Short Communication

A tribute to Giovanni Anania: Scholar, Mentor, Friend

Associazione Italiana di Economia Agraria e Applicata (AIEAA)

Giovanni Cannata (Università del Molise, Italy)
Giovanni Anania accompanied my professional and personal life for more than 30 years. It has been a privilege for me to know him, sharing experiences with him and enjoying his friendship and professional knowledge.

It is hard to speak in his honor without being moved by warm memories and emotions, but I will try. And I will try also to avoid any rhetoric tone.

I would like to recall a few aspects of Giovanni’s life with specific reference to his Italian academic and professional career, considering that other colleagues already talked about his outstanding achievements at international level. Specifically, I’d like to recall also Giovanni’s civil engagement as a man of the South, a son of Calabria, the land he came from and he honored a lot.

Giovanni’s professional life is very consistent with the topic of ICAE 2015 - where his presence is deeply felt, and this is why we wish to pay him a tribute - “Agriculture in an inter-connected world”. The topic of interdependence between agriculture and the economy and society is central in his research since the very beginning, and this is why we met some thirty years ago.

Giovanni knows how to master even the most sophisticated analytical tools with great simplicity and to share them with colleagues and collaborators, but never forgetting why these tools are developed for, which is providing answers to relevant problems. He is the quintessence of an applied economist. This is true not only in his well-known research on international trade or European agricultural policies, but also in his “Italian” researches focusing on the transformations of agriculture, public intervention in Southern Italy as well as the labour market in agriculture and pluriactivity or the analysis of some production sectors such as the citrus fruit, olive oil, and dairy sectors.

Likewise remarkable is Giovanni’s good common sense in applying quantitative approaches to the study of territorial systems and to the analysis of business structures, thus drawing implications for the future. Providing insights for future directions in real life settings featured his works on Europe and international trade as well as on his Italian works, especially as far as Calabria is concerned. Calabria towards the future.

The analysis of the implications of these researches contributes a lot in strengthening our collaboration in a particularly fertile season for research in Italy, that of the so-called Targeted Research Programs, when the government, via the National Research Council, promoted multi-year projects concerning specific objectives, like the IPRA (Increase of agricultural resources productivity) or the RAISA (Advanced research for the innovation of agricultural systems). These were the good old times for research, in Italy, unfortunately gone away. With the collaboration of other colleagues from the University of Calabria, Giovanni remarkably contributed first to solve some issues in territorial analysis (and I greatly benefited of his help and advise) and later to build up a think tank on international trade and policy.
Referring to institutional service, fundamental is Giovanni’s contribution to many organizations such as INEA, the Italian National Institution of Agricultural Economics (recently shut down by an unfortunate decision of the Italian government) and ISTAT, the Italian National Institute of Statistics.

When INEA regional offices were established, Giovanni was its great catalyst in Calabria. This office is a sort of grass-root think tank, a knowledge lab well rooted in the local environment but looking at the global. A gym for the many youths who began a research career, some more successful than others, but all of them holding a huge debt of gratitude to Giovanni.

Considerable is also his contribution to ISTAT, where Giovanni actively participates to the modernization of agricultural statistics and to the design of agricultural Census.

Giovanni is also the promoter of a number of initiatives aimed at aggregating scholars and experts. For instance, I remember the support he gave me during my presidency of the Italian Association of Agricultural Economics or his contribution to the Rossi Doria association and, more recently, to the establishment of AIEAA, the Italian Association of Applied Agricultural Economics, whom he is a co-founder.

Furthermore, I underline his role as one of the most active member of the Group 2013, an interesting experience where not only producers, but also stakeholders at large and policy-makers make use of scholars’ independent advices and analyses. Even in this case Giovanni’s role is key, walking in the footpaths of a glorious tradition of agricultural economists that can be traced back to Ely’s Institutional School.

