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Ostiense and Esquilino on Two Institutional Tourism Websites. Dominant Framings and Possible Reframings

ABSTRACT

This paper sets out to analyse the discursive identity and the main framings of the city of Rome in the English versions of two key institutional tourism websites, *Italia.it* and *Turismoroma.it*, with a focus on the two pilot neighbourhoods of the project «Roaming in Rome»: Ostiense-Garbatella and Esquilino. The visual and verbal features of selected sections of the two websites are examined through multimodal discourse analysis (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001). Finally, drawing on Positive Discourse Analysis (Martin, 2004; Bartlett, 2012), a few examples of other possible stories that could be told about Rome are offered, ranging from international news articles to literary nonfiction works.

KEYWORDS

Institutional Tourism Communication; Multimodal Discourse Analysis; Framing; Positive Discourse Analysis; Rome.

ABSTRACT

Questo articolo si propone di analizzare l'identità discorsiva e i principali *framings* con cui la città di Roma è presentata in due siti turistici istituzionali, *Italia.it* e *Turismoroma.it*, concentrandosi sui due quartieri pilota del progetto «Roaming in Rome»: Ostiense-Garbatella ed Esquilino. Attraverso la *multimodal discourse analysis* (Kress e van Leeuwen, 2001) vengono prese in esame le caratteristiche visuali e verbali di alcune sezioni dei due siti web. Infine, adottando la *positive discourse analysis* (Martin, 2004; Bartlett, 2012), si offrono alcuni esempi di altre storie possibili su Roma tratti dalla stampa internazionale e da opere di saggistica letteraria.

KEYWORDS

Comunicazione Turistica Istituzionale; Multimodal Discourse Analysis; Framing; Positive Discourse Analysis; Roma.

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1. Introduction

This essay presents the results of an exploratory study carried out within the project «Roaming in Rome. Nuove narrazioni per una città non solo eterna», launched by Roma Tre University in 2023. As part of Spoke 9 of the extended partnership CHANGES (Cultural Heritage Active Innovation for Next-Gen Sustainable Society), «Roaming in Rome» focuses on innovative forms of storytelling to promote tangible and intangible cultural heritage among younger generations; expand and vary the relation between centre and periphery, residents and tourists; develop educational projects to improve young people's understanding of their urban environment through the creation of literary, visual and audiovisual documents that promote less central and less celebrated sights of the city, this with the aim of reshaping the image of a contemporary and multicultural Rome.

The goal of developing new bottom-up narratives expressing the identity of the city and involving the active participation of local communities is a natural consequence of an awareness that, in the context of multiculturalism and globalisation, the way a city presents itself in institutional discourses contributes in highly specific ways to the construction of its identity and that of its imagined community (Anderson, 1983). Following a decline of the sense of national identity in the Western world, a complex phenomenon triggered by Globalisation (Ariely, 2012), it has been argued that «the best place to look for a supplement (or a replacement) might be 'down' to the city rather than 'up' to the world» (Bell and de-Shalit, 2014: xi). That is precisely what official tourism websites aim to do through their words and images: their goal is – or should be – to «mediate the social construction of independent communities», but also to «construct and promote for their communities an identity as a welcoming, soothing, (divinely) poignant setting for spiritual, intellectual and cultural fulfilment» (Hallett and Kaplan-Weinger, 2010: 7). In this context, to promote tourism means also to engage in identity construction (Robinson and Smith, 2006).

Given that today city branding – «an increasingly relevant field in the wider sectors of public policy and urban governance» (Paganoni, 2015: 14) – takes place mainly online, through dedicated new-media channels and digital genres, this paper sets out to analyse the discursive identity and the main framings of the city of Rome as represented in the English versions of two key institutional tourism websites, *Italia.it* and *Turismoroma.it*, with a focus on the *Roaming in Rome* project's two pilot neighbourhoods, Ostiense-Garbatella and Esquilino.

