



Belgeo

Revue belge de géographie

1 | 2004

Special issue : 30th International Geographical Congress

Geography in Italy

Luciano Buzzetti



Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/belgeo/10074>

DOI: 10.4000/belgeo.10074

ISSN: 2294-9135

Publisher:

National Committee of Geography of Belgium, Société Royale Belge de Géographie

Printed version

Date of publication: 31 March 2004

Number of pages: 119-134

ISSN: 1377-2368

Electronic reference

Luciano Buzzetti, « Geography in Italy », *Belgeo* [Online], 1 | 2004, Online since 17 October 2013, connection on 19 April 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/belgeo/10074> ; DOI : 10.4000/belgeo.10074

This text was automatically generated on 19 April 2019.



Belgeo est mis à disposition selon les termes de la licence Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International.

Geography in Italy

Luciano Buzzetti

- 1 Those who doubt the validity of the saying that “appearances are deceptive” would find much support for their scepticism in Italian geography. The discipline evolved in the course of the last century from a concept substantially coherent with the continental one into one that was entirely distinctive and *sui generis*. This was a consequence of a reorganization of educational curricula, especially those for university studies, whereby what had previously been viewed simply as a system for the formal organization of knowledge was given contents not originally envisaged for it. The phenomenon began in the early decades of the century, when the intense process by which knowledge was fragmented into a large number of specialist subjects, inherited from the previous century, also involved geography, which in its turn was fragmented into its main sectors. The process took place in other countries as well, but in Italy it was so profound that it gave all sectors markedly autonomous character, with the consequence that they developed independently and were unable fully to reap the advantages of intradisciplinarity.
- 2 The effects of this process were most evident in the scientific sector of territorial planning (urban planning in particular), which soon broke away from the main body of the discipline to assume autonomous status as *urbanistica*, devoted to the organization of urban territory, or of small portions of land, and the tools for their efficient and satisfactory planning.
- 3 Similar situations arose in numerous other areas of the broad disciplinary field of geography. Owing to their affinity with certain sectors of geology, geomorphological and glaciological studies, and more generally physical geography, found many of their specific areas of interest being absorbed by that discipline. The same happened to biogeographical studies, these being taken over in their entirety by biology, zoology, botany, and so on.
- 4 The list could be extended much further, for example by citing medical geography, which was transferred to sectors of medicine concerned with diffusive processes and the relationships between health, territory and physical environment, as well as numerous

aspects of social geography, which were widely addressed by sociology, or quantitative geography, which became the almost exclusive prerogative of the statistical sciences, and so on. In recent decades, specialists in economics have occupied even broad sectors of economic geography.

A fragmented geography

- 5 The origins of this evolutionary process – the goodness or otherwise of which I shall not dwell upon here – can be identified in the profound reorganization of the Italian educational system that took place in the first half of the last century. This reorganization was based on the historicist concept that the learning process should consist only in a review of the main stages of knowledge development within a particular discipline. It is obvious that geography was ill-suited to this didactic method, with the consequence that it was parcelled out among the other subjects on the curriculum: geography, that is to say, was taught only when these other subjects dealt with the spatial dimension. The topic of enterprise location, for example, was treated by business economics, medical geography by medicine, and so on.
- 6 Geography as an autonomous discipline was thus left with jurisdiction solely over its central themes – over its core business, so to speak – these being the organization of large terrestrial spaces, their structure, their formative process, their image (landscape), and the rest.
- 7 When this set-up was translated into education facilities – especially at university level¹ – there came about the fragmentation mentioned earlier. Geography's dispersion among numerous academic subjects led to its loss of the benefits accruing from operation in a large number of sectors, albeit with similar instruments, methods and procedures. Like those of most European countries, the Italian university system organized itself on the basis of individual disciplinary groupings, or at most clusters of similar disciplines. This process was largely driven by the fact that these disciplinary groupings formed (and still do) the basis of mechanisms for the selection of teaching and research staff, and for career advancement, as well as being a central component of the research funding system, both national and at the level of individual universities. As we well know, although this system has its merits it also has a downside: it compartmentalizes research, thereby hindering the osmosis among branches of science, which is the most powerful engine of knowledge growth and development. This drawback characterizes all, or almost all, higher education and research systems, but it is usually attenuated by the presence of disciplinary groupings, which operated cross-wise to more strictly specialist subjects. Geography is certainly one of these, as are sociology, general medicine and economics for that matter, mainly because their subject of study is not a single phenomenon but rather the set of phenomena present in a particular area of terrestrial surface². The importance of this function assigns the discipline a leading role in scientific and educational systems, because it enables the reconstruction of that unity of knowledge, which the exigencies of specialization have fragmented. It also performs this role externally to the scientific domain in civil society, where its capabilities are widely used both for knowledge acquisition and for operational purposes.
- 8 For the reasons given, Italian geography has been deprived of this role, so that in civil society, too, it has never received more than scant recognition, given that its image is that of a subject whose concerns are restricted to what I have called its “core business”.

