



Feedbacks on Beyond Globalization: 10 years of keywords for the Italian Political and Economic Geography

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Abstract

On December 11, 2020, the 10th edition of the annual conference “*Oltre la globalizzazione*” (Beyond Globalization), dedicated to economic and political geography organized by the *Società di Studi Geografici*, took place in online fashion due to Covid-19 pandemic. Despite this novelty, it was confirmed the main occasion for geographers to attend plenary lectures and parallel sessions focused on the key challenges and trends for the Italian Political and Economic geography. The inspiring title, “feedback”, aimed at reviewing the keywords related to the complex relationship between globalization processes and geography, recalled in the previous editions: Proximity, Resilience, Conflicts, Commons, [S]rootedness, Barriers, Mosaic, Boundaries.

Keywords: Economic Geography, Geography Trends, Globalization, Italian Society for Geographical Studies, Political Geography

1. Introduction

On December 11, “*Oltre la globalizzazione*” (Beyond Globalization), the annual conference dedicated to economic and political geography organized by the *Società di Studi Geografici*, the Italian Society for Geographical Studies (SSG), turned ten years old. Since 2011, this scientific appointment has been strengthened year by year, by finding a brilliant balance between the traditional Italian academic system and the international one, i.e. leaving freedom of participation thanks to the traditional “call” for sessions and then the one for contributions, the “call for abstracts”, and a selection of keynotes

and *lectios magistralis* held by distinguished Italian political and economic geographers. A method that has allowed and allows to activate the new generations of geographers, strengthening their scientific leadership as well as giving space to those who intend to integrate reflections with other disciplines, that is, opening the dialogue with other scientific fields and with the policy-makers and practitioners. Hence, the conference is going beyond the boundaries of the established Italian geography communities.

“Beyond Globalization” means opening up the scientific minds and relational network,

discovering new colleagues and new spaces for reflection, experimenting at a constant and inclusive pace. Of no less importance is the written legacy of the work: the collection of the papers in an intermediate format, neither too short nor excessively detailed, punctually published with open access by the next edition in the “*Memorie Geografiche*” of the SSG)¹, is a mine of articles that represent in-depth studies, often also very usable in lecturing. These papers are useful and recommended not only to the scientific community, but also to teachers in order for them to keep updated and to students of the subject in secondary education for insights.

2. Main innovations and participation geovisualisation

Three elements of methodological novelty have characterized the 2020 edition. These are:

- a) the choice of a horizontal theme to the reflections of previous years;
- b) the completely digital format; and
- c) the international coverage with a session specifically dedicated to the dialogue between Italian economic geography and those of other areas of the world.

The trigger to these last two innovations was the active reaction to Covid-19, which the organizing committee transformed into an opportunity to experiment with new approaches. The choice showed a certain courage and it resulted in a successful edition. “Beyond Globalization”, in fact, has been one of the few Italian geographic conference appointments for 2020 and it was widely attended at national and international level: 140 people connected from all over Italy representing 19 regions, some from Europe, as well as nine scholars from South America as the international session was dedicated to Latin American geography. The session, chaired by Roberta Curiazi, Maria Fernanda Lopez (FLACSO University), and Silvia Grandi (University of Bologna), aimed at

discussing the most interesting geographical dynamics of the last decade, comparing the Italian and the Latin American geographical perspective.

A simple survey and a webGIS visualized in real time made everyone participate in this plurality. With the use of the geovisualization technologies to support conference communication in the pandemic period, it was possible to account for the composition of participants in real time (39% structured university professors, 26% doctoral students/young scholars, 21% researchers, 14% subject matter experts, employees of public agencies, geography teachers or other) and the prevailing specializations. In particular, it emerged that there was a wide attention to environmental, regional and urban geography, to population geography and migration, as well as to geographic information systems and spatial data analysis, especially among younger people. It is no coincidence that the idea of integrating ICT and WebGIS technologies to the organization of the event was brought forward by the new generations of geographers of the large group in Florence.

