

# City of goldsmiths: Economy, local identity and rhetoric in Valenza, Italy

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## Abstract

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

KEYWORDS: local community, rhetoric, Italy, imagined community, media, identity

## Introduction

Coming from Milan along State Road 494, after a one-hour-and-a-half drive among rice fields and industrial sites, one finally reaches the Po River, the border between the Lombardy and Piedmont regions. The wide grey line of fresh water divides the two areas and creates a visible interruption between the Lombard plain and the Piedmont hills, which rise just beyond the border. Looking at the hills, Valenza is the first settlement to be seen – small ochre houses and many bell towers. The city lies on the top of a knoll less than one kilometre from the river and the bridge. From this position, it dominates the course of the river and the plain over it. Since medieval times, this position has made Valenza a strategic point for the control of traffic along and across the river. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, high towers were built around the town, turning it into one of the most important fortresses on the border between Piedmont and Lombardy (Barghini, Comoli & Marotta 1993: 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: the *Bastione della Colombina*, in the northern sector of the city. Without its walls, during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the city experienced a profound redefinition of its economy: a town based on agriculture, in less than a century, turned into an industrial city, in particular focused on the jewellery trade. The legacy of such transformation can be seen today.

Along the State Road, still 30 km from Valenza, one begins seeing many advertisements for Valenza's jewellery firms placed along the road. Some of them are new; some have seen better days. Approaching Valenza, the amount of such advertising increases, introducing the traveller to one of the world's most famous centres for jewellery.

They are just the first signs that tell the visitors that today the economy of the city is founded on jewellery production. Following the road, this is clearly understandable once one arrives at the train station, located on a plateau that overlooks the city. There it faces the modern part of the city: the Coinor neighbourhood, a vast belt of industrial plants in the small valley, dividing the station from the city. Damiani, Bulgari Pasquale Bruni, and many other famous national and international brands can be seen on the buildings' façades or 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 1,175 jewellery firms in Valenza (Unioncamere 2009), and they employed 7,227 people of the total 20,215 inhabitants of the city (ISTAT 2006; Unioncamere 2009).<sup>1</sup> Thus, a third of the entire population, roughly half of the city workforce, works in the jewellery trade. They explain why Gaggio stated that in Valenza 'there [was] hardly a family in town not involved with the jewellery business' (2007: 33).

The pervasiveness of the jewellery trade in the city, however, is not limited within the economic sphere. It has become part of the imagery of Valenza's people, a fundamental element in the representation and thinking about their city and community and of the local media, authorities and population. In all of these dominions, Valenza is, in fact, identified as *città orafa* or *città degli orafi*: a *goldsmith city*, a *City of Goldsmiths*. 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, not only describes the factual characterisation of the local urban space. It is above all the model of imagery of the community of people that lives in Valenza. By linking the rhetoric object of the *City of Goldsmiths* to the model of imagined community proposed by Anderson, in this paper I show that 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 who have never visited it contribute to the diffusion and development of the rhetoric of the *City of Goldsmiths* and its concretisation in Valenza.

## A rhetorical premise

The works by Carrithers and other scholars (Carrithers 2005; Carrithers 2009; Gudeman 2009; Pandolfi 1998; Strecker and Tyler 2009) have highlighted the potentialities that studies of private and public rhetoric can offer to understand 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

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<sup>1</sup> These are the data gathered during the last local census (2001). After that year, we do have not data with such a level of completeness.

difficult to capture, its historicity, its eventfulness' (Carrithers 2005). 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 recent years, scholars have conjugated the anthropological studies of rhetoric in the observation of rhetorical figures or tropes.<sup>2</sup> 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 a trope requires. Instead, in this perspective, the *City of Goldsmiths* must be considered a *boundary object* (Bowker & Star 1999; Star 1989; Star & Griesemer 1989):

This is an analytic concept of those scientific objects that 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 (Star & Griesemer 1989: 393).

This analytical concept, once applied to the case of the object of the *City of Goldsmiths*, returns well the substantial unity that sustains the various different interpretations and actualisations 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 that provides visualisation and description of the urban space and the community that dwells there to its user.<sup>3</sup> The object of the *City of Goldsmiths*, thus, offers a description of the ideal economy of the city and the *modus vivendi* of its population. In this regard, for its cultural function to the Valenza community, the *City of Goldsmiths* can be considered an example of the idea of an imagined community proposed by Anderson (1991).

