

The 'City of Goldsmiths': work, local identity and rhetoric¹

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Abstract

Drawing on the case of Valenza, Italy, this paper moves from the analytical model of the "imagined communities" to deal with the process of definition of local identity, intended as rhetoric boundary object. Local identities are considered as rhetoric object that are propelled by the interaction among the practices of Discourse carried on by different social actors. Differently from Anderson, this paper highlights that the cultural process is not only limited within the local community, but involves also the geographical environment and people outside the community since it is deeply linked with the interaction of the community with the outsiders, landscape and media.

Key word

Local community, rhetoric, Italy, imagined community, media, identity.

Introduction

Coming from Milan along the State Road 494, after one hour and a half driving among rice-fields and industrial sheds, one finally reaches the Po river, the border between Lombardy and Piedmont regions. The wide grey line of fresh water divides the two areas and creates a visible interruption between the Lombard tableland and the Piedmontese hills, which rise just beyond the border. Looking at the hills, Valenza is the first settlement one can see. Small ochre houses and many bell towers. The city lays on the top of a knoll less than one kilometre far from the river and the road bridge. From this position, it dominates the course of the river and the plain over it. Since the Medieval time, such position made Valenza a strategic point for the control of the traffic along and across the river. In the XIVth century, high tower were built around the town and turned the town in one of the most important fortresses on the border between Piedmont and Lombardy (Barghini, Comoli, & Marotta, 1993, p. 30). In 1805, after the defeat of(Barghini, Comoli, & Marotta, 1993, p. 30). In 1805, after the defeat of the Savoy Kingdom and the inclusion of Piedmont into Napoleonic France, the wall was demolished. Only a small section was left deprived by every its own usability for military purposes: the Bastione della Colombina, in the northern sector of the city. Without its

¹ **Work in Progress: Please do not quote without permission**

walls, during the XIXth century, the city experienced a profound redefinition of its economy: a town based on agriculture, in less than a century, turned to be an industrial city based on the industry, and in particular on the jewellery trade. The legacy of such transformation can be seen today.

Along the State Road, still 30 km far from Valenza, one begins seeing many advertising placards of Valenza's jewellery firms are placed on the border of the road. Someone of them is new; someone has seen better days. Approaching Valenza, the number of such advertising charts increases introducing the driver to one of the three world's most famous centres for jewellery manufactory.

They are just the first landmark that tells the visitors that today the economy of the city is fundamentally based on jewellery production. Following the State Road, this is clearly understandable once one arrives to the train-station, which is located on a plateau that overlooks the city. There she fronts the modern part of the city: Coinor neighbourhood, a vast belt of industrial plants that dwells in the small valley that divides the station and the city. "Daminiani", "Bulgari", "Pasquale Bruni", and many other famous names of the national and international jewellery marks can be read on the buildings' façades or indication signs on the road. Dozens of factories, small workshops or larger establishments, are located in the area between the train-station and the city. They are just a part of the jewellery firms opened in Valenza. The majority is still within the city centre. In 2006, there were about 1175 jewellery firms in Valenza (Unioncamere, 2009), and they employed 7227 people of the overall 20.215 inhabitants of the city (ISTAT, 2006; Unioncamere, 2009)². Thus, a third of the entire population, roughly half of the city workforce, works in the jewellery trade. It explains why Gaggio stated that in Valenza "*there [was] hardly a family in town not involved with the jewelry business*" (Gaggio, 2007, p. 33).

The pervasiveness of the jewellery trade in the city, however, is not limited within the economic sphere. It has become part of the imaginary of Valenzano people, a fundamental element in the representation and thinking about their city and community and of the local media, authorities and population. All of these dominions, Valenza is, in fact, identified as the 'Città degli orafi', 'City of Goldsmiths', or 'Città dell'oro', 'City of Gold'. Hence, the 'City of Goldsmiths' is the rhetoric object that makes Valenza unique in the eye of its citizens, its politicians and journalists. It is also the object that is used by people outside Valenza to describe and represent this city.

The idea of the 'City of Goldsmiths', however, does not only describe the factual characterization of the local urban space. It is above all the imaginary model of the community of people that lives in Valenza. By linking the rhetoric object of the 'City of Gold' to the model of imagined community proposed by Anderson, in this chapter I show this object is the subject of a large Discourse. It embraces not only the people of Valenza: the local press and, even, the people outside the city that never visited it contribute to the diffusion and development of the rhetoric of the 'City of Goldsmiths' and its concretization in Valenza.

² These are the data gathered during the last local census. After that year we have not data that present such a level of completeness.

A Rhetorical Premise

The works by Micheal Carrithers (Carrithers, 2005, 2009) and other scholars (Carrithers, 2007; Gudeman, 2009; Pandolfi, 1998; Strecker & Tyler, 2009) have highlighted the potentialities that the studies of private and public rhetoric can offer to understand the culture. I confide, like Carrithers, that *“attention to rhetoric sharpens the ethnographic eye and lays open to study that feature of social life that is so difficult to capture, its historicity, its eventfulness”* (Carrithers, 2005, p. 577). In particular, the study of the rhetoric object of the ‘City of Goldsmiths’ is intended to shed light on the cultural dynamics that underpin the sense of belonging of the individual to a community.

In the past years scholars has conjugated the anthropological studies of rhetoric in the observation of rhetorical figures or tropes.³ However, in its occurrences in different social contexts, the ‘City of Goldsmiths’ does not present the regularity of form and meaning that the general acceptance of trope requires. Instead, in this perspective, the ‘City of Goldsmiths’ must be considered a *boundary object* (Bowker & Star, 1999; Susan Leigh Star, 1989; Susan Leigh Star & Griesemer, 1989, pp. 285-318). *“This is an analytic concept of those scientific objects which both inhabit several intersecting social worlds [...], and satisfies the informational requirements of each of them. Boundary objects are objects which are both plastic enough to adapt to local needs and the constraints of the several parties employing them, yet robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites. They are weakly structured in common use, and become strongly structured in individual-site use. These objects may be abstract or concrete. They have different meanings in different social worlds but their structure is common enough to more than one world to make them recognizable, a means of translation.”* (Susan Leigh Star & Griesemer, 1989, pp. 392-393).

This analytical concept, once applied to the case of the ‘City of Goldsmiths’ object, well returns the substantial unity that sustains the various different interpretations and actualization that distinguish such a rhetoric object in the eyes of different people that use, and contribute to the propagation of this rhetorical object. Thus, the object of the ‘City of Goldsmiths’ is a rhetoric boundary object which provides visualization and description of the urban space and the community that there dwells to its user⁴. The object of the ‘City of Goldsmiths’, thus, offers description of the ideal economy of the city and modus vivendi of its population. In this regard, for its cultural function to Valenzano community, the ‘City of Goldsmiths’ can be considered an example of the idea of imagined community proposed by Anderson.

Communities among imagination and practices of discourse

³ They are common pattern of linguistic strategies occurring in different communicative context. (Mortara Garavelli, 2003)

⁴ The substantial semantic ambiguity of this object derives from the ambivalence of the word ‘città’, city in Italian. In this language, city refers both to the urban space and the group of people who lives it.

