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Dynamics of urbanisation in Italy

Corrado Bonifazi and Frank Heins

Institute for Population Research - National Research Council
Rome, Italy

Introduction

Urbanisation processes are a basic element in the dynamics of human societies. Through the changes in the spatial distribution of population and resources, they reflect the links and relationships between the urban and rural areas, economic sectors, social classes and groups. In the Western world the cities, especially the larger ones, have formed the most dynamic element, capable of reflecting, intensely and in an early stage, the transformations starting in the economic sphere that have modified (and sometimes revolutionised) the basic structures of society.

The link between urbanisation and economic change survives today despite the extraordinary transformations caused by the processes of globalisation of the world economy, with the related modification of the relationships between geographical spaces and the hierarchical order of places. The traditional relationships of dependence between city centre and periphery is being accompanied and overlapped by "a hierarchy of networks […] in which the lower level nodes […] no longer necessarily depend on the nearest 'higher node' but potentially on every node, far or near, of the metropolitan, national and European network" (Dematteis 1995, page 693).

In all probability, these transformation processes are related to the renewed interest in the dynamics of urban systems. These dynamics of the urban systems are increasingly complex and also increasingly difficult to interpret with the typical tools of quantitative analysis. This situation has stimulated an interesting debate, with analyses giving sometimes different results and the proposal of numerous frameworks for the interpretation of the urbanisation processes and dynamics. The traditional view which saw as outcome of the urbanisation processes a growing concentration of the population has gradually given way to an interpretation substantially based on the urbanisation/counter-urbanisation dichotomy (Champion, 1989). The differential-urbanisation model proposed by Geyer and Kontuly (Geyer, 1989; Geyer and Kontuly, 1993) inserts the intermediate stage of the polarisation reversal between urbanisation and counter-urbanisation, in order to develop a tool of interpretation that is closer to the reality.

The differential-urbanisation model, whose basic features are described in the following paragraph, will serve in this report to analyse some aspects of the dynamics of urbanisation typical of the Italian situation. Among the countries of Western Europe, Italy has many specific features and provides motives for special interest. In the first place, the delay of industrialisation in Italy has led to the concentration of many phases typical of the transitional dynamics of the urban systems in the past fifty years. In 1921, the year when our analysis starts, 55.7% of the workforce was employed in agriculture and 34.1% of the population lived in municipalities with less than 5,000 inhabitants. Thirty years later, after World War II, Italy was still a mainly agricultural and rural country, since 43% of the economically active population continued to work in agriculture and still 27% lived in small municipalities.

In the second place, the extent of the local differences in economic and social development has few equals in other European countries. Southern Italy, including the provinces of the southern mainland and the two main islands, still has a significant gap toward the rest of the country. The *Questione Meridionale* or "southern problem" has been on the agenda since the Italian unification in 1870. This situation has deeply affected the evolution of the southern urban system and, in particular, of the major metropolitan areas there, on the basis of a situation whose settlement characteristics and processes differed considerably from those in North-Central Italy.

Conceptual and Statistical Framework

In the differential-urbanisation model, Geyer and Kontuly (1993) identify three stages in the evolution of the urban systems, identifiable through the relationships between migration and settlement size. The first stage is urbanisation, with faster growth in the large metropolitan areas; the second one shows a polarisation reversal and is characterised by faster growth in medium-sized areas; the third one shows a counter-urbanisation with a faster growth in the small-sized regions.

The relationships between net-migration rates and settlement size during a cycle of urban development are shown in Figure 1. The first three positions (*EPC*, *IPC*, *APC*) correspond to three moments of the urbanisation phase, the next two (*EIC*, *AIC*) to the phase of polarisation reversal and the last two (*ESC*, *ASC*) to the phase of counter-urbanisation. At the end of this evolutionary cycle, the start of a new stage of urbanisation has been hypothesised, with much smaller levels of mobility than those recorded in the initial part of the process.

The analysis of the evolution of an urban system involves three critical choices in the initial stage, which may significantly affect the research results. This regards the choice of the period of time, the data to be used and the geographical units. In reality, these choices derive more from the availability of data than from a theoretical and interpretative approach: "pragmatism has to prevail in what must therefore be considered merely an exploratory investigation" (Champion 2000, page 3). In particular, using the differential-urbanisation model as a point of reference, it is very often inevitable to refer to data on population change rather than to migration data.

In this paper, in order to analyse the long-term trend of the Italian urban system, we have referred to two sets of data: those on population change at municipal level for the years from 1921 to 1999 aggregated in the Local Labour Market Areas (LLMA) (ISTAT 1997), and those on internal migration between the provinces from 1955 to 1996. This two views on the processes enables us to have a more realistic and complete picture of the phenomenon. The reference to population change has enabled us to consider a period of nearly 80 years, during which we record the basic changes in the Italian settlement structure at the national level and in the various sub-divisions. Data on the origin and destination of internal migration has been available at a more aggregate geographic level only since 1955; this information provides a more analytical view of the processes while inevitably providing a more narrow view with regard to the time period.

Every year, *ISTAT* (Central Statistics Institute) provides a large amount of demographic information on the Italian municipalities. Demographic flows and migration data based on population register information are currently used to estimate population accounts of municipalities, and were used in various analyses on urbanisation and counter-urbanisation (Dematteis 1986; Dematteis and Petsimeris 1989). A critical appraisal of these estimates for the last thirty years has convinced us to refrain from using them, since specific administrative procedures involved in preparing these estimates tend to produce inconsistencies and to give a falsified picture of the Italian situation.

We preferred to use - on the one hand – data on population change for labour-market areas, which are designed according to the same criteria for the entire national territory. On the other hand, we rely on the considerable migration data at the provincial level.

The basic data used to calculate the population change are those for the resident population of the municipalities. For the period 1921-1991, reference is made to census data, while for 1999 the information is derived from the population registers. In our analysis, the data for the whole period considered are based on the municipal boundaries of 1991. This has been possible due to the

reconstruction of the population of the municipalities made by the Central Statistics Institute after every census, with the estimate, at the date of all the censuses conducted since 1861, of the population of the administrative units within the boundaries existing at the time of the last survey (*ISTAT* 1994). For 1999 population register data were used. In some cases population figures had to be estimated because some municipalities changed boundaries in the 1990s.

In the analysis based on internal migration data, the reference unit is the province, the intermediate administrative unit between municipalities and regions; during the period 1975-1994, there were 95 provinces. Earlier and later data of provinces changing boundaries are estimated and/or aggregated to assume comparability over time. Migration data are based on information from population registers, but undergo a procedure of verification that assures the consistency of origin/destination information of the single migration flows. In the case of internal migration, it seemed preferable to distinguish the units of analysis according to population density and not population size, considering the average value for the period examined (1955-1996).

Whereas questions regarding data quality could be solved, unfortunately, both systems of geographic subdivisions, even if better than municipalities and regions, are far from being without fault. Over-bounding has to be assumed for local labour-market areas in the past, since they are defined according to 1991 census result on commuting. Under-bounding is observed in the case of some provinces; especially for Milan and Naples, where the "overspill" of the metropolitan area is not contained by the area of the respective province.

Moreover, it seems important to underline that the significance of settlement size and population density in Italy is not directly comparable to the situation in other countries. The urban/rural distinction has less importance, since the low density rural areas - especially in the South - had always a *quasi* urban settlement structure. Consequently, the urban/rural dichotomy never reached an important prominence in reporting and analysing population processes in Italy.

Measuring the Stages in the Differential Urbanisation Model: Population Change by Settlement Size in the Italian Local Labour Market Areas

The long-term analysis of population change has been conducted at the level of Local Labour Market Areas (LLMA), aggregated into classes based on the population size. The LLMAs are aggregations of municipalities identified on the basis of daily commuting for work purposes as reported in the 1991 census (*ISTAT* 1997). The reference to an area beyond municipal boundaries has enabled us to avoid the problems stemming from the large number of municipalities (8,100 in 1991). This high number of municipalities is the result of a geographical subdivision whose basic units are, in most cases, based on a system formed in the late Middle Ages and in the Renaissance, with few, limited changes over the past five or six centuries (Gambi, 1995). This means an inevitable difficulty in interpreting the most recent evolution processes, especially in the large metropolitan area where there have been the most extensive changes. Even the number of LLMAs is high, considering that 784 were identified in 1991.