Whereas previous studies dealing with the representation of Rome on tourism websites have adopted a quantitative approach (Turnbull, 2017, for texts collected from a variety of sources about Rome as a tourist destination image; Manca, 2016, for an analysis of the homepages of official tourist websites, with a cursory look at Rome's most popular attractions), this paper will adopt a qualitative analytical approach. The research questions that will be ad-

dressed are as follows: what are the visual and textual representations of the two pilot neighbourhoods on Rome's institutional tourism websites? What kind of «destination images¹» emerge? Would it be possible to find alternative framings² by bringing in elements presently excluded from the prevailing destination image?

To answer these questions the visual and verbal features of two selected sections of the institutional tourism websites have been examined through multimodal discourse analysis (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001), starting from the premise that place identity hinges «on the promotion of ideals, images and lifestyles in discourse» (Aiello and Thurlow, 2006: 149). To conclude, drawing on Positive Discourse Analysis (Martin, 2004; Bartlett, 2012), a small selection of other possible stories that could be told about Rome will be offered, ranging from international news articles to literary nonfiction works. These alternative stories all frame Rome as a lively, engaging city, with a human dimension, creating a relationship between tourists and locals as a possible path to sustainability.

2. Corpus

The first institutional website considered, *Italia.it*, labelled «Discover Italy: Official Tourism Website» (in Italian: «Sito Ufficiale del Turismo»), was launched in 2004 under Silvio Berlusconi's government to «give the country a new and modern image, put it online, make it light and accessible»³, closed in 2008 because full of serious mistakes and irremediably slow, relaunched and closed again in 2014, then launched a third time (after being replaced by the less expensive version *Verybello.it*) as a Beta version on June, 27, 2022 in a «marketing technology data-driven and omnichannel platform»⁴ with a mission to «promote the entire tourism ecosystem of Italy in order to enhance,

¹ The concept of destination image was initially introduced to the field of tourism by Hunt (1971) in the early 1970s. During the early stages of research on destination images, scholars such as Crompton (1979), Gartner (1989), and Echtner and Ritchie (2003) examined the internal structure and attributes of a destination image. The definition of destination image proposed by Crompton in 1979 was widely used in the early days of destination image research. Crompton (1979) considered the destination image as the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person has of a destination. Cfr. Wang, Udomwong, Fu, Onpium (2023). More recently, Beerli and Martin (2004) analysed the perceived image of tourist destinations, a composite image formed by taking into consideration different dimensions and attributes of a location. The destination image analysed in this paper is a self-image projected by two Italian tourism institutional websites to attract foreign visitors.

² Dann noticed how «tourists generally filter their experiences according to prior expectations, and the latter in turn have been linguistically framed» (2000: 348).

³ My translation of «dare un'immagine nuova e moderna del Paese, metterlo online, farlo leggero e accessibile» (Turismo, chiuso il portale *italia.it*, 2008).

⁴ *Tourism digital hub. È online la nuova versione "beta" del portale italia.it.* (2022, June 30). Ministero del Turismo. <<https://www.ministeroturismo.gov.it/tourism-digital-hub-e-online-la-nuova-versione-beta-del-portale-italia-it/>>.

integrate and promote its offer»⁵. It's worth noting that all editorial contents have been provided by «pre-existing content platforms» that manifested their interest in the project after the release of a public notice in June 2022. The deadline for contributions has been extended several times, and, at the time of writing, is December 2024⁶.

The second institutional website, *Turismoroma.it*, is defined, in English, as «the city's tourist portal», aiming to provide «information about events, restaurants, transport plus a great deal more interesting details». It is supposedly run by the Dipartimento Grandi Eventi, Sport, Turismo e Moda, although the Italian version specifies that «the editorial committee includes people from Zètema Progetto Cultura (a wholly owned subsidiary of Roma Capitale)» and of the above-mentioned Dipartimento.

3. Methodology

Tourism discourse has been described as largely promotional text that tends to be euphoric, ideologically laden and cliché ridden, with words that «fire the imagination» (Dann, 1996: 74), thus potentially exerting social control over tourists (Turnbull, 2017). The traditional ways of transmitting touristic messages were the written and spoken word; however, as observed by Dann, in a «postmodern age of the image», and «particularly since the advent of the Internet, the emphasis has switched to multimedia presentations focusing predominantly on the visual» (2000: 348). In this context, Kress and van Leeuwen (2001), in their grammar of visual design, invite us to consider visuality, central to the semiotic process of the tourist gaze, as a non-neutral, ideological destination representation strategy. Indeed, in tourism research literature, images are recognised as «an essential component of the process of destination branding» (Ponton and Asero, 2022: 184) and a key feature of the tourism industry (Morgan et al., 2004; Roesch, 2009).

