From the Metropolitan Areas to the Post-metropolitan Dimension

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Abstract This chapter introduces a description of the two main areas that will be discussed throughout the book: the metropolitan region of Palermo and South-Eastern Sicily. The chapter starts with a socio-economic analysis describing the characteristics of demography, employment and income in these two parts of Sicily, by comparing them to the situation of other areas in Italy. A spatial analysis of housing and land use complements the socio-economic outlook. Each section describes the most consolidated trends in these areas, but also discusses the most innovative changes and the challenges Sicily has been facing over the years.

1 Approaching the Post-metropolitan Dimension in Sicily

Throughout this chapter, we are going to introduce the two main areas our research group has analysed in Sicily: the metropolitan region of Palermo and the South-Eastern region. We intend to compare these two Sicilian case studies in order to appraise the similarities and differences between them, but most of all to prove how these two particular cases show some unexpected post-metropolitan traits. This portrait also displays several references to the rest of Italy which can help the reader grasp the uniqueness and peculiarity of the island, as related to the Italian context.

Palermo is the most populated and important city of Sicily, and the fifth most populated city in Italy. Although it is widely known for its marginality (Cannarozzo 2000; Pinzello 2003; Rossi Doria 2003; Rossi Doria et al. 2005; Lo Piccolo 2009; Lo Piccolo et al. 2013) and the presence of criminal organisations (mafia), Palermo...
has long played a key role in the Mediterranean basin. One of the traditional clichés connected to Palermo and Sicily is that its people has developed a passive attitude as a consequence of the many foreign dominations of the island (starting from its foundation, Palermo has been ruled by the Carthaginians, the Romans, the Arabs, the Normans, the French, and the Spanish). As for all clichés, this one is partly true, but cannot be considered the only reason that explains the city’s complex situation.

Most scholars point out that the city of Palermo has never been a metropolis (Giampino et al. 2014), and therefore there is no way it could be considered a post-metropolis, having almost entirely skipped the metropolitan phase. However, history should not be considered as a straight line connecting the past to the future along the same regular path: there are lots of twisted patterns and recurrences in the case of Sicily. Thus, even Palermo might show a few traits that characterise other post-metropolises. This does not mean that we are claiming Palermo’s post-metropolitan nature as an easily acceptable status. However, the recent economic crises are blurring the line between Northern and Southern Italy in many ways, and Palermo seems to be undergoing a new stage in the relationships with its hinterland and the other parts of Italy, as we will show.

Given the marginality of its geographical position, we will present the Palermo region through its area metropolitana (metropolitan area), an administrative entity which was introduced in Sicily in 1986 and conceived to include 27 municipalities from Partinico (west) to Termini Imerese (east). These 27 municipalities include Ustica, a very small island northwest of Palermo, which arguably shows peculiar traits and cannot be related to the other municipalities (Piraino 1988; Di Leo and Esposito 1991; Grasso 1994).

The area metropolitana, although expected to be operative since 1995, has actually never played an active role in this region (Di Leo 1997; Schilleci 2005, 2008a, b). The Regione Siciliana (the administrative regional authority) has recently worked on a reform that should lead to the full establishment of the Città Metropolitana (Metropolitan City) of Palermo (Lotta 2015).

We have chosen to consider the metropolitan area in order to take into account the relationships linking Palermo to its hinterland, but we have to stress that this condition is quite different from other cases in Italy, as Western Sicily is largely surrounded by sea and has only minor relationships with the rest of Italy. The Palermo region embraces the Metropolitan Area of Palermo (Fig. 1).

The other area we are discussing in this chapter, as previously mentioned, is South-Eastern Sicily (SES). This area is apparently the opposite of any likely post-metropolitan case study. It holds no major city (with the partial exception of Syracuse and its 118,000 inhabitants) and appears to be an island within an island, being one of the most marginal areas of all Sicily (Nobile 1990; Schilirò 2012). Media representations have contributed to strengthen this imagery, by portraying South-Eastern Sicily as a land that is lost in the past, in the echoes of the Baroque era and traditional agriculture (Cannarozzo 2010; Abbate 2011; Azzolina et al. 2012; Lo Piccolo et al. 2015), with people hardly speaking Italian at all. However, this is far from the truth. South-Eastern Sicily is probably one of the most dynamic areas of Southern Italy (Asso and Trigilia 2010) and shows some post-metropolitan traits that
are definitely worth discussing. One might consider SES as a counter-case to the true post-metropolitan Italian cases like Milan and Turin; however, this counter-case has much to say on how the post-metropolitan nature is not necessarily tied to megacities or to a world-leading economy. Within this chapter, we will try to deconstruct the clichés related to South-Eastern Sicily and describe the most innovative trends one can find in this remote corner of Italy.

South-Eastern Sicily, according to our analysis, embraces nineteen municipalities which are comprised within the Provinces of Syracuse and Ragusa (Fig. 2). The entire Province of Ragusa is included in the area, while only some parts of the Province of Syracuse are (see PRIN Postmetropoli 2015). The only city with a population over 100,000 inhabitants is Syracuse, with three more towns over 50,000 (Ragusa, Vittoria and Modica) and seven under 10,000.

These municipalities were chosen by applying the criteria of inter-local planning and programming initiatives, i.e. by considering the connections between them in the light of their abilities to team up and play an active role in territorial planning.

The following sections will present some data regarding these two areas. Data are divided into three sections: a socio-economic outlook describing the characteristics of demography, employment and income in Sicily; a spatial analysis of housing and land use; and finally, an institutional description of the administrative state of the art in the two regions. Each section describes the most consolidated trends in this area, but also discusses the most innovative changes and the challenges this area is facing in recent years. The final section points out some concluding remarks and puts the two case studies within the theoretical framework of the post-metropolitan discourse in Italy.
2 Socio-economic Trends: Time for a Change?

The following section will discuss several data related to the domains of demographics (population and density; housing dispersion index; dependency ratio; foreign citizens; mobility index) and economics (unemployment rates; employees by industry sectors; average per capita income).

The generic outlook of Palermo is closely related to the cliché of a marginal condition, quite far removed from the standards of the high-income, high-quality of life status of Northern Italy. Although it would be foolish to deny such a picture, which is historically rooted in the social, cultural and economic peculiarity of this Mediterranean island, it is also worth noting that this area has been able to express several innovative tendencies in recent decades, and that more particular propensities have been emerging in recent years, as a consequence of the economic crisis and the general deterioration of the socio-economic status in Italy. It is true that the Palermo area is still a deprived one if compared to most of the Northern Italian regions, but the gap appears to be getting somehow smaller and, most importantly, suggests that Palermo might have some hidden resources (still to be fully developed) that could help it find a new place and role in post-metropolitan Italy.

As for South-Eastern Sicily, although its generic outlook might look quite similar to what we have already described for Palermo, things are a bit different here. According to some data (such as location, population and density), SES is even
more marginal and peripheral than Palermo, considering its distance from any significant economic centre (with the partial exclusion of Catania, about 60 kms north of Syracuse).

Nonetheless, the socio-economic data we will discuss here describe a richer area than Palermo, with some extremely innovative trends, making SES an exceptional case in all of Italy.

Such a case might probably be compared to other marginal but resourceful areas in Northern or Central Italy, such as the so-called Chiantishire around Siena.

### 2.1 Population Trends

The first set of data we are going to present is related to the demographic domain and starts with the simplest numbers: the ones on population. The population trend in Palermo and its surrounding areas proves quite similar to most other major Italian cities, with the main city initially attracting population and then losing it to its surroundings. This may be considered a traditional case, as with most medium- or big-sized cities in Italy and Western Europe.

Considering the whole Italian state, Palermo has long been the fifth city by population, surpassing Genoa in the 1981–1991 decade (Fig. 3).

The quick and steady growth of Palermo faces a slowdown during the last four decades, but the city is still holding a leading position within its Metropolitan Area, with the second town (Bagheria) only counting a relatively small number of inhabitants, although the ratio between the inhabitants of Palermo and the inhabitants of Bagheria moves from 18:1 (1921) to 12:1 (2011).

Looking at the population percentage variation from 1971 to 2011, most hinterland towns of the Palermo area show very high increases (Isola delle Femmine +176%; Carini +129%), while Palermo is stuck on a mere +2% (Fig. 4).

The Palermo area seems to confirm, at least partially, Edward Soja’s (2011) density convergence theory. Although the density of the main city has slightly increased over the forty years between 1971 and 2011 (+91 per sq.km), the surroundings have

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**Fig. 3** Population of Palermo and the second municipality of its area (Bagheria), compared with other similar municipalities in Italy. Time period 1921–2011 (Image by Riccardo Alongi and Giovanna Ceno; data taken from *ISTAT* Census)
experienced a tremendous growth (Villabate +2,490 per sq.km, effectively doubling its original density, to the point of surpassing Palermo as the highest-density town of the area (Fig. 5).

Looking at the population trends, therefore, Palermo is a clear example of centralisation, with a traditional medium-sized city initially attracting population and then stimulating a process of suburbanisation, according to van den Berg et al.’s (1982) urban life cycle theory. Apparently, Palermo is only nowadays reaching a late disurbanisation stage (Picone 2006).

In the case of South-Eastern Sicily, our data show a very unstable attitude here: Modica (the largest town in 1921) slowly yields its leading role to Syracuse, which almost doubled its population between 1951 and 1981. The secondary administrative centre, Ragusa, kept a marginal role in the development of the area (Fig. 6).

