Luigi Piccioni

Urban Networks and Small Towns in Southern Italy from the Fifteenth to the Eighteenth Centuries

Relazione tenuta a Leicester il 3.7.1990 nel corso della “International Small Town Conference”.

1. THE GENERAL FRAMEWORK: EUROPEAN URBANIZATION IN THE EARLY MODERN PERIOD.

On a very broad scale the phenomena of urbanization in the Early Modern Europe seem to have been marked by three basic features:

1. The progression of population toward the N-E starting from the Mediterranean area, with the creation of towns and new urban systems.

2. The existence and the progressive strengthening of some areas of dense urbanization connected to a great commercial and industrial vitality, in which spatial distribution and hierarchy varied through the time following the fortune of geo-economic centralities.

3. A growing importance of the administrative functions of some big towns, overall capital towns, during the expansion of the modern national state, always toward the N-E.

Also if these last two features distinguished (particularly in the Late Middle Ages) urbanization processes which generated towns and urban hierarchies which were very different, then these processes tended progressively to intertwine with the expansion of the market economy and the modern national states.

---


2 These areas, already evident during the Middle Ages, were first the Flanders, then the Po Valley with Tuscany, and Andalusia; Holland around 1600 and, then between 1800 and 1900, the new industrial areas of Germany (Ruhr) and England (Midlands). It is well known that both the competition among these areas and the global changes of the European economy caused rises and falls that first Fernand Braudel interpreted in terms of world-economy, thanks to the centre-periphery model. The intuitions contained in F. Braudel, Civilisation materielle, économie et capitalisme, XVe-XVIIIe siècle, Paris, 1979, III, chapp. 1-3, were developed by Immanuel Wallerstein and confirmed more recently in an analysis of the urbanization phenomena in chapter 8 of J. De Vries, European Urbanization, ‘The Spatial Pattern of European Urbanization’. More observations in P. M. Hohenberg and L. Hollen Lees, The Making of Urban Europe, Cambridge (Mass.), 1985, chap. 2, ‘Systems of Early Cities’.


4 See in P. M. Hohenberg and L. Hollen Lees, The Making of Urban Europe, pp. 69-73 a review of the different positions about the two patterns of great urbanization. An empirical analysis shows, nevertheless, how from the first half of the Fifteenth Century the big administrative towns (Paris, Prague, Naples, Lisbon, London) began to compete effectively with the big trade and industrial centres.

5 As the century passed and the modern state was more and more involved in the promotion of the capitalist economy, the capitals and the administrative centres began increasingly to fulfil mixed functions, becoming important commercial and
2. NAPLES, THE MEZZOGIORNO AND THE ITALIAN CASE IN THE LONG PERIOD.

The Italian peninsula seems to be an area able to anticipate the most important characteristics of the evolution of European urbanization because of its peculiar history and its position. On the one hand, it is strongly influenced by the urban heritage of Rome, on the other, it represents a sort of European outpost in a very dynamic world as the Mediterranean area. Through the Middle Ages, it acted as a hinge between the Christian West which was basically poor, underpopulated and unstable and Islam and Byzantium, which were rich and dynamic civilizations. Roman heritage and geographical position influenced Italian urbanization basically in two ways.

First, they contributed to a very fast reconstruction of a dense settlement rich in populous towns. In the Early Modern Period, Italy as a whole was the most urbanized area of Europe. Of the 154 towns with more than 10,000 inhabitants in the Jan De Vries database, 44 are Italian. Italy is also the first country in the Bairoch database whose minimum is 5,000 inhabitants: out of the 2209 European settlements that had reached this threshold between 800 and 1850 A.D. 406 were Italian.

Secondly, the privileged position among civilisations and world-economies fostered an early and diffused development of commercial and colonial activities, banking and manufacturing which only afterwards spread into the rest of Europe. It was here that the "commercial revolution of the Middle Ages" began, first concentrated in some coastal points, then progressively developing between Tuscany and the Po Valley. Fernand Braudel put the first 'centre' of the modern European world-economy in Venice. In the Late Middle Ages Northern Italy was comparable only to Flanders, Holland and Southern Spain, the other big commercial and manufacturing areas of the Middle Ages and the Reformation.

This process of concentration of activities and powers between Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries began to cause a strong gap between Northern and Southern Italy which still exists (and continues to deepen), and is reflected in the settlement and urban hierarchies of the peninsula.

The Italian high rates of urbanization of Early Modern Age, in fact, hid strong geographical disequilibriums. In the early modern Italy, there were several regional patterns of urbanization firmly established in a dualistic basic frame.
In the city-rich, heavily urbanized north, the shared leadership of 1500 became even more pronounced in later periods as Genoa and Turin gradually joined Venice and Milan to assume the top position in rank-size distribution whose slopes became, if anything, less steep over time. In the Kingdom of Naples the primacy of the capital city dominated an otherwise concave distribution which, interestingly enough, assumed almost exactly the same form in 1800 as it had in 1500.\(^{14}\)

If we consider more attentively the towns with more than 5,000 inhabitants at the beginning of the Seventeenth Century (figure 1) we see immediately an uneven geographic distribution that comes down from economic gaps already established at least four centuries before.\(^{15}\) We can recognize five major regions.

The first is the core area including the basin of the Po river and Tuscany. At its center a quadrilateral with Venice, Bergamo, Turin, and Siena serving as corners which delimited the most rich and urbanized region of Italy,\(^{16}\) with Turin in rapid growth and Siena powerful in the past but from 1300 to the present in a stage of dramatic decline.

This first area can be considered part of a typical European typology. It had, like all the most important trade and manufacturing areas of preindustrial Europe, a high density of big towns strictly connected with each other and with the other stronger economic areas. None of them showed dimensional or functional primacy. This low level of hierarchization is the same of Medioeval Andalusia, Flanders from Thirteenth to Sixteenth Century, Holland in Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries, Ruhr and the Midlands in the Nineteenth Century.\(^{17}\) In all these cases we are considering areas relatively small, well delimited and with no traces of primacy. At the beginning of Fifteenth Century, at least four towns in Southern Spain had between 40,000 and 100,000 inhabitants (Granada, Sevilla, Cordoba and Malaga). In the same range were six northern Italian towns (Venice, Genoa, Milan, Florence, Bologna and Ferrara). In the area of Flanders and Brabant there were five towns having between 30,000 and 120,000 inhabitants (Brugge, Gent, Tournai, Liege and Brussels), with the first prevailing. Five out of the first nine British towns of the Early Nineteenth Century were in the Midlands, counting between 35,000 and 376,000 inhabitants (Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds and Sheffield). Other areas confirm on smaller scale this pattern of urbanization based on the control of commercial networks and, partially, on the specialized manufacturing activities, like the towns of the Hansa, the Crimean ports and the Northern Russian towns connected to Crimea through a long and very important commercial road.\(^{18}\)

For urban history the case of Tuscany and the Po Valley is very important because their big towns owned both strong commercial and manufacturing features and fulfilled important administrative functions. These functions had been originated first during the political experience of the Comuni, then in that of the state-towns of the Renaissance.\(^{19}\) In these towns, then, we can find a large range of functions, sometimes heavily concentrated: industrial and proto-industrial

---

\(^{14}\) J. De Vries, European Urbanization, p. 112.


\(^{16}\) F. Braudel, La Méditerranée, I, pp. 354-6 proposes a more restricted quadrilateral with the more powerful towns as corners: Venice, Milan, Genoa and Florence.