Since its first edition and, then, in its revisited version, *Imagined Communities* (Anderson, 1983; B. R. O. G. Anderson, 1991) highlighted the process of cultural construction that underpins the modern nationalism through the definition and creation of distinguished large community, the nations⁵. Contrarily from Gellner's critic to modern nationalisms (Gellner, 1964), Anderson analysis is based on the determination of a dialectical process that sees large groups of people progressively define themselves as a distinguished community, or using the terminology proposed later by De Landa a social assemblage (DeLanda, 2006), on the basis of the imagining, spreading and sharing of an idea of community⁶.

The theory proposed by Anderson innovated a long lasting tradition within the discipline. In the previous decades, scholars have described the small and large communities as groups people that shared a common space and "symbols" (Eriksen & Nielsen, 2001, pp. 96-110). These symbols were factual elements, material and immaterial objects, linked to the spheres of religion, such as relics, ritual equipments, rituals or myths, (Durkheim & Swain, 1976 (1912)), or to other aspects of the "structure" of the society, such as kinship (Duncan, 1968; Fortes & Evans-Pritchard, 1940; Gluckman, 1964). The individual and collective use of these symbols had the double role of underpinning the community's politics (Cohen, 1976; Kleinman, 2005), and manifesting the community as a such. In Anderson's analysis, however, the people are not bound together for a common factual basis (Friedman, 1992, p. 849). In fact, he looked at the creation of a collective communitarian imagination as foundation of the sense of belonging: a group of people are turned into a community by the sharing of the same idea of being members of the same limited, bounded and sovereign "community" (Anderson, 1991, p. 7).

It was the sharing the idea of community that allows people to be a community. The scholar noticed that, due to this idea of community, the group starts perceiving itself as distinguish social entity, "parallel" to other groups. Thereby, it detaches itself from previous larger communities and not considering it anymore part of the larger assemble.

In the case of the nation, Andersons pointed out that each community differentiates itself from the others through a language, which is elected as different from all the others, and, more important, the creation, displaying and celebration of its national history, the narration of the Past of the community and its socio-political system. History is described as the result and the perpetuator of the community's identity. In this regard, Anderson's analysis can be seen as part of a then-ongoing debate in Social Science and History about the connection between community's history, traditions and identity (Faubion, 1993; Halbwachs & Coser, 1992; Hastrup & European Association of Social Anthropologists., 1992; Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983; Nora, 1984-1992, 1989; Ranger, 1993; Rogister & Vergati, 2004). Refusing the idea of an objective, modernist history (Friedman, 1992), Anderson pointed out the social role that history has to create community and the genuine effort that communities, and in particular their ruling class, spend to create *their* history. However, the process of creating tradition is not an isolated event, but it is integrated in a

⁵ "All communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined." (B. Anderson, 1991; B. R. O. G. Anderson, 1991, p. 6)

⁶ In the case of the rise of nationalism and national states, this is the idea of nation that corresponds to a community, consisting of a limited number of individuals, who are sovereign over the bounded territory entitled to the community that describes that geographical extension of the nation (Anderson, 1991, p. 7).

dialectical model of building community. In the creation of the nation, the process is based on the interaction of the cultural work operated by media and politics/bureaucracy⁷. The result of such action is the creation of the idea of community that is embodied and justified by the narrative that is the community's official history. Thus, the relationship between history and community can be described with a circular model: whilst history is written from the perspective of the image of community -hence, it (consciously or involuntarily) shaped on the basis of the idea off community-, the public display and celebration of history through museums, parades, monuments create collective experiences for the members of the community that becomes a visible confirmation of the idea of community and enforces the imagination of being a community among the people that take part to the collective rites of history.

In Anderson's, a major role in the creation of collective identity is, thus, played by history, which is described as an account of the political and institutional past of the community. The relationship played on a symbolic/imaginary level between community and a precise model of economy, however, is almost overlooked⁸(O'Rourke, 2006).

Moving from the study of national communities to local ones⁹, O'Rourke (2006) addressed this theoretical gap in her ethnography of the Greek village of Lehonía. In her research, she adopted the model matured by Anderson. Through it, she explained the process of creation of local collective identity of the rural community. In so doing, she argued that also the local communities, such as a village in the Greek countryside, are culturally determined through the sharing among their members of a meta-narration of community. This narrative, however, embraces not only the history and politics, but, above all, it is based on an archetypal model of local economy that characterizes for the village. In the case of Lehonía, she showed that the local identity of the settlement was based on the belief, shared by the villagers, that the village was distinguished and distinguishable from the other villages thanks its opulent agriculture and not only for its administrative autonomy. Once this superiority was undermined by social and economic transformations of the village, the idea of the community was thrown into crisis and lost his congregative persuasiveness. As a result, the local community lost its unity and disaggregated. She explained such phenomenon pointing out that, besides the circular process of creation and consumption of history proposed by Anderson, the sense of belonging to a local community is underpinned by the dialectics between the social and economic characteristics portrayed by the idea of community and the factual conditions of the place. The idea of the community would be able to congregate people only as far as it

⁷ Very little space is given to the effect of the work of individuals, associations and other civic institutions on the grassroots level. In the last decades, however, often it has pointed out that these are powerful agents of the process of building communitarian identities.

⁸ In this regard, this overlooking is quite striking, since, for example, in the case of the creation of socialist countries, treated in the book, the creation of nation passed through not only the creation of a national history, but also the recognition of the difference of the national economic structure in the respect of other, foreign experiences.

⁹ Which she defined: "mutually-obligated people linked with that locale[...] belonging to a place bounded from other places"(O'Rourke, 2006, p. 3).

mirrors reality. Consequentially the incidental creation of a gap between the immateriality and the materiality of the community, caused by a sudden evolution of its socioeconomic condition, risk bringing the dissolution of the sense of belonging, as it happened to Lehonía's community¹⁰.

Both in Anderson and O'Rourke, the idea of community is described as a rhetorical element, rather than an individual or collective mental process. It is shared by the population and spread, as Anderson described, through and by media, bureaucracy, and, as in the case of O'Rourke's, face-to-face everyday interaction among the members of the community. In this respect, one can see the affinity that 'City of Goldsmiths' object has with such analytical model. However, it is necessary to reconsider in some extent the model to adopt it to the study of Valenza.

The ethnography by O'Rourke was able to integrate the economy within Anderson's model and show the role it plays on both immaterial and material level in the process of creating community; however she did not overcome other limits of Anderson's epistemological model. She, as well as Anderson, considered the narration of the imagined community as concerning only the community itself. Even though she premised acknowledging after Suddon (Sutton, 2000a, 2000b) the fluidity of the local community, she did not recognize the eventual difference that the narration can assume for the different members of the community due to their unlike degree of participation to its social and economic ambits. By considering the idea of community as a boundary object, I want to stress such structural plurality without losing the overall coherence that the various individuals' narrations shares.

