to society and the most clear example is the just cited wake of the protests that have torn throughout Egypt, Libya and Mediterranean area.

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<sup>5</sup> In this sense “prosumer” has the meaning of producer and consumer.

<sup>6</sup> UGC, User Generated Contents, indicates the creation of personal contributions by the means of several media technologies, like digital video, blog and forum posts, podcasts, web page, wikis, etc.

## 2. Participation and peer reactivation

A frequent issue in the current debate around the Internet is whether it reshapes the forms of political participation. On one side some scholars point out that the Internet, by removing communication barriers among individuals and information, allows an inclusive, pluralistic and democratic participation to public sphere (Dahlgren, Olsson 2007), and it could invigorate democratic participation of disaffected citizens. Others suggest that the phenomenon of political participation can't be explained by Internet use, while it might still be correlated with other independent variables, such as income, education and occupation (e.g., Verba, Schlozman and Brady 2002; Best and Krueger 2005, di Gennaro and Dutton 2006, Krueger 2002, 2006; Bimber 2001).

Many empirical researches demonstrate that an intensive Internet use is positively associated with a higher predisposition to civic engagement (see Jennings and Zeitner 2003; Tolbert and McNeal 2003; Weber, Loumakis and Bergman 2003; Norris 2005; Quintelier e Vissers 2008), but there are conflicting explanations of this phenomenon. One thesis states that it represents a causal effect, while the counterargument is that there exists a self-selection effect of politically engaged citizens into Internet use (Kroh and Neiss 2009).

Following the mobilization theory, the Internet is said to be effective in mobilizing individuals who aren't already political activists (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1988; Danziger, Dutton et al 1982). According to some scholars, the Internet can reinvigorate political participation because it offer new attractive opportunities to citizens in three ways. First, it increases the chances to have access to information (DiMaggio et al 2001; di Gennaro and Dutton 2006). Second, it can increase previous networks and create new ties: the Net could generate political knowledge and social capital, and consequently civic engagement (Freschi 2003; Rheingold 1993; Castells 2001; Katz and Rice 2002). Third, it offers new platforms where people can experiment direct democracy, and it decreases the costs of democratic involvement (possibility for online petitions, etc.). In this way, it provide an appropriate support for the diffusion of "networked individualism" as a new pattern of sociability (Wellman 2001). In other terms, the Internet would allow citizens and social movements to experience with new practices of political participation based on non-bureaucratic (nor hierarchical) organization, flexible interaction, fluid identities and horizontal communication (Castells 2001).

All these features of non hierarchical organization, fluidity, emergent communication reveal the complex adaptive system behind the use of different social media. The overall tissue of links, connections and actions between the online layer and the territorial layer makes mostly unpredictable and not controllable the system of communication, overcoming the surveillance of the authorities and the policy of "silence" of many countries. Many studies underlined these aspects and the role of social media in situation of political challenge between people and government. For example Kathryn Corrick<sup>7</sup> and Giovanna Loccatelli<sup>8</sup> showed how journalists have used Twitter to report in real-time and to upload photographs or YouTube video to open a window in territory where press was not admitted. In this sense the web was the first feed-

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<sup>7</sup> Study for the Foreign Press Association, see the presentation *What role did social media play in the news coverage of 2011 Egyptian revolution*, URL: <http://www.scribd.com/doc/49529040/What-role-did-social-media-play-in-the-news-coverage-of-2011-Egyptian-revolution>, last verified 2011, 13rd Sept.

<sup>8</sup> Loccatelli, G., *Twitter e le rivoluzioni*, Editori Riuniti, 2011, Roma.

ing channel also for other media. Many broadcast providers used social media tools to follow updates from Mediterranean Area in real time (Tweetdeck checking the hash tags, for example), presenting a mashed up collection of sources reframed into a narrative way that traditional news media could discover.

