
ARTICLE – DIGITAL MODERN LANGUAGES

The Online Presence of Italian Antimafia Associations

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This tutorial explores the online presence of antimafia associations as a means for critically engaging with their mission and the initiatives that they promote. It is aimed at learners of Italian at post-beginner to intermediate level with an interest in accessing a variety of authentic materials, including articles, news items, social media posts, comments, photos, videos, and an interactive map. The activities have been designed to guide the user through these online resources and evaluate them, for example in terms of usability of the website, the links between sections, and the visibility itself of sections and tools.

The focus is on voices and experiences of activists who have resisted organized crime, but also and more interestingly how they got the civil society involved by using online tools. This tutorial stems from the proposition that antimafia culture should be included in the curricula of Italian as a foreign language, as part of a wider interest in presenting issues related to contemporary Italian culture and society in the language classroom. In terms of Modern Languages research, the aim is to bridge the existing divide between ‘language’ and ‘content’ teaching, asking in what ways language classes may incorporate cultural elements.

Introduction

How can civil society help in fighting organized crime? What initiatives have been promoted in Italy? How can initiatives that are promoted in a specific local area in Italy engage in dialogue with a worldwide audience? This tutorial explores the online presence of antimafia associations as a means for critically engaging with the aims and activities that they promote. The focus is on the voices and experiences of activists who have resisted organized crime, but also – and more interestingly – how they encouraged the involvement of civil society. Through this tutorial, you will learn about the online resources available to take part in the fight against organized crime.

The vast majority of the webpages you will need to access are in Italian and you will be exposed to a range of authentic materials (articles, news items, blog/social media posts, comments, photos, videos, an interactive map). The tutorial, almost entirely in English, will provide the context necessary to access the website and get acquainted with its content. You will be able to answer the questions in English/your language (focus on receptive skills) or Italian (focus on productive skills), depending on your level.

The activities have been designed to guide the user through an understanding of how to engage critically and evaluate online resources. You will focus on the structure and usability of a specific website and will evaluate how the message of the association it represents is transmitted to visitors. You will consider elements such as the strategic choice between static pages, interactive pages and social media tools, and discuss how the structure of the website itself may contribute to the narrative that is presented.

The activities that follow use the [Addiopizzo](#) website as a case study, but they can be adapted to other websites by similar associations. In general, this tutorial can have wider applications for the analysis and evaluation of institutional websites in the language classroom.

Learner's profile

This tutorial is aimed at learners of Italian as a foreign language. Its content has been trialled at secondary-school (see Panzarella) and undergraduate level, but because of the topic and the challenges that it poses, adult learners will find it interesting and stimulating, too.

As this tutorial can be accessed with no further support by teachers, it is particularly intended for people who want to practise their Italian at post-beginners or intermediate level. Depending on your level, you may want to answer the questions in English/your own language or in Italian. The activities have been designed to accompany the learner when exploring and evaluating online resources in Italian in a gradual way: if you answer the questions in Italian – either orally or in writing – you will see that activities become gradually more challenging. Italian language teachers might want to alert students to this tutorial when they are required to rely on self-directed study, for example during the summer break.

From the point of view of digital skills, an evaluation of a specific website, its various sections and usability will be the central learning point of this tutorial. You will become acquainted with the context in which the initiatives have been developed in order to be able to focus on specific sections of the website, such as the homepage and an interactive map. To make the most of this tutorial, you will be guided through a series of tasks to help gain a basic understanding of the design and usability of an institutional website, as well as an awareness of the potential and limitations of a website for a non-profit organization. One of the tasks, for example, centres on navigating an institutional website to source information: you will be challenged by activities that ask you to reflect on the static versus interactive nature of pages and on the usability of the website more widely. For one of the activities, you will use an interactive map and explore how it integrates other resources that the website provides; you will also explore social media profiles to reflect on the online presence of Italian antimafia associations beyond their websites. In terms of transferable skills, the focus is on professional-related skills, such as marketing strategies when campaigning for a non-profit organization by employing digital tools.

Why do we need this tutorial?

