



Rappresentante dell'Italia in IGU

Italy National Committee, **The Chair**

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## **REPORT from Italy on the occasion of IGU Congress Beijing, China, August 2016**

### **Geography in Italy**

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#### **1 Approach and aims**

The report is conceived on the basis of a specific scientific approach not merely a technical one. The approach is about reporting on the state of our discipline in light of grids of power struggle and control under both internal and external conditions.

State of art is meant in terms of conditions where our field of knowledge can reproduce/change and those ones, which affect the healthy conditions of Geography.

The rather open and critical approach to the state of art of geography in Italy is oriented not only to explain current circumstances but it is aimed at future- building and action. It is critical because we need to realize new paths for the best of our community. It was conceived in a frame of a call of collaboration initiated by Italy National Chair to AgeI-Association of Italian Geographers, AIG-Association of Teachers of Geography, SGI- Italian Geographical Society, Society of Geographical Studies (Florence) and some individual Colleagues in order to share on views and provide data. Association of Italian Geographers was not able to send updated data on this report. They are going to be finalized and discussed on the occasion of the yearly AGEI Conference in upcoming September.

#### **2 Positive factors and trends of Geography in Italy**

A good number of Italian geographers attend regularly IGU Conferences despite national constraints.

National community is informed about IGU via AGEI -Association of Italian Geographers and SGI-Italian Geographical Society based on my updates, of those ones who are active in the international arena and via IGU websites. They are normally now well known and consulted by those who are willing or able to join IGU events. National associations rapidly circulate provided information.

Indeed Italians, despite difficulties, are cooperating in a sound and solid way to IGU in several Commissions (Mediterranean, Human Mobility, Political Geography, Toponymy, Global Information Society, Modelling, Gender, History of geographical thought, Water sustainability, to quote some of them, and IYGU). Italian Geography cooperate well in Eugeo and EUROGEO too.

The National Chair, Maria Paradiso initiated and instructed the Italy National Committee how to try again to have an Italian candidacy for IGU EC and in the last ballot, it was decided that Elena Dell'Agnese as candidate to IGU and Maria Paradiso continuing as National Chair. Dell'Agnese was elected after Giuliano Bellezza expired his mandate.

The National Chair has been attending all IGU Conferences, Congress and meetings in the reporting period and ensured effective communication with IGU President and General Secretary as well as interested Colleagues.

From Italy, the undersigned tried to open a IYGU Centre in Rome with a Mediterranean focus under the auspices of CNR-National Council of Research. However, it turned out after the initial approval of CNR President, because of some internal problems to CNR that: 1. without available funding -beyond what is considered good enough by IYGU (half time position of a secretary and a room)- it is not feasible a regional center in Italy. SGI-Italian Geographical Society suffered a severe crisis all fronts. Thus, there was no chance to think about such an effort based in SGI 2. In such a short time (less than one year of IYGU) CNR did not judge existing a solid terrain to move ahead in a short delay, with its previous commitments and under financial constraints to achieve IYGU goals (communications with Earth Sciences Department Dr Brugnoli and President Luigi Nicolais).

Personally I did committed a lot in CNR in order to avoid ITALY (CNR) withdraw from ICSU. Myself as Representative in IGU and the Colleague of Geosciences were successful with CNR President in this regard and with the National ICSU Committee.

Italian Geographical Society during past Presidential turn occurred a severe crisis and risked closure. It was avoided and we are committed to counter it into a positive turn with a new presidential ad interim mandate.

In 2017, Italian Geographical Society is committed in carrying out a celebration of an important anniversary, which is going to be connoted under an international orientation.

We are working as a group of truly international geographers in internationalizing our national associations and community to change the dominant tradition of 'localist' approach and not general attitude to recognition of merit for promotions. Altogether now, it became even more serious for general lack of funding since the most brilliant scholars cannot progress or promising young scholars cannot enter the system (see next section).

