Narratives and Narrative Approaches in the Social and Educational Sciences. By Way of Introduction

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1. Narrative are modes of speech which have to do with time and action. In its essential structure, a narrative deals with a process by which A (a human being, an animal or an object) goes through a process of transformation from an initial stage X to a final stage Y (Eco, 1979, p. 30). Thus, in order to be qualified as a narrative, a speech has to do with actors, time, and changes. Even this minimal definition of narratives should suffice to show the relevance of narrations as both a mode of communication and a resource for the social sciences. The social scientist deals with action, time and change, and may therefore take advantage of narratives as pieces of communication particularly apt to describing social processes.

Another relevant connection between narratives and the social sciences is meaning. By narrating, people share meanings with their fellow-people. As social actors, we generally share meaning by telling a story. By recounting, we share our experience with other people, we get to know other people's actions or experiences, we may communicate what other people have done and, in so doing, we generate communicative interchange. Since meanings has been considered, at least from Weber onwards, as the basic stuff of society, hence a prerequisite for the bulk of social processes (from the micro level of social action and interaction up to institutional and system phenomena), narrations are to be intended as constitutive elements of the social.

Meaning may be narratively communicated and shared in so far as narrations are endowed with a cognitive quality. According to Carr, what makes

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telling a story particularly apt as a mode of explanation is its proximity to everyday common sense (Carr, 2008, p. 21), by which he means that when we explain things by adopting a narrative, we use a communicative and cognitive mode which is typical of everyday reasoning. However, regardless of their affinity with everyday reasoning, narratives are highly artificial pieces of communication, through which social actors give meaning to theirs and other people experiences by selecting events, placing them in a specific time, interconnecting them, for example in a temporal perspective (A after B) or a casual relation (A because of B).

This interconnecting quality of narratives has been analysed chiefly by Louis Mink (1970) and Paul Ricoeur (1984), according to whom, by narrating, we put separate aspects of reality together, and give coherence to them within the structure of the narrative speech act. Thus, as we tell a story, we make sense of a variety of differentiated elements which would remain otherwise unrelated. It is through narratives that we understand action, and this accounts for the universal nature of narration. If we want to explain something unusual which is happening, we may resort to telling a story (a simple example: a traffic jam may be explained by telling of a car accident). Regardless of its everyday nature, there is nothing natural (or true) about narratives. They are modes of constructing the order of events, by establishing interconnection which are neither univocal nor unambiguous.

2. The idea according to which narratives are meaningful modes of construction of reality contradicts the strong conviction that, by recurring to narratives, the social scientists may get to the core experience of the social actors. Paul Atkinson (1997) has written about the relevance of narrative methods for qualitative inquiries, stressing nonetheless that they are often affected by an excess of optimism as to their truthfulness. Atkinson writes that the attention for narratives is rooted in a long-standing tradition, dating back to the Chicago School of Sociology, by which the main task of sociological analysis is to portrait real life from the standpoint of the individual actor. In the search for authenticity, social inquiry has given narratives (especially in the form of narrative interviews) a central position as a research method, as if in the process of interviewing the social scientist could guarantee himself a direct access to the respondent's experience (including actions and interactions) and internal world (including emotions, motivations, attitudes). This applies particularly to the case of narrative interviews: «The very notion of the in-depth interview – Atkinson writes – often carries with it connotations that the surface of the respondent can be probed, and that the personal, private aspects of the "experience" can be rendered visible through dialogue» (Atkinson, 1997, p. 327). This highly romantic conception of qualitative methods (the in-depth interview in particular) does not take

into account the highly artificial nature of narrations (of every-day narratives, hence narratives we use in our daily intercourses, too). Let alone the possibility of lying, by narrating the social actor does not reproduce reality as it is, since he reconstructs his and his fellow-man's action and experience, through a process of selection and omission, emphasis and exclusion. According to Paul Ricoeur, emplotment (e.g. the construction of a narrative) is the linguistic mechanism by which the teller gives uniformity to the incoherence of human actions. Hence, narrating implies «a synthesis of the heterogeneous» which is brought about by the emplotment process (Ricoeur, 1984, p. 7). What emerges from any narrative is not a realistic mirroring of what has happened, but a coherent representation in which the discordant aspects of the actor's experience are made logically consistent and cognitively plausible. Thus, a piece of narrative can never «be the simple imitation of life, in the sense of mirroring or representing it. Narrative mimesis [...] is not reproduction but production, invention. It may borrow from life but it transforms it» (Carr, 1991, p. 170).

