

## EUGEO - 'State of Geography in Europe'

Sunday 26, University of Cologne

Claudia ROBIGLIO<sup>1</sup>

### The State of Geography in Italy<sup>2</sup>

#### 1. Introduction<sup>3</sup>

The Italian society shows an high demand for geographic information, as evidenced by the spread of thematic TV channels and the success of television programmes focused on geographic content on other televisions. A similar high attention to geographical effects of their action is shown by the business system and institutions. A geographical dimension considered in terms of territorial subjects (at a different scale) as privileged actors of the political discourse or as locational process of factors of production and as regional dynamics of economic development. In the last years this high demand did not match an adequate supply by the cultural or academic geographical structures: other disciplinary sectors have thus exercised a replacement or supplementary role, gradually “grabbing” of the contents and methods of geographical knowledge. Recently, however, thanks to a constant and pressing engagement, medias, institutions and business come to recognize to geography a potential greater than some other and most “accredited” disciplines (history, economics, sociology, urban planning). A potential that consist in the ability to conceive scenario analysis and to know how to combine in the best way development with preservation of environmental resources.

The focal importance assigned by the geographers’ scientific community to studies more oriented towards capturing the very essence of the problems – concerning the territorial organization of the Italian society and its international projection - helped to reach such a turning point. A similar support has come from the cultural geographical institutions not disdaining media communication tools alongside those of traditional scientific communication. Last but not least efforts were put into building concise and performative tools of analysis specifically conceived for use by institutions and business rather than exclusively academic.

#### 2. Geography in primary and secondary education<sup>4</sup>

In Italy the school system is divided up as follows:

- a first stage, made up of primary school (5 years) and lower secondary school (3 years);
- a second stage, made up of upper secondary school (5 years): ‘Licei’; or technical and professional high schools (less than 5 years).

Geography is taught in the first stage, whereas it is not always part of the curriculum in the second one.

- *First stage* - It has undergone various reforms over the years. In 2004 big changes took place with the shift from the national curricula – prescriptive, centralised and characterized by lists of contents and

---

<sup>1</sup> Member of the AGeI (Association of Italian Geographers) Committee and Representative in EUGEO.

<sup>2</sup> This paper has been written in the collaboration with the Presidents of Italian geographical associations or related: Franco Farinelli (AGeI), Franco Salvatori (SGI), Lidia Scarpelli (SdSG), Claudio Cerreti (CISGE), Gino De Vecchis (AIIG), Giuseppe Scanu (AIC and also incoming for ASITA) and Massimiliano Tabusi (representative of SGI and AIIG in EUGEO); for the abbreviations see the text.

The former presentation of the state of geography in Italy was done in the EUGEO framework by: Buzzetti L. (2004), “Geography in Italy”, *Belgeo: Special Issue 30<sup>th</sup> International Geographical Congress*, 1, pp.119-123.

<sup>3</sup> The paragraph 1 was drafted by SGI (Rome).

<sup>4</sup> All the information of this paragraph was provided by AIIG.

objectives – to the national guidelines which move the barycenter from the teaching processes to those of learning and are aimed at a more autonomous school in the construction of didactic courses. The national guidelines were reformed in 2007 and will have a new definition in the autumn of 2012. The founding nucleuses for Geography - to be found in the History-Geography area - are made up of: orientation, language of geographicity, landscape, regions and territorial system. The study of Italy is given priority in the primary school; in the lower secondary school priority is given to Europe and the world. The constant comparison between far and distant places is nonetheless recommended.