\(^{17}\) This kind of spatial organization still structures largely the European space. See the map in E. Juillard et H. Nonn, Espaces et régions en Europe occidentale, Paris, 1976, pp. 26-27.

\(^{18}\) It was the trade connection between Kiev and Novgorod, very important on European scale until the Thirteenth Century. Good, synthetic insights on its history in F. Braudel, Il mondo attuale, Torino, 1966 (org. ed.Paris, 1963), II, pp. 598-600.

\(^{19}\) See the first two volumes of Istituzioni e e società nella storia d’Italia: G. Rossetti (ed.), Forme di potere e struttura sociale in Italia nel Medioevo, Bologna, 1977 and G. Chitolini (ed.), La crisi degli ordinamenti comunali e le origini dello stato del rinascimento, Bologna, 1979. The final result of this multisecular process in terms of urbanization doesn’t seems very far from the German result. See M. Walker, German Home Towns: Community, State and General Estate. 1648-1871, Indiana (N.Y.), 1971.
production, international banking, control over a well developed national agriculture, administration of colonial territories, international trades of commodities and money, and, in many cases, the typical administrative, political and cultural functions of the capital cities. Between 1400 and 1700, while in the rest of Italy the number of towns with more than 20,000 inhabitants remained very few, never reaching ten, only in Tuscany and in the Po Valley there were about 25. Many of these towns were very important, famous in Europe and with a very high level of civilisation: Bologna, Verona, Brescia, Cremona, Ferrara, Padua, Piacenza, Vicenza, Mantua, Pisa, Lucca, Parma, Pavia. This list alone could be enough to show that Tuscany and the Po Valley was the Italian core of the European economy of the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period.

Outside this first region it is possible to recognize four areas, whose borders are, however, very difficult to draw.

The first two areas, Apulia, in the Kingdom of Naples, and Sicily, were typical areas of ‘rural urbanization’, concentrations of big towns with weak hierarchy established in regions dominated by commercial crops like grain, olives and grapes.

The other two regions can be defined, very generally, as great extents of weakly urbanized territories dominated by big capital cities. These capitals were Naples and Rome, at the head of the largest Italian states, respectively the Kingdom of Naples and the Vatican State.

In the middle of Sixteenth Century the situation of Naples and Rome was similar to that of other state capitals of Europe of the same period like Prague, Paris, or London: the most peculiar feature of the states and areas dominated by this kind of town was the strong primacy. The diffusion of this phenomenon is common to the whole Early Modern Europe, but in Italy, again, the process was more innovative and vigorous in its effects. With the passage to the Early Modern Period the big capitals of Central and Southern Italy progressively overpassed the dynamic towns of Northern Italy, which had been dominant during the Late Middle Ages, and came both to an overwhelming leadership over their own territories and to the top of the Italian urban hierarchy.

If we look at the early Fifteenth Century map of the Italian towns with more than 5.000 inhabitants (figure 2) we see immediately that the capitals of big states as Naples and Rome are distanced from the three ‘economical capitals’, Venice, Genoa and Milan (about 100.000 inhabitants) and close to the other two ‘economic capitals’, Florence and Bologna (about 50.000 inhabitants). By 1500, on the contrary, the predominance of Naples over the Italian urban network is clear. The growth of Milan and Venice stagnated while Naples had tripled its population and probably overpassed the others by at least 20.000 inhabitants. Moreover, in the meantime, other ‘administrative capitals have performed very well. Palermo was fifth while Rome was seventh in population. By 1600, Naples is isolated at the top of Italian urban hierarchy, and only Venice and Milan can still match the growth of Palermo and Rome. During the Eighteenth Century this trend of

20 About the interaction of so many functions in shaping the character of the big towns in the Mediterranean area see F.Braudel, La Mediterranée, I, pp. 290-295. The features of these towns have been recently sketched in M. Luzzati, ‘La dinamica secolare’, pp. 43-53 and G. Pinto, ‘Città e campagna’, in R. Romano (ed.), Storia dell’economia italiana, pp. 219-231.

21 There are no studies about the agro-towns of Apulia, while on the contrary, the Sicilian agro-towns have been largely studied and interpreted since the Twenties. A good survey on this topic is R. King and A. Strachan, ‘Sicilian Agro Towns’, Erdkunde, XXXII (1978), 2, pp. 110-123. Two important comparative essays about European agro-towns are A. Blok and H. Driessen, ‘Mediterranean Agro-Towns as a Form of Cultural Domination’, Ethnologia Europaea, XIV (1984), pp. 111-124 and T. Hofer, ‘Agro-Town Regions of Peripheral Europe. The Case of the Great Hungarian Plane’, Ethnologia Europaea, XVII (1987), pp. 65-95.

22 About primacy as a theoretical concept and as a tool for research, see J. De Vries, European Urbanization, pp. 88-95.

23 If at the beginning of Fifteenth Century the only capitals remarkably primatial were Paris and Prague, after one century we must add Lisbon and Naples. By 1600, while Prague lost rapidly importance, London and Rome gained primatial characteristics. Between 1600 and 1800 there were several new cases of primacy. The Seventeenth Century contained spectacular growth in Madrid, while during the Eighteenth Century the capitals of the new central and oriental European states (Berlin, Vienna and Saint Peterburg) grew rapidly. The phenomenon evidently coincided with the strenghtening of the national modern states along the W-E line.
urban growth follows the same path. Rome is now the third Italian town for population size, while at the beginning of the next century (figure 3) we find Naples, Rome and Palermo at the top, Naples having three times the population of Rome and Venice and Milan blocked at the level of 150,000 inhabitants. Only after the political unification of the country (1860-70) and the industrialization of the North, this hierarchy will be reverted again24.

In the evolution of the Italian urban network we can see a historical triumph of the primatial capitals and of the administrative function over the capitalist state-towns and the big economic poles in which the Italian glory of the Reinaissance originated, from the Eleven to the Sixteenth Century. This evolution, as we said, had three fundamental causes. First, the diffusion all over Europe of states based on vast territories and a great capacity of taxation. Secondly, the decline of northern Italian importance in the European economic framework25.

Thirdly, for the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries, Italy shared with the rest of Europe a kind of urbanization that clearly favoured the big towns with administrative features, such as a consequence of the bad economic conjuncture26.

Nevertheless, the success of the two big Italian capitals didn’t implies a greater vitality of the areas they dominated. On the contrary, the economic and cultural gap between the Italy of the small states of the North and the big central and southern states was bound to deepen favourably for the first states.

In order to study the Kingdom of Naples, it is first necessary to understand how the Neapolitan primacy was established and what kind of features it assumed over the time.

In 1266 Charles I of Anjou moved the capital of the Kingdom from Palermo to Naples, into a very fertile area, rich in big towns and in large scale trades since Antiquity27. The success of Naples seems to strengthen after the conquest by the aragonian kings (1443) thanks to their centralized and modernizing politics28 and overall after the annexation to the Spanish crown, which was almost exclusively interested to convert the Kingdom into a source of fiscal revenues and a strategical headquarter for its mediterranean policy29.