Moreover, the idea of community is an object in constant evolution. It is the subject and the result of a continuous dialectical tension between factual occurrences and their interpretation. Above all, it is the product of a wide discourse that has as the focal point, the community and from the community it is irradiated over the political borders. Thereby it involves also people outside the original community. In Foucault the Discourse is a socio-cultural dynamic that overpasses the geographical and political boundaries (Foucault, 1971). It encompasses many communities that become the agents of the evolution of the discourse. Each one of these communities participates to the general dynamic in different ways, with different practices (Foucault, 2002 [1969]). In this way she contributes to the continuation of the discourse. In the light of Foucault's philosophy it appears that to understand the evolution and the entity of an idea of community the researcher must enlarge her scope to the communities beyond the political borders in order to understand the role played by them in shaping the idea of community.

¹⁰ In this rich settlement the "locals" identified themselves with a closed, inhospitable community based on the profit-bearing farming. The decline of the profits from agriculture, the following loss of importance of this trade in the community, the reduction of the prosperity of the village, the increasing immigration from "outside" of new comers, changed the social structure of the village, undermining the sense of belonging "*as having shared customs, values, and an identity distinct from others—even other residents of Lehonía—and having moral obligations to each other.*" (O'Rourke, 2006, p. 1)

Analyzing the 'City of Goldsmiths' object, I want to overcome the severe limits imposed by such simplification. First of all, in presenting this idea as a boundary object, I want to stress the plurality of interpretations that characterizes it, without losing the general coherence they share. Furthermore, in the next paragraphs I reconstruct the dimension of the discourse of the 'City of Goldsmiths' that is the idea of a Valenzano community. By starting from the analysis of the perception of this rhetoric object among Valenzano people, I highlight the interconnections that their practices of the discourse have with the one carried on by other groups of people. In order to do it, I show how the interpretation of the Valenzano people is influence and influences the actions and the idea of Valenza of the local elected politician, the press and some outsiders, in this case a sample of Alessandrino people who never visited Valenza.

Communities I: From the streets of the 'City of Goldsmiths'

"How do you describe your city?" has been one of the questions I had posed to all my Valenzano informants whether or not they were actually occupied in the jewellery trade. The majority of my informants¹¹, goldsmiths as well as people non-employed in the jewellery trade, answered employing the rhetoric object of the 'City of Goldsmiths'. In the interviews, it was used as a precise portrait of the city, first of all, in a geographical and demographic perspective. *"Look, Valenza is the 'City of Goldsmiths'! Look at the city. Everything is linked to the jewellery industry. Just think about the Coinor or the new Exhibition centre... Everywhere there are goldsmith firms and signs of jewellery producers, manufacturers, and sellers. Gold, the jewellery trade, is everywhere. Go to the supermarket and ask to the customers what is their job and the ninety percent will tell you that is employed in the jewellery trade. Someone will be a goldsmith, someone a gem setter, someone will be just a clerk but in a jewellery firm: still they all will work in the trade. In this respect, Valenza is the 'City of Goldsmiths'."* In the words of my informant, a gem-setter in his fifties that arrived to Valenza in the '70s as a student of one of the local professional school, Valenza is a 'City of Goldsmiths' because the jewellery trade pervades the urban landscape. This visceral interconnection is expressed by the presence of some particular landmarks, such as the Coinor industrial neighbourhood¹² and the Exhibition centre Expo Piemonte¹³. Moreover, due to the massive diffusion of firms amid the urban context, it is impossible to perceive a (physical) division between jewellery production and other functional areas of the city (Bovero, 1992)¹⁴. Thus, in the eyes of my informant, such a profound interconnection between the jewellery trade and the urban space makes almost impossible to discern the difference between Valenza and the jewellery industry. The idea that all the city of Valenza is an enormous

¹¹ The only persons that do not know this locution were immigrated into Valenza from other distant parts of Italy or from abroad since few weeks, did not have many acquaintance in the city, and, some of them, were still struggling with the language.

¹² This neighbourhood was planned in the late '70s, and built in the '80s. It lays in the western area of the city, and divides the train station from the city centre. For a precise historic account on the origins of Coinor see: (Bovero, 1992)

¹³ See next paragraph for further information concerning this building complex and its use.

¹⁴ Such as the residential and the commercial ones.

jewellery plant is a remarkably common perception in the city, shared by people of different age, occupation and income (Bovero, 1992; Fontefrancesco, 2004, 2009b; Pietrasanta, 1991). It is further reinforced by the conspicuous number of people working in the jewellery firms: in the 2000s, about the fifty percent of the working population –and not the ninety percent assumed by the informant.

In their private conversation at home as well as in public places, by employing the locution ‘City of Goldsmiths’ my informants did not just to stress the substantial importance of the particular trade in the city, they inferred the city was the jewellery trade. This emerged as a sort of common representation shared by all the people in the city. The nuance of meaning and its affectiveness that it brings along, however, dramatically diverged on the basis of the occupation of the individual and her family.

When the goldsmiths, or people with close relatives employed in the trade, referred to the image of the ‘City of Goldsmiths’ it was generally to stress the centrality in the city life that “they”, the jewellery making, have. Quoting an interview with a goldsmith entrepreneur, in his late fifties, who was born in a village neighbouring Valenza, since twenty years he moved due to his job: “Yes, when I think of Valenza I think it is the City of Goldsmiths. But I don’t mean that all the streets are paved with gold. I think Valenza is the city of the goldsmiths. We are the motor of the city, the ones who make it be unique. We are Valenza.”

Whilst in the case of goldsmiths, the idea of the ‘City of Goldsmiths’ is accompanied by a sense of pride toward the city and the role hold by their professional category; in the case of people not employed in the trade, the ‘City of Goldsmiths’ is tinged with uneasiness. They often referred to their situation as being forgotten by the other Valenzano citizens. As a public officer of the local health service, in her fifties, born and bred in Valenza explained: “We [people not employed in the jewellery trade] do not exist, in the eye of the goldsmiths. Valenza is their city. Stop. All the other people, at least in their eyes, seem not to exist. We live in the shadows of the gold.” The object of the ‘City of Goldsmiths’ is not rejected by my informants. It was the image they used to portray the city as well as its population it was to the goldsmiths. However, they charged this rhetoric object with a sense estrangement that make ‘City of Goldsmiths’ become in their narration the expression of their felt marginalization.