Slow epistemological progress

- 9 However, this is not the only reason for the marginal position of geography in Italian society. On its own, in fact, it is not enough to account for the phenomenon. Despite the drawbacks mentioned, the role of the subject should have been much more significant than it has been. But in addition to the limitations due to organization of the university system there is another, much deeper-lying one which relates to epistemological considerations. In the first decades of the twentieth century, when population growth raised worries of overpopulation and economic affluence enormously increased the demand for space, it became necessary to curb and manage such demand, thus to prevent the onset of disequilibria and maximize exploitation of a resource – space – which in some cases was in increasingly short supply. This task was given to geography, as the science pre-eminently concerned with territorial problems. It was a relatively new task which flanked geography's traditional speculative one and enriched the discipline with important operational features. However, it also entailed a profound epistemological revision, given that now necessary was the development of entirely new tools and, above all, the adoption of methodologies which in a very broad sense can be termed scientific³. This process was reasonably straightforward in disciplinary areas more closely tied to the natural environment, where the randomness of phenomena was much more manageable, and where scientific laws were much more rigorous. But in sectors concerned with the anthropic environment it was much slower and more difficult, and continued almost until the present day – and not even now have all the problems been resolved. However, the long wait for completion of this evolutionary process conflicted with the needs of civil society, which demanded much more rapid responses.
- 10 The epistemological problem can be summarized⁴ as the impossibility of applying the scientific method to phenomena, which are unique and unrepeatable. Because every stretch of territory is, by its nature, indisputably unique and unrepeatable, the use of the scientific method was highly problematic, for in the absence of a profound epistemological revision it was extremely difficult to satisfy the demand for knowledge utilizable in the management and organization of territories.
- 11 Under pressure from the concrete needs of civil society, in many countries the solution was provisionally found at the empirical level : that is to say, the scientific method began to be used as if it were applicable, and as if solution to the epistemological problem were forthcoming⁵. In Italy, however, principally because of the constraints imposed by the dominant paradigm described earlier, this solution was not considered acceptable, so that for several decades Italian geography was unable to satisfy the needs of civil society⁶. The latter evidently could not wait, and it consequently turned to disciplines already accustomed to drawing up territorial plans, and in particular to subjects comprised within the broad grouping of architecture and building and infrastructure design. These had been validly engaged in the planning of limited territorial spaces like streets, squares, neighbourhoods, etc., for some time. Thus it was that they became the main recipients of demand for the planning of broad spaces like towns, urban systems, large areas, regions, and so on.
- 12 After persisting for many years, this situation became embedded in the public consciousness, producing the marginalization of geographical research, which still distinguishes it in Italy. Geography was assigned only tasks concerning the analysis of

territorial phenomena, while those of planning and management were allocated to other subjects.

- 13 More in general, geography was for long given only purely descriptive tasks, while more strictly operational ones were undertaken by other disciplines. The phenomenon mainly concerned the above-mentioned sectors of territorial planning, but others were involved as well, for example enterprise location, or even the management of natural environments.
- 14 Towards the end of the millennium, largely through the efforts of a number of influential schools of geography – most notably those of Naples, Genoa and, especially, Turin – the phenomenon began to attenuate. It did so also as a consequence of the increasing need to plan large spaces and the realization of the limits to the competences of the other disciplines. Today, however, although there are growing numbers of geographers working in the discipline's operational sectors, its image in civil society continues to be the same as in previous decades. Consequently, still today, the discipline is not considered among those most useful for the correct management of the land, although signs of recovery are beginning to be apparent⁷.

Geography in schools

- 15 It is obvious from what has been said so far that geography does not play a particularly important role in the Italian educational system.⁸ I have already made frequent mention of the situation in the universities. With the exception of a handful of degree courses in geography, the presence of the subject on university curricula is decidedly limited. Indeed it is entirely absent from some of them, those for highly specialized faculties like engineering, law, medicine, physics, and the like. Geography is included on the curricula of other faculties, but it is largely marginal with respect to the bulk of the course programme, being attributed a purely cultural function and given a position that is typically ancillary to the core subjects. The phenomenon is even evident in teacher training courses, as well as in those, which prepare professionals with a high cultural expertise. In the latter case, a large number of history courses, for example, are flanked by very few indeed in geography.
- 16 The reasons for this phenomenon – which is quite incomprehensible in the rest of the Continent – have already been discussed. It should be borne in mind that it results from a process that persisted throughout the last century but greatly accelerated in its second half⁹. The most striking example is provided by the status given to economic geography by the course programmes of Italian faculties of economics. Here, in 1970s the subject was still considered fundamental (albeit in purely cultural terms), with the consequence that its study was compulsory. But with successive reforms of the Italian university system and the granting of greater autonomy to universities, the subject has gradually disappeared from faculty programmes, so that now many of them do not even include it as an optional subject, and when they do so assign it only a small number of credits.
- 17 This is therefore a situation at odds with the above-mentioned renewed interest of civil society in territorial matters. It would be a surprising situation if we did not know how difficult it is for the Italian university system to respond and adjust to the demands of the outside world.

- 18 However, it should be pointed out that the geography in question is that typical of the Italian conception of the discipline : namely as restricted to its central interests and poor in operational content. It should not be thought that the Italian higher educational system entirely neglects territorial matters. But they are instead addressed by developing sectors in other disciplines engaged in the analysis of the territory and its spatial aspects. Moreover, territorial themes are sometimes dealt with simply by using names that pertain to other disciplines. Many degree courses in economics, for example, have only formally abolished economic geography, because in reality it has survived simply by changing its name. The majority of courses in land economics, regional economics, and so on, consist less in economics applied to spatial ambit than in full-fledged economic geography. The same applies to some courses in territorial history, or the history of cities or regions, which are essentially courses in historical geography.

