Public communication on the Internet: an overall analysis and six case studies

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Abstract (English)

The present thesis originates from the need to show how some City Council websites were edited and modified following the increasing percentage of multicultural communities. Its main purpose, indeed, is to carry out an analysis of the content addressed to migrants and of the language used to that extent, and to provide six examples of online portals (respectively: Sydney, Melbourne, Toronto, Wellington, Paris and Lecce). The choice of the central topic is motivated by two on-going phenomena: on the one hand, the increasing institutional use of the Web to communicate with citizens; on the other hand, the never ending migration flows leading to multicultural societies. Moreover, this study could be helpful for those Italian City Councils willing to create a digital platform for their foreign citizens.

This work is divided into five chapters, the first one, “An introduction to institutional communication”, being a general introduction to public communication. In particular, this section focuses on the evolution of public communication throughout the last decades, the concept of social communication, the essential contribution of new technologies, the Italian situation, and the relationship between public communication and multicultural societies.

The secon chapter, “Foreign examples of online institutional communication”, has a more analytical approach than the previous one, since it is based on the description
of five foreign City Councils websites: Sydney, Melbourne, Toronto, Wellington and Paris. This order follows the rank of each country according to the net migration rate. Before analysing the Web portals of each City Council, a short introduction on their social and multiethnic background is given.

Both the third and the fourth chapter consist in a comparative study of the above-mentioned City Councils, but from two different perspectives. The third chapter, “Website content – A thematic analysis”, indeed, is the analysis of the content of the institutional websites, and it takes into consideration the following aspects: main target groups; language bars and interpreting services; administrative services; information on settlement, employment and education; health and social services; and online bureaucracy. On the contrary, the fourth chapter (“Website content - Multimodality and communicative techniques”), focuses on multimodality (in particular interactivity and the use of images) and linguistic techniques (syntax, evacuative language, register, and nominal groups).

The fifth and last chapter, “An Italian model of online institutional communication: the Lecce City Council website”, differs from the previous ones because it deals with a small town (Lecce), rather than with a huge metropolis. However, the choice of such City Council is consistent with the overall analysis, since Lecce, too, belongs to a multicultural environment. The Italian Web portal has been analysed in the light of what expounded in chapters 2, 3 and 4.

In conclusion, the contrastive analysis revealed that the six City Councils set out different strategies to deal with their foreign citizens, both from a thematic and a linguistic point of view. Moreover, the size of the City Council proved not to be influential in the exhaustiveness of the corresponding portal, as demonstrated by the Italian case study. Then, such web portals must be considered as parts of a more complex net of institutional websites, which often cooperate to spread a huge quantity of information. Finally, this study showed that new technologies, especially the Web, are extremely important for public institutions to catch the attention of a higher number of citizens.