The artificiality of narratives does not account for their uselessness. Let alone their cognitive and communicative function, it is through narratives that we share meaning and hence create social bonds. Sharing meanings means sharing stories. This has relevant social effects, both on the meso and macro levels. On the meso level, groups and organizations need stories to consolidate collective identities. On the macro-level, (as an example) national identities, as highly artificial constructions, are based on narratives of ancestors, enemies and heroes (Anderson, 1991). Thus, (paraphrasing Thomas' theorem) although narratives are never mere reproductions of reality, they are real in their consequences (hence in the way we perceive, conceive, understand the world).

3. In this issue devoted to narratives and narrative methods we have collected papers which use as empirical materials both narrations, which are directly referred to some aspects of reality (narrative interviews, for examples), and narratives which are patently fictive, made-up, a-referential. If one adopts a referential perspective, by which narratives consist chiefly of assertion (that is a kind of speech act which commits the narrator to saying the truth), the question of the use of fictional narratives would appear as ill-posed (Searle, 1975). Only referential narrations (hence reports, confessions, everyday stories, news and the like) could be used as data for social research. Otherwise, we would commit our analysis and results to manifestly fictional accounts, paradoxically admitting that some form of scientific truth may come from made-up narratives. In the field of historical sociology, Peter Laslett (1976) has dealt with the thorny methodological problem of the use of fictional sources of data for empirical research, stating that liter-

ary accounts may distort reality, such that the social scientist may look at social phenomena "the wrong way through the telescope". Laslett's critique is plausible, provided that one specifies what kind of data a social scientist is looking for when resorting to literary narratives. If looking for quantitative data, for example the average age a girl got married in England in the 17th century, making reference to Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* may be deceptive, since parish registers provide accountable date that show that the age was higher than thirteen (Juliet's age). However, if we want to investigate complex social phenomena, such as the social relations between sexes (e.g. the conception of love and marriage), resorting to novels such as Richardson's *Pamela*, Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* or Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, may prove an inexhaustible source not only of data, but also of theoretical insights. The strength of fictional narratives is, paradoxically as it may sound, to be detected in their distorting capacity. They do not reproduce reality: they amplify it, through the complex, multi-layered, meaningful artificiality of literary writing. By adopting Pablo Picasso's effective sentence, art (in this specific case literature) «is the lie that reveals the truth», that is the artificiality which leads us (including social scientists) to penetrate deeply into otherwise unperceivable (or neglected aspects) of reality (Falck, 1988, p. 369).

What is needed for the social scientist is a non-referential conception of the relation between narrative and reality. Narratives are always made-up accounts. They do not, as Paul Ricoeur has masterfully demonstrated, simple mirror what is out there. They are, on the contrary, the output of the interconnection of events and temporal processes which eventually produce socially shareable meaning. Thus, the problem is not, like in the case of a referential conception of language (Searle, 1975), to neatly distinguish between fictional and non-fictional narratives. Both fictive and non-fictional narratives are based on the artificial linkage of otherwise unconnected events and actions (Simms, 2003, pp. 79-80), in such a way as to construct meaningfulness. As per Ricoeur, this process of constitution of meaning, artificial as it may seem, consists of «grasping the operation that unifies into one whole and complete action the miscellany constituted by the circumstances, ends and means, initiatives and interactions, the reversals of fortune, and all the unintended consequences issuing from human action» (Ricoeur, 1984, p. x).

Once the question of the difference between fictional and non-fictional narratives has been made less dramatic, one may resort even to literary narratives with a greater methodological awareness. There are many reasons why we may use fictional narratives as research instruments. Some are very complex. We hint here to three of them:

a. literature (fiction in particular) gives us a kind of knowledge that is not as abstract as scientific learning and not as trivial as common sense.

In literary fiction, the case as described by the author takes an exemplar nature. Literature gives typicality to the single case. Although the story refers to events, incidents, characters which are unique, they are perceived as endowed with an exemplar nature (Bruner, 1991, pp. 6-7; Luckas, 1971). For example, Anna Karenina is a noble woman in 19th century Russia. She tells us much not only about her character, but also about habits, ideas, behaviours of coeval Russian aristocratic women. Thus, her character tells the reader (including the social scientist) much about her social environment, its values, habits and norms;

b. another relevant quality of literary fiction is that it works with the unexpected. A novelist may lead «… people to see human happenings in a fresh way, indeed, in a way they had never before "noticed" or even dreamed» (Bruner, 1991, p. 12). Think of *Reunion* by Fred Uhlman in which we learn to see Nazi from an unexpected perspective;

c. Milan Kundera (1988) has once stressed, from the point of view of the novelist, that fictional narratives (the novel in particular) does not only confirm our sense of reality, but sometimes recreates it, from a new, unusual perspective. The category of the Kafkesque, for example, is used to define some contradictory aspects of modern society, yet the set of ideas it condensates was not even conceivable until Kafka wrote his stories.