Geography at upper-secondary school

- 19 The upper-secondary level is the one most indicative of the crisis afflicting geography in the Italian educational system¹⁰. Here the discipline goes almost entirely untaught, and when it does appear on the curriculum it is relegated to a role of secondary importance.
- 20 The reason for this state of affairs reaches back to the distant past and the enormous difficulty that the Italian educational system has always found in renewing itself. Suffice it to point out that upper-secondary school is still imbued with the doctrine that presided over its reorganization in the 1930s and which has been only partially dispelled by attempts thereafter to rejuvenate the system. As said, that doctrine was founded on historicist principles whereby the syllabuses of subjects replicated their development in European culture in general, and Italian culture in particular. Because geography was ill-suited to this method, it was marginalized and reduced to the mere description of the spaces in which human affairs had unfolded.
- 21 In the absence of an evolutionary method, the subject was taught – and in many cases still is today – according to criteria that were Italo-centric and purely spatial in the sense that territorial aspects were covered by moving from West to East and from North to South, starting from national context, the lowest level of closeness, and then gradually extending outwards to more remote areas, regardless of the presence of cultural, social, historical, economic, and other, connections.
- 22 Moreover, for much of the twentieth century the basic territorial unit was the nation-state, so that territorial analysis largely took the form of analysis of states and their territories. For this reason, the study of continents became the study of a succession of state entities, and generally in a predetermined order. Europe, for example, was almost invariably studied by starting from its south-western extension consisting of the Iberian nation-states, and then proceeded northwards, eastwards and southwards. In other words, the syllabus began at nine o'clock on a hypothetical clock centred on Italy and then followed its hands as far as six o'clock.
- 23 Study of Italy itself followed the same criterion : from North-West to North-East to the Centre to the South and the Islands. In this case, the unit of reference was the administrative region.

- 24 The analysis of territories therefore consisted of examination of juxtaposed territorial units, and it was conducted on a cartographic scale, which gradually diminished as the distance increased from Italy.
- 25 This procedure – which was used in other countries as well – remained unchanged until only very recently. It clashed with the more well-established pedagogical doctrine that the teaching of territorial themes should begin with the “near” and gradually move towards the “far”¹¹. A teaching method of this kind, moreover, required the accumulation of an enormous quantity of merely factual knowledge, and it was not infrequently the case that the entire didactic effort was directed solely to that end¹².
- 26 Neither in this case should one forget the fundamental role that the dominant epistemological paradigm played in throwing the discipline into crisis. It was this paradigm, indeed, that was responsible for the classification of geography among the so-called “humanistic” subjects – those that deal with unique and unrepeatable phenomena. This classification was not in itself erroneous, given that every stretch of territory is unquestionably unique and unrepeatable, but it was incomplete because it concerned only some aspects of the subject. As is well known, in terms of other of its aspects, geography can be included among the scientific disciplines, so that its classification in another category stripped it of a large part of its educational value. Moreover, for much of the twentieth century, geography was unable to shake off this conception of it as a humanistic subject, with the consequence that its teaching in schools was assigned to arts graduates¹³. The latter, precisely because of their training, were unable to follow geography’s subsequent evolution. They persisted in teaching the subject as a purely descriptive body of knowledge, and thereby increased its detachment from everyday reality.

Geography and the media

- 27 The presence of geography in the world of the media largely replicates the situation just described¹⁴. One observes a revival of interest in geographical knowledge, but within an overall context characterized by profound lacunae and a general lack of interest.
- 28 This is not surprising if we consider the poor quality of the education delivered by the school system. It should be stressed that this deficiency is apparent at every cultural level. We are in the presence of a truly democratic feature.
- 29 The media must perforce adjust to these characteristics of their audiences. The consequence is a general lack of interest in geography and its concerns by the mass media. This indifference is reflected in the training of media practitioners, who feel no obligation to deepen their knowledge of geographical matters, as evidenced by the frequent gaffes that they commit when dealing with geographical issues.
- 30 The problem reaches worrying levels when one considers reports. In so far as news services transmit information about the various realities of the world, they should display detailed knowledge of the contexts in which the events reported occur. Otherwise the risk arises that thorough understanding of those events will not be possible. Instead, one notes with a certain disappointment that news journalists display an ignorance, which is tolerated only because the audience is unable to discern the superficiality of certain information and tends to interpret it according to local parameters. However, this situation is not exclusive to Italy : on the basis of my personal experience of foreign radio

and television broadcasts in Italy, it seems that it obtains in other countries as well. What is certain is that it is a serious problem in Italy and causes constant complaints by the community of Italian geographers.