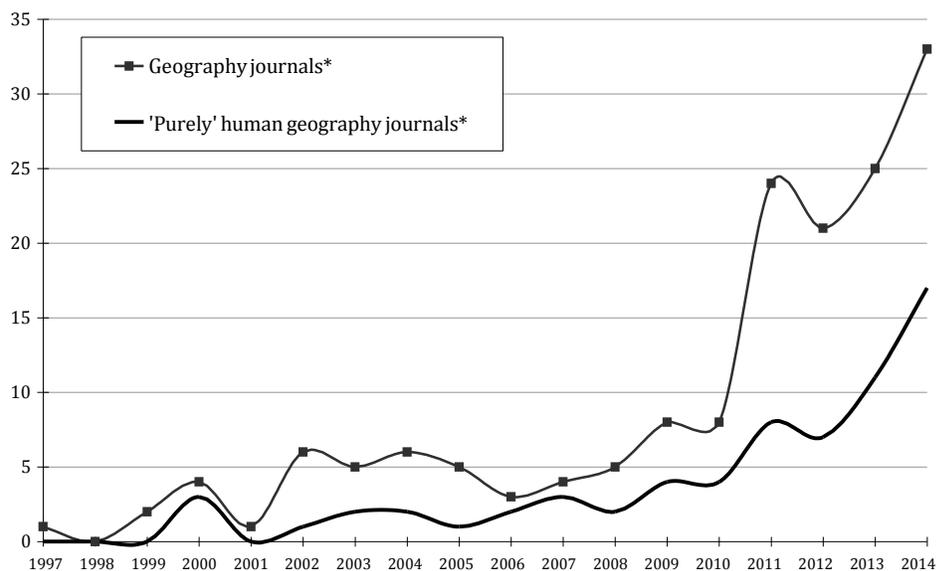
In terms of academic practices, there is a growing example of scholars committed in a third way between research migration and the reproduction of localistic/nationalist academic practices, which are main problematic issues of Italian geography so far (see Celata, AAG 2015 presentation also for the following discussion, which is based on Celata 2015).

This problems has been defined by Claudio Minca (2005) as the 'double absence', i.e. the inexistence of a strictly codified Italian tradition of geographical studies (this happens in my opinion also because the majority is not formed in Geography Degree programs), and the distance from the canons of Anglophone (its critical essence and the need of challenging statu quo) geography. This opens a space, again following Claudio Minca, for the emergence of moments of exceptional brilliance on the part of small groups of individuals, in a broad context of rather not good scholarship.

Additionally, Celata surveyed the emergence of a new academic subject that may be defined as the *Anglophile*: a substantial and recent increase of articles by authors affiliated to Italian universities in top Anglophone geographical journals (Figure 1).

This important finding however has to be complemented, for a fully satisfactory approach, by assessing participation thru more general international standards publications and research data bank; such those which cover also interdisciplinary and niche specialization journals and not only main stream geographies; as well as the assessment has to be enlarged to important geography and interdisciplinary journals beyond the Anglophone arena (see par example IGU statement endorsing the San Francisco Declaration).

Fig. 1. Articles by authors based in Italy in top Anglophone human geography journals<sup>1</sup>



Source: F. Celata 2015 elaboration based on SAGE, Wiley and Elsevier data.

Following Celata's paper presented in 2016 AAG panel session on Geography in Italy, Italian geographers are already contributing to Anglophone geography: first by the work of those Italian geographers between academic scholarship and political activism. The second approach refers to the role Italians in 'translating', in a broad meaning, the growing body of work referred to as "Italian theory", (specific approach to radical political philosophy which has its latest expression in the study of biopolitics i.e. Esposito 2012, Gentili 2014, Giorgio Agamben, Roberto Esposito or Antonio Negri who have already inspired several interventions and collaborations from geographers based in Italy (names are not quoted to avoid missed quotations).

<sup>1</sup> Top 50 Journals in "geography" according to ISI-Thomson, published by SAGE, Wiley and Elsevier, with the exclusion of non purely geographical journal (e.g. Global environmental change, Landscape and urban planning, Regional studies, etc.), i.e. „purely“ human geography journals: Annals of the Association of American Geographers, Area, Canadian Geographer, Cultural Geographies, Economic Geography, Geoforum, Journal of Historical Geography, Political Geography, Population, Space and Place, Progress in Human Geography, The Geographical Journal, Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography, Tijdschrift voor economische en sociale geografie, Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers; and other geographical journals: Applied Geography, Geographical Research, International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, Journal of Transport Geography.