## **Communities among imagination and practices of discourse**

Since its first edition and, then, in its revisited version, *Imagined Communities* (Anderson 1991) highlighted the process of cultural construction that underpins modern nationalism through the definition and creation of distinct large communities: the nations.<sup>4</sup> Contrarily to Gellner's critique of modern nationalisms (1964), Anderson's 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 (2006) 'a social assemblage' – on the basis of the imagining, spreading and sharing of an idea of community.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> They are common pattern of linguistic strategies occurring in different communicative context (Mortara Garavelli 2003).

<sup>3</sup> The substantial semantic ambiguity of this object derives from the ambivalence of the word *città*, city in Italian. In this language, *città* refers both to the urban space and the group of people who live it.

<sup>4</sup> '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' (Anderson 1991: 6)

<sup>5</sup> 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: 7).

The theory proposed by Anderson was an innovation to a long-lasting tradition within the discipline. In the previous decades, scholars had described small and large communities as groups of people that shared a common space and 'symbols' (Eriksen and Nielsen 2001). These symbols were factual elements, material and immaterial objects, linked to the spheres of religion, such as relics, ritual equipment, rituals or myths, (Durkheim 1976), 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 such. In Anderson's analysis, however, people are not bound together for a common factual basis (Friedman 1992). In fact, he looked at the creation of a collective communitarian imagination as a 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: 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 to perceive itself as a distinct social entity, parallel to other groups. Thereby, it detaches itself from previous larger communities and no longer considers itself part of the larger assemblage.

In the case of the nation, Anderson pointed out that each community differentiates itself from the others through a language, which is elected as different from all the others, and, more importantly, 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-on-going debate in the fields of social science and history about the connection between community's history, traditions and identity (Faubion 1993; Halbwachs & Coser 1992; Hastrup 1992; Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983; Nora 1984; Nora 1989; Ranger 1993; Rogister & Vergati 2004). Refusing the idea of an objective, modernist history (Friedman 1992), Anderson (1991) pointed out the social role that history has in creating community and the genuine effort that communities, and in particular their ruling classes, spend in creating *their* history. However, the process of creating tradition is not an isolated event, but is integrated into a 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/bureaucracy.<sup>6</sup> 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: While history is written from the perspective of the image of community – hence, it is (consciously or involuntarily) shaped on the basis of the idea of community – the public display and celebration of history through museums, parades,

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<sup>6</sup> Very little space is given to the effect of the work of individuals, associations and other civic institutions on the grassroots level. In recent decades, however, often it has been pointed out that these are powerful agents in the process of building communitarian identities.

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 in the collective rites of history.

For Anderson, 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 is played on a symbolic/imaginary level between the community and a precise model of economy, however, is almost always overlooked (O'Rourke 2006).<sup>7</sup>

Moving from the study of national communities to local ones,<sup>8</sup> 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 the creation of local collective identity of the rural community. In so doing, she argued that the local communities, such as a village in the Greek countryside, are also culturally determined through the sharing among their members of a meta-narration of community. This narrative, however, embraces not only history and politics, but it is based above all on an archetypal model of local economy that is characteristic 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 because of 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 its congregative persuasiveness. As a result, the local community lost its unity and disaggregated. She explained such a phenomenon by indicating that, besides the circular process of creation and the 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 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, risks bringing the dissolution of the sense of belonging, as happened to the community of Lehonía.<sup>9</sup>

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

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<sup>7</sup> 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 the 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.

<sup>8</sup> Which she defined: 'mutually obligated people linked with that locale ... belonging to a place bounded from other places' (O'Rourke 2006: 3).

<sup>9</sup> In this rich settlement, the local people identified themselves with a closed, inhospitable community based on profitable 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 of newcomers, 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 2006:3).

population and spread, as Anderson described, through and by media, bureaucracy, and, as in the case of O'Rourke, face-to-face everyday interaction among the members of the community. In this respect, one can see the affinity that the *City of Goldsmiths* object has with such an analytical model. However, it is necessary to reconsider to 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 levels 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. Moreover, although she premised acknowledging after Sutton (Sutton 2000a; 2000b) the fluidity of the local community, she did not recognise the eventual difference that the narration can assume for the different members of the community due to their different degrees of participation to its social and economic ambits. By considering the idea of community as a boundary object, I want to emphasise 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 its focal point the community; from the community, it is spread over political borders. Thereby, it involves also people outside the original community. In Foucault, the discourse is a socio-cultural dynamic that overpasses 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). In this way, it contributes to the continuation of the discourse. In light of Foucault's philosophy, it appears that to understand the evolution and the entity of an idea of community, the researcher must enlarge the scope to the communities beyond the political borders in order to understand the role played by them in shaping the idea of community.