Where the overwhelming majority of my informants knew and used the image of the ‘City of Goldsmiths’ to describe Valenza, all of them were not able to imagine its historic origin. “I do not know. I never thought about the possibility of a historic origin for such idea. Wasn’t Valenza always like that?”¹⁵ is a representative example of the answers I received. In my informants’ perspective, rather than to be historically motivated, the success and the diffusion of the rhetoric was mainly linked to the present aspect of Valenza and a complex dynamics that bound together Valenzano insiders and outsiders, the press and the political debate

¹⁵ The informant was a polisher and goldsmith in her mid thirties born and bred in Valenza who started her career after having attended the Cellini high school in the early ‘90s

of the city. A university student of cinema, in his mid twenties, grew up in Valenza, but who actually lives in Turin, and whose his entire family is employed in the jewellery trade, on the matter of the diffusion of the idea of the 'City of Goldsmiths' commented: "You go out from Valenza and people, even without having visited the city, will tell you that Valenza is the 'City of Goldsmiths'. You look at the newspaper and Valenza is always associated to gold. You speak with Valenzano people and they will talk about the jewellery trade. You listen the local political debate and, again, it seems that the only problem in Valenza is the jewellery production. What do I have to think about my city?". In the words of the informant, the individual's awareness that Valenza in the 'City of Goldsmiths' would raise from her exposition to multiple experiences: the encounter with the outsiders, the reading the newspaper, the (active or passive) participation to Valenza's political debate and interaction with valenzani. All these experiences together would create a persuasive rhetoric network, which is weaved around the individual and transmits the object of the 'City of Goldsmiths'. The existence of such a network has been recognized by other informants. In the previous quote the different experience are juxtaposed, almost implying that each one of them has the same importance and persuasive power. However, when I asked them to the different role that this experience may have in transmitting the idea of the 'City of Goldsmiths', they stressed that some of them have a more "weight" than other, although all these experience, are to some extent significant. "You cannot compare the weight of what you mother says with what you are told by a stranger" was one of the comments. In particular they found to be crucial the everyday interaction with other Valenzano people and the characteristics of the public local debate. Rather than the active participation to the political and associative life of the city, often the informant stressed that Valenza was in the eye the 'City of Goldsmiths' also because Valenza's public debate seemed only concentrated on the problems of the jewellery trade since the equation it appeared "Valenza = Jewellery trade" underpinning the entire debate and local policy making. To many goldsmiths this was a "natural" conclusion and a validation of the being Valenza the 'City of Goldsmiths'. For example, a goldsmith in his sixties, who has been the owner of a small firm since the '70s, glossed on this topic: "Yes, the political debate is centred on the jewellery trade. What's so strange? Valenza is a City of Goldsmithssmiths, isn't it?". At the same time, to the non-goldsmiths, this aspect of the local debate was a further proof of their social exclusion. A fifty years old owner of one of the shops of the city centre commented: "They still speak only about the problems of the jewellery trade. However, many people that do not work in the jewellery sector live. Why they do not speak of us? It seems we are forgotten." In the eyes of my informants, there was a gap between the community and the political class. In fact, the largest part of my informants did not consider themselves to be actors of the public debate but just sort of victims. They describe the process of decision making in the city as led by a minority of Valenzano people who my informants often addressed as "*loro*", "them". "Them" are the people "in the control room", the elected politicians in the local bodies. These "them" are perceived as detached from and not influence by the rest of Valenza social milieu. "Them" would more or less autonomously from the rest of the city's population decide the city economic and political agenda and carry on the policy making process. The "normal Valenzano person", using the expression proposed by my informants which describes the non elected, generally passive, participants in the local political debate, would not have any weight in them's decisions: she would just become acquainted with them's choices through the news or the chats with other Valenzano people. However, them's decisions were considered to be crucial for the development and the factual transformation of the city: "If Valenza is the City of Goldsmiths, it is also thanks to them, who are in the control room. With their decision they made Valenza as it is and killed any other alternative", noted a retired goldsmith in his seventies who worked for fifty years in Valenza as owner of a small artisan firm.

Communities II: from the Palace

Thus, to understand the creation, the circulation, the dialectic tension with reality of the rhetoric object of the 'City of Goldsmiths', we need to consider another group of people, the one the Valenzano people often called "them". This group, which may echo Anderson's bureaucratic and political establishment, presents some relevant difference from the group of people the scholar pointed out as the responsible for the spreading of the idea of the nation in the colonies¹⁶.

In Anderson's account the identification of such group of people is easy, sharp and neat. Through an etic categorization, the motor of the diffusion of the imagined community are individuated in the bureaucratic machine, all the people working in the public administration as officers or politicians. They are conceptualized as a group of people distinguished and rather detached from the rest of the population.

Differently from Anderson's, definition of "Them" is emic, generated by Valenzano people to explain to themselves how their city works in the basis of their, often publically admitted, incomplete knowledge of the policy making process. The "cut" (Strathern, 1996) that this classification operates in the social milieu is far from be sharp: the identity of whom is part of "Them" is quite unclear and imprecise and it changes from informant to informant. Most commonly, my informants only listed the most prominent elected administrators in this group¹⁷: the city mayor and the other members of the city *giunta*, the city board of governors, whose members in Italy are called *assessore*, assessor. Besides their pivotal role in the policy making, my informants altogether ignored other people employed in the city bureaucracy, for example, the city managers¹⁸. A possible explanation of this omission can be found in the sources used by my interviewees to inform themselves on the current local political and administrative debate: the chatting with other Valenzano people and the press. In particular, the local press still presents all the actions and plans launched by the city council as the results of the work of only the elected politicians silencing the role

¹⁶ In Anderson's as well as in my informants' opinion in the creation, spreading and actualization of the particular idea of community it is relevant rather than the actual identity of the people involved in the policy making, the protocols, the procedures and the services established by them.

¹⁷ An example is provided by the words of a gem setter in his forty "Who are them? Well the mayor and the assessori, I guess. At least, reading the news it seems they are the big shots that decide everything..."

¹⁸ An important part is played by the City managers, who actually write the policies and protocols. In fact, since the coming into force of Law 81/1993 (Repubblica Italiana, 1993), the mayor and the assessori have lost their legislative centrality in the policy making. The city managers, appointed officers hired by the city administration, have assumed greater importance, because they became the person legally responsible for all the legal acts produced by the city council.

played by the city managers and other bureaucrats, besides the change in the Law had increased the administrative role of such officers¹⁹.

In the previous section we have seen as that Valenzano people consider the rhetoric object of the City of Goldsmiths' be actively and arbitrarily shaped by the action of "Them". Thus, considering the general individuation of "Them" as the principal elected local politician, in this section I focus on the role played by these people in the actualization of the imagined community model portrayed by the idea of the 'City of Goldsmiths', highlighting the complex relationship that binds Valenzano politicians to the rest of the city population.

First of all, however, it is to reconsider a fundamental element of the grassroots conceptualization of "Them". My informants considered it as being as a social group totally separated from the "common valenanzo people". By using the rhetoric recently introduced into the national political debate by Stella and Rizzo (Stella & Rizzo, 2007), my informants referred to "Them" as "*casta*", a caste. This social division, however commonly, must not be overestimated. In fact the elected politicians are still part of the social body of Valenza, as they remembered. For example, Gialuca Barbero, then assessore, stressed in December 2008: "I am always sorry when I listen such a thing... when I listen that we, politicians, are perceived as barricaded in the Palace of Power... I do not consider myself as "a politician" or "one of the caste". Sincerely, first of all, I am a Valenzano people, who grew up in this city, and works in this city. Whatever I do as public administrator, I do it with the tools, the ideas, the dreams and fears that this city taught me." Thus, the public administrators are not totally detached from the rest of society. They are part of it and in their actions they are influenced by the other Valenzano people's opinions. Thus, the role eventually played by these administrators in the creation the fertile ground where the idea of the community can root and prosper rhetoric, must be considered in the light of these dialectics, not explored by Anderson.

