



## **“J-READING” reaches its tenth year of publications in the framework of geographical journals.**

### **Geographically thinking about didactics, research and interdisciplinary approaches. Introduction**

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#### **1. To take stock**

“J-READING – Journal of Research and Didactics in Geography” has celebrated ten years of publications since it was founded, coming from the determination and recommendation of Gino De Vecchis who was the National President of the Italian Association of Geography Teachers at that time.

In fact, in December 2012, Number 0 of this new journal was published and it was introduced by the editorial “J-Reading is born” subdivided into the following paragraphs (De Vecchis, 2012, pp. 7-10): Why a new magazine?; Integration between research and didactics; Course of research and new technologies; From scientific theory to didactic practice; Educational and scientific-disciplinary transversalities; Exchanges between researchers and teachers.

Many focal points were at once underlined, as for example the aim to:

- contribute to building a robust bridge between didactics and research in a complementary perspective of promoting a cultural education able “to deal with analytical-interpretative and educational-professional needs” (p. 7);
- evidence with practical examples and laboratorial experiences the relevance of a close and bi-directional link between university and school didactics which are “involved in fostering rationality and emotions, creativity and imagination with the education into which they merge” (p. 8);
- facilitate a profitable collaboration among different scientific fields and valorise the introduction of Information Technologies, GIS and innovative methods and tools into the didactics of geography in order to open up fruitful paths to interdisciplinarity and trigger students’ curiosity and interest, acquiring inputs from scientific and methodological research (p. 8);
- disseminate the results obtained in terms of research and didactics in civil society, also in the perspective of the creation of awareness to territory education, active citizenship, intercultural exchange and public geography (p. 9);
- strengthen the geography of values aimed at important social objectives, i.e. involving

sustainable development, risk approach, health education, starting with the university and school world (p. 9);

- support an at distance dialogue among the representatives of the Italian and international scientific community, as well as the world of culture and public institutions and professional enterprises (p. 10).

A new engaging initiative was started up and the Italian Association of Geography Teachers was enriched with a new editorial project (intended as being entirely in English as a basic planning) focused on a scientific journal, in addition to the historical magazine at first called "*La Geografia nelle Scuole*" and then (since 2001) renamed "*Ambiente Società Territorio – Geografia nelle scuole*".

The birth of J-READING and its position among scientific journals was also evidenced in the newsletter dated December 2016 of the International Geographical Union – Commission on Geographical Education (2016-2020), where J-READING was presented as a new magazine to publish and widespread research or ideas and founded "to develop a strong link between didactics and research as an important strategy for the development of the geography and geography teaching".

Number 0 of J-READING was faithful to the declared purposes since there were contributions regarding the following.

- Geographical education in a changing world (van der Schee, 2012).
- Perspective on geographical education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Stoltman, 2012).
- The reduction of volcanic risk in the Neapolitan area (Scandone and Giacomelli, 2012).
- Parental nutrition knowledge, geographical area and food habits in Italian schoolchildren: is there a link? (Bevilacqua et al., 2012).
- Integrate geographic skills with active learning in geography: a case of Turkey (Artvinli, 2012).

Therefore a number of contributions were strictly related to didactical and educational aspects and contextualised in the frameworks and directions of: defining and winning future challenges for modern geography; promoting active learning, geotechnological skills, scientific

method, data collection and analysis in geographical education at different levels; supporting the comparison of interdisciplinary knowledge, increasing collaboration among geographers, and enhancing international understanding among the scientific community, educational world and people. Other contributions were focused on – with specific exemplifications based on case studies – problems and themes of notable geographical interest with the viewpoint of expertise in volcanology and human nutrition science, respectively for discussing: measures, educational aspects and scientific knowledge useful for tackling a possible emergency phase; health education, risk factors and health determinants for school children and their future.

Over time these subjects and areas of interest have been integrated and enlarged with contributions coming from geographers and colleagues of other scientific sectors and different countries that have increasingly expanded the network of the relations and comparisons of themes of great topical relevance. Geography Education in different countries has been summarised, national cases have been presented and the need for a profitable international collaboration has been discussed, looking for strategies and best practices and remembering the fight to enhance the role of geography at school. Seismic and volcanic risks in the pre and post event, landslide susceptibility and forest fires have been analysed according to a geographical and interdisciplinary approach, making use of images coming from multiple sources, simulations, damages scenarios, geospatial elaborations and also deducing lessons in natural history. Geography and disability as well as special didactics have been addressed. Aspects regarding food and agriculture, mountain stories and sea images have been discussed. Citizenship, migration movements, sustainability and territorial education have been the subject of various contributions. Crisis of landscapes, landscapes of the crisis and possible solutions for a rebirth have been analysed, above all in Number 1-2016 (with foreword by Aru S., Parascandolo F., Tanca M. and Vargiu L.), with the addition of emotional perception, landscape reconstruction, landscape and semantic repertoire, sense of belonging to place. Urban regeneration, smart cities, touristic and commercial trends, and the problems and hypothesis of val-