Between the first half of the Fifteenth Century and the end of the Sixteenth the population of Naples grew by probably 325%, passing from about 50,000 inhabitants to more than 200,000, while the population of the Kingdom grew approximately 150%. In the same period, the ratio between the second town of the Kingdom and Naples passes from 1:4.8 to 1:7.9. At the beginning of the Sixteenth Century only one big European capital showed the same ratio, Lisbon30. At the end of the same century, the first of massive growth for the capital towns, Naples had been overpassed

30 This data comes from calculations based on the database of P. Bairoch, J. Batou, P. Chevre, La population.
by London as well. During the Sixteenth Century London had grown at least four times, but in front of a much weaker national urban network.\(^{31}\)

Naples and Paris are the first big European examples of towns become primatial thanks to their role as capital of a vast, centralized national state dominating a territory with a basically rural economy and operating a strong fiscal pressure on the countryside. During the period of the Ancien Régime, Naples had almost all the administrative functions of the Kingdom concentrated there and was the major consumer of the most part of both the national rural and the manufacturing national production. Naples also was the residence for the most important families of the Kingdom and, overall, was the point in which the bulk of the fiscal revenue was concentrated, year after year.

The primacy, we said, is usually associated to a strong state, with a strong fiscal policy, which dominates a vast territory basically rural. Also if the primacy is not always exclusively connected to these features,\(^{32}\) the Neapolitan case seems to be very typical. It poses once more the traditional question about the role (‘stimulus or parasitic town?’) of a big capital. Naples, in fact, seems to have been a strong factor of compression and blockage of the economic and social potentialities of the Kingdom\(^{33}\), already penalized by a consolidated situation of semiperiphericity in the Italian context.\(^{34}\) Some of the most important urban growths, between 1500 and 1700, were tightly connected to forms of administrative or economic control by Naples.\(^{35}\) While, on the contrary, a town like L’Aquila, whose importance until the end of Fifteenth Century was based both on a great politic-economic autonomy and an exceptional administrative originality, was repressed and underwent a dramatic decline.\(^{36}\)

These are the most relevant historical elements indispensable to bear in mind before passing to a deeper analysis of the trends in the Kingdom of Naples and of the characteristics of its small towns.

---

\(^{31}\) By 1600, in front of a global population of about four million of people, England had only about fifteen towns with more than 5000 inhabitants. In the same period, the Kingdom of Naples had more than seventy towns with more than 5000 inhabitants, while the global population was no more than two and half million inhabitants. For the English data, see J. Patten, English Towns 1500-1700, Chatham, 1978, tab.9, and R.S.Schofield and E.A.Wrigley, The Population History of England 1541-1871. A Reconstruction, London, 1981, tab.A3.1.


In this case, the term of ‘parasite town’ is arguably just, in spite of the important objections posed against the relative concept by E. A. Wrigley, in ‘Parasite or Stimulus: The Town in a Pre-industrial Economy’, in P. Abrams, E. A. Wrigley, Towns in Society, pp. 295-309. Beyond the correctness of the Wrigley’s remarks on a general economic level, both in the case of Naples and in the relationship between Madrid and the Castilia during the Seventeenth Century, the inhibitory effect of the primatial capital on the diversification of the national economy and on the development of urban functions in the surrounding towns appears evident. About this effect, see D. Ringrose, ‘Il mutamento’, pp. 47-74, which contains relevant observations on the importance of administrative factors in determining urban centralities and hierarchizations, especially pp. 53-54. See also P. M. Hohenberg and L. Hollen Lees, The Making of Urban Europe, pp. 159-171.

\(^{33}\) For the economy of Southern Italy in the Late Middle Ages, see M. Luzzati, ‘La dinamica secolare’, pp. 93-94.

\(^{34}\) For the economy of Southern Italy in the Late Middle Ages, see M. Luzzati, ‘La dinamica secolare’, pp. 93-94.

\(^{35}\) The cases of Chieti and Foggia are exemplary in different ways. In the first case, the presence of the administrative functions on the provincia, in the second, the vitalizing role of the Dogana delle Pecore di Puglia (the royal sheep customhouse) provided a very rapid growth of the two towns and their final predominance in the provincial urban hierarchy. Chieti passed from the 53rd position in the list of the bigger Kingdom’s towns of the Kingdom in 1443 to the 21st position in 1595, overpassing other important towns of Abruzzo, such as L’Aquila, Lanciano, Sulmona e Teramo. Foggia jumped from the 283rd position of 1545 to the 46th in 1648; in the first half of last century it was in third position, just after Naples and Bari. On the influence of the Dogana delle Pecore on the fortune of Foggia see the first chapter of J. A. Marino, Pastoral Economics in the Kingdom of Naples, Baltimore, 1988.

\(^{36}\) There are no adequate studies on this important subject. For a first survey see E. Piroddi, A. Clementi, L’Aquila, Bari, 1986, pp. 57-70.
3. The Sources for the Study of the Urban Hierarchies in Southern Italy.

When studying the European demography in the period prior to the Nineteenth Century, we usually have to face a lack of and a fragmentation of qualitative and quantitative sources making it very difficult to produce synthetic and reliable views of large areas before 1750.

But in the case of continental Southern Italy we can have rough, but very detailed information concerning the centuries of the Early Modern Period. In that period a long Spanish domination began, lasted until the first decade of the Eighteenth Century. During this period the Catalan and Castilian administrations introduced the characteristic fiscal system in which the tax was computed on the basis of the number of households. This system was called numerazione dei fuochi. The same method was systematically utilized in Spain and in the Spanish colonies. From 1443 to 1732, several of these numerazioni dei fuochi were carried out, and until 1943 the complete documentation, more than 1800 books, was stored in the State Archive of Naples. In that year German soldiers burned the most valuable part of the Archive, including all the files of the numerazioni. Thus the most important European demographic source of the Early Modern Period vanished. At present we have seven reliable synthetic lists of the università (municipalities) of the Kingdom of Naples with the number of their households for the years 1443, 1532, 1545, 1561, 1595, 1648 and 1669 and an eighth made in the 1730s, the reliability of which is very doubtful. The degree of completeness of these lists varies from 70% the first year to the more than 95% the fourth. The missing units are always evenly distributed on the Kingdom's surface so that is possible to draw a good portrait of the settlement system and to make reliable enough estimates. This kind of material is of course very rough and unreliable for inquiries in historical demography, but it is very important for the study of historical population geography and for research in the history of urban systems. In this sense, the lists of the numerazioni dei fuochi are still an exceptional source in the European documentarian landscape. Moreover, I have used the data of the first census of 1796.

Starting from the rough data of the seven lists and of the census, I made several estimates and elaborations that allow a first profile of the Kingdom of Naples's settlement and urban systems in the Early Modern period, until the end of the Eighteenth Century. These estimations and elaborations are arbitrary on a large degree, thus it is necessary to explain the methods I have used.

The Neapolitan state under the Spanish domination was divided into about 1,900 università. The lists do not include a big provincial town owned by the State of Church (Benevento), and the many villages and towns of the region immediately surrounding Naples, such as Portici, San Giorgio a Cremano, Torre del Greco and Torre Annunziata. This systematic lacking of certain data is the first element that can bias the analysis, but there are no possibilities of correction. For the moment, I avoided making estimates, leaving a blank space in the lists and in the maps. I accepted considering the very rough estimates currently utilized for Naples and proceeded to a general estimate of the università according to a coefficient of 4.5 persons per household and giving the missing data values calculated by extrapolations from the existing data.