- 31 Contrasting with this general lack of interest in geographical topics is the recent advent of media formats specialized in territorial issues. The phenomenon is growing apace, and it testifies to spreading interest in geographical studies among certain sections of the general public. Nor can it be said that this heightened interest is solely due to the inadequacy of the information provided by the mass media. It is still an elite phenomenon, to be sure, but it is spreading through diverse cultural levels of the population. In so far as it is elitist, moreover, it concerns specific thematic sectors rather than the territorial issue as a whole.
- 32 As in many parts of the Western world, the geographical topics that attract greatest interest are those of travel and the natural environment. This a reflection of the demand for more profound knowledge about areas of the world, which improved transport and greater affluence, now make accessible to broader sections of the public. In this regard, in Italy several new publications devoted to these themes have appeared in recent years, while radio and television programmes on them are broadcast even at peak periods.
- 33 Some of these publications do not restrict themselves to travel and the natural environment alone, but also deal with more general geographical topics. This is a very encouraging development – even more so when one realizes that thorough geographical knowledge has been used to write articles on non-geographical subjects like history, archaeology, sociology, anthropology, botany, zoology, and so on. The fact that the authors of these articles have felt it necessary to acquire close familiarity with geographical aspects is further confirmation that at least some of their readers are attentive to the correctness of the information conveyed. It should be pointed out, however, that some of these articles are by foreign authors or have been reprinted from foreign publications.
- 34 These mainstream publications have recently been flanked by new ones devoted specifically to cities, urban systems and geopolitical issues. The latter in particular are indicative of an increasing desire to acquire detailed knowledge of events that, with the end of the Cold War and the onset of the Terror War, have marked the end of the last century and contemporary history. For that matter, the phenomenon is not surprising, given that the current period is characterized by profound changes. According to some, including myself, these changes can be called epochal and regarded as marking the end of the modern age and the beginning of a new one, which, for lack of a better expression, is at the moment called “post-modern”.

The Geographical Italian World

- 35 Interest in geographical themes is coordinated and organized by a sizeable number of national associations. Some of them have interests that encompass geography in its entirety, while others specialize in more specific aspects.
- 36 Should one wish to classify these organizations into categories, they can be distinguished into professional associations, geographical societies, and associations or bodies more generally interested in geographical culture or certain of its aspects.

Professional associations

- 37 These comprise professional practitioners and they endeavour to foster their interests, paying particular attention to those that concern their professional activities.
- 38 The most representative of these associations is the Associazione dei Geografi Italiani (Italian Geographers Association) (AGEI), to which almost all Italian university geographers belong, whether as lecturers or researchers, or as geographers embarking on academic careers. The association pays especial attention to these last, encouraging them to take part in its activities. The principal tasks of the association are to enhance the standing of the geographer's work, to develop contacts within the geographical community and with other academic sectors, and to stimulate research by organizing study groups on themes of national and international interest involving a good number of scholars.
- 39 The most important part of the association's work is organization of the Italian Geographical Congress, which is usually held on a four-yearly basis in the same year as the UGI-IGU International Congress. This year's congress is scheduled to be held in Palermo on 14–16 September.
- 40 Of equal importance are the Giornate della Geografia, which are held annually in years when there is no Congress. These "Geography Days" provide important occasions for Italian geographers to meet and discuss specific topics, to describe the progress of their research, to devise new projects, and to define new areas of interest.
- 41 The third significant activity of the association is organizing the Escursioni Interuniversitarie (Interuniversity Field Trips), the purpose of which is to introduce geographers, especially ones who have recently joined the profession, to aspects of the Italian landscape which are generally little-known because they are unfrequented by tourists or professionals. These excursions also provide opportunities for geographers to gain systematic understanding of the areas visited.
- 42 Numerous other scientific initiatives and meetings are organized or supported by the association. Its official organ, the journal *Geotema*, is published without a fixed schedule. Each issue is devoted to a particular theme and provides updated information of especial value to scholars concerned with other areas of research. For this reason, it is a formidable instrument for thematic inquiry and the exchange of experiences and methodologies within the discipline.
- 43 Moreover, AGEI represents the main linkage between the academic community of geographers and the Italian political and administrative institutions.
- 44 In order to foster contacts among its members, the association publishes *Repertorio dei dipartimenti e insegnamenti di discipline geografiche nelle Università italiane* and *Indirizzario dei docenti* – lists of university geography departments, courses and lecturers – compiled by its current president, Professor Alberto Di Blasi.
- 45 Further information can be obtained from the website : <http://www.agei.org>.
- 46 AGEI has been a member of EUGEO since 2003.
- 47 The Associazione Italiana Insegnanti di Geografia (Italian Association of Geography Teachers) (AIIG) is devoted mainly to the problems of geography teaching in Italian schools of all levels, and its members are consequently concerned either full-time with

the subject or on an occasional basis. Although the association is national, it divides into regional sections, which may in their turn divide into interprovincial, provincial or city ones. This organization of the association into a network facilitates the provision of training and refresher courses for teachers and brings it closer to their particular needs. Each section organizes activities of great interest and is the most effective means to cater to local situations. More detailed information about the association is available at its website <http://www.aiig.it>.

- 48 The main event on the association's calendar is its annual National Conference. This year's conference will be held in Padua on 14-17 October. It will be an occasion of especial importance because it marks the fortieth anniversary of the association's foundation. Conferences are usually organized into a traditional section comprising debate on professional issues and workshops, and a section consisting of field excursions intended to yield direct knowledge of the area surrounding the conference venue.
- 49 The association is markedly international in its scope and organizes numerous educational visits abroad, especially in areas about which relatively little is known because they are extraneous to the tourist interests and the attention of the media.
- 50 The official organ of the association is the journal *Ambiente Società Territorio - Geografia nelle Scuole*, which replaced *Geografia nelle Scuole* some years ago and is a valuable source of information and updating for practitioners.
- 51 The association's current president is Professor Gino De Vecchi. At the national level AIIG is the main body representing geography teachers in relations with the educational authorities.
- 52 AIIG is a member of the European Standing Conference of Geography Teachers.