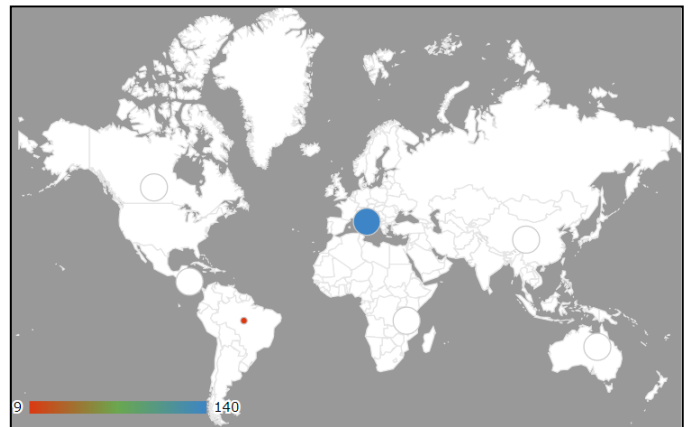


Figure 1. The geovisualisation of the participants' localisation according to main regions of the World. White bubbles imply zero participants. Source: Società di Studi Geografici, 2020 on Google Sheets application.

¹ “*Memorie Geografiche*” openaccess repository, <http://www.societastudigeografici.it/memorie-geografiche/>, Florence, Società di Studi Geografici.

3. Main keywords and sessions

The keyword “Feedback” symbolises the mutual relationships between the themes that have guided the geographical interpretation of the economic-political contemporaneity in the various editions of the previous conferences.

“Feedback” was the thematic *leitmotif* of the 2020 edition to stimulate discussion to take stock of the relationship between geography and globalization, the evolution of the economic-political processes – and therefore also social, cultural, and environmental – observed, studied, and experienced during the 2010s. Therefore, on how contemporary geographies have changed in the last decade, on how they are manifesting themselves today, and on the directions they are most likely to take from now on. To do this, the SSG wanted to recover all the themes (Proximity, Resilience, Conflicts, Commons, [S]rootedness, Barriers, Mosaic, Boundaries) that in previous years have offered the opportunity to work on its many facets of the phenomenon of globalization, proposing them as guidelines and interpretive fabric capable of directing reflection on.

Environmental change and the relationship with resources and ecosystems, the impact of technologies on markets and territories and, in cascade, on the geographical forms of society, politics, and culture have been further realm of scientific insights.

In particular, the opening plenary session saw the introduction of the President of the SSG, Professor Egidio Dansero of the University of Turin, followed by the greetings of the past-President, Professor Lidia Scarpelli. Professor Francesco Dini of the University of Florence, head of the scientific committee of the SSG, then retraced the path from the first edition of the congress to today by conceptually going over the keywords proposed and discussed from 2011 to 2019, a way to make a dynamic picture of the discipline and the evolutionary perspectives of Italian political-economic geography.

Moreover, Prof. Patrizia Romei and Prof. Filippo Randelli, also from the University of Florence, discussed respectively the keywords “Resilience” and “Conflicts”; Prof. Filippo Celata (Sapienza University of Rome) reviewed

“Commons”, Prof. Egidio Dansero “[S]rootedness”; Prof. Marina Fuschi (University of Chieti-Pescara “G. D’Annunzio”) discussed the theme “Barriers” while Prof. Cesare Emanuel (University of Eastern Piedmont) framed “Mosaic”, and finally Prof. Sergio Zilli (University of Trieste) the 2019 theme: “Boundaries”.