The boundaries of each LLMA are those of 1991. From this point of view, a static approach was favoured, projecting back the situation emerging from the analysis of the 1991 census data. This choice was nearly inevitable considering that the survey of daily commuting for work purposes, indispensable for identifying the LLMAs, was introduced in the Italian census only after 1981.

On the contrary, the results are based on a dynamic definition of the population size classes. For each point in time the classes contain the LLMAs that at that moment fell within their boundaries. The contents of the diverse classes therefore changed over time, since an LLMA could shift from one category to another (Table 1). Of the 8 classes considered, the only two with a decreasing number of LLMAs over the study period are those with a population of between 10,000 and 25,000 (from 266 to 232 units), and between 25,000 and 50,000 (from 199 to 139 units). All the others increased their components: the LLMAs with a population less than 10,000 rose from 95 to 151 units, due to the depopulation of many hilly and mountainous areas. Those LLMAs between 50,000 and 100,000 rose from 128 to 140, while the number of those LLMAs in the 100,000-250,000 group rose from 79 to 88. In the next class (250,000-500,000 inhabitants), the units rose from 9 to 22, while the LLMAs with a population of between 500,000 and 1,000,000 rose from 5 to 7, and those LLMAs with over a million rose from 3 to 5[1].

The rates of change of Italy's population in the three time intervals in which the period 1921-1971 was subdivided have similar levels (a yearly growth rate of 0.6-0.7%); however, the growth rates seem quite different when considering the population size classes (Figure 2 and Table 1). In particular, between 1921 and 1951, all the classes show a population gain, but the growth rates increase decisively starting with the LLMAs with 100,000 to 250,000 inhabitants, and reaching the highest levels in the major urban areas (with a growth rate of 1.6% per year). This process of concentration and urbanisation of the population becomes even more significant in the two subsequent decades. The shape of the curve recalls that of the transition between the early primate city stage and the intermediate primate city stage (Figure 1), with the significant difference regarding population growth also in smaller towns. The reason for this difference probably lies in the use of population change instead of net migration, since in Italy up to the early 1950s, the levels of internal mobility were not so high as to completely counterbalance the considerable natural population increase recorded in the less urbanised areas of the country. Owing to the still limited attraction of the industrial sector and the law by which the fascist dictatorship had placed severe limitations on changes of residence (Treves, 1976). It should also be considered that a series of factors considerably reduced the volume of emigration abroad for most of the time period considered, thus reducing size of emigration flows of the rural population. The restrictive immigration policies in North America (above all of the US), the anti-emigration policy of fascism, the economic crisis of the 1930s and finally World War II are all elements that, at different times, contributed to the decline of emigration.

While Italy before World War II was a basically agricultural and rural country, with a process of industrialisation which had only started to change the country's economic and social structure, in the 1950s and 1960s Italy underwent a radical and definitive transformation. Internal migrations and the great growth of the large cities were the two most significant consequences of these processes (Bonifazi and Heins, 2000). Consequently, in the two decades considered, the rate of population change on the basis of the population size of the LLMAs became almost linear, indicating the transition to the advanced primate city stage. Therefore, the LLMAs with a population of under 50,000 lost inhabitants, with maximum levels of about –1.0% per year for the two classes with a population of under 25,000 between 1961 and 1971, while the positive population-change rates increase in all the classes with over 50,000 inhabitants. Among these classes, the growth rates rise with the population size, with sole exception of the LLMAs with a population of 500,000-1,000,000, which for both decades show rates lower than the previous class. In particular, the major urban areas recorded very high growth rates: 2.6% per year between 1951 and 1961 and 2.1% in the subsequent decade.

[1] In the latter case to Milan, Rome and Naples, initially included in the class, Turin is added during the decade 1951-1961 and Bari during 1971-1981.

This process of concentration, besides representing a transfer of population from the countryside and rural areas to the large cities, in Italy it has also involved a significant shift of the country's demographic centre towards the Northern-Central regions, and from the mountainous and hilly areas to the plains. Besides the regional differences in the population change, Table 2 summarises the importance of altitude and distance from the sea. Altitude influences the patterns of economic and demographic settlement largely through the costs - including time - of transportation.

From 1951 to 1971, despite the higher rate of natural growth, the percentage of population resident in the South declined from 37.2% to 34.9%.

The mountainous parts of Italy are the Alpine region in the North and the Apennines which stretch from the North-west to the Southern across the length of the entire Italian peninsula. From 1921 to 1971, the percentage of population in the mountainous areas fell from 20.1% to 14.3% and that of the hilly areas from 41.9% to 38.6%, leading to an increase of 9 percentage points in the weight of the plains (Cortese, 1988). In 1971 the plains, forming less than one fifth of the country's area, hosted 47% of its population. Whereas in 1921 more than 20% of the Italian population lived in mountainous areas, today this value is only 13% due to negative rates of population change in the period 1951 to 1991. On the other hand, the plains had considerable growth rates, which slowed slightly during the 1980s.

Italy has approximately 7,500 km of coastline. Municipalities close to the coast - including Rome, Naples and other important centres, especially in the South - had until 1981 higher rates of population growth than non-coastal municipalities. The share of the Italian population living close to the coast rose from 1921 to today from 26.1% to 32.9%.

In the 1970s, a process of polarisation reversal started, with the continuation of population loss in the two classes of LLMAs with a population of less than 25,000, a rising increase in LLMAs with a population of between 250,000 and 500,000 (0.7% per year) and lower growth rates in the last two classes (0.5% for the large metropolitan areas). The shape of the curve is very close to the one showing the transition from the advanced primate city stage to the early intermediate city stage. These results differ from the ones obtained by using the municipalities classified by population size as the unit of analysis of the evolution of the urban system (Fig. 3). From this point of view, the polarisation-reversal stage seems to be anticipated in the decade 1961-71, while the period 1971-81 would show a situation of genuine counter-urbanisation, with growth rates falling as the population size rises and population decrease in municipalities with a population of over 500,000.

This difference seems to confirm all the limitations pointed out earlier regarding the use of municipalities in the study of urbanisation and counter-urbanisation processes in Italy. The basic administrative units have few links with the processes characterising urban systems and it often happens that small- or medium-sized municipalities form an integral part of the major Italian metropolitan areas. In this sense, and despite all the limitations, the LLMAs represent a useful step forward. The smaller ones are, in fact, concentrated in the inland, mountainous or hilly areas, and are the result of a real isolation from the country's economic processes. It should then be considered that the LLMAs acquire an increasingly strong characterisation and closer correspondence to the real dynamics of the phenomenon in the years nearest to 1991.

The considerable growth of the metropolitan areas with a population exceeding 1,000,000 recorded between 1961 and 1971 was concentrated above all in the municipalities around major cities rather than in the major cities themselves. In Milan and Naples, the growth rate of the ring municipalities was 7.8 times higher than that of the major city; it was 6.8 times higher in Turin, while in Rome, which has a very special geographical layout, the rate is 1.3 times higher (Misiti and

Gesano, 1994). In the subsequent decade, while the major cities started to lose population, the ring areas kept on growing, so that this phenomenon led to a rise in the population of the metropolitan areas. A different method of analysis thus shows quite different results. However, the use of functional areas, identified on the basis of observed relationships like the LLMAs, can provide a more accurate interpretation of the processes.

An other important process of transformation in the Italian production structure started in the 1970s. The limitations of the Fordist model of development, based on large factories and the growth of the large cities, became evident. In the second half of the decade, there was a sharp drop in interregional migration from Southern to North-Central Italy, with a more balanced geographical distribution of production (Bonifazi and Cantalini, 1988; Bonaguidi, 1988). Above all, the development model based on the system of small- and medium-sized enterprises became stronger; these enterprises, organised in industrial districts, were often characterised by a considerable degree of production specialisation, and were mainly located in what is often defined as the Third Italy, generally including the North-eastern and Central regions (Bagnasco, 1977 and Dematteis, 1995).

These basic trends also continued in the subsequent decades. Between 1981 and 1991, the shape of our curve tends to show that of the transition from the early intermediate city stage to the advanced intermediate city stage. It involved a population loss for the LLMAs with a population of less than 25,000 and for the two classes with over 500,000 inhabitants, while all the other LLMAs recorded a population gain. This situation was basically confirmed in the 1990s, except for the higher levels of growth in the classes of medium-sized LLMAs and zero growth levels for the two largest LLMAs. In particular, the LLMAs with a population exceeding 1,000,000 show a very small increase of population. In both decades, there has thus been a situation of polarisation reversal, though the system has not actually entered a real counter-urbanisation stage, as already stressed by Vitali (1992).

