

The Italian e-Diaspora: Patterns and practices of the Web

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e-Diasporas Atlas

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Plateforme e-Diasporas

<http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=section§ion=30>

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the unprecedented configuration of the online Italian diaspora, due to the newly-delineated patterns of self-representation as well as the recent community connections provided by the social Web. In particular, the article analyses the modalities of connection developed by a specific diasporian niche, highly skilled emigrants, in order to understand whether this virtual community can be regarded as a mirror of reality, in terms of its main features and geographic distribution. As a consequence, after an introductory section devoted to methodological questions, the paper turns to the history of past Italian past as well as its most recent configurations, including the increasing presence of the Italian diaspora online. The last section concerns the interpretation of the graphs, compared with the data about the offline diaspora, in an attempt to build a more exhaustive picture of the Italian community abroad, thanks to a constant to-and-fro between real and virtual spaces of migration.

Keywords

diaspora, web, internet, migrations, Italians, expatriates, Italy

Mots-clefs

diaspora, web, internet, migrations, Italiens, expatriés, Italie

This work deals with a multilayered analysis of the patterns and practices that shape the Italian diaspora within the unprecedented spaces of organisation and self-representation provided by the Web, and above all with regard to the most recent migratory flows. In particular, the paper aims at highlighting the new models of community narratives and socio-cultural discourses developed by Italian migrants thanks to an increasingly widespread use of the social Web, with a specific focus on the features of an online highly qualified diaspora, the most striking characteristic of current Italian mobility trends.

The main goal is to evaluate the modalities and typologies of such a specific diasporian niche through which the diaspora (re)builds its cultural links with the homeland. In so doing, we hope to understand to what extent the virtual narratives correspond to the multifaceted Italian diaspora of skilled professionals and its distribution.

To begin with, the (re)construction process of Italian virtual communities of migrants, variously linked with each other, is perfectly inserted within the wider framework of the growing interconnections provided by the Internet for transnational migrants, who now arrive at their destination without ever fully leaving their place of origin. As is widely argued, this represents “another manifestation of the space of flows, for such sojourners have converted the linearity of migration into the circularity of transnational movement and, in so doing, seek to renegotiate the state’s desire to reproduce national citizens” (Ley et al., 2004: 108)¹.

In effect, since the Nineties, migrants’ access to the ICTs has been the nodal point of research inspired by transnationalism and cultural studies, according to which migrations and ICTs concur in the “diasporisation” of the whole society. It is even argued that the recently appeared transnational communities are contributing to the decay of the traditional conception of the nation-state: “It is tempting to assert that the global spread of the Internet renders state boundaries malleable across a range of narratives of subjectivity” (Everard, 2000: 45). Thus, “because of the Internet,

we live in a global community of increasingly networked relations, where boundaries between individuals are shrinking, and lines between states are frequently interpenetrated by flows of capital, data and bodies, thus transforming the location and meaning of international relations” (Wheeler, 2006: 192).

As a consequence, the deeply rooted dialectics that have always characterised the literature on migrations, that is to say the opposition mobile/immobile, not here/not there, absent/present, centre/periphery, starts to be insufficient to portray a growing worldwide mobility. In fact, “different diasporas are characterised by different geographies that go beyond simple oppositions between the national and the transnational, the rooted and the routed, the territorial and the deterritorialized” (Jackson et al., 2004: 2).

The “déraciné” has been replaced by the “connected” migrant who is inserted within a frame of continuity that permits him/her to be “here” and “there” at the same time (Diminescu, 2010). The “double absence” (Sayad, 1981) has been substituted by the “connected presence” (Diminescu, 2010) thanks to the evolution of communication practices, which make it possible not only to stay in contact with the homeland but also to contribute actively to its development in terms of economic and social issues, above all with the advent of the social Web.

As a consequence, the idea of presence is no longer “physical” or “topological”, but rather more active and dynamic, whilst the idea of absence has been irremediably modified by such recent practices of communication (Diminescu, 2002), which encompass unprecedented implications of “the location of identity in an increasingly globalised and wired world” (Everard, 2000: 5).

Thus, the Internet is a space which is particularly pertinent to the diasporian condition, because it has been decentralised, interactive and transnational from the very start, in addition to being based on the concept of a selective social interactivity and symbolic belonging dynamics very useful for migrants (Georgiou, 2002).

If it is widely argued that “migration has always had the potential to challenge established spatial images” (Rouse, 1991: 11), it is even more evident after the advent of the Web: in effect, from a geographical perspective, processes of de-territorialisation may be followed by simultaneous and

1. Many experts wonder if it is useful to re-label immigrants as transmigrants? Transmigrants should be bilingual, move easily between different cultures, and pursue different interests that require a simultaneous presence in two countries (Portes et al., 1999).

equally forceful processes of re-territorialisation (Watts, 1996), which become more striking when this process of re-territorialisation is not only real but even virtual.

Since “the Internet arguably allows individuals to expand on identities based on geographical territories, towards identities based more on the cultural terrain of cyberspace” (Everard, 2000: 151), the social Web has become an instrument with which to negotiate migrants’ identity and retain psychological links with the cultural identity of their homeland. In effect, diasporians have always participated in place-based diaspora communities but, with the advent of ICTs, they can create online communities too. As a tool for community building among dispersed populations, the Internet enable the creation of cybercommunities that can connect geographically scattered diasporians (Brinkerhoff, 2009)².

As a result, migrants usually use the Web for different reasons: to disseminate information about the homeland culture or faith; to strengthen identity links even for different generations in diaspora, and to participate in homeland socio-economic and cultural development. (Brinkerhoff, 2009)³.

History of the Italian diaspora

The traditional Italian diaspora is perfectly inserted in the wider frame of the transoceanic mass exodus of the 19th and 20th centuries, which is highly dependent on the deep changes in migratory flows, with regard both to their temporal duration and their numeric consistency. Such a completely new scenario of transnational displacements was provoked by deeper transformations that occurred within late-18th-century society, upset by new economic and social layouts unleashed by the Industrial Revolution and growing urbanisation. Furthermore, shocking

political upheavals such as the French and the American revolutions, with their consequent ideological and cultural mutations, concurred in fostering unprecedented patterns of migratory flows, not to mention the consequences caused by the demographic transition. In effect, new population trends started being sketched out from the last decade of the 18th century, owing to the increasing fall-off in mortality thanks to scientific and medical developments, not to mention new behaviour patterns in terms of birth control.

As a result, the new vibrant European cities came face to face with an underclass of rural origin attracted by the mythology of urban life, and often forced to migrate abroad because the promises held out by industrialisation revealed themselves to be vain.

For the first time in human history, migrations were not induced by climactic and natural factors, but rather by human-caused transformations. What is more, while the first transoceanic migrations, dating back to around 1830, were the exclusive prerogative of deportees and adventurers, they subsequently turned into mass displacements, firstly from North-Eastern Europe – the so-called “old migration” – and secondly Southern and Eastern Europe, the “new migration”⁴ (Corti, 2003).

It was during this phase that the transoceanic Italian diaspora appeared, particularly after the Italian unification of 1861. Until the First World War, though, the contributions of Northern and Southern regions to emigration were equally divided; over the whole period, two fifths of these emigration flows originated from the poorer Southern regions, above all directed towards transoceanic destinations (Del Boca & Venturini, 2003).

In effect, apart from the internal mass displacement of people from Southern to Northern regions, Italy was affected by a transnational exodus during the 20th century, both along transoceanic routes towards North America, South America and Australia, more attractive for migrants from southern Italy, and towards Northern-European countries, chosen primarily by migrants from northern Italy. Usually unskilled men of working age, Italian migrants were hired mostly in construction, railways and mining,

2. The Internet connects people into a community no matter their geographical location (Borgmann, 2004).

3. Five features can be attributed to the online communities, similar to real ones, such as sharing symbols and ritual practices; accepting common rules; offering mutual aid, mutual respect and authentic communication (Feenberg, Barney, 2004). With regard to the diasporian communities, the most important functions of e-diasporas are community building, norm development, and issue-framing. The most important activities are fostering solidarity and promoting cultural and religious identity, supporting homeland socio-economic and cultural development (Brinkerhoff, 2009).

4. It can be argued that European migrants assured one third of the demographic growth of the USA.

Original Wop



<<Mezzo chilo 'e spaghetti' e un fazzulett' al collo,
 lo stiletto e calzon ' fustagno,
 metti l'aglio che inghiott' a boccate bestiali
 e un talent' a lustrare stivali.>>
 (Life, 1911, Historical Pictures Service, Chicago)

How poor Italian migrants were regarded at the beginning of the century: "rude spaghetti-eater, dirty, ugly, stinking of garlic shoeshine boys"

Source: <http://www.speakers-corner.it/rizzoli/stella/immagini/vignette.spm>

thus contributing to the astonishing growth of the host countries. Alternatively, in the mother country the impact exerted by such emigration flows was consistent with the demographic structure as well as the social and economic structures, by outlining a country deprived of male manpower. Nonetheless, the irreplaceable role played by remittances in the support of the homeland economy can not be underestimated, nor can their contribution to alleviating the social unrest fostered by unbearable levels of unemployment, while helping maintain migrants' sense national of belonging.

