My intervention could carry the title of “cultural and political geography in the local experience of an “orthodox” geographer”, replying to the request of Calogero Muscarà to bring concrete experiences of cultural and political geography, carried out in diversified geographical fields. I wish, first of all, to thank my Master and Friend to have considered my experiences significant, in some way.

It turns to be inevitable to insert a component of autobiography that I will try to contain and to generalize, by remembering that my experience begun in the school of geography “without adjectives”, in the mid Sixties, in that Institute of the University of Rome, which had seen the works of Roberto Almagià and Riccardo Riccardi followed by Osvaldo Baldacci and – after a long permanence in Naples and a passage through the Roman faculty of Education – of Elio Migliorini, under whose supervision I begun the assistantship.

It was a fundamental experience, even if very controversial in relation with the contents of the discussion we are conducting here: on the one hand, cultural geography was inborn to the dominant conception of the type of life, which is at its turn indissoluble from a bi-univocal with the physical context, according to the orientations French thought over human geography of the early XX century; on the other hand, the evolution (already hugely underway) of the territorial system towards that complexity, which would have led to the globalization was progressively closing the Vidalian exceptionalism, so fascinating and of highest conceptual profile, in marginal “research labs”, as Alpine or Apennine valleys and the most deep and hidden rural areas, where the study of local cultural values was risking to become a sterile ethnological exercise. I cannot forget the suggestion of abandoned dwellings, in those little fractions of Val Divedro (Ossola), which was the object of one of my first work, published in the “L’Universo”; nor the sense of uselessness that, more or less consciously, I was feeling when visiting the and collecting data of an already disappeared world.

Then a research for a “specialization” of geography in more actual fields (the city, the industry, the tertiary), was conducted mainly by young generations. It was conducted also through the use deductive models which had just then appeared in the Italian geographical literature: let us think about Christallerian theory introduced – after thirty years from the original!- by Eliseo Bonetti, a well settled geographer, and for this same reason, definitely independent from the dominant paradigm.

There was also a research for a major operative concreteness of geographical studies, through a political presence. The forerunners of this presence were – although with totally different positions and outcomes-other two great Masters, Ernesto Massi (disciple of Giorgio Roletto, with whom he had shared the idea of the founding of “Geopolitica”, suddenly closed in 1942) and Francesco Compagna (with the extraordinary experience of “Nord e Sud”), for a long time considered even “strangers” to geography. I have had the honor to be the assistant of the first; from the second; I have received an appreciation that was unconceivable to me, which turned to be decisive for the developments of my academic career.

In those same years, Elio Migliorini was publishing – in a singular way, in a foreign magazine, “Geographica Helvetica” – a very short article carrying the following title – Geography or geographies?. With this article he synthesized the state of the disciplinary debate in Italy. The response of the “orthodox” geography was clear: a unitary, monolithic, unattackable geography from any external interference. The corner stone that was endangered to become – I state it without compromising my deep respect, and affection, towards who has made possible my first steps in my profession of geographer – a gravestone. Those were the years when a split from my original school was ripe and a passage to the economical geography – much more open to the real issues of a profoundly transforming landscape - was behind the corner.

Certainly, the abrupt shift towards “specialization”, uphold by a progressively extreme quantitativism represented a danger of a loss of geography identity: if the theoretical and
epistemological re-foundation of the discipline (thanks mainly to Giuseppe Demattesi and Alberto Vallega) was a precious and unavoidable operation, the forced “run-up” that at times was approaching political economy, sociology and the very philosophy of science, exposed the discipline to not lesser threats, that in the Nineties would have led to – even if pushed by instrumental motivations of some political and academic streams – the proposal of a definite cancellation, because of the substitution carried out by other corporations had carried out towards geography, ranging from the landscape sciences to economic and social disciplines. Also the cultural geography, if meant as a winning garment for a re-represent of the discipline in order to defend it better, by borrowing concepts and methods from other disciplines, is senseless.

Fortunately, the real question of geography is reemerging: mainly towards a fundamental and recognizable entity for the knowledge of places, regions, cultures and human activities that the urban and industrial development, then the virtual networks had deprived of individuality, conformed and almost annihilated in the extreme opposite of the exceptionalism, that is, in an absolute although unthinkable homologation.