The smallest LLMAs have continued to lose population, while the growth of the intermediate ones contrasts with the basic size equilibrium reached by the largest LLMAs. Therefore, a genuine process of counter-urbanisation has not yet taken place in Italy, since there has been a redistribution of the population from the centre to the periphery of the metropolitan areas and from the larger to the medium-sized LLMAs. The central element of the processes characterising the past 20 years seems to be the significant dynamism of the intermediate-sized areas, where growth increased in the 1990s. This trend basically coincides with the general trend in the national economy, in which the industrial districts and the small- and medium-sized enterprise are the driving forces. Later, we shall see the relationships that have linked the various areas together in terms of migration flows, looking in greater detail at the different trends in Southern and North-Central Italy. For now, we should highlight that the lack of a counter-urbanisation process is due mainly to the geographical and economic isolation of the smaller LLMAs. These latter areas seem to be mostly cut off from the main production processes, and, due to past migration dynamics and very high levels of population ageing, destined to undergo a population decline which seems hard to stop.

Measuring the Stages in the Differential Urbanisation Model: Net Migration by Population Density in the Italian Provinces

The second approach to the study of differential urbanisation in Italy is based on migration data at the provincial level for the period 1955 to 1996. These migration data offer more insights in the functioning of the processes, especially with regard to the South-North migrations, which are a characteristic of the Italian migration system.

The Authors settle on a simple North/South division to analyse the process of urbanisation in Italy and abstained from further dividing the Italian migration system, even if Dematteis and Petsimeris (1989) identified a separate settlement system of the North-Eastern regions of Italy.

The net-migration rates, by population density classes shown in Figure 4 and Table 3, are grouped for time periods, based on an analysis of the yearly data. This analysis was performed separately for the two subdivisions and focused on the structure of the net-migration pattern for population density classes. In Central and Northern Italy (Figure 4a), an intensification of the primate city stage from the 1950s to 1960s is observed. In the mid 1970s - or more precisely with the year 1975 - a clean break took place and the Central-Northern Italian migration system moved to the intermediate city stage. Between 1975 and 1992, no further important changes were observed. In recent years, the migration loss of the provinces with very high population density intensified without an indication of a clear move to the small city stage. The migration system of Central-Northern Italy is vigorous also due to the migration losses of Southern Italy. In Southern Italy, all categories - with the exception of Naples in the short period 1955-57 - show a migration loss over the entire study period. Reasoning on the differences in migration loss (even if very unusual) leads to the observation that urbanisation extends until the 1980s; in fact, we identified for the Southern provinces the year 1981 as the point of transition. For the lowest population density category only, a limited population loss can be observed. Not considering the special case of Naples, the migration system of Southern Italy in the 1980s and 1990s is balanced with similar migration losses for all the categories. The special case of Naples can be explained through the migration loss towards Northern Italy and towards the surrounding provinces - Caserta, Avellino and Benevento.

Comparing these results with an analysis based on population-growth rates (Table 4), it becomes clear that they are significantly different. In North-Central Italy, a cycle from the primate-to-small city stage would have been observed. And the situation in the South seems to show a transition from the small city stage to the primate city stage followed by the intermediate city stage. Undoubtedly, the differences in the age structure and changes in behaviour lead to significant differences in the birth and death rates.

The subdivision of the Italian differential urbanisation process in specific periods is based on the net-migration data for the population density categories (Figures 5a and 5b). Due to the South-North migrations in the 1950s and 1960s, no perfect cycles of urban development can be expected. In the case of Northern and Central Italy, the primate city stage, which comes to a conclusion in the beginning of the 1970s, can still be identified. The polarisation reversal took place in the mid 1970s. Since then, North-Central Italy has been shifted in the intermediate city stage at a low level of internal mobility. The internal differentiation of Southern Italy, which was rather important until the seventies, is today largely reduced to the contrasting position of Naples and the other density categories. Naples has a special role with an important out-migration to surrounding provinces, to Northern Italy and to foreign countries. This process is fed by a fertility consistently above the national average and caused by the difficult living conditions in the province of Naples, which are characterised by urban congestion and severe economic problems.

Vinning and Kontuly (1978) refuted the hypothesis that aggregate economic conditions caused the reduction of migration into metropolitan areas. In the Italian situation, only minor importance can be attributed to the business cycle. Italy is a confirmation of the observation of Cochrane and Vinning (1988): "It has been shown clearly that all countries go though major shifts in settlement patterns as their economies undergo shifts from agriculture to industrialisation and from industrialisation to post-industrial activities …" (p. 108). The shift of the Italian economy from traditional agriculture to industrialisation was certainly completed during the 1970s. With the growing importance of part-time agriculture, the agricultural sector stabilised and no longer causes

out-migration. On the other hand, the discussion between environmentalism and productionism, which in other industrialised countries plays a significant role, does not seem to influence Italian migration patterns today. Italian migration patterns are influenced by environmental concerns only to a minor extent.

Fielding (1989) identified links between the population-redistribution process and the fundamental economic and social changes. "Regional sector specialisation" and the Fordist growth period, based on the mass production of consumer goods, lead to depopulation of rural or low density areas in the 1950s and population gain of North-Western Italy in the 1950s and 1960s. In this time period falls the industrial development - in part state sponsored - of Turin, Genoa and Mestre (Venice). The subsequent de-industrialisation of some important Italian cities - i.e. Genoa and Turin - with few other employment alternatives has led to population loss. The more dispersed pattern of production associated with the emergence of the Third Italy in the late 1970s did not cause fundamental shifts in the settlement pattern. For years, economic growth in these areas was based on local labour force reserves, expressed by generally high economic activity rates. The situation in many areas of Southern Italy in the 1990s is characterised by continuous socio-economic difficulties with high unemployment and an economy depending largely on the public sector. Today, the role of traditional agriculture in the Italian economy is limited. And its abandonment continues through a generational change and not through migration. Instead, many small industries and an increasing part of tourism are emerging in some rural areas.

As indicated by Champion (1988) also in Italy the spatial distribution of economic activity is of significant importance for the underlying processes of concentration and de-concentration for population distribution. A third component - the demographic composition of the population - is of less importance in the Italian case. The share of the highly mobile category aged 20-29 declined from 17.0% in 1955 to 13.8% in 1980. After a rise to 16.2% in 1992, it has reached 14.2% in 2000. Accordingly, the major changes in the Italian settlement trends cannot be attributed to demographic changes.

The Italian central government has never had - in our view - a specific policy regarding settlement processes. However, the creation of decentralised universities especially in Southern Italy in the 1970s certainly contributed to a reduction or delay in migration. The investment in communication infrastructures - especially roads - also played a significant role.

Dematteis (1986) cites the following factors leading to counter-urbanisation in Italy: the housing market, the de-industrialisation of urban areas and industrialisation of peripheral areas as well as social, historical and cultural factors, and, to a lesser degree, regional and urban policies.

Further details of the Italian migration system can be shown by analysing the balance of the single migration streams between the density categories. We limit the presentation of the results to the intermediate, high and very high population density categories of North-Central Italy, since these areas of Italy follow better the differential urbanisation model (Figure 6). The agglomerations of the North-Central provinces with a very high population density show a positive net-migration rate with respect to all other categories until the mid 1970s. In the first short period (1955-57), this migration gain came from the same geographic subdivision, whereas the period 1958-74 was characterised by in-migration from Southern Italy. In the mid 1970s again, the clear turn-around with a migration loss to all categories of the same subdivision and continuous gains from the South are observed. The intermediate population density category of the North and the South plays a key role in the population-redistribution process of the primary cities. For the high density category, the 1955-57 period is characterised by gains from the low density and losses towards the very high density provinces of North-Central Italy. During the subsequent period, again, the migration gains

with Southern Italy increased. Whereas a migration loss towards the intermediate population density category appears to be increasingly strong by the mid 1970s. In the more recent period, the migration gains from the primate cities are the most prominent. The intermediate density category had a migration loss only with the major Italian agglomerations limited to the period before the mid 1970s. Since the migration turnaround, we can observe migration gains for all categories, especially for the higher density areas of North-Central Italy. In the most recent period, the gains with Southern Italy are the highest compared to the other categories. Today, the role of the low and very low population density categories in the Italian migration system is small, which is in part due to their limited demographic importance. In fact, during the study period 14% of the Italian population has lived on the average in the low density and 4.0% in the very low density provinces.