All in all, 27 million Italians decided to move abroad during the so-called great-exodus century, between 1876 and 1985 (Stella, 2003)⁵, with increasingly sharp fluctuations after the turn of the century: whilst, between 1875 and 1928, Italian emigration peaked at more than 17 million units, between 1929 and 1985 about 9 million migrated. According to the latest data provided by the Fondazione Migrantes (2011), during the

150 years since the Italian unification of 1861, the total number of Italians having moved abroad is 30 million, with 60-80 million people of Italian origin scattered all over the world.

Both in the first phase of emigration and in the second, among the main push factors was the growing social unrest fostered by a tottering economy, whilst, on the contrary, other European countries, such as France or Germany, were beginning to experience unprecedented patterns of economic growth after the Second World War. After having concurred in promoting the Italian economic boom of the Sixties, emigration started downhill in the Seventies. What is more, during the same period the country was discovered to be an attractive destination for migratory flows, due to the implications of the oil shock of 1974, which persuaded traditional host countries to close their borders to foreign manpower, thus diverting the flows, above all the irregular ones, towards unprecedented host countries, such as Italy and Spain, which had wider off-the-book economies.

During the Eighties, in spite of high unemployment rates, emigration flows continued to decline, due to a deeply rooted system of family welfare

5. An average of 3.4 million migrants per decade were registered between 1875 and 1928, and an average of 2 million migrants between 1929 and 1975, that is to say almost one Italian out of four (Del Boca & Venturini, 2003).

typical of Italian households, which supported long periods of unemployment of their members.

New configurations of the recent Italian diaspora

According to the most recent data collected by AIRE (Register of Italians living abroad⁶), 6.8% of Italians live abroad, out a total population of 60,626,444 (2011). The greatest portion of Italians choose European destinations (55%), while 39.6% move to America, 3.2% to Oceania, 1.3% to Africa and 0.9% to Asia. The principal countries of destination are Argentina, Germany and Switzerland, followed by France, Brazil, Belgium, USA and United Kingdom. Finally, the Italian regions with the highest rates of international migrants are the Central-Southern ones: in first place is Molise (24.5%), followed by Basilicata (18.6%), Calabria (17.7%), Sicily (13.2%), Abruzzo (12.1%) and finally Friuli (12%), the only Northern region positioned among the first places, due to a deeply rooted tradition of emigration. Moreover, it is interesting to underline that even the Northern regions have recently registered an increase in the rates of international emigration (AIRE, 2011).

Nonetheless, new patterns and concepts of migratory projects make the current diaspora very different from the historical version. In the era of Italian unification, the lower social classes were provided with every material means of support, but full of hopes for the future, their elaboration of a migratory project was always followed by a real settlement abroad, often definitive.

Nowadays, it seems the dream of moving abroad fascinates more than those who really migrate: 40.6% of Italians, in particular 50.9% of working-age young people (25–34 years old) admit a strong desire to migrate, not necessarily followed by a real migratory project (Eurispes, 2011). This could be explained by the increasingly widespread stalemate perceived by wider groups of the Italian population, forced to cope with a labour market insufficient to satisfy the demands of new economic structures as well as the poor chances of finding a suitable job in terms of required skills and remuneration, above all for highly skilled young professionals. What is more, the so-called

“*nè-nè*” (neither study nor work) generation (15–29 years old) represent more than two million, a fifth of this age class (Eurispes, 2011).

As a matter of fact, an inadequate economic system together with a cultural background not based on meritocracy but often suffocated by growing corruption, has fostered a sense of moral dejection and weariness, especially among young graduates who cannot find a job adapted to their skills. As a result, emigration is no longer a tool of mere survival and escape from extreme poverty, as it was in the past, but rather an instrument for improving highly skilled migrants’ socio-professional status.

In effect, the Big Crunch of 2008/2009 is still exerting a long-lasting impact in terms of social and economic structures, particularly with regard to employment levels. Nonetheless, whilst in the Northern regions a faint pickup can be detected, in the Southern zones the rate of unemployment has reached a peak of 13.4% with the growing exclusion from the job market of highly skilled young professionals, to the point that 30% of young graduates cannot find a job (Svimez, 2011).

As a result, apart from the deeply rooted internal migratory routes as well as the traditional host countries, such as the USA and United Kingdom, new destinations have started attracting Italian migrants, especially the most qualified ones. Finland is the most recent example of Italian settlement. Though still contained (about 1,550 Italians), it speaks volumes about the Italian diaspora’s expectations: the legendary high standards of facilities and organisation of Scandinavian countries makes Finland a completely different country where it is possible to (re)create a new life; this is also attested to by Sweden, where Italians number 7,000 and those of Italian origin are some 20,000 strong (Fondazione Migrantes, 2011).

As far as the highly qualified diaspora is concerned, it is no accident that the brain-drain discourse has recently been monopolising the Italian political agenda. The growing incidence of this phenomenon, which does not correspond to an equivalent brain gain of highly skilled migrants coming from abroad, has been at the heart of media debates.

From a general standpoint, recent research suggests that the highly qualified diaspora should be considered more as a brain circulation than a

6. Registration at the AIRE is based on voluntary mechanisms, so the data collected represent a trend of Italian emigration rather than an exhaustive picture. Nonetheless, it is the only existing database of Italians living abroad.



A Web-based survey of Italian science professionals and scholars abroad, based on a structured semi-automated data-collection method

Source: <http://www.mappacervelli.org/map.pl>

real brain drain (Johnson & Regets, 1998; Meyer, 2003; Ackers, 2005), owing to the fact that “contrary to what happened in the past, modern migrants interact at a distance and maintain links with the region of origin” (Morano-Foadi, 2006: 209). As a result, “highly skilled professionals generally do not transfer completely as they often retain links with the country of origin, reinvest, send remittances and sometimes migrate back to their countries” (Morano-Foadi, 2006: 209). This is particularly true in the most recent years, during which identity and cultural links are maintained above all through the Web.

However, Morano-Foadi (2006: 209-210) underlines the difference of assumptions with regard to the highly qualified Italian diaspora, which has been posing “a challenge for the long-term sustainability of the indigenous RTD system” because Italy reveals itself to be “a country losing Italian brains and failing to attract them back”. Therefore, more than a brain circulation, we can actually speak of brain drain and even brain waste.

Even though no exhaustive data on this highly specific migration target can be found, Morano-Foadi counts among the pull factors the meritocracy and recruitment system abroad, in addition

to better salaries and career opportunities. The main push factors are the lack of facilities and investment for socio-economic growth at home, in addition to the widespread corruption, nepotism and bureaucracy, which preclude a fair recruitment system.

In all events, it is indubitable that the 20th-century racist image of the dirty, ugly and *mafioso* spaghetti-eater landing in America with his cardboard baggage has been replaced by that of a highly skilled young researcher with his laptop bag.

The Italian diaspora online

Despite the current deep economic crisis, Italy can be still regarded as one of the main global powers, where the Internet has recently been imposing itself as an irreplaceable instrument of development, supported in particular by political and institutional driving forces in view of promoting economic growth, potentiating key sectors, reducing communication costs and improving government operations⁷.

7. A group of nuclear physicists created Italy's first computer network in 1980 to connect all nuclear research institutes. However, at the beginning there were some obstacles to wider penetration of the Internet, such as unfamiliarity

PRESENTE STORICO

Claudia Cucchiariato
VIVO ALTROVE
 Giovani e senza radici: gli emigranti italiani di oggi
 Bruno Mondadori

Vivo altrove è un libro di Claudia Cucchiariato, pubblicato da **Bruno Mondadori** a maggio 2010. Raccoglie le storie di alcuni tra le decine di migliaia di giovani che negli ultimi anni hanno deciso di abbandonare l'Italia. Ma *Vivo altrove* è anche un blog dove sarà possibile mantenere aperta la discussione e continuare a raccogliere **Testimonianze**.

Indagine conoscitiva sugli italiani all'estero

Pubblicato il: | 21 ottobre 2011 | Nessun commento | [f](#) [t](#)

È un'iniziativa dell'associazione **ITalents**, assieme a **Controesodo** e all'**assessorato al Lavoro del Comune di Milano**.

Un **doppio questionario** per capire chi sono e perché non tornano (o come vorrebbero tornare, a quali condizioni) gli italiani che vivono all'estero. Il **primo** questionario è destinato a chi ancora vive "altrove"; il **secondo** a chi ha recentemente deciso di tornare in Italia.

FINALMENTE!

Abbiamo quindi a disposizione uno **strumento** che può servire a contarci, darci voce, farci uscire allo scoperto e aiutarci a conoscerci un po' di più, raccogliendo dati che si rifanno ai censimenti dell'Istat (dati anagrafici, stato civile, figli, titolo di studio, lavoro svolto all'estero e lavoro che si svolgeva in Italia...).

Compilate tutte e due, sfrazzate le voci, è una grande notizia!

