



J-Reading new and recent initiatives: for research, education and multifaceted collaborations

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With this number of J-READING we introduce a new initiative that concerns the thematic issues which can be useful to reach the aim of stimulating an in-depth debate on specific themes, phenomena and problems. Such thematic issues have the benefit of providing multifaceted and detailed geographical considerations and analysis on aspects and arguments that catch the attention at national and international level and which are moreover particularly topical, opening up pathways to an interdisciplinary discussion. At the same time, the thematic issues make it possible to overcome a number of problems that generally must be considered when planning whole monothematic volumes for journals awarded “Class A” by the National Agency for the Evaluation of the University System and Academic Research, as for example the possibility of having fewer contributions, with respect to the initial hypothesis, due to the peer review process; moreover, the setback must be added of not publishing papers already submitted and accepted but out of the context of the monothematic volume and therefore subject to a delay in the publication.

In particular, this number of J-READING is characterised by two thematic issues, in addition to some free papers:

- *Re-imagining Europe through geography education*; and
- *Accessibility and sustainable tourism: a kaleidoscope of issues and perspectives*.

The first one was born following the initiative of Joos Droogleever Fortuijn, Dino Gavinelli and Matteo Puttilli and involves a number of contributions coming from two different sessions of the 7th EUGEO Congress which was held in Galway (Ireland), in May 2019, regarding “Re-imagining Europe’s future society and landscapes”. This initiative has been approved by AIIG (Italian Association of Geography Teachers) National Council and can be considered a shared project to highlight the role of geographical education, within an international debate and framework, in order to mindfully re-imagine and re-modulate some important social, cultural, urban and environmental aspects and changes of the European contexts, singularly and as a whole. Particularly, this thematic issue involves three different geographical institutions: AIIG, EUGEO (Association of Geographical Societies in Europe) and IGU (International Geographical Union). The importance of additional learning, workshops, active didactics, value-oriented approach and appropriate methods of communica-

tion and sharing is evidenced. The aim is above all to underline how geography can be useful in this perspective in order to reach a deep understanding of the problems and themes that require robust knowledge bases and how different choices can produce negative impacts or respectful results on the components which constitute a lively and dynamic system. Specific examples and considerations are therefore provided.

The second one was proposed by Stefania Cerutti and Elisa Piva to provide inputs and insights into accessibility and sustainable tourism, as a propositional consequence of the scientific discussion held in Lecce (Italy) during the 4th International Global Management Perspective (GMP) Conference, in March 2019. The proposed theme occupies an important position and offers a fascinating perspective into geographical studies, and moreover opens facets of possibilities of interdisciplinary analysis. This is achieved by: discussing policies and initiatives for regulating and promoting accessible tourism; presenting opportunities related to the reuse and adaptive conversion of building heritage for sustainable tourism; intensifying the role of transport systems in the appeal and accessibility of destinations; reflecting on the relevance of residents' perception in obtaining a resounding brand identity. New, specific considerations would be imminently necessary after the fateful consequences of the COVID-19 emergency, destined to re-design and re-formulate, in the short (and medium) term, destinations, accommodation and catering arrangements, transport routes, the possibility of enjoying local peculiarities and "immerse" oneself in the reality visited etc.

With regard to new and recent initiatives, and specifically in the light of the current appalling situation of the COVID-19 emergency, which is having an impressive impact on all the spheres and previous balances of human society (sanitary, epidemiological, social, economic, perceptive, behavioural etc.) at global level, J-READING boasts, since number 1-2019, a specific column, named "Health Education", which can represent a very important platform for discussing huge problems, proposing hypotheses, analyses, discussions, geotechnological perspectives, according to an interdisciplinary, methodological and applicative approach. It is, therefore, a column which characterises J-READING, demonstrating how

we moved in advance, underlining the need to focus the attention on themes, tendencies and matters which can involve mankind on a global scale with striking implications and repercussions for the population and human health.

In addition to having thought of a possible thematic issue regarding COVID-19 (n. 2-2020) and specific in-depth fields (i.e. importance of geography, GIS and geotechnologies to tackle this emergency; applicative proposals in the perspective of possible future crises and emergencies; social repercussions of the COVID-19 emergency on different geographical scales; importance of geography to understand global and local problems related to epidemiological and sanitary aspects etc.), J-READING already has a designated area to contextualize some first considerations on the use of GIS in the time of the COVID-19 crisis (casting a glance at the future) and on the spatial inequalities of COVID-19 in Italy.

This column and this kind of initiative show and reflect the relevance of a strict intersectoral collaboration and approach among geographers and epidemiologists, applied geography and hygiene, GIS expertise and medical statistics; and this need is materialised in Italy for example in the Degree course in *Geographical Sciences for environment and health* at the Sapienza University of Rome¹, an Interfaculty between "Letters and Philosophy", "Pharmacy and Medicine" and "Economy". A similar tradition of studies, focussed around the relationship between human health and environment, the causes of disease spread and distribution, the features and problems of health services, the aspects related to quality of life, derives from the legacy received by the *School* in medical geography initiated in Italy by Cosimo Palagiano – for many years Director of the past Institute of Geography and Vice Dean of the Letters and Philosophy Faculty, as well as the main organiser of the International Seminars on medical geography².

