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## **METROPOLITAN DEVELOPMENT POLICIES AND DEMOGRAPHIC DYNAMICS IN SICILY\***

### **ABSTRACT**

#### **Metropolitan Development Policies and Demographic Dynamics in Sicily**

This article will take in consideration the co-existence in Sicily of different models of urbanisation with rising complex problems. Particularly we notice: A) in the coastal conurbations with infrastructural improvements, there is a timid decentralization of functions and the start of plans that would increase of the gateway functions on one hand, and processes of impoverishment of environment and reduction of economic potentialities on the other hand; B) in the inner and marginal areas, while some cities are marked from an unstoppable decline, others show an awakening of initiatives in many fields, from the productive activities to the tertiary and touristic ones. The Sicilian Regional Governments have adopted very different urban policies to front the necessity of various city typologies, since the second half of years '80, with the law n.9 of 1986, that it has defined limits and functions of the Sicilian metropolitan areas (M.A.). However, the difficulty to concretely start the activity of the M.A., according to the regional law, is appeared obvious in the next years also for the new Italian Constitution Reformation. Reformation that needs of new regional law from the Sicily and of the definition of the Territorial Urban Regional Plan.

#### **1. Demographic decentralization**

The urban network of Sicily is complex and interrelated, including nearly 400 inhabited centres, among which three big coastal cities: Palermo (with more than 682 thousand inhabitants), Catania (with more than 308 thousand) and Messina (with about 250 thousand). Another 10 cities, with Syracuse at the head (little less than 123 thousand inhabitants), account for more than 50 thousand inhabitants and among these other provincial capital towns are included, excluding Enna (with less than 29 thousand inhabitants), as well as Bagheria and Marsala in western Sicily and Gela, Modica and Vittoria in the eastern part, which carry out a more or less relevant sub-regional role.

This urban network in the aftermath of the Second World War enjoyed a period of important centralization of the population, that carried on up to the end of the Sixties, so much so, that the capital towns, which in 1935 contain less than 29% of the total population of Sicily, at the beginning of the Seventies contained almost 36% and the three biggest cities (Palermo, Catania and Messina) from a little under 22% had risen to a little less than 28%. In the same way, even if less amazingly the inversion of the tendency in the subsequent thirty years was evident, when the demographic weight of the capital towns was reduced to 33% and that of the three main cities to less than 25%.

The demographic decentralization towards the metropolitan towns assumes very different characteristics and proportions in the three big urbanized areas of the island. Moreover, the towns that gravitate more directly on the capital towns, above all those of the coastal area, are still

subjected to the considerable immigration from the in-land areas of the Island, economically weaker, where demographic reduction occurs.

#### POPULATION OF THE PROVINCES AND OF THE CAPITAL TOWNS OF SICILY 1935 - 2003.

<u>Provinces</u>	1935	1971	1981	1991	2001	2003	2003			Variations	%	Density 2001
							%	1981-91	91-2001			
<b>Agrigento</b>	398.886	454.048	466.486	476.158	448.053	456.818	9,1	-2,07	-5,9	-4,1	147,3	
<b>Caltanissetta</b>	245.575	282.069	285.829	278.275	274.035	275.908	5,5	2,64	-1,5	-0,9	129,0	
<b>Catania</b>	685.785	938.273	1.007.579	1.035.665	1.054.778	1.067.307	21,3	-2,79	1,8	3,1	296,9	
<b>Enna</b>	225.987	202.131	193.639	186.182	177.200	175.328	3,5	3,85	-4,8	-5,8	69,2	
<b>Messina</b>	600.092	654.703	669.323	646.871	662.450	658.924	13,2	3,35	2,4	1,9	204,0	
<b>Palermo</b>	843.742	1.122.671	1.198.379	1.224.778	1.235.923	1.238.571	24,8	-2,20	0,9	1,1	247,6	
<b>Ragusa</b>	237.910	255.047	275.583	289.733	295.264	304.297	6,1	-5,13	1,9	5,0	182,9	
<b>Siracusa</b>	284.369	365.039	394.692	402.014	396.167	397.362	7,9	-1,86	-1,5	-1,2	187,9	
<b>Trapani</b>	374.520	405.393	420.865	426.710	425.121	428.747	8,6	-1,39	-0,4	0,5	172,8	
<b>SICILIA</b>	3.896.866	4.679.374	4.912.375	4.966.386	4.968.991	5.003.262	100,0	-1,10	0,1	0,7	193,3	

