Processes of multi-scalar regional urbanization are occurring worldwide. Such processes are clearly distinguishable from those of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries due to the shifting concepts of both the city and the metropolis. International literature highlights how what we have historically associated with the idea of cities has long been subjected to consistent reconfiguration, which involves stressing some of the typical features of the idea of “cityness”.

*Post-Metropolitan Territories: Looking for a New Urbanity* is the product of a research project funded by the Italian Ministry for Education, Universities and Research (MIUR). It constitutes a thorough overview of a country that is one of Europe’s most diverse in terms of regional development and performance: Italy. This book brings together case studies of a number of Italian cities and their hinterlands and looks at new forms of urbanization, exploring themes of sustainability, industrialization, de-industrialization, governance, city planning and quality of life.

This volume will be of great interest to academics and students who study regional development, economic geography and urban studies, as well as civil servants and policymakers in the field of spatial planning, urban policy, territorial policies and governance.

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Post-Metropolitan Territories
Looking for a New Urbanity

Edited by Alessandro Balducci,
Valeria Fedeli and Francesco Curci
This book is dedicated to Daniele Pennati, post-doctoral fellow in urban planning and active member of our research team who, thanks to his exceptional knowledge in web design, has been the designer of our atlas of post-metropolitan territories, the instrument around which we have developed our research project. Daniele had the extraordinary capacity of making complex problems understandable, and for us his dramatic death, with the sudden interruption of his young life, has been a great loss, completely incomprehensible.
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10 South-eastern Sicily

A counterfactual post-metropolis

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A counterfactual post-metropolitan region

When we refer to south-eastern Sicily (SES) we are considering an area that is apparently the opposite of any likely post-metropolitan case study. This area holds no major city (with the partial exception of Syracuse and its 118,000 inhabitants) and appears like 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 and traditional agriculture (Giampino et al., 2015; Azzolina et al., 2012; Abbate, 2011; Cannarozzo, 2010), 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 & 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 of 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.

As a consequence of the geographical and historical situation of south-eastern Sicily, considering a $100 \times 100$ km square for this area seemed an inconvenient solution to us, because the square would include both sea areas and the city of Catania, with its industrial presence and a completely different outlook, if compared with Syracuse, Modica or Ragusa. Therefore, in this regional portrait we never refer to a $100 \times 100$ square, but rather to a tessera, a tile of a larger mosaic. We propose the word tessera for two main reasons: first, it breaks the overly rigid geometry which the square implies, and which seems hardly applicable to any part of Sicily; second, this Latin word recalls the ancient history of the island, suggesting that this particular geographical area, despite its long-lasting ties to the rest of Italy, still demands to be considered as a standalone case for its peculiar historical, geographical and cultural specificities. Our tessera is $60 \times 100$ km wide, and embraces 19 municipalities which are situated within the Provinces of Syracuse and Ragusa. All of the 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 of over 100,000 inhabitants is Syracuse, with three more towns over 50,000 (Ragusa, Vittoria, Modica) and seven under 10,000. These municipalities were chosen by applying the criteria of inter-local planning and programming initiatives, that is, by considering the connections between them in the light of their abilities to team up and play an active role in territorial planning.

The two main points we want to highlight here, considering their importance in the whole research project on Italian post-metropolises, revolve around the presence of foreign citizens (migrants) in Sicily and housing. Regarding migrants and migrations, the obvious starting point is that Sicily holds a strategic position in the Mediterranean area, and it is often used as a gateway for those (sometimes illegal) migrants looking to reach northern Europe (we refer, for instance, to the famous case of Lampedusa). However, there are many more legal migrants moving to Sicily for other reasons in recent years, especially in south-eastern Sicily, and we will try to point out the reasons why.

Housing is also an important topic, considering the Sicilian inability to facilitate the relationships between strong urbanization processes and the traditional presence of agricultural areas.

The following sections will present some data regarding south-eastern Sicily. The data are divided into three sections: a socio-economic outlook describing the characteristics of demography, employment and income in this part of Sicily; a spatial analysis of housing and land use; and finally an institutional description of the administrative state of the art in Syracuse, Ragusa and their surroundings. Each section describes the most consolidated trends in this area, but also discusses the most innovative changes and the challenges south-eastern Sicily has faced in recent years. The final section points out some concluding remarks and puts this Sicilian case within the theoretical framework of the post-metropolitan discourse in Italy.

