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The Geographer's profession: Umberto Toschi

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Umberto Toschi is an illuminate paragon of geographer, a profession who he lived and exerted with deep and passionate engagement both within the academia and in his civilian life; and such paragons are increasingly rare nowadays, especially in Italy, where there seems to be a trend to privilege teaching and research activities and to abandon contents and implications wider and complex that could be useful to the management policies of the territory and to the "public and private reason".

Umberto Toschi was born in Dozza Imolese (Bologna province) on June 10th 1897 from a rural noble family. After having fought during World War I, he achieves a degree in Humanities in 1921 at the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Bologna with a thesis in Geography entitled "The Carpathian-Danubian geographical individuality and its influence as a historical factor". After having devoted a period of his life to journalism and teaching in high commercial schools, in 1933 he was called to take on the Chair of Economic Geography at the University of Catania, where he remained for two years heading then to Bari, where he remained until 1948. At that time he became also the Dean of the Faculty of Economics and then was elected Rector. Over the three following years he worked at the University of Venice "Ca' Foscari", and in 1951 he was finally back in Bologna to assume, in 1953, the direction of the prestigious Institute of Geography at the Faculty of Humanities and Philosophy, which he directed until his sudden death that occurred in his bureau on July 27th 1966.

Academic and "expert", indeed, Toschi has been the first Italian geographer to engage with tourism issues in the academia, which he dealt both with a theoretical and an applied perspective.

His works, as his scholar G. Merlini reminds us (1966), have always referred to field research sided by important descriptive, systematic and teaching-oriented volumes (Emilia-Romagna, 1st edition 1961, 2nd edition 1971 revised by L. Pedrini; Course of General Geography, 1946 1st edition and 1964 6th edition). The fundamental work of Umberto Toschi interests the field of Economic Geography, including Tourism Geography; he has always shown interest in it since the beginning of his academic years, and it has always been at the core of his researches, that still represent a sample of original, brilliantly exposed and accessible works. Considered was his engagement to deepen the conceptual and methodological arguments when dealing with themes of industrial localizations, socio-economic planning and urban organizations.

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In an article published in 1961¹ the scholar of Romagna origin wrote with respect to his own activity: <<To those who followed my activity as a scholar, or as an "expert" as they say nowadays, will be clear that I have repeatedly put a word in favour of Geography and of geographers in all those public and private initiatives that could benefit of both in terms of public and private utility. So, in an article published by the "Giornale degli economisti" (The Economists' Journal) in 1955 not only we illustrated the possibility of an Applied Geography, but also presented a series of experiences, in large part personally undertaken, somewhat a record of exemplary cases. We started indicating the well-established applications in preparation of military defence and attack and in international political relations – and particularly, at that time, in colonial expansion, where political initiative and geography went side-by-side and were reciprocally stimulated. We then highlighted the applications in economic activities, notwithstanding that Economic Geography itself was born from commercial Geography meant as a tool for commercial expansion, impulse and guide towards commercial relations, as well as in transports sector (navy, harbours, roads and railways) and tourism. More recently, geographers got interested in issues of agriculture and of the geographic distribution and localizations of industrial areas; this lead them to being involved actively in concrete applications. So along with Urban Geography we assisted to the interventions of geographers in urban planning and, more widely, in the integral "regional planning">>.

Even though understanding the strategic importance of Geography in planning, Toschi appears to be farsighted especially in defining tourism an area of interest for Applied Geography, even ahead of sectors such as agriculture or industry. Indeed, he sees in the "circulation" the real soul of a territory. That is, exchange as a development vector; and exchange includes certainly goods and services but, as he already understands, that engenders also cultural aspects. In this respect, first in Italy (his theory about the regional impacts of tourism can be dated back to 1948) he attributes an active role for development to a phenomenon considered marginal and irrelevant by the majority; and in this it is possible to see the sagaciousness of a scholar that introduces his theories on tourism in an époque when Europe was struggling to recover from the war through the implementation of the industrial sector. Specifically, Toschi affirms that Tourism Geography is a chapter of Circulation Geography, anticipating the idea of tourism as a vector of ideas, knowledge, culture, consciences, money and many more, despite demarking it apparently "only" within the circulation of people. Undoubtedly the economic moments are present, since no movement of human beings and their productions is free, none doesn't imply an effort, a production, a consumption of resources and its circulation, prices salaries, costs and proceeds; in brief, all which that recalls to Economic Geography. But it would be limitative to stop here; in fact, he underlines the need to interpret the tourism phenomenon in its wholeness and to observe it as a geographic one. From this point of view, he takes the definition of the subject that engenders such phenomenon, the tourist, as a starting point for his analysis to go beyond a merely statistical definition: the risk in this case, Toschi affirms, would be to fall in approximate expressions, declaring that in the human world circulation is not only determined by reassembling spatial lacks of balance², but could also derive from the psyche of the human being, that is taste, fashion, faith, illusion, autonomous and free will, beyond a rational conscience. Substantially, the tourism phenomenon is traced back to a

¹ U. Toschi (1961), "A scanso di equivoci", in *Bollettino della Società Geografica Italiana*, Roma, n°9-10.

