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## AlmaTourism

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### Giacomo Corna Pellegrini Spandre, Geographer and man of knowledge

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He used to be very attached to his three surnames. The name *Corna* belongs to a family of farmers and boatmen native from Parzanica, a village placed on the western shore of the Iseo Lake (close to Bergamo): the Corna family was attested since the XVII century and entered the circle of the local entrepreneur bourgeoisie after the big changes which the Napoleonic domination carried out. Giovanni Antonio Corna, the forefather of the dynasty, during the first half of the XIX century moved to Pisogne, a more relevant town on the eastern side of the Iseo Lake, placed in the Canonica Valley, and here he opened an emporium. Giovanni Antonio married then Giacomina Pellegrini Spandri (later changed into *Spandre*), who inherited some chalk-pits which made possible to acquire later great part of the iron and barite mines in the area as well. One of their sons, Giacomo Maria, was bishop in Brescia from the 1883 to the 1913 and other descendants became priests and nuns. Giacomo's father, Camillo, held some public office in Pisogne; Pia Schiatti, his mother, widened the cultural-geographic horizons of the family, being the grand-daughter of Giuseppe Toniolo, professor in Political Economy and one of the masters of the social catholic thought, and cousin of Antonio Renato Toniolo, a brilliant geographer from the University of Bologna. Giacomo, born in Pisogne in the Canonica Valley, on the eastern shore of the Iseo Lake, on the 31<sup>st</sup> of January 1931 and dead in Milan on August the 15<sup>th</sup> 2011, for sure absorbed the catholic faith and the authority due to his origins as son of an entrepreneur family deeply involved into social issues (Franzoni, 2002).

In his scientific activity he loved to start from the facts, carefully examined through the direct experience on field carried out travelling ceaselessly in remote regions and hiking through the places of his everyday life. He used to apply with rigour the *reductionism*, circumscribing with precision the geographic area to be studied in order to limit the amount of issues depending on sources and time at his disposal. Instead of following the cause-and-effect rule, he used to read the reality by connecting the phenomena one to another, preferring to search for a subjective synthesis instead of exhaustiveness, maybe reaching more arbitrary conclusions nevertheless always through a careful analysis of good authorities. This approach led him to give less relevance to general theories, and whether he discovered some of them, he used to frame them within the contingent experiential context and to consider them as a result of empiric investigations. The charm of his writing style was made of a clear and simple language, *which should be understood by a first year student*. He was a social scientist, specialized in the interpretation of the continuous changes of the World at his time. He

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practised a living science, pushed by the taste for the discovery and narration, following step by step the Italo Calvino's "proposals for the next millennium": levity, rapidity, precision, multiplicity, visibility, starting and then finishing. He had anyway his own vision of the world, which he explicated just in the end of his life as result of his entire activity. In his last publication, *The passion of getting to know the world (La passione di conoscere il mondo - 2010)*<sup>1</sup>, he outlined the guide lines for his personal view of the cosmos just like an impressionist painter can do, following the Pirandello's imperative "pensaci Giacomino" - "*Giacomino, think about it*".

From 1940 to 1948, a period of great social changes for Italy<sup>2</sup>, he attended the middle school and the senior high school in science education in Brescia. From 1948 to 1952 he was student at the Economics Faculty at the Catholic University in Milan<sup>3</sup>, where he attended the lectures in Economic History held by Amintore Fanfani, under the watchful eye of Father Agostino Gemelli<sup>4</sup>. For what concerns the political economy, he embraced the Keynesian theories, being student and later volunteer assistant for Francesco Vito (The economy in the service of humanity). The thought of Giacomo Corna Pellegrini Spadre developed within a context of great cultural heat and for sure he studied Teilhard de Chardin, a very popular author between the catholic student youth of those times, as deducible from one of his last statements: *I/.../ think that beyond space and time a divine Energy does exist /.../ [parallel] to the <<big bang>>/.../we can maybe imagine it as an explosion of enthusiasm and love/.../Inside the living world as in the whole reality, an original energy and spiritual footprint was there and always is, joined to the tangible aspects... I see some crucial steps on the path of every single person: a straight private and social life, the capability of constant introspection and re-discovery of oneself, the capability of a deep meditation/.../ setting free one's own thoughts from any tie with the everyday life, a sort of preview of the human life's closing and of the end of the entire universe (the omega point of Teilhard de Chardin), into the fullness and in the brightness of the divine Energy* (2010, pp.133-135). These words are confirmed in the publication of Teilhard de Chardin, *L'umanità en marche*, in the passages XX-XXII from Hymne de l'Univers (1916), which have been read during his funeral: *<<Inside the pain the upward power of the World is so intensely hidden/.../ The world builds itself/.../ it should be compared to a structured system/.../it could be better resembled to a kind of gestation and birth /.../ a new World>>* (de Chardin, 1961).