Despite the power of new media, which has aided these countries to spread their stories to audiences that would otherwise be unaware of the events taking place, Loccatelli and Corrick observed some problems. All the material produced as UGC has some limits like reliability, curation, editing and verification of the real content. The limits in some cases are not only of technology and connectivity, but also of auto-censorship, self-interpretation and meta-analysis to report a story when the attempt is to realize a complete real-time reportage. These limits find a compromise with the different sources that produce similar materials. The global overview of a specific event, translated by different peers as single producer, and streamed, uploaded, posted and podcasted in comparable way is the best warranty not only for information and knowledge to survive (against censorship or factious government material) but also to find an homeostatic balance to create a “network opinion” that is not possible to drive or to control like the mass media opinion fed only by press, radio or television.

What emerges is the dimension of a connective tissue of active peers constituted by single person, by small groups, by narrow networks of people cross-fertilizing the real life with the digital space of Internet, towards a concept of political participation. We can understand this idea using the definition of Pasquino, who asserts that we can speak of political participation when people that are part of the same political system seek to influence, through their attitudes and concrete behaviors, the decisions of political power holders and their selection (more or less directly and legally), in order to conserve or modify the structure and the values of dominant interests<sup>9</sup>.

The main categories generally used to distinguish between different forms of political participation in post-industrial societies<sup>10</sup> seem no longer effective in describing the complexity of this phenomenon in the era of social media and in explaining the multiplicity of the online forms of participation.

For example, the term “visible participation” refers to political behaviors (i.e. voting, attending a demonstration, signing a petition), while the “invisible participation” is the set of values and cognitive orientations which express an involvement in political facts – even if they do not necessarily cause concrete actions (i.e. political interest and knowledge, reading and discussing about politics)<sup>11</sup>. But if we analyze the online interaction, this dichotomy falls: the act of discussing about politics on a social network is a public, transparent action, which visibility can have different dynamics and broader consequences compared to a face-to-face assembly discussion. In other terms, even if the action is limited to exchanging information and reflecting, it can aim itself to influence the public debate.

Furthermore, social networks and, in general, the ICTs bring people to assume a certain level of activation. The simple act of choosing their own information channels autonomously, even without expressing their point of view, makes individuals less passive than – for example – the television audience.

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<sup>9</sup> Pasquino 1997, p 42

<sup>10</sup> Cfr Raniolo 2002 p. 12 : Cipolla 1978, Cotta 1979, Urbani 1980, Cazzola e Lancheater 1987, Ceri 1996, Sani 1996

<sup>11</sup> Pasquino 1997, p. 15, Barbagli e Maccelli 1985, 14-15

Obviously, it is not correct to define “activists” all the people participating in different forms of online activities. Moreover, while some scholars suggest that the political communication at the virtual level has to be considered political participation, others...

For example, is writing political comments on a website considered to be political participation?<sup>12</sup> Some authors defend that the transmission of e-mails or different forms of political communication should be considered as such (Peretti and Micheletti 2004). For others, the excessive extension of the concept may make it useless on an analytical level (Van Deth, 2001: 13)

The confluence of the two layers (real/virtual), the possibility to mash up different tools and platforms to empower and spread the communication, the creation of social hubs in continuous movement and redefinition are the key-elements of a new process of political activation and participation. This process in fact is able not to favor only the traditional active groups or people with ITC competencies, but mainly to re-activate the “Proximity peers” of every participant, triggering the interest by the means of discourse analysis, participative storytelling, shared opinions, reciprocal indignation, etc.

The concept of “proximity peers” allows to define the potential map of social propagation on a specific topic drawing a map of the possible relations according to six basic different kinds of relations in narrow networks:

1. Family
2. Friends
3. Colleagues/Employers
4. Neighbors
5. Accidental/Desired
6. Networked

As we argued by the application of a replication protocol analysis and an in-depth interview in three specific case studies of local communities, active peers spread chunks of information that could be retrieved in proximity peers up to 3—4 nodes of distance (fig. 1 and 2).