<u>Capital Towns</u>	1935	1971	1981	1991	2001	2003	2003			Variations	%	Density 2001
							%	1981-91	91-2001			
<b>Agrigento</b>	30.032	49.213	51.325	55.283	54.619	55.901	3,4	-7,71	-1,2	1,1	223,3	
<b>Caltanissetta</b>	44.067	60.051	61.146	61.319	61.438	60.919	3,7	-0,28	0,2	-0,7	147,3	
<b>Catania</b>	249.142	400.048	380.328	333.075	313.110	308.438	18,7	-12,42	-6,0	-7,4	1731	
<b>Enna</b>	22.946	28.189	27.838	28.273	28.983	28.852	1,8	-1,56	2,5	2,0	81,1	
<b>Messina</b>	197.509	250.656	260.233	231.692	252.026	249.351	15,1	10,97	8,8	7,6	1193,1	
<b>Palermo</b>	416.479	642.814	701.782	698.556	686.722	682.901	41,5	0,46	-1,7	-2,2	4322,3	
<b>Ragusa</b>	49.694	61.805	64.492	67.535	68.956	69.686	4,2	-4,72	2,1	3,2	155,8	
<b>Siracusa</b>	50.096	108.981	117.615	125.941	123.657	122.896	7,5	-7,08	-1,8	-2,4	605,9	
<b>Trapani</b>	60.000	70.134	71.927	69.497	68.346	68.417	4,2	3,38	-1,7	-1,6	251,5	
<b>Totale</b>	1.119.965	1.671.891	1.736.686	1.671.171	1.657.857	1.647.361	100,0	3,77	-0,8	-1,4	-	

*Source: ISTAT Our Processing*

The movement of the population from the big urban centres both towards the suburbs as well as towards the neighbouring towns determined the development of new districts, if not the real and true dormitory towns, where a considerable slice of the population, discouraged by the imbalances of the house market and by the increasingly chaotic living conditions and a noticeable environmental risk, preferred to transfer their own homes, even if they continued to carry out their own work in the city itself. Keeping this in mind, the significant increases in percentages of the population that happened between 1991 and 2001 should be read, in the towns of the metropolitan cities and in the neighbouring ones, such as Carini (+22%), Torretta (+11%), Misilmeri (+15%), Isola delle Femmine (32%), Monreale (22%), Villabate (23%) in the province of Palermo and Acicatena (+30%), San Pietro Clarenza (+46%), Camporotondo Etneo (+45%) and Mascalcia (+27%), Valverde (27%) in the province of Catania and Villafranca Tirrena in the province of Messina.

Another factor that stands out in a particularly significant manner is represented by the loss of population of the in-land and marginal areas, a phenomenon that is juxtaposed against not only the demographic growth of the three biggest conurbations that gravitate around Palermo, Catania and Messina, but also against that of the coastal areas of the Hyblean Region (the provinces of Syracuse and Ragusa). It is sufficient to consider that in comparison to a total increase of the population of Sicily in the last thirty years of over 2.1%, the in-land and marginal areas (among which we can

include a large part of the provinces of Agrigento, Caltanissetta, Enna and Trapani) lost in total about 7.4% of their population.

The demographic loss signals a further worsening in the already strong imbalance of the urban functions between the northern and eastern coastal areas, in which all the main conurbations are included, and to which lesser ones can be added (Milazzo – Barcelona Pozzo di Gotto and Giarre – Riposto), the in-land areas, where urban development has very modest features. An imbalance that, among other things is associated with the almost total absence of rural settlements, which has impeded types of decentralization of non- agricultural business.

The same largest cities in the in-land and marginal areas, if on the one hand they give rise to hierarchical forms of relationships in comparison to the lesser centres, on the other hand aren't able to fulfil, neither among themselves nor with lesser units, a functional integration, and even less so to represent a "gateway" and centres of a superior level of territorial organizational forms of a grid like nature. It is worth remembering in this case that, in the absence of metropolitan towns of a regional level and in the presence of disjointed urban structures, like the present ones, for these areas the only reference models for the development of urban functions are represented by the polycentric urban systems. It is worth saying that the networks of the towns with complementary and interdependent units, capable of joining up with their higher levels of links to the regional metropolitan areas. Models that require nonetheless the overcoming of numerous restrictions such as the lack of predisposition to endogenous development, the presence of rather inefficient systems of local mobility, the furnishing of infrastructural links of a rather low level, etc.