Besides his active and constructive contributions to congresses, workshops and seminars, I would like to mention also an activity where Giovanni is specially good at, that is mentoring of younger colleagues, probably a legacy of his experience at the Portici Centre. It is worth mentioning his enthusiastic, friendly, informal contribution to the Summer Schools for PhD candidates and Post-Docs, organized by SIDEA first and later on by AIEAA. Giovanni offers his experience and knowledge to the young participants by stimulating them with provocative questions such as: “I got my PhD: what shall I do with it?”

When the AIEAA is established, Giovanni provided precious suggestions on its Statute design, so that it has to be firmly research-oriented, more open than other Italian associations to the international debate, and focusing on the “analysis of agricultural economics and policy in a multidisciplinary context”.

Giovanni’s curriculum is so outstanding both from research and profession service viewpoints, and well known by all of you, as proven by the fact that many of you all elected him to the EAAE Presidency, that what I just said are probably only minor aspects. Therefore, I would like to turn now to something that probably not everybody in this room is aware of, that is his civil engagement.

Giovanni is one of the best examples of a scholar who was educated in his own home region, specialized abroad and then decided to come back in his own region to contribute to its development, despite the offer of positions in more prestigious academic institutions. Giovanni is an example of social investment aiming at building human capital in an underdeveloped region. Before concluding, let me recall some activities showing his engagement with and dedication to the development of his home region, the special relationship with Calabria featuring his whole life, just the way they were told me.
Giovanni is a member of the editorial board of “Meridiana” (1989-1995), a multidisciplinary journal founded in 1987 by a group of scholars looking at the Italian “Mezzogiorno” in a very open-minded way, well beyond the received cultural stereotypes. He always looked at the problems of “Mezzogiorno” (inequality and geographical disparities, political and social regulation, environmental policies, etc.) addressing a demand of knowledge whose coordinates were scientific rigor and policy relevance.

In a conference significantly entitled “Public choices, private strategies, and economic development in Calabria. Knowledge to make decisions”, Giovanni wrote:

“Universities are often rightly criticized for their limited ability in offering to the surrounding territory the results of their researches. The awareness of this limit brought the Department (of Economics, Ed.) to open its doors and to decide to disseminate, mostly to a non-academic audience, the results of those researches more directly concerned with the public and private choices particularly relevant for the economic development of Calabria. A Conference and a volume are just the first step to make available what we do to ones who, with different roles and responsibilities, are in charge of making decisions, which are relevant for the regional development. We hope that our readers will share our view about the usefulness of what we have done so far, pushing us to do more and better in the future.”

As an example of his civil commitment, let me tell you that Giovanni actively supports the cooperative breeding farm “Valle del Bonamico”, helping in solving its organizational and marketing problems. The cooperative is active within an initiative of the diocese of Locri-Gerace, devised to organize unemployed young people in the valleys “Bonamico” and “Careri” and to offer them labour opportunities as an alternative to a fate of marginalization and probably mafia enrolment. Employment and entrepreneurship as a possible remedy to underdevelopment and social deviance in Calabria. Solidarity and trust-building as an antidote to the prevailing individualism and familistic closure.

Giovanni enthusiastically joins, as a funding partner, also the cooperative “Terre Grecaniche”, whose mission is to rebuild local communities able to plan their own future. The cooperative’s goal is the improvement of productive use of local resources and the development of farming in the “Grecanica” area (or Bovesìa: a part of the province of Reggio Calabria, where the spoken dialect is a derivation of ancient Greek). The cooperative allocates part of its revenue to the creation of microcredit projects and solidarity initiatives in developing countries as well as in projects aimed at contrasting school drop-out in the “Grecanica” area.

Finally, Giovanni is also engaged in local political life: he gives always, when required, his personal contribution at local and regional level in informal terms, offering his knowledge derived from years of studies on the issues of the agricultural sector and, more generally, of economic development.

Giovanni was to me a colleague with first class academic and human talents.
Giovanni was a partner in academic fights.
Giovanni shared with me fruitful research programmes.
Giovanni was a leader for fellows and colleagues.
Giovanni is, and I’m sure will still be, a reference and a fraternal friend to many of us.