Valenzano informant pointed at the voluntariness of the intervention of "Them" in order to shape the city into the 'City of Goldsmiths'. However, such perception of the administrative work does not imply the administrators actually consider their work as willingly aimed to transform the city into that model. It clearly emerged from the interviews I had²⁰. All the public administrators did not consider privileging the problems of the people employed jewellery trade against the ones of the people working in other sectors.

¹⁹ "At the end of the day, the public wants to know what the politicians they voted, nor some grey bureaucrat, do." was the explanation provided me by a radio journalist in her late twenty.

²⁰ For example, in august 2009, in an interview with the then city mayor, Gianni Raselli, I asked him about the centrality of jewellery trade in the policy making of the city. He answered: "I, as well as the other members of the giunta, work in the jewellery trade. Moreover the most of people who vote are employed in that trade. We cannot ignore this fact. However it does not mean that we forget the other Valenzano citizens. If the jewellery trade has a problem, we must attempt to offer some solution. That is. I do not believe our work is done just for the goldsmiths and I do not believe we are hindering the possibility of an economic diversification. For example during my mandate, two new large supermarkets opened and gave jobs to hundreds people."

In July 2009, the then vice-Mayor, Marilena Griva, argued: "Of course, the jewellery trade is important: the majority of Valenzano people are employed in that trade. However it is not true we thought only to the goldsmiths. We have done a lot for all the Valenzano citizens. Maybe the press did not cover enough those projects. Maybe the Valenzano people are not interested in anything but gold."

Whilst the social planning of the City Council may not be based only on the needs of the people employed in the jewellery production (e.g. Fontefrancesco, 2006; Maggiora, 2005, 2010), and the public administrator may have not intended their action as directed only to the goldsmith, in the last ten years the council publicly embraced the idea of the 'City of Goldsmiths' in his public rhetoric, in particular in the case of tourism.

During all the 2000s, the council invested resources to nationally and internationally promote the city as place of tourism and culture (Comune di Valenza, 2009; Quaroni & Zeppa, 2005). In this effort, the administration together with the local goldsmiths' associations advertised Valenza as the 'City of Goldsmiths' and goldsmith. Public signs were installed around the city and advertising were published in many local and national newspaper and online journal using slogan such as "the European capital of the manufactory of gold and precious gems" (e.g. Vino, 2009). In this way, the idea of the 'City of Goldsmiths' became an immaterial distinguishing Valenza's landmark. In September 2010, I met the assessor deputed to the tourism and public events, Settimio Siepe, and I asked for the reasons of such strategy. He answered: "Yes, when we try to sell Valenza as a possible destination for tourism we speak a lot about gold and its jewellery trade. It is not because I think Valenza is only the jewellery trade, but it is because the image of the 'City of Goldsmiths' is effective, ask to our jewellery sellers!, and people outside of Valenza already know Valenza as the 'City of Goldsmiths'!"

The words by Siepe stress a link between this rhetoric action and an ongoing practice spread in Valenza. In fact, the use of the rhetoric object of the 'City of Goldsmiths' as a tool to make Valenza stickier (Gladwell, 2000, pp. 89-132) image in the mind of the outsiders and increase the value of Valenza production is commonly employed by Valenzano people.²¹ Thus, we can consider the administrative action, rather than

²¹ As one non-goldsmith informant, an engineer in his fifties that lives in Valenza but works near Milan and every day commutes by train or car, explained: "*Valenza "the 'City of Goldsmiths'"... such a fantastic stereotype! Every person who lives here knows it and when she needs to describe Valenza, she comes to use it. I tell you an anecdote. Yesterday I was out for job. I met a client and chatting he asked me where I live. Then, vois-la, I told him I live in Valenza, the 'City of Goldsmiths' where... bla, bla, bla. You know the story... it's simple and makes your interlocutor think you live in a fabulous place and not in a anonymous small town...*" This informant as well as many jewellery traders underlined that rhetoric of the 'City of Goldsmiths' is an important tool to 'sell' the city and its products. In their experiences, it helped to characterize the place: to associate the name of the city with an imaginary of opulence and fantasy that, an informant, a Jewellery trader, in his fifty, who was born and bred in Valenza, commented. "makes people not forget the name of Valenza". Besides it cannot be a priori proved to be a general, mathematical rule, this corresponds to what we have seen above analyzing the case of alessandrino people: indeed, even though they never visited Valenza they knew the city remembering the image of the 'City of Goldsmiths', which was stuck in their imaginary.

an authoritarian action than *cum imperio* shapes the collective imaginary, an example of the interconnection between “common valenzano people’s” practices and the administrative actions taken.

Coming back to the examination of the administrative work, we can see that, in the 2000s, the employment of the rhetoric of the ‘City of Goldsmith’ can be considered to be linked to another important role in another important plan of the City Council aimed to spur both tourism and the economy of the city. The City Council with the Provincial and Regional Governments launched the program “Expo Piemonte” in 2002. This program was aimed to create in Valenza the second trade fair centre in Piedmont and implied the building of an exhibition centre, called Expo Piemonte, on the outskirts of the city (R. Il Piccolo, 2010; Zemide, 2002, 2005). The new building, moreover, would have answered to the growing need expressed by the goldsmiths community for a large exhibition centre where it could be hosted the starting from the experience matured and the need raised in the city for the annual international jewellery exposition, “Valenza Gioielli”, which ran since the 1970s. This fair has continued growing in the course of the years, and in the ‘90s the need of a new exhibition centre where it could be hosted the annual international jewellery exposition, “Valenza Gioielli”²².

The building was inaugurated in 2009 and became the official location of the annual international jewellery fair, Valenza Gioielli. Besides this four days event and the three days event, V+, a national exposition of technology, and services for the jewellery trade, no other events are organized in the large building. However, some of the rooms are, instead, used as seat of the goldsmiths’ association AOV.

Besides the good intention of the public administrators, the Expo is perceived by Valenzano people as a facility for the jewellery trade, rather than something opened for any possible pole of development of new businesses, services and tourism, and a new landmark that manifests the centrality of the jewellery trade in the city. This perception was explained by my informants on the basis of the characteristics of the limited number of events hosted by the structure, which concerns only the jewellery trade, and the physical presence of AOV, the main Valenzano goldsmiths’ association. Thereby, whilst in the eyes of the local politicians Expo Piemonte was still an open project aimed to create a new business opportunity for the city that was *also* able to answer to the needs of the goldsmiths’ community²³, to all my Valenzano informants

²² The manifestation organized by AOV has run since 1970s. To host this event the AOV built the first exhibition centre of Valenza, Palazzo Mostre, in 1983. Since the constant growth of the event, year after year, the large building located in the west sector of the city, not far from the city centre, rapidly became too small to efficiently house the exposition. In the ‘90s in AOV began the works to expand the building, but they were stopped in 2000 when the discussion about the Expo Piemonte project started. In the eyes of the members of AOV, once it would have opened, the Expo Piemonte building would have become the new location for the jewellery exposition. (Associazione Orafa Valenzana, 2006)

²³ For example, Gianni Raselli in his interview commented: “We imagined Expo Piemonte as an important service to the local jewellery trade, but we did not want to make Expo Piemonte only a facility for the Valenza’s jewellery production.”

the new exhibition centre was a project imagined and designed *only* for the needs of the city's goldsmiths. Thus, whilst the administrators were willing to describe the Expo as a resource for the entire city²⁴, the Valenzano people considered it just a extremely expensive project that answered to one particular need of the goldsmiths' community (to have a space large enough to host their exhibition). In the eyes of the former, Expo Piemonte provides a possibility of development and economic diversification to the entire city and cannot be considered a project "only for goldsmiths"; to the latter, instead, the large investments involved in the project and the edification of the building were factual examples of how the city policy making process is massively oriented towards the needs of the goldsmiths, and is actively doing in shaping Valenza into the "City of Goldsmiths", the city thoroughly and utterly dedicated to the goldsmiths.