Analysing 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 emphasise the plurality of interpretations that characterises it, without losing the general coherence they share. Furthermore, in the following 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 so, 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 people from the neighbouring city of Alessandria, who never visited Valenza.

## Communities I: from the streets of the *City of Goldsmiths*

‘How do you describe your city?’ was one of the questions I posed to all my Valenzano informants, regardless of whether they were actually occupied in the jewellery trade. The majority of my informants,<sup>10</sup> goldsmiths as well as people not 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 per cent will tell you that they are 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 who arrived in Valenza in the 1970s as a student of one of the local professional schools, 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 neighbourhood<sup>11</sup> and the Expo Piemonte exhibition centre.<sup>12</sup> 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).<sup>13</sup> Thus, in the eyes of my informant, such a profound interconnection between the jewellery trade and the urban space makes it almost impossible to discern the difference between Valenza and the jewellery industry. The idea that all the city of Valenza is an enormous jewellery plant is a remarkably common perception in the city, shared by people of different ages, occupations and incomes (Bovero 1992; Fontefrancesco 2004; 2009b; Pietrasanta 1991). It is further reinforced by the conspicuous number of people working in the jewellery firms: in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century it was about fifty per cent of the working population – not the ninety per cent 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 merely emphasise the substantial

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<sup>10</sup> The only persons who do not know this locution had recently immigrated to Valenza from other distant parts of Italy or from abroad in the previous few weeks, did not have many acquaintances in the city, and (some of them) were still struggling with the language.

<sup>11</sup> This neighbourhood was planned in the late 1970s, and built in the 1980s. It lies 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)

<sup>12</sup> See next paragraph for further information concerning this building complex and its use.

<sup>13</sup> Such as the residential and the commercial ones.

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 individuals and their families.

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 emphasise the centrality in the city life that jewellery makers have. Quoting an interview with a goldsmith entrepreneur, in his late fifties, who was born in a village neighbouring Valenza, twenty years after 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.

While 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 held by their professional category; in the case of people not employed in the trade, the *City of Goldsmiths* is tinged with unease. 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. Full 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 same image they used to portray the city as well as its population as did the goldsmiths. However, they charged this rhetoric object with a sense of estrangement that makes *City of Goldsmiths* become, in their narration, the expression of their perceived marginalisation.

Where the overwhelming majority of my informants knew and used the image of the *City of Goldsmiths* to describe Valenza, not all of them were 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?'<sup>14</sup> is a representative example of the answers I received. In my informants' perspective, rather than being historically motivated, the success and the diffusion of the rhetoric was mainly linked to the present aspect of Valenza and a complex dynamic that bound together Valenzano insiders and outsiders, the press and the political debate of the city.

A university student of cinema, in his mid-twenties, grew up in Valenza, but who currently 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:

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<sup>14</sup> The informant was a jewellery 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 1990s



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 with gold. You speak with Valenzano people and they will talk about the jewellery trade. You listen to the local political debate and, again, it seems that the only problem in Valenza is 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 his 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 the citizens of the town. All these experiences together would create a persuasive rhetoric network, weaved around the individual and transmitting the object of the *City of Goldsmiths*. The existence of such a network has been recognised by other informants. In the previous quote, the different experiences are juxtaposed, almost implying that each one of them has the same importance and persuasive power. However, when I asked them to elaborate on the different role that this experience may have in transmitting the idea of the *City of Goldsmiths*, they emphasised that some of them have a more *weight* than others, although all these experiences 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 the everyday interaction with other Valenzano people and the characteristics of local public debate to be crucial. Rather than the active participation in the political and associative life of the city, often the informants emphasised that Valenza was in the eye the *City of Goldsmiths* also because Valenza's public debate seemed only focused on the problems of the jewellery trade, since it appeared the equation Valenza = Jewellery trade underpins the entire debate and local policymaking. To many goldsmiths this was a 'natural' conclusion and a validation of Valenza being the *City of Goldsmiths*. For example, a goldsmith in his sixties, who has been the owner of a small firm since the 1970s, glossed on this topic: 'Yes, the political debate is centred on the jewellery trade. What's so strange? Valenza is the *City of Goldsmiths*, 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-year-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 merely sort of victims. They describe the process of decision making in the city as led by a minority of Valenzano people whom my informants often addressed as *loro*, meaning *they/them*. *They* are the people 'in the control room', the elected politicians in the local bodies. *They* are perceived as detached from and not influenced by the rest of the Valenzano social milieu. *They* would decide the city's economic

and political agenda, and carry on the policymaking process more or less autonomously from the rest of the city's population.