Looking through the *tessera*

*Socio-economic perspective*

In order to evaluate the socio-economic outlook of south-eastern Sicily and its *tessera*, we will analyse several data related to the following domains.

- **Demographics** – population and density; housing dispersion index; dependency ratio; foreign citizens; mobility index.
- **Economics** – unemployment rates; employees by industry sectors; average per capita income.

Although the generic outlook of south-eastern Sicily might look quite similar to what we have already described in the Palermo case (see Chapter 9), things are a bit different here. According to some data (such as location, population and density), south-eastern Sicily (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 kilometres north of Syracuse). However,
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 with other marginal but resourceful areas in northern or central Italy, such as the so-called “Chiantishire” around Siena.

We will start by discussing the population trend, which shows a very unstable attitude here: Modica (the largest town in 1921) slowly yields its leading role to Syracuse, which almost doubles its population between 1951 and 1981. The secondary administrative centre, Ragusa, kept a marginal role in the development of the area (Figure 10.1). Looking at the population percentage variations from 1971 to 2011 and comparing them with other, more traditional cases such as Palermo, south-eastern Sicily shows low percentage increases (the highest being for the small town of Acate, +65%) and some significant decreases (such as Monterosso Almo, −21%). 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 later the reasons for this growth, but for now we will just point out that most of Acate’s new citizens are foreign citizens.

When we try to adapt Edward 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. Even in 1961, Pozzallo was at the top of the list, with a density of 797 inhabitants per km². In 2011, Pozzallo’s density (1,231 inhabitants per km²) is 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 hint to the polynuclear system that characterizes this region, with at least four greater core areas (Syracuse, Ragusa, Vittoria, Modica) and other lesser districts gravitating around them.

Looking at the population trends, the south-eastern tessera has long been a place to move away from, and thus does not comply with van den Berg’s (1982) urban lifecycle theory. Arguably, most people moved to the nearby industrial cities of

![Figure 10.1 City population in south-eastern Sicily between 1921 and 2011](source: Authors’ graphic based on PRIN Postmetropoli (2015))
Catania and Gela, while others relocated outside of Sicily. These movements may be because of 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 recent years, however, things have started to change, as SES now hosts several small or medium towns with increasing growth rates, most of them close to Ragusa. The reasons for this change must be explored within the domain of recent economic developments, involving a renewed role for agriculture, along with the tourism attractiveness of this region (Picone, 2006).

The analysis of the housing dispersion index (the ratio between the number of scattered houses and the total of the houses) in this area highlights a flattening of the 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.

In order to describe the socio-economic outlook of south-eastern Sicily, we have chosen to analyse the dependency ratio, that is, the ratio of the sum of the number of children (0–14 years old) and older persons (65 years or over) compared with the working-age population (15–64 years old). The dependency ratio could be related to the productiveness and economic strength of the analysed area, although one must not forget that it only speculates that the productive part of the population actually has an 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 sectors of the local population.

While the biggest towns of Syracuse and Ragusa have experienced an increase in their dependency ratio (Syracuse moves from 44 in 1991 to 49 in 2011, while Ragusa moves from 49 to 52 in the same period), small municipalities like Acate and Pozzallo have 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 trend seems to be continuous in time. This phenomenon is linked to several factors: the opening and closing of demographic windows (Golini & Marini, 2006), the ageing 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%) with other Italian cases, such as the Milan area (San Donato Milanese, +124%) or the Venice area (Spinea, +87%). Moreover, most municipalities in SES have negative values in their percentage variation of the dependency ratio, meaning that in 2011 the working-age population is larger than in 1991. Most notable are the cases of Acate (−12%) and Pozzallo (−11%), but 12 out of 19 municipalities in the area have a similar profile.