Geographical Societies

- 53 These are associations set up not only to promote or defend professional interests but also to foster the spread of geographical culture by means of conferences, debates, excursions and, especially, publications. They also sponsor or coordinate geographical research, scientific expeditions and conferences, and they may sometimes take active part in research projects.
- 54 Società Italiana di Studi Geografici (Italian Society for Geographical Studies) (SSG) (<http://www.societastudigeografici.it>) is the oldest of the Italian geographical associations. It was founded in 1895 in Florence, where its headquarters are located, with the aim of supporting initiatives to foster the progress and spread of the geographical disciplines. To this end it promotes research and organizes conferences, as well as supporting large-scale geographical projects. In recent decades, the society has gone through periods of difficulty, which have hampered its activities. However, its present dynamism testifies that it has largely recovered its leading role in the discipline. The most important undertaking by the association is publication of its prestigious quarterly journal *Rivista Geografica Italiana*, which is an especially important source of information and a major stimulus for research, in that it contains not only scientific articles but also a news section and various discussion columns.
- 55 Società Geografica Italiana¹⁵ (Italian Society for Geographical) (SGI). Given the size of its membership and its endowment of bibliographical and documentary materials, the Società Geografica Italiana is indubitably the largest of the Italian geography societies

and consequently acts as the discipline's main representative in civil society. Further information is provided by the panel and can also be obtained from the website <http://www.societageografica.it>.

- 56 The society is distinguished by its intense programme of activities. Its headquarters in the centre of Rome close to the Colosseum frequently host conferences and seminars, many of them organized by the society itself, usually on geographical topics but occasionally on more general ones. Exhibitions and more generally cultural initiatives are also frequently organized. Moreover, the society is distinguished by its commitment to the conservation, restoration and cataloguing of its large stock of bibliographical and cartographic materials. The society is also responsible for the maintenance of the historic building in which its headquarters are located, and of the historical and archaeological items in its possession.
- 57 The society's principal purpose is to promote geographic culture and knowledge, although it also plays a prominent role in research, on occasion acting as the coordinator of scientific projects. Furthermore, its wide range of publications is of essential importance for the Italian community of geographers.
- 58 The society's quarterly *Bollettino della Società Geografica Italiana*, published uninterruptedly since 1868, divides into two parts, the first consisting of a news section and the second of scientific articles.
- 59 The society has published numerous books, either as individual volumes or as items in series, the best known and longest-standing of the latter being the *Memorie della Società Geografica Italiana*. These are collections of monographs on various topics, which constitute important tools for scientific investigation. Equally important is the society's annual *Rapporto della Società Geografica Italiana*, intended to provide land management experts and professional geographers with a permanent observatory on the dynamics of Italian society and the country's landscape. With its descriptions of the national geographic space and the people that inhabit it, and will do so in the decades to come, the success of this initiative, strenuously promoted by its current president, Professor Franco Salvatore, bears witness to growing interest in the management and organization of Italy's territory.
- 60 The *Memorie* series has recently been flanked by the more dynamic *Studi e Ricerche* series, which by now consists of a substantial number of volumes. This series comprises a section of foreign-language publications, mainly in English, in the intention of reaching a broader international readership, thereby overcoming the difficulties of disseminating the results of Italian geographical research due to relatively scant knowledge of the Italian language abroad.
- 61 The *Studi e Ricerche* series bears witness to the society's intense international endeavour over recent years, the purpose of which has been less to discover distant and little-known regions than to promote Italian research internationally. Part of this endeavour are the society's initiatives to foster contacts with the international geographical community, and especially with national geographical societies. Specific attention is obviously paid to relationships with European geography. The creation of EUGEO, of which the society is a founder, is one of the principal outcomes of this effort. Relations with the International Geographical Union have also been consolidated with the society's regular participation in its conferences and the organization of stands at international IGU congresses. The society also takes part in IGU research projects while hosting conferences organized by its

Commissions. Moreover, the IGU Commission “Global Change and Human Mobility” (GLOBILITY) is based in the society’s Rome headquarters. Mention must finally be made of the Home of Geography, which is also based in the society.

- 62 Elsewhere in Italy, the society constantly engages in activities not exclusively organized at its headquarters. Its relationships with local associations are maintained through a network of local trustees in the country’s regions and provinces.

