



## EUGEO activities and interests through J-READING's papers

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### Abstract

The 10th anniversary of this Journal provides an opportunity to retrace the relationship between EUGEO and J-READING through various papers of interest, which also allows us to trace part of the history of the Association of European Geographical Societies' (EUGEO) commitment over the last decade. The main issues discussed in the papers are related to geographical education (in harmony with the journal's approach), but also to the operational and statutory activities of EUGEO and to the commitment to achieve the best interconnection between European geographical societies and the global scale (as in the case of the fruitful collaboration with the IGU, but also of the GeoNight initiative). The subdivision into chronological paragraphs has the intention of providing a phased synthesis of the flow of papers.

**Keywords:** EUGEO, Association of European Geographical Societies, EUGEO Congress, GeoNight, Geographical Education, Geography and Society, International Cooperation

### 1. Introduction

From its foundation until today, also thanks to the vision of its founder, Gino De Vecchis, and his successor, Cristiano Pesaresi, J-READING has been one of the most attentive journals to EUGEO's activities. This has probably happened also because AIIG, the Italian Association of Geography Teachers, is both the organization that publishes the Journal and one of the Italian associations which is member of EUGEO, and because J-READING is the most important geographical Journal published in Ita-

ly entirely in English, with a strong focus on international aspects of the discipline and with authors from all over the world. This paper aims to retrace, in a sort of "anthology", a series of texts published in J-READING that directly or indirectly concerned EUGEO, its commitment and some actions promoted by the Association. Records show that J-READING is certainly among the fundamental sources that should be consulted by anyone wishing to understand the work of EUGEO in the last ten years, especially with reference to geographical education.

## 2. 2012-2014

In 2013 Gino De Vecchis, at that time director of J-READING and President of AIIG, in his paper “*Some keywords of J-Reading*” with great expectations introduced the EUGEO Congress in Rome and, within it, the session entitled “Geography education’s challenges in changing geographies” (De Vecchis, 2013, p. 6). In fact, during the EUGEO congress in Rome, the Association of European Geographical Societies, together with IGU and its Commission on Geographical Education (IGU-CGE), AIIG and EUROGEO, organized a special session dedicated to Geography Education in Europe, resulting in the joint drafting of the “Rome Declaration on Geographical Education in Europe” (De Vecchis, Donert, Kolossov, Ottens and van der Schee, 2013, p. 101 – see the annex in Ottens, 2013).

At the end of 2013, the then president of EUGEO, Henk Ottens, chose J-READING to publish his paper entitled “*Reflections on Geography Education in Europe*” (Ottens, 2013). In his article, Henk Ottens describes the Declaration as “a joint response of the European Geography Community to recent threats to reduce or even abolish geography content from school curricula” (pp. 97-98), but also a way to engage “the societal task of keeping the profile of Geography curricula and teaching methods up to date and to regularly and convincingly prove to the outside world the value of geographical knowledge, tools and skills for personal development and empowerment, for good and responsible (global) citizenship, for efficient business and for good and effective governance” (p. 98). Ottens also briefly presented insights and results from the “Remote Sensing for Geography Teaching” project, in which EUGEO was actively involved, that analyzed nine European countries and a “quite considerable variety in the way Geography is dealt with in schools”, but also a number of common goals, as it was underlined in the paper.

In 2014 Joop van der Schee, at that time co-chair of the IGU Commission on Geographical Education, published in J-READING the article “*Looking for an international strategy for geography education*” (van der Schee, 2014). The author considered the Rome Declaration important and valuable and, at the same time, highlighted the importance of proceeding on that path start-

ing other initiatives in various parts of the world. He also mentioned that “As follow up to the Rome Declaration a small group meeting of EUGEO, EUROGEO and IGU took place at the end of February 2014”, thus highlighting that the close cooperation between IGU and EUGEO did not end with the drafting of the Declaration but continued thereafter. A photograph of one of the joint meetings during the IGU Regional Conference held in Krakow in August 2014, was included in the article by Maria Paradiso confirmed the continuing cooperation (Paradiso, 2014). A cooperation to which, again in 2014, the then President of IGU Vladimir Kolosov also explicitly referred in his J-READING article “*The International Geographical Union before its centennial: new challenges and developments*” (Kolosov, 2014), in which he presented the programmatic perspectives of the International Geographic Union towards its centenary.