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<sup>12</sup> The traditional definition of political participation contains various fundamental elements: it should be an activity carried out by individuals outside of their employment remit, the aim of which is to influence a political decision (Verba and Nie 1972, Parry, Moyser and Day 1992, Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995). The last point has been gradually extended to include activities such as protests, which on occasion attempt to influence political opinion rather than decisions taken by government agents, or such as political consumption aimed at company activities (Barnes and Kaase, 1979, Norris 2002, Peretti and Micheletti 2004).



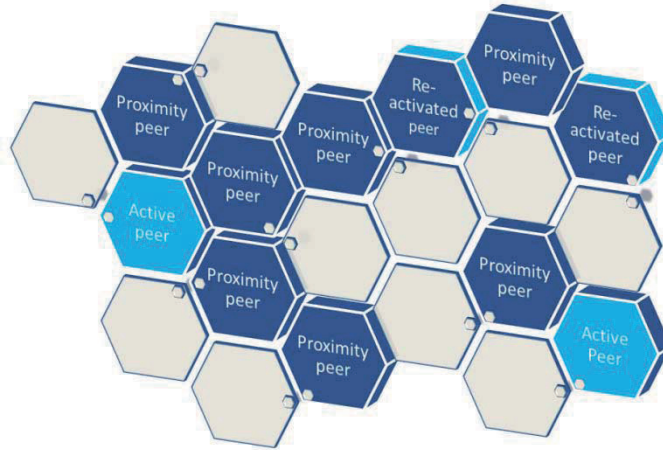


Fig. 1. The graphic shows the connections of the peers and the distance-limits in peers re-activation in a limited dataset (frameset of a small community). The diagram would illustrate the possibility of direct and non-direct reactivation in the case studies of a given information, according to the 6 different relations that every peer can have. The diagram must not be read as an overall network map, because it is not allowing the repetition of the propagation with two or more peers connected to the same relation (the same side of the hexagon): it maps out the path of a given information on the different relations linked to an active peer and confirmed (by in-depth interviews) by the activation of another peer (high interest an rediffusion with more details). In the diagram the example is the news about manifestation in Tahir Square: the active peer diffused this news with 5 relations but only 3 gave a feedback (hexagon: friend – family – networked); 3 relations re-diffused/re-discussed the information with other people (2/6 relations each proximity peer); after one more process, some proximity peers were informed but did not diffuse anymore the information, some other continued; a new peer non-updated about the fact was informed and the interest about the fact moved her to search more information and diffuse more materials about the fact. This last one is considered a re-activated peer able to restart the viral process and to add new information to it (criteria: have no previous information or only a vague idea, acquire information, check traditional media and networks, rediffuse dataset on-line and in real life).

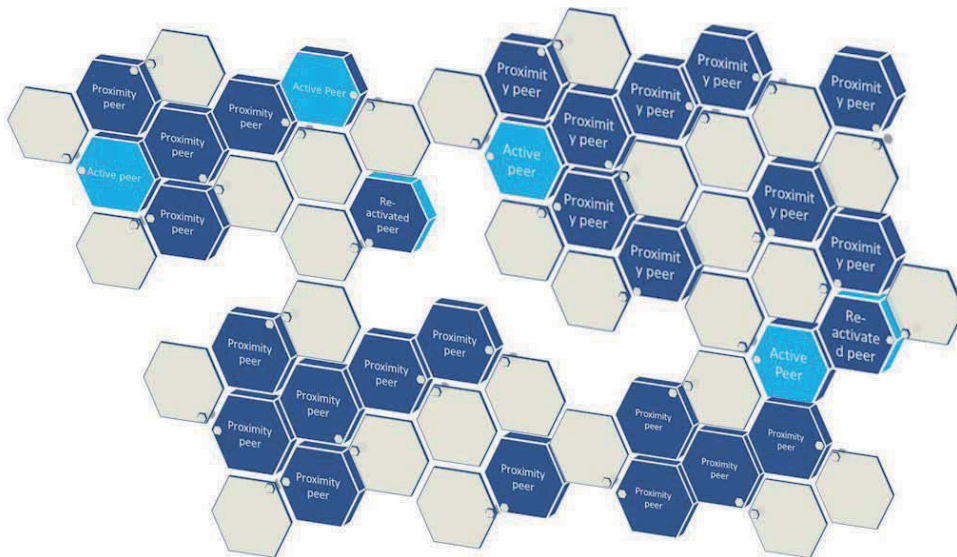


Fig. 2. The diagram shows an enlarged map of peers reactivation: the same information could have a different propagation and the single peer could decide to become active promoter of the information without specific drivers of pertinence (empathy for the previous peer, interest for the topic, indignation, etc.). The peers belong to clustered micro-communities and sometimes are the only link between them.