39 All the list are printed, except for the numerazioni of 1532 and 1545, whose data is still available thank to the manuscripts of Karl Julius Beloch in the Istituto Italiano per il Medioevo in Rome. For 1443 see R.Cozzetto, Mezzogiorno e demografia, Soveria Mannelli, 1986. For 1561 and 1595, E.Bacco, Il Regno di Napoli diviso in dodici provincie, Napoli, 1618. For 1648 and 1669 O.Beltrano, Descrittione del Regno di Napoli diviso in dodici provincie, Napoli, 1678. For the census of 1796 P. Villani, 'Documenti e orientamenti per la storia demografica del Regno di Napoli nel Settecento', Annuario dell'Istituto Storico Italiano per l'Età Moderna e Contemporanea, XV-XVI (1963-64), pp. 83-123.
I am aware of the risks and limits of this kind of work, but I decided to process the data in this way in order to obtain a complete sketch of the Kingdom, probably the most accurate estimate ever drawn for the Early Modern Period. Moreover, I think that the maps coming from these estimates are on the whole largely reliable and can represent a useful contribution to the knowledge of the history of the Italian urbanization.


The demographic trend of the Mezzogiorno in the Early Modern Age has a dramatic and irregular shape. Adopting the described criteria of estimating, it is possible to build the following curve for the period 1443-1796, according to three classes of settlement:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>1443</th>
<th>1532</th>
<th>1545</th>
<th>1561</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,085,714</td>
<td>1,729,029</td>
<td>2,173,160</td>
<td>2,424,840</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;5,000</td>
<td>125,136</td>
<td>445,632</td>
<td>629,478</td>
<td>753,821</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-5,000</td>
<td>458,731</td>
<td>710,562</td>
<td>984,343</td>
<td>1,103,781</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;1,000</td>
<td>501,847</td>
<td>572,834</td>
<td>559,338</td>
<td>567,238</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The irregular distribution of the numerazioni over the time and their relative imprecision make it very difficult to be precise about the rate of population growth in the centuries studied, but it appears clear, nevertheless, that in the last part of the Sixteenth Century a long period of exceptional growth came to an end. This growth was very strong in the first half of the century and its rates decreased slowly, but progressively in the second half. From the numerazione of 1595 an absolute diminution of households in several towns and villages began, and this negative trend was strongly accelerated in the whole Kingdom by the pestilence of 1656-57. This kind of demographic evolution was the same for the rest of Italy and of the whole Mediterranean area and differed from that of Northern Europe, but in our case the population change seemed to be much more dramatic.

Thus, in one hundred years, from the middle of the Fifteenth to the middle of the Sixteenth Century, the population of the Kingdom of Naples doubled, then continued at slower rates this growth for thirty or forty years. At the end of the Sixteenth Century, a rapid and dramatic decline began that reduced its number to the level of the 1530's.

This is the general frame for considering the temporal evolution of the urban and settlement network of the Mezzogiorno in the Early Modern Period.

---

41 It was the same trend for the whole Mediterranean: F. Braudel, La Mediterranée, I, p. 299.
43 See J. De Vries, European Urbanization, tab. 3.6.
But there are also the structural aspect of the Kingdom's urbanization to bear in mind. Although already in the Middle Ages, the Kingdom of Naples could be regarded as a semiperipheral area if compared to the economic strength of northern Italian towns, it was visibly populated and very rich in towns.

The density of population was always less than the Italian average, while the urbanization rate was very high. Look at the following table, concerning the population living in centres with more than 10,000 inhabitants:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1443</th>
<th>1532</th>
<th>1595</th>
<th>1648</th>
<th>1669</th>
<th>1796</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.56</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These are among the highest ratios in Europe that only countries such as Belgium and the Netherlands could match, except that these areas reached the 20% level before 1700. The elaborations of De Vries show that under the slow, but constant growth of the European urbanization rates were hidden different regional evolutions. Look again at the table 3.7 of European Urbanization:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AREA</th>
<th>1500</th>
<th>1550</th>
<th>1600</th>
<th>1650</th>
<th>1700</th>
<th>1750</th>
<th>1800</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EUROPE</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>14.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N.EUROPE</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>14.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.EUROPE</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.EUROPE</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E.EUROPE</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The southern Italian urbanization trend of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries corresponded to that of the other Mediterranean countries and seems connected more to the physiology of the general demographic growth, than to processes of development and articulation of the urban system, as it was in the case of many northern European countries.

Thresholds lower than 10,000 inhabitants confirm this analysis.

---

44 See the table 3.7, p. 39 of J. De Vries, European Urbanization.
Table 4. Classes of settlement of the Kingdom of Naples. Percentages and evolution 1443-1796

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size</th>
<th>1443</th>
<th>1532</th>
<th>1595</th>
<th>1648</th>
<th>1669</th>
<th>1796</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&gt;10,000</td>
<td>5.56</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>28.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% var.</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>-56.8</td>
<td>194.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-9,999</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>19.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% var.</td>
<td>65.0</td>
<td>47.5</td>
<td>-11.0</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-4,999</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>30.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% var.</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>-8.4</td>
<td>-4.4</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-1,999</td>
<td>69.4</td>
<td>51.6</td>
<td>39.9</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>50.5</td>
<td>22.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% var.</td>
<td>-25.6</td>
<td>-22.7</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>-56.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Also if we consider that we are speaking here of administrative units and not exactly of towns\textsuperscript{45}, it is impressive to observe that since the beginning of the Sixteenth Century, more than 25% of the southern Italian population lived in centres with more than 5,000 inhabitants, with peaks of about 36%, when more than 40% (with peaks of about 60%) lived in centres with more than 2,000 inhabitants. In the same period the European averages did not exceed respectively 13% and 17%\textsuperscript{46}. The maximum estimated level for the 5,000 threshold was in the Mediterranean area: around 20%\textsuperscript{47}. These figures are higher than the Italian averages, estimated by Paul Bairoch (around 22%), and those of Belgium. They are comparable only to the rates of the Netherlands:

Table 5. Urbanization rates (more than 5,000 inh.) in Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy and Southern Italy 1500-1700\textsuperscript{48}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>1500</th>
<th>1600</th>
<th>1700</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>37.4</td>
<td>38.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>30.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>22.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mezzogiorno</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>31.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At the end of the Sixteenth Century in the Kingdom of Naples there existed more than 300 centres in which the population exceeded 2,000 inhabitants and more than 600 in which the population exceeded 1,000 inhabitants.

5. THE PROBLEM OF SOUTHERN ITALIAN SMALL TOWNS IN THE EARLY MODERN PERIOD.

I will present some methodological remarks before passing to the empirical analysis.

Is interesting that the shape of the southern Italian rank-size distribution remained almost the same during the three centuries from 1500 to 1800 and that the 1980 map of the big urban concentrations (figure 4) is not very different in its general shape from the one of 1595 (figure 5).

\textsuperscript{45} The bias coming from this problem has some relevance; nevertheless, generally speaking, the population of the Kingdom of Naples and Sicily lived in settlements with an high degree of concentration. Relatively few towns had many casali. Among them the most important were Cosenza (55), Napoli (45), San Severino (43), Amatrice (42), Montereale (39), Nocera (37), Scigliano (36), Capua (33), Leonessa (26). 40 administrative units had more than 10 casali. For a short survey on the subject see G. Muto, ‘Il Regno di Napoli sotto la dominazione spagnola’, in Storia della società italiana. XI. La Controriforma e il Seicento, Roma, 1988, pp. 263-7.


\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., tab.B4, p. 258.

\textsuperscript{48} The data concerning the Mezzogiorno comprises 1532, 1595 and 1669.
Differently from other European countries where some towns and areas developed very rapidly changing in this manner the shape of the national settlement network (Ruhr, Prussia, the Midlands, Berlin, Madrid, Amsterdam, St.Petersburg), the Italian settlement system did not experience such sudden and dramatic transformations.