This is also the case of, for example, research at the intersection between geographical studies and literature studies. Another peculiarity of Italian geography, particularly evident in the so-called 'Turin school', an attempt to reconcile what within Anglophone geography is usually regarded as irreconcilable: policy-oriented research on the one hand, and a critical perspective on place and politics on the other.

Whether those Anglophile authors will bring a specific Italian perspective to Anglophone geography or just add a few voices to an already orchestrated choir, is an open and problematic question.

However, the discussion should take into account not only the top journals but also the journal of special reference for new specialties in geography or multidisciplinary journals; as well as the discussion should take into account those papers published in high reputation journals France or at a large beyond the Anglo-Saxon contexts. For example it can be quoted the Italian contribution in the global arena, not only the Anglophone one, to new fields of geography in international specialized journals like the field of Geography of Information society and Internet geography studies (Paradiso and her work as Associate Editor of France based bilingual journal NETCOM, in Journal of Urban Technology, Future Internet also as Vice chair of the IGU Commission till 2012).

In this regard another approach emerged beyond individual activity: it should be observed a bridging role between national and international community beyond the individuals' re-positioning which has been provided in this field by the undersigned; Maria Paradiso established a specialty group on Geography of Information and Communication Geography in the Italian Association of geographers, Marcella Schmidt consolidated on international basis of the Gender Specialty Group in Italy in AGEI, Elena dell'Agnesse (media studies), Cosimo Palagiano (toponymy).

This international approach in bridging the national and international community, especially oriented to the younger colleagues, enabled international publications for some Italian younger colleagues since 2010 and bridged to IGU Commission Geography of Global Information Society.

In 2012 Italian National Committee issued a book gathering a large group of Italian geographers entitled 'Mediterranean lexicon' and edited by Paolo Giaccaria, Maria Paradiso which was presented in an IGU 2012 Cologne parallel event. Editors gathered a large group of interesting Colleagues in a national proposal for the international geography arena.

Indeed, Italy is substantially contributing to establish first, then developing, an international IGU geography community and studies regarding the Mediterranean Basin with and after the MRP-Mediterranean Renaissance Program initiated by Adalberto Vallega and coordinated by Maria Paradiso. This turned out in the first Commission in the IGU history with a regional focus chaired by her, an Italian geographer since the inception in 2012 which reached now circa 200 members.

In terms of International conferences in Italy, an Italian group of Colleagues under the auspices of all geography association in Italy held the EUGEO 2013 Conference in Rome which proved a very successful one in the hosting premises of University of Rome LA Sapienza and in particular thanks to the endless devoted efforts by Massimiliano Tabusi (coordinator of 8 colleagues) and Filippo Celata. This endeavor was backed by all geography associations in Italy.

The Italian Association of Geography Teachers (AIIG), founded in 1954, (chair Gino Devecchis in collaboration with a group of younger Colleagues) keeps contacts and exchange experiences

with other similar associations in Italy and abroad, with a special attention to those ones located in EU Member States; it encourages transnational projects, especially those aimed at developing the European dimension; promotes citizenship education in all geographic scales, studies of different cultures and the right of all peoples to sustainable development.

The Association of Italian Geographers on next September it is going to have its first National/International Congress **UNEQUAL GEOGRAPHIES Geographical education for inclusion** Rome, 29th September – 3rd October 2016. Professor Joop van der Schee (Utrecht University, co-chair of the IGU Commission on Geographical Education), will provide a keynote *'Earth and Sustainability. A Geographical Education.*

Specifically in this reporting period, and being since 1979 member of the European Standing Conference of Geography Teachers Association (later EUROGEO), AIG participated in international projects such as (2012/3013) "How to teach geography through remote sensing", commissioned by the educational sector of the ESA-ESRIN, which coordinated the survey on the status of teaching of geography in secondary schools and second degree in France, Spain, Belgium and other EU countries.

It recently launched a half-open access journal J-Reading (Journal of Research and Didactics in Geography) to expand even further its international scope while working from Italy, to encourage meetings and exchange of ideas among geographers and to support geography teaching in schools and on a world scale, under the IGU auspices linked to San Francisco Declaration IGU official position. The journal's site ([www.j-reading.org](http://www.j-reading.org)) is a further locus to spread news related call, conferences and events of international importance especially those of IGU in coordination with the Italian National Chair too.