More surprises come if we look at the unemployment rate, although in all of Italy this rate was lower in 2011 than in 2001, but then it rose up and it is now (2014) higher than in 2001. Accordingly, in most Sicilian towns and cities there was a strong decrease in the unemployment rate over those ten years (for instance, Palermo moves from 29% in 2001 to 23% in 2011). The unemployment rates for Sicily are lower in SES, with Syracuse staying around 17% in 2011, and Ragusa
and Modica getting a respectable (by Sicilian standards) 13%, if we compare it with bigger southern cities such as Naples and Catania (both around 26%). Again, agriculture and tourism may be two leading fields dictating this more positive (or rather, less negative) trend.

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, because 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 labourers. Moreover, vines play an important role given the growing importance of IGP (in English: Protected Geographical Indication, also known as PGI-quality) and DOC (in English: Controlled and Guaranteed Designation of Origin) wines, as the dairy industrial 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 & Simonetti, 2005).

Quality agriculture and tourism become then 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. If we consider Allen J. Scott’s (2008) ideas on the most relevant economic aspects in post-metropolises, SES – although incomparable with much bigger and different contexts like Los Angeles – unexpectedly shows some elements that may be defined as “post-metropolitan”, such as 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 (€14,200–16,000). Incomes are also high compared with 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 with €18,026 per taxpayer. Things are different in northern Italy, because the variance between the two values is lower (for example Venice has a €17,207 income per inhabitant, compared with €22,223 income per taxpayer); this confirms the effects of the higher Sicilian unemployment rates previously discussed, and portrays a society with few, but rich, taxpayers.
As we will more thoroughly discuss later, the growing presence of foreign citizens is affecting Sicily in unexpected ways (Lo Piccolo, 2013). In the 20 years between 1991 and 2011, all the municipalities included in SES have experienced a steady increase of foreign citizens. Acate (19%) and Santa Croce Camerina (15%) have 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 quite close to slavery and mistreatment. Most foreign citizens in SES traditionally come from North Africa, but recently some Eastern European migrants (for example from Romania) have overcome them.

These trends lead to a few interesting considerations if we analyse the Index of Dispersion of the Foreign Population (IDFP), an index we have proposed building upon the existing literature on migrants and foreign citizens (Caritas Migrantes, 2011; INEA, 2013; Giampino et al., 2014; Lo Piccolo & 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, Acate (717) and Santa Croce Camerina (581) have the highest IDFP of all Italy, given the relatively low presence of foreign citizens in the most populous city of SES (Syracuse; Figure 10.2). This is another hint to the peculiar, polynuclear, post-metropolitan configuration of this region. The Venetian area has some similarities, with a strong polarization comparable with 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 because of the high cost of living), while some towns such as Ragusa, Modica and Noto all have positive values. At the same time, foreign people are moving

Figure 10.2 South-eastern Sicily: Index of Dispersion of the Foreign Population (IDFP) in 2011

Source: Authors’ graphic based on PRIN Postmetropoli (2015)
to this region in very high numbers, if compared with 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 some of these people are likely able to afford that lifestyle, therefore suggesting different national origins (that is, Western Europeans looking for a historically and culturally attractive region to live in).

To summarize the evidence we have presented, we may consider the following:

1 South-eastern Sicily proves to be an exceptional case if compared with 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 touristic relationships to other European countries.

2 The relatively small dimension of most cities and towns has likely reinforced the idea of a polynuclear urban region, with no capital centralizing functions and policies (as it happens, on the other hand, in the case of Palermo). The presence of foreign citizens, as we will more thoroughly discuss later, 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 The challenges that SES is facing today lie mostly within the opportunity and ability to adapt to a quickly changing scenario, with Sicily no longer being a land of emigration but a place where incoming migrants could play a key socio-economic and cultural role. However, so far the situation does not comply with this, as migrants are often exploited, sometimes even abused and left to live and work in poor, inadequate conditions.

The controversial case of the immigrant population

With regard to the impact of globalization on urban spaces, Soja (2000), referring also to Chambers (1990), highlights the lack of conceptual and material limits of contemporaneous metropolis and the intensification of transnational flows of migrants, invoking the “turns toward cosmopolis” as resistance to the prevailing neoliberalism among other active approaches involved in the debate on post-metropolitan transition.