Looking at the population percentage variations from 1971 to 2011 and comparing them to other more traditional cases like Palermo, South-Eastern Sicily shows low percentage increases (the highest being for the small town of Acate, +65%) and some significant decreases (like Monterosso Almo, −21%; Fig. 7).

If depopulation can be evoked as an explanation for Monterosso Almo and similar cases, it is harder to explain Acate’s growth. We will discuss the reasons for this growth further on, but for now we will just point out that most of Acate’s new citizens are foreign citizens.
Fig. 5  Density variation for the metropolitan area of Palermo. Time period 1971–2011 (Image by Riccardo Alongi and Giovanna Ceno; data taken from ISTAT Census)

Fig. 6  Population of Syracuse and other municipalities in South-Eastern Sicily. Time period 1921–2011 (Image by Riccardo Alongi and Giovanna Ceno; data taken from ISTAT Census)

When we try to adapt Soja’s (2011) density convergence theory to South-Eastern Sicily, we get a surprising result. Unexpectedly, the densest town of SES is the small and only relatively relevant town of Pozzallo (Fig. 8). Even in 1961, Pozzallo was at the top of the list, with a density of 797 inhabitants per sq.km. In 2011, Pozzallo’s density (1,231 inhabitants per sq.km) was much higher than Syracuse’s (570).

Although this paradox is partially explained by the small size of the municipality of Pozzallo, if we try to apply Soja’s density convergence diagram to SES, the results are utterly contradictory. This could probably be considered a nod to the polynuclear system that characterises this region, with at least four greater core areas (Syracuse, Ragusa, Vittoria, Modica) and other smaller districts gravitating around them. Looking at the population trends, the South-Eastern area has long been a place to move away from, and thus does not comply with van den Berg et al.’s (1982)
urban life cycle theory. Arguably, most people moved to the nearby industrial cities of Catania and Gela, while others relocated outside of Sicily.

These movements may be due to the rural nature of this area. Only Syracuse thrived, probably as a consequence of its close ties with Catania and the factories of nearby Augusta.

In these last years, however, things have started to change, as SES now hosts several small- or medium-sized towns with increasing growth rates, most of them close to Ragusa. The reasons of this change must be explored within the domain of the recent economic developments, involving a renewed role for agriculture, along with the touristic attractiveness of this region (Picone 2006).
2.2 Housing Dispersion

The analysis of the housing dispersion index (the ratio between the number of scattered houses and the total of houses) in the Palermo area helps to understand how Palermo and its surroundings were behaving in 2001, a transition year between the metropolitan and the post-metropolitan phase.

Moreover, the housing dispersion index is a good measure of how the socio-economic outlook is tightly tied to the spatial one (which will be discussed later on). In the coastal municipalities near the city, just like in Palermo, the dispersion index can be considered low or medium, if compared to other Italian cities (the index hits the 0.05 threshold in 9 municipalities and moves to 0.10 in most of the others).

The farther one moves from Palermo and its immediate surroundings, the higher the indexes become, with a maximum value of 0.30. A single municipality, Bolognetta (in addition to the island of Ustica, which, being an island, cannot be easily compared to inland municipalities, and whose population is mainly tied to the summer tourist presence), has a high dispersion index, greater than 0.40, probably due to its strategic location, adjacent to a major road connecting Palermo to Agrigento and Corleone.

This situation confirms the image of Palermo as a strong and compact city. The population probably moves around for working reasons, but there is also a nod to the metropolitan phenomenon, which is not very strong yet, having started in the 1990s in the Palermo area.
Recalling Soja’s (2000) theories on the post-metropolis and Bruegmann’s (2005) interpretation of the sprawl, we claim that the area of Palermo is quite closely abiding by these models, although the post-metropolitan phase and the disurbanisation phase are not fully developed yet, leaving the city to a late metropolitan and late suburbanisation stage.

South-Eastern Sicily, on the other side, highlights a flattening of the housing dispersion index values, with the lowest values found in Pozzallo and Comiso. This confirms that the traditional landscape is still quite intact in this area, because the low fragmentation is a result of cautious policies at the urban and the agricultural level.

2.3 Dependency Ratio

Continuing our description of the socio-economic outlook of the two regions, we will now consider the dependency ratio, i.e. the ratio of the sum of the number of children (0–14 years old) and elder persons (65 years or over) compared to the working-age population (15–64 years old), as a key factor to understand how both areas are experiencing new trends that might question the legitimacy of some enduring clichés. The dependency ratio could be related to the productiveness and economic strength of the analysed area, although, as a memento, we must not forget the dependency ratio only speculates that the productive part of the population actually has employment but holds no certainties over this trait. Rather, the ratio highlights the presence of large clusters of young (0–14) or old (65+) people depending on the productive parts of society.

In 2011 Palermo had a lower dependency ratio (48) than Milan (60), Rome (58) and Naples (50). Twenty years before, this was exactly the opposite way around, with Milan (39), Rome (38) and Naples (45) all having a lower ratio than Palermo (48). This means that the demographic composition of Milan has changed a lot in those twenty years, while the composition of Palermo is still quite similar to 1991. One likely interpretation of this apparent paradox could lie within the consequences of the economic crisis starting in 2008, which struck the more productive parts of Italy and forced people to relocate to other countries. Sicily, considering its historically marginal role in the productive processes, did not experience a comparable change in its demographic composition. The metropolitan area of Palermo does not show any significant exception to the general trend so far described. In 2011, no single municipality had a particularly higher or lower ratio, and almost all were comprised within the 40–60 range.

These data are even more significant if we compare the highest percentage variation of the dependency ratio from 1991 to 2011 for the municipalities in the Palermo area (Trappeto, +24%) to other Italian cases, like the Milan area (San Donato

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1The dependency ratio is actually just a demographic indicator; linking it to other economic elements (like the unemployment rate or the inactivity rate) would require additional speculation.
Milanese, +124%) or the Venice area (Spinea, +87%). Once again, the demographic composition of Palermo appears steadier, although this is not necessarily a signal of a stable economic status (Fig. 9).

Moving on to South-Eastern Sicily, while the biggest towns of Syracuse and Ragusa have experienced an increase in their dependency ratio (Syracuse moved from 44 in 1991 to 49 in 2011, while Ragusa moved from 49 to 52 in the same period), small municipalities like Acate and Pozzallo had a significant drop in their values: Acate moves from 51 to 44, and Pozzallo from 53 to 46. This means that in 2011 we can find a larger working-age population in Acate than in Milan (60), and that this seems a steady trend (Fig. 10). This phenomenon is linked to several factors: the opening and closing of demographic windows (Golini and Marini 2006), the ageing of the population, and the incoming flows of foreign citizens working in the greenhouses.

These data are even more significant if we compare the highest percentage variation of the dependency ratio from 1991 to 2011 for the municipalities in SES (Portopalo di Capo Passero, +16%) to other Italian cases we already mentioned above. Moreover, most municipalities in SES have negative values in their percentage variation of the dependency ratio, meaning that in 2011 the working-age population was larger than in 1991. Most notable are the cases of Acate (−12%) and Pozzallo (−11%), but 12 out of 19 municipalities in the area had a similar profile.
Fig. 10  Dependency ratio index for Milan, Syracuse, Ragusa, Pozzallo and Acate. Time period 1991–2011 (Image by Marco Picone; data taken from *ISTAT* Census)

### 2.4 Economic Outlook

If we move to more proper economic data and look at the unemployment rate, we must start by considering the general trend for that index in Italy (2001–2019). Generally, the rate was lower in 2011 than it was in 2001, but then it rose and it is now\(^2\) (9.8% in December 2019) higher than it was in 2001, because the economic crisis struck the Italian market a few years later than it did in the US or in other countries. According to the general Italian rate, in most Sicilian towns and cities there was a decrease in the unemployment rate over those ten years, followed by an increase and a new, slow decrease over the following years (the *Provincia*\(^3\) of Palermo moved from 20% in 2004 to 15% in 2011, then to 25% in 2016 and back to 19% in 2018). The unemployment rates for Sicily in 2011 were thus lower than they were in 2004, but still quite high if compared to other Italian regions. In the Palermo area, by considering the data presented for the single municipalities (for the year 2011), it is obvious that unemployment is higher in those areas immediately surrounding the city, like Capaci (31%) and Villabate (29%), and it seems that the farther one moves from Palermo the better it gets (Termini Imerese shows a 22% rate, despite the recent crisis connected to the closing of the *FIAT* factories). Palermo itself has a 23% rate, which is very high if compared to Northern Italian cities (Milan,

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\(^2\)These data do not take into account the events connected to the Covid-19 crisis.

\(^3\)The *Provincia* (Province) does no longer exist in the Italian administrative system, but it is still used by the National Institute of Statistics (*Istituto Nazionale di Statistica, ISTAT*) for its data. The *Provincia di Palermo* included 82 municipalities and has now been replaced by the *Città Metropolitana di Palermo*, which includes the same municipalities.
Venice and Florence are all around 6%) but in line with other Southern cities (Naples and Catania 26%, Cagliari 17%).