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 *their* decisions: she would just become acquainted with *their* choices through the news or the chats with other Valenzano people. However, *their* 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, and the dialectic tension with reality of the rhetoric object of the *City of Goldsmiths*, we need to consider another group of people, the one that 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 indicated as responsible for the spreading of the idea of the nation in the colonies.<sup>15</sup>

In Anderson's account, the identification of such group of people is easy, sharp and neat (1991). Through an etic categorisation, the motors 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 conceptualised as a group of people distinguished and rather detached from the rest of the population.

Distinct from Anderson's, the 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 policymaking process. The cut (Strathern 1996) that this classification operates in the social milieu is far from sharp: the identity of who is part of *them* is quite unclear and imprecise, changing from informant to informant. Most commonly, my informants only listed the most prominent elected administrators in this group:<sup>16</sup> the city mayor and the other members of the city *giunta*, the city board of governors, whose members in Italy are called *assessore*. Besides their pivotal role in policymaking, my informants altogether ignored other people employed in the city bureaucracy, for example, the city managers.<sup>17</sup> A possible explanation of this omission can be found in the sources used by my interviewees

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<sup>15</sup> In Anderson's as well as in my informants' opinion in the creation, spreading and actualisation of the particular idea of community, the protocols, the procedures and the services established by them are relevant, rather than the actual identity of the people involved in the policymaking.

<sup>16</sup> An example is provided by the words of a gem setter in his forties 'Who are they? Well, the mayor and the *assessori*, I guess. At least, reading the news it seems they are the big shots who decide everything ...'

<sup>17</sup> 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 policymaking. The city managers, appointed officers hired by the city administration, have assumed greater importance, because they became those legally responsible for all the legal acts produced by the city council.

to inform themselves on the current local political and administrative debate: 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, thereby silencing the role played by the city managers and other bureaucrats, although changes in the law have increased the administrative role of such officers.<sup>18</sup>

In the previous section, we saw 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 main elected local politicians, in this section I focus on the role played by these people in the actualisation 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's population.

First of all, however, it is necessary to reconsider a fundamental element of the grassroots conceptualisation of *them*. My informants considered it as being as a social group totally separated from the 'common Valenzano people'. By using the rhetoric recently introduced into the national political debate by Stella and Rizzo (Stella and Rizzo 2007), my informants referred to *them* as a *casta* (a caste). This social division, however common, must not be overestimated. In fact, the elected politicians are still part of the social body of Valenza, as they remembered. For example, a then *assessore* responsible for city police, emphasised in December 2008:

I am always sorry when I hear such a thing... when I hear that we, politicians, are perceived as barricaded in a 'Palace of Power'... I do not consider myself as 'a politician' or 'one of the caste'. Sincerely, first of all, I am a Valenzano person, 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 is in the creation fertile ground in which the idea of the community can root and rhetoric prosper must be considered in the light of these dialectics, which are not explored by Anderson.

Valenzano informants indicated the choices of the intervention of *them* in order to shape the city into the *City of Goldsmiths*. However, such a perception of administrative work does not imply that the administrators actually consider their work as willingly aimed at transforming the city into that model. It clearly emerged from the interviews I had.<sup>19</sup> None of the public administrators considered privileging the problems of the people

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<sup>18</sup> 'At the end of the day, the public wants to know how the politicians they voted, nor what some grey bureaucrat did' was the explanation provided me by a radio journalist in her late twenties, who grew up in Alessandria but also worked in Valenza as a reporter.

<sup>19</sup> For example, in August 2009, in an interview with the mayor of the city at that time I asked him about the centrality of jewellery trade in the policymaking of the city. He answered: 'I, as well as the other members of the *giunta*, work in the jewellery trade. Moreover, 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'.

employed jewellery trade against the ones of the people working in other sectors. In July 2009, the then vice-Mayor argued:

Of course, the jewellery trade is important: the majority of Valenzano people are employed in that trade. However it is not true we think only of the goldsmiths. We have done a lot for all Valenzano citizens. Maybe the press did not cover those projects enough. Maybe the Valenzano people are not interested in anything but gold.

