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Giovanni Merlini, a Geographer between Academy and Territorial Commitment

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Giovanni Merlini is "one of the most representative figures of those geographers who have been trained in the period between the two world wars in the school of Italian university teachers of geography in the early decades of the century, and who had the good fortune to become the leaders of the increase studies and dissemination of geographic education in our country in the last two decades" (Pedrini 1978, p. 420). He stands between those geographers, therefore, that have made *great* Geography in the Italian University, multiplying teaching and professorships dedicated to the training of citizens and to the research focused on the development of the Country to rebuild and to make it competitive in the international contest.

Tourism is an issue studied by Giovanni Merlini intermittently from 1939 to 1957, as from 1960 to 1974 is launching a series of publications that address this phenomenon with a theoretical approach in the wake of the work of U. Toschi, then he lower it even on the geographical reality because of its academic way of being involved in territory management. Born in Pisa in January 1907, he graduated early twenties in Arts and Humanities from the university of Pisa with A. R. Toniolo, who is going to call him in 1934 to Bologna as an assistant in charge. Since the beginning, he start his career as a teacher of Geography in various technical Italian institutes, first in the South (Salerno) and then from 1935 in the Technical Institute "G. Marconi" of Bologna, where previously G. Roletto and U. Toschi taught; here he take service until 1951, when he win the university chair. During this long period (1934-1939) he carries the assistance of Economic Geography at the University of Bologna, in 1938 he qualified as a lecturer first and gets the role of Geography in the Faculty of Natural Sciences, University of Modena, by 1931 to 1941, and then the Economic Geography role in the University of Bologna from 1942 to 1951. When he won the competition for university chair organized by the Faculty of Economics and Commerce of Bari, was called in Genoa to the Chair of Economic Geography, where he remained for 5 years. But his desire is Bologna, and returned here in 1956 for the first professorship of Economic Geography, at the Faculty of Economics, where he also obtained the lectureship of Political and Economic Geography from 1955 to 1959. In June 1977 held his last university lecture crowing fifty years of teaching and he died in June of the following year.

No less important are the positions held by Giovanni Merlini in public offices like the presidency of the Chamber of Commerce and the Hospitals of Bologna, and also the Vice Presidency of the Italian Geographic Society since 1972. Among other things, he has been

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active, at the National Academy of Agriculture in Bologna and at the Institute of Economic and Social Studies of the Literary Clique of Trieste.

Giovanni Merlini, despite its classical education, has always displayed near to the economic problems, and this is evident from his earliest writings on the towns of Garfagnana (1930th), and on population changes based on the altimetry in the Apuan Alps (1930b). Then he shows a special interest in the investigation promoted by the National Committee for Geography, drawing up three specific and documented monographs, that is on the depopulation in the mountain valleys Rendena Giudicarie and Ledro (1935), on the eastern Cadore (1938th) and the Rendena and Giudicarie valleys in the high Sarca basin (1938b).

A considerable body of more than 120 publications, characterizes the publishing activity of Giovanni Merlini, mainly composed by "economic geography topics" that are addressed with different nuances and specific emphases. And this to report its particular sensibility "to investigate, to perceive the economic reality although framed in different environmental conditions" (Candida 1978, p. 468). With the exception of two of his works on industry, agriculture and trade in Salerno and Amalfi Coast, published in 1930 and 1937, a number of publications concern the Emilia-Romagna, without forgetting Tuscany where he was born.

In his extensive production we can find studies on the geography of transport and communications began in the early forties and continued to the last, ranging from the Po valley to the South Italy and to Europe: for him pathways and nodes are tools for location and development of economic activities. But are mainly the writings of agricultural geography published most during the period 1943 to 1960, that reach a strong significance in the National Geographic research followed in the Sixties by those dedicated to a more systematic way to the industrial sector. A fourth working group is composed by the studies related to tourism, which is examined as a sector of a complex economic picture: around a dozen essays. But also in many other emerge more than a few thoughts, especially when Giovanni Merlini deals with the landscape theme, useful and engaging essays nowadays. The same applies to the question of the localization and tourist destination, which are analyzed directly and more often in a general context. And all this in a stimulating confrontation with U. Toschi!