According to Soja, indeed, post-metropolis is the spatial – although transitory – result of new socio-spatial transformations of the cities; this is characterized by a high and new level of socio-economic fragmentation. In relation to these phenomena, social polarization of urban space, typical of the Fordist city, has given way to an “unstructured” and “dispersed” social geometry. This has called into question the traditional analytical models of the socio-spatial concentration geographies, and requires new interpretative categories.
These phenomena do not just occur in global cities, and they start to change the urban structure and scenario of even smaller (in terms of local population) urban areas or in extra-urban areas.

Over the last 50 years many European countries, considered areas of origin for international migratory flows in the twentieth century, became places of stable hospitality (King, 2000; Ambrosini, 2000).

More recently, the globalization processes and the deep socio-economic transformations, as well as the enlargement of the European Union to the countries of Eastern Europe, are at the heart of a complex system of interdependent factors that have changed the relationship between countries of origin and countries of destination for migratory flows (King, 2000).

Among the regions of Southern Europe, Sicily, in the last 30 years, has transformed itself from a land of emigrants into a land of immigrants, becoming the gateway to Europe, especially for the people arriving from North Africa.

With regard to the territorial distribution of foreign population in south-eastern Sicily, there is a clear phenomenon of socio-spatial polarization of immigrants, also in relation to the functional specialization of the territory. In effect, in south-eastern Sicily the immigrant population is mainly concentrated in rural areas and engaged in seasonal agricultural activities, especially in the summer–autumn period (Caritas Migrantes, 2011; Giampino et al., 2014).

With reference to the six discourses on the post-metropolis (Soja, 2000), these phenomena can be ascribed particularly to the discourse about “Exopolis”, in which Soja describes the characteristics of a metropolitan dimension where in the area of south-eastern Sicily the traditional limits of settlements are exceeded. Moreover, the territorial distribution of the immigrant population in small municipalities shows a “restructured social mosaic” (Soja, 2000) that is at the same time, compared with a global scale, the result of the phenomena of de-territorialization and re-territorialization of capital, labour and culture (“Cosmopolis”) and, in relation to the local scale, the outcome of hybridization, with increasingly evident impacts in injustice social terms and spatial marginalization and segregation (“Metropolarities”) (Giampino et al., 2014).

Actually, south-eastern Sicily stands out as a polycentric structure of settlements; this structure, related to the quality agricultural production of the rural areas, promotes the dispersion of immigrant population, outlining a more distinctly post-metropolitan territorial profile in respect to other Sicilian areas.

However, the actual situation seems much more controversial if we analyse the rural context of south-eastern Sicily in greater depth, and in particular what is commonly called the “transformed strip” (municipalities of Vittoria, Acate, Ispica, Scicli, Pozzallo, Comiso, Santa Croce Camerina), along the coastal plain of Ragusa, which is characterized by intensive greenhouse production (fruit, vegetables, nurseries) (Todaro, 2014b).

In this area unofficial statistics (Caritas Migrantes, 2011; INEA, 2013) show a significant concentration of foreign workers employed in greenhouses; this allows a doubling of annual production of vegetables, but at the same time necessitates a greater number of workers.
Whereas the “greenhouse landscape”, on the spatial front, has replaced the traditional dune-lined coastal landscape, from the eminently social point of view greenhouses also have determined a profound transformation in the “social landscape” of this area. This condition has led to a more complex “differentiated rurality” (Corrado, 2012), which is the result of the process of transformations in social and economic relations between the various ethnic groups; at the same time it has played an instrumental role in the success of the model of economic development of greenhouses. From this point of view the “social weakness” of immigrants is an essential component of the “greenhouses’ landscape”.

Behind this economic success, an extremely complex situation affects immigrants, often living and working in seriously demeaning conditions.4

The Ragusa area, in particular, apart from being a constant point of arrival for flows of illegal migrants from North Africa, already boasts a stable foreign presence; this is partly linked to historical immigration from the Maghreb, and partly to the temporary presence of workers (especially from Romania) on a cyclical basis, this being related to the shifting regional and inter-regional flows, which are, in turn, linked to the various production cycles (INEA, 2013). Most of these unskilled and low-cost manual workers are unregistered, and therefore are badly paid and unprotected; compared with these conditions, the various social, economic, sanitary and housing aspects are at some risk (Gertel & Sippel, 2014).