Given the widespread integration of visual resources into communicative acts and discursive practices in computer-mediated communication (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001; van Leeuwen and Jewitt, 2001; Garzone, 2009), the present analysis will combine multimodal discourse analytical tools (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001, Scollon and Levine, 2004; O'Halloran, 2004; Ventola, 2004, Garzone, 2009), developed from Halliday's systemic functional linguistics (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004), with Entman's framing paradigm, whereby «frames become embedded within and make themselves manifest in a text»

⁵ *Terms and conditions*. (2022, November 02). Sito Ufficiale del Turismo – <Italia.it. <https://www.italia.it/en/terms-and-conditions>>, latest update, 16/09/2024.

⁶ See Partecipa all'avviso e contribuisce con i tuoi contenuti al programma turismo digital hub. (2022, June 29). Ministero del turismo. <<https://www.ministeroturismo.gov.it/promuovi-la-tua-italia-su-italia-it-partecipa-ai-contenuti-del-tourism-digital-hub/>>, latest update, 16/09/2024.

(1993: 51), thus influencing user response. The peculiar nature of tourism discourse as a specialised type of discourse (Dann, 1996; Cappelli, 2006; Gotti, 2006; Nigro; 2006; Maci, 2013) and of tourism itself, a complex phenomenon with psychological, sociological and cultural dimensions (Urry, 2002), but also an «act of promotion» with «a discourse of its own» (Dann, 1996: 2), will require an interdisciplinary approach, starting from systemic linguistics, with forays into social semiotics, visual studies and the sociology of tourism.

4. Analysis

The homepage is a very important section of a tourism website and, as has been noticed by Manca, it is likely to contain «most of those cultural features which are typical of the way cultures represent themselves or are represented» (2016: 13). The homepage of *Italia.it*, the official website of the Italian Ministry of Tourism, is dominated by a rather peculiar image of Rome (Francesconi, 2024).

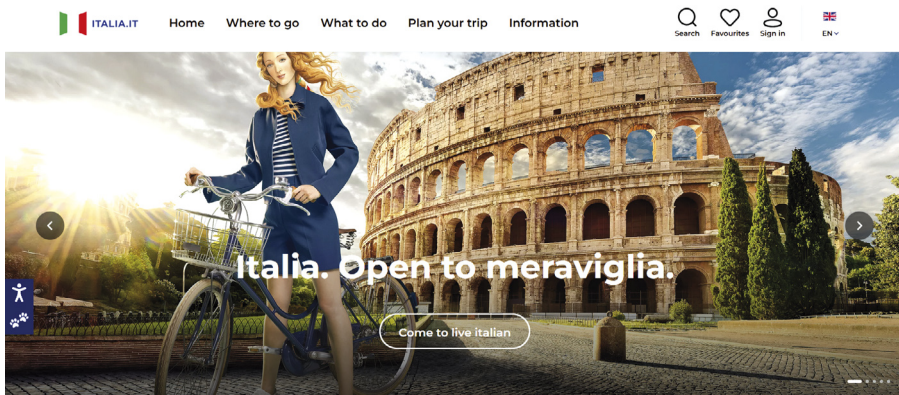


Figure 1 – Homepage of the English version of *Italia.it*

We immediately recognise the Colosseum under baroque sunrays while, at the centre, Botticelli's Venus, brought to life by AI, is wearing shorts and holding a bike. It is a highly symbolic but static image (Giannitrapani, 2010: 53) mixing natural and artificial elements: cypresses, a lawn, clouds and sunbeams, on the one hand; bicycle, theatre, *sampietrini* and «virtual influencer» (a digital avatar created using 3D modeling, animation and artificial intelligence), on the other. The headline metonymically conflates this idealised (artificial) image of Rome with Italy as a whole («Italia»), adding the jaberwocky phrase «Open to meraviglia», followed by the payoff «Come to live italian» (sic), an invitation in the form of an imperative that exhorts the viewers to experience Italy and adopt its peculiar way of living.

