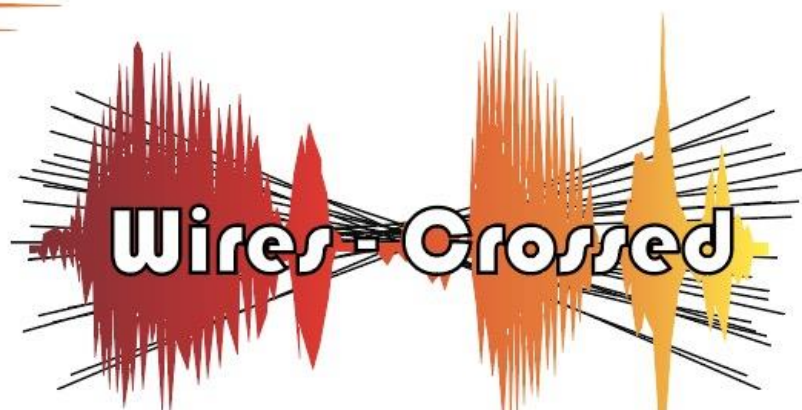




Executive Summary of the Community Audit in Italy

*By Speha Fresia Società Cooperativa
April, 2020*



**Developing Community Media to Mitigate
the Impact of Fake News**

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Introduction

The Community Audit was conceived within the Erasmus Project Wires-Crossed, in partnership with 7 other European countries, Germany (project leader) with partner organisations from Cyprus, Croatia, Ireland, Italy, the Czech Republic and Poland. Wires-Crossed focus is to develop the skills of ordinary people to cope with stress and to the tensions of today's information society, mitigating the impact of false news campaigns aimed at destabilizing social cohesion, and in the most serious cases, the democratic process. It aims to build a framework for community media centre, providing knowledge, skills and competences to develop, manage and maintain it for local residents.

Methodology

As in the other partner countries, we started with a very brief recognition of the state of the art on fake news in Italy. The second step was achieved through the convening of a targeted group of local interlocutors, who participated in a three-hour workshop in December 2019, during which we shared the project objectives and agreed on the start of the action-research with the several local contacts, with the review of the questionnaire.

Specifically in our region (Lazio), we have activated various territorial and thematic "communities". During a workshop held in Rome in December 2019, we identified the potential reference communities. Among the territorial ones, the secondary headquarters of Speha Fresia in Sicily, where one of our working partner has been invested with the responsibility of a Digital Hub for the cooperation of Legacoop Sicilia.

In the surroundings of Rome, with the collaboration of the Association Paola Decini, which is being carried out in favour of women who have escaped from conditions of domestic violence, and where a multimedia classroom is planned. The other sites of a potential experimentation are in the south of our region, in the province of Latina, in the two municipalities of Maenza and Priverno. In this latter, Speha Fresia has carried out a training course for organisers of cultural events and community festivals, as part of the Erasmus+ called VAL.oR., with the associate partner ATCL, which is supporting us in complementarity with its mission, the promotion of live artistic performance. Other engaged stakeholders are the online magazine NoiDonne and two intercultural associations.

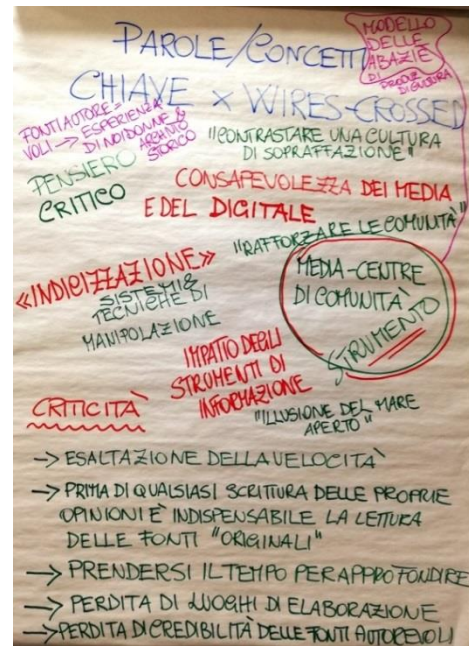
The quantitative target of 100 questionnaires was reached with 103 participants. Unfortunately, the method of the online administration was an obligatory choice, in consideration of the restrictions that occurred due to the effect of the pandemic.

In our initial programme we planned a public meeting in Maenza, to be held in March 2020, after having agreed with the Councillor for Culture the involvement of other territorial associations to promote further collaborations and complementarities. For the project staff, this appointment is only extended, as soon as it will be possible to meet again.

Data Analysis

Among the key words and concepts, emerged during the focus group with the Local Media Group, we find the central element of the authoritativeness of the sources, as the over seventy-year experience of NoiDonne and its Historical Archive teaches us.