What emerge from this analysis are sensible data about a complex mapping system of possible triggers, nodes, pertinence hubs for political reactivation, and the consideration that social media, as cross-cultural and real/virtual participating environment, give people the ability to share what is happening to them with the outside world, and reframe the outside world as part of their small community of pertinence.

### 3. Social media framework to enhance participation

According to the previous analysis, one of the aim of the present research is to offer a possible operative framework to local communities to adopt social media as multi-level channel to defense (and to discover) their rights and to reactivate many peers as possible of their territorial network.

The idea to work on local, small communities has three principal reasons: primarily, small communities can better identify their actors and can move quickly in specific processes, having a deeper knowledge of their own environment and of the issue/possibilities/critical points of their territories; secondarily, small communities can be easily traced and it is easier to have a feedback about goals and blindspots; finally, small communities are the starting point to explore huge networks and we want operate in the interchange between these two dimensions, in order to help the groups to adopt social media as multi-level channel to defense (and to discover) their rights and to reactivate many peers as possible of their territorial connections: start from the territory to come back, enriched, on the community itself.

#### *3.1 Guidelines to define a social media framework for political participation*

The operative framework would not be a simple platform, a software to self-guide community in political reactivation. A traditional platform present a set of functionalities mashed up via specific software, applets and plugins. The framework we are introducing has to be considered as a local project based on the cross-application of some practices oriented to the needs of the community itself. The aim is to define the best practices to re-activate the sense of citizenship by the meaning of social networking for a public, shared debate. The first part is the setup of the project, the second one is an example of guided workshop to activate information exchange and participative debate in the communities adopting web 2.0 tools crossed with traditional media.

The operative framework needs a core team to be designed and adapted to local actors and environments. The core team must include at least a territorial active peer (a person to coordinate the initiative) and two nodes: one person with enough skills to manage social media software and platforms and a second one that will take care of communication on/by traditional media.

##### *3.1.1 Phase 1: definition of the participants*

In this first phase the core team will define the participants to the local project, their roles and their main tasks, according to their time schedules and to their real interest in their own subject matter. The core team must expand the key-figures and focus on main issues that could trigger interests of proximity peers. After an initial definition to start the work, the core team will identify external experts in order to enrich the competences of the working group (on the issues defined to focus) in order to cooperate in particular seminars, workshops and other activities that could be developed for the local community. In the team must be identified also people in charge of the institutional aspects of communication, funding and terri-

torial coordination. If the project will last for a long time (6-12 months) according to the time scheduling of the various actions, after a period of some months, the core team will redefine itself in order to allow more flexibility to the several positions and roles, including administrators and active citizens willing to contribute to the whole project with their experience. It is necessary a constant process of enlargement and remixing of the team.

### ***3.1.2 Phase 2: communication***

In the second phase, the team will show the project through the local media and the other advertising tools available (especially online). Rather than proposing a network or the project in itself, the idea is to conduct an analysis of the local situation according to the guidelines that are at the bases of this project. The plan is to make use of the collaboration of local administrators from different parties and to ask cultural contribution to the experts previously identified. The communication campaign involving new participants and actors must be diffused on the principal social media activated for the project, to give online/offline resonance to the initiative.