Considering the employees by industry sector, the Palermo region looks quite traditional. Fishing is still quite important in the economic outlook of some towns, but less and less relevant with each passing year (Santa Flavia moved from 40% employees in 2001 in sector A—agriculture and fishing—to a mere 26% in 2011), while agriculture per se is almost worthless and definitely less important, in a strategic sense, than it is elsewhere in Sicily. Even in sector I (which may be linked to tourism), with the exception of Palermo most towns are experiencing negative trends, with very few exceptions. One of the few sectors that still seems quite alive and well is sector G (wholesale trade), but this does not appear like a suggestion that the economic status of Palermo is particularly innovative.

If we refer to Allen J. Scott’s (2008) ideas on the most relevant economic aspects in post-metropolises, it seems quite clear that Palermo and its surroundings are quite far from the general trends of global metropolises. Likewise, considering the average per capita income, in the region of Palermo there is a distinct difference between the capital city, where the income of taxpayers is one of the highest of all Sicily, and the rest of the municipalities. This is possibly due to the fact that those who reside in the municipality of Palermo have better-paid jobs, which allow them to live there. The remaining region, generally quite heterogeneous, is divided between coastal areas with a higher income and inland areas with lower incomes.

The average per capita incomes of the inhabitants, if compared to those of the taxpayers, are lower: Palermo has a €11,073 income per inhabitant, compared to the €19,867 per taxpayer.

Things are different in Northern Italy, as the difference between the two data is lower (e.g. Venice has a €17,207 income per inhabitant, compared to the €22,223 income per taxpayer); this confirms the effects of the high Sicilian unemployment rates, as we have previously discussed.

In the case of South-Eastern Sicily, more surprises come if we look at the unemployment rate. Once again, we can notice the same trend we discussed above for the Province of Syracuse, which went from a 17% unemployment rate in 2004 to a 15% in 2011, then up to a (quite astonishing) 25% in 2015 and finally to a 22% in 2018. The Province of Ragusa boasts even lower unemployment rates: 8% in 2004, 12% in 2011, 19% in 2015 and finally 18% in 2018.

The unemployment rates for Sicily were initially lower in SES, with the municipality of Syracuse having a figure of around 17% in 2011, and Ragusa and Modica getting a respectable (by Sicilian standards) 13%, if we compare it to bigger Southern cities like Naples and Catania (both around 26%). Again, agriculture and tourism may be two leading fields, dictating this more positive (or rather, less negative) trend.

Although the unemployment rate for SES has increased enormously over the last ten years, these latter hypotheses are confirmed if we take a look at the employees by industry sector.

SES proves to be one of the most interesting regions of all Italy, as its Agriculture and Fishing (sector A) percentages of employees are very close to the top of the list (Portopalo di Capo Passero has a remarkable 49%, but most towns in the area
have greatly increased their employees in this sector). Acate, one of the smallest towns west of Ragusa, looks like a solid sample of this trend: the employees in agriculture moved from 1.1% in 2001 to 6.3% in 2011, and definitely contributed to the demographic growth of the whole municipality in recent years; much of this growth can be explained with the presence of greenhouses where flowers, tomatoes and eggplants are grown and the increasing presence of foreign people, who are employed in the greenhouses, often as seasonal laborers.

Moreover, wines play an important role, given the growing importance of IGP (Indicazione Geografica Protetta) and DOC (Denominazione di Origine Controllata) wines, as the industrial dairy sector does for the same reasons. As for tourism (sector I), most towns in SES have experienced remarkable increases in this domain, particularly Portopalo di Capo Passero (6% in 2001, 13% in 2011) and Pozzallo (7 and 12% respectively). This may be mainly explained by beach tourism, but cultural tourism in the UNESCO cities of the Baroque (Modica, Ragusa, Scicli) also plays a key role (Fusero and Simonetti 2005).

Quality agriculture and tourism are two strategic elements for understanding how SES is slowly but firmly shaping its outlook and changing its representations in the global arena: from a traditional, deprived and marginal periphery to a thriving economic driving force in Sicily, and one to be reckoned with in Italy.

Looking at the most relevant economic aspects of post-metropolises, as Scott (2008) suggests, SES—although incomparable to much bigger and different contexts like Los Angeles—unexpectedly shows some elements that may be defined as post-metropolitan, like a lower unemployment rate and a demographic increase for those small towns (like Acate) hosting a renewed agricultural attractiveness.

Considering the average per capita income per taxpayer, the city of Syracuse (€18,026) surpasses Ragusa, Modica, Noto, and Avola with their slightly lower incomes (€16,000–14,200). Incomes are also high compared to the rest of Italy. Venice, for example, has an income of €17,207, lower than Syracuse and higher than Lucca (in Tuscany), where shop rents are more than twice as expensive. The average per capita incomes of inhabitants are lower than those per taxpayer, however: Syracuse has €11,356, compared to €18,026 per taxpayer. As we have already remarked, things are different in Northern Italy, because the variance between the two values is lower; this confirms the effects of the higher Sicilian unemployment rates previously discussed, and portrays a society with few, but rich taxpayers.

### 2.5 Foreign Citizens

All the data we have so far analysed may apparently strengthen the idea of a marginal, deprived land. However, we have already pointed out that some data (like the dependency ratio for Palermo or the unemployment rate for SES) are surprisingly hinting at a less negative situation than the one we would expect. Therefore, portraying Sicily solely as a region without hope is at the very least limiting.
There are clear, if feeble, signs of something evolving both in Palermo and in SES, as slow as it may seem. In order to provide additional details, we now want to return to some other demographic data, and discuss the growing presence of foreign citizens, which is affecting Sicily in unexpected ways (Attili 2008; Lo Piccolo 2013; D’Anneo 2016).

In the twenty years between 1991 and 2011, the Palermo area showed a complex trend, with some municipalities facing negative values (Trabia) and others moving from positive to negative, or the other way around (Santa Flavia, Misilmeri, Villabate and so on). Within this area, most foreign citizens live in Palermo, which proves to be the most attractive city for its employment opportunities, although the percentage of foreign citizens in Palermo in 2011 (around 3%) is still much lower than in Northern or Central Italian cities (Milan 14%, Prato 15%).

These trends lead to a few interesting considerations if we analyse the Index of Dispersion of the Foreign Population (IDFP), an index our research group has built using the existing literature on migrants and foreign citizens (Caritas Migrantes 2011; INEA 2013; Giampino et al. 2014; Lo Piccolo and Todaro 2015), and defined as the percentage of foreign population in a single municipality multiplied by 100 and divided by the percentage of foreign population in the most populous city of that region. In this case, the Palermo area is in line with most of the other Italian regions (e.g. Lombardy, Piedmont), with foreign people living mainly in the most populous city (Fig. 11).

When we look at the data on migration flows in Sicily, we can point out a couple of significant points. The Palermo area is experiencing a slow but steady increase of incoming foreign people, most of them headed towards Palermo; at the same time, the suburbanisation process is causing Italian people living in Palermo to relocate to the hinterland (mainly to Carini and Misilmeri), in search of cheaper housing.

Anyway, the general outlook is quite similar to the trend we can see for Milan and Turin, although these cities show some polarisation phenomena (since 1991 in the case of Turin, or 2011 in the case of Milan).

![Image](https://example.com/fig11.png)

**Fig. 11** Index of dispersion of the foreign population for the Palermo area. Time period 2011 (Image by Riccardo Alongi and Giovanna Ceno; data taken from ISTAT Census)
Looking at South-Eastern Sicily, in the same time frame as discussed above (1991–2011), all the municipalities included in SES have experienced a steady increase of foreign citizens. Acate (19%) and Santa Croce Camerina (15%) display very high values, like most other towns west of Ragusa. Once again, this is tied to the presence of greenhouses and intensive agriculture, where foreign citizens are often employed in deprived work conditions, sometimes approaching slavery and mistreatment.

Most foreign citizens in SES traditionally come from Northern Africa, but recently some Eastern European presences (mainly people coming from Romania) have overcome them.

By analysing the IDFP for this area, Acate (717) and Santa Croce Camerina (581) have the highest index of all Italy, given the relatively low presence of foreign citizens in the most populous city of SES, Syracuse (Fig. 12). This is another hint of the peculiar, polynuclear, post-metropolitan configuration of this region. The Venetian area has some similarities, with a strong polarisation comparable to the westernmost municipalities of SES.

When we look at the data on migration flows in Sicily, we can point out a couple of significant issues. Syracuse is experiencing a slow but steady increase of incoming foreign people, with Italian people moving out of the city and relocating elsewhere (probably due to the high cost of living), while some towns like Ragusa, Modica and Noto all have positive values. At the same time, foreign people are moving to this region in very high numbers, if compared to the original population. This is especially true for Vittoria, Ragusa and Acate. There is also a strong increase of foreign people in Syracuse, but, given the high cost of living in that city, at least a part of these people is likely able to afford that lifestyle, therefore suggesting different national origins (i.e. Western Europeans looking for a historically and culturally attractive region to live in).
2.6 Towards an Unusual Post-metropolitan Region?

This rather quick presentation of the socio-economic data shows that the long-term trends regarding Palermo are intimately related to a marginal condition and a deprived area, as correctly addressed by most scholars who focus on the influence of low employment rates and the destructive presence of criminal organisations (Cannarozzo 2000, 2009; Rossi Doria 2003); however, though these traits are not to be dismissed, there is a serious risk of overestimating them and ignoring the (feeble) traces of something new growing in the background. South-Eastern Sicily, on the other hand, proves to be an exceptional case if compared to other parts of Sicily or Southern Italy. This uniqueness is mainly due to a marginal, yet extremely resourceful status that traces its roots to the Baroque era and creates a space suitable for high-quality tourism and agriculture. In a sense, the most notable path dependence of SES is related to the role it has played within the island, and a somewhat wise exploitation of the traditional resources of the place, combined with a renewed interest for cultural and tourist relationships to other European countries.