EUGEO has always supported actions for the advancement and recognition of geography as a discipline not only at the international level, but also on a national scale. One of these cases emerges from the J-READING article “*The fight for geography in the Italian schools (2010-2014): an updating*” (De Vecchis, 2014), in which Gino De Vecchis takes stock of the Italian situation, recalling the importance of international support. IGU, EUGEO, but also the various geographical associations that are EUGEO members, took concrete steps to convince the Italian institutions of the importance of geography, which had been hit hard in Italy by the reforms in the school system. For a petition in favour of geography, recalls De Vecchis, “In Europe [...] the largest number of adhesions was recorded. A record number of signatures came in particular from the United Kingdom, thanks also to the contribution of the Royal Geographical Society, which rallied by writing to Minister Gelmini herself. Important backing for the initiative arrived also from the Associação de Professores de Geografia (Portugal), the Asociación de Geógrafos Españoles (Spain) [...]. Among the associations giving their support to the appeal are lastly [...] the Hungarian Geographical Society and the Finnish National Board of Education etc.” (De Vecchis, 2014, p. 7).

### 3. 2015-2017

The article “*EUGEO Commitment to Geographical Education: from the ‘Rome Declaration’ to the ‘New International Charter on Geography Education’*”, published in J-READING by the EUGEO Secretary General (Tabusi, 2015), is intended to retrace the involvement of EUGEO in the path that led the IGU to the drafting, and subsequently to the approval of a new fundamental document on Geography Education. The final goal in this path is “to reach a geographical education whose usefulness is perceived and put into practice by the communities in a cooperative way” (p. 117). “The point is to preserve and put into action strikingly modern knowledge [Geography] with a decisive avail in our time. Knowledge that is useful to understand and solve actual problems, and to prevent and avoid future problems. To let people see that geographical thinking is not (only) for the military, tourists and academics, but is helpful for individuals and communities in their everyday life”. “To succeed in this, geographers need collective awareness of their social role and increased cooperation and networking. The nodes of the networks are certainly scholars, geographical societies, universities and research centres, but schools can also be so; teachers may try to start from the local scale, applying geographical thought to investigating territorial problems and possible solutions, and ‘infecting’ students, families and (maybe) local decision makers with it” (pp. 118-119).

After a long and careful drafting process the new “International Charter on Geographical Education” was prepared by Joop van der Schee and John Lidstone on behalf of the IGU Commission on Geographical Education, and then signed by IGU President, Vladimir Kolosov, in Beijing, 24th August 2016. The Charter was published on the website of IGU and also in J-READING in the second issue of 2016. The principles set down in this declaration are still absolutely relevant, and the proposed International Action Plan is an essential reference not only for geography education but also for geography as a whole, at local, national and international levels.

The connection between the commitment of EUGEO, IGU and others to the Rome Declaration and the IGU International Charter on Geographical Education is also highlighted by an article published in J-READING by Monica De

Filpo, which puts it in relation with the lectio magistralis of the Nobel Peace Prize Adolfo Pérez Esquivel given in Rome in June 2016, with the title “*Defend this little planet called Earth. Human rights and environmental safeguard*” (De Filpo, 2016). In fact, “Adolfo Pérez Esquivel gave his Lectio Magistralis on the causes and effects that are destroying the Planet, illustrating that the ideal response to this dilemma lies in the balance between human and natural needs. He illustrated different topics strictly related to geographical knowledge”, but the Nobel prize winner also stressed many social aspects, like the unequal distribution of resources and technologies, human mobility and migration, borders, globalization and many more, shedding light on human living crisis and various forms of injustices and the need of a “more sustainable approach towards the environment through education” (p. 114). “In order to face the increasing changes involving our Planet”, De Filpo says, “it is necessary to adopt a geographical point of view which is founded on its ability to interconnect environmental and social fields of studies, and which gives the opportunity to connect different disciplines thanks to its marked interdisciplinary nature” a direction inspired by the IGU document. In this same light, the text of the IGU International Charter on Geographical Education is well defined, in an article in J-READING of 2017 by Pasquinelli d’Allegra, “a unifying document” (Pasquinelli d’Allegra, 2017, p. 22).