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- Da un'isola all'altra: la storia di Benedetto
- Studiare in Inghilterra
- Noi Italiani, siamo poi così diversi dagli altri?
- Cerco contatti a Monaco di Baviera

CATEGORIE BLOG

In spite of some long-lasting obstacles to a wider penetration of the Internet (such as infrastructure limitations, the unfamiliarity of older generations with ICT and a more widespread affinity for the mobile-phone sector), in 2010 Italy registered a penetration rate of 50%, with 53.68% of Internet users over the total population, and 22.13% of fixed broadband subscribers (Itu, 2011, www.itu.int)⁸. As a result, above all during the last decade and after the advent of the social Web, Italians have been developing an increasing familiarity with the Web as *prosumers*. This is attested by the wide proliferation of the blogosphere, which plays a growing role in civic commitment, participatory democracy and access to wider information flows.

As far as the online diaspora is concerned, the first Italian diasporian websites belonged to the Web 1.0 era, that is to say they were mostly "display-websites" created by associations of Italian emigrants at home and abroad, and focused particularly on the sharing of identity and cultural elements.

The interesting aspect, mirroring a deeply rooted cultural regionalisation and parochialism, is that many of these websites were created on regional

with computers and the English language, in addition to the dominance of commercial television and the diversion of consumer spending on mobile telephony.

8. According to Internet world statistics, there are 19,806,660 Italian users of Facebook.

or even city bases, thus attesting to a long-standing attachment to a highly specific local-identity heritage. Some are still active, even though their display attitude precludes being dynamic centres of diasporian connections. Furthermore, the most widespread typologies of such websites are essentially two: websites created by groups of Italians, both living abroad and in Italy, for the purpose of strengthening community links; and websites created exclusively by migrants, variously aimed at nostalgia for the homeland, celebration of the culture of origin, as well as enhancement of the host-country heritage or organisation of the diasporian community through events.

With the advent of the social Web, a new tendency came to light: many diasporian websites, focused on the sharing of both cultural elements and practical information, started to be articulated principally around forums or began to collect links to blogs, thus transforming users more into *prosumers* (i.e. <http://italiansonline.net>).

At the same time, within the blogosphere, the unprecedented virtual Agora where it is possible to (re)negotiate identity questions or show off personal narratives of migration, a highly specific niche designed for diasporian discourse stands out. In particular, with the recent configuration of Italian migratory flows, increasingly represented by highly skilled professionals and researchers, even the blogosphere has started reflecting such

a specific phenomenon by creating a great enthusiasm for so-called expatriates' personal histories⁹. Many of the blogs dealing with the Italian brain drain have reached such a peak of success among the "old" media that they have become best-sellers, as in the case of *Vivo Altrove* (www.vivoaltrove.it; transl.: "I live elsewhere"): this blog collecting histories of young Italian migrants, managed by the expatriate journalist Chiara Gamberale now living in Barcelona, has been made into a book (*Vivo Altrove. Giovani e senza radici. Gli emigranti italiani di oggi*, Milan: Mondadori, 2009); while the blog itself continues to be updated by the accounts of personal migratory histories.

9. Expatriate is the word preferred by the Italian highly skilled migrants online, because it they feel it underlines the difference between the generic economic migrant and the most qualified diaspora.

Another blog has even become a radio talkshow on the national network Radio 24 (<http://fugadeitalenti.wordpress.com>). It is managed by an Italian journalist, Sergio Nava, who, after many experiences abroad, decided to come back to Italy and contribute to spread awareness about the current Italian situation, suffocated by corruption and nepotism, in order to stem the long-lasting "exile of the best Italian people". As in other cases, the use of the blog is not exclusive, nor has it been substituted by the most recent social networks such as Twitter or Facebook. On the contrary, blogs are often used as part of an integrated system of connection and communication, where each tool is exploited according its main features and potentialities: that is to say, the blog is devoted to deeper and wider reflections

An example of the complementary use of Web tools: the blog <http://fugadeitalenti.wordpress.com>

Fuga dei talenti:
the Facebook page

Fuga de talenti:
the Twitter page

and opinions, whilst social networks are destined for up-to-the-minute updates¹⁰.

Interpretation of the graph

In order to pursue the main aim of this research, that is to say to evaluate the recently structured identity patterns and narratives developed by the Italian diaspora within the multifaceted virtual spaces, I started construction of my corpus by surfing among diasporian websites, using a series of keyword searches in the best-known search engines, such as Google. Later on I used

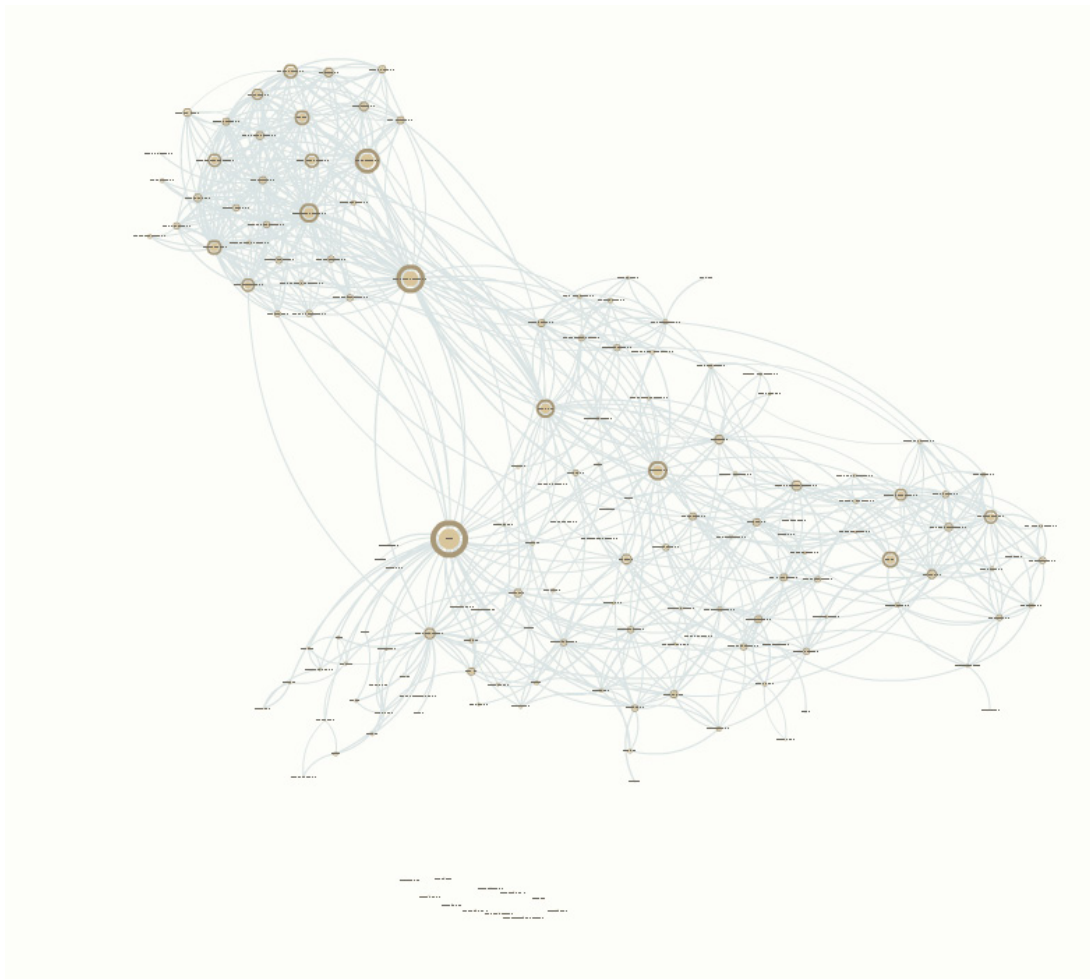
10. It is very interesting to highlight that both of the already-quoted blogs, in spite of being often cited by the main Italian media (television, radio) as representative of the recent Italian migratory trends, are not the top nodes resulting from this study: if <http://fugadeitalenti.wordpress.com> can be at least considered to be a hub (12 inbound edges, 23 outbound edges), www.vivoaltrove.it has just 8 inbound edges. This could be explained by the consciousness that there is not always a direct and osmotic relationship between new media and old ones, so that the latter often give some web phenomena more importance than they actually have in the virtual world.