- *Second stage*<sup>5</sup> - The upper secondary school, following many failed attempts at reform, has been at a standstill for decades, being renewed only through a series of experimental programmes. The recent reform, begun in 2010-2011, resulted in the penalization of the teaching of Geography in a general framework of scaling down the study hours for pupils. In the 'Licei' (classical, language, human sciences, art and music) Geography is taught only in the first two years together with Ancient History. Only three hours per week have been allocated to the two subjects. As far as concerns the objectives, the guidelines for the most part include the conceptual bases of the subject: from landscape to urbanization, from migrations and the demographic question to globalization. The references to the instruments are also clear: from traditional cartography to GIS. The technical high schools are divided into two sectors (economic and technological), subdivided into eleven courses. In the first there are two: Administration, Finance and Marketing; Tourism. The second sector includes nine, among which Transport and Logistics; Constructions, Environment and Territory. Geography is completely absent in all professional and technical high schools (technological sector), where in the past the subject had consolidated traditions, like in transports. According to the guidelines for the economic sector the pupil must be able to recognize:
  - the geographical, ecological and territorial aspects and the transformations that have taken place over time;
  - the interdependence among economic, social and cultural phenomena and their local/global dimension;
  - the value and potential of cultural and environmental heritage and for them to be used and valorized correctly.

### 3. Geography in higher education and academic research

In Italy there are 96 universities (10 of which are virtual campuses), having branches in more than one city. Geography – as a discipline and in terms of employed research personnel – is present in most of them. Its weight and importance, though, have in time decreased. Geography is included in a macro area titled: “Scienze Storiche Filosofiche Pedagogiche Psicologiche”. The term “Geography” is not explicitly mentioned and this – in our opinion – reflects the modest role to it attributed within the academic environment as a whole. A few figures – recently produced (2012) and publicly available at the web-site of the Ministry of Education, University and Research ([www.miur.it](http://www.miur.it)) - will allow us to describe the current status of the discipline:

- 384 people work as academic geographers in Italian universities. Out of such total, those employed are 329. The rest is made of post-docs and fixed-term researchers. These figures – if compared with the total number of those active in Italian universities as scholars (in all disciplines, that is) (63198) – substantiate the statement made above concerning the weakness of the discipline.
- This notwithstanding, Geography is present in 66 multi-disciplinary PhD programmes<sup>6</sup>, in itself a positive fact. A good number of those who enroll are interested in taking up a career in the university. The academic labour market, though, is incapable of absorbing the vast majority of them who end up either working in the private market or experiencing unemployment/difficult situations. A few more details below:

---

<sup>5</sup> For a complete view of the debate see: De Vecchis G. (ed) (2011), *A scuola senza Geografia?*, Roma, Carocci.

<sup>6</sup> For more details for 2006 see: Celata F., Muti G., Rondinone A., Rossi U. (2007), “Il dottorato di ricerca nelle discipline geografiche in Italia: un’indagine preliminare”, *Ambiente Società Territorio*, 3, pp. 22-28. For 2012 see the list in [www.miur.it](http://www.miur.it), but the topic would require a further analysis.

- Programmes in which M-GGR/01 (i.e. Human Geography) is predominant as a disciplinary area of study (subject) tend not be exclusively geographical in nature; those more oriented towards M-GGR/02 (i.e. Economic and Political geography) express a higher level of homogeneity. In either case, it is hard to find programmes in which attention is paid to provide a good balance – in terms of the Schools’ educational-related activities – between Human and Physical Geography, rarely included together in the syllabus.
- In most cases members of the Scientific Committee of the Doctoral Schools belong to the very same university offering them.
- Economic and Political Geography is the area of interest of 1 out of 3 PhD candidates. Development Geography and Historical Geography follow.
- The vast majority claims to have been abroad for rather long periods of time, to either carry out research (also in the field) or for other activities (and humanities in general).
- Quite a few programmes established exchange agreements or a Joint PhD supervision.
- There is also a good number of PhDs not included in the figures above mentioned: people who have gained a PhD in Geography or collateral areas (e.g. cartography) and are not employed by universities or people who have contracts (e.g. post-docs) not specifically mentioning Geography. All seem committed to our discipline and carry out research work to it related.
- Those who access academic research and careers in Geography come from a vast array of undergraduate and graduate studies/*curricula*: they choose Geography as a subject area on which to work (e.g. thesis and dissertations). Before enrolling in PhD programmes, the majority of candidates obtain a degree in Economics, Political Sciences or Literatures.

Bachelor’s and master’s degrees in Geography are offered only in two universities: Bologna and Milano-Genova. The number of new geography students yearly as well as the one of those graduating in Geography is, therefore, rather limited.