² << We see in that of man a fact of circulation analogous to others that can be observed in the physical world determined by density imbalances distributed in the space, as well as in the trend to compensate themselves through movements of masses and of their components. So, human circulation can be explained firstly as determined by unbalances of values mainly economic, that is in relations between human masses and resources of spaces in which they are settled>> (U. Toschi, *Aspetti geografici dell'economia turistica in Italia*, in *Atti del XVII Congresso Geografico Italiano*, vol II, Bari, Cressati, 1957, pp.443-470).

human impulse: a desire, a *need to go*, to depart, to emigrate from an ordinary life become unbearable because of boredom, routine's burdening, lack of healthiness. The tourism impulse can take, therefore, two different shapes: a *repulsive* one (to depart from a place) and an *attractive* one (to go to one place). Nevertheless, geographically speaking, the fundamental fact is that these two impulses are differentiated and distributed into space. Toschi identifies, in this way, places of active tourism (the former) and places of passive tourism (the latter). In the latter is then possible to highlight, in particular, the signs of the tourism phenomenon, and in them is positively mirrored the higher economic value. Such two circulatory impulses reflect important geographical effects: they are physically perceivable on the one hand, and socio-cultural on the other. The physicalness of the phenomenon is outlined in Toschi's analysis, which drawing attention on the typology of tourist resources, natural or human, configures respectively tourist areas or point tourist centres.

Not only. Toschi studies too the streams of tourist flows through the nevralgic points of passage on the territory: frontiers, harbours, airports, highways tollbooths, and so on; but soon he realizes that, already at that time, the means of transport used by the tourist increase more and more towards the "periphery", totally changing the regime of presences, of pauses, and of itineraries. This sheds light on the importance of arrivals, presences and seasonality of the phenomenon, so to adequately interpret it; however, what the scholar mainly wishes to point out is to investigate the mark that tourism leaves on the landscape. Landscape to which Toschi attributes an attractive impulse, analysing mainly «if and how and how much, reciprocally, tourist circulation inscribes itself in the landscape» (Toschi, 1957; cited, p. 463).

At the beginning of the past century, therefore, the strategic function of landscape management was clear: its transformations reflect social, cultural and economic changes of an époque and of a territory. As far as tourism is concerned, those places in which it engraves "overbearingly on the landscape", as Toschi puts it, are those in which it is going to be installed, while the transformation of the lines of communication is marginal or at least not attributable exclusively to this sector. For instance, this is how he interpreted the transformation of the Romagna coastal landscape: «The speaker cannot affirm to have assisted at the beginning of the transformation of the Romagna littoral zone, but remembers vividly those that were the attestations of its originary aspect over the long solutions of continuity between the first bathing stations that were developing around the middle-size, small and smallest urban centres of ancient origin: Rimini, Riccione, Cesenatico, Cervia. It was all a long sandy shore, from Gabicce's foreland to Cervia's pinewood. And behind, low dunes sandbars covered of dust and rare tamarisks, wild thistles and weeds, that subsided till the plain: an edge of sandy and bare land, that eventually surrendered to drained fields.

And now is an entire belt of houses, villas and maisonettes. Dunes have been dismantled and covered with trees. Buildings are with in the green, roads spread parallel to beaches and small paths intersecate them perpendicularly, and the highest buildings stand up (hotels, pensions, children's seaside holiday homes); the sandy shore itself is pervaded by huts, colourful tents, crowd of bathers. And crowd in the streets, crowd in the small squares, crowd at the railway arrival stations. Thickening of buildings and life in correspondence of the old centres and new nucleuses: Cesenatico, Bellaria, Viserba, Miramare, Riccione, Cattolica and a full minor new toponymy».

Furthermore, as a geographer he doesn't neglect any element to read the landscape and cartography recovers a fundamental role in this. He affirms that «tourism, a geographic phenomenon, uses maps and in return gives impulse and poses its own urgencies to the cartographer», highlighting the active role of tourism on maps production. If at the beginning of the Twentieth Century a product such as the TCI 1:250.000 map could simply be a generic chorographic map, mass tourism imposes itinerary schematic maps that highlight drivers' support equipments, first aid spots and lay-bys. In this way, road and motor maps were

created, in order to absorb exclusively the title and concept of tourist map. The discourse has certainly evolved in this direction, and tourism has induced a friendly use of maps: from gis web maps to satellite navigators guiding the driver step by step in any part of the world.

Among others, another element in which Toschi's analysis seems particularly farsighted is to put in relation tourism and culture, and more specifically geographic culture. In this direction, he highlights the interest that tourism has for the spread of geographic knowledge: in itself, he affirms, the very same tourist "propaganda" is a work of diffusion of geographic knowledge: necessarily, geography becomes fundamental in the training of those that are going to spread a tourist "propaganda".

Toschi affirms that the true motivations of tourism are curiosity, search of novelty, of unknown or not much known, desire to know by the hard way people, countries, customs and landscapes that have been imagined only through literary suggestions or school books. It becomes therefore natural for the tourist to acquire a preventive knowledge of the places he wishes to visit, in order to be able to move with greater ease and to better enrich his own notions. However, he gets such knowledge, so to say: even without his will. Tourist, in this way, sees and learns.

On these fundamentals, according to Toschi, we can affirm that tourism development, the greater intensification of tourism circulation and in particular its capillary diffusion within the territories, determine a greater interest for knowledge and more specifically for geographical knowledge. The most immediate consequence is a greater diffusion of them, that neither school nor conferences, symposia or publications could ever make equal. And, not least, as Toschi affirmed, tourism <<contributes to facilitate that inter-comprehension among people that everybody auspicate as a foundation for a peaceful and fruitful coexistence>> (Toschi, 1957, cited, p. 469).

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