If we then run a search for the word «Rome» in the website search box, we find 3071 entries, including 205 «Destinations», 137 «Articles», 7 «Events», 6 «Itineraries» and 19929 «Restaurants». Clearly these numbers do not add up, but they do give a good idea which private entities and economic operators are providing most of the editorial contents for the website. The first section, «Destination», opens with the heading: «She never hides her years, but still wears them well: after all, Rome is the Eternal City». This textual personification of the city as a woman, in this case a woman who ages well, reinforces the most common of stereotypes, that of Rome as the Eternal City, but in a glib, savvy style. The short text that follows is characterised by hyperbolic language and exaggerations, euphoria and clichés; in short, it deploys a rhetoric of excess («A walk through the streets of Rome is a stroll through History with a capital H», «it offers and almost demands endless new discoveries», «the enormity of its artistic heritage», «a place of universal pilgrimage»). Some «unmissable sites» are then suggested under the subheading «What to see in Rome», which includes five sections featuring six items each: «Highlights», «Art & Culture», «Must-see Places», «Sites», «Surroundings».

An entry in the section «Highlights» has the title «Rome is the perfect destination for sustainable tourism». It opens with a suggestion put in the form of a rhetorical question introduced by the verb form «suppose» («Suppose we told you that Rome is the most sustainable city in Italy, or at least strives to be?»), usually used with past tense forms to talk about the present or future in order to suggest something is not likely to be true or to happen. The first two paragraphs are mistakenly repeated twice (but only once with «sustainability», «responsible tourism» and «Rome» in bold). «Eco-friendly accommodation facilities» purportedly ensure «a truly responsible stay», and «environmentally friendly means» like public transport (but also bikes, scooters and Tuk Tuk) offer «the best way to enjoy each attraction without affecting the environment». In the subsection «Eating organically in Rome» traditional Roman dishes (and the restaurants associated with them) are twice set up against the environment by the adversative «but», as if in an attempt to reconcile two opposite drives, hearty eating and ecological ethics («The carbonara from Flavio al Velavevodetto or the cacio e pepe from Felice Testaccio are a source of veneration for virtually all Romans, but safeguarding the environment also requires good food. The flavours are typical, yes; but the cuisine is also attentive to seasonality, using zero-kilometre ingredients»). Finally, sustainability is equated with «slow tourism»; to enjoy this approach, however, visitors will have to refer to «the many tour operators who organise slow and eco-friendly itineraries to discover the Eternal City».

Despite this shallow emphasis on sustainability, the proposed itinerary is hardly sustainable, let alone desirable: we are assured that it is possible to visit «the Eternal city» in two days. It is true that the first suggestion is to «wear comfortable shoes», that is to walk through the city, but unsurprisingly the destinations are those already struggling with overtourism (see Hugues et al.,

2018; Milano et al., 2019): the Colosseum, the Imperial Fora, Piazza Venezia and Piazza del Campidoglio, the Pantheon, the Trevi Fountain, Piazza Navona, the Vatican Museums and the Sistine Chapel, the Basilica of St. Peter, Castel Sant'Angelo, the Belvedere on the Gianicolo, the Botanical Garden and Trastevere.

The highlights do include an «unmissable» site in Garbatella, one of the seven stages of the set for the TV series *Skam Italia*, portraying «the everyday life of people in Rome». This entry offers a striking example of «staged authenticity», defined by MacCannell as a process where tourism providers put their culture on display to attract travellers seeking genuine experiences. The «marker» (that is, the piece of information about the sight), the TV series setting, here becomes the «sight» itself, the place where authenticity is to be found. In this typical case of «marker involvement» – an original form of «sight → marker obliteration» – it is the information about a place (its marker) that «is the object of touristic interest», while the place is «the mere carrier of that information» (MacCannell, 1999: 127-128)⁷.