Consequently, the Early Modern Period was not an age of colonization and towns-building for continental Southern Italy. The Iberian kings conquered a stable country\textsuperscript{49}, in which the last important town foundations had been realized from the Eleventh to the Thirteenth Centuries\textsuperscript{50}.

Later, differently from the Sicilian case\textsuperscript{51}, there were no new policies of town building, neither from the state, nor from feudal lords. Some little colonizations and foundations took place and overall small villages had rapid growth toward urban dimensions (San Giovanni in Fiore, Pescara, Trinitapoli) as elsewhere, but is not possible to speak of these cases in terms of town building because there was no creation of big, strategic settlements.

The numerous changes of localization of many Calabrian villages following the earthquakes of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries were probably more important because of the great number of villages involved, but also in this case it is not possible to speak of new urbanization: the size of the villages was too small and successively they rarely become real towns.

But the Neapolitan case is exceptional in Europe also for what concerns the problem of small towns. The research conducted in Leicester and in other European universities over the last ten to fifteen years\textsuperscript{52} concerning small towns in the Early Modern Period seems to have the scope of individualizing the nuclei of the emergence of the new urbanized areas and the causes of their development between the end of Seventeenth Century and the middle of Nineteenth Centuries.

These new urban areas grew rapidly in territories often with weak urban traditions\textsuperscript{53}. In the case of the Italian Mezzogiorno, on the contrary, we have a situation totally different and in certain respects completely opposite, at least for two reasons.

First, in the Middle Ages, the Mezzogiorno was already an area strongly and diffusely urbanized, in spite of the primatial role of the capital, Naples. Fifty centres of more then 5,000 inhabitants in the middle of Sixteenth Century are hard to classify, because of their dimensions, only as local markets or boroughs\textsuperscript{54}. Moreover, the phenomena of urbanization in the modern sense of the term, connected to radical modifications in the urban functions and to the development of a much more integrated economy, occurred here only in the last hundred years, and in some areas only after the Second World War\textsuperscript{55}.

\textsuperscript{50} During these centuries several towns were founded and other were strengthened for strategic purposes, as in the case of L'Aquila, Gravina, Lucera, Amalfi, Aversa, Foggia, Altamura, San Severo, Molfetta, Lecce, Catanzaro. See E. Sestan, ‘La città comunale italiana dei secoli XI-XIII’, in G. Rossetti (ed.), Forme di potere e struttura sociale nel Medioevo, Bologna, 1981, pp. 181 sgg.
\textsuperscript{53} See the conclusions of Jan De Vries about the fortune of small and new towns after 1600: J. De Vries, European Urbanization, pp. 258-259.
\textsuperscript{54} In a typical agro-town region such as Terra di Bari, for example, it was possible to observe, at least until the middle of the Fifteenth Century, the presence of a functional hierarchization of towns and strong urban features in towns such as Trani and Barletta. See B. Salvemini, ‘Prima della Puglia’, in L. Masella and B. Salvemini (eds.), Storia d'Italia. Le regioni dall'Unità a oggi. La Puglia, Torino, 1989, pp. 8-11.
In such a context, small towns were neither the settlements in which the most part of southern Italian urban life took place\textsuperscript{56}, nor important seeds of change, places in with the most important phenomena of modernization reflected\textsuperscript{57}. According to the central importance of political factors in Southern Italian urban history, dynamism concentrated first in administrative towns, towns which were rarely small.

These remarks are very important: if the growth of towns and the creation of a more integrated urban network in the last two centuries took place here in a framework substantially blocked, the usual questions about the evolution of small towns lose much of their relevance.

Nevertheless, in the compact urban texture of Southern Italy in the Early Modern Period, several kinds of small towns worked in different ways, fulfilling different functions, according to their position in their regional sub-systems, in the Kingdom and in the Mediterranean economic and political system.

Before sketching the situation of the small towns in the period between 1443-1796 as they were portrayed in the the quantitative data, one must consider two other problems given by the characteristics of the sources.

The first one is the excessive quantity of data. The lists of the numerazioni are almost complete and their data has a good level of reliability, which means that utilizing the range 1,000-5,000 inhabitants to define the small towns at the end of the Sixteenth Century, there are about 600 small towns for the Kingdom of Naples, more than 30\% of the centres. Working analytically on this database, it is very expensive and difficult.

The second problem is the lack of qualitative sources that would allow a systematic study of the urban functions and thus to separate the big centres without urban characteristics (typical of certain areas, as we shall see) from the ones that can be considered real towns. This kind of research is very difficult for the period prior to the Eighteenth Century as in all the European countries. We have complete lists of bishoprics, fairs and local markets, interesting urban taxonomies and systematic descriptions only for the end of the Eighteenth Century. For the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries an inquiry into the urban functions would require a long and hard work on loose and dispersed sources beyond the capabilities of a single searcher.

I can consequently offer only a synthesis of the quantitative data I am elaborating and propose some problems I met during the last two years of data collection, elaborations and reflections, as well as problems usually not considered and which I hope can be of more general interest.

Centres with urban characteristics and functions emerged in the area we are considering, during the Early Modern Period, usually beyond the 1,000 inhabitant threshold, and often beyond higher thresholds. Centres with urban features, however, could emerge also below this threshold and many centres above the threshold had very weak urban characteristics. The only 'official' town list of the Kingdom that I have found so far\textsuperscript{58}, for example, compiled in the last decade of the Eighteenth Century, number only 220 centres, 121 of whose, in the numerazione of 1595, were included in the 1,000-5,000 range.

Among the seven numerazioni we still have, I have chosen to utilize the one of 1595, because it is the most complete and represents the moment of maximum demographic maturity in the Early Modern Period. On 1,967 administrative units (155 of these are estimated by extrapolation), 79 had probably more than 5,000 inhabitants, 596 should have a population comprised of between 1,000 and 5,000 inhabitants and 1,298 did not go beyond 1,000 inhabitants. About 30\% of the

\textsuperscript{56} As it was in Great Britain and in the most part of northern European countries before the last two hundred fifty years: see the articles of Peter Clark and Sven Lilja in this same book.


\textsuperscript{58} L.Giustiniani, Dizionario geografico-ragionato del Regno di Napoli, Napoli 1797-1816.
administrative units of the Kingdom had a population within the proposed range. Their ratio with ‘large towns’ (more than 5,000 inhabitants) was of 1:7.

In 1443, the urban hierarchy was considerably different. Only 275 settlements had more than 1,000 inhabitants, and those above the 5,000 threshold were only 12. During the about 150 years between 1443 and 1595 the number of middling and large towns increased of 558%, when the number of small towns increased by only 127%. The ratio between large and small towns reduced accordingly, from 1:21 to 1:7.

Successively, during the demographic and economic crisis of the first half of Seventeenth Century, the number of middling and large towns and that of the small towns experienced almost the same rate of decrease, respectively of -29% and -32%. The ratio remained the same.

Once considered the absolute numbers, it is finally possible to introduce the central problem of this paper: the regional distribution of the small towns.

6. Economic and settlement regions and their small towns.

In the research on small towns it is necessary to pay close attention to the regional differences and to the changing role of the small towns in each region. Generally speaking both the history and the structure of the settlement system, as well as the economical and political features of a certain region, have a heavy influence on the shaping of the settlement hierarchy and on the role and the weight of small towns. The spatial and historical context is thus indispensable to understand features and functions of small towns. In an agro-town region, the small town can have neither the same dimensions, nor the same functions of a small mountain town, as we shall see.