orisation have been the topics of other works. The International Charter on Geographical Education, perspectives from the International Geographical Union – Commission on Geographical Education, possibilities for the development of robust competences in geography by applying the IGU International Charter and working in a cooperation network (i.e. with AIIG, Association of Geographical Societies in Europe/Association of European Geographical Societies – EUGEO, the European Association of Geographers – EUROGEO) have fuelled a profitable debate and exchange.

Many works have highlighted the essential role of an applied approach, both in research and didactics, supported – in addition to historical and traditional cartography – by specific geotechnologies, tools and functionalities, like: GIS and *ad hoc* extensions; GPS, drones and mobile technologies; remote sensing, geobrowsers and satellite images; web mapping, web 2.0, on line portal, neogeography and open geodata; story maps, dashboards and digital storytelling. Number 2-2018 represented a particular experience in this direction since it was focused on some of the contributions presented during the “Esri Italian Conference 2018”, confirming the attention to support also the link with the professional and company world; Number 2-2018 also included the contribution by Jack Dangermond, President of Esri (Redlands, California, USA)<sup>1</sup>.

In fact, in the section “Focus and Scope” of the J-READING website it is evidenced that<sup>2</sup>:

In the interconnected perspective of research and didactics, J-Reading deals with issues related to:

- the use of cartography, digital maps, remote sensing, models and tools for geographical and intersectoral perspectives;
- epistemology, history of geography and cartography;
- natural, environmental and social risks, and territorial planning;
- medical and health geography and quality of life;
- landscape, land use and resource enhancement;

- sociodemographic and economic-tourism frameworks, territorial problems and opportunities.

Moreover, J-READING has recently started to publish “thematic issues, having the added value of providing in-depth geographical considerations and analysis on aspects and phenomena that attract the attention at national and international level”.

Number 1-2020 contained two thematic issues, respectively, focused on “Re-imagining Europe through geography education” (edited by Droogleever Fortuijn J., Gavinelli D. and Puttilli M.) and “Accessibility and sustainable tourism: a kaleidoscope of issues and perspectives” (edited by Cerutti S. and Piva E.).

Number 2-2020 tackled the thematic issue “A geographical and crosscutting look at the COVID-19 pandemic in an international framework” (edited by Pesaresi C.), at once underlined and discussed in the blog of the Royal Dutch Geographical Society<sup>3</sup> by Joop van der Schee.

The initiative of thematic issues seems to be a profitable opportunity for stimulating and promoting a convergence of viewpoints concerning subjects and phenomena which have a certain current relevance, requiring an interdisciplinary and international comparison to record an advancement in the state of the art and reaching productive aims in terms of research, didactics and third mission.

In the perspective of connection and interchange are also to be found the different journal features which are present in J-READING, that is to say: The language of images (edited by Elisa Bignante and Marco Maggioli); Mapping societies (edited by Edoardo Boria and Tania Rossetto); Geographical notes and (practical) considerations; Teachings from the past (edited by Dino Gavinelli and Davide Papotti); Referred papers for remote sensing (edited by Alberto Baroni and Maurizio Fea); Health Education (edited by Corrado De Vito). All these features have different topics, structures and purposes but share the desire to feed a virtual circle aimed to show the vitality and potentialities of geography-

<sup>1</sup> Dangermond and Pesaresi, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> (<http://www.j-reading.org/index.php/geography/about>).

<sup>3</sup> <https://geografic.nl/artikel/kennen-om-te-kunnen-kiezen>.

ical studies and tools and provide rigorous materials and critical contributions which are contextualised in the intersectoral and international framework of knowledge.

On the occasion of the tenth year of publications of J-READING, and with Number 1-2021, the journal website has been graphically and technically improved and enhanced in its layout and functions. The contents have been migrated in a recent version of Open Journal Systems (OJS)<sup>4</sup>, the software application which is at the basis of the system for managing and organising the submission of the papers and the editorial workflow up to publishing the different contributions and the whole number. One technical and graphic step has been performed functionally to operational and figurative criteria and to better guarantee the working flow and procedure according to current standards.