We can understand better his scientific activity by following his path as contributor and traveller. He wrote 70 books and 300 between papers and essays on newspapers and magazines, he spent travelling an average of two months per year, *which makes 10 years of uninterrupted travel*. Already in the high school years he published a description about a scout camp and at university (1948-1952) he reported a pilgrimage to Oslo. He wrote about friendship and faith on university journals and he especially visited European capitals. Afterwards, he lived in Rome for two years, as president of the FUCI (Federazione Universitaria Cattolica Italiana – *Italian Catholic University Federation*), he focused on the political tendencies inside the University and he treated issues of political economy writing also on the catholic newspaper *L'Avvenire*, on the International magazine of social sciences

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<sup>1</sup> From this point, the year in brackets refers to the annotated bibliography in this book. We referred to the author also for works published in cooperation with others.

<sup>2</sup> The transition from the monarchy to the republic, the construction of the Constitution as the synthesis between the social thought from the Church and the Socialism, the choice between a soviet-oriented policy and the subscription of the Atlantic Charter carried out by the Italian Christian Democrat party.

<sup>3</sup> It was usual for the sons from the Italian industrial bourgeoisie to become business economists or engineers. The same happened in this case: Giacomo's brother, Piero, was an engineer and used to manage the family enterprise, Giacomo studied Economics, nevertheless he boned up to the political branch and its philosophies instead of to the course in business.

<sup>4</sup> Founder of the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Milan, psychologist and psychoanalyst, president of the Pontifical Academy of Science.

of the Catholic University in Milan and on *Mondo economico*. From 1955 to 1967 his activity revolved round political topics, such as the reins of power (written with Piero Bassetti, 1959), economic planning (Varese, introduction to planning, 1963), urban planning (A proposal of linear development, planning the metropolitan area of Milan with M. Bacigalupo and G. Mazzocchi, 1965), development of urban transportation (1965), economical development (Cremona: elements for a development policy, 1965), the change (A world in change, 1968). His travels took the intercontinental range and he had the chance to repeat some of them more than once, especially in Latin America and India and a travel to the United States and Austral Africa.

The abandonment of politics and the choice of geography are explained by the author: As to the ideals of changing the world, it took me fifteen years to realize that the world is difficult to change... In later years I also realized, finally, that the knowledge of the world precedes any reason to change it... In politics were heavy self-promotion and the disproportion between the energy spent in the pursuit of consensus and those dedicated to solving real problems ... Perhaps it was the experience of travelling that introduced me to geography (2010) conscious that trying to understand the world, I believe, is a way of love (1998, p.138). Travelling I always found this double propulsion and this emotion: on the one hand try to understand the landscape and the people I met, on the other- by comparing with other than me – going into the knowledge of myself, of my worries, my daily life, of my desire to reconsider myself (2010, p.116). The commitment to academic geography began in 1967 when he was 36 years old, as a volunteer assistant in the Economic Geography of Caesar Saibene, with a wealth of about 50 publications on the territorial planning. His academic career was swift: a lecturer in economic geography at the Catholic University of Milan in 1971, and full Professor of Economic Geography at the University of Palermo in 1974 and then at the University of Milan from 1975 to 2006<sup>5</sup>. His writings describe almost all the places of the earth and address the issues of the reality of his time and of Italian and world geography.

Of Milan, his place of life, he describes the changes between '50 and '70 (1977), the function of region-city that was assuming (1974), the size of megalopolis padana (1977), explores the thinking of intellectuals (1992), the commitment of geographers (1996) and the impressions of students (1999).

Of Lombardy region, is responsible for the planning of an industrial area (1961) and work on its location between the Mediterranean and Central Europe (1980, 1994), of Italy he highlights the extravagance of the "Bel Paese" (1998), edits the cultural historic landscape in geographic types Atlas (2004) and introduces the entry Italy in the *Corriere della Sera's* geographical Encyclopedia (2004-2005). It outlines the economic and social development that has transformed it into a new country (1988), in a difficult cultural region (1997) and interprets the transformation of landscapes and cultures (2007). His travels in Italy are very numerous, at conferences, seminars, educational tours and lectures, which gave generously to his colleagues and former students become teachers.