This kind of approach is even more important for the Kingdom of Naples, an area marked by the great natural contrasts typical of the Mediterranean basin and by the lacking of a clear and balanced urban hierarchy as in Tuscany and in the Northern Plain.

The first and simplest subdivision of the Kingdom, always well alive in the consciousness of the contemporary writers, is that among Campania, Apulia and the mountains. This subdivision was a very rough one, but it is useful to distinguish clearly the two plain areas of the Mezzogiorno and the rest of the country. The basic differences in the Kingdom’s geographic morphology had a great influence both on the formation of productive regions and on the pattern of settlement and organization, like in the rest of the Mediterranean area.

In a closer analysis one could define more precisely the boundaries of these three fundamental areas looking at them as composed of sub-regions with very different characteristics and to consider their reciprocal influences. Nevertheless, this rough tripartition can provisorily help to understand Southern Italy, as it was helpful four centuries ago.

In the Campanian and in the Apulian planes the most part of the market-oriented rural production was concentrated, as well the main national roads and the most populated towns of

61 See P. Macry, Mercato e società nel Regno di Napoli. Commercio del grano e politica economica del ‘700, Napoli, 1974, p. 36. The economic consequences of the canonic subdivision of the Kingdom are extensively described in the first great agronomy handbook for the Mezzogiorno published in the first half of the last century: L. Granata, Economia rustica per lo Regno di Napoli, Napoli, 1835, chap.1.
the whole Kingdom\textsuperscript{64}. Both areas had Naples and its surroundings as the most important market, overall from the beginning of Sixteenth Century\textsuperscript{65}, but showed also great reciprocal and internal differences.

Actual Campania corresponds to three of the old provinces of the Kingdom: Terra di Lavoro, Principato Citra and Principato Ultra. The territory of these provinces was not entirely flat and fertile. The economic core of this area was the so called Campania felix, a vast irriguous plain made of volcanic tofa and alluvial deposits which extended between the Volturino river and the Lattari Mountains. Both the orographic and pedologic features of this area\textsuperscript{66} and the abundance of water fostered the cultivation of a great variety of valuable cash crops. This countryside was probably the most fertile of continental Southern Italy\textsuperscript{67} and in it grains were cultivated side by side with valuable vegetables and fruit trees. The northern part, around the Volturino river and on the coast, was more suitable for cattle ranching and especially for raising buffalos, because of the marshy nature of the soils. On the coast between Naples and Salerno the cultivation of vegetables, of fruit trees was well diffused, as well as the so-called giardino mediterraneo, which is an intensive cultivation of rare fruit trees and vegetables in small gardens.

The landscape of the whole Apulian Plain, on the contrary, in its four fundamental subdivisions\textsuperscript{68}, was dominated by the monoculture: large plantations of wheat, olives, vineyards, figs, nuts and almonds beside big pastures, primarily for sheep.

The remaining part of the Kingdom, about 80\% of the country, was made up of hills and mountains with rare internal basins and narrow coastal plains. Also if this area had neither homogeneous patterns of property of the land, nor the same level of orientation towards the market, of economic vitality, nor similar settlement patterns, its parts shared some common features. This major area had a very poor system of transport structures (ports, roads), was scarcely opened to interregional and international markets and had a small number of settlement of big dimensions, separated by great distances.

The settlement patterns did not follow immediately the division we have still sketched, because they were influenced by historic heritages and by internal differences.

Campania felix and the surrounding areas, for example, showed an extraordinary density of population and chaotic settlement patterns. Here, around the Neapolitan metropolis, big rural centres followed closely trade and manufacturing towns, small rural settlements (the casali) connected to the biggest towns, rich villages and, in the most fertile parts, a great quantity of hamlets and dispersed farms.

In this situation of very irregular hierarchization, it is not very easy to speak of small towns because trying to outline their eventual functions and characters would be a very difficult task.

If possible, the task is even more difficult for the Apulian Plain. In its northern part, for example, small towns were a minority. Inside a large triangle delimited by San Severo, in Capitanata, Tursi, in Basilicata, and Ostuni, in Terra d'Otranto, the landscape was characterized almost exclusively by great settlements, some more dense (the coastal plain of Terra di Bari) and some less dense (the Tavoliere, the Murge), some of huge average dimensions (Terra di Bari), some a little smaller.

\textsuperscript{64} In 1595, nine out of the twenty largest Kingdom's towns were in Apulia (province of Terra di Bari and Terra d'Otranto), six in Campania (Terra di Lavoro and Principato Citra). In 1881, the concentration was even more pronounced: eleven in Apulia and seven in Campania.

\textsuperscript{65} See P. Macry, Mercato e società, pp. 78-80.

\textsuperscript{66} Most of these geographical remarks refer to the classical handbook A. Sestini, Il paesaggio, Milano, 1963. About the Campania felix, see the pages 145-149.

\textsuperscript{67} P. Macry, Mercato e società, pp. 257-9. See also the unanimous observations of the contemporary writers in A. Lepre, Storia del Mezzogiorno d'Italia. I. La lunga durata e la crisi (1550-1656), Napoli, 1986, p. 25.

\textsuperscript{68} A. Sestini, Il paesaggio, p. 164; P. Macry, Mercato e società, pp. 126 and 140-142.
(oriental part of Basilicata), but always with a very low degree of hierachization\(^{69}\). In this case it is very difficult to define what is 'small', because there are almost no villages, the average size is very big and the hierarchy very weak. In the southern part, around Lecce, on the contrary, a sharp, anomalous polarization between the regional capital, second town of the Kingdom during the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries, and the constellation of small centres\(^{70}\) around it, make it difficult to recognize the towns with intermediate functions.

In the mountains and in the hilly parts of Southern Italy a more clear hierachization make more easy to distinguish big, middling and small towns. The internal basins, some valleys and some coastal planes were more favoured, and some regions had a denser settlement, but almost everywhere harmonic hierarchies existed, composed of a balanced number of villages, small, middling and big towns with different functions and influence, separated by relatively regular distances. In these areas the provincial towns, differently from Campania felix e the Apulian Plain, emerge clearly from the surrounding landscape for their dimensions, for their rarity, for the presence of a good deal of central functions absent from the closest towns (bishopric, annual fair, residence of feudal lords, administrative and judicial offices, rich social stratification and economic differentiation).

The research on small towns, thus, requires the definition of homogeneous areas of urbanization and the knowledge of the ways in which the central functions are distributed within them.

I will illustrate this concept with four ancient province of the Kingdom of Naples\(^{71}\) (figures 6.1-5): Abruzzo Ultra, Molise, Terra di Lavoro and Terra di Bari. I have chosen these province because they had very different settlement patterns, sometimes opposite, but each of them had a good level of internal homogeneity. (see the figure 7, showing the relation between the average and the coefficient of variation of their population size).

The Terra di Bari had a low coefficient of variation and a very high average for the population size: in this provincia dominated not hierarchized big towns. The Molise had a low coefficient of variation, but a very low average: a provincia made up of low hierarchized settlements with similar size. The Abruzzo Ultra showed a high coefficient of variation and a low average, that meant strong hierachization in an area of small settlements. The Terra di Lavoro, a rich and complex area, had a high coefficient of variation and a high average size of settlements.