In 2017 Dino Gavinelli reported in J-READING the commitment and results of the EUGEO meeting in Zadar (Croatia), held in September 2016 together with the General Assembly (Gavinelli, 2017). As Gavinelli pointed out, the meeting was divided into four workshops: “Coordinated by Henk Ottens and Massimiliano Tabusi, the first workshop concerned the International Charter on Geography Education. It has been emphasized that this document is specifically addressed to policy makers, education leaders, curriculum planners and geography educators to counteract geographical illiteracy; the second workshop, held by Ana Pejdo, dealt with the management and possible developments of national and regional school curricula of geography; the third workshop, coordinated by Oana Ramona Ilovan of the Romanian Geographical Society, dealt with the sensitive issue

of territorial identity in Europe; the fourth one, coordinated by Henk Ottens, discussed practices

and a variety of experiences carried out by a few European geographical societies” (p. 92).



Figure 1. The GeoNight 2021 website (www.geonight.net), designed and managed by an Italian working group (Massimiliano Tabusi, Sara Carallo, Arturo Gallia, Sara Nocco). The international “Night of Geography” has been jointly promoted by EUGEO and IGU: for the 2021 edition the site had contacts from 96 countries around the world and 1023 cities from different continents.

#### 4. 2018-today

In 2018 EUGEO decided to support and re-launch, on a European scale, an initiative started the year before, in France, by the French National Geographical Committee. This is why 2018 is the year of the international start of GeoNight, an event which subsequently developed further to reach a global scale. In an article published in J-READING in 2018, entitled “*The European Geonight: how to reconcile academic and popular geography*”, Antoine Le Blanc, Massimiliano Tabusi and Alexis Alamel, as coordinators of the first international edition, described the meaning, objectives and organization of GeoNight. The event tries to achieve many goals, which can be summed up in one simple question: “How do we better inform the public of the variety of geographical research and applications, and how do we reconnect academic geography and popular, real, lived, mostly unnamed geographies?” (Le Blanc et al., 2018, p. 138). The paper also highlights the central role of EUGEO in the organization and promotion of the event, and also gives some data and examples from the 2018 European GeoNight, which involved thousands of people in Europe.

“*The challenges for geography in higher education in European universities*” is the title of an article published in J-READING in 2020 by Joos Droogleever Fortuijn (IGU vice-President; session chair), Zoltán Kovács (EUGEO President), Antoine Le Blanc (EUGEO EC member), Gerry O'Reilly (EUROGEO Presidium member), Leo Paul (EUGEO EC member), Ana Pejdo (EUGEO EC member). The paper is the result of a joint EUGEO/EUROGEO/IGU panel discussion with the same theme at the EUGEO Congress in Galway, Ireland in May 2019. It offers insights from different European countries (Hungary, France, Ireland, The Netherlands, Croatia), with data on teachers and students, relationships with the labour market and other important challenges that geography has faced in recent years. From the report very different situations appear: “Some countries struggle with decreasing numbers of geography students; others have a stable or growing student population. Geographers in some countries have a strong tradition with good employment opportunities, in other countries students are confronted with

limited employment prospects” (Droogleever Fortuijn et al., 2020, p. 58). But there are also common challenges, such as decreasing budgets and high student/staff ratios, priority for research instead of teaching, the struggle with the legitimization, recognition and visibility of the discipline of geography, a gap between geography in primary and secondary education and academic geography (pp. 58-59). “Strong national geographical societies are necessary to make geography visible and to convince politicians, employers and the general public that society needs more geographers and that geography should have a firm and stable position in the curricula of primary and secondary education” (p. 59). Possible solutions, it is argued, also emerge from public initiatives and good communications, “to convince people that geographers are the experts-par-excellence in the main world problems, now and in the future, and that geographical knowledge is indispensable to understand and solve these world problems” (p. 59). This is precisely what EUGEO aims to do through its coordination activities, with the IGU and between European geographical associations, the Congresses and seminars that it organizes every year and events such as GeoNight, which had a truly unexpected global participation success in 2021 (Figure 1), despite the pandemic.

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