4. Neuroscientists have stressed the fact that the human mind is chiefly narrative. This accounts for the transcultural nature of narrations, which are a constitutive component of any society (regardless of time and space) and the translatability of pieces of narratives from one language into another (Barthes, 1975) Translatability accounts for the structural nature of narrations, as well as for their relevance not only as a mode of communication, but also as a mode of cognition. In this specific regard, Jerome Seymour Bruner refers to narratives as a tool to deal with, from an original perspective, the old distinction between ideographic and nomothetic approaches to knowledge (Bruner, 1986, pp. 11 *ff.*). When we tell a story, we activate a specific form of understanding, which gives order to the complex chaos of human existence. Bruner distinguishes between two modes of understanding: the paradigmatic and the narrative. Both try to come to terms with the problem of the complexity of reality, by interconnecting events and phenomena, so as to give order to our scattered perceptions. In order to explain the phenomena, the paradigmatic model makes reference to general categories. On the contrary, the narrative mode focuses on the concrete relations, in the situational dimension as exemplified within the story (*Ivi*, p. 13). The specific knowledge-value of a narrative depends, according to Bruner, on its capacity to locate the universal elements of human experience in a specific time and space (hence in an actual, concrete, situation). By narrating, we give sense to

reality, and in particular to individual and collective actions and the motives triggering them. Mark Turner (1996) is even more radical when he states that narratives (including fictional narrations) are the original mode we adopt to understand the world. Stories are relevant in so far as it is through narrations that we define our understanding of the world. In Turner's effective words: «Narrative imagining – story, is the fundamental instrument of thought. Rational capacities depend upon it. It is our chief means of looking into the future, of predicting, of planning, of explaining. It is a literary capacity indispensable to human cognition» (Turner, 1996, pp. 4-5). Both Turner and Bruner stress the fact that our mind is essentially narrative. As per Turner, we give sense to events by constructing small, everyday stories: "now she is going to pour me some tea"; "we have to get ready: it is time to leave"; "she will cross the road and come to me". The further step is to connect the stories with more general categories (hospitality, travel, meeting friends) which are, at any rate, based on our capacity to recount. Which implies, according to Turner, that even what Bruner calls paradigmatic mode is, at a closer look, based on the narrative model.

According to Turner, general categories, abstractions, formulas are all deeply rooted in our capacity to recount. If we assume that our mind is chiefly narrative, we may easily understand that any attempt to contest the cognitive value of narratives may be intended as a late-positivist claim to reduce knowledge to abstract formalizations. Moreover, if our mind is structured upon narratives, this implies that a sharp difference between fictional and non-fictional narratives is by now ever less relevant, since both are based on analogous mental patterns.

5. Moving from these introductory remarks, this issue collects papers which reflect on, from different perspectives and vantage points, "*Narrative approaches in social and educational sciences*". With the aim of developing a necessarily unfinished and ongoing appraisal of narrative approaches as an instrument of research and analysis in social and educational sciences, a call for papers was launched in order to invite reflections either offering a critical assessment of the use(s) of narratives for the analysis of social and educational processes, or presenting empirical/field research carried out assuming both fictional (including movies) and non-fictional narratives as empirical materials, or discussing the use of literary or artistic narratives of various kinds for better understanding phenomena connected to social and educational contexts.

By adopting a non-referential conception of narratives, two main results may be achieved. The first is connected to an aware conception of narratives, whose cognitive value is linked to the capacity of narrations to convey not a mirroring representation of reality, but a complex set of information about

social values, habits, hierarchies, modes of expressions and attitudes. The second result is to overcome the naïve idea according to which qualitative methods, in so far as they adopt a narrative model, are able to understand the social actor and his real self. Obviously, the papers presented in the issue do not intend to – and may not – cover the wide range of methodological and theoretical issues connected to and underlying the use of narrative approaches in social and educational sciences. They are rather to be intended – as it is made clear in the first two papers of this issue – as a (partial) inventory of possible questions and challenges emerging when considering the relevance and the potentialities of narratives as tools for understanding the social.