Even if the situation shows quite a few difficulties scholars are engaged in active research.

### 3. Associations promoting Geography as a discipline

The Italian geographical scenario includes a number of associations (grouping together scholars and “professionals”, mainly teachers). The main ones are: the Associazione dei Geografi Italiani (AGeI), the Società Geografica Italiana (SGI), the Società di Studi Geografici (SdSG), the Associazione Italiana Insegnanti di Geografia (AIIG), the Associazione Italiana di Geografia fisica e Geomorfologia (AIGeo), and the CISGE (Centro Italiano per gli Studi Storico-Geografici), Associazione Italiana di Cartografia (AIC). Then, there are associations for specific topics to which geographers belong, but which also (and especially) include scholars in other collateral or related disciplines: the Associazione Italiana di Scienze Regionali (AISRe), ASITA (Federazione delle Associazioni Scientifiche per le Informazioni Territoriali ed Ambientali). Below a few more details:

#### 3.1. *AGeI, Associazione dei Geografi Italiani, an exclusively academic association* ([www.agei.org](http://www.agei.org)<sup>7</sup>)

AGeI since 1978 aims to: 1) encourage/coordinate geographical research; 2) promote educational initiatives (mainly aimed at young geographers); 3) disseminate the culture of individual territories in Italy; 4) distribute information regarding the various aspects of the discipline (art. 2 of its Constitution).

Its main activities are the following ones: a) the organization of geographical events [i.e.: 1) a regular Italian Geographical Congress held every 4 years to deepen the theoretical-reflective empirical speculation based on the subject which gives its title to the Congress with related proceedings; 2) “Le Giornate della Geografia” (“The Geography Days”), smaller-scale events in the year in which the congress is not scheduled; 3) the “Escursione Geografica” (Inter-university Geographical Excursion), an annual educational event organized by a different University to deepen the knowledge of a diverse Italian “territory”]; b) research and working Groups (16, currently working on crucial themes for study of both a theoretical and practical nature); c) relations with the institutions and other organizations [ministerial and scientific/cultural

<sup>7</sup> After the Congress in Cologne AGeI website changed in [www.associazionegeografitaliani.it](http://www.associazionegeografitaliani.it)

bodies such as CUN (Consiglio Universitario Nazionale), CNR (Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche) and IGM (Istituto Geografico Militare)]; d) relations with other associations dealing mainly with geography; e) international relations (like the ones we are involved here, EUGEO, IGU). AGEI publishes *Geotema* (41 numbers since 1995), a monographic speculation and a review of the operations by different authors of a particular Research Group<sup>8</sup>.

### 3.2. *Società Geografica Italiana (SGI)* ([www.societageografica.it](http://www.societageografica.it))

Since 1867 the Società Geografica Italiana (now has its headquarters in Rome - Villa Celimontana, close to the Colosseum) is the largest of Italian geographical societies. Once concerned with geographical expeditions<sup>9</sup> now mostly concentrates on promoting scientific research and diffusing information among its members. Such activities are channeled through programmes and research projects, focusing on different territories and on the environment. Much effort is also put into publishing and organizing conferences and excursions (in close collaboration with other associations and institutions, both Italian and international). The SGI publishes the following: *Bollettino della Società Geografica Italiana* (quarterly), *Rapporto Annuale*, *Memorie* (monographs on different topics), *Ricerche e Studi* and various other publications. It has a very rich library.

### 3.3. *Società di Studi Geografica (SdGI)*<sup>10</sup> ([www.societadistudigeografici.it](http://www.societadistudigeografici.it))

The Society for Geographical Studies (founded in 1896 and located in Florence) develops scientific activities based on a multi-year, editorial program publishing the quarterly journal, *Rivista Geografica Italiana*, a widely diffused journal of Geography research. In addition, the Society publishes *Memorie* (memorial editions), special issues and volumes. The Society organizes conferences and exhibitions of high scientific and cultural value in collaboration with other activities carried out by government research institutions, promoting and conducting research and cultural workshop activities, planning cultural activities through its links with national and international research institutions. Additionally, the Society maintains a rich bibliographic heritage and archive.