While 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; Maggiora 2010), and the public administrators may have not intended their actions as directed only to the goldsmiths, in the previous ten years the council publicly embraced the idea of the *City of Goldsmiths* in his public rhetoric, in particular in the case of tourism.

Throughout the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the council invested resources in order 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*. Public signs were installed around the city, and advertising was published in many local and national newspaper and online journals using slogans such as 'the European Capital of Gold and Precious Gems' (e.g. Associazione delle Donne del Vino 2009). In this way, the idea of the *City of Goldsmiths* became an immaterial but distinguishing Valenza landmark. In September 2010, I met the *assessore* responsible for tourism and public events 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 the 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 the *assessore* emphasise a link between this rhetorical action and a widespread on-going practice in Valenza. In fact, the use of the rhetoric object of the '*City of Goldsmiths*' as a tool to make Valenza a 'stickier' (Gladwell 2000) image in the mind of the outsiders and increase the value of Valenza production is commonly employed by Valenzano people.<sup>20</sup> Thus, we can consider the administrative action, rather than an

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<sup>20</sup> As one non-goldsmith informant, an engineer in his fifties who lives in Valenza but works near Milan and commutes daily 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 uses 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, *voilà*, 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 an anonymous small town...' This informant as well as many jewellery traders emphasised that rhetoric of the *City of Goldsmiths* is an important tool to 'sell' the city and its products. In their experience, it helped to characterise the place, to associate the name of the city with an imaginary of opulence and fantasy. An informant, a jewellery trader, in his fifties, born and raised in Valenza, commented that it '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 analysing the case of people from Alessandria: 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.

authoritarian action than *cum imperio* shapes the collective imagery, 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 first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, 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 at creating a second trade fair centre in Piedmont in Valenza and implied the building of an exhibition centre, called *Expo Piemonte*, on the outskirts of the city (Il Piccolo 2010; Zemide 2002; 2005). The new building, moreover, would answer the growing need expressed by the goldsmith community for a large exhibition centre where the annual international jewellery exposition *Valenza Gioielli* could be hosted. This fair has continued growing since it began in the 1970s, and into the 1990s.<sup>21</sup>

The building was opened in 2009 and became the official location of Valenza Gioielli. In addition to this four-day event and *V+*, a three-day national exposition of technology and services for the jewellery trade, no other events were organised in the large building. However, some of the rooms are used as headquarters of AOV, *Associazione Orafi Valenzani*, the Valenza goldsmiths’ association.

Besides the good intentions of the public administrators, the building is perceived by Valenzano people as a facility for the jewellery trade, rather than something open for any possible form 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 goldsmith association. Thereby, while 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’ community,<sup>22</sup> to all my Valenzano informants the new exhibition centre was a project imagined and designed *only* for the needs of the city’s goldsmiths. Thus, while the administrators were willing to describe *Expo Piemonte* as a resource for the entire city, the Valenzano people considered it just an extremely expensive project that answered to one particular need of the goldsmith 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

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<sup>21</sup> The fair is organised by AOV. To host this event, AOV built the first exhibition centre of Valenza, *Palazzo Mostre*, in 1983. Since the constant growth of the event, year after year, this large building located in the west of the city, not far from the city centre, rapidly became too small to efficiently house the exposition. In the 1990s, AOV began work to expand the building, but this was stopped in 2000 when the discussion about *Expo Piemonte* project started. In the eyes of the members of AOV, once it would have opened, the building would have become the new location for the jewellery exposition (Associazione Orafi Valenzana 2006).

<sup>22</sup> For example, the then-major in his interview commented: ‘We imagined *Expo Piemonte* as an important service to the local jewellery trade, but we did not want to make it only a facility for the Valenza’s jewellery production’.

for goldsmiths'; to the latter, instead, the large investments involved in the project and the building were factual examples of how the city policymaking process is massively oriented towards the needs of the goldsmiths, and is actively at work in shaping Valenza into the *City of Goldsmiths*, i.e. city thoroughly and utterly dedicated to the goldsmiths.