Examining living conditions in rural areas, they show a context of extreme difficulty: immigrants often live in small abandoned and unstable rural constructions, not far from the fields or greenhouses, and therefore a long way from inhabited neighbourhoods and services. The aforementioned living and working conditions, characterized by a vast spatial segregation, have serious repercussions on the immigrants’ social and community situation. Working conditions in the greenhouses, the number of hours at work, the distance from towns and the unavailability of public transport that might render them “autonomous”, constitute tangible limitations on their individual and collective freedom. Whereas, in the urban context, the “appropriation” of public space contributes significantly to the “construction” of a community or a group, with one’s own spaces and one’s own activities (Bonafede & Lo Piccolo, 2010; Lo Piccolo, 2013), for immigrants living and working in rural areas, and in particular in greenhouses, it is difficult to have access to these spaces and, consequently, to form a group, or, at the same time, to claim one’s rights (Todaro, 2014a). For immigrants, claiming a “right to the city” (Lefebvre, 1968) often coincides with a demand for, and safeguard of, human rights (Bonafede & Lo Piccolo, 2010); therefore the difficulty of “access” to the city becomes a limitation on, or an actual denial of, these very fundamental rights.

Housing difficulties are linked, on the one hand, to forms of job exploitation and spatial segregation, and, on the other, to forms of social exclusion and isolation of individuals and small groups of immigrants; with regard to the aforementioned issues, they represent an extremely complex territorial profile, in which latent conditions of conflict find a niche (IRES, 2011).

The first condition of conflict to emerge principally involves clashes between different ethnic groups (in particular Northern Africans and Romanians) in the
search for a job. Until the 2000s, the foreign workforce employed in the agricultural sector in the Province of Ragusa was made up almost entirely of Tunisians, and more generally, North Africans, arriving from the 1970s onwards. Over the years, these workers had acquired rights (fair wages, union rights, and so on) and a certain acknowledgement by society at large, which had put a few of them on the road to becoming entrepreneurs, and even, in some cases, to purchasing greenhouses. With the enlargement of the European Union to include Eastern Europe, a sort of “ethnic substitution” of immigrant workers took place in the Ragusa greenhouse belt (Colloca & Corrado, 2013); there was a sudden increase in fresh flows of immigrants, especially Romanians, seeking employment, and mostly taking the place of North Africans. These neo-Community workers came from countries characterized by serious socio-economic difficulties and were willing to accept very low wages (about 20 euros for a ten-hour working day), thus neutralizing the “social” gains achieved by the North Africans. For the whole immigrant manual workforce this was followed by a real loss of rights and a worsening of living and working conditions. Other critical conditions relate to the illegal status of immigrant greenhouse workers, with one part, in this case, moonlighting in the “black economy” and another in the “grey”. Indeed, in the southern regions, the informal economy and irregular employment have even greater weight. These two aspects existed well before the arrival of immigrants (De Zulueta, 2003).

In respect to this condition, according to certain cautious estimates by Caritas Migrantes (2011), the former amounts to 10% (and in some periods of the year, up to 20%) of the total of “regular” workers. On the other hand, INEA (2013) suggests an estimate of 15,000–20,000 overall units of immigrant workers in agriculture and considers 50–60% of them to be “irregular”; in this case, immigrants are usually employed by small businesses, where there is a lower risk of controls.

In the light of the deliberations laid out above, it is clear that official statistics describe south-eastern Sicily as a dynamic, innovative (and post-modern) reality. At this point it would be useful to ask whether the conditions of the immigrant workers, which find little space in official reports, merely represent a factor that is instrumental in the success of this economic system (Berlan, 2008), or, on the contrary, if they call the whole system into question, highlighting a part of this story yet to surface.

**Spatial perspective**

Spatial phenomena and particularly those linked to the dynamics of the settlement system and other variations of utilizing 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 monocentrism of the greater metropolitan area of Palermo. The *tessera* comprises the whole Province of Ragusa and the southern part of the Province of Syracuse (including its administrative centre), where Syracuse, with it 122,503 inhabitants, against the 73,030 inhabitants of Ragusa (ISTAT, 2014), is instrumentally considered...
the main centre; however, the whole urban area is characterized by a polycentric settlement structure, in which small and medium-sized towns are interdependent with respect to the provision of facilities and services (Giampino et al., 2014).