### ***3.1.3 Phase 3: activity and models' design***

In the third phase the team will carry out the main project defining an operating model and trying to organise in a flexible and open way the several activities to do and share together, such as workshops, ad diffusion, seminars, public speech, etc. In this phase the team will define some transversal formats, to empower the knowledge and the users' skills, in terms of political critics, organizing skills and autonomy of expression, through the media provided by the web and platforms for territorial dialogue. In this phase the team will define the scenarios to face some specific issues related to the common political sense and the identity narratives of their territory (crisis zones, racial issues, community limitations, submersed economies, etc.). After the definition of the scenarios and of the educative and social models, it will be necessary to find several possible solutions – in territorial and telematics terms - to the management, empowerment and spread of the emergent politics to promote. This phase, together with face-to-face activities, sees not only the design of a social platforms (a mashed up CMS, for example) to coordinate the different actions and to fix a shared system to actively participate in non-synchronous way, but also the co-design of this platform together with the citizens involved in seminars and workshops. In this way, the platform will be immediately and effectively opened, with the possibility to be copied and re-adapted without any hierarchy in other narrow communities.

### ***3.1.4 Phase 4: activities (political grass-root reactivation)***

This phase revolves around a deep work on the territory, activating several activities, door-to-door campaigns, seminars and all possible satellite-events that fit in the operational nucleus of the project. The phase of the activity on the territory is followed by a phase of recollection and transformation of the deliveries into a product that could be either distributed online and by the local actors (territorial peer-to-peer). The outcome obtained should tell about the experience, analyse its critical aspects, the difficulties, the missteps, and turn into a tool to improve the immediately following cycle of activities. To have an idea of the several models, look at the example of the workshop in this paper.

### ***3.1.5 Phase 5: activity (the upper political leading class)***

The fifth phase addresses the previous critical objectives developed during the fourth phase to the leading class, trying to favour the combination of the critical bottom-up debate triggered by the political reactivation of citizens, and the administrative necessities of the electoral consensus. In this phase the prevailing model will try to give the administrators the tools for the territorial organization, also through the channels of civic expression, which are often neglected, except in case of polling. This phase also sees both a face-to-face training dimension and a participatory-working one, followed by updating that can be managed autonomously by those groups that were actively committed during the training on the field process.

### ***3.1.6 Phase 6: Observatory for networking***

The objectives of this phase are a high level of attention and an analytical control of how the situations evolve in terms of participation and activity. For this reason during this phase the core team will reframe the platform realized into a social observatory that could work as an online hub to share topics and opinions emerging in the clustered communities linked by active peers. The observatory, based on the concept of social-media design, will be built according to the participatory criteria of mashup and web 2.0 and will allow the free and open participation of the active citizens and of the different realities that will be the hubs of this web to observe. The content editing will be released to those users who are part of the several communities, while the most scientific analyses will be submitted to the partners, who will check the flow and the different interactions to obtain a general topography of the system. The aim of the observatory is not only to offer a social map of the political reactivation and its results, but also to intertwine an open and free network, self-regulated by its members, to interrelate issues and problems that might have already been deeply debated.

## **3.2 The model of the Participative Workshop**

If governance becomes a direct engagement in political life through the critical capacities of individuals, expressed in working groups on civic focus, the framework becomes the principal hub of convergence between the peer-to-peer analysis of problems, the territory it covers and other national and international realities connected by a virtual (online) sphere of public attention. To enter more concretely with an example on the public sphere of a narrow community, the Participative Workshop is one of the possible framed activities.

The workshop is based on the aforementioned aspects and aims to give rise to intensive moments of analysis to favour a “political reactivation” and to shape “play writers” (those who settle the basis for actions, plot and agency), that is citizens able to surf the web in order to trigger political action and activate the communities to the critical opinion exchange.

The workshop carried out under this specific model is inspired by the 3-parts structure of Greek tragedy for the definition of the activities, for the “mise en scène” of the actors and for the dynamics of exchanges in terms of participatory culture.

