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Urban
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Nextdoor's potential in participatory processes

Neighbourhood & Community

When observing a city or a large metropolis, we do not face a unitary and uniform structure. Rather we face a varied mosaic, a complex system of parts, each with different morphological, functional, and settlement characteristics.
The tiles of such mosaic are indeed neighbourhoods: places where we still recognise traces of local identity, abundant resources, meeting points, and residents' sense of belonging (Balducci, 2001).
Hence, a neighbourhood's characterisation is the product of a multitude of different kinds of relationships happening at different levels. And its peculiar tracts are shaped by the sum of actros' actions and the forms of coexistence among individuals within the same territory (Verga, 2013).

The Dimension of Social Practices

The new organisational tendencies of contemporary society and of its territorial processes result in articulated urban systems (Tosi, 2001). Here everyone weaves its network of relationships on a diffused spatial scale, deploying its ties across many parts of the city. The individual becomes a knot of a social network, which he builds among a certain world of neighbours and a broader system of networks and relationships by choosing the connections he wishes to maintain (Blumer, 1986).
Moreover, the neighbourhood scale is where forms of collective engagement towards shared local topics emerge and often develop into organised structures for civic participation

Civic Participation & Citizens' Engagement

The concept of civic participation defines a form of interaction between institutions and the citizenry that allows citizens – either individually or associated, and at variable degrees of involvement – to contribute to public administration's planning and decision-making process. Civic participation is therefore a structured process of discussion and/or planning on publicly relevant matters, which involves a plurality of subjects (e.g. public institutions, organised groups, experts, citizens, etc…) and opinions, and which can be activated either bottom-up on civil society's impulse or promoted top-down.
Such practices are grounded on a set of participatory methods and techniques aimed at enabling opportunities for debate and discussion between the citizenry and the institutions. Such discussions follow predetermined rules and focus on specific topics within defined time limits, and assume that broad, transparent, and equal information is made available to all the parties involved (Manconi & Porcaro, 2015).

Nextdoor's potential in participatory processes

In recent years new online tools emerged in support of participatory processes. Digital Participatory Platforms (DPPs) are a specific type of Web 2.0 civic technology explicitly built for participatory, engagement and collaboration purposes that allows for user generated content and include a range of functionalities which transcend and considerably differ from traditional social media such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram (Falco & Kleinhans, 2018). DPPs are in fact tools to co-produce 'public value' and to contribute to achieving societal objectives (Falco & Kleinhans, 2018). Nonetheless, the efficacy of such tools is not granted and can be affected by several factors, among which citizens' technological literacy (Afzalan et al., 2017).

Thanks to its high accessibility and to an extremely intuitive interface, Nextdoor seems – instead – to hold all the required potential to overcome such barriers. It can indeed become a platform for civic participation, where to co-create neighbourhood-based projects and initiatives.
As John Dewey (1927) famously wrote "Democracy must begin at home, and its home is the neighbourly community" – in fact the very same neighbourly community that today Nextdoor contributes strengthening also online.

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