Garbatella also has a dedicated entry under the label «Historical sites», where it is introduced as «The 'suburb neighbourhood' in the Italian capital» and framed as «vast» but «of humble appearance», just like «a typical village», and at the same time iconic. This description contrasts with the accompanying image which shows the covered roof-terrace (culminating in a tympanum) of the six-storey building attached to the Palladium theatre, one of the most innovative architectural projects of the late 1920s, built in a monumental neo-classical style. Once again, the stratification of historical time has been erased from the website's storytelling, where the prevailing framing of Rome's destination image is that of quaint and picturesque timelessness.

A direct search of the name «Esquilino», the second of our pilot districts, on *Italia.it*, gives no results. Consequently, the entry on Piazza Vittorio Emanuele II, at the centre of the Esquilino district, will be considered in detail as an example of the way this website frames the tourist gaze in relation to the Esquilino neighbourhood.

⁷ As illustrated in the paragraph «The domination of a sight by its markers», obliteration is one of the several types of marker → sight displacement identified by MacCannell (1999: 123-131).

Piazza Vittorio Emanuele II



Overview

The historic green area in the heart of the capital

The multicultural centre of the Esquilino rione, **Piazza Vittorio Emanuele II** is the largest square in the capital. Near Termini Station, it was built following the Unification of Italy, between 1880 and 1887. It is no coincidence that it is dedicated to the first king of Italy and is considered the symbol of the 19th-century "umbertino" culture.

The **garden in the square** is a masterpiece of landscape architecture: a romantic green corner in the city centre, featuring works of art and archaeological finds.

You're sure to be stunned by the so-called "**Magic Door**", flanked by twin grotesque marble statues of the Egyptian god Bes. At the north-western corner of the gardens are the impressive ruins of the **Nymphaeum of Alexander Severus**, a trapezoidal brick structure, originally covered in marble.

In the centre of the garden is the **fountain** featuring tritons, dolphins and a large octopus: the famous sculptural group known as "fritto misto" by the Romans.

In one corner of the square, surrounded by porticoed buildings, is the 4th-century **church of Sant'Eusebio all'Esquilino**.

[Show less](#)

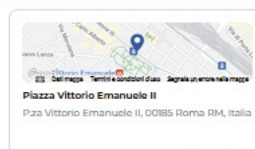


Figure 2 – Piazza Vittorio Emanuele II on the English version of *Italia.it*

Combining Kress and van Leeuwen (2006)'s framework for visual analysis with systemic functional linguistics and the metafunctional system (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004), we can ask: what is the relation between interactive and represented participants, namely the reader and the main visual elements in this webpage? What kind of social distance can be identified?

The image offers the square to the viewer as a mere item of information. As regards the represented participants, an «attributive» symbolic process activates a conceptual representation⁸. The image features inanimate participants (the monumental fountain prior to its recent facelift, the nymphaeum, the trees) depicted «in their timeless, frozen, universal value» (Francesconi, 2014: 87) on a typical sunny day, as the epitome of "Romeness".

⁸ Symbolic processes are frequent in tourist texts, since they represent what the participant means or is. The other processes identified by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) for the representation of participants' stable identity include "classificational" processes, typical of scientific or academic texts, and "analytical" processes, representing part-whole relations, as in topographic maps. It is interesting, in this regard, that Manca has already observed how, in a previous version of this website, images «almost never depict human participants but monuments and attractions, and, for this reason, they can be defined as Conceptual» (2016: 14).

Applying Dann's (1996) framework of analysis, which invites observation of human presence, role and interaction in tourist pictures, another crucial element emerges: the visual space does not feature any human presence, except for a few tiny, barely visible figures in the background. In terms of Halliday's and Kress and van Leeuwen's interpersonal metafunction, the interactive participant is invited to enter the represented natural and artificial space, which becomes an impersonal object of contemplation, a specimen in a display case. The image thus shows a weak interaction, with no interpersonal closeness or intimacy and no contact between interactive and represented participants; the main object, the fountain, is shown in full but without much space around it from a middle distance, in such a way as to exclude any other living presence around, making it the main character in the scene; an objective attitude, from a frontal angle, is adopted, with a low modality (that is, in Kress and van Leeuwen's grammar, low credibility as socially shareable truth), thus affecting the reliability of the message: otherwise we have maximum colour saturation and a plain, unmodulated background. Under the main image, an abstract image showing the square on a tiny map seems to invite the interaction of the viewer, although the map is too small to be of any use.