That is the reason of a return – surely riper – to an “integral” geography, able to recognize the SECTORIAL decomposition of phenomena, but also and foremost, to bring back to unity the diversities: in other words, to provide a “wide spectrum” vision of the landscape, which is typical of the education of a geographer and has to stress on the necessity of a wide knowledge ranging from physical environment to the history of the territory and of the anthropic cover, up to the economic development scenarios and its, public and private, management.

Here is the reason why, at the beginning I have defined myself an “orthodox geographer”, by revaluing those educational bases that had seemed to me, at a certain point, mainly to be rejected: they, vice versa, have allowed me to carry out an intense professional activity, in the first place, in the geographical publishing and of higher spreading, ranging from general works to monographs, from conventional paper based atlases to the most recent multimedia experiences and, as regards regional dimensions, from local systems to the entire world system. These products, according to the strategies of the major groups of this sector, have proven to be of great interest on the market, and that an increasingly large public continue to localize in geography an irreplaceable source for learning.

But also in landscape planning and management, the role of the geographer is subject to a continuous revaluation. In effect, it happens to be invited to coordinate working groups, mainly for large area plans, where that wide vision and that “crossroad” position between really diversified competencies (of geologists, agronomists, city planners, engineers, business and transport experts) turns useful to frame general compatibility and the goals of the plan. Otherwise, there would appear a danger of dispersion in a series of sector and at times even contrasting visions.

In these experiences, the localism has had – in my case – a determinant role: the choice to live and work in a little region, like Abruzzo, divided in an exemplary way into geographical units, in the very period of epochal transformations from rural into urban dimension, from cantonalization into a network system and from Mezzogiorno into Central Italy, has offered me a rich and much more innovative “lab” (in order to repeat a term already used above).

The applied geography that I had discussed about from a theoretical point of view has emerged concretely in that region. A Department of Economy and History of the Territory has been created at the university, where geography, even without appearing in the denomination, has acquired a central position and has been able to confront itself with the inputs expressed by local administrations, research agencies, industrial districts, by the companies providing services operating in the region.

This contact has favored my direct commitment into the government of the territory: it has been really stimulating for whom, in his research activity, had defined Pescara a “regional metropolis” since 1973 (first edition of the SOMEA atlas), to find itself, after twenty years, to verify the evolutionary conditions in the post of vice-mayor and assessor for urban planning, in the context of that already commonly defined “metropolitan area”. It has also been stimulating to restart those many studies carried out on the region in order to fulfill the functions of coordinator of the Territorial Planning of the Province of Chieti and of the new
draft law on regional urban planning, rooted on a typically geographical tool (a GIS with valuational characteristics) called “map of places and landscapes”.

Politics, tout court, has reserved also some delusions for me, geography – never. Electoral campaigns have been an incredible opportunity for entering local communities and appreciating their cultural diversities, however with a common element: the rooting of the man inside territory, which is deep also in little towns, exhilarating in the countryside (even if generally urbanized and socially evolved), such to provide precious cues for the deepening of the research into overall identity of the region. A research that has been conducted, in frontline, by hundreds of graduating students, who through geography have learnt to “understand” their space of life and to interpret its changing and inertia.

I would like to propose a conclusive reflection to the young researchers, recalling then thoughts of Peter Haggett, maybe the only geographer of the second half of the 20th century, who together with Paul Claval, has in the best way personified the passage from the descriptive geography, closed in itself, towards the interpretative one, open to confrontation and operativity. His splendid book *The Geographer’s Art* (1990), only by leafing through, shows a variety of contents, approaches, methods and tools for a truly surprising representation: written in seven years, it constitute a kind of a “spiritual guide”. I remember how comfortable I felt myself in reading it in a period where the horizons of the geography seemed closed by non-healable contradictions. I was particularly hit, as much as the diatribe about the unity of geography is concerned, by the serenity and security of the author when defining “the geographical trinity” (p. 11, Italian edition, Bologna, Zanichelli, 1993): spatial distribution; relations between man and environment; regional synthesis. Many of us, a couple of years before, would have defined them even banalities! Instead, that is what the global and local world is asking for to us, and that is what we have to give, as geographers.

When I have young students, in front of me, of the Degree Course in Territorial Analysis, which together with my colleagues of the Gabriele D’Annunzio University, we have preferred to institute in Pescara, as an offer of specific competencies for the evolutionary processes of our region, on the one hand I feel the responsibility for the challenge, on the other hand, the joy to have returned to teach the very “art of the geographer”: and, by uniting my professional experience with this renewed cultural enthusiasm, I am convinced that the future will prove we are right.