¹ <https://corsidilaurea.uniroma1.it/it/corso/2019/29402/home>.

² For some insights and to find the general index of many International Seminars on medical geography see <https://geomedseminar.weebly.com/>.

It is thus that the Geography section of the present Department of Letters and Modern Cultures and the Department of Public Health and Infectious Diseases (Sapienza University of Rome) interacts and works together for didactical, project and research matters, with the aim of:

- nurturing professional figures also able to critically understand and know the risk factors connected with the environmental, socio-demographic, sanitary-economic aspects of the different geographical contexts and to provide specific data analysis and elaborations;
- conceiving projects and answering (national and international) calls which require a combined use of competences, methods and instruments to reach some developments with respect to the actual state of the art and produce innovative elements and replicable models;
- conducting research of public utility able to show concealed aspects, anomalies, territorial differences, patterns, clusters and trends, combining the use of: GIS and geotechnologies; geospatial, multitemporal and geostatistical analysis; questionnaires, investigations and field surveys; as well as applied processes and methodologies, disciplinary and interdisciplinary contents, also addressing ad hoc measures and possible actions and supporting territorial screening.

The further consolidated relationships between the Degree course in *Geographical Sciences for environment and health* at the Sapienza University of Rome and the AIIG and between the AIIG and the Commission on Geographical Education (CGE) and other Commissions of the International Geographical Union create the conditions to transfer on a wide radius – in the didactics and in the research for didactics in geography – hypotheses, results, methods and instruments to provide critical keys of interpretation and rigorous conceptual frameworks.

Recently a tangible testimony of these broad-based collaborations, along with Public Institutions and Private Agencies, has been provided by the organization (in the Sapienza University of Rome) of the GIS Day 2019 (11 November) dedicated to “Medical geography and GIS appli-

cations for social utility”³. As evidenced in the brochure, the event was organised in two sections. The first one was dedicated to research and applications based on some results achieved at an interdisciplinary and interfaculty level between geographical and medical-epidemiological studies. In particular, it was highlighted how the elaboration of geodatabases, the creation of spatial analysis models, the definition of buffer zones and the use of geocoding functions, in a harmonious perspective among different scientific-disciplinary sectors, can bring significant benefits for an adequate use of health and first aid services and the identification of the risk factors present in specific areas. The second one was first of all characterized by a demonstration-application course with the aim of re-elaborating John Snow’s map in a GIS environment, as a starting point for reflections and analysis that can lead to the identification of polluting sources with consequent negative implications for the health of the population exposed.

Another testimony is provided by the organization (in the Sapienza University of Rome), for the initiative of the AIIG – Rome section (and circulated by national websites and channels⁴), of the training course entitled “Geographical health education. Interdisciplinary contents and digital Story Maps”, in the months of March and April 2020 and postponed to a later date due to the COVID-19 emergency. As underlined in the brochure, the primary aim is to provide a geographical picture of the distribution of some widespread risk factors for the health of the population, in order to highlight regional trends and differences regarding bad behavioural habits that cause negative repercussions and represent avoidable harmfulness. The second aim is to promote elements and guidelines to reduce exposure to these factors, through appropriate precautions and adjustments, in the perspective of social utility and with particular attention to the problems related to unbalanced diets and obesi-

³ <https://web.uniroma1.it/lcm/news/gis-day-roma-11-novembre-2019-geografia-medica-e-applicazioni-gis-1%E2%80%99utilit%C3%A0-sociale>; <https://www.esriitalia.it/component/eventiesri/calendario/539/geografia-medica-e-applicazioni-gis-per-l-utilita-sociale>.

⁴ <https://www.aiig.it/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Locandina.pdf>; <https://www.aiig.it/attivita/formazione/>.

ty, tobacco smoke, reluctance to vaccinate, and alcohol consumption. Moreover, the course has the aim to provide competences to represent, connect and spread information, images and supporting documentation for geographical health education, and participants can learn to develop Story Maps with open source applications after having acquired specific contents.

At the same time and in the light of the peculiarities of the Degree course in *Geographical Sciences for environment and health* at the Sapienza University of Rome, enhanced by the close collaboration with the AIIG, for the translation of the results of the research into new and various didactical opportunities, a specific participation was recorded in the “EO and AI for Health and Urban Resilience” (10 March 2020), organised (by ESA-ESRIN – European Space Agency, Frascati, Italy) as an international event in the form of a virtual workshop⁵. One of the aims of the workshop was to identify and discuss the current main challenges related to Global Health and to show the importance of Earth Observation and geotechnologies for possible analysis and interpretations.

Geographical health education appears nowadays as ever a key element to know how to prevent and avoid risk factors due to personal behaviour, promoting a widespread process of awareness. At the same time, it covers a role of notable relevance in knowing how to recognize risk factors present on the territory and how to provide a close interpretation of the different components also in the optic of alternative solutions and making corrections. Moreover, it has a crucial position in contributing to elaborating models, apps, dynamic elaborations to tackle problematic healthcare situations and emergencies that can have notable consequences at different geographical scales representing huge social problems.

⁵ <https://eo4society.esa.int/resources/eo-and-ai-for-health-and-urban-resilience/>.