As regards the ideational metafunction, the range of process types offered in the text is somewhat restricted. We can identify an analytical process, with one carrier (the square) and a number of intensive, circumstantial, possessive attributes related to what it is, where it is located, when it was built, what it features. In contrast to the accompanying image described in the previous paragraphs, where the square was framed as a timeless Paradise, here Piazza Vittorio Emanuele II is inconsequentially introduced as «The multicultural centre of the Esquilino rione»⁹. The text is fundamentally concerned with describing the square in its tourist appeal («the largest square in the capital», «a masterpiece of landscape architecture», «the impressive ruins»), with an impersonal tone resulting from a weak interaction between writer and audience, only mitigated by the presence of a «you» to anticipate the reaction of «wonder» on the part of the reader («You're sure to be stunned by the so-called 'Magic Door'»). The absence of the personal pronoun in the Italian version of this entry makes it clear that the impersonal tone of the English translation is a direct consequence of the even greater social distance that characterises the source text.

In the target text some culture-specific terms or *realia* have been left in Italian, through the rhetorical device of languaging, «the use of foreign words to provide local colour or to flatter the pseudo-linguistic abilities of the reader» (Boyer and Viallon, 1994, quoted in Cappelli, 2013: 353). If the meaning of the first of these loan words, «rione», could perhaps be inferred by the context, since it is preceded by the proper name «Esquilino», and the second, «umbertino» (in inverted commas in the text, used as an attribute of «culture»), is

⁹ The term *rione* indicates any one of the 22 areas in which the centre of Rome was historically divided by Emperor Augustus.

at least partially clarified by the fact that the square is said to be «dedicated to the first king of Italy» (who was actually Re Vittorio Emanuele II di Savoia and who is never mentioned explicitly), one wonders what foreign readers would make of the nickname with which the Romans sarcastically refer to the fountain, «fritto misto», literally “mixed fish-fry”, so called because it presents a confused tangle of three Tritons, a dolphin and a big octopus. In short, this foreignizing strategy (Venuti, 1995) does not seem particularly effective here; rather than giving an exotic allure to the square, it simply confuses the readers attempt to decode the cultural and historical heritage of the city.

Finally, looking at the composition of the whole multimodal text, we notice how the page is split into two parts: the image in the upper section, with an emotive appeal, representing what might be, the ideal; a more informative text in the lower section, indicating in a concise and almost impenetrable way, what is, the real. In the image, salience is given to the ruins and the fountain as cultural symbols, whereas the text is a descriptive piece of writing with mainly unmarked solutions and simple clauses which largely fail in their culture-mediating role. The same can be said for other entries, as for example those dedicated to the Basilica di Santa Maria Maggiore, striking for its «splendour and magnificence», or to Termini Station, described as «A point of reference for commuters and tourists» who, once again, are not visible in the corresponding image which shows only an elegant detail of one side of the building, something that few locals would recognise as Termini station.

The website *Turismoroma.it* presents a similar framing of the two areas, though with a more striking contrast between pictures and inappropriately long texts. Again, Esquilino is framed as a multicultural place, «the area of Rome where the highest number of nationalities and traditions intertwine», «a real cultural melting pot and a crossroads of taste». These traditions, however, seem to be there specifically for the tourist, who can enjoy a wide range of cuisines; if it is a cultural melting pot, that is «thanks to its numerous restaurants and ethnic food shops, and street-food kiosks». Thus, the multicultural character of Esquilino is at once commodified and exoticised («Their exotic character [of the Gardens of Piazza Vittorio] is underlined by the numerous tree varieties from all over the world»). These two distorting framings are a common feature of tourism discourse: Harvey (1989), Mitchell (2000) and Thrift (2000) have reflected on how cultural practices are converted into saleable commodities for economic return, place making, and identity building. Moreover, as observed by Gotham, «local customs, rituals, festivals and ethnic arts become tourist attractions, performed for tourist consumption and produced for market-based instrumental activities» (2002: 1737). This process, resulting from the interplay of the global tourism industry with the local context, is known as tourism commodification (Xiaobo, 2011)¹⁰.