Italy's and in particular Southern Italy's historical links to organized crime has had an impact on the public perception and representations of the country. The popular imagination is permeated by the presence of a narrative around the mafia that encourages stereotypes and generalizations. Movies, such as the classic *The Godfather*, are an example of how popular culture has been influenced beyond artistic reception and have also contributed to the building of a specific imaginary around Italy. Television, too, has played a role in this, as Dana Renga points out:

Italian television series focusing on national criminality, and in particular on organized crime, are plentiful and are growing rapidly in popularity. This is particularly interesting as Italy's mafias are deadly, lucrative, adaptable, *and* international structures. Mafias such as the Camorra, Cosa Nostra, and 'Ndrangheta are culturally specific while also global in nature. They have pervaded almost every facet of cultural life and have left tens of thousands of victims. (266, italics in the original)

While there is a strong focus on the connection between Italy and the mafia, such narratives are one sided as we should also remember the existence of recent antimafia movements and initiatives. These are much less known, publicized and discussed, especially in the language-learning context. This tutorial stems from the proposition that antimafia culture should be included in the curricula of Italian as a foreign language, as part of a wider interest in presenting issues related to contemporary Italian culture and society in the language classroom.

From a methodological point of view, this tutorial belongs in the digital humanities because of the centrality of the critical understanding of online resources and awareness-building activities. In particular, the focus is on the need to encourage learners to engage critically with websites via a series of activities whose overall aim is an evaluation of the online resources available. It is also informed by the CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) methodology, with an emphasis on the concept of 'culture' and intercultural competence. In addition, this tutorial positions itself within a debate on to what extent language teaching should incorporate cultural elements: in terms of Modern Languages research, the aim is to bridge the divide between 'language' and 'content' teaching, asking in what ways language classes may incorporate cultural elements.

TUTORIAL: The online presence of Italian antimafia associations

1. A Webquest on Antimafia
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1. A Webquest on antimafia

As a **first step**, you should build up some knowledge about antimafia initiatives. There are plenty of resources available online, ranging from news items to data and information provided by relevant institutions. You may want to research some key figures in the fight against the mafia, such as prosecutors Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino, and activist Peppino Impastato.

A way to approach the search through such a vast range of resources is to map your reading against the grid below. Fill the grid with the keywords that you identify and the information you find. You may need to adapt the grid depending on the resources you explore, for example adding new columns with new criteria.

Keyword	Online newspaper	Institutional websites	Wikipedia	Social media	Other
1. 'antimafia'	/	/	https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antimafia		
2. 'certificato antimafia'	'Certificato antimafia: per cittadini e imprese da ora solo in Prefettura' in https://www.toscanaoggi.it/Toscana/Certificato-antimafia-per-cittadini-e-imprese-da-ora-solo-in-Prefettura				
3. ...					

Now reflect:

- What are the strengths and the limitations of such sources? Do you believe that they are all reliable? (e.g. maybe some resources have not been updated recently? Is the author of the website stated clearly? Are these institutional websites, or personal websites/blogs?)
- Are there results referring to news/initiatives outside Italy?
- How is antimafia presented on social media? Are networks or groups localized in a specific area or are they active globally?

As a **second step**, you will expand on the notion of antimafia and consider the role played by civil society. This tutorial focuses on the Italian context, but it might be interesting to explore initiatives outside Italy (for example, the association [Mafia? Nein Danke!](#) in Berlin) and the networks of collaboration that have been established. Our Webquest continues with [initiatives by civil society in fighting organized crime](#) (you may start with those listed on the Wikipedia page). Make sure you prioritize Italian websites and use the questions below for guidance:

- In what ways does organized crime have an impact on people's everyday life? What actions has civil society taken to fight organized crime?
- Are these initiatives one-off events or long-term projects?
- Can these initiatives be joined in only by people based in a specific territory? In what ways does the internet help?
- What is the link between these initiatives and education? Is there a specific attention on school activities?