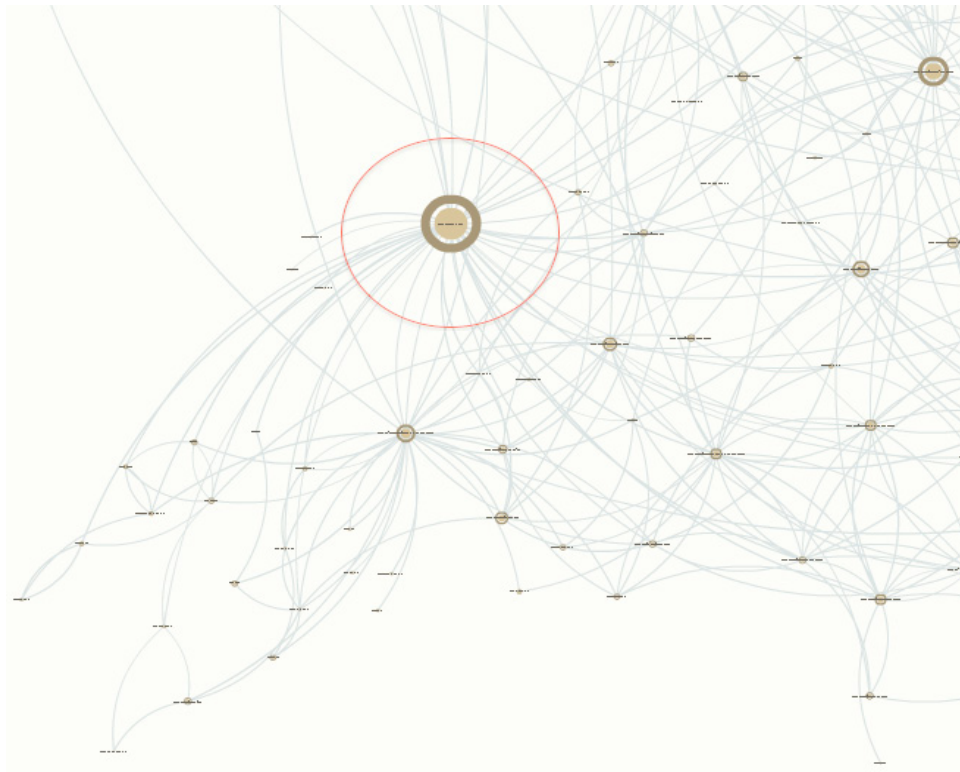
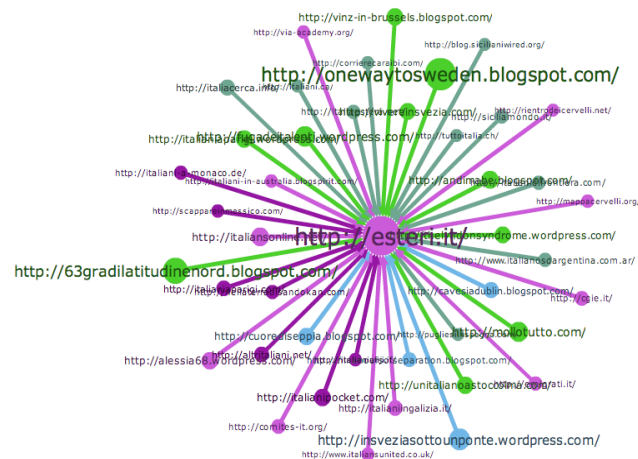
the semi-automatic exploration of the Web provided by Navicrawler. This rough corpus was subjected to an automatic crawl and, after another contents-based analysis, I filtered the results in order to discard the websites that were irrelevant to my research.

The configuration of the corpus was based on a partition according to main categories/attributes which could be useful in drawing an exhaustive picture of the Italian diaspora, with particular focus on the highly qualified diaspora, since this work aims at analysing in depth the virtual spaces developed by such a specific migratory niche. For each attribute, I chose different values, which were attributed after a qualitative analysis of the contents, both from a synchronic and a diachronic perspective.

At the end of this first phase, my corpus contained 159 nodes connected by 872 edges, with a density of connection of 3.5%.

General graph of the Italian e-diaspora



Detail. General graph; the node www.esteri.itDetail. Graph: "main activity"; the node www.esteri.it

According to a general analysis of the resulting graph, the distribution of nodes shows a very low level of homogeneity and density. The cartography of the corpus confirms the presence of a non-homogeneous Web community with regard to the distribution of connections and the tendency to polarisation, which turns out to be clearly not thick, deprived of strict connections. As a result, not many communities can be found, since, even when there is a central top node, it is not surrounded by highly connected nodes of smaller

size which could testify to a steady community network.

In spite of the predominance of some central nodes, the graph is structured by different sets of components fairly well connected with each other, as is shown by the broad blank areas punctuating the graph in both the upper and lower parts.

Nevertheless, the evident lack of density and homogeneity makes it easier to distinguish some

clusters within the graph, from a morphological standpoint. It can thus be useful to distinguish some areas, which are articulated around the bigger nodes, surrounded by other smaller nodes, whose configuration in a single-centred star pattern rather than a spiderweb pattern, indicating the presence of weak and frayed community links.

The configuration of the graph around the main top node www.esteri.it reveals the predominance of such an authority (42 inbound edges), which does not establish real interactive and mutual connections with the other nodes surrounding it (no outbound or mutual link has been detected). It turns out that its authority comes from its being the institutional website of the Italian Ministry of Foreign affairs, an up-to-date version of the traditional “display-website” typical of institutions and associations. This explains why this node is the most cited, without having a single outbound edge. The relatively dense cluster around it, which testifies to the high number of connections, can not be regarded as a sign of the presence of a community structure, since there are no smaller nodes strictly connected to it in a pattern of reciprocity.

The only real cluster that can be easily seen is the one in the upper left part of the graph, where the top authority node www.onewaytosweden.blogspot.com (31 inbound edges, 25 outbound edges, 23 mutual links) acts as a bridge site between the densest part of the graph on the left and the frayed and discontinuous part on the

centre-right. As a consequence, we can define the pattern of links passing through this website as a really specific one, which clearly indicates how this node connects the different sections of the graph.

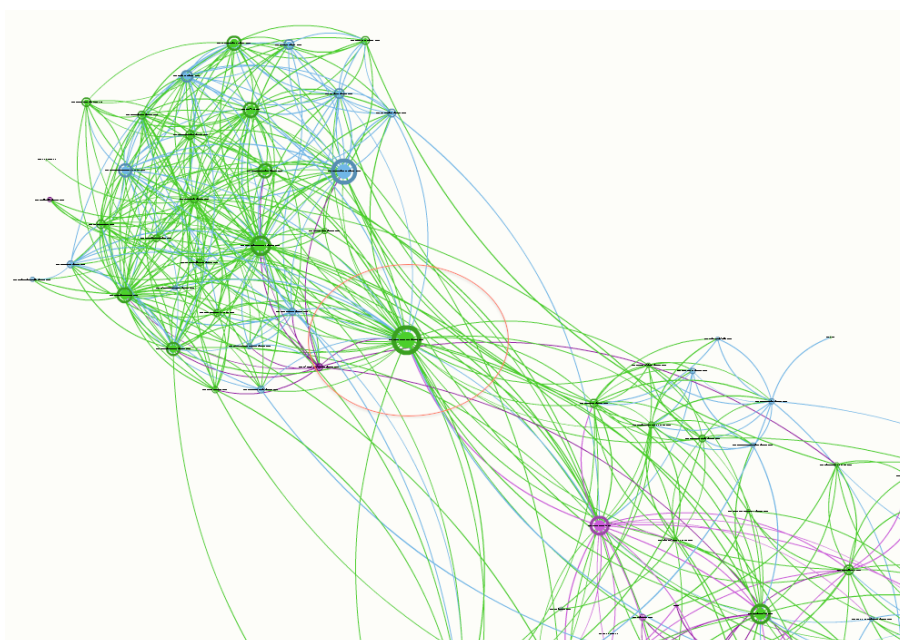
It is interesting to underline that this relatively dense and clusterised area of the graph not only is structured around this top node, but also reveals a community configuration, indicated by the presence of other top nodes such as the authority <http://gattosolitario.splinder.com> (27 inbound edges, 6 outbound edges, 6 mutual link¹¹) and the hub <http://6gradi3latitudinenord.blogspot.com> (21 inbound edges, 30 outbound edges)¹², surrounded by other nodes of smaller size.

Moreover, there is evidently a tendency for a strong polarisation based on the sharing of the same value with regard to the attribute “country of residence”. **Almost every node within this cluster has the value “Sweden”,** while two of smaller size have the value “Finland”: this means that the

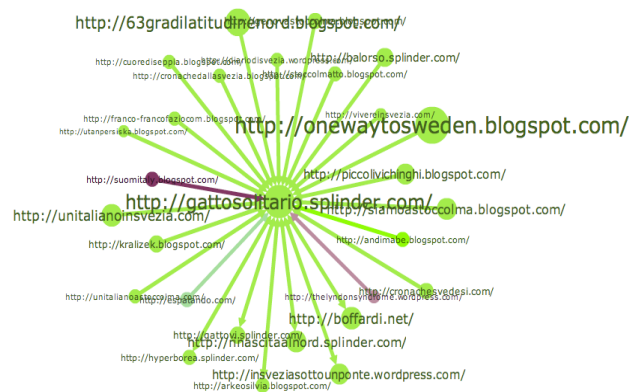
11. This is the blog of a young Neapolitan researcher, moved to Sweden to work in an international research institute. His blog is a tangle of accounts of personal migratory history and experiences, in addition to generic reflections about the differences between Italy and Sweden with regard not only to the academic system but also to everyday life.

12. This is the blog of a female researcher moved to Sweden for job reasons, now married with a Swede. Her blog deals principally with her personal migratory experience, with particular focus on the differences between host and home country. In addition, the blog is a journal of everyday life as the mother of a bilingual child.

