

The environmental education in the Italian Renaissance: the geoethical model of Machiavelli

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The importance of the environmental and geoethical education is also present in the thought of one of the greatest intellectuals of the Italian Renaissance: the philosopher Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527).

In the "Discorsi" of Machiavelli, the natural character of the place where a city is built is a determining factor in the overall measure of the need on the character of the citizens; but the barren place, if can keep away the people from idleness, and thereby constitute an essential tool of virtuous civic life, prevents the development of the power which can be fostered only by the fertility of the site. It may give rise own laziness which hinders the development of virtue; and then, according to Machiavelli, laws must be to impose the need to produce good behavior through education. Already in the Renaissance, Machiavelli recognized the importance of establishing a harmonious relationship between man and environment and suggested that the institutions should give a virtuous model of environmental education.

The physiognomy of the geographical and natural environment conditions in an essential way the exercise of civil life and the development of virtues. If the Rome's model imposes the primacy of fertile places, it happens, however, that, in his general conception of virtue and of historical dialectic, Machiavelli tended toward ultimately to increased functionality of the desolate places, which make difficult the life, and through the exercise of the need, make men more virtuous, keeping them away from the destructive threat of idleness. This aspect emerges from a different perspective, but convergent in "Asino" of Machiavelli (Chapter V).

The link between the natural places and civic life that takes place isn't something absolutely default. Men's work, orders underpinning their collective life, laws that place the compulsion of necessity by the behavior of citizens, change the data of nature. Although the structure of a territory unequally, according to Machiavelli, can be changed by the foundation of new cities, an aspect to which the ancients placed special care, distributing and multiplying the population through the colonies, as highlighted in a passage of great historical and geographical interest in "Istorie Fiorentine" (II, 1). In this passage, the relationship between city and territory, human building and natural habitat is configured as an action of civil institutions and the work of human groups on the rough and unhealthy hostility of the physical environment.

This passage is a topical question, considering the importance of human action which helps to change the places for their livelihood. Already in the Renaissance, Machiavelli identified the importance of a geoethical virtuous model for the citizens and the institutions.