¹⁰ See also, in reference to how Uyghur culture in China has been ‘exotified’ and ‘Sinicised’, O’Brien and Brown (2022).

The same exoticisation connotes the framing of the past and its remains; «the mysterious Magic Door», foregrounded in the text (in bold) and in the image (where it occupies a central position) is «an ancient testimony of a city that hides many myths and mysteries», while the whole area, whose reputation as «a fatal place» where «in the Middle Ages, wizards, witches, and necromancers met [...] to celebrate their magical rites», is said to have remained «unchanged over the centuries». No human figure can be seen in the image, though a few scattered pigeons introduce an element of mundane down-to-earth reality in this supposedly magic space.

On the portal *Turismoroma.it*, the district Ostiense-Garbatella-San Paolo is given one lengthy and verbose entry. Once again, the presentation of Garbatella displays the attributive structures and conceptual representation of the village outside time: «a human scale neighbourhood with a strong personality», characterised by the atmosphere «of a small out-of-time village». The second person pronoun is used throughout the text to create a link with the reader, who is invited to take «a pleasant walk» and to «discover small shops, charming villas, and historic places». No images of Garbatella accompany the text, nor are any «events and services» pinned on the interactive map of the area at the bottom of the page, under the five images of the district that follow the text.

5. Discussion and conclusion: dominant framings and possible reframings

In terms of framing, the two neighbourhoods are represented on both institutional websites as timeless places, in line with the metaphor of Rome as eternal city. This is achieved through the juxtaposition of abstract images and plain text, the latter giving a commodified and exoticised description of shops and restaurant for the sake of attracting paying visitors. However, while giving salience to certain features of this or that place, this framing also implies the exclusion or downplaying of other elements or social actors, a strategy multimodal discourse analysts call «exclusion», «suppression», or «backgrounding» (van Leeuwen, 1996: 39). In this case what is excluded are people, both the locals who live in the area, and the tourists, typically swarming around, queuing or taking photographs in the streets of Rome.

Strikingly, a similar scarcity of human figures was observed in the corpus of tourism photographs of Sicily analysed by Ponton, who concludes that since the absence of people is also found in his reference corpora, it «could thus perhaps be seen as another generic feature of tourism photography» (2023: 15). Ponton admits, though, that there is «something paradoxical in such human absences», since what one might expect is «images to show crowds of tourists flocking to museums or participating in [other] events» (2023: 16).

If this framing is hardly attractive for a potential visitor, other possible reframings can be suggested. With this goal in mind, after deconstructing the dominant framings and discourses on which the representations of Ostiense-

Garbatella and Esquilino on Rome's institutional tourism websites are based, this paper will conclude by offering examples of a tourism discourse «that inspires, encourages, heartens; discourse we like, that cheers us along» (Martin, 1999: 51-52), thus performing what Martin (1999, 2004) calls Positive Discourse Analysis. The intention is «to discover constellations of language features which tell a useful story» (Stibbe, 2017), a story that frames Rome as a lively, contemporary and engaging city, with a human and natural dimension, and includes a proper consideration of ecological issues, offering and promoting examples of possible relationships between tourists and locals as a viable path to sustainability.

A good practice to emulate to put tourists and residents literally “in the picture”, for instance, might be the kind of material produced by the Irish tourist board, Fáilte Ireland (quoted in Francesconi, 2014: 71-103), which shows images of conversations between hosts and guests, introducing the affective dimension of a journey, something entirely lacking in online tourism texts on Italy¹¹, and encouraging in the tourist-viewer a process of identification.



Figure 3 – Carlow: Kilgraney Country House (copyright Fáilte Ireland, in Francesconi, 2014: 84)

¹¹ In her analysis of a corpus of tourism texts taken from the web, Turnbull finds that the category of «Appreciation» is much more frequent than that of «Affect» in the texts, «even in the blogs where more 'personalised' descriptions of Rome might have been expected» (2017: 349).