While researching the range of antimafia initiatives and their online presence, you may also keep in mind the following remark by Robin Pickering-lazzi:

The sites and networks explicitly engaged in fighting all mafia organizations and forms of corruption include, for example, Addiopizzo, Ammazateci Tutti, the Associazione Antimafie Rita Atria, Libera, and Legalmente m'intendo. Although features of their landscapes vary, such networks solicit travellers through news reports, interviews, videos, discussion forums, comment posting, and opportunity for online and offline volunteer works. These medial forms and enterprises enable engagements with lawful

models of identity and the visitors' own inventive expressions and acts composing the cultural formation of legality. (5–6)

2. Case study: Addiopizzo website

We will now focus on a specific case study – the [Addiopizzo website](#) – to investigate the role played by the online presence of antimafia initiatives. In particular, we will engage with how digital tools may convey the mission of Addiopizzo's initiatives and facilitate the association's interaction with civil society.

Addiopizzo is an example of an association that gets civil society involved in the everyday fight against organized crime. It speaks about 'azioni quotidiane antimafia', particularly in the area of an ethical consumer strategy. It shows that the mafia is not fought against in courts alone, but that Addiopizzo's campaign is meant to be followed and received by the whole civil community. For instance, inviting business owners to display the Addiopizzo logo on their front doors is a way for them to show the community that they are not contributing to the pizzo (protection money) system. The logo sends a signal that the fight against the mafia is something to which everyone can contribute.

2.1 Meet Addiopizzo and its *Manifesto del cittadino consumatore per la legalità e lo sviluppo*

By exploring the Addiopizzo website, you will now engage with some key resources available and learn more about the organization.

- The [Chi siamo](#) page briefly describes the purpose of the association. As you will see, the central point of its mission is to engage with the impact that racketeering has on the everyday life of consumers.
- A key section of the website is the [Manifesto del cittadino consumatore per la legalità e lo sviluppo](#). On this page, users can sign the manifesto and commit to the principles of *consumo critico*, namely reiterating the active role played by consumers that meet their responsibility by choosing products and services provided by those who do not pay the pizzo.
- The list of subscribers is published in the [Elenco firmatari manifesto consumo critico](#). Interestingly, the same page is linked on the website's main banner in a way that stresses the active role of subscribers by defining them as 'che li sostengono' ('supporters').

2.2 Learn about Addiopizzo's initiatives

Is the homepage the most important part of a website? In what ways does [homepage design](#) affect the usability of the website? Among other features, the homepage of Addiopizzo hosts a space called *Rubriche*. Click on the link to the *Rubriche* page and answer the following:

- Why do you think this space has been named *Rubriche*? What does the word mean? What is the origin of its use? What is the equivalent in English (linguistically and culturally, e.g. in a newspaper)?
- What is the role played by the map on this page?
- In what ways is the list of items organized?
- Now click on the *News* section. What sorts of news are hosted on the website? Are these news items that you would expect might appear in newspapers?

Now click on any of the items listed at the end of this *Rubriche* section of the website, so that you can see how each piece of content is presented to the user.

- Why is the first paragraph of the page in a larger font than the rest of the text?
- What is the purpose of the social media bar at the end of the text? Who may want to share these news pages on their social media?

At the end of each text you can access both other Rubriche items and another section of the website named *News*.

- What is the difference between the *Rubriche* section and the *News* section?
- Why are the Rubriche items more visible (with the most recent items published on the homepage) while the News section is only accessible through the main menu?
- 'Addiopizzo discloses information strategically to address the problems affecting either its own activities or those of its affiliates' (Vaccaro 30). Comment on this excerpt by reflecting on the risks and benefits that may be associated with sharing information with the public.

2.3 Databases and interactive map

The right-hand side of the homepage gives you access to a key section of the website. By clicking on the number of 'negozi imprese addiopizzo', you will access a database connected to an interactive map. This database lists and organizes by category (such as clothing, restaurants etc.) the businesses that are part of the Addiopizzo network.

- Which other categories are included in the list? Do any of these categories surprise you (for example in terms of being businesses that need to resist rackets)?
- Looking at the businesses listed, can you think of an additional category that would facilitate users' access to the database?
- In addition to the use of categories, which other tool would you consider when evaluating how to improve the accessibility of this database?

The database is also accessible via an **interactive map** that can be used to explore the businesses that are part of the Addiopizzo network by using geographical criteria. The uses of this resource are numerous, especially because the section of the website that lists shops and businesses is very large and counts more than a thousand businesses. For example, the map can be used to select a specific area of the city to check which businesses there are part of the Addiopizzo network and safe to shop in from the perspective of consumers who value the *consumo critico*.