From the comparison, it is highlighted the gap between the interpretation given by the public administrators and my informants. The Expo Piemonte is an example of how the action of bureaucracy and administration do not only have a direct role in reinforcing and spreading a particular idea of community, that in the case of Valenza is portrayed in the rhetoric of the City of Goldsmiths. They have also a highly significant indirect role. The local community may perceive administrative projects and actions from a different angle respect the one of the administrators', and may just consider the factual entity of these actions, as in the case of Expopiemeonte. These differences may bring the member of the local community to an interpretation and comprehension of the administrative actions that will diverge from the one that administrators have. Nonetheless, for this gap, actions that were not meant to reinforce a particular idea of city and community are lived as such reinforcement.

Communities III: From the news

One of the principals reasons my Alessandrino informants knew Valenza as the 'City of Goldsmiths', they said, was the press. Indeed, from an examination, even a superficial one, of the articles about Valenza published in the last years by local newspapers, radios it emerges the public press extensively uses the imaginary of gold and jewellery production to describe all the aspects of the life Valenza. For example, a recurring synonym of Valenza is "the 'City of Goldsmiths'", the nickname of Valenzana Calcio²⁵ players is "the goldsmiths", and the image of gold is often used in the title to introduce any kind of topic, from the singing contest to sport event²⁶.

During the research, I met many journalists that worked in Valenza reporting the news of the city and are the authors of the articles I scrutinized.

²⁴

²⁵ Valenza's football team (Maggiora, 2006).

²⁶ To have a grasp of this phenomenon it is enough a quick research in the database of the local newspapers (i.e. Il Monferrato, 2007; Il Piccolo, 2007; Stampa, 2008) and radio (Radiogold, 2009)

Talking with them, first of all I tried to understand the reasons behind the use of the locution 'City of Goldsmiths'. *"Why we use such an expression? Well, it's catchy. It is evocative. Think about a 'City of Goldsmiths' and you'll wonder about magic castles and fairies. You see. It is a good rhetoric image! Besides it, everybody in the Province, no matter whether she has never visited Valenza, knows that the 'City of Goldsmiths' is Valenza and Valenza is the 'City of Goldsmiths'!"* I was answered by a radio journalist in his mid thirties, who has worked for almost ten year in Valenza. The journalist, as other his colleagues, underlined the functionality of the locution: in one hand, the imaginary that the expression 'City of Goldsmiths' brings along is evocative, in the other it is known by all the readers/listeners that, even though they never visited Valenza, are accustomed to associating the city of Valenza to it.

When the journalists where asked about the origins of the idiom, the common answer was concerning the actual diffusion of the imaginary. *"Well, I do not when the expression was invented or used for the first time. When I started my job, it was commonly used by the all the other journalists. So, I kept using it as well. However, if you go to Valenza every Valenzano, no matter if she is or is not a goldsmiths, will tell you that Valenza is the 'City of Goldsmiths', or something like that. I know that Valenza is not only the jewellery trade, but if Valenzano people think so, why cannot I write that Valenza is the 'City of Goldsmiths'?"* argued a radio-reporter, in his thirties.

The historic origins of this rhetorical practice were unknown by my all my informants, despite the difference of age. The use was already current in the '80s, when the older of my informants began their careers. It had been a dominant stylistic element that was commonly used by the press. Thereby, they implemented it in their writing. They mainly justified its use on the basis of an ongoing practice in Valenza on a grassroots level, rather that for its veracity. Indeed, the journalists recognized that Valenza was not only the jewellery trade, but to call Valenza the 'City of Goldsmiths' portrays what valanzani think of themselves in the eyes of the journalist. In this respect, my informants added a further element by arguing, as the editor of the local page of Valenza on *il Piccolo*²⁷ did, *"Don't forget, the City Council and many private citizens use this image to advertise the city and its production!"* : if the media spread the rhetoric of the 'City of Goldsmiths' it is because public bodies and privates firms used this image to distinguish Valenza.

The use of the rhetoric of the 'City of Goldsmiths' by the press is not based on its truthfulness. In other words, journalists were aware that the rhetoric does not portray the complexity of the city. However, they employed it for the rhetoric power that it is endowed, and due to their connection with the public and city's population. In fact, the image of the 'City of Goldsmiths' is considered to have a strong emotional potential on the public since it is connected with a sort of fable-like imaginary.

Moreover, they justified their use on the base of a cultural dialectic with their public that they schematized in three layers of interaction: the relationship with the Valenzano people –all Valenzano people think that Valenza is the 'City of Goldsmiths', so I –journalist- say that Valenza is the 'City of Goldsmiths' because this

²⁷ Journalist in her forties, she worked at the newspaper since the '90s as reporter for Valenza.

locution portrays their way of conceptualize their city; the relationship with advertisement made in Valenza by public bodies and private companies –they use the image of ‘City of Goldsmiths’ in their campaign, so, while I am writing about their campaign, I have describe Valenza as the ‘City of Goldsmiths’, because it is part of their message; the relationship with their public –the article must be amusing and understandable to all my public. My public knows Valenza as the ‘City of Goldsmiths’. I use this locution because they know it and make the article more understandable for them. Considering this links, the media appear to be strongly embedded into a wider cultural dynamic that involves other three partners: the public outside Valenza, the Valenzano people and the institutions of Valenza. Whilst the first of them was already sounded, in the next paragraphs we focus on the other partners in order to describe the dialectics that sustain the circulation of the object of ‘City of Goldsmiths’.

Communities IV: From the spyglass

As my Valenzano informants highlighted, there is a last actor which participate into the creation and diffusion of the rhetoric object of the ‘City of Goldsmiths’. It is the outsiders, the people who live outside Valenza. They too know the rhetoric object, and contribute to its diffusion. Moreover through their knowing produce a strengthening feedback to Valenzano people and press for their use and belief in the representation of community that the rhetoric object conveys.

To understand the role they play, I focus my attention on a particular group of outsiders, the alessandrino people who never visited Valenza.