Before adopting a structural model for the political reactivation, the workshop will conduct an analysis of the cases and models of narration that the web allowed to discover and reinvent. The analysis also sees the evaluation of the participatory factors such as micro-blogging, self-advertise marketing, collective campaign

and social networking. Analysis of some significant cases of the web-system in terms of platforms/websites, movements, exemplary cases, shared scenarios (the rubbish in Napoli, the earthquake in l'Aquila, the crisis in Libya, the censorship in Egypt). The phases will be the following:

### ***3.2.1 Prologue – Finding the threads***

The prologue is the introductory part where the issues at stake are explained. In this phase the several participants collaborate in the co-construction of the plot according to how it is globally considered, the different ways it is read and the multiple interpretations/definitions it has triggered. After having chosen a topic, the participants have to find the web sources that face that topic, make use of traditional media (press and television, if it is possible) and put the highest number of resources on the stage, which is the place for the dialectic action and the critics of all participants in the following phase.

In the prologue we also have to mention those communities where similar topics have been discussed, we have to collect information about some other possible actors to be involved and that have already made their contribution in similar situations (experts, politicians, people on the field, people in favour, people against, etc.) and we generally define the plot to follow.

### ***3.2.2 Parodos – Declaring the plot***

The parodos is the entrance of the chorus during the performance. Therefore, it is the first dialectic contribution made by all the participants to evaluate, analyse and compare all the materials found in the phase of the prologue. It is not much about taking personal positions, but trying to find a pattern in the elements found, trying to understand the processes that led to the construction of different scenarios, rather than defining the value or the content. The chorus is the synergic activity of all the citizens participating in the web through recollection and aggregation (meet-up, remote storytelling, chat, etc.), trying to build the critical background of knowledge revolving around the issue at stake.

### ***3.2.3 Episodes – Intertwining the models***

The episodes are the central part of the process of political reactivation Workshop. The action starts and the participants start posting comments and giving voice to the several contributions/contributors that constitute the whole problem. The episodes can be plural and have to be started firstly inside one's own community. Later, during the stasimons, interphases dedicated to a summary of the situation not to lose the developing thread, it is the moment to call the contributions/contributors. The outcome, shared through social platforms to be showed during the workshop (social network e social media), will be then shared by means of broad folksonomies, enlarged communities that can make their own contribution by adding or re-defining those aspects that did not emerge during the episodes.

It is important to point out that both episodes and stasimons have two separate functions: the formers are intensively narrative in order to test if the structure of the parodos makes sense and whether it is well balanced with the previous architecture (is the topic well framed and documented?), and change it, if it is the case. The latters have a strong critic and dialectic focus, and instead of looking for pros and cons solutions, they seek blindspots, alternative perspectives and hypotheses that could reshape the contributions of the web itself and even acquire a totally unexpected structure.

### 3.2.4 *Eisodos* – *Creating tracks*

The *eisodos* corresponds to the plot's resolution. It is not much about getting to a definitive conclusion or opting for the best solution among many, but it is about figuring out a real track, something that could remain and orientate the people and lead them to a collective reflection (the *eisodos* is the passageways leading to the exit). This is the moment that sees a real political reactivation even when there is a total impossibility for a unilateral solution. The web and the social media that can communicate this track, will let it develop even further, adopting one asset and another but keeping the grass-root element, which remains active during the whole process, independently of any kind of orientation it might assume over time and in a balancing, connective game, strongly narrative and social oriented.

## Conclusions

This paper is a resume of a major research to explore the possibility to create in narrow communities a bottom-up and self-managed frameworks for political participation in order to help local actors to adopt social media as multi-level channel to defense (and to discover) their rights and to reactivate many peers as possible of their territorial networks. The main result of the research is an atlas to be used as flexible toolkit for the establishment of educative actions for political inclusion and re-activation, related to the connective way to cross the social tissue from online networks to everyday life and viceversa.

The main deliveries on the pilot cases are now under analysis and mapping, and the theoretical approach is being now reformulated as a socio-political theory to trigger a reflection on the idea of political network framework, even before the exploration of the mashed-up tools to adopt, to deepen analyze the concept of bottom-up governance. In this sense, the main idea is that governance has to become the direct mirror of the critical capacities of individuals, expressed in working groups on civic focus that are the real, pre-administrative and pre-electoral political tissue of every community.

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