To highlight an important characteristic of the Italian migration system at the beginning of the 1990s, the age selectivity of the migration processes was analysed (Figure 7). The most polarised situation - regarding the South versus North-Central Italy - regards the 20-29 age group. Low and intermediate population density provinces of Northern and Central Italy are 'gainers' for all age groups, whereas for the high and very high density categories, a significant age selectivity is observed. The very high population density category had only in the 20-29 age group a significantly positive net-migration rate. Whereas the high population density category had population losses for the population 40 to 69 years old. For both categories, a total net-migration rate close to 0 was observed. In short, Northern and Central Italy is characterised by a mainstream migration leading to de-concentration and undercurrent migration - composed by young, education- and career-oriented adults - leading to concentration. For the density categories in Southern Italy, the age-selectivity process is less marked. Naples - with a very high density - is a 'loser' regarding all age groups. But in the other density categories, 40-49 years old have net-migration rates close to 0 and 50-69 years old have positive net-migration rates. The main process behind this age selectivity is the return migration from Northern-Central Italy. To conclude, Italy conforms to the generalised model of migration gains of young adults in the primate cities, combined with losses for families and the elderly, even if to a different degree in the two geographic sub-divisions.

Summary and Conclusion

The two analyses conducted on population change and net migration have shown that a genuine counter-urbanisation has not yet been achieved in Italy. In both cases, in fact, the most recent situation seems to be characterised by a faster growth of intermediate urban areas. From the theoretical point of view, this situation represents a confirmation of the usefulness of the differential urbanisation model, proposed by Geyer and Kontuly, which besides the stages of urbanisation and counter-urbanisation also provides for an intermediate stage of polarisation reversal.

In the analysis of the Italian situation, the geographical difference between the Northern-Central and the Southern subdivisions still emerges as a major element characterising the dynamics of the national urban system. However, it should be stressed that not even in Northern-Central Italy, which is the part of Italy nearest to the economic profile of the Western European countries, the urban system has really entered the stage of counter-urbanisation. In this sense, the migration behaviour of the very high density provinces of this subdivision appears to be quite significant (Figure 6). These areas are losing population with respect to the other provinces of the subdivision, especially towards those areas that show an intermediate density, but have gained in respect to almost all the categories of the South. This aspect confirms the complexity and multiplicity of the links between the various geographical areas in the Italian urban system.

From this point of view, the data on population change by population density (Table 4), which in the 1990s showed a growth rate inversely proportional to the levels of population concentration, could indicate a significant change. However, it seems premature to reach final conclusions, since these data, based on the population registers, could be affected by inaccuracies, errors as well as real population dynamics. The population census of October 2001 will offer the possibility of verifying if really a new stage in the evolution of the Italian urban system started, though in general the analyses of urbanisation suffer considerably from the lack of an adequate statistical material.

It should also be considered that in the Italian case, foreign immigration is becoming increasingly important in determining national and regional population change. Together with natural dynamics and internal migrations, it provides a further important factor of change in the size of the urban aggregates.

Many questions are still waiting an answer. Can we expect a further migration turnaround? What will be the effects of economic (and social) structural change and spatial economic forces on the one hand and the technological innovations reducing distance on the other? The agglomeration and/or concentration forces of the economic system are still strong in the era of globalisation and show no signs of abating. Therefore, the authors do not see indications for an early or advanced small city stage. However, the transition from the advanced primate city stage to the early primate city stage took also many by surprise.

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Annex

Figure A1 Population size, Local Labour Market Areas 1991

Figure A2 Population density, Provinces 1955-97

Table 1 Population change and settlement size with related information, 1921-1999

	Periods					
	1921-51	**1951-61**	**1961-71**	**1971-81**	**1981-91**	**1991-99**
			Average population growth (per %)			
0 - <10,000	0.488	-0.279	-1.063	-0.382	-0.344	-0.342
10,000 - <25,000	0.314	-0.557	-1.067	-0.201	-0.131	-0.107
25,000 - <50,000	0.369	-0.348	-0.439	0.274	0.070	0.155
50,000 - <100,000	0.394	0.052	0.412	0.528	0.214	0.368
100,000 - <250,000	0.636	0.654	0.752	0.596	0.162	0.361
250,000 - <500,000	0.794	1.213	1.221	0.718	0.226	0.315
500,000 - <1,000,000	0.794	1.029	0.897	0.264	-0.276	-0.023
1,000,000 and more	1.645	2.578	2.145	0.471	-0.158	0.036
Italy	**0.627**	**0.636**	**0.673**	**0.438**	**0.039**	**0.197**
			Standard deviation of average population growth in class			
0 - <10,000	0.558	1.170	1.188	0.803	0.615	0.722
10,000 - <25,000	0.613	1.086	1.053	0.711	0.534	0.602
25,000 - <50,000	0.649	1.137	1.075	0.571	0.486	0.847
50,000 - <100,000	0.585	0.959	0.893	0.493	0.433	0.447
100,000 - <250,000	0.516	0.836	0.824	0.476	0.439	0.440
250,000 - <500,000	0.422	0.738	0.774	0.387	0.398	0.385
500,000 - <1,000,000	0.239	0.433	0.257	0.501	0.421	0.448
1,000,000 and more	0.717	0.571	0.479	0.294	0.353	0.225
Italy	**0.672**	**1.291**	**1.222**	**0.544**	**0.470**	**0.508**
			Average population			
0 - <10,000	698,905	714,723	850,614	1,026,194	1,028,181	1,095,076
10,000 - <25,000	4,446,088	4,374,828	4,260,635	4,061,864	4,007,167	3,763,795
25,000 - <50,000	7,295,131	6,587,834	5,748,703	5,133,549	4,918,112	4,915,553
50,000 - <100,000	8,865,695	9,907,116	10,208,891	10,425,702	10,154,225	10,058,063
100,000 - <250,000	11,319,428	11,349,773	11,767,389	12,591,007	12,980,033	13,526,848
250,000 - <500,000	3,080,025	4,773,573	5,395,732	6,459,819	7,267,976	7,704,333
500,000 - <1,000,000	3,460,605	4,238,604	5,175,005	4,477,153	4,967,536	4,894,336
1,000,000 and more	4,290,271	7,123,104	8,973,092	11,171,443	11,344,242	11,270,961
Italy	**43,456,147**	**49,069,553**	**52,380,058**	**55,346,729**	**56,667,471**	**57,228,963**
			Number of areas in class			
0 - <10,000	95	93	112	137	141	151
10,000 - <25,000	266	262	260	248	246	232
25,000 - <50,000	199	183	163	145	138	139
50,000 - <100,000	128	144	146	146	142	140
100,000 - <250,000	79	77	76	79	84	88
250,000 - <500,000	9	15	16	18	21	22
500,000 - <1,000,000	5	6	7	6	7	7
1,000,000 and more	3	4	4	5	5	5
Italy	**784**	**784**	**784**	**784**	**784**	**784**

Note: Based on 1991 local labour market areas, Istat 1997
Source: Istat 1994 and Istat 2000, own calculations

Table 2 Population change by administrative divisions and geographic characteristics, 1921-1999

	Average population growth (in percent)						Distribution of population	
	1921-51	**1951-61**	**1961-71**	**1971-81**	**1981-91**	**1991-99**	**1921**	**1999**
	By administrative division							
North-West	0,52	1,14	1,28	0,23	-0,22	0,12	25,5	26,2
North-East	0,45	0,09	0,54	0,38	-0,03	0,28	20,9	18,4
Central	0,88	0,80	0,93	0,48	0,10	0,21	16,9	19,2
Southern	0,82	0,42	0,23	0,64	0,27	0,18	23,7	24,5
Islands	0,40	0,64	0,02	0,55	0,17	0,23	13,0	11,7
	By zone of altitude							
Mountains	0,15	-0,22	-0,47	-0,11	-0,25	0,06	20,2	13,0
Hills, non-littoral	0,39	0,12	0,21	0,42	0,13	0,27	27,2	23,3
Hills, littoral	0,68	0,82	0,67	0,58	0,13	0,20	15,0	15,9
Plain	0,99	1,20	1,30	0,56	0,05	0,20	37,6	47,8
	By distance from sea							
Non-littoral	0,46	0,35	0,49	0,39	0,06	0,25	73,9	67,1
Littoral*	1,07	1,29	1,06	0,54	-0,01	0,08	26,1	32,9
Italy	**0,63**	**0,64**	**0,67**	**0,44**	**0,04**	**0,20**	**100,0**	**100,0**