In the in-land and marginal areas, indeed, many medium size centres have lost part of their traditional functions and have difficulty in assuming new ones. Only very recently, and only for some of them, new prospectives are foreseeable, thanks to projects brought into play with the Territorial Pacts, The Area Contracts, the Leader I and II, the Prusts, the Pits, the Urban I and II and other instruments of planned negotiation and plans for the stimulation of endogenous potential. These instruments for development, that range from farming to industry, from urban structures to services and tourism, receive substantial aid from the regional POR, are activating new energies at a local level, stimulating the creation of associations between state bodies and private enterprises in order to achieve common aims.

The co-existence on the Island of these different types of settlement and development models, poses problems and possibilities of intervention of a very different nature. Indeed, if on the one hand the coastal conurbations demonstrate substantial infrastructural improvement, a timid process of functional decentralization and the starting up of projects that should increase the functions of "gateway", on the other hand they show processes of impoverishment of their economic potential and the degradation of the living and working conditions, as well as environmental quality. The medium size and small towns of the in-land and marginal areas present among them quite different conditions, some are characterised by an unstoppable decline, others are characterised in recent years by a re-awakening of initiative in many fields, production, tourism, cultural activity and services, activated by public and private bodies in an attempt to stop their decline. The grid like paradigm allows these centres to foresee new opportunities and is often indicated at a regional and provincial institutional level both as a theoretical model as well as a political objective for the creation of evolved urban systems. The problem nonetheless remains as to how to extend and strengthen the relationship of synergy and complementarity between these centres on the basis of aid in the form of decentralized development.

## **2. Urban strategies**

The challenge of a polycentric urban development, particularly appropriate for the in-land and marginal areas of Sicily, where a superior urban level, capable of guaranteeing local systems with the access to resources and "coded" knowledge is absent, which is indispensable nowadays for

acquiring competitive ability, is hinged on some key concepts, sustained by the same Community Policies:

- The strengthening of the economic and social cohesion, developing material and immaterial local resources (capital stock, trust, tacit understanding and “governance”);
- The stimulation of the processes of acquisition, elaboration and diffusion of information in the systems of small and medium sized firms (with reference to market conditions, to new technology etc.);
- The creation and strengthening of the network between spheres of production, research and financing and the stimulation of entrepreneurship and the processes of “spin-off”.

The necessity to adopt coherent urban strategies, suitable for the different urban types in Sicily has been acknowledged by the regional Governments from the second half of the Eighties, with the law n.9 of 1986 which defined the limits and functions of the metropolitan areas of the Island (areas with a population not under 250 thousand inhabitants, including the area of its provincial territory, characterised by the collection around a town of at least 200 thousand inhabitants of more than one urban centre, having among them a substantial continuity). Among these, those of Palermo, Catania and Messina which were included, even in front of different identities and different problems should have:

- ✓ given place to urban systems capable of interrelating with the rest of the supranational, national and regional territory;
- ✓ allow, at a supra-municipal level, essential services for the development of a AM (Aree Metropolitane- Metropolitan Areas) to be planned (among which mobility, road networks and transport; state housing; inter-municipal works and plants; inter-municipal plan of the business network) and to maximise the efficiency of the running of some town services for the whole territory (public transport; the distribution of drinkable water and of gas; the collection and disposal of urban waste).

More generally, the establishment of the AM represented an awakening which, without a rationalization of the development of the three conurbations and of their running and, above all, without a reorganization of urban functions in a metropolitan key, these would have succeeded with difficulty in achieving the necessary qualitative leap to give life to the typical complex interrelations of mature AMs. Unfortunately, however, in enacting the law several contradictions emerged, seeing that the ambiguity in the relationships between the different centres, the lack of specialization and complementarity of the smaller centres and the strong hierarchical dependency of the capital towns made it clear that the new level of Metropolitan Government appeared to be an operation guided from above, without a sufficiently solid base at a territorial level, and with foreseeable consequences in terms of conflict and uncertainty in the process of strengthening and developing the AM.