Thematic associations

- 63 These are associations interested in particular aspects of geography or in broader sectors of the discipline. Their large number means that they cannot all be listed here. Consequently, I shall mention only those that most closely pertain to geography.
- 64 The *Associazione Italiana di Cartografia* (Italian Cartographic Association) (AIC), for example, concerns itself with problems to do with cartography and representation of the territory. It maintains very close relationships with the geographical community : indeed, its president Professor Giuseppe Scanu is a geographer at the University of Sassari. The Association holds an annual conference, which furnishes the most important linkage between cartography in Italy and its users, and publishes the conference proceedings. The association’s journal is the *Bollettino dell’Associazione Italiana di Cartografia*, and its website is <http://www.associazioneitalianacartografia.org> (presently under construction). It is a member of the International Cartographic Association.
- 65 The *Associazione Italiana di Scienze Regionali* (Italian Regional Science Association) (AISRe) (<http://www.aisre.it>) is a section of the European Regional Science Association (ERSA). Although it is open to all regional science practitioners, its members are mainly scholars working in the sectors of regional and land economics. It organizes an annual conference, the proceedings of which are part of a substantial body of published output. The association’s journal is the quarterly *Scienze Regionali*.
- 66 The *Associazione Italiana di Geografia Fisica e Geomorfologia* (Italian Association of Physical Geography and Geomorphology) (AIGeo) (<http://www.aigeo.it>) promotes and coordinates physical-geographical and geomorphological research. It also organizes training seminars for physical geographers and geomorphologists and mounts initiatives to foster knowledge of the landscape and the environment. The association belongs to the *Federazione Italiana di Scienze della Terra* (FIST) (<http://server.dst.unipi.it/fist>), the umbrella organization for physical geography associations.
- 67 There are several associations of urban geographers in Italy. I mention by way of example the *Istituto Nazionale di Urbanistica* (INU) (<http://www.inu.it>), which seeks to promote knowledge and research in the various sectors of urban planning. The institute is extremely active : it organizes conferences and congresses and produces a wide range of publications, including *Urbanistica* (four-monthly) and *Urbanistica informazioni* (two-monthly).

Associations and bodies of geographical interest

- 68 There are obviously a large number of associations or institutions concerned with geographical matters. Listing all of them would be an arduous undertaking, and anyway the space available here precludes it. Moreover, many of them are local organizations. As

a consequence, I shall mention only the two largest of them, and which have played the most significant role in fostering interest in geography.

- 69 *Touring Club Italiano* (TCI) (<http://www.touringclub.it>) is a large association with more than a million members and comprises numerous sections. Its aim is to promote the social and cultural values of tourism, and consequently seeks to foster a profound knowledge of the landscape and the environment. Its activities are too numerous to list here, but mention should at least be made of its numerous and valuable publications, which comprise not only maps and travel guides but also studies on the landscape, environment and national and international culture. The Touring Club also engages in important research and educational programmes and works closely with geographical institutions, the *Società Geografica Italiana* in particular.
- 70 *Istituto Geografico Militare* (IGM) (<http://www.nettuno.it/fiera/igmi/igmit>) is a public body originally created to produce the official maps of the Italian state. With the passage of time its range of activities has extended to comprise broader geographical aspects. It produces a number of publications besides maps and aerial photographs. Especial mention should be made of its two-monthly journal *L'Universo*, the most widely circulating periodical on geographical topics in Italy.

Società Geografica Italiana



Largo della Società Geografica Italiana
Villa Celimontana
 I - 00184 ROMA

Founded 12 may 1869
Moral Entity 1869
Environmentalist Association 1986
Cultural Institution 1996

Until a few years ago the Italian Geographical Society may have given the impression of an almost impoverished nobility : perhaps the austerity felt within its rooms seemed to be the result of a certain lack of means, so that the seriousness of its actions were mistaken for haughtiness.

However, over the last two decades, many things have changed at the Italian Geographical Society, though not its seriousness, nor its austerity or nobility. The Italian Geographical Society is and intends to remain the serious organization that it has always been, austere administering its resources and using them for what it considers to be noble purposes.

The Italian Geographical Society has been a free association since its foundation in 1867, and it can be joined by whoever endorses the objectives established by the Statute, which can be summarized in the fundamental goal of promoting the advancement of geographical knowledge. This objective and the methods used to achieve it immediately qualified the Society for approval by the Italian State, which, as early as in 1869, granted it the status of “moral entity” (non-profit foundation). More recently, the Society has been officially recognized as an environmentalist association. The main reason for this attention by public administrations is that the Geographical Society has always sought, and still does so, to make its heritage of assets and knowledge available to the general public, directly or indirectly via the use made of it by the Society itself. However, a constant feature of the Italian Geographical Society’s long life has been its interest in its country and citizens and – beyond any bombast – in humanity as whole, though obviously in the modes and within the limits of a scientific-cultural association.

In accordance with the provisions of its Statute, the Italian Geographical Society does not concern itself solely with applied research. The main goal of its policy is the advancement of geographical knowledge ; expanding, updating or innovating knowledge but also fostering geographic culture and environmental awareness, which always seem too limited and yet are absolutely vital.

The Society seeks to foster geographic culture in various ways. The first, obvious and traditional, is that of documentation : with approximately 300,000 volumes, the Italian Geographical Society’s *Library* conserves the most important collection of specialized documentation in Italy, and one of the most significant in the world : it holds, amongst other things, more than 2000 periodicals of geographical interest, a quarter of them current, and obviously from all over the world. The Library has an annexe comprising a collection of modern geographical maps (much more than 50,000 items), which is almost complete with regard to Italy’s territory and its seas – indeed, consultation of the *Map Library* is the Society’s most frequently requested service. There is also an *Antique Collection* in the Library, with several thousand volumes and hundreds of maps and atlases dating from the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries. There is then an *Oriental Collection*, a valuable collection of Chinese and Japanese maps – more than 200 items, the majority of them hand-drawn and most of great historical and artistic value. The list continues : there are more than 150,000 photographic images from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, documenting places, people, landscapes and scientific explorations and investigations in every region on earth. Finally, to be mentioned are the Society’s *Paper-Based Archives*

(approximately 250 fascicles available for consultation) containing documentation on the history of the Society, and its recently acquired *collections of individual scholars*.