The need for greater awareness in the use of digital media has been underlined, intervening, especially as educators, in training critical thinking and in promoting the contrast to a culture of oppression. Through the online questionnaires we have deepened the three thematic areas envisaged. After the first draft of the complete report in Italian, we proceeded to send it to the members of the Local Media Group, for a final review, and to subsequently extend it to all the people who responded to the survey, and uploading it to the company website to ensure a wider sharing. The results were obtained thanks to the commitment of the Local Media Group.



Results and reflections

Despite the legislative delays (2015; 2017) and the timid activation of the mainstream media, there is a need to increase awareness on the correct use of new media and train critical thinking among people.

Undoubtedly, manipulation has always existed, but those who find the time to deepen take less risks. The exaltation of speed, the poor accuracy in reading the original sources, the loss of places of elaboration and comparison, but also the loss of credibility of the authoritative sources, represent significant critical issues.

The majority of respondents (88.3%) accesses news and multimedia content through social media, while TV (72.8%) and Radio (43.7%) remain high, followed by Magazines (15.5%).

Most used social networks: Facebook (73.8%), Google News (47.6%), YouTube (25.2%) and Twitter (9.7%), Instagram (7.8%), and online newspapers (7%).

In understanding the content origin and its recipients, 23.3% is always able to do it, 65% does it often, and 11.7% sometimes. About the underlying intent of news, 34% understands them, 53.4% often, and 12.6% sometimes. The majority (53.4%) is unaware of click bait practice, and some admit to having fallen into these traps, even with material damage, such as the unconscious activation of paid subscriptions, or by resetting data on their computer, requesting a ransom. Generally this type of practice is found on Facebook and email providers.

Only 3.8% admits to never checking the origin of multimedia content, while 20.4% always does, 47.6% often, and 28.2% sometimes. Those who never check the credentials rises to 28.2%, while only 7.8% always does so, 24.3% often, and 39.8% sometimes. Some declare that they do not have time for these insights, and many avoid it a priori, relying on newspapers and journalists known and considered reliable. The fake news mainly concern the latest events on Covid-19, and against migrants and women.

Compared to specific knowledge on social media, 92.2% accesses via smartphone, 69.9% owns laptop, 54.4% computer, and 35% tablet, and 98.1% has daily Internet access. The majority (57.3%)

evaluates ICT skills at intermediate level, 30.1% advanced, and 12.6% basic. While, on social media, 25.2% consider them advanced, 48.5% intermediate and 26.2% basic. 61.2% would be interested in training courses to improve their competence in new media, in fact only 17.5% has already carried out specific training. 25.2% had previous work experience in this field, and 35% thought of starting their own blog. 68% is interested in contributing with newsletter, blog or online channel for their community.

Suggested themes are: political, social, economic development, quality of life, sport, participation, education, work, urban and waste management, environment, culture, collective memory, democracy, citizenship, rights, Europe. Above all, local news to give value to the talents of the communities, often ignored by the residents themselves. 56.3% is interested in participating in a Local Media Team.

On the availability of infrastructures, 46.6% responds positively, and 32% is able to identify available spaces, while 23.3% is able to identify who could have access to multimedia equipment, and 10.7% indicates supporters for the equipment.

Three types of resources are identified: instrumental, logistical and human.

- Instruments: Internet, computer, printer with scanner, video projector, recorder with high quality microphone, audio system, mixer, radio equipment, camera with tripod, smartphone with good resolution, video editing and suitable software, podcast app to open streaming radio channel, technique, audio-visual archives, drone.
- Logistics: room, chairs, tables, lockers, screen, flipchart. But more than new media, people need more physical meeting places and liveable squares.
- Human resources: beyond the professional skills to carry out quality work, the presence of people who have an integrated and peaceful relationship with their territory and with their fellow citizens.

Implications, recommendations and next steps

The declaration of an elderly person, an 80-year-old pensioner, who feels distant from these issues and not very interested in participating, requires a reflection on the inclusion of those people who could contribute, not so much on the organisational or technological aspects, but on memory, on stories that belong to their places, and on people who have played important social roles for the communities. As well the inclusion of the "new arrivals", migrants who are bearers of cultures, stories, human experiences of distant places.

We would like to conclude with the anthropologist Marc Augé: *"The notion of social network summarises the contradictions of the current situation. Human being is a symbolic animal and needs relationships inscribed in space and time: that is, she/he needs "places" where her/his individual identity can be built in contact with and in comparison with others. The fascination exercised by electronic media is proof of this, but their ideal of ubiquity and instantaneousness is contrary to learning the relationship between individuals, which instead needs time and space."*¹

The Comprehensive Report will be translated into Italian for a wider dissemination and to facilitate a better understanding of the fake news phenomenon at European level.

¹ Sourced from: <https://fondazionefeltrinelli.it/il-bisogno-di-luoghi/>

Wires - Crossed



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