In 1948 he published a precise and difficult work of synthesis aimed to identify and give "personality" to the agrarian regions, in which the Italian Country can be divided to define the spatial forms of the rural economy. These forms, Merlini says, are explained by the combination of environmental factors, namely from the soils morphology, the climate, to the population etc. Factors and elements those that interfere, penetrate and create, in a synthesis, a reality which is called landscape where reality is not a static, unchanging *quid* but rather a collection of life forms in continuous evolution and transformation.

And it is in this synthesis that we can read a geographic reality where everything is included and where the mankind and the environment are intertwined, or rather landscape and human society. In fact, to the concept of "landscape", central to his studies, Merlini alongside that of "human society" in order to clarify the relationships, various and changeable, between society and landscape. Also he intervenes decisively in the field of "applied geography", publishing in 1967, *Applied Geography: experiences and perspectives* and affirming that: "there is not geography that is not applied, and there is not science, between those who are dedicated to provide the guidelines that govern the relations between man and space, i.e. the territory, which is applied most of Geography? ". In this direction, is part of the work, published in 1970, inspired by a university course, addresses the issue of industrial location, which can be considered the first contribution to a broader analytical level which will affect the relationship between geography and industry in general.

Again, by making continuous reference to the theories of Italian and foreign localization of Toschi, (that since 1951 holds the chair of Geography at Bologna), addresses the issues of localization, namely the recognition and evaluation of elements and environmental conditions, natural and human, which motivate the choice of where to locate a manufacturing factory. A problem that is not easy, which was considered with different approaches by business economists, politicians and planners, but also by geographers, for whom reality is always composite and the choice of the place, voluntary or imposed, produce often significant effects in the landscape.

So from the agrarian regions to the landscape, from the industry to the territory, tourism comes in the studies of Giovanni Merlini based on the vocation of the places and landscapes, based on localization processes, as interpreted as an industry, so much to say "it seems that is now arrived the opportunity to demonstrate how and how much geography can bring its contribution to the application to the enhancement and to the development of this typical phenomenon of our time and that is the result of the increasingly widespread dissemination of the affluent society" (1968, pp. 1). The tasks for the geographer are: "the definition and identification of the centers and tourist areas, the study of vocations of this or that accommodation area, the relationship between our object of study - the landscape-, and this phenomenon of large masses of humanity movement, whatever the end, utilitarian or pure cultural or material enjoyment" (1968, p.1). Tourism brings with it a dynamic humanization of the landscape and builds a new association between man and environment that is just the landscape of a tourist area. A dynamic that is characteristic of mass tourism and not of the exploration and pioneering of the few elected or rich of the past. The geographer must devote to the study of this impact, such as to the infrastructure, economic development, social and cultural tourist destinations, where "access to new trades and professions, the income security in appreciated currency...the contact with the stranger profoundly modify social stratification, the mentality, the psychology, the kind of life and the level and cultural attitudes of locals: in a word tourism makes the resident populations *gens nova*" (1968.7)

For the Geographer Merlini there are three essential tasks: examination of tourism demand, the search for new locations of tourism accommodation and adaptation to different types of landscape in which it is inserted and at the same time, adaptations to the landscape tourism (1968, p.9). To the theme of tourism location is dedicated one study "in an attempt to express in formulas *geographic trends* very difficult to ponderate, but that may be indices in which the scholar will represent positive and negative factors of active and receptive tourism, and from equations that compute the potential competition from other locations susceptible" (1965, p.2). In fact, for Merlini, the study of the localization is no longer limited to the description of a region or a center or to identify factors that influenced the development of tourism, even to the transformation of urbanization processing, but has to offer "weighted factors" useful to private operator, politician and public administrator to base their choice. In short, an applied geography of tourism!

In this geographical itinerary, he shows a rare sensibility towards tourism, this implicitly from his studies on the landscape, encouraged sensitivity by his rich personality linked to the world of academia as to the political and public commitment and also to a problematic dimension of the discipline.

For Giovanni Merlini geographic problems of tourism in Italy "are not those of the distribution and localization, but are those of its inclusion in the landscape and the adaptation of the landscape to the current mass tourism: Problems of Applied Geography, then, to face in the field of economic and social planning, not in the context of individual companies and different locations, or even in the angulation purely scientific of geography:

problems of territorial organization, of a particular aménagement de l'espace...make a region of the earth a different region from what it was before, with a particular organization and purpose - the tourist one- and with its new and tipic way of life" (1968, pp.17-18) A lesson that still valid nowadays and an invitation to read again thwe wiritings of Giovanni Merlini, not just to geographers.

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