*(municipalities within 5km from the coastline)

Source: Istat 1994 and Istat 2000, own calculations

Table 3 Net migration and population density with related information, 1955-1996

	Number of provinces and population share in %	Periods				
		1955-57	1958-74	1975-80	1981-92	1993-96
		Net migration rates (per 1000) – Northern and Central Italy (61)				
Very low density	6 (3.8)	-1.73	-3.65	-0.01	0.59	1.6
Low density	13 (14.2)	-4.91	-2.92	2	2.33	3.32
Intermediate density	25 (32.5)	-2.25	0.28	2.25	2.17	2.9
High density	12 (24.9)	4.01	5.85	0.95	0.27	0.66
Very high density	5 (24.5)	13.2	11.36	0.32	-0.17	-1.48
		Net migration rates (per 1000) – Mezzogiorno (34)				
Very low density	4 (5.3)	-3.18	-7.82	-2.49	-0.93	-0.89
Low density	8 (17.5)	-6.04	-10.63	-3.46	-1.68	-1.75
Intermediate density	17 (44.0)	-4.64	-7.65	-2.49	-1.56	-1.91
High density	4 (19.6)	-3.57	-4.92	-1.1	-0.47	-1.14
Very high density	1 (13.6)	0.93	-2.77	-2.39	-4.93	-4.45
		Net migration rates (per 1000) – Italy (95)				
Very low density	10 (4.4)	-2.36	-5.5	-1.12	-0.1	0.47
Low density	21 (15.4)	-5.38	-6.13	-0.26	0.65	1.2
Intermediate density	42 (36.8)	-3.31	-3.18	0.2	0.54	0.78
High density	16 (22.9)	1.64	2.6	0.34	0.04	0.09
Very high density	6 (20.5)	10.2	8.13	-0.3	-1.29	-2.19

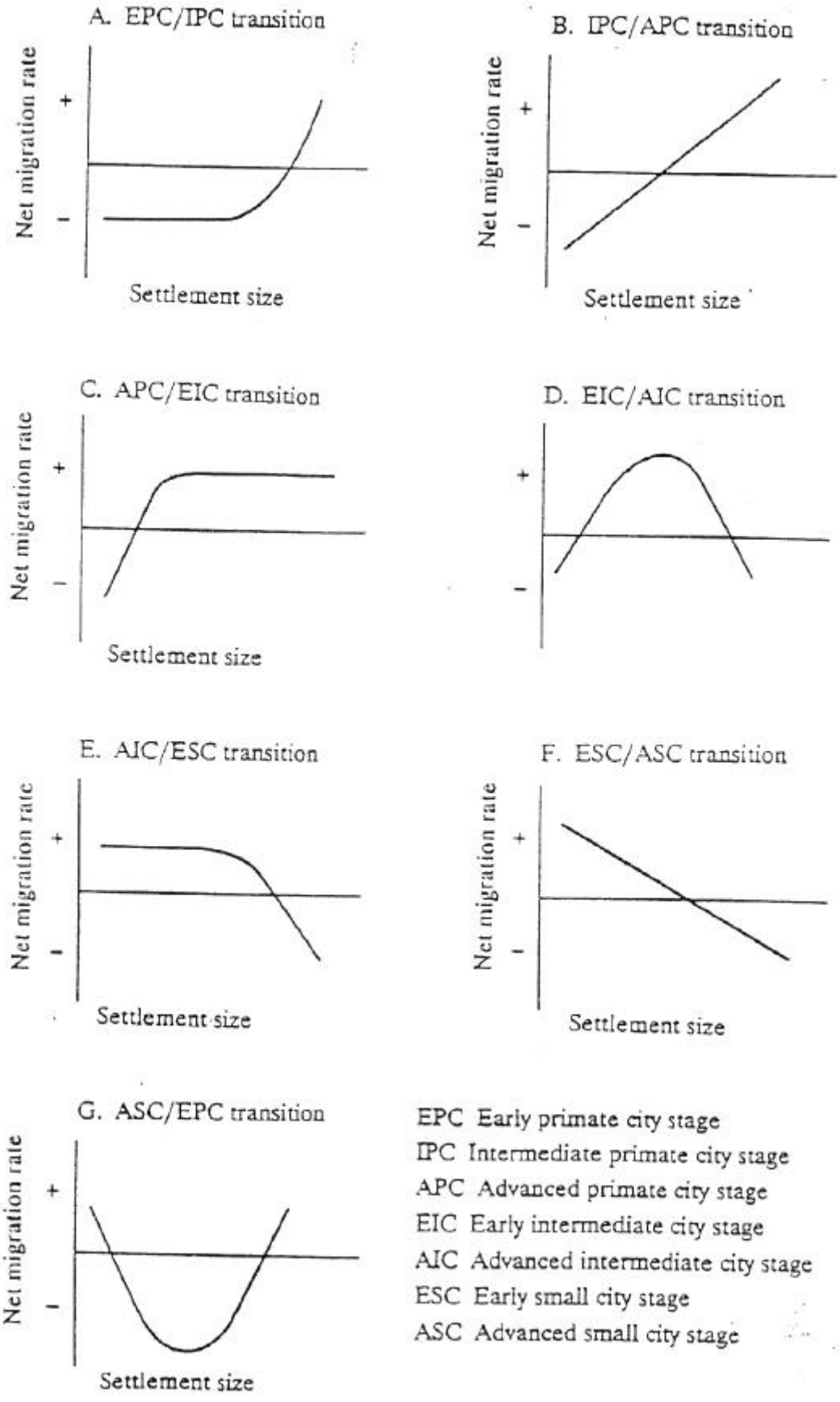
Note: The classification of provinces according to their density refers to the entire study period, accordingly the population share is the average for the entire study period.
Source: Istat Statistical Yearbooks, own calculations

Table 4 Population change by population density classes of provinces, 1921-1999

	Average population growth (in percent)						Distribution of population	
	1921-51	**1951-61**	**1961-71**	**1971-81**	**1981-91**	**1991-99**	**1921**	**1999**
	Central and Northern Italy							
Very low density	0,38	0,35	0,15	0,22	0,03	0,31	2,7	2,3
Low density	0,15	-0,27	-0,05	0,27	-0,01	0,27	11,6	8,4
Intermediate density	0,42	0,17	0,44	0,29	-0,05	0,25	23,2	19,9
High density	0,57	0,86	1,31	0,48	-0,07	0,22	15,3	16,3
Very high density	1,44	2,12	1,94	0,33	-0,14	0,06	10,5	16,9
Total	**0,60**	**0,72**	**0,96**	**0,35**	**-0,07**	**0,20**	**63,3**	**63,8**
	Southern Italy							
Very low density	0,96	0,87	-0,02	0,58	0,25	-0,02	1,8	1,9
Low density	0,65	-0,03	-0,29	0,42	0,16	-0,03	7,0	5,9
Intermediate density	0,58	0,26	-0,09	0,47	0,18	0,14	17,3	15,4
High density	0,73	0,77	0,50	0,85	0,49	0,48	6,6	7,5
Very high density	0,91	1,53	1,13	0,92	0,15	0,34	4,0	5,4
Total	**0,68**	**0,49**	**0,16**	**0,61**	**0,24**	**0,20**	**36,7**	**36,2**
	Italy							
Total	**0,63**	**0,64**	**0,67**	**0,44**	**0,04**	**0,20**	**100,0**	**100,0**

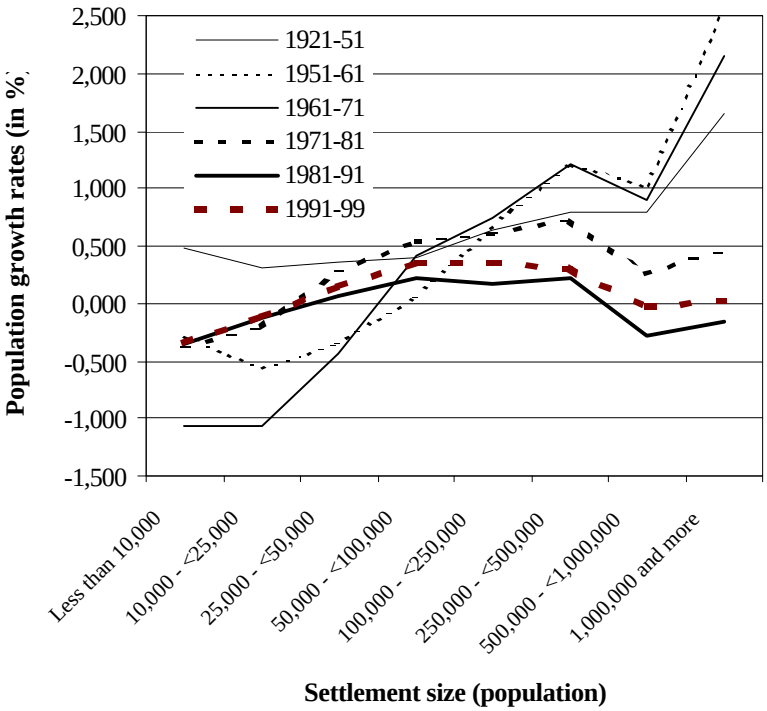
Source: Istat 1994 and Istat 2000, own calculations