The Terra di Bari (average size of the administrative units 947 households in 1595) had a very peculiar frequency in the distribution of the settlements: 30% big and middling towns, 46% small towns and only 24% villages, according to our method of settlements classification. It was a typical area of agro-towns, and it is very difficult to distinguish the towns of the first and of the second group. For example, nine out of the sixteen big towns were bishoprics, but were bishoprics also five out of the twenty-five small towns. Twelve localities out of the first group were classified as towns at the end of Eighteenth Century, but also eight of the second group. In the first group, we find both huge 'pure' agro-towns (Altamura, Gravina, Andria) and very old and important ports for the trade in the Adriatic Sea such as Molfetta, Barletta, Monopoli and Bari, but also in the second group the agro-towns (Terlizzi, Noci and Minervino) alternated with port towns such as Giovinazzo, Mola, and with the capital of the provincia, the old and glorious town of Trani. Moreover, most of the settlements\(^{72}\) had a vast range of services and were served by an efficient system of

---

\(^{69}\) In 1595, Basilicata and Terra di Bari, though hugely distant, had the highest average population for each administrative unit in the Kingdom: respectively 394 and 947 fuochi. On the other hand, they shared with Molise the lowest coefficient of variation: 88.7% and 87%.

\(^{70}\) See the introductory remarks in M.A.Visceglia, Territorio feudo e potere locale. Terra d'Otranto tra Medioevo e età moderna, Napoli, 1988, pp. 28-31.

\(^{71}\) The base is always the data of the numerazione of 1595.

\(^{72}\) The towns of the Terra di Bari had no casali, so that they coincided perfectly with their administrative units.
communication\textsuperscript{73}, so that it is difficult to say something definitive about the degree of centrality of each town. It was probably the exceptional success of the cash crops in this area during the Sixteenth Century to favour this situation of relative undistinctness. We already know\textsuperscript{74}, on the contrary, that at the beginning of the Fifteenth Century, the hierarchization among the settlements of Terra di Bari had been stronger than in the following century and it will be again stronger after the Italian unification with the growing importance of the new provincial capital, Bari.

The Molise is the provincia with the smallest average size of the settlement (162 households for each settlement), but also here, like in the Terra di Bari, the coefficient of variation is very low. The hierarchization is low. By 1595, in the whole area, no town overpassed 5,000 inhabitants and only 21.4% of the settlements had more than 1,000 inhabitants. Moreover, most of these small towns were very small, as in the Abruzzi. Nevertheless, this mountain provincia without big and middling towns, without access to the sea, that had always been marginal in the context of the Kingdom's history and economy, showed some areas of urbanization and peculiar forms of centrality. The first area with a more evident presence of towns was at the border with the province of Terra di Lavoro and Principato Ultra. Here, near the rich provincia of Capitanata and not far from the big neapolitan market\textsuperscript{75}, the major towns of the provincia (Campobasso, Morcone, Boiano, Sepino, Isernia) were concentrated. The second area, the N-E part of the provincia, confined with the Abruzzo Citra, had smaller and looser settlements; consequently, the few small towns emerged very clearly, especially the Episcopal town of Trivento. In the Molise, as well as in other marginal areas of the Kingdom, these small and very small towns acted as central places, by coordinating the poor activity of the surrounding regions through institutions like bishoprics, fairs and markets, some ecclesiastic schools, baronial courts of justice, little castles and warehouses. A very good example of the contrast between Terra di Bari and Molise is given by the size of the bishoprics\textsuperscript{76}. The bishoprics of the large towns of Terra di Bari (7-11,000 inhabitants), Monopoli, Bisceglie, Moletta or Ruvo, had very small territories and controlled only one or two towns. On the contrary, the Molisan bishopric of the small town of Trivento (about 1,800 inhabitants in 1595), controlled a vast territory in which 46 administrative units settled.

Our third case is Abruzzo Ultra. This provincia, in the highest part of the Apenines, different on the most part from the other province, had a weak connection with Naples and an economic structure prevalingly oriented to self-consumption. Small, but very intense internal exchanges of food and petty commodities fostered a dense network of markets and fairs\textsuperscript{76} and strategical goods, such as wool and safran, favoured the only important external trades, toward Rome and the neighbouring province. Abruzzo Ultra shared with the Molise a very low average size of settlements, but with a much more marked hierarchy. At the top of this hierarchy, there was a big town which had been very important during the Middle Ages, L'Aquila. Its Sixteenth Century decline did not mean a reduction of its population size, but a stagnation: by 1595, it had, probably, the same population of 1443 (about 9,000 inhabitants). The percentage of small towns was the lowest among the province of the Kingdom (only 15% of the settlements); but some of them had more than 4,000 inhabitants at the end of Sixteenth Century and showed marked urban features (Penne, Atri, Teramo) and others covered central functions for vast marginal areas full of small villages. This regular hierarchy depended paradoxically on the irregularity of the provincia. Abruzzo Ultra was made up of vast spaces without settlements corresponding to the highest parts of the

\textsuperscript{73} Terra di Bari had a relatively small number of fairs and markets because the circulation of goods was very easy and continuous and did not need special market structures (figure 8).

\textsuperscript{74} See above note 54.

\textsuperscript{75} P. Macry, Mercato e società, pp. 163-7.

\textsuperscript{76} This network was undoubtedly the most dense of the whole Kingdom. At the end of the Eighteenth Century there were 93 fairs a year in 59 towns and villages. The second provincia of the Kingdom for fairs, Calabria Ultra, had only 34 fairs a year in 20 localities (see figure 8). This data comes from C. Capobianco, Descrizione di tutti i luoghi che compongono le Dodici Province del Regno di Napoli colla giunta di tutt'i fuochi secondo l'ultima numerazione fatta dalla Regia Camera nel 1737, e di tutte le fiere del Regno, Napoli, Salvatore Palermo, 1794. Insightful remarks about the provincial distribution of fairs and markets in P. Macry, Mercato e società, pp. 60-66.
Apenines, prevailing mountain territories with poor, self-consumption economic activities and dense networks of very small villages and few fertile fluvial basins (absent in Molise) as in the Aterno and Vomano Valleys, around the Fucino Lake and in the plain of Sulmona, where the population was more densely concentrated. These geophisical differences favoured the existence of a well hierarchized network, with clear central functions of different levels. Also in this case, the size of bishoprics is a good index. Four out of the seven dioceses of the provincia held more than seventy università and their ville inside their borders. The bishops of L'Aquila and Teramo controlled respectively 172 and 129 università. In the Kingdom, only Salerno had a diocese so important.

Small towns, in Abruzzo Ultra, were generally central places in the usual sense of the term, acting, on the one hand, as storage and trading points for the surplus produced in the countryside and, on the other, as centres of feudal and ecclesiastic control over a territory vast, fragmented and often complicated to manage. The result was that in many small towns of this provincia, it was possible to find a complex social stratification; variety of small trades and handycraft; and a good and regular diffusion of civil and ecclesiastic institutions. Generally speaking, this situation appears probably poorer but more dynamic and complex than that of Molise.

The last case is the Terra di Lavoro, the rich provincia around Naples. It comprised the major part of the Campania Felix, some poor, hilly areas with fragmented settlement near the Vatican border, and some areas on the western side of the Apenines. Consequently, the provincia comprised different settlement patterns. On the northern hills and near the mountains hierarchized networks of settlements dominated like the ones we have seen in Abruzzo Ultra and Molise. On the Vatican border, a military town such as Gaeta (about 5,600 inhabitants in 1595) dominated an area with important rural small towns, such as Fondi and Itri; near the Apenines, a town of small manufactures and local trades such as Piedimonte d'Alife (more than 8,000 inhabitants) was surrounded by a long line of villages and small towns, running at the foot of the mountains (Cerreto, Venafro, Cusano Mutri); finally, in the fertile plains and low hills of Ciociaria, several small and middling towns (Alvito, Arpino, Sora, Atina, Roccasecca) dominated a constellation of small villages and scattered farms.