From comparison, the gap between the interpretation given by the public administrators and my informants is highlighted. Expo Piemonte is an example of how the actions of administration have not only a direct role in reinforcing and spreading a particular idea of community, which in the case of Valenza is portrayed in the rhetoric of the *City of Goldsmiths*, but they have also a highly significant indirect role. The local community may perceive administrative projects and actions from a different perspective than that of the administrators', and may consider only the factual entity of these actions, as in the case of Expo Piemonte. 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 reinforcements.

### **Communities III: From the news**

One of the principal reasons my informants from Alessandria 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 recent years by local newspapers and radio, it emerges that the public press extensively uses the imagery 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 Gold*, the nickname of the team Valenzana Calcio's<sup>23</sup> players is *the Goldsmiths*, and the image of gold is often used in the title to introduce any kind of topic, from a singing contest to a sport event.<sup>24</sup>

During the research, I met many journalists who worked in Valenza, reporting the news of the city and who were the authors of the articles I had scrutinised. Talking with them, I first tried to understand the reasons behind the use of the locution *City of Goldsmiths*.

According to a radio journalist in his mid-thirties, who has worked for almost ten years in Valenza:

Why do 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 they've never visited Valenza, knows that the City of Goldsmiths is Valenza!

The journalist, as did other his colleagues, highlighted the functionality of the locution: on one hand, the imagery that the expression *City of Goldsmiths* carries is evo-

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<sup>23</sup> Valenza's football team. For more information about the team and its history (Maggiore 2006).

<sup>24</sup> To have a grasp of this phenomenon, it is enough some quick research in the database of the local newspapers Il Monferrato (2007), Il Piccolo (2007), la Stampa (2008) and Radiogold (2009).

cative, on 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 with it.

When the journalists were asked about the origins of the idiom, the most common answer concerned the actual diffusion of the imagery. The reporter in his thirties argued:

Well, I do not know 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 whether they are goldsmiths or not, 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 the Valenzano people think so, why can't I write that Valenza is the City of Goldsmiths?

The historic origins of this rhetorical practice were unknown by my all my informants, despite differences in age. The usage was already common in the 1980s, when the oldest 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 on-going practice in Valenza on a grassroots level, rather than for its veracity. Indeed, the journalists recognised that Valenza was not only the jewellery trade, but to call Valenza the *City of Goldsmiths* portrays what Valenzano people 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<sup>25</sup> 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 private 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 accuracy. 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 with which it is endowed and due to their connection with the public. 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 imagery.

Moreover, they justified their use on the base of a cultural dialectic with their public that they schematised in three layers of interaction:

- the relationship with the Valenzano people, i.e. 'All Valenzano people think that Valenza is the *City of Goldsmiths*, so I – a journalist – say that Valenza is the *City of Goldsmiths* because this locution portrays their way of conceptualise their city';
- the relationship with an advertising campaign made in Valenza by public bodies and private companies, i.e. '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, i.e. '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'.

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<sup>25</sup> Journalist in her forties, she worked at the newspaper since the 1990s as reporter for Valenza.

Considering these links, the media appear to be strongly embedded into a wider cultural dynamic that involves three other partners: the public outside Valenza, the Valenzano people and the institutions of Valenza. Whilst the latter two have already been discussed, in the following paragraphs I will focus on the other partner in order to describe the dialectics that sustain the circulation of the *City of Goldsmiths* object.

### **Communities IV: From the spyglass**

As my Valenzano informants highlighted, there is a final actor that participates into the creation and diffusion of the rhetoric object of the *City of Goldsmiths*. It is the outsiders, those who live outside Valenza. They too know the rhetoric object, and contribute to its diffusion. Moreover, through their knowing they 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, people from Alessandria that never visited Valenza. Alessandria is the third largest city of Piedmont (Comuni-Italiani.it 2009) with almost 100,000 inhabitants. It is 14 km southern Valenza and its territory confines with the one of Valenza. It is the capital of the province of Alessandria, the Piedmont administrative region in which Valenza is situated. The offices of many governmental and nongovernmental agencies active in Valenza are actually situated in Alessandria for the administrative importance and geographical closeness of this city. Moreover, the most-read local newspapers, *la Stampa* and *il Piccolo*, and the most listened local news radio, *Radiogold*, have their editorial offices in Alessandria, while hundreds of people who work or study in the schools in Valenza commute daily between the cities. In addition to such interconnection, the increasing integration of the services offered by the two municipalities, and the improvement of the infrastructure linking the cities (Fontefrancesco 2009a), the two city-communities continue to vividly identify themselves as separate, parallel entities, embodying and manifesting the strong *capanilismo* (which should translate *local pride* rather than *parochialism*) that can characterise Italian culture (i.e. Bravo 2001; Clemente 1997).