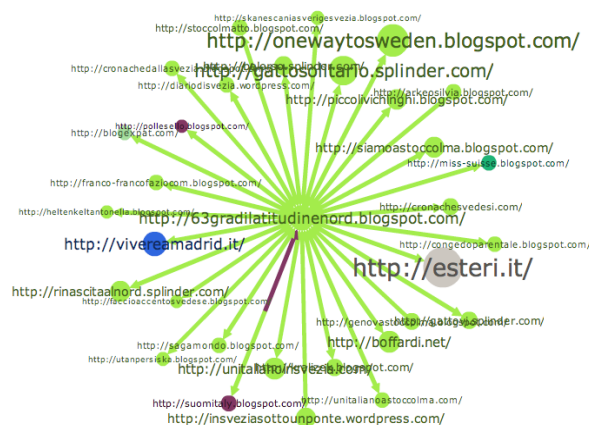
Detail. Graph: “main activity”



Detail. Graph: “country of residence”; the node <http://gattosolitario.splinder.com/>



Graph: “country of residence”;
the node <http://6gradi3latitudinenord.blogspot.com/>



cluster mirrors the presence of a diasporian community structured on the same territorial basis, confined principally to Sweden and, more generally, to the Scandinavian macro-region. Thus, the connections linking such a community probably depend on the need to share the same expectations, experiences and problems deriving from the process of settlement in the same host country. However, it is not a totally closed community, because it reveals itself to be connected with other nodes showing different values as “country of residence”.

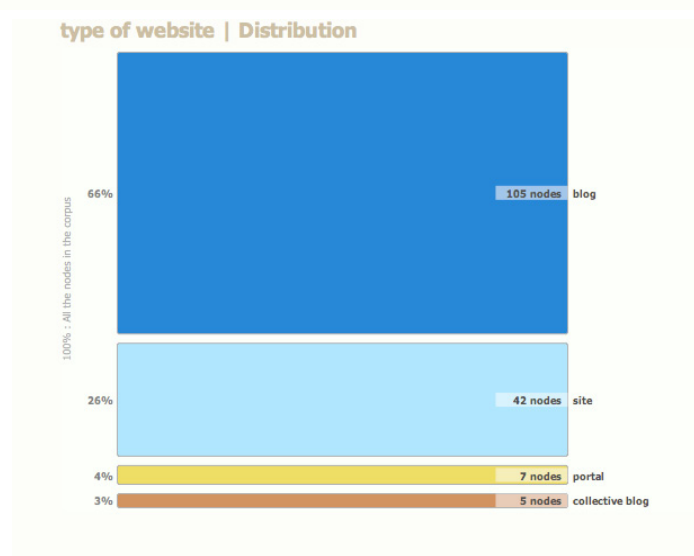
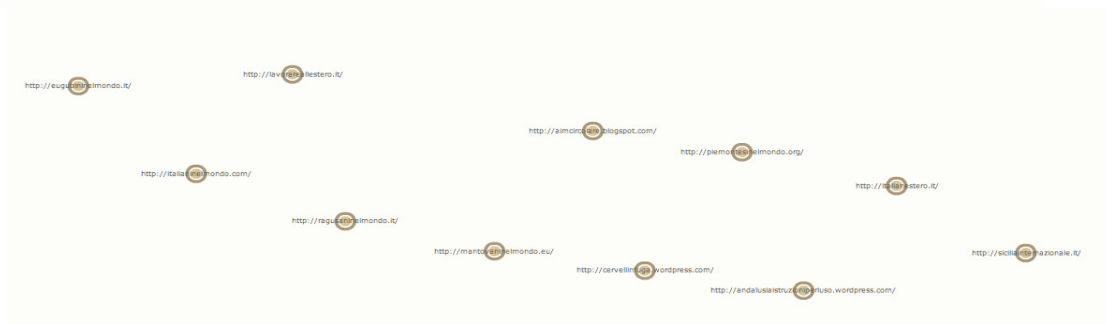
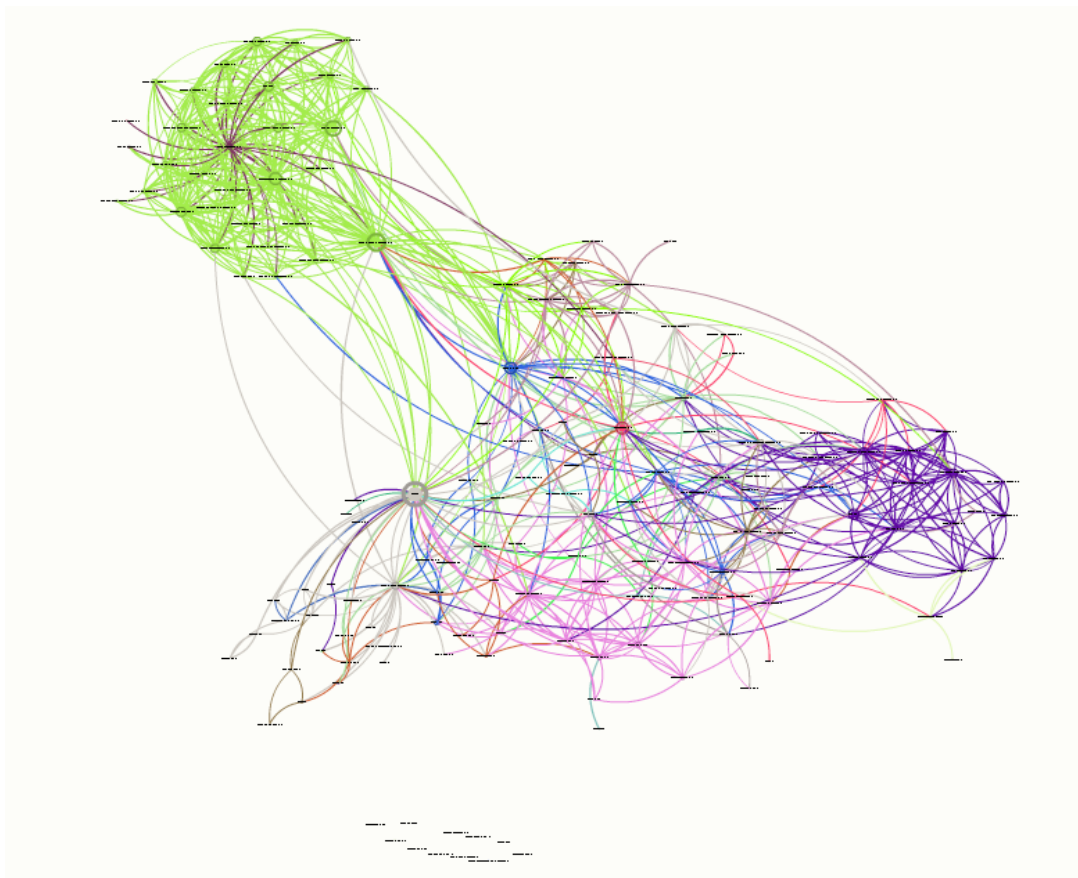
The same tendency for configuration can be seen in the right-hand side of the graph, where, although we can not speak of a real cluster and even less of community, we see at least an easily definable trend towards territorial polarisation. Even though the levels of density are not high, this area of the graph tends to attract the violet nodes, whose value for the attribute “country of residence” is North America.

Since even in the lower part of the graph the same tendency towards a territorial polarisation can be found (with regard to the value “France”, the pink nodes), we can easily argue that the Italian diaspora tends to build its virtual spaces of self-representation on the basis of the same host-country settlement, rather than on the sharing of cultural or political issues at the core of their websites.

The overall image of this graph is one of an e-diaspora fragmented in a kind of patchwork of communities, distinguished by geo-territorial principles. The scattered pattern is completed by a set of totally detached small nodes, situated in the lower part of the graph. They mostly represent the websites of some emigrant regional and city associations, which work more as old-fashioned display-websites and, consequently, lack any interactive connection either among one another or with the rest of the graph.

As far as the specific attributes are concerned, in the graph “publisher type” highlights the value

Graph: "country of residence": green: Sweden; burgundy: Finland; violet: North America; pink: France; brilliant red: Australia; deep red: UK; grey: Italy; blue: Spain; dark pink: Ireland



“individual”, as easily predictable (64% of nodes), followed by “community” (26%), media (8%) and “institution” (3%).

The polarisation with regard to this value is particularly evident in the upper part of the graph, where all nodes have the value “individual”, whilst in the central and lower parts there are some connections with nodes having the value “community”, as is attested by a deeper analysis of “individual” as a subgraph: of a total of 46 inbound edges and 118 outbound ones to and from other publisher types, the greater share come from or point to the value “community”.