The settlement patterns complicated terribly in the Campania Felix, just around Naples. Few kilometres from the huge capital a great number of big towns crowded together without any apparent order. Some of these big towns with the inclusion of their many casali, could have overpassed more than 10,000 inhabitants, but their nucleuses had always more than 5,000 inhabitants and all of them were episcopal towns (Aversa, Capua, Caserta, Marigliano, Nola, Somma Vesuviana). Around them, in an area that had always been and still is one of the more populated regions of Europe, laid a great number of centres having a population between 1,000 and 5,000 inhabitants. Only a few of them, probably enjoyed real central functions: in the Campania Felix the network of fairs and market was very weak; few, but not very extended dioceses (Napoli, Nola, Caiazzo, Aversa, Teano, Caserta, Capua) controlled a great number of settlements.

This chaotic situation depended greatly on the exceptional richness of the countryside and on the presence of the huge Neapolitan food market; and its pattern extended to the neighbouring area of the Northern Principato Citra (Salerno, Cava, Nocera, Sarno).

The settlement in the close area of the Sorrento Peninsula was a little more easily comprehensible. Along the coast and in narrow basins inside the Lattari mountains were cultivated the valuable crops of the giardino mediterraneo, the olives, the vineyards and fishing was a good source of revenue. No big towns were settled in this peninsula at the end of Sixteenth Century, in spite of the ancient glory of Amalfi. There were many small towns with old urban traditions and urban features: Massalubrense, Sorrento and its casali, Vico Equense and, in the part of the Principato Citra, Amalfi, Ravello, Castellammare, Gragnano, Tramonti and its casali, Maiori. In the small triangle of mountains among Vietri, Castellammare e Massalubrense, there was the highest

---

77 On the features of the settlement of this area see A. Sestini, Il paesaggi, pp. 146-7.
concentration of episcopal towns of the Kingdom. Also, in this case, the ‘middling’ or the ‘small’ dimension of a town is not a guarantee that it is situated in an intermediate position of an urban hierarchy, and that it assumes typical functions of the towns of its class. In the peninsula of Sorrento, several small towns with complex social and economic structure had autonomous existences looking overall to the Neapolitan market.

The above rough sketches of Terra di Bari, Molise, Abruzzo Ultra, Molise and Terra di Lavoro illustrate that the ‘small towns’ could have different sets of functions and different relations with the rest their regional urban hierarchy varying accordingly with their economy and their settlement patterns.

In the remaining eight province, it is possible to find urban typologies not very different from the ones we have already seen. The urban network and the settlement system of Basilicata, for example, closely resembled those of Terra di Bari, except in the average size of the population in the centres. Also the northern part of Terra d’Otranto and the Tavoliere Plain in Capitanata showed the same features. The two Calabries, the two Principati, the Abruzzo Citra and the hills of Capitanata showed many similarities to the Abruzzo Ultra. The regions of the Cilento (Principato Citra) and the Salento (Terra d’Otranto) had much in common respectively with Molise and Campania Felix.

7. The fate of the small towns.

One can ask if during the Early Modern Period the small towns of Mezzogiorno had a different fate from the big and middling towns on the one hand, and from smaller settlements, on the other. The evidence suggests positive responses.

In order to respond, I have chosen to compare the estimates based on the numerazioni of 1443, 1595, 1648, 1669 and the first census of the Kingdom of 1796. The three classes of settlements are built on the basis of the numerazione of 1595.

Table 6. Percentual variation of the global and urban population of the Kingdom of Naples.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1443/1595</th>
<th>1595/1648</th>
<th>1648/1669</th>
<th>1669/1796</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kingdom</td>
<td>134,2</td>
<td>-5,5</td>
<td>-20,8</td>
<td>166,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big towns</td>
<td>210,8</td>
<td>-6,5</td>
<td>-19,2</td>
<td>48,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small towns</td>
<td>141,4</td>
<td>-6,9</td>
<td>-23,8</td>
<td>150,4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Two of the four comparisons (1443-1595 e 1669-1796) show a diffuse positive trend, the others (1595-1648 e 1648-1669), on the contrary, show a diffuse negative trend. I have decided to choose both the period of 1595-1648 and the period of 1648-1669 because the negative growths have different intensities and different causes. The first period shows a population decline of about 6%, due to the economic crisis of the 1590s and the 1620s, while the second is much more intense (about 20%) and dramatic and was in great part caused by the plague of 1656-57.

78 See above, note 69.
79 About the influence of the European crises of the 1590s and of the 1620s on the economy and the society of Southern Italy see R. Villari, La rivolta antispagnola a Napoli. Le origini 1585-1647, Bari, 1967, pp. 3-7.
80 See A. Lepre, Storia del Mezzogiorno, pp.289-314.
During the first period (1443-1595), the strong and diffused demographic growth clearly favoured the big towns. As the big towns grew by 200% (Naples, probably, by about 350%), the small towns grew at about the same rate as the overall population (by about 150%). The Sixteenth Century appears to have been an age of prosperity for rural production and trade in which the role of big towns as the engine of global development was exalted. Nevertheless, the success of big towns was not evenly diffused in the Kingdom. They did very well in the two Calabries, in Terra d'Otranto, and in Principato Citra, while in the other province, they showed rates of growth not far from the overall rate.

During the two periods of crisis (1595-1648 and 1648-1669) all kinds of settlements were affected by almost the same rate of negative growth. In the first period there were marked regional differences in the trends, while in the second, the plague made the losses much more homogeneous. Because of the plague, the small towns had losses not far from the general average (about -6%), when in certain areas, particularly favored by the growth of the previous century (Basilicata, Capitanata, Abruzzo Citra, Terra d'Otranto, Terra di Bari), the big towns underwent dramatic losses. The big towns of the self-consumption areas and those around Naples (Terra di Lavoro, Principato Citra) fared much better.

The recover of the Eighteenth Century (1669-1796) showed an extraordinary homogeneity through the province. The rates of growth varied greatly from one provincia to another, but the pattern of growth was the same everywhere: the villages had very high rates (more than 220%), then followed the overall rate (at about 150% rate), the small towns rate was almost equal to the overall rate and the big towns had very low rates (about 50%). All this means that the expansion of the Eighteenth Century happened mainly in the countryside and in the small towns and confirms, for the Kingdom of Naples, the remarks of Jan De Vries concerning the wave of ‘new urbanization’ in Europe from 1750 to 1800-1850:

Rapid population growth, technical innovation, and changed relative prices that brought a new prosperity to the agricultural sector all combined to reverse a century-long process of urban population concentration in the large cities. [...] The ‘new urbanization’ was an urban growth from below.81

The demographic growth of the Eighteenth Century favoured in the Kingdom of Naples a redistribution of the population among the classes of settlements and a new equilibrium in the urban hierarchy by damaging the position of the old big towns. This process of redistribution toward the small towns and the countryside could be an index of an inertial growth, different from the growth of the Sixteenth Century. The big success of villages and small towns doesn’t seem to be, in this case, a symptom of a new kind of development, but appears to confirm a state of marginality and backwardness if compared to Northern Italy and Nort-Western Europe.