Another step has been planned in terms of publication. In fact, among the main aims of J-READING is the wish to represent a key bridge to reduce distances or more incisively to move more closely, above all in a perceptive sense aimed at active sharing and the creation of a basis for common discussion, making it converge the attention on themes and aspects of great far-reaching relevance and defining documents in a participant way. A very good example of this was the meeting which was held in Rome, at the Sapienza University, in the location of the Geography Unit of the current Department of Letters and Modern cultures, during the IV EUGEO Congress (5-7 September 2013), when the Rome Declaration on Geographical Education in Europe was signed by Representatives of the Italian Association of Geography Teachers (AIIG), the Association of Geographical Societies in Europe (EUGEO), the European Association of Geographers (EUROGEO) and the International Geographical Union (IGU)<sup>5</sup>. In a cohesive atmos-

phere of international collaboration an important document was defined to “underline clearly and strongly that the teaching of Geography in schools is fundamental for the future of Europe”, since “Geographical knowledge is indispensable for well informed citizens, successful businessmen and policy makers”. In order to feed an analogous sense of active and common participation and discussion about the role of geography research and didactics and the position of the geographical journals like suitable seat for discussions and comparisons and for creating knowledge and citizens’ awareness, this number of J-READING has been thought with a thematic issue entitled “‘J-READING’ reaches its tenth year of publications in the framework of geographical journals. Geographically thinking about didactics, research and interdisciplinary approaches”.

This issue gathers together the contributions written by:

- Joseph P. Stoltman, who contextualises the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of J-READING (and its journey) in a reflective perspective which involves other journals able to give notable inputs on geography education;
- Gino De Vecchis, regarding geography and the teaching of geography at university, with considerations about how and what to teach and an incipit concerning looking back... ten years ago and beyond;
- Rafael de Miguel González, who provides propositional reflections relating to geographical and geospatial competences and skills from school education to higher education, in a framework which considers the contribution of geographical journals and EUROGEO in proactive cooperation and international projects;
- Zoltan Kovacs and Massimiliano Tabusi, who highlight the relationship between EUGEO and J-READING and, in this way, also summarise the history of EUGEO’s ac-

<sup>4</sup> <https://pkp.sfu.ca/ojs/>.

<sup>5</sup> The Rome Declaration was signed by: Gino De Vecchis, at that time President of the Italian Association of Geography Teachers (AIIG); Karl Donert, at that time President of the European Association of Geographers (EUROGEO); Vladimir Kolossov, at that time President of the International Geographical Union (IGU); Henk Ottens, at that time President of the Association of Geographical Societies in Europe (EUGEO); Joop van der Schree, at that time Co-chair

of the Commission on Geographical Education of the International Geographical Union (IGU-CGE). In J-READING, the Rome Declaration was published on p. 101 of Number 2-2013, after the contribution “Reflections on Geography Education in Europe” (Ottens, 2013).

tivity and specific initiatives over the last decade and look towards new challenges;

- Paolo Villari, Roberto Scandone, Lisetta Giacomelli and Maurizio Pollino, who offer a paper with multiple entries about geographical keys for research and didactics from perspectives regarding hygiene and public health, volcanic and natural risks, GIS use and applications.

## 2. For free and open research

I still remember the first meeting at Gino De Vecchis's house together with Cristiano Pesaresi, Marco Maggioli and myself, during which the present honorary president of the Italian Association of Geography Teachers proposed the idea to edit a new international, open access, scientific journal.

I think it is important on the tenth anniversary of its publication to go back to that moment, because there was such a meaningful desire to create a space for horizontal debate and the exchange of free ideas, even before setting out on this new adventure.

For this reason, I may now better understand why Gino De Vecchis chose his home for our meeting (for a geographer, a place is never neutral and random, of course!). He clearly wished to have an honest exchange of thoughts (not only about the aims, but also about the journal's desirable placement in the national and international present and future scenarios and about the proposal's sustainability in relation to the human resources available) and he was well aware that the life of this new ambitious enterprise would strictly depend on a free adhesion to the proposal.

If the meeting had taken place in an usual daily working context, it would probably have been more difficult to feel this freedom. By opening his home to us, Gino De Vecchis underlined the absence of cooptation once more and, at the same time, the need to share a common scientific and civil commitment in order to build this project. At that time, we chose to listen to De Vecchis's idea and to express our personal positions, while other people got the opportunity to avoid taking part in the meeting.