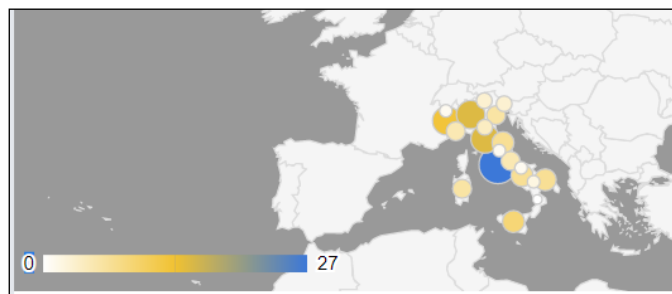


Figure 2. The geovisualisation of the participants’ localisation according to Italian Regions.

Source: Società di Studi Geografici, 2020 on Google Sheets application.

The journey across these keywords has highlighted their centrality in the economic and political geography discourse and its research in the latest years both in Italy and worldwide. Proximity, Resilience, Conflicts, Commons, [S]rootedness, Barriers, Mosaic, Boundaries show still a solid ground of significance in the education paths of the geographical discipline as they characterize the broadness, the inter-disciplinarity and some of the main entry points to critically discuss contemporaneity in a geo-perspective. None of them have lost. Most of them reflect the complexity of the world system at various scale and their persistence in shaping phenomena. None of these words has lost its relevance over time. Hence, eventually, the meaning has thickened, evolved or has been contaminated, but they are still able to explain socio-political contradictions, trends in spatiality and in the complex relationships between man and the biosphere.

In a didactic perspective, these keywords could become an innovative structure of an educational path in economic-political geography. It can be seen as a conceptual grid where students’ learning is moving towards advanced

reasoning on the understanding of contemporary and future phenomena of places and spaces.

The nineteen parallel sessions addressed various topics of interest in contemporary economic and political geography and case studies, providing not only theoretical perspectives but applied approaches².

For the economic part, the sessions touched on mobility, urban geography, international and development cooperation, with insights on migration, sustainability, and circular economy, the role of the university in spatial and urban configurations, as well as tourism in a pandemic framework that has redefined (at least temporarily) some trends.

As far as political geography is concerned, the reflections of the contributions presented in the parallel sessions addressed the evolutions and involutions of the administration of the territory and globalization from a geographical perspective, as well as the discussion of the new forms of territoriality resulting from digital development.

4. Conclusions

The conclusions of the work were unanimously positive and confirmed “Beyond Globalization” as a dynamic event, with prospects for growth and an ability to enliven and fertilize economic and political geography beyond the traditional scientific community. The formats and technological innovations have been a challenge for the organizers, but also a stimulus for experimentation in communicating and organizing that will remain even in the post-pandemic period. A McKinsey study³ argued that in 6 months of Covid-19 pandemic, the digitalization of activities gained an acceleration of about 7 years!

Picking up on the closing words of the keynote speakers, the political and economic

geography of the new decade faces very important challenges. Some of these, though not unforeseen, will be greatly amplified by the pandemic, and relate to the structural changes to be managed when we emerge from it. For many decades now, new technologies have been redefining markets and politics within that phenomenon, globalization, to which the SSG conferences were dedicated. There is no doubt that Covid-19 has powerfully accelerated this change, to an extent that is not easy to predict now, but that it will certainly have a powerful impact on labor markets and on all forms of associated life, opening, for all intents and purposes, clearly a new “the beyond globalization” era. Moreover, a paramount scientific and educational challenge is the geography of the relationship between the market and the environment for which politics and policies will have to be the necessary mediator to manage the transition from the unsustainable exploitation of resources to a healthy planet. The latter represents a critical and central theme, perhaps the challenge of all the challenges that the science and geographies, including Political and Economic Geography, will have to face throughout this century. Much future and much engagement, then, awaits geographers.

² Società di Studi Geografici, 2020, Oltre la globalizzazione – Feedback, conference website, <https://sites.google.com/unifi.it/ssg2020feedback/home>.

³ <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/strategy-and-corporate-finance/our-insights/how-covid-19-has-pushed-companies-over-the-technology-tipping-point-and-transformed-business-forever#>.