Besides the proximity of the two cities, in Alessandria it is not rare to find people who have never visited Valenza<sup>26</sup> although perhaps they had seen the city but just for few minutes through the windows of their car or train, or from afar as ironically emphasised of one of my informants, a retired woman in her sixties<sup>27</sup>: ‘Have I seen Valenza? Yes, when I went to Betania sanctuary<sup>28</sup> I have seen it with my binoculars... ah ... you mean I have never visited the city ... no ... unfortunately, no ...’

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<sup>26</sup> In contrast, it is reasonable to say that all the Valenzano people visit Alessandria, perhaps only to go to the hospital, complete some administrative necessities or take a train.

<sup>27</sup> She was born in the south of the province and moved in Alessandria in the 1970s, when her husband was employed in the local Michelin factory. She worked as housemaid for many Alessandria families until she retired.

<sup>28</sup> Betania is a sanctuary and building complex owned by the Diocese of Alessandria. It is on the top of a hill half way between Alessandria and Valenza. From the high parts of the complex, it is possible to see Valenza and its surroundings quite distinctly.



The lack of visiting the city was explained by one of my informants, a bank clerk in his twenties,<sup>29</sup> 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 not visiting 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 city.<sup>30</sup> 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 comment made by an engineer in his forties who had a studio in Turin.

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, for a shop cashier still in her teens<sup>31</sup> the *City of Goldsmiths* was place crowded with jeweller shops: ‘You know, I 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’, while a clerk in his thirties<sup>32</sup> 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 buildings and high chimneys... I guess...’

Thus, all of them had knowledge of one piece of information, which equated Valenza with the jewellery trade. Without a direct experience or familiarity with the features of the jewellery trade in Valenza, my informants defined this information according their taste and imagination. The result of this may vary due to personal inclination, education, age, etc. However, every one of my informants *knew* the discrete parcel of information that they did not directly experience. Besides the difference of age, gender, education, and family background, their knowledge derived from two main cultural vectors: the (local) mass media,<sup>33</sup> in particular the press, and the vis-à-vis relationship with people who knew Valenza, and especially Valenzano people.<sup>34</sup> The exposure to these media originated their fundamental understanding of Valenza.

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<sup>29</sup> He was born and educated in Alessandria and attended the university in Turin. Once he finished his studies, he returned in Alessandria where he found his current job in a bank.

<sup>30</sup> Ignorance is the lack of awareness or knowledge. All my informants knew that Valenza existed and was a short distance far from their home. Hence, they had a grasp of knowledge of Valenza.

<sup>31</sup> She was born in the early 1990s in Valenza and grew up there, completed secondary education, but did not attend university. She was hired by a local supermarket as cashier in 2008 and still works there.

<sup>32</sup> Born in Alessandria in the late 1970s, 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 by a large chemical factory in the southern suburb of the city in the late 1990s. He still works there.

<sup>33</sup> For example, by showing an article about Valenza published in the last issue of *Il Piccolo*, a clerk of a major firm Alessandria, in her late forties, commented: ‘Look at the press. You see? They tell that Valenza is the *City of Goldsmiths*. There should be some truth over there, shouldn’t it?’

<sup>34</sup> 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.’

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 that Valenza's community is strictly connected to, circulates. Following Foucault (Foucault 1971; 2001), the human network through which the discourse of the *City of Goldsmiths* is developed can be considered. Differently from what is suggested by Anderson, the discourse passes over the geographical and political boundaries of the territory where the community of Valenza is set, and also encompasses the outsiders, for example the group of Alessandrino people who never visited Valenza.

In Foucault, the discourse is presented as an entity 'unlimited, continuous and silent' (Foucault 1971). However the French philosopher emphasised 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 Goldsmiths*, 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 image began to be used in the late 1950s, thanks to the active role played by AOV in promoting Valenza jewellery production in Italy and abroad.<sup>35</sup>

However, this historic moment is not recognised 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 no past: it is just a derivation of the present socioeconomic characteristic of Valenza, i.e. Valenza is the *City of Goldsmiths* because Valenza's economy is based on the jewellery trade. At most, its origins go back to an historical past, 'centuries ago'. Moreover, the overall majority of my Valenzano informants considered as irrelevant the possible dating of the origins of the rhetoric object. In particular, this predisposition was manifested in the answer I received, even by my closer informants, when I showed them the findings of my research on the history of the rhetoric: 'Oh, really?