The settlement model is 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 specialization. The advantages for territorial development that emerge in these forms of reticular territories are numerous. They range from economic growth (together with differentiation and specialization of production, promotion of district dynamics between small and medium-sized businesses often with evident results with regard to development of research and technical growth) to a raising of the quality of life (with reference to the improvement of the variety and specialization of services). In all cases mentioned these contexts have, as a precondition, the development of an adequate infrastructure system, which, in the case under examination, might be represented by the completion of the Catania–Syracuse–Ragusa motorway and the reinforcing of Comiso airport, but especially the overcoming of specific, traditionally individualistic, logical ideas that characterize, in particular, the public policies of certain municipalities, all of which renders the potential effects of “building a network” ineffective.

In this case, the small- and medium-sized urban areas are strongly linked to the historic events that assigned to each of them specific functions (also related to productive activities), establishing interdependent relations among them and with larger urban areas. In particular, in the region of Ragusa, agriculture constitutes the first sector of productive specialization with relevant results in relation to the innovation of the production, which is recognized at national and international level (Asmundo et al., 2011; Giampino et al., 2014).

Specifically in the 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 calcarenitic 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. In these coastal areas most of the residential seasonal growth extends.

Generally, the areas around the largest towns were used initially for housing, and later on for industrial uses and coastal tourism. The settlements’ coverage ratio in south-eastern Sicily is very low (although it has a strong impact on the landscape because of settlement dispersion), with the highest percentage being in Pozzallo (22%), and the rest having an average of less than 10%. In 2011, the situation is almost unchanged. 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 below.

These strong increases, along with the diffusion of greenhouses and an economy gravitating towards agriculture, prove very interesting and meaningful consequences (Magnaghi, 2013; Fusero & Simonetti, 2005).
As mentioned earlier, the number of houses 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 tied (at least for the first two cases) to the demographic growth and the inflow of foreign citizens. Reflections on this indicator agree with what has already been asserted in the cases of the indicator on the resident population, on the housing dispersion index and on the unemployment rate.

In relation to the price of buildings, in south-eastern Sicily the sales price of dwellings, 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 affected by rehabilitation programmes of the historic town, and therefore are the most expensive areas. Regarding shops, the rents exceed the prices of Palermo, close to the €2,000 per square meter threshold, and still remain low when compared with many popular tourist destinations of the Italian coast. Just like the region of Palermo, south-eastern prices decrease as one moves inland.

Finally, in relation to the accommodation capacity, the analysed data show a significant increase of the tourist offering. Field research and scholarly literature explain the phenomenon with the more organized and better tourist offering, also aimed at the international level, which characterized the area in the last decade. All of this must certainly be related to the baroque architecture, growing seaside tourism and the aforementioned imagery of historical landscape that characterizes 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 need to be underlined.

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

The Province of Syracuse in Sicily is second only to that of Messina for the number and level of hotels. In 2012 it counts 4 five-star hotels (in 2005, the year of introduction of Syracuse in the WHL, it was one), 34 four-star hotels (in 2005 they were 14), 48 three-star hotels (in 2005 they were 43), 16 two-star hotels (in 2005 they were 17), 9 one-star hotels (in 2005 they were 16). The four five-star hotels are all in Syracuse – two of them in Ortygia. However, a significant increase of tourists does not correspond to the increase of the four- and five-star 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 of the tourist offering is also certainly related to the inscription of the “Syracuse and the Rocky Necropolis of Pantalica” site in the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2005.
This popular acknowledgement at the local and at the 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 offering, 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. The real risk does not imply a significant increase in tourism flows and economy. On the contrary, the process of replacement of traditional handicraft and commercial activities in Ortygia, together with the process of construction of coastal strip and internal or close interventions to the UNESCO site, shows how the presence of the UNESCO site has been an accelerator of the forms of pressure without the effective promotion of development actions, or – even less – the implementation of safeguarding actions (Lo Piccolo & Todaro, 2014).

In relation to the Ragusa region, if we look at the products, services and facilities for tourists, the region has significantly changed its territorial profile over the last 20 years. Namely two main trends have been recorded: new accommodation facilities have been developed, from hotels and holiday villages 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 accommodations and B&Bs, had a consistent and significant positive trend: in the 2012–13 period, 206 new facilities came into operation (Giampino et al., 2015).