Within the specific scientific aims of the Society, members have, in the past, either personally as geographers or as part of a larger research consortium, taken part or are active in multi-scale planning and programming activities with various authorities from administrative and political institutions. Additionally, members collaborated with institutions and organizations working in the private or industrial sectors. In particular, the Society has had, and continues to maintain, close working relationships with the city of Florence in the planning of special events, such as the signing of the Convention on Landscape (which took place in Florence), or the celebration of significant historical researchers (such as the organization of the Year of Vespucci, in memory of the 500th anniversary of Amerigo Vespucci's death). Notwithstanding the limited budgetary resources available, the Society aims at offering and disseminating an image of geography which underlines the importance of cultural heritage to civil society in frequented city venues and well-known areas, such as the historical Palaces in Florence. Finally, of special emphasis, is the Society's ongoing and fruitful working relationship with other geographical institutions.

### 3.4. *CISGE (Centro Italiano per gli Studi Storico-Geografici)* ([www.cisge.it](http://www.cisge.it))

Founded in 1992, CISGE is the only Italian academic organization to deal systematically with geo-historical studies. Among his major achievements, research groups and studies on the history of Italian maps and the relationship between mapping and landscape. The members of CISGE are mainly geographers, but also archaeologists, historians, literary historians, art historians and so on. Main journal: *Geostorie*. It is in Rome. It organizes thematic conferences and publishes proceedings.

### 3.5. *AIIG (Associazione Italiana Insegnanti di Geografia)* ([www.aiig.it](http://www.aiig.it))

---

<sup>8</sup> For details from 1978 up to now see: Di Blasi A. (2005), *I venticinque anni dell'AGEI (1978-2003)*, Bologna, Pàtron editore; Robiglio C., *The Association of Italian Geographers (AGEI): the community of university geographers*, Bologna, Pàtron editore, forthcoming.

<sup>9</sup> Cerreti C. (2000), *Della Società Geografica Italiana e della sua vicenda storica (1867-1997)*, Roma, Società Geografica Italiana.

<sup>10</sup> The paragraph was drafted by SdSG.

The AIIG, founded in 1954, has branches in the whole country and in almost all Italian provinces. The association deals with issues related to the teaching of Geography at all educational levels, and publishes the following journal: *Ambiente, Società, Territorio. Geografia nelle scuole* (6 issues per year) and a series of books on specific topics. AIIG organises yearly a national conference. The association is involved in vocational training related activities and aims at creating a common space for its members to discuss. AIIG is a member of the European Standing Conference of Geography Teachers.

### 3.6. AIC (*Associazione italiana di Cartografia*) ([www.aic-cartografia.it](http://www.aic-cartografia.it))

The Italian Association of Cartography (1964) - member of the International Cartographic Association (ICA) – gathers scholars, producers and lovers of maps, including geographers. It has a four-monthly magazine, the *Bollettino dell'Associazione Italiana di Cartografia*, under international certification, with papers about cartography, with a particular attention to the new methods of acquisition, processing and representation of geographic data and to the new method of data visualization by digital technology. The use of GIS as a tool of cartographic production and of data analysis is a research field followed by the *Bollettino* that does not neglect the analysis of maps from the past in view of planning and the studies on landscape, environment and art representation. Many geographers write for the *Bollettino*. AIC, together with three scientific associations which study topography, remote sensing and GIS, constituted the Federation of the Scientific Associations of Territorial and Environmental Information (ASITA). Every year the Federation organises a conference on state-of-the-art geographic information, giving scope to tools and methods of data acquisition and processing.

### Geography in Italy: main future challenges

- The role and importance of the discipline as a core subject must be strengthened in particular in secondary education and in the curricula of professional and technical high schools.
- The same must be done at university level.
- Professionally geographers are not enough visible and recognized for the original and extremely valuable contribution they can give (as well as their competences). This calls for more efforts to raise the awareness of policy-makers and institutions of the relevance of our discipline, fostering public debate too. AGEI is trying to act accordingly.
- What could be the role of Italy and Italian Geography in the new models and scenarios of the world