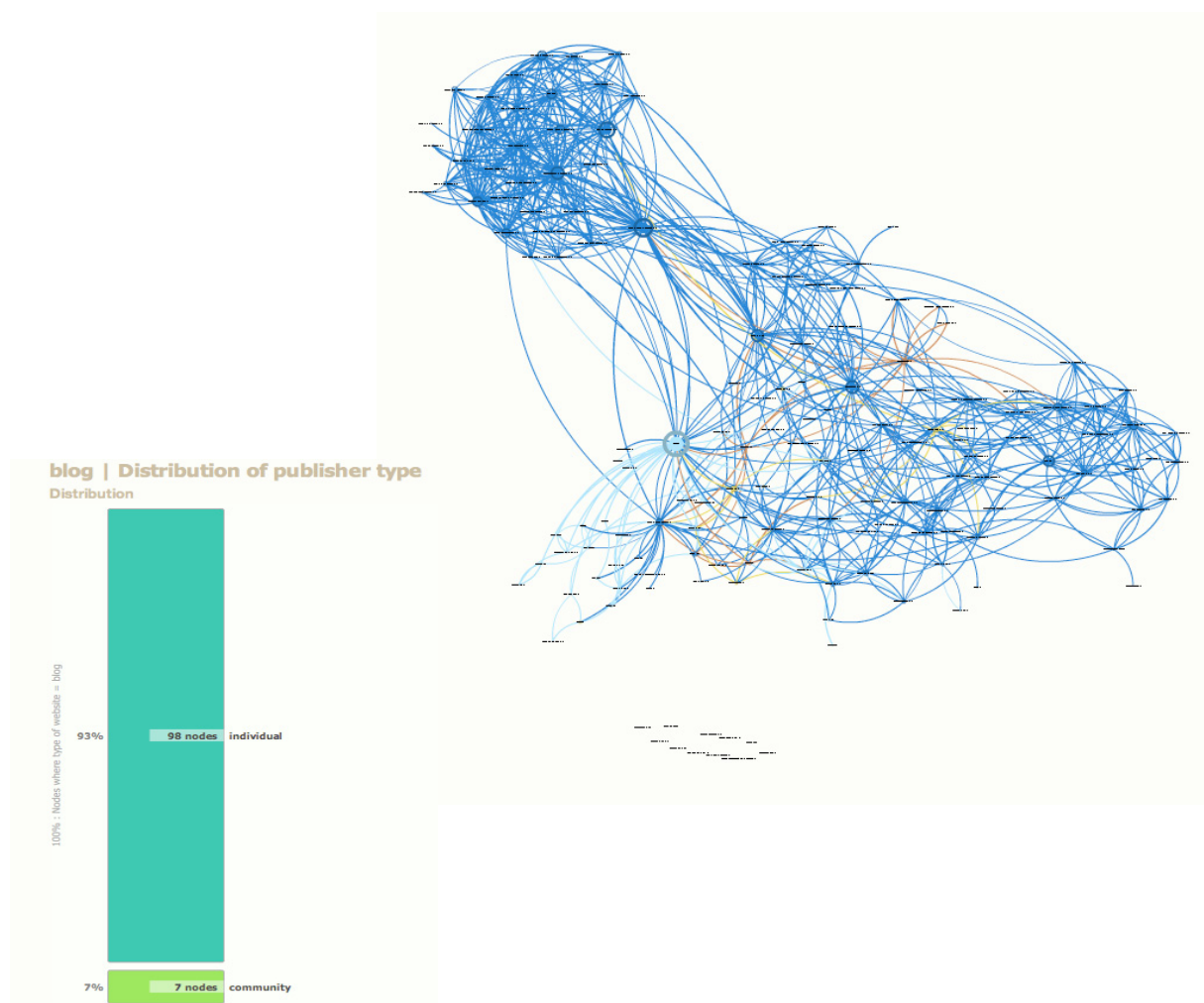
As a consequence, it can be supposed that the Italian diaspora, like many others, tends to mould its own virtual spaces of representation in a highly individual manner. This strong tendency towards a sharp individuality is further emphasized by

very weak community links, which paint a deeply fragmented e-diasporian picture.

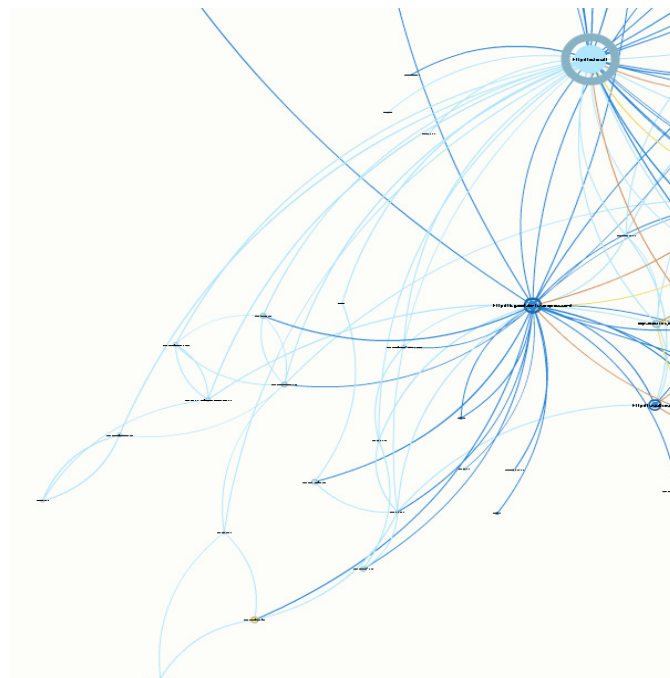
The close and osmotic relation which traditionally links the value “individual” with the value “blog”, in regard to the attribute “type of website”, is confirmed even in this graph, owing to the intrinsic nature of the blogosphere, which permits highly personal modalities of exploitation. In fact, 93% of nodes having the value “blog”, which accounts for 66% of nodes within the graph, boast the value “individual”, thus exemplifying the traditional deeply rooted link between such values.

A slight tendency towards a polarisation focused on the value “site”, on the contrary, can be detected around the top authority node www.esteri.it, because it concerns institutional or association nodes, which prefer a less dynamic type of website to the deep interactive potentialities of the blogosphere.

Graph: “type of website”



Detail. Graph: "type of website"



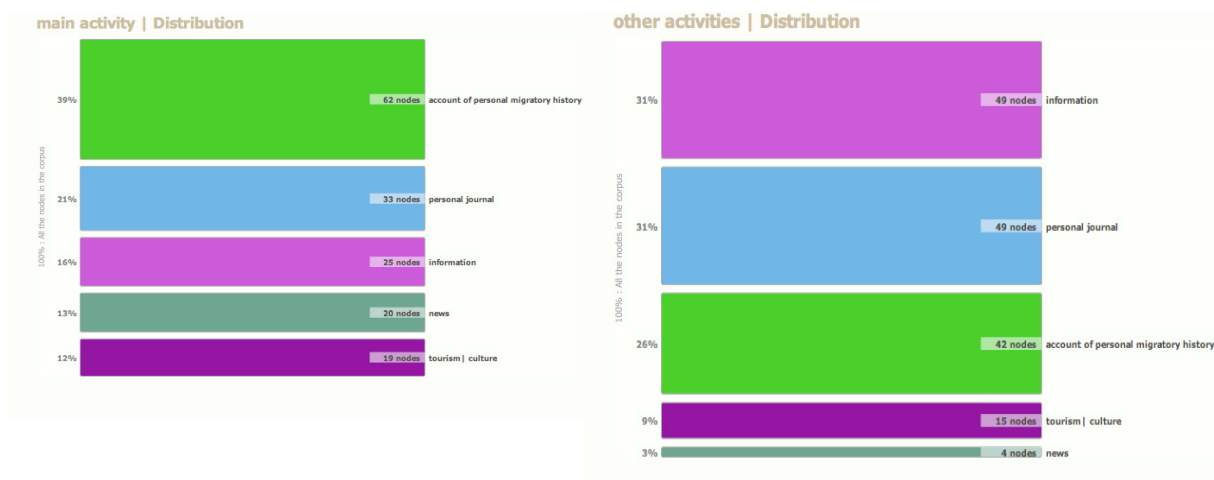
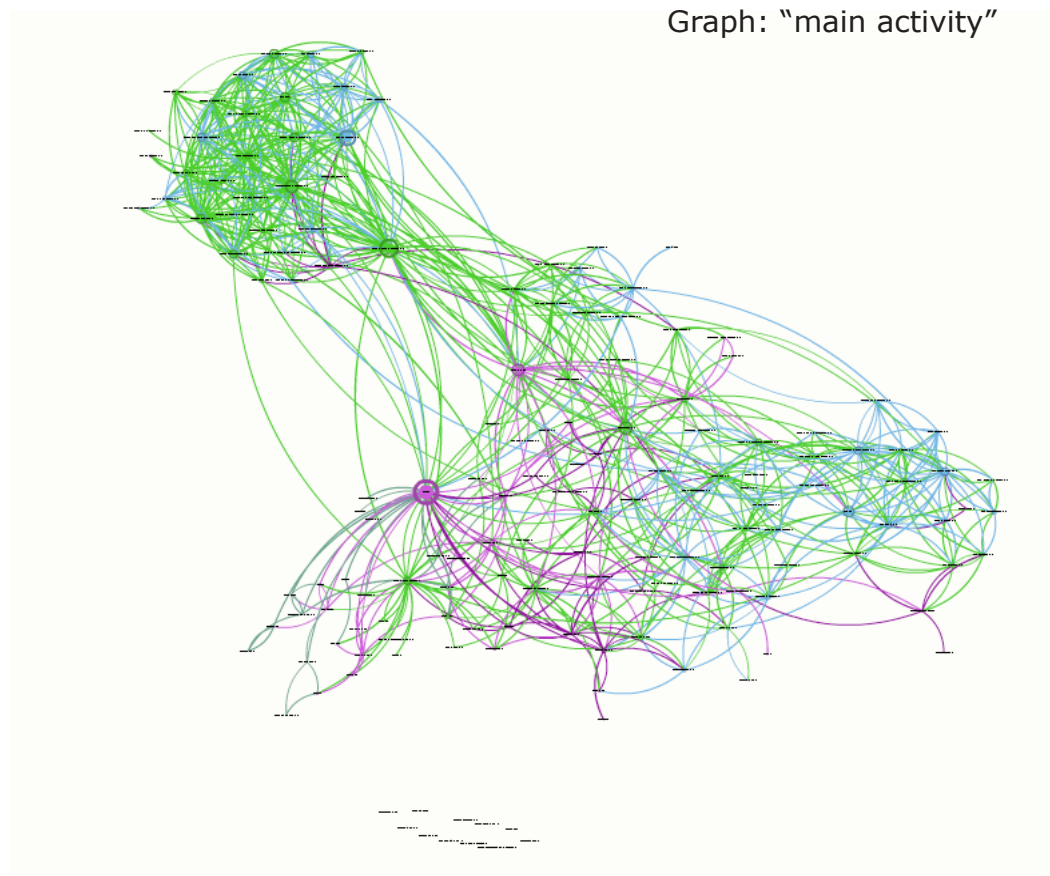
With regard to the attribute “main activity”, the Italian e-diaspora reveals itself to be inclined to shape the Web as a highly personal virtual space where it is possible to pour out memories, hopes and expectations deriving from the migratory project. We can not speak of a cyberactivism, intended in a traditional way, as a civic commitment to the political development of the homeland. Nonetheless, a kind of more cultural cyber-activism, aimed at reflecting on the current social stalemate, in addition to a latent indignation at politicians incapable of dragging the country away from a structural crisis, can easily be found in many websites. This was shown when a deep content-analysis was carried out both from a synchronic and a diachronic perspective.