Concerning tourist flows, a few surveys carried out in this field (Mantovani, 2010; Magazzino & Mantovani, 2012) and crossing various basic data, clearly show that in the 2000–08 period, tourist arrivals and overnight stays in the Province of Ragusa, if compared with Sicily, increased by 5.0% and 5.8% with respect to the period 1990–99, when they were 4.5% and 5.2% 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 Italian RAI TV series *Inspector Montalbano* (put on the air in Italy and in 18 other countries from 1999–2013) significantly contributed to this success. *Inspector Montalbano*, protagonist of the stories of Camilleri, played its part in limiting the crisis of the tourism sector in the 2007–13 period, in a comparison with regional trends of Sicily (Mantovani, 2010).

Furthermore, although we cannot argue that *Inspector Montalbano* is directly responsible for the steady performance of tourist flows, it is undeniable that the TV series showed the territory and the landscapes of south-eastern Sicily successfully and made them known to the world.

Over the last few years, many tourists went to see the so-called “places of Montalbano”. The Inspector’s house located on the beach of Punta Secca, in the territory of Santa Croce Camerina, has been transformed into “La casa di Montalbano” B&B. The town hall of Scicli, which in the TV series is home to the police station, has been moved to a different venue in order to be visited as one of the most popular sites.
Although the “Montalbano effect” has helped the world familiarize itself with this area and has contributed to maintaining high levels of tourism, the actual, relative policies have not been capable of transforming and modernizing the quality of tourist facilities and bringing them into line with international standards (Giampino et al., 2015).

In fact, there is a very weak, or sometimes even non-existent, 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.

To summarize the evidence we have presented, we may consider the following:

1. From the spatial point of view, the whole urban area is characterized 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 specialization of towns.

2. More recently pressure of the settlements increased, especially along the coasts. This is largely because of the international attractiveness of this area, which increased because of the following two factors: marketing activities related to the cultural and gastronomic offer (those related to the establishment of UNESCO sites, Inspector Montalbano, and so on) for international tourism; and the opportunity to easily find unskilled work in the field of greenhouses for immigrant workers coming first from North Africa and more recently from Eastern Europe.

3. The settlement growth determined an increase of the impact on the environment and landscape, as well as the increase in the price of buildings in the most attractive centres (Syracuse, Ragusa, Modica, Scicli, Noto). On the other hand, local policies have not been able to transform and modernize the quality of tourist facilities, bringing them into line with international standards. While, in relation to the immigrant workers, major problems are noted with regard to the lack of houses and services, as well as the forms of abuse and labour exploitation.

**Institutional perspective**

The data analysed below highlight that south-eastern Sicily has 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 characterized 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.

Furthermore, more recently the *tessera* is characterized by inter-institutional cooperation practices in order to promote new socio-economic development
programmes (Progetti Integrati Territoriali, Patti Territoriali, Progetti Integrati d’Area, Programmi di Riqualificazione Urbana e Sviluppo Sostenibile del Territorio, Programmi di Recupero Urbano, Programmi di Iniziativa Comunitaria, Piani strategici, Piani Integrati di Sviluppo Urbano, Piani Integrati di Sviluppo Territoriale). However, these tools establish controversial relationships with respect to the traditional urban planning instruments and policies (Lo Piccolo & Todaro, 2014).

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 way (Lo Piccolo & Schilleci, 2005; Lo Piccolo & 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 emphasized. In fact, 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 cases, with the result of generalized town planning provisions, which are generally weak.

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 principal 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 specialized with regard to the sub-sections of cultural tourism.

Although these instruments are characterized 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 with 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 (for example Piani Strategici) to bring individual projects to common strategies. However, the
attempts 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, such as, for example, offices (urban centres, civic centres, and so on) for “EU policies” or “European projects” spawned in the larger cities.

We can observe a tangible example of this situation 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 & Todaro, 2014).

In these years, several projects of urban regeneration were enabled, with incentives for creating renovation and economic revitalization initiatives. Ortygia peninsula was then involved in a process of renewal that, even through the localization 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 boosted by the significant presence of foreign investments – significantly increasing real estate values (Cannarozzo, 2006).