Another example of positive discourse can be found in a recent feature in the Financial Times written by the Italian journalist Davide Ghiglione¹². In this case the technique of ego-targeting (Dann, 1996: 185) is deployed by having an Italian “insider” (the writer) who identifies some of the possible tourist types (the readers). These «interactive participants» (Kress, van Leeuwen, 2006: 114) include the romantic, the history buff, the architecture enthusiast and the gourmand. The approach offers a much more naturalistic and less picturesque framing of Garbatella, which also has the merit of giving voice to residents. After encouraging his readers to explore the neighbourhood, the author acknowledges the presence and the rights of its citizens: «Local residents are now used to strangers sneaking a glimpse, but be discreet and respectful». In mentioning the Palladium theatre, Ghiglione frames it not as a building of the past, but as a culturally active and popular venue, «one of the venues for the Romaeuropa Festival, a celebration of art, performance art, contemporary dance, theatre, music and cinema that takes place in the city each year»¹³.

The article’s images, shots by the Italo-American photographer Olimpia Piccolo, frame ordinary scenes of local life («environmental portraiture»¹⁴, she calls them), like a line of washing hanged near a peeling damp-stained façade («faded red buildings adorned with laundry that seemed artfully arranged for a photograph»), old Fiat cars and relaxed young people drinking coffees at a local bar made famous by the popular Italian TV series *I Cesaroni*.

Taking our inspiration from literature, a different destination image of Rome as a lively and flamboyant Mediterranean city could be drawn, for example, from Charles Dickens’s sketches of the Roman Carnival, where the English author shares the pleasure of the scene with its mad humour:

[...] carriages on carriages, dresses on dresses, colours on colours, crowds upon crowds, without end [...] the main pleasure of the scene consisting in its perfect good temper; in its bright, and infinite, and flashing variety; and in its entire abandonment to the mad humour of the time – an abandonment so perfect, so contagious, so irresistible, that the steadiest foreigner fights up to his middle in flowers and sugar-plums, like the wildest Roman of them all, and thinks of nothing else till half-past four o’clock, when he is suddenly reminded (to his great regret) that this is not the whole business of his existence [...] (Dickens, 1846/2011: 179).

An illustration published beside the passage and entitled *A Sketch at the Carnival* features a motley crowd in Carnival costumes, offering an interesting

¹² Ghiglione (2022). As specified, this article is part of a guide to Rome from FT Globetrotter.

¹³ Ibidem.

¹⁴ The quote is taken from Olimpia Piccolo’s LinkedIn profile.

visual reframing which would be worth considering when editing tourism web-pages. In fact, the engravings for the section on Rome in Dickens's *Pictures from Italy* was already intended «as a sharp rebuke of the Picturesque 'Grand Tour' architectural scenes»¹⁵. As in the mid-19th century Dickens rejoiced in mixing with the locals on “the Corso” during the Roman Carnival, so today the Chinese New Year celebration in piazza Vittorio Emanuele and the processional singing of holy hymns throughout the Sikh community in the Esquilino district, or the street food festival in Garbatella, to give just a few examples, might well contribute to a more engaging and powerful framing of the city.

Some ten years after Dickens's Italian journey, the American writer Nathaniel Hawthorne, overwhelmed by the energy of the Roman Carnival, concluded that «Only the young ought to write descriptions of such scenes», since his own «cold criticism chills the life out of it» (Hawthorne, 1871)¹⁶. The project «Roaming in Rome» shares this belief in the power of young people's storytelling not only for its documentary value, but also as a leverage for the development of their own civic identity and the promotion of a more informed, ethical and sustainable tourism in an ecological perspective aimed at critically (re)thinking (and translating) the «stories we live by» (Stibbe, 2015; Cronin, 2017).

¹⁵ The engraving was executed by Edward Dalziel for the P.F. Collier re-printing of the Chapman and Hall Household Edition, published in a single volume with Dickens's other travelogue, *American Notes for General Circulation*. A scanned image and text by Philip V. Allingham is available here: <<https://victorianweb.org/art/illustration/thomsonjg/8.html>>.

¹⁶ Entry of February, 13, 1858.

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