The economic crisis of 2008 has somehow hit the Northern Italian regions harder in terms of the relative loss of employment and the worsening of economic parameters, leaving Sicily in a still hindered but possibly more competitive position if compared to other similar Italian cities, and opening new trends that are still uncertain but could prove innovative and unexpected. However, things seem to have been getting relatively worse in the last few years, and the impact of the Covid-19 crisis will require further investigations in the future.

The challenges that Sicily is now facing are first of all connected to its geographic position at the centre of the Mediterranean Sea: given its location, Sicily is quickly turning from a reservoir of emigrants to a crossroads in the often-desperate trajectories that lead immigrants to Europe (Guarrasi 2011). In this very complex context, Palermo may act as a catalyst for promoting new policies of shelter and refuge for migrants: the local municipality has apparently been supporting this approach in the last few years, trying to turn Palermo into not just a geographical, but also a cultural and political hub for those migrants that look at Europe as a promised land.

These processes are strengthening the idea of a post-metropolitan role for the area. As for SES, the relatively small dimension of most cities and towns has likely reinforced the idea of a polynuclear urban region, with no capital centralising functions and policies (as it happens for the case of Palermo). The presence of foreign citizens is an important piece of this puzzle. Therefore, the latest socio-economic developments are changing the traditional image of this apparently peripheral region, possibly turning it into a lesser, yet well-acknowledged cultural and economic polarity in Italy.
3 Spatial Patterns

In Sicily the phenomenon of soil consumption, which started in the 1960s, has strongly contributed to shape the regional territory both from a physical and from a functional point of view. Since then, the soil consumption of the fragile island territory has never entirely stopped. The comprehension of these processes cannot be separated from a close examination of the role that, historically, the building industry and housing revenue have played in the region’s economy.

Although the building industry has played a leading role in the economic recovery of the whole of Italy since the 1950s, in Sicily, as in most parts of Southern Italy, this sector has taken on an exceptional importance, as a consequence of the fragility of its productive and social systems.

Since 1960, the data on soil consumption reflect the dispersive model that has characterised many other Italian areas. This model, which is well represented by low-density settlements sometimes supported by illegal practices, is common throughout the whole region. Within the inner areas there are large and unused areas close to agricultural lands. On the contrary, from the 50s to the 90s, coastal areas have been characterised by a totally uncontrolled building growth, becoming a perfect representation of continuous urbanisation (Fig. 13).

Another process, which started in the 80s, has contributed to fill up the coastal area and increase the anthropised land percentage: the suburbanisation phenomenon of the bigger cities on the coast inside the metropolitan areas. This growth headed towards middle cities according to a specific direction, related to the different geographical contexts, and with an increasingly bigger range.

![Fig. 13](image-url) Soil consumption of the municipalities in Sicily. Rivers, lakes and other water bodies are excluded from the percentage (Munafo 2018, 170)

3.1 Urban Sprawl vs. Polycentric Patterns

The urban structure of the Palermo area has taken on the appearance of the urban sprawl model (Bruegmann 2005). Its principal peculiarities are high soil consumption, high management costs, and significant community flows related to the lack of facilities.

Palermo has a population of 663,401 inhabitants (ISTAT data for 2019) and no other municipality of its region boasts a comparable number, with Bagheria (54,714 inhabitants) being the second most populated municipality. To complete the framework of the suburbanisation that marks the metropolitan system we have to talk about the Industrial Development Areas (IDA), grown in the coastal area of Sicily, often localised near areas of natural interest. Moreover, the coastal parts which did not exhibit any industrial areas have been seized by beach establishments or seasonal settlements characterised by a very low density.

The situation of South-Eastern Sicily is entirely different. Spatial phenomena and particularly those linked to the dynamics of the settlement system and other variations of utilising the land, taken in parallel with demographic dynamics and those relating to population distribution, restore a polycentric distribution to SES, in contrast with the accentuated mono-centrism of the greater Metropolitan Area of Palermo. SES comprises the whole Province of Ragusa and the Southern part of the Province of Syracuse (including its administrative centre), where Syracuse, with its 121,171 inhabitants versus the 73,373 inhabitants of Ragusa (ISTAT data for 2019), is instrumentally considered the main centre; however the entire urban area is characterised by a polycentric settlement structure, in which small and middle-sized towns are interdependent with respect to the provision of facilities and services (Giampino et al. 2014).

The settlement model of SES is unlike the Palermo area but quite common in the rest of Italy, with a network of small- or medium-sized towns, which have traditionally followed lines of development based on the sharing of higher-ranking services and specialisation. In this case, the small- and medium-sized urban areas are strongly linked to the historic events that assigned specific functions (also related to productive activities) to each of them, establishing interdependent relations among them and with larger urban areas. In particular, in the region of Ragusa, agriculture constitutes the first sector of productive specialisation with relevant results in relation to the innovation of the production, which is recognised at national and international level (Asmundo et al. 2011; Giampino et al. 2014).

3.2 Land Use

The data on the settlements in the Palermo region reflect the dispersive model that has characterised many other Italian coastal areas (Indovina 2003). The areas around the city were initially used for housing reasons, and later on for industrial uses.
The coverage ratio of the Palermo region emphasises that over the last decade the urbanisation of Sicily has continued, especially in coastal areas and in those municipalities that are closer to the capital. This change in the land use has slowly jeopardised the identity of the so-called agro of Palermo (Fig. 14).

This process is very different from the one that has characterised the growth of the urban structure of the actual Metropolitan Area of Palermo. In fact, up to the second part of the eighteenth century, the agro of Palermo, which means the entire coast from Alcamo to Termini Imerese, [...] is characterised by a different legal and institutional organisation. The agro is a state-owned land, shared between Palermo and Termini Imerese; it means that there are no barons who have the power to found new cities. These cities, except Trabia, grew with no foundation rules. (Renda 1984, 9)

In the twentieth century, after WW2, there have been various causes of the growth and the rules have also changed as a consequence of new national and local laws. Particularly in the coastal territory, soil consumption is manifest in two different typologies. The first confirms a well-known phenomenon, consolidated in recent decades. The second shows a marked choice towards suburban areas. These phenomena show a metropolitan dimension, particularly for large-scale detail trade, for some manufacturing organisations and for particular types of facilities. Analysing all the consolidated data of the municipalities, the socio-economic gap between Palermo and the other municipalities is ever present.

So, in the wide area dimension and especially with regard to the unfulfilled housing demand, all these considerations confirm the suburban role of the majority of the municipalities. At the same time, it is possible to observe a new plural and post-metropolitan organisation of lifestyle, housing and work (Giampino et al. 2014).

Moreover, this recent organisation has fragmented and restructured the traditional commuting relationship between housing and working, above all because of the still unaccomplished or incomplete metropolitan reality (de Spuches et al. 2002; Picone 2006). This is clear in the case of Terrasini, whose coverage ratio was equal to 22% in 2001, and then to 36% in 2011. Today, these same areas are affected by a strong increase of the presence of medium-sized and larger shopping malls. As for agricultural land use, looking at the maps of agricultural lands between 2000 and 2010, in the region of Palermo there is a clear and pronounced distinction between the Western and the Eastern areas. From Palermo to Balestrate there was a significant
increase in the Utilised Agricultural Area (UAA), with the exception of Trappeto (−49%).

On the contrary, in the Eastern area, excluding Santa Flavia and Misilmeri (+88 and +10%, respectively), there is a significant reduction of UAA. Over the years this change of use has been affected by coastal tourism, by new holiday homes with very low density (as we stated earlier), but also by a renewed interest in agriculture (although this is not reflected in a consequential increase of employees in agriculture; Magnaghi 2013), as many scholars have described on a local basis (Cannarozzo 2000; Rossi Doria 2007, 2009; Barbera et al. 2009; Fig. 15).

These reflections are tied to the idea of scattered cities and sprawl and explain these transformations through economic and political reasons rather than cultural outlooks.

On the other side, in the polycentric region of Ragusa the morphology of the territory contributed to the creation of a complex and polycentric settlement scheme where small- and medium-sized urban areas are scattered on the edge of calcarenite terraces opening up towards the coast and creating breath-taking landscapes. Direct relationships can be observed between several settlements in the hills and their equivalent along the coastal strip: Vittoria with Scoglitti; Comiso with Punta Secca (suburb of Santa Croce Camerina); Ragusa with Marina di Ragusa. Most of the residential seasonal growth extends in these coastal areas.

Fig. 15 The renewed interest in agriculture and orti urbani (community gardens) in Danisinni, a neighbourhood in Palermo (Photo by Chiara Giubilaro)
Generally, the areas around the largest towns were used initially for housing reasons, and later on for industrial uses and coastal tourism. The settlement coverage ratio in South-Eastern Sicily is very low (although it has a strong impact on the landscape due to settlement dispersion), with the highest percentage being in Pozzallo (22%), and the rest having an average of less than 10%.