In all events, the main activity conducted by the nodes of this graph is the “account of personal migratory history” (39% of nodes), aimed both at the sharing of personal expectations or achievements as well as exorcising a kind of nostalgia for a country that, given different career and life opportunities, the migrants would never have left. It is no accident that 21% of nodes are devoted to “personal journal”, so that the Web is used essentially to share the small everyday events punctuating every migrant’s life. What is more, 16% of nodes are aimed at gathering practical “information” about migration, particularly conceived for the would-be migrant, whilst 13% are dedicated to “news” and updates from the homeland. Finally,

12% of nodes are dedicated to the promotion of the host-country heritage, for which activity the value “tourism/culture” has been chosen.

Interestingly, the value “account of personal migratory history” reveals a highly fragmented distribution with regard to the value “country of residence”: it is the main activity for 27% of nodes managed by migrants living in Sweden, but 13% of nodes have the value “Italy”, that is to say that many diasporian websites gather accounts of personal migratory histories from the homeland, managed both by former emigrants come back to Italy and by people interested in the phenomenon of Italian diaspora. Finally, 81% of nodes dealing with personal migratory history are part of the highly qualified diaspora: this indicates a deep consciousness of the implications of every migratory project as well as the will to share displacement experiences.

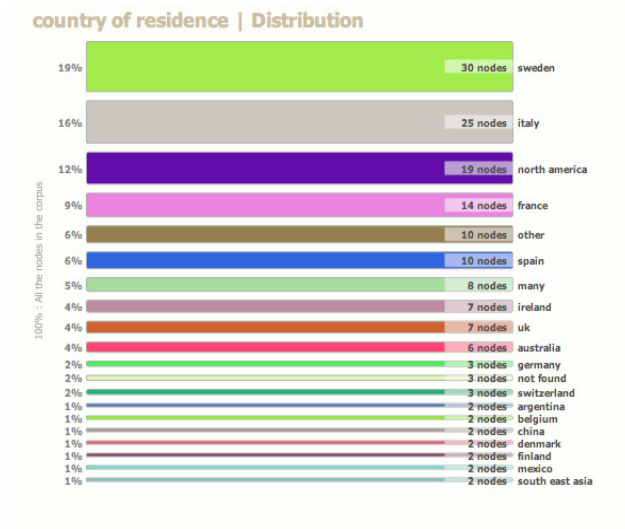
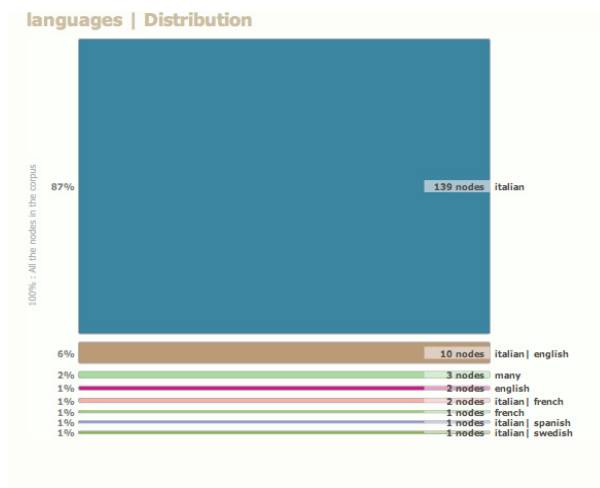
Closely linked to the over stratified nature of the Web, which permits multiple uses at the same time, the websites chosen for my corpus do not deal exclusively with simply an activity (only 5% of nodes have as exclusive value “account of personal migratory history”), but there is also often a tightly interwoven tangle of activities. Thus, the most widespread secondary activity is “personal journal” (31%), followed by “information” (31%), “account of personal migratory history” (26%), “tourism/culture” (9%) and “news” (3%).



As far as the attribute "language" goes, the Italian e-diaspora shows itself to be closely dependent on the origin language, probably both owing to identity issues and the greater familiarity with Italian, which permits a wider range of meanings and nuances. Thus, 87% of nodes indicate websites written in Italian, 6% written in Italian and English, and 2% in several languages.

One of the most interesting attributes for the specific purposes of this research is "country of residence", which reveals a highly fragmented distribution, reflecting the multiplicity of destinations

of the Italian diaspora, even though it is not a faithful mirror of the real distribution of Italians abroad. However, if compared to the main destination countries of Italian migrants, the graph shows a very different picture: the first value (19%) is represented by Sweden, which is not among the preferred host countries of the Italian diaspora offline, but actually embodies at least the most important cluster of the e-diaspora, as already seen in this paragraph. In all events, Sweden certainly represents one of the most recent host countries of Italian migrants, in addition to



attracting the most highly qualified young professionals and researchers: this could link the predominance of such a country of residence with the high socio-professional status of the migrants settled there, usually more familiar with ICTs.

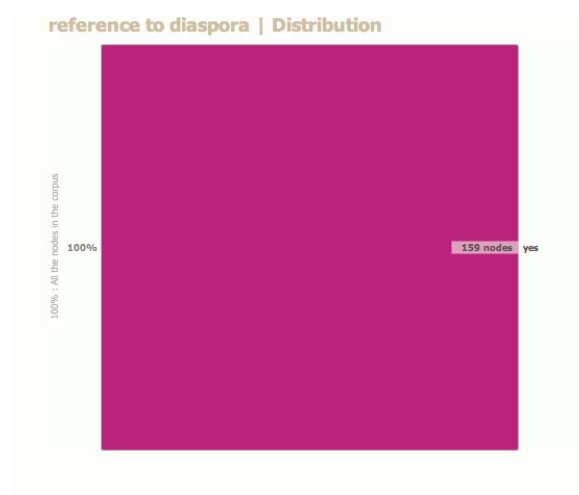
Moreover, 16% of nodes have the value “Italy”, thus suggesting an ever-more widespread consciousness of the impact exerted by migration within the country, too, above all with regard to the apparently unstoppable phenomenon of the brain drain. These nodes are usually referred to websites conceived as platforms gathering migratory histories or reflecting on the current Italian situation. They could also be websites of emigrant associations explicitly conceived to dwell on homesickness and to strengthen links with the origin community. Some nodes have the value “North America” (12%) and “France” (9%), traditionally host countries of the Italian diaspora, while 6% of websites are managed by Italians living in Spain, a recent destination country, like

