A way to study transnational identities

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Abstract

The contribution reflects upon a research about Italo-Argentinians, carried out adopting a mixed method approach in a digital context.

Nowadays, migrations lay on transnational relationship-wise networks affecting both the destination and origin countries and populations, in a non-stop of interaction and mixture mechanism. In an era of geolocalization, migrants do not move from a place to another without leaving traces: they keep having multiple and different interrelations with their origin, transition, and arrival countries, but also with all the other physical and digital spaces they enter in contact with.

In this scenario, ICT ease the development of transnational relationships and contribute to the raising and strengthening of the so-called "imagined identities". Italo-Argentinians, for example, developed continuous interactions allowing them to build and re-build their own culture and their own hybrid identity.

The research has been carried out through a digital ethnography providing the opportunity to observe the interactions among subjects identifying themselves as Italo-Argentinians: they were able to build a suitable environment, where their identity can live and grown up. Ethnography made it possible to study the network as a "field of relations", following the links likely to be significant.

Ethnographic method has been integrated with a web survey, allowing to deepen arguments and to develop an ego network analysis with the software Egonet, useful to understand the social networks importance in defining the cultural and identity belonging.

To verify one of the starting hypothesis, namely the influence of close ties on the identity of the Italo-Argentinians, we collected 119 self-administrated questionnaires. The survey identified the strong ties, the main relationships building the subject's first reference horizon. It asked to rank persons according to the degree of intimacy, also asking the category of belonging, nationality, means of communication, and the frequency of that contact. Nationality and compactness of the network proved to be important in building the transnational identity of the subjects.

The visualization of the ego-centered maps helped us to more intuitively show what were the relationship influencing the subjects interviewed. In particular, the graphic approach allowed to directly compare the networks of different individuals, in search of a significant similarity.