There were both political and cultural topics to consider. It is important not to forget that J-READING is an offshoot of the beginning of the Italian process of university research evaluation: in fact, despite the fact that "*Ambiente Società Territorio – Geografia nelle scuole*" had the same citation indexes as other historical geographical Italian journals, it was not yet ranked in the first Italian list of scientific geography journals. During the following years, because of the quality of papers still published, that serious mistake was corrected, but at that time it was essential to take a standpoint.

On the one hand, there was the need to adhere to some formal standards, both quantitative and qualitative, as defined by the newly born National Agency for the Evaluation of the University System and Academic Research; on the other hand, first of all, we were aware that the Italian Association of Geography Teachers should have the responsibility to legitimate disciplinary research on educational and didactic subjects, and also to support the equally important relationship between research and didactics.

We all agreed with the need to make available also to geography teachers and researchers in Italy an "instrument" to meet these kinds of cultural needs.

Moreover, it was easy to understand why that instrument could be an open access scientific journal. In fact, some years earlier Marco Maggioli and I had been working in two directions:

1. stimulating, along with many other colleagues, the cultural and scientific Italian debate on scientific geographical journals, their function and their "weight" within the fledgling research evaluation process;
2. qualifying the journal "*Semestrale di Studi e Ricerche di Geografia*"<sup>6</sup>, together with Gino De Vecchis and Cristiano Pesaresi, in order to enhance the historical journal of Geography's Cabinet of the Sapienza University of Roma (published since 1931) and to develop it from a very local journal into a national and then international one.

<sup>6</sup> [https://rosa.uniroma1.it/rosa03/semestrale\\_di\\_geografia](https://rosa.uniroma1.it/rosa03/semestrale_di_geografia).

Beginning with this first informal meeting, we started to work in supporting Gino De Vecchis so that his idea became a project and then reality:

- Marco Maggioli worked hard to support the selection of the scientific profile's scholars to invite for the scientific committee;
- Cristiano Pesaresi constantly assisted Gino De Vecchis as Associate Editor (to then become Editor in Chief in 2018);
- I took on the role as the Editorial board's Chief (until 2018, when I had the opportunity to be nominated by the Sapienza University of Rome as Editor in Chief of "*Semestrale di Studi e Ricerche di Geografia*"). I am very proud to have proposed the title that will be the journal's heading during those months, stressing the unavoidable connection between research and didactics.

As the present President of the Italian Association of Geography Teachers, I wish to express the Association's gratitude to Gino De Vecchis for the civil worth of his efforts in order to progressively improve the placement in Italy of studies on geography education, children's geography and geography didactics in Italian Universities, both in relation to teaching subjects (we have always to remember that in the 90s he obtained and taught the first "didactics of geography" course in Italy) and to the scientific legitimization of research practices around those topics.

In fact, again thanks to De Vecchis's ingenuity, nowadays our Association also edits an open access book series with one of the most prestigious Italian publishers, "*Tratti Geografici. Materiali di ricerca e risorse educative*"<sup>7</sup>.

Therefore, it does mean that in the last decade there has been no more misunderstanding in Italy about the qualification of a geography researcher interested in these studies, and many of them have been able to be recruited and upgraded in the Italian university system thanks to the

brilliant evaluation of papers edited by the Italian Association of Geography Teachers too.

For these reasons, I am very grateful to Cristiano Pesaresi for his continuous highly professional work, as Associate Editor and since 2018 as Editor in Chief.

We do not have just the responsibility to maintain the outstanding results obtained since 2012 but also to develop them more in the following years.

We need to further improve public awareness and better highlight the essential social role of research and didactics in geography, particularly today for the future generations.

It is the very lack of scientific culture and geographical imagination, which is fundamental in prefiguring the even radical variations in the context and organisation of the territory, that has contributed decisively to the general underestimation of the impacts of the dramatic socio-sanitary and environmental emergencies that exploded with the passage to the XXI century and to the unpreparedness in immediately tackling the effects and consequences (Morri, 2020a, 2020b).

The constant research activity in the didactics of geography has in fact made it possible to identify, as well as educational objectives and the competences peculiar to the teaching of geography, strategic concepts for the education of citizens and sustainable development, translocality and globality, as clearly confirmed by fundamental documents in this regard (Dematteis and Giorda, 2013):

- 2000: International Declaration on Geographical Education for Cultural Diversity;
- 2007: Lucerne Declaration on Geography Education for Sustainable Development;
- 2013: Rome Declaration on Geographical Education in Europe;
- 2016: International Charter on Geographical Education.