This impressive stock of materials is accessible to members and to all those applying to consult it. It seems pointless to add, although perhaps appropriate, that besides the hand-written documents, many of the works conserved are unique to the collection at the Geographical Society.

It is therefore evident that the Society pays every possible attention to documentation and to geography's concrete heritage. However, it also engages in activities intended to increase geographical knowledge : *public meetings* organized in the form of conferences, seminars, round tables, refresher courses, lectures and book presentations. The Society works closely with other associations, and through them develops relations with schools, for example. In short, the headquarters of the Geographical Society host numerous initiatives by other institutions working in fields akin to geography, as well as occasions to acquire knowledge and establish and consolidate relationships.

A wide-ranging "diplomatic" initiative by the Society has been its invitation to the geographical associations of the EU countries to found a *European Society for Geography*, EUGEO. Also housed at the Italian Geographical Society is the *Home of Geography*, the permanent secretariat headquarters of the International Geographical Union. The network of knowledge, contacts and cultural initiatives by now extends worldwide, and the association has taken the appropriate initiatives in this regard as well, offering itself as an international standard setter.

However, publishing activities are still essential for the exchange of ideas among scholars and for greater awareness of geography among the general public. The oldest Italian geographical magazine – indeed, one of the oldest in the world – is the Society's *Bollettino della Società Geografica Italiana* : published uninterruptedly since 1868, with at least 100,000 pages printed, several tens of thousands of images, and bibliographic information, news and data on the most varied aspects of Italian and world geography, the *Bollettino* is an impressive geographical archive. The intention is now to circulate the *Bollettino* more widely by means of the Internet. Besides the Society's journal, a range of scientific monographs demonstrate its most recent dynamism, as well as a quantity of volumes in series.

The Society's publications have dense scientific content : they are not, that is, works designed to popularize the subject, a task that is excellently accomplished by other publishing enterprises. Their essential aim is to present the results of Italian and international scientific geography, thereby furnishing optimally updated information, as well as essential news on the association's activities, to members, who receive the *Bollettino* free.

Inscribed on the Society's Roll of Honor are almost all the most distinguished travelers and geographers since the mid-nineteenth century until the present day.



GIUSEPPE DALLA VEDOVA († 1919), FULL PROFESSOR OF GEOGRAPHY IN ROME, "LA SAPIENZA" UNIVERSITY ; SECRETARY OF THE ITALIAN GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY, 1877-1896, AND PRESIDENT, 1900-1906 ; FELLOW OF LINCEI NATIONAL ACADEMY, HE ORGANIZED THE NEW ASSOCIATION AND GUIDED IT DURING THE BIG GEOGRAPHICAL EXPLORATIONS AGE.



GIACOMO CORNA PELLEGRINI, FULL PROFESSOR OF GEOGRAPHY AT MILAN STATE UNIVERSITY ; CO-PROMOTER AND FIRST PRESIDENT OF AGEI ; FELLOW OF THE ACCADEMIA EUROPEAE OF LONDON ; INSCRIBED ON THE SGI ROLL OF HONOR. GLOBAL TRAVELLER (HERE IN ALASKA), AUTHOR OF A LARGE NUMBER OF PUBLICATIONS, HE DEVOTES MOST OF HIS PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITY TO HIS STUDENTS.



GAETANO FERRO († 2002), FULL PROFESSOR OF POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC GEOGRAPHY AT GENOA UNIVERSITY ; PRESIDENT OF THE ITALIAN GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY, 1987-1997, PRESIDENT EMERITUS FROM 1997 TO 2002 ; FELLOW OF LINCEI NATIONAL ACADEMY ; REFOUNDER OF THE SOCIETY, HE GUIDED ITS EVOLUTION TOWARDS THE MODERN DEMAND OF GEOGRAPHICAL KNOWLEDGE.

Associazione dei Geografi italiani



A.Ge.I.

Founded 24.06.1978

The Associazione dei Geografi Italiani is the youngest of the geographical associations in Italy : it came into being relatively recently, in 1978, and celebrated its first jubilee last year. However, its origins can be traced considerably further back