The lowest peak is found in the municipalities of Noto and Rosolini, which respectively have a coverage ratio of 1 and 5%, while Syracuse and Ispica exceed the 10% threshold and the rest remains under it. These strong increases, along with the diffusion of greenhouses and an economy gravitating towards agriculture, prove very interesting and meaningful consequences (Fusero and Simonetti 2005; Magnaghi 2013).

### 3.3 Number of Houses

For years, constant monitoring and several local studies have given the image of a region, Sicily, that suffers from a depopulation of the greater urban centres in favour of the smaller ones, where the population prefers to live mainly (but not only) for economic reasons (Picone 2006).

This aspect could be related to a higher life quality satisfaction in small towns, especially if these are well connected to the main urban centre (ISTAT 2013). The data collected for Palermo, analysed year by year and by comparing the whole series, confirm this idea.

This area highlights a change, even if minimal, to the number of houses in the middle ranges, although Palermo obviously maintains a leading position over the remaining municipalities. The difference is still very high. What matters is the confirmation of an increase in houses in neighbouring municipalities, and this is coupled with an increase of population in those municipalities, as a result of relocation for the reasons given above (Fig. 16).

The number of houses, on the other hand, remains quite steady in South-Eastern Sicily. Acate, Santa Croce Camerina and Vittoria, however, have all experienced an increase in their number of houses, and this can be linked (at least for the first two cases) to the demographic growth and the influx of foreign citizens (Fig. 17). Reflections on this indicator agree with what has already been asserted in the cases of the resident population index, the housing dispersion index and the unemployment rate.

### 3.4 Accommodation Capacity and Tourism

Another interesting set of data, which has a close relationship with the first and with the history of the territory as highlighted before, is the accommodation capacity. These data can be analysed in several ways.
Fig. 16 The increase in the number of houses in the area surrounding Palermo, particularly in the municipality of Trabia (https://www.google.it/maps/)

Fig. 17 The increase in the number of houses in the area of Marina di Ragusa, in South-Eastern Sicily (https://www.google.it/maps/)
First, we can look at them as absolute data, to be linked to the accommodation capacity of each town. Secondly, we can analyse the data comparing all the towns in the areas, estimating the whole accommodation capacity. Moreover, we can study the increase in the considered period. Finally, we can compare our areas with those outside of Sicily.

Matching all the analyses, the overall picture that emerges shows that, in Sicily, the largest city beats all the others. Palermo, in fact, offers a high accommodation capacity, and it is placed at the first level in the analysis. Even if with a big difference at the same level we can find another town, Terrasini, probably due to a large resort complex that hosts a large tourist flow, especially during the summer.

In the other towns, in the considered period, the accommodation capacity shows no significant variation.

However, it is important to highlight that five small towns do not have any hotels, maybe for their location or the low tourist attraction. Another interesting piece of information is that Palermo is located among the top twenty Italian cities for its accommodation capacity.

Recent increases in tourist flows, due to significant cultural events that were organised in Palermo (Arab-Norman Palermo, UNESCO, 2016; Italian Capital of Culture, 2018; Manifesta 12, 2018), prove how the city is strongly committed to the idea of attracting more and more consumers; this process is certainly causing a strong increase in the accommodation capacity (Fig. 18).

In the case of SES, tourism is also playing a key role for the whole area. Field research and scholarly literature explain the phenomenon with the more organised and better touristic offer, also aimed at the international population, that characterised the area in the last decade.

All of this must certainly be related to the Baroque architecture, the growing seaside tourism and the aforementioned imagery of historical landscape that characterises the area. These are elements that the municipalities have enhanced, turning them into a driving force for the economy of the whole area. However, taking a closer look at the phenomena analysed, a few interesting and controversial aspects must be underlined.

At the present time, the current offer is based on a short and fragmented cultural chain, weak in terms of system services and innovative contents if compared to the central role of cultural heritage and colliding with a strong national and international competitiveness in the tourist destinations of cultural interest market.

The Province of Syracuse in Sicily is second only to that of Messina for the number and level of hotels. In 2012, for number of tourists, the Province of Syracuse (1,249,936) comes after those of Messina (3,464,271), Palermo (3,057,733), Trapani (2,084,475), Catania (1,871,849) and Agrigento (1,300,906) (Tourism Observatory data, Department of Tourism, Sport and Entertainment, Regione Siciliana, 2014). The increase in the tourist offer is also certainly related to the inclusion of the “Syracuse and the Rocky Necropolis of Pantalica” site in the “UNESCO World Heritage List” (UNESCO WHL) in 2005.

This popular acknowledgement at local and global level is generally considered a contributing factor to the rise in popularity of the site, in its appeal and consequently
in promoting tourism. In the case of Syracuse, the growing tourist offer, together with directly or indirectly linked forms of speculation (mainly related to a distorted vision of promoting tourism development, with serious effects on high-quality soil consumption especially in coastal areas and agricultural landscape), could impair the value of cultural heritage for which the site has been included in the WHL. No significant increase in tourism flows and economy corresponds to the real risk. On the contrary, the process of replacement of traditional handicraft and commercial activities in Ortygia, together with the process of construction on the coastal strip and inland or interventions close to the UNESCO site, shows how the presence of the UNESCO site has been an accelerator for the forms of pressure without the effective promotion of development actions, or—even less so—the implementation of safeguarding actions (Lo Piccolo and Todaro 2014).

In relation to the Ragusa region, if we look at the products, services and facilities for tourists, the region has deeply changed its territorial profile over the last twenty years. Namely two main trends have been recorded: new accommodation facilities have been developed, from hotels and holiday villages only to a wide range of large-, medium- and small-sized facilities, and they are now evenly spread throughout the territory, while in the past they were exclusively located along the coast. Over the last decade, accommodation facilities other than hotels, mainly rural accommodation and
B&Bs, enjoyed a consistent and significant positive trend: in the 2012–2013 period, 206 new facilities came into operation (Lo Piccolo et al. 2015).

Concerning tourist flows, a few surveys carried out in this field (Mantovani 2010; Magazzino and Mantovani 2012), by crossing various basic data, clearly show that in the 2000–2008 period tourist arrivals and overnight stays in the Province of Ragusa, if compared to Sicily, increased by 5.00 and 5.80% with respect to the period 1990–1999, when they were 4.50 and 5.20% respectively.

Moreover, given the broader scenario of the international crisis that is also affecting tourism, in general South-Eastern Sicily seems to maintain positive figures.

According to some scholars, the National Italian Television (Radio Televisione Italiana, RAI) series “Inspector Montalbano”⁴ (broadcast in Italy and in 18 others countries in the period 1999–2020) significantly contributed to this success (Fig. 19; see also chapter by Todaro et al. for more details on the TV series and its impact on tourism in SES).

Although the “Montalbano effect” has helped the world familiarise itself with this area and has contributed to maintaining high levels of tourism, the actual, relative policies have not been capable of transforming and modernising the quality of tourist facilities and bringing them into line with international standards (Lo Piccolo et al. 2015).

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⁴At present (12 episodes in the 2012–2015 period) The Young Montalbano is broadcast, which deals with the events of the Inspector at a young age.
In fact, there is a very weak, or sometimes even inexistent, system strategy aimed at directing tourist flows and the tourist demand towards a more sustainable, responsible and innovative tourism. In particular, the current offer relies on a short and fragmented supply chain featuring extremely poor innovation with respect to the key role of cultural heritage and system services. Nonetheless, a very strong national and international competitiveness does exist in the market of cultural destinations for tourists.

3.5 Real Estate Market

The real estate market is a valuable source of information for our spatial analysis. The indicator of the average sales price of houses, warehouses, stores, and offices, as well as average lease price of houses, warehouses, stores, and offices is interesting if related to the data on the resident population, the mobility index and the working issues.

Therefore, the high cost of leases, such as those in Palermo and in the coastal municipalities with a higher density, is justified by the decreases of the inner Sicilian areas. The highest ranking city for the average sales price of housing is Palermo, together with Cefalù, whose accommodation is related to seasonal tourism.

Bagheria and Santa Flavia, however, differ in the high price of shops and offices. In this last case an important role is played by the proximity with Bagheria and the functional railway link to other local municipalities and especially Palermo, which is only 17 kms away and part of the same urbanisation.

With regard to industrial warehouses the crisis of the FIAT factory has caused obvious consequences. The East Coast, in 2012, was less expensive compared to the West Coast, where Carini and Palermo are the most expensive areas.

In relation to the price of buildings, in South-Eastern Sicily the sales price of houses, warehouses, stores and offices is strongly influenced by the peculiarities of the territory and the economic activities related to them. Syracuse, Modica, Scicli and Ragusa were declared UNESCO sites and are affected by rehabilitation programmes of the historic town, and therefore are the most expensive areas. For stores, rental costs exceed the prices of Palermo, close to the € 2,000 per square meter threshold, and still remain low when compared to many popular tourist destinations of the Italian coast. Just like the region of Palermo, South-Eastern prices decrease as one moves towards the inland.

3.6 Confiscated Buildings

The last data considered concern a specific field that in Sicily, and particularly in the area of Palermo, has played an important role at political level in recent years: the data on confiscated buildings, which must be considered as another
aspect of the deregulation that characterises corrupted political systems and hinders public action and the production of *commons* (Donolo 2001; Cremaschi 2009). In fact, the policies of confiscating buildings from criminal organisations represent a different approach to chaotic transformation practices, because it fuels new policies of territorial regulation.