Fig. 1 Net migration rate and settlement size during a cycle of urban development



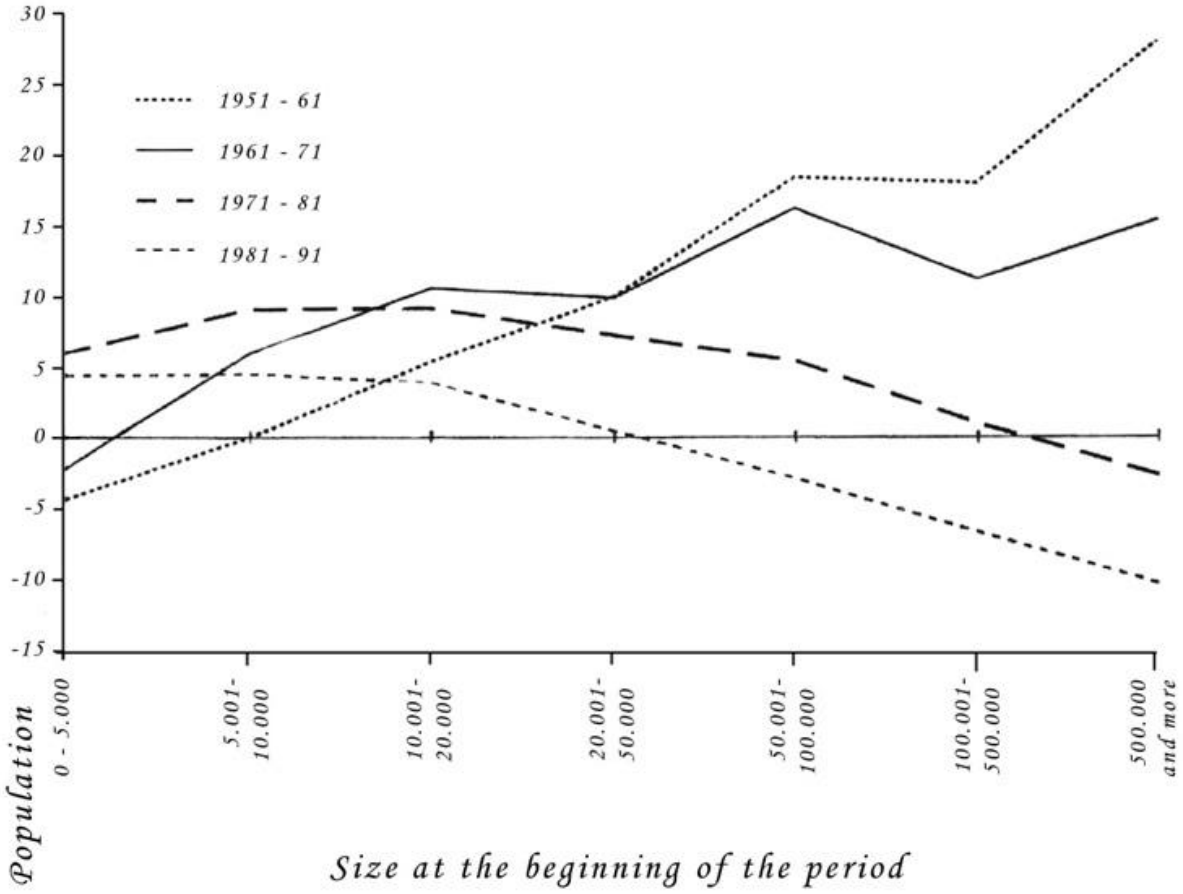
Source: Geyer (1996).

Figure 2 Population change and settlement size, local labour market areas 1921-1999



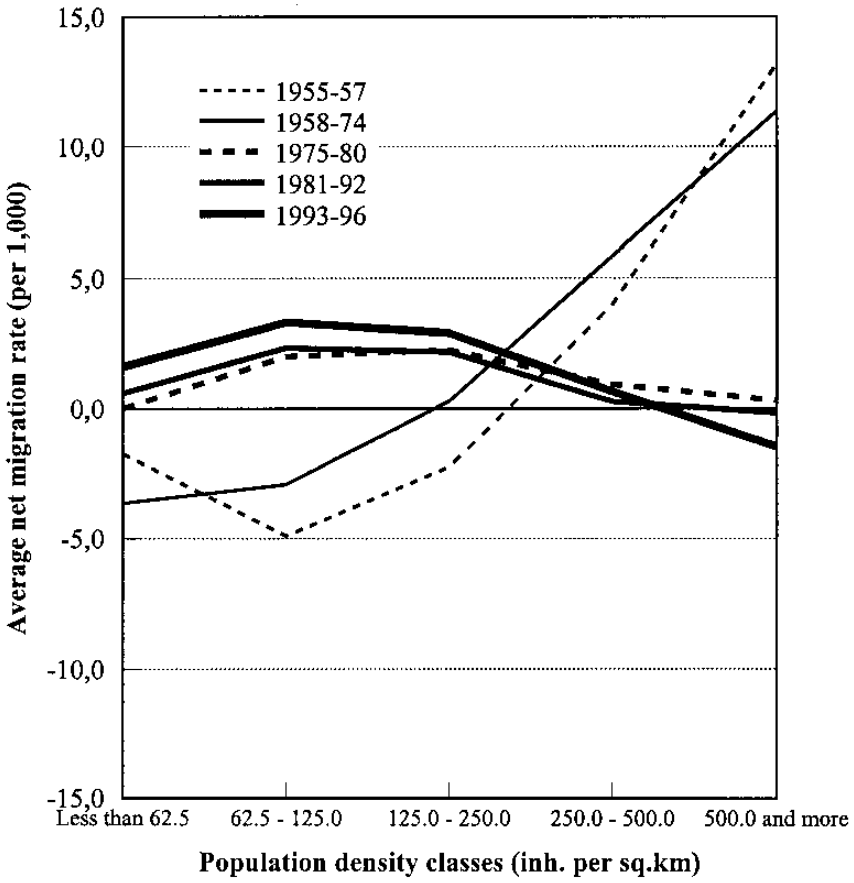
Note: Based on 1991 local labour market areas, Istat 1997
Source: Istat 1994 and Istat 2000, own calculations

Fig. 3 Population change and settlement size, municipalities 1951-1991



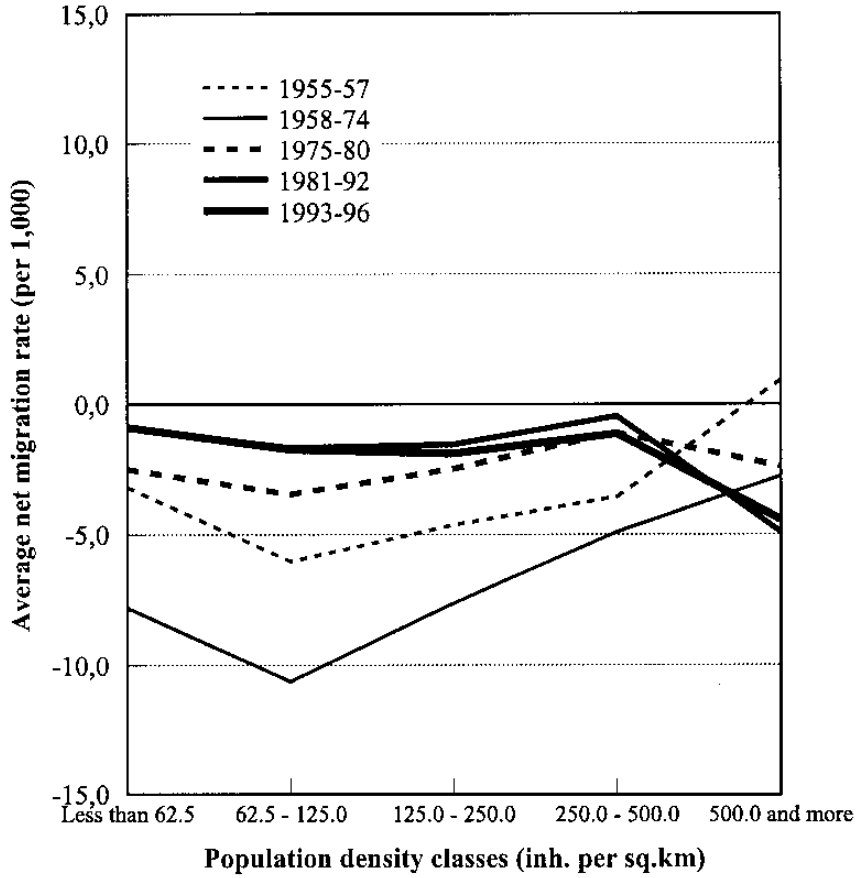
Source: Martinotti (1993) and Dematteis (1995)