The AIIG have stable relations with national offices of organizations, associations and international agencies such as UNICEF, WWF, and the Committee for the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (UNESCO), participating in environmental education campaigns in the field of network that supports the implementation of the agreement on climate change in Paris.

The upcoming Italian Geography Congress under the auspices of AGeI- Association of Italian Geographers and Scientific Coordination of all Geographers based in Rome will held in June its first International Conference truly open to papers from other countries' geographers.

Società di Studi Geografici is now issuing its journal quoted rank A in Italy as a member of Scopus databank thus fulfilling the recent Ministerial criteria for scholar's publications' evaluation. It has now a yearly scientific conference on innovative topics, which is now considered of national reference in Italy.

### **3 Weakness' factors of Geography in Italy**

Despite all good progress, situation of Geography's vitality is quite critical in Italy for a series of reasons both internal and external ones to our national community.

*Internal reasons.* The first one is a scientific one, since several Colleagues of previous generations and of the current ones did not updated their descriptive approaches in favor of more

theoretical ones or did not carry out empirical research which have to be effectively grounded on solid theoretical updated basis. As Franco Farinelli Chair of AGEI writes in response to the call for collaboration to this report: "The situation of the Italian geography is characterized by a peculiar status: that one of a discipline which has not been able to catch the wave of "spatial turn" that hit a dozen years ago the social sciences in the international arena; therefore it suffers now such a delay as a boomerang, since it sees its 'discourse' transmigrated to other fields, impenetrable for geographers. The reasons for this paradoxical situation in many ways are to be found in the closure, which goes back to the fifties, with respect to the themes and methodologies of other disciplines (only one reference: the Gambi-Gribaudo controversy in the mid-sixties) and the consequent choice a defensive strategy rather than attacking with respect to them. The result is now an obvious inability to continue to defend (in every respect and in every sector) the specific geographic identity, that it is not rebuilding as the exclusive field of interest (it would be totally useless to say the worst) but in the thickness of its point of view. After all, the "spatial turn" it is stated precisely when the spatial model (meaning its space in the 'Ptolemy' geographical sense) is in crisis, thus, geography does have to invent a geography 'without' space. This is the challenge on which depends the survival (in Italy but not only) of the geographical knowledge".

Definitely, it must be noted that a not good reputation of discipline have be understood not only on the basis of scientific terms. Actually it must be coupled by a clear reference to decades of career promotion which had not be truly based on scholars' quality vita records and their overall maturity or capabilities. Several cases of recruitments or progressions have not been based on recognition of merit, recognition of international capability and scholarly standards and scholarly personalities. A different orientation could have better matched the goals of pushing ahead science frontiers, innovating them beyond the tradition of 'ipse dixit' and keep high geography reputation vis à vis competition with other disciplines locally and nationally.

*External reasons.* Additionally and *severely* especially in the last decade, Geography vulnerability in Italy occurs for national reasons of:

- very poor funds for posts in Universities at a large (and even worse for geography) and consequently just a fewest recruitments occurred in the last decade as well as promotions.
- economic and public debt crisis implied turnover blockages; retired people are not replaced. Posts in geography are lost.
- national policy-making of different political orientations are fully inadequately funding Education and Universities.
- regional levels are narrowly linked to research showing an immediate interest for regional plans and concrete impacts in terms of innovation and profit. It is quite impossible for independent researchers from political ties to win bids at a regional level.
- several University Reform Bills increased the role and recognition of hard sciences and applicative ones towards social sciences and humanities. Moreover, they pushed in favor of the issues of economic relevance of sciences which can prove an immediate economic spill over in society. Geography teaching has been also severely reduced in school thus affecting all knowledge chain and recognition in society in favor of history or natural sciences.

Basically, in the past twenty years Universities underwent deep reforms. Law 'Gelmini' canceled

the role of lecturer and required that after two terms of a grant researcher position, one person should quite fast win a national competition as Associate Professor. Second step, he/she has to find an University available to open a position and a competition. Otherwise, he/she is forced to leave the system. In a cadre of very low funding to Universities it is unlikely to have chances for recruitment and additionally blockages occur for career promotions.