The survey on confiscated buildings, even though it was carried out for only one year, is very interesting both as an indicator for the region and in comparison to the other Italian areas. This topic is closely linked to the areas where mafia, in its various forms, unfortunately has a long and established history. The data show a fair amount of residential and productive buildings that have been confiscated until now.

Like in other cases, Palermo heads the list (Fig. 20), and the reason is easily explicable given the historical origins of the criminal phenomenon in Sicily (Cannarozzo 2000, 2009). In the same high rank, we can find some others towns such as Monreale, Partinico, and Bagheria.

Palermo heads the list even if we consider all the Italian cities, and the ratio between Palermo and Rome, or Palermo and Milan, is 10 to 1 (Palermo has 2,481 confiscated buildings in 2012, whereas Rome has 241 and Milan 210).

The reasons are very clear if we consider the history and the politic relevance of criminal organisations in Sicily. At the same time, though, people started to realise the real weight of mafia in the 1990s with the killings of two judges, Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino, and this gave way to a new awareness of the phenomenon,

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**Fig. 20** The association *Centro Studi Paolo e Rita Borsellino* (https://centrostudiborsellino.it, accessed 8 June 2020) is located in a confiscated building in Palermo (Photo by Domenico Giubilaro)
along with a stronger desire to fight it: this is why there are so many confiscated buildings in Palermo today.

Although data on confiscated buildings are not as significant for SES as they are for Palermo, it is a certainty that mafia has regulated the processes of urbanisation and the real estate market (Cannarozzo 2009) in all of Sicily, and we must not forget these phenomena when we discuss the housing issues in Sicily today.

### 3.7 Post-metropolitan Sicilian Trends

Spatial analysis proves that the two areas we are discussing here each have their peculiar traits. Undoubtedly, in the initial phases the sprawling model that characterised the transformation of identity in the Palermo area was the same model that affected other Italian metropolitan areas.

However, in the most recent years the phenomenon has developed to achieve different outcomes. On the other hand, SES is characterised by a polycentric settlement structure, in which small- and medium-sized towns are interdependent with respect to the provision of facilities and services. This settlement development is based on the sharing of higher-ranking services and specialisation of towns. The polycentric model seems like a more innovative and less traditional spatial pattern for Sicily, one that all of Sicily might probably want to consider for its future development, if given the opportunity.

The actual post-metropolitan vision of the Palermo area is to be connected to a new organisation of lifestyle, housing and work as a consequence of the attempt to start institutionalised metropolitan processes at the beginning of the 1990s, whereas in SES it is related to the international attractiveness of this area, that increased due to the following two factors: marketing activities related to the cultural and gastronomic offer for international tourism and the opportunity to easily find unskilled work in the greenhouses for immigrant workers.

### 4 Planning a Post-metropolitan Sicily

The institutional choices that have affected the island reveal an ongoing, yet not mature, process, a path which is often associated with existing administrative structures, in terms of aggregations and conservation of roles, positions, and management tools. In this section, we are going to discuss the institutional characteristics of Palermo and South-Eastern Sicily, but one should consider that these two areas have very different social and spatial outlooks, as described in the previous sections. Therefore, even the two institutional contexts will be analysed considering their respective profiles. The main issue concerning the area of Palermo is tied to the institutionalisation of metropolitan cities, whereas SES has a very particular history of inter-institutional cooperation.
4.1 The Creation of a Metropolitan City

Confirming that the institutional process has started but has not taken off yet, Sicily, even before other parts of Italy, has found a renewed interest in the Italian debate on redefining the institutional metropolitan city (see chapter by Lotta for additional information). In the 1960s, this interest already existed, when the issues of the city-region and regional planning were debated. The Region\(^5\) had expressed its will to establish a level of intermediate dimension and, with RL 9/1986, instituted the Regional Provinces, aggregations of municipalities into Consortia corresponding to the pre-existing Provinces.\(^6\) The Region had also proposed the identification of metropolitan areas and had defined the criteria for their identification, delimitation, functions and objectives.\(^7\) Since then, the new metropolis was hard to map, as its boundaries became more and more blurred (Picone 2006). The difficulty of that time, like today, was aggravated by the local institutions ignoring the economic territorial features of the affected areas, the spatial and environmental implications, the mobility, the technological innovation, the facility settlement, the offer of services and finally the labour market (Di Leo 1997; Schilleci 2008b).\(^8\)

Recently, the Regional Government has got back to the path of reform to establish the metropolitan cities, which include Palermo. With RL 15/2015, the entire former Province of Palermo is identified as a single metropolitan city. No reasoning about the real dynamics in progress has been carried out. Once again, the institutional model, revealed both in law and in practice, appears to be monocentric. Palermo still wants to maintain a central role, due to its position of political and administrative capital. The criteria to define the new administrative dimensions are not innovative: they are based on income position, in terms of functionality and concentration of certain service categories. Also, there are not many innovations at management level of the new dimension. The Plan for the metropolitan area, dictated by RL 71/1978, should have been managed at municipal or provincial level, because the law did not require an administrative entity of metropolitan dimension. The result was an area with two overlapping plans.

\(^5\)The Sicilian Region has a special status, approved by the Constitutional Law of 26 February 1948. This law has regulated the power to legislate on an exclusive basis about certain topics enumerated in the Statute, as local order authorities, urban planning, agriculture and forestry.

\(^6\)The law establishes that the Provinces must adopt the economic and social programme. This will feed into a Plan of Economic Development with social multiannual order to plan and articulate plans, sectoral and territorial projects.

\(^7\)The delimitation of the metropolitan system proposed, including Palermo, was based on administrative (belonging to the same province) and demographic (a population of over 250,000 inhabitants) criteria.

\(^8\)The Metropolitan Area of Palermo which was proposed at that time included 27 municipalities. It was characterised by a core and by a ring made of thick and continuous urbanisation along the coast, between the valleys of the Oreto and Eleuterio rivers. This was later extended from Termini Imerese to Partinico and had a land area of 906 sq.km and a population at 1991 of just over one million inhabitants (1,001,345), equal to 21.15% of the regional population.
In this way, the relationship between the different levels of planning became so confusing and unclear, that the only result was the study for the General Directives of the Inter-municipal Plan for the Metropolitan Area of Palermo, presented in 2001 and including the General Guidelines, regarding cognitive analysis, the Annexes, containing part of the information that were produced, and a Commercial Plan.

Despite the existence of some dynamism, this is not yet supported by a real implementation. Currently, the area of Palermo appears particularly active in promoting local projects.\(^9\) These exceed the average of the largest Italian cities. However, most projects are limited to the Palermo municipality, which has proven unable to include the surrounding municipalities in its development programmes (Giampino et al. 2010).

The partial data available show a strong engagement, but with few results. In fact, the hinterland of Palermo, headed by Monreale, counts two active pacts. With regard to GAL,\(^10\) instead, part of the same municipalities belonging to the Territorial Pact are affected by this programme and create an exception in the entire Italian framework. Finally, considering the PRUSST, we have the same dynamic and Palermo has 1 PRUSST (against the Italian average score of 0.02). Actions for Agenda 21 instead are inactive in the Palermo region.

The absence of a coordination plan for large areas has a negative impact on the territory. Each municipality has planned its territory regardless of the surrounding areas. The largest absence has been and continues to be perceived in the adoption of some complex programmes. These programmes—aiming to enhance the partnership with private stakeholders, to devise new means of propulsion of urban regeneration, etc.—have only affected parts of the territory, with no systemic approach. The programmes have established uncertain relationships within a potential scheme of Palermo’s wider area, confirming what was already delineated by the relationships between municipal planning and complex programmes (Lo Piccolo and Schilleci 2005).

The case of complex programming initiatives that affected the eastern part of Palermo’s former province leads in fact to reflect about an incomplete or inconsistent dialectic between the projects expressed by the various tools and the complex programmes. The latter sometimes show elements of a post-metropolitan innovation for the local territorial realities, looking for a difficult coordination with the municipal planning and with the (unrealised) wide-area planning.

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9Since the beginning of the 1990s, “the new instruments, known as local development partnership programmes, were conceived by the ministry to support the development and implementation of specific projects through cooperation between the public and private sectors” (Lo Piccolo and Schilleci 2005, 80). The scene quickly becomes much larger, with the introduction of the so-called “complex urban programmes” as Programmi Integrati di intervento (PII), Programmi di Recupero Urbano (PRU), Programmi di Riquilificazione Urbana (PRIU), Programmi di Riquilificazione Urbana e Sviluppo Sostenibile (PRUSST). These are consolidated in parallel with the experiences due within the framework of EU programmes, like Agenda 21.

10The **Gruppo di Azione Locale** (GAL) is a local action group composed of public and private stakeholders to promote local development in a rural area. GAL are funded by the EU Initiative Programme called LEADER +.
Indeed, Palermo as a metropolitan city continues to maintain its rank, its role, its attractiveness and innovation, but at the same time a few surrounding towns, albeit slowly, begin to structure a potential system of polynuclear city-region. In continuation of the paths taken in the 1990s, some local governments have in fact had the power to promote a territorial coalition among the municipalities that fall between the valleys of Imera Settentrionale and Torto, the Madonie park authority, the former Province of Palermo and a public–private partnership.

This coalition has created some forms of coordination. These actions were coordinated only due to the will of the promoters and managers and are not included in a wider range of vision, but the most recent results are an indicator of an uphill process, characterised by a regional and introverted vision, that basically ignores the flows and dynamics that cross it.