In the first paper, Maria Carmela Catone and Paolo Diana provide an overview of the role of narratives for sociological analysis, from both a theoretical and a methodological point of view. The analysis focuses on three aspects: firstly, the authors offer a concise description of the main features of the narrative process and of how narratives allow sociologists to understand everyday life in contemporary society. In the second part of the paper, they delve into the similarities and differences between «traditional and emerging techniques», that is on the challenges that empirical research faces when dealing with the so-called "digital narratives". Finally, assuming the distinction between the "digitization" of methods and "natively digital" methods, Catone and Diana examine some features of the emerging techniques aimed at analysing narratives embedded in new digital environments, thus highlighting the renewed need «to connect the multiplicity of digital traces and contribute to the reflective interrogation of the empirical material emerging from digital contexts».

In the second paper, Giuseppe Annacontini scrutinizes the practice of narrative approaches from a pedagogical perspective. In particular, the «*Narration of Self*» is assumed as a vantage point from which critically reflecting on the pedagogical relevance of narrative practice, understood by the author as the bearer of «the improvement and the strategically oriented modification of the circumstances of educational action». The experience of narrative thus becomes «the story of the transformation of a "maybe being" into a new way of "being present"». The paper identifies some areas of reflective competence that can be involved and activated in self narrative practices and, on this basis, presents an inventory of skills useful to support the development of tools aimed at evaluating the formative quality of narrative experiences. Several «warnings» are also highlighted throughout the paper, thus giving rise to a critical argumentative line for the evaluation of narrative performances and the discussion of the pedagogical qualities necessary for the educational use of self-storytelling.

The next two papers explore the use of narrative approaches in connection with educational practices and lifelong learning policies.

In her contribution, Elisa Rossi focuses on "*The Social Construction of Gender in Adult-Children Interactions and Narratives*". The paper is based upon data collected through audio and video recording during extracurricular activities carried out in schools of different grades in Northern Italy. Moving from the opposition between education understood as "monologues" and as a form of "dialogue and facilitation", the paper adopts a performative and conversational approach to narratives in order to «investigate how gender is narrated and interactionally accomplished». While recognising the perpetuation of gender stereotypes and the «reproduction of narratives of the traditional and dominant gender order», the analysis reveals a wide range of forms of interaction and interplay among the narratives produced in the investigated contexts. At the same time, Rossi interestingly argues for the adoption of specific forms of dialogic facilitation as able both to contrast children's prejudices and gendered representations, as well as to promote new narratives, so as to foster the production of new alternative narratives.

In the fourth paper, Mauro Palumbo, Sebastiano Benasso and Valeria Pandolfini discuss a section of a three-year project funded by Horizon 2020, aimed at analysing Lifelong Learning policies targeted at young adults in Europe. The paper specifically focuses on the 'storytelling strategy' adopted to examine the chosen case studies in their social, political and economic realities. Within the specific context of this special issue of *IJSE*, this offers an interesting vantage point from which to consider the use of storytelling – and more generally of narrative approaches – in policy analysis. As argued by the authors, this approach allows «to take into consideration the different levels (from transnational to local) at which the discourses surrounding and shaping LLL policy making interact, as well as the interplay of different governance patterns involved in the implementation». Furthermore, the two case studies discussed in detail throughout the paper give full evidence of a method able to be inclusive and representative of the perspectives and interests of both decision-makers, policy implementers and addressees.

A third group of papers deals with – either from a theoretical or empirical perspective –issues that refer to religion, migration and mobility.

In "*Performance as embodied narratives in young Italian Muslim women*", a theoretical framework through which conceptualizing daily cultural practices of young Muslims women living in Italy is discussed. At the basis of the analysis, there is the concept of performance, understood «as a narrative that primarily calls into question the body». In particular, the paper emphasizes the need to refer to «performativity as embodied narrative». On this basis, Letteria Fassari and Gioia Pompili clarify the methodological premises of the tool they adopt so as to analyse the narratives collected through inter-

views and focus-groups with young Muslim women living in Italy. Moving from the results of their research, they try to clarify the relevance of their analytical tool centred on the performative dimension, so as to understand «how the actors "performs" their social experience», that is the ways many social, symbolic and discursive dimensions are intertwined in the body of Muslim young women.