The publications were publishing successes, each in two volumes, covering the South and East Asia (1982) and Latin America (1987): wrote on Mao's China (1973), where he was twice, on Australia (1999) and New Zealand (1990), on all the 5 continents (1989) and all countries and peoples of the world (2007). Cities and regions around the world are contained in essays and articles grouped by topic.

It is hard to separate the writings about places from those methodological and thematic, because as has been mentioned, the description included both an explanation and interpretation.

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<sup>5</sup> To be known and to be visible before the public exam for the full professor position he went with his works to all Italian full professors, demonstrating a high sense of himself then advised to his students.

The environment and the population are treated in the books "I tell you the Land" (2001), "Land of Men" (2002), "Population and territory" (1973), in "Cesare Saibene and the Italian landscape" (1994), "The house of the Po Valley" (1979) and in articles such as "E for environment" (1991), "Environmental Indicators" (1985). About economic activity he has focused on tertiary and transport sectors (1965) the leisure, travel and tourism. In particular tourism phenomenon he has written extensively and are to mention the his first contribution to geography, and ever in Italy, "The geography of leisure" (1967, 1998), the definition of tourist area and the study of Lidi Ferraresi (1967)<sup>6</sup>, "Tourism how and why" (1985), "Tourism between the cultures of the world" (1996 - 1997), "Blue Planet, landscapes and atmospheres in the world" (1995) - the book he cared more because it reminded him of his travels- "Tourists Travellers" (2000), "Tourism Planning" (2000), "Geographical explorations and cultural tourism" (2010). He deal a lot with urbanization (1973, 1993), cities (1994) and suburbs (1978). In terms of geographical methodology he followed a systematic way beginning from the history of geography with "Roberto Almagià and Italian geography in the first half of the century" (1998), "Geographical Research in Italy" from 1960 to 1980 (translated into English in 1982). With this work product of the Geographical Congress in Varese, organized by himself as the first president of AGel<sup>7</sup>, there appears a whole new freedom of expression in Italian geography<sup>8</sup>. "Aspects and problems of geography" (1987) represents a further synthesis of Italian geography through the contribution of the most important representatives of geographical thought and the continuous development of the variety of geographies (1992), which is also recognized internationally. Outlines the routes of human geography (1986, 1989), political geography (1974, 1995), cultural geography (1997, 2004, 2008) and humanistic (1992 English). He has been recognized founder of the geography of perception in Italy (1980, 1994, 1999).

He had a lot of attention both for teaching and for the relationship with students and also for research (1998) organizing also a dozen of yearly conferences collected and published in the series by him edited "Research and teaching of geography" (Cuem edizioni).

His curiosity has not stopped even in front of the flood of technological innovations. He founded the virtual journal Geoculture-on line (2001), has created an online course (2000-2001), inaugurated the electronic journal Almatourism and explored the relationship between new communications and new geographies (2009), suggesting a dynamic geography (2007, 2009).

He explored new forms of expression of geographic "novel": "In Australia with Pepita" (1997), "In Filippo's islands: travelling with my daughter. Travelling with my father" (2000), "Robinson in the Canary Islands, geography of a shipwreck on a desert island" (2002), "Geography different and valuable. The geographical thought in other human knowledge" (2007).

It was one of the most regarded and respected masters of Italian geography<sup>9</sup> and popularizer of Italian geographic research abroad, member of the European Academy of London, honorary member of the Italian Geographical Society and the Italian Association of Geography Teachers.

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<sup>6</sup> It is interesting to quote some of his confidences that he used to comfort his students in a spot and to show the method. This study was his first important writing and Cesare Saibene, who signed it with him, made him rewrite it seven times. Moreover the choice of Lidi Ferraresi was made because he use to spend there holidays with his family. A method used and passed to his students: each trip made for whatever reason had to be transformed into knowledge of the area adding depth documentation and studies.

<sup>7</sup> Italian Geographer Association fonde with the aim to organize geographic conferences again.

<sup>8</sup> Dematteis G., 2010

<sup>9</sup> Horacio Capel Sancez: is one of the most regarded and respected masters of Italian Geography (2010, p.13)

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Pict. 1: Giacomo Corna Pellegrini Spandre



**Pict. 2: Giacomo Corna Pellegrini Spandre (lake Como)**



**Pict. 3: Giacomo Corna Pellegrini Spandre in a family party**