Direct confirmation of this comes from the hostility of some towns, because the law in attributing the Government of the AM to the Regional Province took away some of the basic rights of the local autonomies, without giving them the concrete possibility of participating in municipal decisions. The difficulty in starting up the activity of the AM, as they had been conceived by the regional law, was recognised implicitly by the same “*Regional Plan for Economic and Social Development 1992/94*” that sub-divided up Sicily into four “*Urban Systems*”, considered as the field of reference of the regional territorial policy:

- the system of Western and Tyrranean Sicily (including the Provinces of Palermo and Trapani);

- the system of Eastern and Ionian Sicily (provinces of Catania and Syracuse);
- the system of the Straits (the provinces of Messina and Reggio Calabria);
- the system of central southern Sicily (the provinces of Caltanissetta , Enna, Ragusa and Agrigento).

This subdivision had planning and project functions, entailing important repercussions both in as much as it related to the interrelation of infrastructures of transport and the organization of services. Moreover, the relative choice for the creation of the urban system of central-southern Sicily was motivated by the necessity to not to attribute this large area to the area of gravitation of the two strongest urban systems (Palermo and Catania ), so as to avoid the peripheralization and the historical condition of dependency of the centres in this part of the Island (Agrigento and Caltanissetta on Palermo, and Gela and Ragusa on Catania).

In the long run, an autonomous urban system was foreseen for the small and medium size centres of in-land and southern Sicily, a system which would have had as its structural axis the main thoroughfare roads of Agrigento - Caltanissetta - Gela – Ragusa. In order to improve the urban quality of these centres, to make the development of better urban services possible , but above all to help overcome their condition of marginality and to avoid the potential degradation as peripheries, on the one hand the efficiency of cultural, social and administrative services would have been operated on as well as on the stimulation of secondary and tertiary business and on the other hand ,environmental protection and the restoration of the historic-cultural heritage would have been operated on. Historic cities like Cefalù, Sciacca, Caltagirone, Gela, Modica, Vittoria, Comiso, Naro and other centres should have carried out a balancing role ,compared to the big cities, in the complex territorial interrelationship of the Island.

The limits of enacting the Metropolitan Areas were underlined by the enforcement of new constitutional laws (Reform of Charter V, Part II of the Constitution, in which the constitutional of 18 October 2001 ,n.3 which foresees explicitly in art.114 the metropolitan town as the holder both of its own administrative functions, and those conferred on it by the law, as well as financial autonomy for revenue and expenditure and autonomous resources, equal to municipalities, provinces and regions)which , for a re-launching of the metropolitan structures of the Island , make indispensable the approval by the Region of Sicily of new settlements of law, similar to the constitutional ones, much more aware of the improvement of local autonomy and of the construction of a polycentric institutional system.

The regional POR 2000-2006, even though it does not deal in depth with the strategies for the Sicilian cities, that will be specified in the Regional Urban Territorial Plan (at an advanced stage of definition) on the measures of the 5 axes (cities), has confirmed a differential and flexible strategy for the different urban types of the Island:

- for the metropolitan cities (Palermo, Catania and Messina)
  - ✓ the strengthening of the availability of rare and innovative functions and of the offer of urban and metropolitan services;
  - ✓ the development of the qualification and functional and managerial reorganization of innovative business and a high level linked to territorial inclinations;
  - ✓ the development and technological upgrading of strategically important urban infrastructures at a regional level with particular reference to those aimed at access to global and transregional networks.
- for medium size centres (with a demographic dimension of more than 30,000 inhabitants, with the addition of Enna, which, even if it doesn't reach the 30,000 inhabitant quota, carries out an important urban role in as much as it is a capital town of a province).
  - ✓ the development of complementarity between one city and another for the construction of town networks and the development of links with the metropolitan cities;

- ✓ the development and the specialization of service infrastructures to the local production systems and their networking;
- ✓ the recuperation of historical centres and the reorganization of the commercial and artisan fabric.

These latter, that is the medium size centres, should be grouped, bearing in mind their peculiar characteristics, in polycentric urban sub-systems, those of the Hybleans (Syracuse, Ragusa and Caltanissetta), those of the in-land areas of Enna and Caltanissetta and those of the peripheral areas of Gela, Agrigento and Trapani.

\* Although this work is fruit of the combined research of the two writers, the first part was written by Luigi Scrofani, the second part by Vittorio Ruggiero.

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