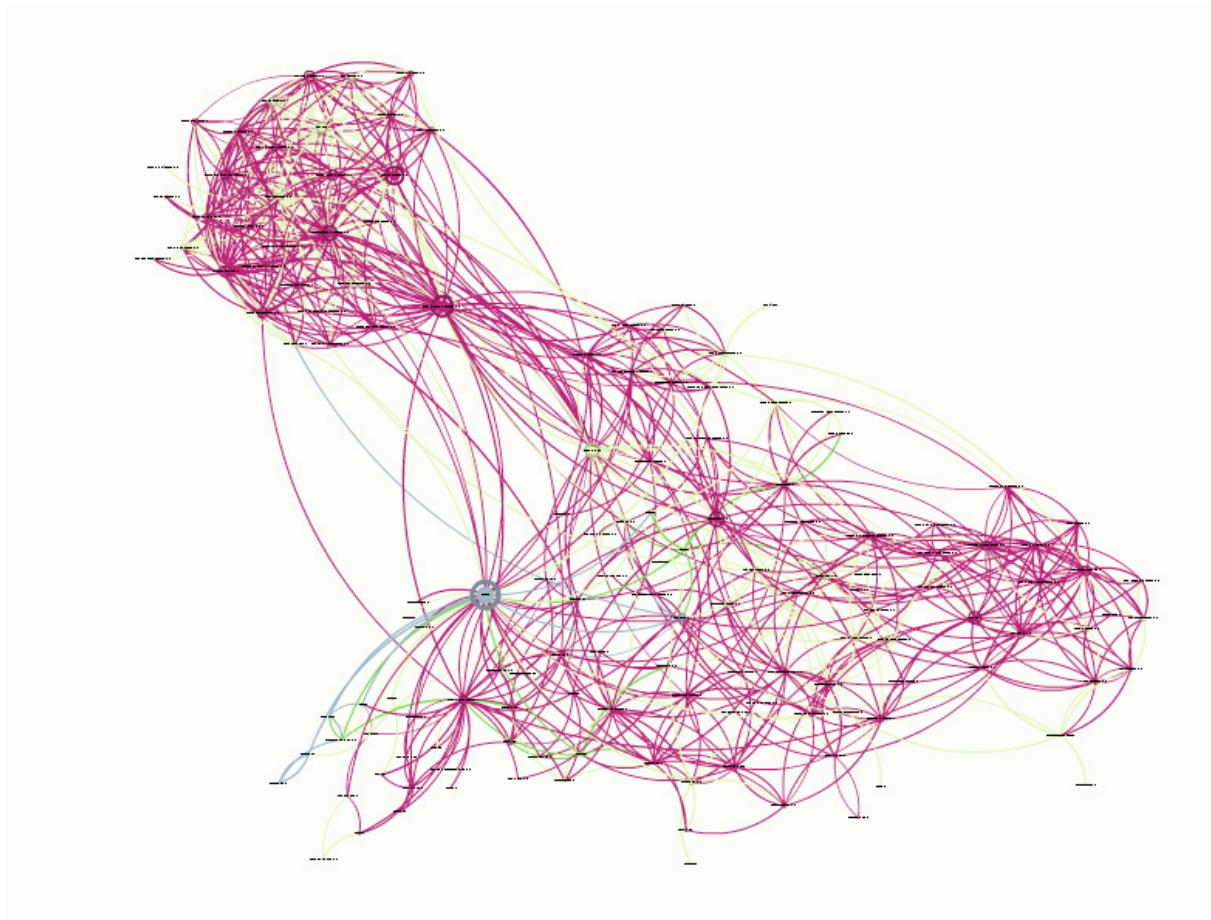
Ireland (4% of nodes), which have represented an alternative model of development for Italy, particularly before the Big Crunch of 2008, which swept away the competitive advantages offered by the two countries.

Finally, every node of the graph encompasses at least a “reference to diaspora”, value I, detected through an in-depth contents-based analysis: all nodes can thus be regarded as diasporian, that is to say that they are made *by* or *for* migrants, or at least they deal with migratory issues.

I also held the view that, for the aims of this work, it could be useful to distinguish another attribute, “member(s) of qualified diaspora”¹³. This attribute indicates the nodes where the managers of

13. When no reference to socio-professional status was found, I indicated the value “not found”, whilst the value “not only” refers to websites managed both by qualified and non-qualified diaspora. The value “no” indicates that the content-based analysis affirms with certainty that the website is not managed by a highly skilled migrant.





Graph: member(s) of qualified diaspora

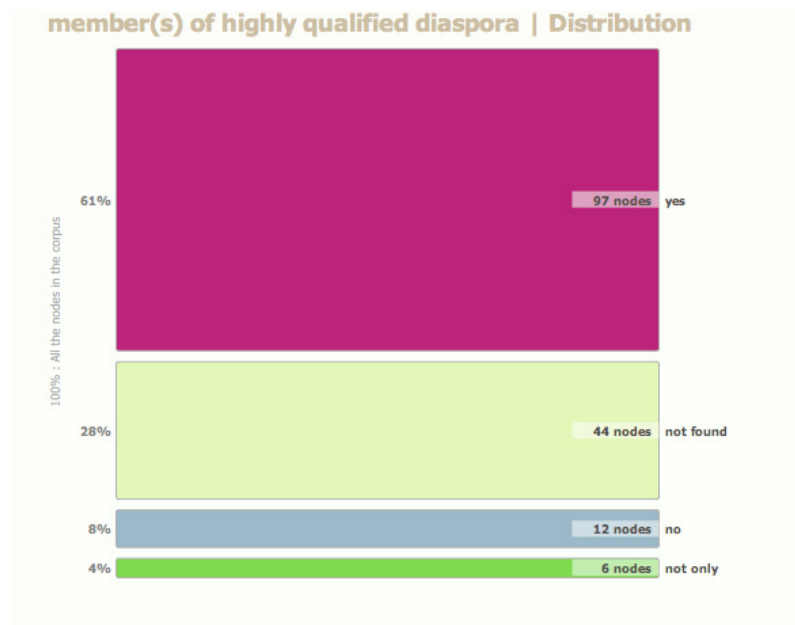
the website are highly skilled migrants, that is to say someone with a university qualification. I had to carry out a deep analysis of the contents of the website or exploit external research tools, such as Whois, Linkedin, Twitter or Facebook, in order to discover details of the migrant's socio-professional profile¹⁴. According to this partition, 61% of nodes indicate a **“highly qualified diaspora”**, which is an eloquent sign of the trend registered even by Italian migrations offline. What is more, a relative tendency towards polarisation with regard to “highly qualified diaspora” can be found within the “Swedish” cluster, in the upper part of the graph. As a result, the clusterisation

14. Contrary to the attribute “reference to diaspora”, which indicates a website made *by* or *for* migrants, or including at least a reference to migratory issues, the attribute “member(s) of qualified diaspora” refers only to people who manage the website, and not to people for whom the website is destined. However, the sharing of similar expectations or problems makes it highly probable that a website managed by highly skilled migrants will be more attractive to migrants with a similar socio-professional status.

can be said to be founded not only on geo-territorial criteria, but also on socio-professional ones, mirroring the newly outlined qualified mobility flows towards Sweden.

Conclusions

All in all, “speaking of diaspora communities we see different ways in which people who are involved in processes of cultural change may relate themselves to the ‘here’ and ‘there’” (de Leeuw, Rydin, 2007: 178), in a constant process of (re) negotiation of multilayered identities saturated with an hybridism that derives from the cultural and economic upheaval unleashed by the transition to a postmodern era. Such (re)imagined diasporas have been recently undergoing a process of further mutation, owing to the unprecedented opportunities for narrative provided by the Web. As a result, the recently outlined virtual spaces represent migrants’ most inventive platform, where not only is it possible to rebuild a national



sense of belonging but also to contribute to the political and cultural debate of the homeland.

As far as the Italian e-diaspora is concerned, its presence on the Web can be regarded as a kind of mirror of the offline diaspora in certain aspects, even though it diverges from the migratory trend of the real world for others.

In effect, the extreme fragmentation of the Italian e-diaspora with regard to the destination countries reflects the deeply rooted tendency of such a diaspora to disperse all over the world since its very first configurations according to modern patterns of mobility starting in the 19th century. However, the Web predominance of Sweden as the main host country does not follow the routes of displacements in the offline world, since the main countries of destination today are still the traditional ones. Nonetheless, Scandinavia represents a recent “discovery” for Italian migrants, particularly for the most highly skilled. It is therefore not so surprising that the most widespread online Italian community is that settled in Sweden, since the higher socio-professional status is probably linked to a wider familiarity with ICTs.

Furthermore, the recurrent tendency to use the Web to share accounts about personal migratory histories can be considered as the sign of a cyberactivism intended in a wider sense, not from a strictly political standpoint but rather from a cultural one. The civic commitment of the Italian

e-diaspora turns into an awareness of the expectations and problems entailed in migratory projects, dependent on the current Italian situation that is stifled by a growing social and economic crisis. It is no accident that the predominance of highly qualified diasporians emerging from the graph reflects an increasing trend found in Italian migratory patterns: the growing consciousness of the implications of the Italian brain drain, dangerously turning into a brain waste, forms not only the centre of virtual narratives, but above all the core of the recent political and cultural debates in the homeland.

Finally, the most striking feature of the Italian e-diaspora outlined by the graph is the complete lack of a homogeneous and dense community; instead it is structured as a tangle of little communities, or even small clusters, above all on a geo-territorial or socio-professional basis. Despite the unifying tool represented by the Italian language, which is almost the only one used in the Web, the Italian e-diaspora probably suffers from the extreme fragmentation that distinguishes it offline, which is also ascribable to the longstanding and profound parochialism of a deeply regionalised country that was unified only 150 years ago.

To conclude, the patterns of self-representation and construction of (trans)national identities detected thanks to this research are useful tools

for evaluating the most recent trends in the Italian diaspora. The constant to-and-fro between the online and offline diasporas makes it possible draw a more exhaustive picture of the Italian migratory narratives, fostered by the increasing role of highly skilled migrants who have been changing the traditional mobility configuration, in addition to deeply upsetting socio-economic and cultural structures even in the homeland.

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