The mitigation of the effects of climate change and the reduction of environmental risk for the young and future generations pass through the construction of citizenship education courses founded on the exercise of critical knowledge and the taking of responsibility,

<sup>7</sup> In English "Geographical Features. Research Materials and Educational Resources", [https://www.francoangeli.it/ricerca/Ricerca\\_Collana\\_Libri.aspx?Collana=11787](https://www.francoangeli.it/ricerca/Ricerca_Collana_Libri.aspx?Collana=11787).

without which the recourse to technical knowledge, however evolved and refined it may be, not only risks remaining sterile, but even dangerous (and tragedies like those of Vajont here in Italy stand to bear witness to this).

Italy – responsible for the organisation in Catania (22 June 2021) of the G20 Education and coordination in Glasgow, together with Great Britain, of the joint event of the Ministers of Education and Environment “Together for tomorrow: Education and Climate Action” held on 4/11/2021 as part of the Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on climate change-COP26 – was in fact the first country in Europe to draw up the scopes of intervention and therefore the outlay for the school-education sector of the economic resources destined to Italy from the European Union.

Fortunately, the School ReGeneration Project (*Piano RiGenerazione Scuola*), a declination of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (*Piano Nazionale di Resistenza e Resilienza*), has an approach that is not totally focused on the rhetoric of technical culture as the only way out of the social, healthcare and economic crisis but presents a structure that can be shared by the prospect of geographical education to citizenship and sustainability.

The progressive impoverishment of the geographical literacy process that Italian society underwent between the end of the XIX and beginning of the XX centuries (Boria, 2020) is thus one of the main causes given for a situation that today sees our students in bottom position among the OECD area countries in demonstrating skills useful for understanding different points of view from their own.

In fact, during the XX century a patrimony of knowledge and competences was squandered and undermined, while instead geographical culture and the Italian schools already at the end of the 19th century were able to express, as very clearly documented by the Scottish geographer John Scott Keltie, who in 1884, appointed as *Inspector of Geographical Education* by the *Royal Geographical Society*, drafted a report on the state of geography teaching in different European countries:

What has been said of France applies equally to Italy. The progress of education in that country in recent years has been of the most radical and hopeful character. All the best features and best methods of Germany have been imported, and maps of German origin, with Italian nomenclature, have been largely introduced. [...] Under the guidance of Professor Dalla Vedova, Professor Cavaliere Guido Cora of Turin, Professor Malfatti of Florence, and other geographers, the Italians are themselves producing series of school wall-maps and atlases, some of which will bear comparison with the best products of Germany. Not only so, but in the matter of relief-maps Italian publishers are perhaps the most enterprising in Europe (Keltie, 1886, p. 503)<sup>8</sup>.

There is an intolerable imbalance between the legitimization process that geography has achieved at scientific and educational level, the inadequate recognition in a political-institutional context and the insufficient teaching and training offer in geography in the schools and universities of Italy (Turco, 2020). A misalignment between demand and qualified offer of geographical knowledge which is at the basis of the foremost commitment of the *Associazione Italiana Insegnanti di Geografia* (AIIG; Italian Association of Geography Teachers) in fostering the dialogue among generations, in education and the professional training of school teachers and in promoting opportunities for cultural exchange (Morri, 2020c).

The reactivation of a process of widespread geographic literacy in fact represents the most efficient and efficacious stimulus of the interventions foreseen with the application of the School ReGeneration Project<sup>9</sup>, coherently with the Sustainable Development Objectives established by the 2030 United Nations Agenda, if it is to be hoped that the beginning of this transition phase produces structural changes aimed at improving the quality of the lives of future generations.

<sup>8</sup> Our thanks go to Elena dell’Agnese, Vicepresident of the International Geographical Union and President of the *Associazione dei Geografi Italiani* (Association of Italian Geographers), also a scholar of the history of geographical thinking, for bringing this important document to our attention.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.istruzione.it/ri-generazione-scuola/index.html>.

Stimulating and keeping the quality of scientific production high, giving it widespread diffusion and offering opportunities for exchange at international level of the outcomes of research on geography education, children's geography and geography didactics thus seems to be decisive at this moment in time.

This is a mission to which, thanks to the creativity of Gino De Vecchis and the commitment of Cristiano Pesaresi, the *Associazione Italiana Insegnanti di Geografia* is able to give its own contribution, also and above all by means of the pages of J-READING!

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