Figure 4a Net migration and population density, provinces of Northern and Central Italy 1955-96



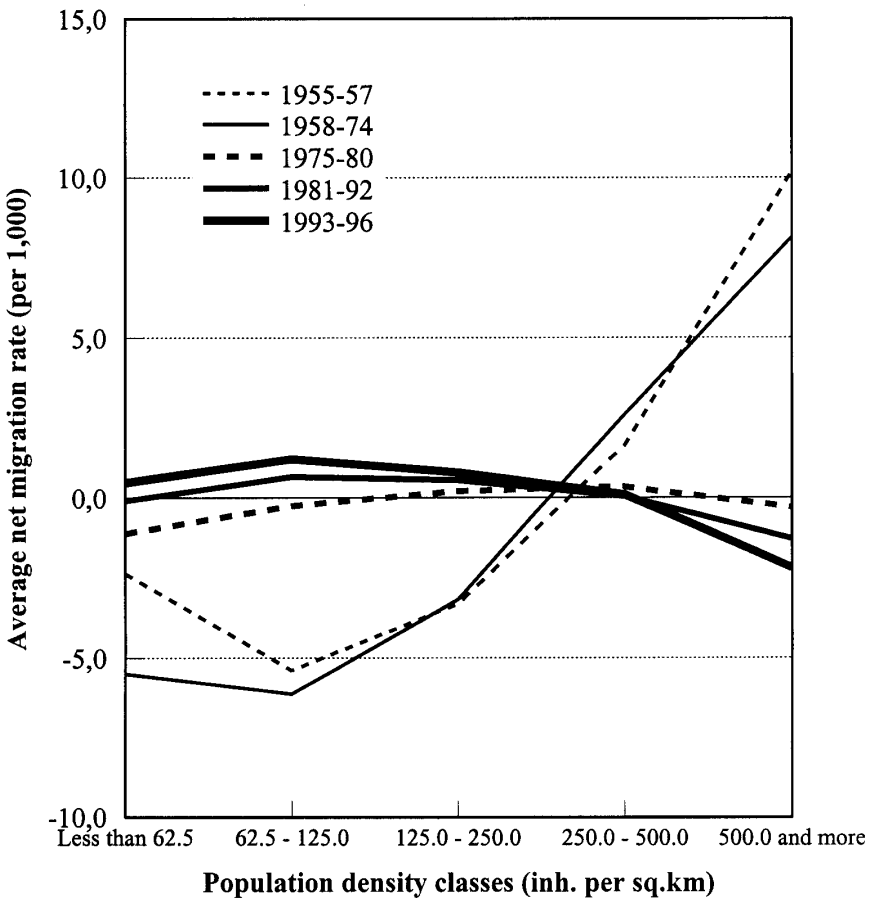
Source: Istat yearly migration statistics, own calculations

Figure 4b Net migration and population density, provinces of Southern Italy 1955-96



Source: Istat yearly migration statistics, own calculations

Figure 4c Net migration and population density, Italy 1955-96



Source: Istat yearly migration statistics, own calculations

Figure 5a Stages of differential urbanisation, provinces of Northern and Central Italy 1955-96

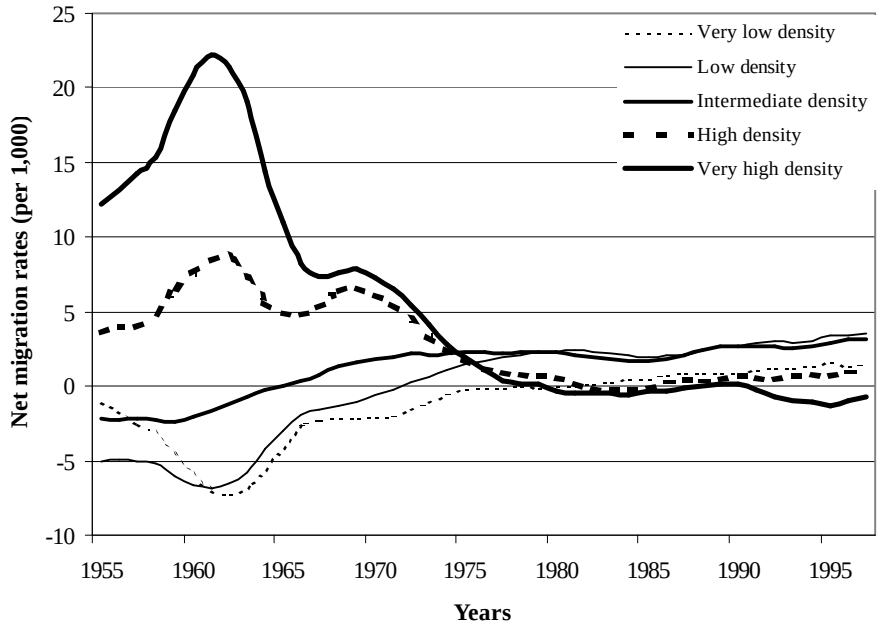


Figure 5b Stages of differential urbanisation, provinces of Southern Italy 1955-96

