

Chapter 10

Researching and Enabling Youth Geographies in the Digital and Material City: The Teencarto Project

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ABSTRACT

This contribution presents the methodologies and the results of an action-research project called Teencarto carried out by the University of Turin and the City of Turin. The project involved more than 600 teenagers from 16 high schools, in a massive process of community mapping aiming at producing a representation of their urban geography. Data collected has been analyzed to make evident the way teenagers use the city as well as how they imagine a better city. The mapping process is based on First Life, a map-based social network, which aims at reconnecting digital and real spaces, using cartographic representations and crowdsourcing. The teenagers' geographies emerging from this large-scale mapping activity reveal the crucial role of four types of "piazza" (Italian word for square) as meeting points: real squares, green squares, commercial hybrid squares, and nightlife squares.

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INTRODUCTION¹

Some categories of citizens are excluded by most decisions about how to use, transform and manage urban space. Among these weak categories of citizens there are teenagers, who are the object of specific urban policies, but at the same time are rarely involved as active subjects of policy making processes (Childress, 2004). This contribution² presents the methodologies and the results of the research project Teencarto, carried out in 2014 and 2015 by the University of Turin and the City of Turin. The project involved more than 600 teenagers from 16 high schools, in an ambitious community mapping process, aiming at producing a representation of youth urban geography, that could provide to policy makers an updated and consistent knowledge for future urban policies. The mapping process was based on First Life (FL), a map-based social network, aiming at reconnecting digital and real spaces, using cartographic representations and crowdsourcing. The specific relational perspective allowed by the social networking functionalities of the application, specifically redesigned for this project on user-centered principles, favours a real shared representation of urban space. The purposes of FL developers are that the platform could be used “to visualize, integrate, share, comment urban data and make them useful for strengthening social communities in the real world” (Antonini et al. 2016, p.2). This chapter is structured as follows: paragraph 2 summarizes the key issues of teenagers’ geographies, basing on a literature review; paragraph 3 explores the idea of participatory mapping and volunteered geographical information (VGI), that guided the research; paragraph 4 describes the methods of the research; paragraph 5 reports the results of the spatial analysis of the more than 2000 points of interest (POI) mapped by teenagers; paragraph 6 provides some critical considerations of the teenagers’ urban geographies emerging from the research; paragraph 7 proposes some final remarks.

TEENAGERS AND URBAN SPACES

Does a “teenagers geography” exist? The existence of adolescence or teenage, as the transition between childhood and adulthood, is a cultural construction, historically and geographically characterized (Savage, 2009).

In this context, teenagers are acknowledged as a specific social group, characterized by psychological and behavioural specificities and playing a specific role in society (Avanzini, 2012).

Among the reasons for the “invention of adolescence” in Western society (Savage, 2009), we can identify historical factors, such as the abolishment of child labor and the extension of compulsory education; cultural factors, with the social

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