Chapter 34
Territorial Knowledge, National Identities, Social Media, a Case Study: 150DIGIT – Italy of Schools

Luca Toschi
Università degli Studi di Firenze, Italy

Stefania Chipa
Università degli Studi di Firenze, Italy

Gianluca Simonetta
Università degli Studi di Firenze, Italy

ABSTRACT

"150DIGIT – Italy of schools" is a research project intended to test the model of generative communication in schools (www.comunicazionegenerativa.org). First introduced on the occasion of the celebration for the 150 years of united Italy, the project foresees the involvement of teachers and students within an innovative social network that provides the activation of a "dialogue" allowing generating and gathering of stories and tales that reposition the "institutional portrait" of the country. Through the architecture of a communication platform organized in different working environments, the system allows users to consult official and local materials, create new contents, make their voices heard and, last but not least, reflect and discuss on the procedures and languages that new technologies call into question.

INTRODUCTION

The Communication Strategies Lab (CSL - www.csl.unifi.it) of the Università degli Studi di Firenze, where our research activities are developed, has been focusing for years on the problems connected to the use of technologies in schools and more generally in education and training environments.

The celebrations for the 150 years of united Italy had given us the opportunity to test the model of generative communication in education and training environments. The organizing com-

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-2122-0.ch034

mittee of the event (Comitato Italia 150 - www.italia150.it) had planned the opening of four big exhibitions starting from March 2011: "Fare gli Italiani" (a journey through 150 years of national history), "Stazione futuro" (how will Italy be in ten years?), "Il Futuro nelle mani" (the excellence of craftsmanship), "La bella Italia" (150 years of masterpieces of art from all over the peninsula).

The CSL proposed the Committee to use the exhibitions to re-write the concept of learning environment, extending it from the activities carried out within the walls of the classes to the way in which students and teachers benefit the exhibitions and use the objects there shown to create new contents.

These are the general aims of the research project "150DIGIT - Italy of schools", an online communication and learning environment where the knowledge coming from the territories – the schools - is getting in contact and interacting with the knowledge that comes from above – the exhibitions.

The Committee had identified the school as one of the strategic interlocutors, because of the specific contents of the initiatives (the concept of national identity and the reflection on the need for planning in the future) as well as the unique role that school plays in "giving shape" to the Italians of tomorrow. For this reasons schools, teachers and students had been considered as interlocutors to involve actively during the visits to the exhibition. On the other hand "150DIGIT" was especially conceived to accompany schools through the inevitable changes determined by new technologies (for instance the recent frontiers of e-book and of Augmented Reality), as instruments capable of acting on social reality and to transform its environments and relations.

The observations outlined above bring up the concept of connection (intended as link), a central and constitutive element of digital language that, by its nature, has the unusual features of connecting what was once unthinkable to approach (such as the ability «make immediately factual a project idea», Toschi 2011). This perspective calls for two reflections that we believe are central in the relationship between school and technology:

- The content is also the product of the relationship that the text establishes with the readers (a document can have different meaning depending on the choice you make to read it, for example scrolling sequentially or following the key concepts, limiting the reading only to the text or activating the hypertext links). The possibility that a reader has to choose which information to get and in what order makes the boundaries of a text very flexible. Digital technology expands this possibility extending it to external elements of the text, delivering to the reader the means to intervene also on writing. Therefore, a digital content cannot be understood as consisting of defined boundaries, either physical or conceptual, because it is reconfigured every time on the basis of interaction on reading and writing;
- Technologies give evidence of another important aspect: schools cannot be read and interpreted as a world enclosed within physical boundaries (the walls of the class). The school is a social territory that is created on the basis of its relations with people (like families), institutions (like the municipality), the environment (like public organizations, institutions and corporations) with which it comes into contact through the real or the digital world.

These premises constitute the scenario in which we begun to imagine the project "150DIGIT – Italy of schools" and, at the same time, the issues that we have addressed during the first steps of our experiment.

Within the theoretical assumptions outlined above, "150DIGIT" has worked with students and teachers around two core concepts, experiment-