State funded bids occur only every two years; funds are extremely inadequate for social sciences and even worse for geography. Last time no bid has been won by geographers. In the bid before the latest one only one project in geography turned out approved for funding. Geography is included in a class with other disciplines and assessors stem out from other disciplines, thus this can impact on assessors' understanding and closeness to geography topics and goals.

Prospections in recruitment and public awareness of the Geographical knowledge potential for society are also linked to educational offer in Geography curricula. It looks like only one full degree program (BA and MA) in Geography (Rome) and a second is likely to miss the MA (Milan-Genoa) because of Ministry of Education requirements of ratio of professors/students.

Moreover the reform of high school in Italy (2010-2011 school year), greatly negatively affected the discipline, making Geography disappear in most schools educational system's curricula. The Association of Italian Teachers of Geography (AIIG) has promoted an appeal in favor of geography. The appeal has crossed the Italian borders, thanks to the support by IGU and EUGEO which had been promoted by Italian geographers active in the international arena. It was successful to reach out much of the world geography community with about two thousand applications received in a few days from about 70 countries.

All disciplines are forced by the Ministry's regulation to set up multidisciplinary PhD where generally grants are given to disciplines which bring money for grants thanks to external sponsors. Other disciplines are perceived better than Geography for getting sponsorships and normally they refer to more 'hard' or technical or business oriented disciplines. Generally, PhD encounter difficulties in Italy for lack of funding and administrative burdens.

In a cadre of no career progression, blocked or semi blocked turnover, not satisfactory recruitment over decades and career progression in the past 15 years, multidisciplinary PhD and practically no more PHD in Geography, the cancelation of lecturer's role as a fixed job and initial not precarious position in geography, thus we are facing serious problems of 1. attracting and keeping young scholars in Italy, 2. to make progress mature geographers 3. provide all basic conditions for research especially for those geographers linked to fieldwork research and participating in the international arena.

In 2015 a Ministerial Group for Geography was set up with the participation of chairs of association and the undersigned as representative of Italy in IGU and an internal detailed report was submitted to the Minister. Ministry's improvements in favor of Geography are still pending so far.

Humanistic approach geographers are favored in this frame since they generally publish conceptual papers after reading other papers, and they have a lower need of fieldwork (national and international) and team's activity to provide original data and a fresh knowledge.

There is an increasing tendency of young scholars to neglect fieldwork and pay importance to research on the basis of journals ranking. This is also a consequence of national and on campus evaluation of research on the basis of statistical approaches of quantitative ranking linked to the major commercial publishers. Therefore the 'Anglo-Saxon' arena of geography is preferred in case of international publishing scholars. Most Colleagues however suffer of

practically no funds. Most of us join international Conference on own salaries and personal money.

IGU suffers competition of AAG or UK RBS Conferences in Italy. Many regional geography association also complicates the fragmentation of international Geography events offer. Lack of funding prevent in most cases scholars' participation to international conferences or priority is accorded to AAG Annual Conference; there is an increasing tendency of participation only in own small networks.

There is a 'fluid' Italian diaspora of geographers in UK, France and Scandinavian countries whose contours are hardly to be calculated since diaspora is mobile.

Stakeholders in Italy provide funding mainly to technical or hard scientist whose research can reveal immediate profit. Regional funds normally pass thru Presidents or Department Directors. Currently, Armando Montanari and I undersigned are the only one to win and coordinate an EU FP7/H2020 project as Italian geographers.

### **Suggestions/Comments for IGU EC**

The 'ontological' status of geography research linked to fieldwork (which has to be well informed of general theories) should be communicated better and encouraging young generations of human geographers to practice of fieldwork by special initiatives in IGU events or written notes.

The Italian community is fully aware that the close collaboration between geographical associations and societies can produce beneficial results to the various national scales in the enhancement of geography in schools and academic/research loci. We do encourage EC to launch and coordinate further initiatives in this regard to help promotion of Geography with policy makers and events for public awareness of Geography's importance for a more equitable sustainable society.

Hopefully IGU EC can invest even more time and activities in networking with Donors and Sponsors, Foundations for research projects grants and awareness events of importance of Geography for societies.

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