in time. Previously, in fact, the interests of geographers working in Italy's universities had been furthered by the Comitato dei Geografi Italiani (Co.Ge.I.), founded in 1967 and whose members were full professors in the geographical disciplines. The Co.Ge.I., therefore, was structured as an association for the most senior of academic geographers. It fulfilled a variety of functions: for example, defending the discipline within Italian academe and promoting it externally, both in Italy and abroad. It also concerned itself with geographical research and the scientific preparation of its members, pursuing these aims mainly by sponsoring conferences and organizing research groups. It also ran fieldwork days in specific territorial areas: these inter-university excursions took the form of itinerant visits to regional areas and concentrated in particular on those most marginal to large-scale tourism. But the principal task of the association was organization of the Italian Geographical Congress. During the 1970s, however, the evolution of the Italian university system – with the abolition of entrance requirements, the proliferation of new universities, the creation of new teaching and research posts, and above all the exponential growth of the student population – revealed the inadequacy of the Co.Ge.I. and its inability to pursue its statutory objectives. For this reason, at the end of that decade, the Co.Ge.I. decided to transform itself into an association open to all geographers working in various professional capacities at the country's universities. Thus created was the Associazione dei Geografi Italiani (A.Ge.I.) as the heir to the former association and to its institutional tasks: indeed, A.Ge.I. continued to organize the national congresses and the inter-university excursions. But it took on new tasks as well, notably the professional development of its members and the organization of scientific meetings. The most representative of the latter are the Giornate della Geografia, seminars intended to prompt reflection on themes of outstanding interest and to present the results of the association's work groups. In fact, the association promotes research by supporting the formation of study groups and encouraging the international exchange of ideas. The Giornate della Geografia take place annually, except in years when the association holds its Congresses, which are organized with the same four-year intervals as the international ones. This year, in fact, the Congress is scheduled for Palermo on 14 – 16 September. Particular mention should be made of the association's endeavour to stimulate revision of the discipline's epistemology and to modernize the subject in response to the constant pressures upon it. Clearly apparent in this endeavour are the marks left by the wide-ranging debate that preceded the association's foundation. Indeed, the tortuous process that led to the modernization of Italian geography culminated in precisely the same years when the idea of transforming the Co.Ge.I. took shape. Not coincidentally, numerous young scholars, among them the present writer, saw the A.Ge.I. as the best instrument with which to foster this rejuvenation process. Also to be emphasised is the association's role in linking the discipline's various sectors together, which is of particular importance when studies in physical geography and human geography are to be kept within the same ambit. The association also mounts various initiatives to develop relationships among its members – a purpose well served, for example, by the editing and updating of the Repertorio dei dipartimenti e insegnamenti di discipline geografiche nelle Università italiane (Directory of Italian University Geography Departments and Courses) and the Indirizzario dei docenti (List of Geography Lecturer Addresses) by the association's current president, Professor Alberto Di Blasi. The association's official publication is the journal

Geotema, which is published on an occasional basis and takes the form of a monographic issue on themes of particular importance and subjected to specific research. The international scope of the association is evidenced by its contribution to the creation of EUGEO, after its initial exclusion by the decision that involvement in the preliminary phase should be restricted to one national body alone. On conclusion of this phase, A.Ge.I. became a fully accredited member of EUGEO. The association can be contacted directly at the following e-mail address : segreteria@agei.org.

NOTES

1. DE VECCHIS G. (a cura) (2002), "La Geografia all'Università. Ricerca Didattica Formazione", *Geotema* 17, 6, maggio-giugno.
2. Geography, in fact is often defined according to its subject of study, which put very succinctly is the territory for territorialists and geographical space for spatialists. However, these concepts are very similar in their contents.
3. BALDACCI O. (1978), *Il pensiero geografico*, Brescia, La Scuola.
4. BUZZETTI L. (1996), "La Geografia tra scienza e descrizione", *La nostra Geografia*, I, 1, pp. 28- 44.
5. For that matter, this expedient was not particular original, given that it had been previously used by many disciplines. Medicine, for example, despite its conviction that every individual is unique and unrepeatable, had resorted to it since the beginnings of its transformation into a modern science.
6. Suffice it point out that still in the 1970s, when so-called quantitative geography burst on the international scene, in Italy that revolution was stoutly resisted by a large part of geographers, who disputed its acceptability as a sector of research and accepted it only because of its international recognition.
7. For more complete treatment of the situation of Italian geography, see L. BUZZETTI (with E. BULLADO) (ed.), *Geographical Renaissance at the Dawn of the Millennium. The Italian Perspective*, Rome, Società Geografica Italiana, 2002 and in particular the article by L. BUZZETTI, "The Italian Response to the Challenges of the New Millennium".
8. CALDO C. e LANZA DEMATTEIS C. (a cura) (1990), *Didattica della geografia nella scuola dell'obbligo*, Scandicci, Nuova Italia and CENTRO EUROPEO DELL'EDUCAZIONE (1995), *L'insegnamento della geografia nella scuola italiana : la ricerca C.E.D.E.* Novara, De Agostini.
9. COLAMONICO C. (1954), "Situazione della geografia nella scuola secondaria", in *Atti del XVI Congresso Geografico Italiano*, Faenza, Lega, pp. 267-277.
10. ASSOCIAZIONE ITALIANA INSEGNANTI DI GEOGRAFIA (1994), *I nuovi programmi di geografia per il biennio della scuola secondaria superiore : guida orientativa*, Bologna, Zanichelli
11. DE VECCHIS G. e STALUPPI G. (1997), *Fondamenti di didattica della Geografia*, Torino, UTET.
12. When in the 1960s the youth protest movement in Italy assailed the school system, one of the main criticisms that we brought against the latter was centred on its almost exclusive concern with superficial factual knowledge. And one of the most typical examples cited in this regard was precisely that of geography.

13. CENTRO STUDI TCI, SOCIETÀ GEOGRAFICA ITALIANA (a cura) (1998). *Perché insegnare la geografia in una rinnovata scuola moderna e interdisciplinare*, Milano, TCI.
 14. AIIG – SEZIONE LAZIO (1998), *La geografia nella società e nella scuola dell'Italia del 2000*, Firenze, Ariani.
 15. CERRETI C. (2000), *Della Società geografica italiana e della sua vicenda storica, 1867-1997*, Roma, Società Geografica Italiana.
-

AUTHOR

LUCIANO BUZZETTI

Vicepresident of the Società Geografica Italiana, buzzetti@ing.unitn.it