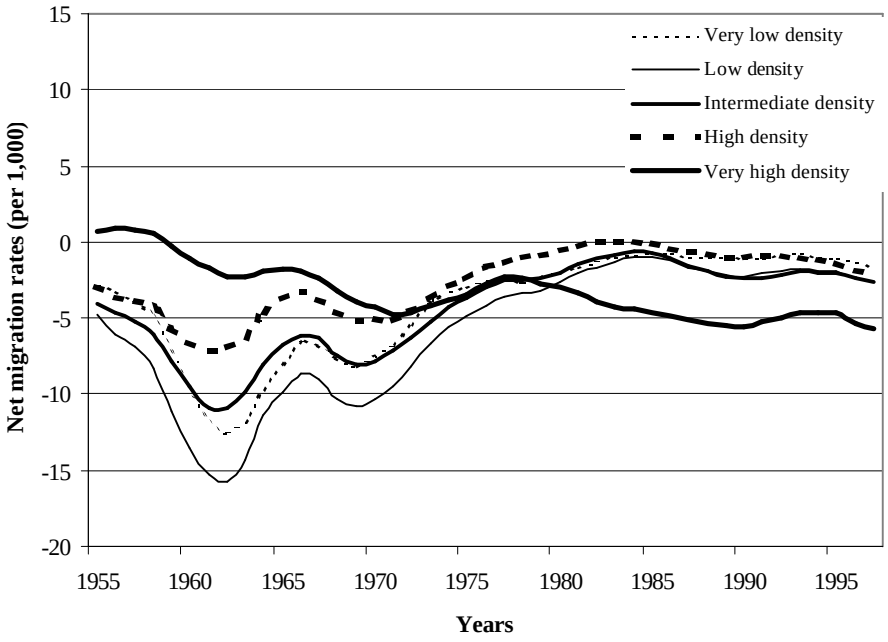
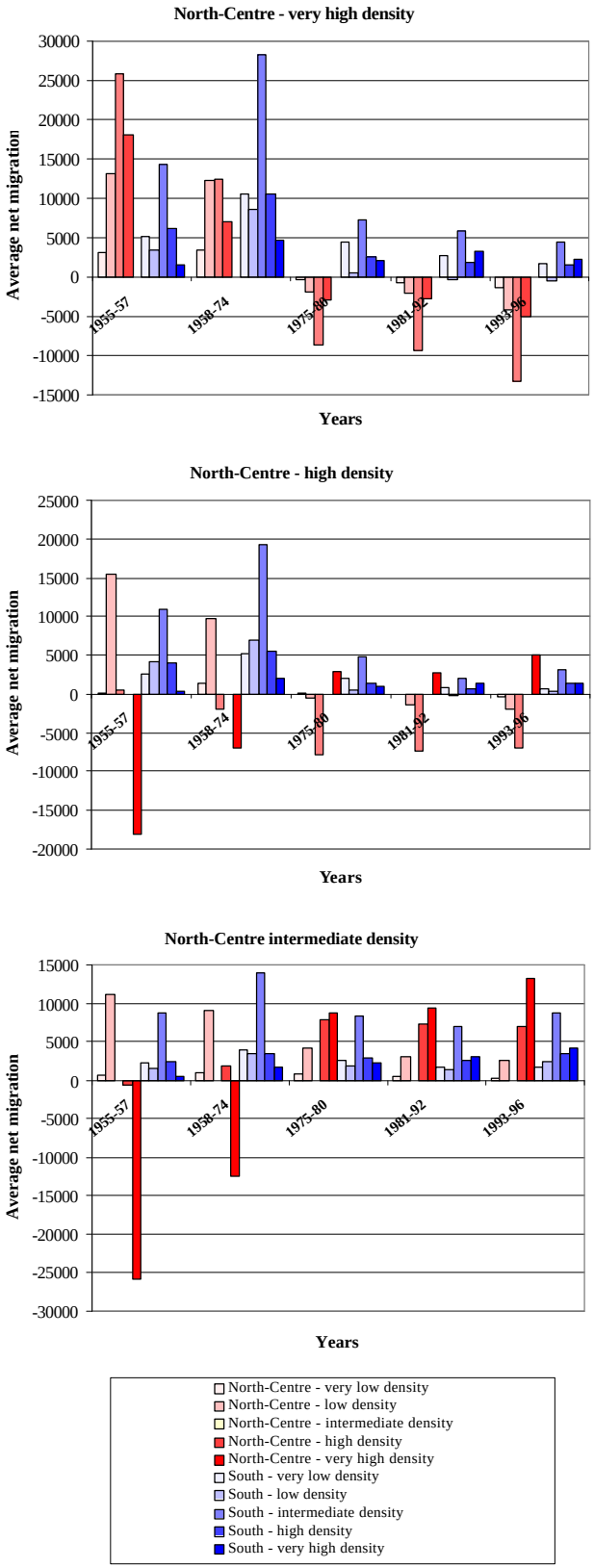
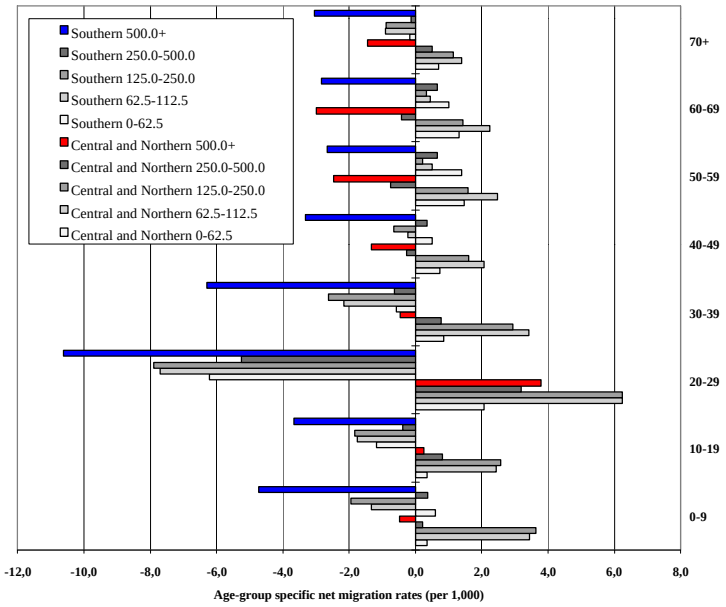


Figure 6 Migration flows by population density, very high to intermediate density provinces, Northern and Central Italy 1955-96



Source: Istat yearly migration statistics, own calculations

Figure 7 Age selectivity of internal migration by population density, 1990-93



Source: Istat yearly migration statistics and 1991 population census, own calculations

Figure A1 Population size of Local Labor Market Areas, 1921-1997

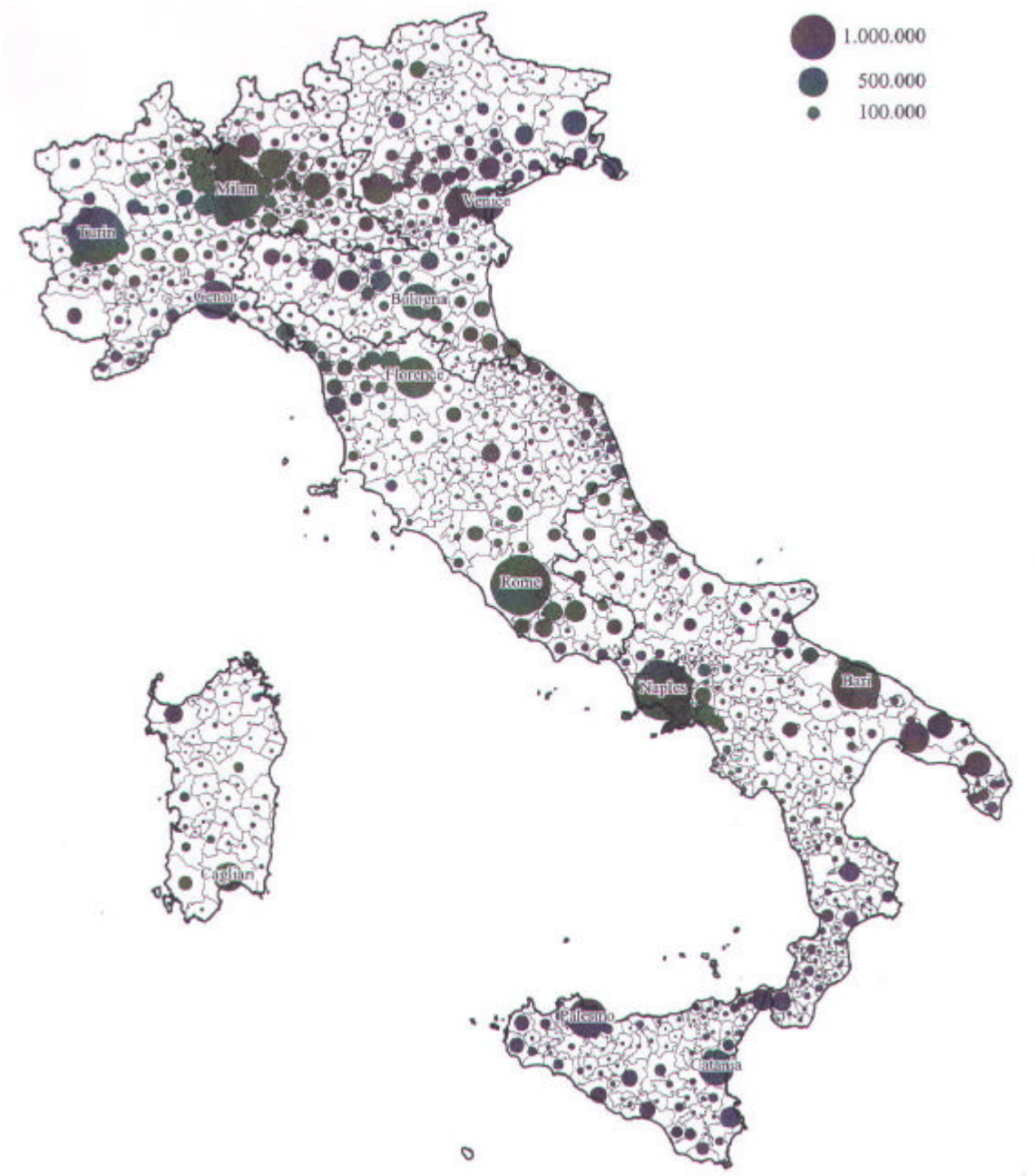


Figure A2 Population density of Provinces, 1955-1997