Alessandria is the third largest city of Piedmont (Comuni-Italiani.it, 2009) with its almost 100.000 inhabitants. It is 14km southern Valenza and its demesne confines with the one of Valenza. It is the capital of Province of Alessandria, the Piedmont’s administrative region where Valenza is situated. The offices of many governmental and nongovernmental agencies that work in Valenza, rather than be in Valenza, are situated in Alessandria for administrative importance and geographical closeness of this city. In Alessandria, moreover, the most-read local newspapers, la Stampa and il Piccolo, and the most listened local news radio, Radiogold, have their editorial offices and hundreds of people that work or study in the schools in Valenza every day commute between the cities. Besides such interconnection, the increasing integration of the services offered by the two municipalities, and the improvement of the infrastructures linking the cities (Fontefrancesco, 2009a), the two city-communities continue to vividly to identifies themselves as divided, parallel entities embodying and manifesting the strong *capanalismo*, one should translate “local pride” rather than parochialism, which would characterize Italian culture (i.e. Bravo, 2001; Clemente, 1997).

Besides the proximity of the two cities, in Alessandria it is not rare to find people that never visited Valenza²⁸ even though maybe they had seen the city but just for few minutes through the glass of their car or train window, or from afar as ironically underlined of one of my informants, a retired woman in her sixty²⁹ “*Have I seen Valenza? Yes, when I went to Betania sanctuary³⁰ I have seen it with my spyglass... ah... you mean I have never visited the city... no... unfortunately, no...*”

The non-visit of the city was explained by one of my informants, bank clerk in his twenties³¹, in these terms: “*Why do I have to go there, when I have everything there... and, then, at the moment I do not need any jewellery... maybe when I will need a wedding ring I will go there*”. In general, my informants justified their non-visit of Valenza with a lack of interest: in their eyes, Valenza would not offer anything that is not already offered in Alessandria. The manque experience of the city, however, does not imply the ignorance of the existence of the city³². They had an “idea” of Valenza, although it was not matured from their direct experience. When they had to explain to what they associate Valenza, and give a brief description of what they know about it, all of them linked Valenza to the jewellery production. “Valenza... isn’t the ‘City of Goldsmiths’ where *everybody is a goldsmith?*” was the explicit comment made by an engineer in his forties who had a studio in Turin, languished.

The repertoire of the ‘City of Goldsmiths’ explicitly or implicitly occurred in all my interviews, since all my informants shared the belief Valenza was a city wholly dedicated to the jewellery trade. However, the link between the city and the trade manifested change from informant to informant. For example, a shop cashier still in her teens³³ the ‘City of Goldsmiths’ was place crowded with jeweller shops -“*You know, I*

²⁸ Instead, it is reasonable to say that all the Valenzano people visited Alessandria, maybe only to go to the hospital, complete a paperwork or take a train.

²⁹ She was born in the south of the Province and moved in Alessandria in the ‘70s, when her husband was employed in Michelin factory. She worked as housemaid for many Alessandria families until she retired.

³⁰ Betania is a sanctuary and building complex owned by Alessandria Bishop’s see. It lays on the top of a hill half way between Alessandria and Valenza. From the belvedere of the complex it is possible to see quite distinctly.

³¹ He was born and educated in Alessandria and attended the university in Turin. Once he finished his studied, he returned in Alessandria were he found his actual job in a bank.

³² Ignorance is the lack of awareness or knowledge. All my informant knew that Valenza existed and was few miles far from their home. Hence, they had a grasp of knowledge of Valenza. Instead, many of them were “ignorant” about Durham. During my research, I gave all the informants an informative paper where I stated the principal features of my research and that I was a PhD student of Durham University. Many of them asked me where Durham was admitting that they “[did] not know where it [was]” or what that Durham University existed. I associate to this mental blankness the word “ignorance”.

³³ She was born in the early ‘90s in Valenza and grew up in the city, completed her studies in the cities and did not attended the university. After the high-school she was hired by a local supermarket as chaser in 2008 and there still works

would like to go there. There should be many jeweller shops over there, shouldn't it? I would like to look at what they sell.. if it is not to buy, at least to dream"-, whilst a clerk in his thirties³⁴ described Valenza as an industrial city -"Everybody knows that there are many jewellery firms in Valenza.... How do I imagine the establishments? Well, you know... big squared prefabricated constructions and high chimneys... I guess...".

Thus, all of them had knowledge of one piece of information that equated Valenza with the jewellery trade. Without a direct experience or familiarity with the features of jewellery trade in Valenza, my informants declined this information according their taste and imagination. The result of this moulding may vary due to personal inclination, education, age, etc. However, every one of my informant *knew* that little parcel of information that they did not directly mature. Besides the difference of age, gender, education, and family background their knowledge derived from two main cultural vectors: the (local) mass media³⁵, in particular the press, and the vis-à-vis relationship with people who knew Valenza, and especially Valenzano people³⁶. The exposure to these media originated their fundamental understanding of Valenza.

However, Valenzano people as well as the press shape their communication of the city on the basis of the knowledge that the outsiders of Valenza have. In this perspective, we note that the cycle closes in a process of enforcing feedback for the rhetoric itself. The Valenzano people as well as the press use, and believe in the rhetoric of the 'City of Goldsmiths' (also) because the outsiders know Valenza as the 'City of Goldsmiths', and the outsiders identify Valenza as the 'City of Goldsmiths' because the Valenzano as well as the press represent Valenza as the 'City of Goldsmiths'.

Discursive dynamics

From the previous paragraphs emerges a tangled network in which the rhetoric object of the 'City of Goldsmiths', the idea of Valenza's community is strictly connected to, circulates. After Foucault (Foucault, 1971, 2001 [1994]), it can be considered the human network through which the Discourse of the 'City of Goldsmiths' is developed. Differently from what suggested by Anderson, the discourse passes over the geographical and political boundaries of the territory where the community of Valenza is set, and encompasses also the outsiders, for example the group of Alessandrino people who never visited Valenza.

³⁴ Born in Alessandria in the late '70s, my informant completed his studies in Alessandria and Turin. He completed a BSc in Economy and Business Administration in Turin and, after his graduation, was hired in a large chemical industry in the southern suburb of the city in the late '90s. He still work in the same industry.

³⁵ For example, showing an article about Valenza published in the last issue of *Il Piccolo*, a clerk of a big Alessandria's firm, in her late forties, commented "Look at the press. You see? They tell that Valenza is the 'City of Goldsmiths'. There should be some true over there, shouldn't it?"

³⁶ For example, an engineer in his early fifties remembered that "When I was in high school [at Alessandria's *Liceo Classico Plana*], I had a schoolmate from Valenza. He always told me that Valenza was a city where everybody works in the jewellery trade."

In Foucault the Discourse is presented as an entity “unlimited, continuous and silent” (Foucault, 1971). However the French philosopher stressed that, in the process of creation of an idea, there are particular moments, shifts of the Discourse, that could bring to profound changes, such as the birth of new ideas. In the case of the ‘City of Gold’ we can trace this birth to a precise moment in the past. In fact, from the analysis of the local newspapers, magazines and video, however, one finds that this images began being currently used in the late 1950s, thank to the active role played by AOV in promoting Valenza jewellery production in Italy and abroad³⁷.