Although in the last 20 years the peninsula of Ortygia has attracted the interest of planning and programming, the activated instruments have resulted in the realization of (sometimes only partial) punctual interventions that did not follow a unitary and organic project (Lo Piccolo & Schilleci, 2005; Lo Piccolo, 2007). It shows, in fact, the evident imbalance between the localization of recovery interventions carried out in the proximity of archaeological and historic monumental interest areas or the seafront and inland areas, which are still characterized by serious 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 networks 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 & 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 in the “construction” of the unitary territorial image of the “late baroque cities”. This 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 1990–2000 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 2000–06, Measure 2.02.d) was established with the purpose of implementing the management plan of the UNESCO site (Giampino et al., 2015).

Moreover, the image of this area produced by the TV series Inspector Montalbano (see the section on tourism) 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, however, be 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, p. 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 infrastructure (including technological ones) prove to be inadequate both in the private and public sector (Giampino et al., 2015).

To summarize the evidence we have presented, we may consider the following:

1 South-eastern Sicily 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 characterized 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.

2 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.

Conclusions

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 the one hand, and of Palermo, on the other hand, to understand how those scales cannot be superimposed at all – even worse if we take into account the area between Syracuse and Ragusa. And yet, Soja argues:

the grounding of the post-metropolitan transition in Los Angeles is not meant to constrict interpretation of the post-metropolis 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 urbanization processes that are affecting, with varying degrees of intensity, all other cityspaces in the world (Soja, 2000, p. 154).

In other words, if we want to “test” the existence and the possible functioning of post-metropolitan systems, we have to play along with Soja: 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.

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, with Soja’s words, there are lessons that Los Angeles can teach to the Sicilian urban studies. Or rather, in a more provocative key, but basically as a logical consequence of these premises, if the south-east of the island can show to the world, including Los Angeles, some variations to the standard model in California, used to explain the operation of the cities of the future.

There are two basic reasons that can help us further this reasoning: 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 localization process of productive, industrial and non-industrial activities, which follows the historic polycentric settlement pattern, compared with a conversion of the industries to commercial activities already affected by a process of delocalization of the centre of Palermo. Similarly, in reference to the internationalization 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 post-metropolises? And what if, paradoxically, south-eastern Sicily were even more post-metropolitan, in some respects, than Los Angeles?

One of the topics that seems 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. These tools, however, should interact with the socio-economic policies starting from the challenges that we have described (migrants, cultural tourism, quality agriculture, and so on). If these two domains (planning and socio-economic policies) were capable of properly interacting, 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.

Notes
1 Although this chapter should be considered a result of the common work and reflection of the three authors, M. Picone took primary responsibility for the sections “A counterfactual post-metropolitan region” and “Socio-economic perspective”, F. Lo Piccolo took primary responsibility for the sections “The controversial case of the immigrant population” and “Conclusions”, and V. Todaro took primary responsibility for the sections “Spatial perspective” and “Institutional perspective”. Maps and tables have been developed by Riccardo Alongi and Giovanna Ceno.

2 This regional portrait is strictly related to the other Sicilian portrait, which describes the metropolitan area of Palermo (see Chapter 9). Our research group from the University of Palermo initially proposed to compare these two Sicilian cases (Palermo and the south-east) in order to appraise the similarities and differences between them, but most of all to prove how these two peculiar cases show some unexpected post-metropolitan traits. Therefore, even if we chose to present the two areas as separate portraits, we suggest that readers look for some shared characteristics. Within this portrait, there are several references to Sicily and the rest of Italy which can help the reader grasp the uniqueness and peculiarity of the island, as related to the Italian context.
3 The dependency ratio is actually just a demographic indicator; linking it to other economic elements (such as the unemployment rate or the inactivity rate) would require additional speculation.

4 Data on this topic are provided not only by the official enquiries made by the Italian Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) but also by parallel reports, such as those from Caritas Migrantes (2011), IRES (2011) and INEA (2013).

5 At present (12 episodes from 2012–15) The Young Montalbano is being broadcast, which deals with the events of the Inspector at a young age.

References