Guido Di Fraia, Elisabetta Risi and Riccardo Pronzato adopt a socio-narrative approach in order to explore how young Italians represent the phenomenon of migration, by considering the role of media in shaping the collective imaginary. Authors define their research questions according to the two core processes through which social representations take shape, while also considering the narrative dimension. The interviews carried out with young people living in the Milan area highlight the presence of a common basic narrative structure, based on the narrative distinction between "us" and "them" as well as on the recurring theme of travel, and show how migration are mainly portrayed by young Italians by using highly stereotypical images and ideas, shaped, without particular differences linked to the characteristics of the interviewees, around media images. More in general, according to the authors, the paper also contributes to appraising «the usefulness of socio-narrative representations both as instrument of analysis and conceptual tool to investigate the processes underlying the interpretation of social phenomena».

Moving from the opposite and conflicting stereotypes, emotions and images through which tourism and migration are usually analysed and portrayed, Pierluigi Musarò and Melissa Moralli examine how alternative representations of human mobility can be co-constructed by social actors. In this respect, after discussing the relevance of the performative dimension of narrative for the study of human mobility, the authors describe the main results of a participatory action-research concerning two innovative practices – the "IT.A.CÀ Festival of Responsible Tourism" and the *"Experiential Course on Tourism Development and Intercultural Hospitality"* – through which participants have been invited to reflect on rhetoric and policies related to tourism and migration. The limits and potentialities of these innovative practices of engaging and educating citizens in diversity and human dignity are subsequently considered. What emerges are *"de-bordering narratives"* which aim at challenging «the mainstream linkages between political discourse, media logic, and moral imaginary».

The fourth group includes papers dealing with fictional narratives from different perspectives and approaches.

The first contribution of this group is devoted to the analysis of the results emerging from a participant observation carried out during the "Liceo della Comunicazione" project, developed from 2015 to 2018 in two lyceums spe-

cializing in classic studies in Campania (Italy). In particular, Gino Frezza and Vincenzo del Gaudio focus on how teaching classical literature, theatre and digital media have been related to each other treasuring a pedagogical technique developed by the "Teatro delle Albe". On the basis of a perspective that combines literature mediology and theatre mediology, the project consisted of three stages: the first was devoted to performing a classic novel in «a sort of inter-medial drama»; in the second, the characters' profiles were staged on social networks; in the third phase, a live happening was performed and broadcasted live. These activities offered the students, as the authors claim, the chance to make them aware of «the models we use to perform our online and offline identities, as well as the relationship between these two spheres».

In the following paper, Olga Tzatzadaki reflects on the use of "*Literature as a socio-spatial diagnosis tool*" for urban studies. After having clarified the reasons why combining sociological and literary imagination in the study of cities matters, the core of the paper is devoted to the presentation of a case-study in which the testimonies, both oral and written, of four writers are intertwined in order «to measure the "social cost" of the economic change who took place in the North-East Italian Region [...] in the last forty years». The "diagnosis" offered by the novels and personal testimonies thus becomes the occasion for exploring the relationship between the space and the subject (i.e. the «"horizontal" section») as well as the daily life of the individual(s) (i.e. the «the "vertical" section»). As a main result of the study, together with «the "sensations" of the lived space and the feelings that the environment creates in the individual», is the fears linked to the impact of the "diffused city" as it emerges in the testimonies of the four writers.

In his contribution, Ferdinando Spina illustrates "*a narrative study of vigilante films*". The recent increase of the (social and political) support toward what the author refers to as the «the "self-defence" argument» becomes – though only in a figurative sense – the trigger for analysing the Italian cinema's portrayal of «*stories of revenge*». After having stressed the relevance of narratives – and particularly of their performative nature – for understanding «crime, criminals and social reaction», the author outlines the historical evolution of American and Italian vigilante films. In the core sections of the paper, an integrated structural and thematic analysis of a sample of six Italian films illustrating private justice is carried out. This allows Spina to grasp the narrative structure(s) and the main recurring themes and motives of the Italian vigilante films, as well as the similarities and differences between the American and the Italian traditions. It also helps to better understand the ambivalence with which revenge is considered – as from the famous Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* quote reported in the opening of the paper – in Western cultures.