- Zoom in and out of the map. Is there an area where participating businesses are more concentrated? Why do you think this is the case? Are the businesses only in Sicily?
- This tool is useful when planning a trip to Palermo. Imagine that you are a tourist and want to spend a couple of hours in a specific area of the city. Which shops would you visit and why? What do you expect to find there?
- Now visit this webpage using a mobile device. Is the page equally accessible? Think of the context of someone checking the map while visiting the city and reflect on the usability of this page and of the map from a mobile device.

2.4 Interaction with the world

On the 'clicca sui numeri di Addiopizzo' banner, you will find a link to [Messaggi di solidarietà dal mondo](#). This section shows that the support received by Addiopizzo goes beyond the local area of Palermo or Sicily, as messages were received from an international audience.

People have commented on the association's initiatives in various languages, which gives an interesting perspective on how antimafia movements are discussed and perceived in Italy and abroad.

- Why is this section of the website given such visibility? Reflect on the importance of showing that support comes from all over the world.
- Before reading the comments, try and think what kind of message you would personally leave on the website. Which aspect of the association would you comment on and why? Why would you use the *messaggi di solidarietà* section of the website instead of one of the organization's social media pages? How do you think a comment on the website is different from a comment on a social media platform?
- Now read some of the comments on the website. Which topics do users address the most?
- Pick one of the comments that you find particularly interesting. Is the person commenting on Addiopizzo or referring to their own personal experience? If you could get in touch with the person who wrote the comment, what would be your first follow-up question to engage in a conversation with them?
- At the top of the page, it is specified that this is only a selection of the messages received. What criteria do you think have been used to select messages?
- Look at the dates of the messages. Comment on this, considering the static nature of the webpage, evaluating the pros and cons of updating it regularly.
- Is there a way to leave new messages? Why do you reckon this has changed?
- Reflect on the social media accounts that Addiopizzo manages and, in general, on the organization's online presence beyond the website. Are the logos of Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest visible on the homepage? Why do you think that these specific social media can serve the purpose of connecting Addiopizzo with followers?

2.5 Revamping the website

There are other sections of the website worth exploring. For instance, one page accessible from the homepage menu is devoted to the Progetto scuola – the purpose of which is to 'testimoniare il percorso di antimafia dal basso di Addiopizzo'. Addiopizzo is also linked to two enterprises, Addiopizzo Travel (whose website includes a section on Viaggio studio) and Addiopizzo Store, an e-commerce outfit whose aim is to 'valorizzare i produttori che aderiscono alla rete di consumo critico Pagochinonpaga'.

Following the previous activities, you will now be very familiar with this website, its subpages and their purposes. To conclude this tutorial, complete the following activities either in writing or orally. If you prefer an oral production, consider drafting a script and/or recording yourself in order to be able to focus on accuracy. Either way, you may want to show your production to a fellow learner, or your teacher, to receive some feedback.

- Based on your previous comments, make an overall evaluation of Addiopizzo's online presence by using the existing website as a starting point for analysis.
- Can you identify one or more areas for improvement? Would you recommend changes in terms of how the website is structured? Please consider the usability of the website, the links between sections and the visibility of specific sections that you believe should be highlighted.
- How would you use this website to summarize the mission of Addiopizzo? Use the website as the main resource to narrate your story of Addiopizzo, making the most of the pathway that you have identified between sections.

Conclusions

You are now familiar with Addiopizzo's website and its features, as well as with how the online presence of antimafia associations facilitates the spreading of antimafia-related initiatives at a local but also global level. The website of the Addiopizzo association serves as a valuable resource to get a sense of how various online tools to fight against the mafia interact. Reflect on your language learning: authentic language such as that encountered here could be a challenge, but hopefully navigating the website by following the prompts of the activities provided some guidance.

Additional note for teachers

This tutorial can be extended to other languages by focusing on an association based in the country where the language is spoken. An example could be the abovementioned website of *Mafia? Nein Danke!* available in both Italian and German. The topic of the tutorial may be expanded so as to include a wider range of initiatives, keeping the focus on investigating how such initiatives benefit from an online presence by evaluating the online resources available.

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