Some municipalities within the Metropolitan City of Palermo, such as Termini Imerese, have expressed their intent to continue a difficult, but not unsubstantiated, path towards polycentrism, by working together with other nearby municipalities in a common framework. Under national influences, in 2013, the regional government got back to the idea of creating the metropolitan cities. RL 8/2014 established three metropolitan cities, including Palermo, and despite the backwardness of the criteria they proposed (once again, these were territorial continuity and population) there is an element of innovation: RL 15/2015, in article 45, paves the way for the establishment of new consortia.

In those places where we find the result of a decentralisation or re-centring, a deterritorialisation or reterritorialisation, a continuous extension or urban nucleation intensified, a growth of the homogeneity and heterogeneity, a socio-spatial integration

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11 At the time Termini Imerese, Terrasini, Trabia, Capaci and Palermo appealed to the Regional Administrative Court (Tribunale Amministrativo Regionale, TAR) asking for the revocation of the institutive decree. The reasons for this opposition were of a different kind, but all aimed at soliciting the Regional Government to revise RL 9/1986 so that better account was taken of the indications of the NL. One of the main demands considered the establishment of an elective organ of government for the metropolitan area (the metropolitan city) and the redefinition of the concept of metropolitan area more as a system of cities, as configured in the NL, than as an area centred around a capital city, as suggested by the RL. A short step to redefine the Metropolitan Area of Palermo was made, identifying not only administrative boundaries, but trying to work on local systems greatly consolidated and based on the elements and environmental reports as fundamental to this delimitation. The focus was also placed on the need for integration between the metropolitan system and regional territory, as well as on internal relations. These reflections, however, never followed through and did not resolve either the problem of delimitation or, even less, the big deal of the liaison with the provincial and municipal planning.

12 The latter is made up of the development company SOSVIMA (Agenzia di Sviluppo locale delle Madonie) (as technical coordinator) and IMERA SVILUPPO, the GAL Madonie, the Banca di Credito Cooperativo San Giuseppe, the Banca di Credito Cooperativo Mutuo Soccorso, Confcooperative Unione Provinciale di Palermo, Fare Ambiente Coordinamento Regionale Sicilia, Confederazione Italiana Agricoltori Palermo and Confindustria Palermo.

13 The Distretto Culturale delle Madonie (2007), the Distretto delle carni bovine delle aree interne della Sicilia (2007), the GAL Madonie (2010), the Distretto turistico di Cefalà e Parchi delle Madonie e di Himera (2011), the Gruppo Azione Costiera Golfo di Termini Imerese (2013) and the PIST (Piano Integrato Sviluppo Territoriale) Città a Rete Madonie-Termini (2009).
and disintegration, where perhaps we can already talk about a new geography of post-metropolitan urbanisation (Soja 2000).

In this case, the institution of the Metropolitan City of Palermo could provide an opportunity to delineate the creation of a strong and stable metropolitan government, able to perform functions already defined in the 1980s, while respecting processes undertaken by individual local realities.

Despite the absence of approved coordination plans, the draft plans, such as the Schema di Massima and the Quadro Propositivo con Valenza Strategica (QPS), reveal a polycentric territorial and organisational will.

The reasons for the great interest for polycentrism reside into at least two specific aspects: the transport systems improvements and the introduction of new production methods and new lifestyles, previously concentrated only in the space of the capital city.

The planning of the metropolitan dimension of Palermo would be a great and necessary change of scale in the territorial organisation of the entire coastline, where the greatest flows and exchanges of territory are concentrated.

A thorough planning which is aware of the residential issues, in a complex space like Palermo city, could define the relationship between the different functions and specific territories. Implementing initiatives of coordination, advocating and supporting local economic systems, could in fact start to densify the dynamic connections that are somehow reticular, in terms of interdependence and complementarity, and can structure and define the different parts of the metropolitan area being set up.

Another field of metropolitan area planning should also take environmental issues into account. In this regard, the draft of the Ecological Network could act as a focal point as well as the reorganisation of the waste disposal system, too often oblivious to its territorial impact. Finally, the re-use in a new virtuous cycle of the buildings that are confiscated from mafia would represent an aspect that is not only civic and/or symbolic, but ultimately relevant, even in quantitative terms, within the territory under examination.

4.2 A Fragmented Territory, with Strong Connections

South-Eastern Sicily, the second case study of this chapter, holds no metropolitan city. However, the area shows a high level of local and inter-local planning and programming initiatives. From the planning point of view, the Provinces of Ragusa and Syracuse are traditionally characterised by a greater number of planning instruments than the other provinces in Sicily, dealing with aspects of both territorial planning and environmental and landscape safeguard.

Furthermore, more recently the area is characterised by inter-institutional cooperation practices in order to promote new socio-economic development programmes (Progetti Integrati Territoriali, Patti Territoriali, Progetti Integrati
The new instruments have considerable financial resources at their disposal. In contrast, town-planning policies are essentially perceived as regulative or, even worse, as restrictive. In many cases a real clash between the former and the latter can be perceived.

On the one hand, local development policies have distributed considerable financial resources in a context of fiscal crisis and serious economic deficiency in local administrations, and have therefore imposed themselves with the supremacy of money.

On the other hand, traditional town-planning policies have not been understood by local communities and authorities as real opportunities for guiding and stimulating local development and have often been put into practice in a bureaucratic manner (Lo Piccolo and Schilleci 2005; Lo Piccolo and Todaro 2014).

However, the results emerging from the new instruments often prove to be short-lived and incapable of activating effective and long-lasting processes of socio-economic development.
The general absence of any link-up with town-planning should also be emphasised. In fact, also in cases in which the new instruments are administratively handled by the town-planning sector of the same municipality, they assume the form of isolated projects in most of the cases, with the result of generalised town-planning provisions that are generally feeble.

Moreover, the paradoxical result is that the new instruments, rather than playing a leading role in promoting innovative strategies and actions, become a collection of goals and actions deriving from other pre-existing programming instruments.

With regard to the topics examined, the main elements of continuity with the recent past seem to consist in singling out tourism as a lever in activating processes of local development and enhancement. It has to be said that these objectives have already been widely associated with integrated territorial planning (which has incorporated many of the new instruments), but these new instruments tend to be more specialised with regard to the sub-sections of cultural tourism.

Although these instruments are characterised by a bottom-up approach, typical of a post-metropolitan reality, the result is an inverse, and totally inefficient conformity, which is that of the new instruments compared to the other existing local programmes (Lo Piccolo et al. 2012).

With reference to partnerships and territorial aggregations regarding these local policies, the need to build networks, usually encouraged by National and Regional guidelines, finds an atypical variant in South-Eastern Sicily.
We can identify two main territorial nodes: the urban area of Syracuse and the territory of Ragusa. In the first case, although active programmes have aggregated several municipalities (Augusta, Noto, Avola, Syracuse) in different forms from time to time, territorial coordination processes were activated (e.g. *Piani Strategici*) to bring individual projects to common strategies.

However, the attempt to establish a coalition proves a formal aggregation of municipalities, unable to work for common aims. Anyway, Syracuse remains a reference city for local development policies and tends to activate autonomous programmes.

In the second case, local development strategies describe two main areas of territorial aggregation of municipalities: the mountainous area of the system of Hyblaean Mounts (Giarratana, Monterosso Almo, Comiso, Modica, Ragusa) and the coastal system (Acate, Vittoria, Santa Croce Camerina, Scicli, Pozzallo) (Giampino et al. 2010).

Also, in this case the aggregations of municipalities often produce weak alliances geared towards competitiveness in the accumulation of partners, in order to obtain public funding (especially structural funds), rather than effectiveness of strategy for territorial growth and development. This status appears evident from the fitful commitment of mayors and town councillors in launching new programmes (strategic plans).

In some cases, the role of programme coordination is entrusted to territorial development agencies, which were set up during the running of previous programmes, like, for example, offices (urban centres, civic centres, etc.) for EU policies or European projects spawned in the larger cities.

We can observe a tangible example of this condition in Ortygia, Syracuse’s old town. Looking specifically at the outcomes of these instruments in the case of Ortygia, an urban context significantly affected by changes in physical, economic, social and environmental components emerges. However, some critical issues can be observed (Lo Piccolo and Todaro 2014).

In recent years, several projects of urban regeneration have been enabled, with incentives for creating renovation and economic revitalisation initiatives. The Ortygia peninsula was then involved in a process of renewal that, also through the localisation of key administrative functions, has reinstated centrality to the peninsula that has returned to be inhabited by the Syracusans (Liistro 2008). This process resulted in the reactivation of the housing market, also thanks to the significant presence of foreigner investments, significantly increasing real estate values (Cannarozzo 2006).

Although in the last twenty years the peninsula of Ortygia has attracted the interest of planning and programming, the activated instruments have resulted in the realisation of (sometimes only partial) *punctual* interventions that did not follow a unitary and organic project (Lo Piccolo and Schilleci 2005; Lo Piccolo 2007). It shows, in fact, the evident imbalance between the localisation of recovery interventions carried out in the proximity of archaeological and historic monumental interest areas or the seafront and inland areas, which are still characterised by the serious condition of physical and social degradation.
Added to this is the growing investment by individuals and real estate companies, not governed by public action, which determines the progressive replacement of traditional socio-economic network with commercial and tourism activities. This phenomenon, accompanied by the progressive disappearance of neighbourhood services (especially for children and the elderly), is causing the loss of the minimum requirements to ensure habitability (Lo Piccolo and Todaro 2014).