Alfonso Amendola and Mario Tirino examine how the "*Mediology of Literature*" – an approach based on Marshall McLuhan's theory – can support the analysis of contemporary "*Narrative Ecosystems*" and of the media processes, such as convergence, serialization, and transmediality that shape them. Moving from a notion of narrative ecosystems conceived as «complex communication objects, constituted by single medial elements, more or less coordinated, that evolve over time thanks to the interaction between aesthetics, technologies, public and socio-cultural processes», the core of the paper is devoted to the analysis of the narrative ecosystem centered on the novel *The Body Snatchers* (1954). Thanks to a perspective which holds together Media Studies and the sociology of the imaginary, the authors show how Jack Finney's novel and the subsequent movies and television series have, on the one hand, intercepted the fears, desires and anxieties of the last seven decades and, on the other one, have produced «universal cultural myths» which have evolved through the interaction of technological and social environments.

The last group combines papers which use narrative approaches for analyzing specific cases, communities and contexts.

On the background of a reflection on the relationship between the «tragedies performed on the stages of recent history» and the different forms of «*transitional justice*» through which societies attempt both to guarantee justice for the victims and to «*transit* from a period of war to a period of peace», Corrado Punzi and Marta Vignola present the main results of a passionate ethnographic and socio-visual observation on the "Podlech Case". The trial held in Italy from 2009 to 2011 against the Chilean military prosecutor becomes the occasion for reflecting on the «divide of the judicial reality, the epistemological dichotomy between the victim's and the executioner's narrations and, finally, the gap between historical and judicial truth». The comparison between the narratives of the victim – i.e. the testimony of Fresia Cea Villalobos – the executioner – i.e. Alfonso Podlech's testimony – and the verdict of the Chilean tragedy of Omar Venturelli and his wife defines the contours of a metanarrative from which «a truth *constructed* by narrative and "shaped by procedures"» emerges, as a selection of antagonistic narrations.

Pier Luca Marzo and Antonio Tramontana adopt a narrative approach to focus on the *Apple Special Event* held at the *Steve Jobs Theater* in 2018. Analysing the video of the event, and with the support of several snapshots from it, the authors aim to describe the «narrative nuclei that articulate this fiction of late capitalism» and the elements through which that rituality is articulated. The authors develop a theoretical framework useful to examine the distinctive features of the event in terms of the religious archetype underlying it. This helps to understand what the authors describe as «the

path that leads to the creation of a real emotional community that is realized around a techno-animistic ritual and identifies itself in the cult of the products sold» by the company. The form of "worship" that takes place in Cupertino and broadcasted live worldwide thus offers the chance to understand how this sophisticated imaginary narrative machine «has the power to create an archaic cult in the age of technology, which creates concrete effects in the world market».

In her "*Meanings of digital participation into the narrative online communities*", moving from a larger mixed method research project on young people's participatory and transmedia experiences, Gabriella Taddeo explores the forms and meanings through which Italian teenagers participate in a writing-oriented social network. In particular, the paper focuses on three different "narratives" – written by a "star", a "micro-celebrity" and an "invisible" author – investigated through a netnography which pays attention to the writings, the interactions as well as the general background surrounding each narrative. This helps to understand the motivations underlying the online participation of young people in narrative online communities, as well as to identify different styles of interaction and practices of authorship and readership.

The special section of this issue of *IJSE* ends with an anthropological glance at the composite and ambivalent idea of *insularity*. In "*Intimate islands. The return to the island as an identity rediscovery*", Ugo Vuoso reflects on some of the cultural peculiarities emblematically associated to it, such as isolation, distance, separateness, inaccessibility. In particular, the author claims that «this composite and ambivalent idea of insularity is present not only in the most ancient mythological contexts» but also in literature and contemporary fiction. Moving from this point, also on the basis of the analysis carried out by a network dedicated to the scientific study of the islands, he presents a brief while intense excursus on the insular narrative universe, that starting from «San Brandano and its mystical sailors» closes with the autobiographical novel by the Danish-Faroese writer Siri Ranva Hjelm Jacobsen. At the end of this path, emblematically the island becomes «a parallel world where man is put to the test, a place of education and theater of utopias and dystopias, the point of arrival of the narrative».

6. These preliminary notes to the papers collected in this issue of *IJSE* show how considering the relevance of narrative approaches in social and educational sciences means going through a scenario that holds together different disciplines, perspectives, topics, contexts and spaces. We do hope that the contents of the following papers can provide an opportunity to identify the intrinsic plurality of the themes, potentialities and challenges which characterize the use of narrative approaches in contemporary social and

educational sciences. Along this line, each of the following papers can be considered as a chapter of a wider and more complex "narrative", which is in itself necessarily unfinished and ongoing, thus potentially able to stimulate new research questions and lines of inquiry.

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