However, this historic moment is not recognized by the informants. All my informants in Valenza as well as in Alessandria ignored the historical origins of the rhetoric of the City of Goldsmiths. In their eyes, the rhetoric object has not a past: it is just a derivation of the present socioeconomic characteristic of Valenza - Valenza is the ‘City of Goldsmiths’ since Valenza’s economy is based on the jewellery trade-. At most its origins go back to an a-historical past, “centuries ago”. Moreover, the overall majority of my Valenzano informants considered irrelevant the possible datability of the origins of the rhetoric object. In particular this predisposition manifested in the answer I received, even by my closer informants, when I show them the findings of my historic research: “Oh, really? It’s interesting... but, I think it is quite useless to understand what it [the ‘City of Goldsmiths’ rhetoric] means now and to what is associated in the mind of Valenzano people.”³⁸

The Discourse of the ‘City of Goldsmiths’ is lived as something concerning the present time that draws its rhetoric strength from the actual situation of Valenza and use the media and other people in Valenza and outside the city make of it, that is the vastness of its discourse.

From the previous paragraphs, it emerges that the discourse of the ‘City of Goldsmiths’ is not carried on in a unique way by the participants. Every one of my informants has offered a personal description of this object. However, it is possible to find common patterns in the different personal approaches. In particular, the individual’s job and the different relationships that my informants had with Valenza allowed me to

³⁷ From an examination of the local newspaper and video reportages, it resulted that the rhetoric became dominant in the late 1950s, when the association of Valenza’s goldsmiths started an international advertising campaign for the jewellery made in Valenza. One of the early example is found in one instalment of “Settimana CIAC” (C.I.A.C, 1959), a weekly video reportage that was broadcasted in the cinema before the display of the movies. The reportage was focused on the inauguration of the “Mostra permanente di gioielleria” of Valenza. In presenting the event Valenza is presented as a city “where for centuries the goldsmiths arts produces glittering, marvellous pieces of jewellery”. In 1964, a 10 min long documentary was shoot in Valenza by Incom company (Orengo, Isoardi, & Tarchi, 1964). In this film, Valenza is titled “The Capital of the Goldsmiths”. In the ‘60s, the rhetoric of the ‘City of Goldsmiths’ was firmly established so that one decade later it was employed not only in the mass-media but also in scientific publications made in the Province of Alessandria (e.g. AOV, 1972; Lenti & Pugnetti, 1974)

³⁸ The passage is taken from an interview with a forty years old goldsmith. She was born in Alessandria but working in Valenza since the ‘90s. I met her in her studio in July 2009.

arrive to define four macro-groups of participants to the grand discourse of the City of Goldsmiths: the Valenzano informants and their elected politicians, the press and the non-Valenzano informants. Each one of these groups uses the rhetoric of the 'City of Goldsmiths' through their particular dialectic practices. However, in their use they are influenced, directly and indirectly, by the practices of the other groups. As in Foucault (Foucault, 2001 [1994], p. 30), also in case of the City of Goldsmiths, the discourse is shaped through "discontinuous practices that cross each other, sometimes they come side by side, but also they ignore or exclude each other".

In the previous paragraphs, we have seen the discourse of the 'City of Goldsmiths' can be unravelled. Taking the perspective of a Valenzano person, the focal centre of the discourse is Valenza's community, who employed the object of the 'City of Goldsmiths' describing their city. This object represented the symbol, the idea they have of their community, and it is often used to describe the city with the outsiders. To my informants, the diffusion of this idea is due to first of all to the everyday life in the city and the spreading through chatting with other Valenzano people. Besides this, they pointed out that their conviction is also influenced directly by the decisions of the local politicians and indirectly by the emphasis given by the press to characterize the city and by the diffusion of the object of the 'City of Goldsmiths' among the outsiders.

The elected politicians, even though were perceived as a detached community from many of my informants, are and feel themselves part of Valenza society. Many of them are goldsmiths or civil servants employed within the city. As all the other Valenzano people, they know the object of the 'City of Goldsmiths' and in the light of it they relate themselves to the city. Nevertheless what is thought by the other Valenzano people, they did not consider their administrative decision taken on the ground of this idea of community. They presented their action as based on a larger angle than the one conveyed by the rhetoric object: the emphasis given to the jewellery trade in their planning is explained as caused by the economic preponderance of this trade in the city.

From the interviews clearly emerged a gap between the politicians' motivations and explanations given to their decisions and the interpretation given to them by other Valenzano people. In the light of this gap, which is mainly generated by the substantial mistrust that many of my informants felt toward "all the politicians", I find quite pointless to sound the sincerity of the motivations and justifications offered me by the local administrators. I consider the gap per se an interesting modus of interaction among different groups and practices of the discourse. It shows that the discourse is carried on not only through direct actions performed by one group toward the others, but it developed also through indirect interactions, in this case the interpretation given by Valenzano informants to the administrative initiatives. Such interpretation, on the grassroots level, results into the reinforcing the Valenzano people in their conviction that Valenza is (just) the 'City of Goldsmiths'.

The press is a further agent of the discourse.

By all my informants, it considered an indispensable medium to connect people and circulate information about Valenza and its public debate. It is also an powerful vector that spreads the imaginary of the 'City of Goldsmiths' within the city and outside, massively associating Valenza with the imaginary of gold. Also in this case, the reinforcement and the diffusion of this idea it is mainly an involuntary effect. The journalists employ the rhetoric of the 'City of Gold' just because is an effective image: my informants underlined they had no will to spread a particular idea of Valenza or influence the cultural dynamics of the city through their actions. Besides the involuntarily, the final result of the journalistic style is a reinforcement and perpetuation of a particular idea of community, within and outside Valenza.

Finally, the outsiders, a group of people would be easily assimilated just to the final recipient of the rhetoric. In fact, even though they might never be in Valenza, they knew the Valenza as the 'City of Goldsmiths' thanks what they learned from the press and from the description offered them by Valenzano people. However, this knowledge can contribute not only to the actual diffusion of the rhetoric object, an expansion of the discourse, but also to its reinforcement. When a Valenzano person interacts with people from outside the city who know Valenza as the 'City of Goldsmiths', this knowledge does result in the confirmation of this imaginary to the Valenzano.

Conclusions

From this resume, it clearly appears the complex cultural dynamics that characterize the discourse of the 'City of Goldsmith'. It involves many communities and social groups. They influence each other, and together their actions result in the constant development and diffusion of the rhetoric object. This interaction can be expressed directly or indirectly and some particular group can have a more prominent role in contributing to the continuous definition of such image. However, they work all together and, to understand the comprehensive dynamic it is necessary to include all of them in the account. In this perspective, an idea of community appears not only as an interpretation of the positive characteristic of the geographic, social and economic environment where the individual and the community dwell. It is a broader cultural phenomenon that extends over the political and geographical boundaries of the community and it is played not only by the members of the community. Thus, the interpretation, which is the cultural and social results that this idea can have to a particular group who is an active member of the discourse, must be frame within such broad picture to be fully understand.

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