Furthermore, as regards policies for enhancing the cultural heritage in South-Eastern Sicily, a specific phenomenon has been observed, with particular importance for the significant and often controversial effects it produced. This phenomenon stems from a process promoted by the Agencies for Cultural and Environmental Heritage of Syracuse and Catania, later joined by the city of Ragusa, and consists of the construction of the unitary territorial image of the Late Baroque Cities.

Such image of the territory, based on the recognition of Baroque architecture and urban-planning as a unifying identity value attracting tourists and visitors, inspired the cultural enhancement policies that were implemented in the 1990–2010 period. Among them, in 2002, the “Late Baroque Cities of Val di Noto” (Noto, Scicli, Ragusa, Militello Val di Catania, Caltagirone, Palazzolo Acreide, Catania, Modica) were listed as “UNESCO World Heritage Sites”, and the Southeast Cultural District “Late Baroque Cities of Val di Noto” (financed in 2009 by the Regional Operational Plan of Sicily 2000–2006, Measure 2.02.d) was established with the purpose of implementing the UNESCO site management plan (Lo Piccolo et al. 2015). Moreover, the image of this area, produced by the TV series and in particular “Inspector Montalbano” (see Sect. 3.4), also contributed to the construction of this phenomenon.

In the light of this phenomenon, and of the misrepresentation that inevitably comes with it, it should be however pointed out that tourism is a recently emerged opportunity for the territory of Ragusa, which needs well-structured strategies and enhanced consolidation (Trigilia 2012; Azzolina et al. 2012).

In this territory, the tourist districts were initially established with a spirit of cooperation and they are currently nothing but an aggregation of municipalities unable to express a “unitary vision of the territory of the Southeast” (Azzolina et al. 2012, 161).

Moreover, the supply of tourist services is based on a traditional model of tourism, which is fully focused on accommodation facilities and catering services. Such a model features extremely poor innovation with respect to the key role of cultural heritage, despite a very strong national and international competitiveness in the market of cultural destinations for tourists. In particular, services and infrastructures (including technological ones) prove to be inadequate both in the private and public sector (Lo Piccolo et al. 2015).
4.3 Two Different Ways of Being Post-metropolitan

With regard to the dynamics of post-metropolitan institutional prospects, the collected data and the elaborations of our research suggest that the Palermo area has never been fully metropolitan either in its institutional structure and its government, or in its socio-economic and territorial features. In recent years, however, the data analysed in this research show the will to propel the territory into a polynuclear dimension (which somehow characterises the post-metropolitan dimension), with all ambiguities and contradictions of the path. Particularly, the components of change and innovation seem to emerge from some geographical areas which are less dependent on role, geography and functions from Palermo’s municipality. They contrast and revolutionise the inertia of the centripetal administrative and hierarchically predominant dimension, which has so far prevented and delayed, in terms of choices and effectiveness, a real metropolitan governance characterising the post-metropolis. The continuous reconsideration of the form and contents of the new metropolitan structure, fluctuating between the metropolitan city model and the consortia, suggests that these innovative elements can actually trigger a process of (post-)metropolisation, in a territory that is actually quite fitted for these changes.

South-Eastern Sicily, on the other hand, shows a high level of local and inter-local planning tools. From the planning point of view, the Provinces of Ragusa and Syracuse are traditionally characterised by a greater number of planning instruments than the other provinces in Sicily, dealing with aspects of both territorial planning and environmental and landscape safeguarding. More recently the area shows a marked tendency to inter-institutional cooperation, by activating new territorial development programmes. These recent experiences are interesting for two reasons: the capability to build networks of inter-institutional cooperation, usually encouraged by National and Regional guidelines and the presumed flexibility of these programmes with respect to the rigidity of the traditional planning instruments. New instruments often become a collection of goals and actions deriving from other pre-existing programming instruments rather than playing a leading role in promoting innovative strategies and actions; new programmes also establish controversial relationships with respect to the traditional urban planning instruments. Furthermore, the networks of inter-institutional cooperation often produce weak alliances geared towards competitiveness in the accumulation of partners, in order to obtain public funding, rather than effectiveness of strategy for territorial growth and development.

5 Conclusions

In this chapter, we started discussing the Metropolitan Area of Palermo by recalling how important marginality and isolation are to grasp the Sicilian situation. Part of the data we have discussed so far implies that this marginality causes a lot of social, economic and political issues. For instance, the number of confiscated buildings is
proof of the failure of the policies led by the national state and the local authorities, together with a sort of quiet resignation to an economic and social negative status that might seem to confirm the clichés we introduced at the beginning of our analysis.

However, other data suggest a different approach. We have discussed how the dependency ratio of Palermo is now unexpectedly lower than Milan’s. This does not mean that finding a job in Palermo is easier than it is in Milan, of course, but it implies that Palermo and its region have some potential energy (given by the relatively high number of working-age population). This sort of energy may be the same that causes so many confiscated buildings to serve a renewed purpose, often for social and cultural goals. We could not discuss the use of confiscated buildings more thoroughly for a lack of data, and most reflections on that topic should use qualitative data instead of merely quantitative data; nonetheless, the number of social bottom-up proposals coming from young and unemployed people has definitely grown in the last decade in Palermo, and may be considered a sign of a slow but unyielding investment on social awareness and bottom-up policies.

Even if we consider all of these new trends and potentialities, there is still no simple answer to the question about the post-metropolitan status of this area. How does Palermo relate to the urban regionalisation processes we have previously described (see chapter by Lo Piccolo et al.)? If we compare this city to Milan, Rome, or Los Angeles, there are indeed many differences, but also a few striking elements that should be taken into account. Considering the presence of foreign people or the density convergence theory, Palermo is behaving almost exactly like Milan or Rome, though the numbers are obviously lower in comparison. In our opinion, this means that a portrait of Palermo and its area must be carefully balanced on a tight line, hanging in the balance between the cliché of a marginal and deprived Southern city and the acknowledgement of something new that might come in the future. In a sense, Palermo is arguably experiencing the initial stages of an urban regionalisation process.

South-Eastern Sicily, on the other hand, is probably yet more peculiar. Even temporarily neglecting any social, urban or economic analysis, it is enough to take a simple look at the demographic profile of Los Angeles on one hand and of Palermo on the other hand to understand how those scales cannot be superposed at all. Even worse if we take into account the area between Syracuse and Ragusa. And yet, Soja argues:

the grounding of the postmetropolitan transition in Los Angeles is not meant to constrict interpretation of the postmetropolis just to this singular and often highly exceptional city-region. Rather, it is guided by an attempt to emphasize what might be called its generalizable particularities, the degree to which one can use the specific case of Los Angeles to learn more about the new urbanisation processes that are affecting, with varying degrees of intensity, all other cityspaces in the world. (Soja 2000, 154)

In other words, if we want to test the existence and the possible functioning of post-metropolitan systems, it is not a matter of adapting the Los Angeles model to the world, but of extrapolating from the particular Californian case those lessons that can be valid for all the world. The same thing could be repeated for urban regionalisation processes.
It is a paradoxical game, of course, based on the *what if* rule, as *counterfactual history* suggests (Ferguson 1999): in that kind of history, every essential question begins with *What if...?* We believe that in addition to the counterfactual history we might think in terms of a counterfactual geography. Instead of asking ourselves, like historians would do, what would have happened if Hitler had won the war, we will ask what would happen if South-Eastern Sicily were a post-metropolitan land. Our goal is to ascertain whether SES can show to the world some variations to the standard urban regionalisation model.

There are two basic reasons that can help us further this reasoning: first, if we look at the number of employees by industry sectors, within the boundaries imposed by the ongoing crisis, there are interesting variations that help us to outline a more post-metropolitan territorial profile than the one of Palermo, where the traditional leading sectors, such as building manufactures, remain the same.

Second, if we look at the effects that the economic transition raises on spatial structures, we can detect in South-Eastern Sicily a polynuclear localisation process of productive, industrial and non-industrial activities, which follows the historic poly-centric settlement pattern, compared to a conversion of the industries to commercial activities already affected by a process of delocalisation of the centre of Palermo. Similarly, in reference to the ability of internationalisation of the agricultural products of South-Eastern Sicily, this area proves capable of innovating its productive district (Asmundo et al. 2011).

If the area of Palermo, from a normative and conceptual point of view, can at least be considered a metropolitan city, South-Eastern Sicily, traditionally considered a non-metropolitan context, shows a more dynamic, innovative and post-modern situation. What if, as a consequence, South-Eastern Sicily were a new reality able to provide useful insights on possible future alternative urban regionalisation models? And what if, paradoxically, South-Eastern Sicily was even more post-metropolitan, in some respects, than Los Angeles?

One of the topics that seem particularly innovative in SES is the way planning has affected these areas, because most municipalities in the Provinces of Ragusa and Syracuse, as we recalled earlier, produced lots of urban and territorial plans, many more than the other provinces in Sicily did. These tools, however, should interact with the socio-economic policies starting from the challenges that we have described (migrants, cultural tourism, quality agriculture, etc.). If these two domains (planning and socio-economic policies) are able to properly interact, SES might launch development processes that are more efficient than the average of Southern Italy, once again proving to be a leading region in this part of the country.
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