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<sup>35</sup> From an examination of the local newspaper and video reports, it resulted that the rhetoric became dominant in the late 1950s, when the association of Valenza's goldsmiths started an international advertising campaign for jewellery made in Valenza. One of the early examples is found in one instalment of *Settimana CIAC* (C.I.A.C. 1959), a weekly video report that was broadcasted in the cinema before the display of the movies. The instalment 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 have produced glittering, marvellous pieces of jewellery'. In 1964, a 10-minute documentary was shot in Valenza by the company *Incom* (Orengo, Isoardi, and Tarchi 1964). In this film, Valenza is titled 'the Capital of Goldsmiths'. In the 1960s, the rhetoric of the *City of Goldsmiths* was so firmly established that one decade later it was employed not only in the mass media but also in scientific publications written in the province of Alessandria (e.g. Associazione Orafa Valenzani, 1972; Lenti & Pugnetti, 1974)

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'.<sup>36</sup>

The discourse of the *City of Goldsmiths* is lived as something concerning the present time that draws its strength from the current situation of Valenza and the uses the media and other people in Valenza and outside the city make of it, i.e. 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 arrive to define four macro-groups of participants to the grand discourse of the *City of Goldsmiths*: the Valenzano informants, 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), 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.'

Previously, 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, which 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 spreading the idea 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 characterise the city and by the diffusion of the object of the *City of Goldsmiths* among the outsiders.

The elected politicians, even though perceived as a detached community by 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. Regardless of 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 actions 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, a gap between the politicians' motivations and explanations given to their decisions and the interpretation given to them by other Valenzano people clearly emerged. 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 it quite pointless to evaluate the sincerity of the motivations and justifications offered me by the local administrators. I consider

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<sup>36</sup> The passage is taken from an interview with a forty-year-old goldsmith. She was born in Alessandria but has worked in Valenza since the 1990s. I met her in her studio in July 2009.

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 also developed through indirect interactions, in this case the interpretation given by Valenzano informants to the administrative initiatives. Such an 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. For all my informants, the press is considered an indispensable medium to connect people and circulate information about Valenza and its public debate. It is also a powerful vector that spreads the imagery of the *City of Goldsmiths* within the city and outside, massively associating Valenza with the imagery 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 Goldsmiths* simply because is an effective image: my informants emphasised they had no will to spread a particular idea of Valenza or influence the cultural dynamics of the city through their actions. Besides this involuntarily aspect, the final result of the journalistic style is a reinforcement and perpetuation of a particular idea of community, within and outside Valenza.

Finally, among the actors we must count the outsiders a group of people who would be easily assumed to be the final recipients of this rhetoric and not its makers. In fact, even though they might never be in Valenza, they knew the Valenza as the *City of Goldsmiths* because of 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 rhetorical 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 imagery to the Valenzano.

## Conclusions

From this overview, the complex cultural dynamics that characterise the discourse of the *City of Goldsmiths* clearly appears, involving 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 a particular group can have a more prominent role in contributing to the continuous definition of such image. However, they all work 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 merely as an interpretation of the positive characteristic of the geographic, social and economic environment in which 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 interpretations, which are the cultural and social results that this idea can have on a particular group who is an active member of the discourse, must be framed within such broad picture to be fully understand.

## Acknowledgements

A special thanks to Matei Candea, PhD, who helped me in the composition of this paper with his suggestions and advice.

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## **POVZETEK**

Članek se na primeru Valenze, Italija, premika od analitskega modela zamišljene skupnosti, da bi proučil proces opredelitve lokalne identitete, mišljene kot retorične meje predmeta. Lokalne identitete obravnava kot retorične predmete, ki jih poganja interakcija med diskurzivnimi praksami različnih družbenih akterjev. Za razliko od Andersonovega pristopa, članek poudarja, da kulturni proces ni omejen zgolj z lokalno skupnostjo, pač pa tudi geografskim okoljem in ljudmi izven skupnosti, saj je tesno povezan z interakcijo skupnosti s tujci, pokrajino in mediji.

**KLUJČNE BESEDE:** lokalna skupnost, retorika, Italija, zamišljena skupnost, mediji, identiteta

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