

SOUTH ITALY BEYOND THE SOUTHERN QUESTION

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## SOUTH ITALY BEYOND THE SOUTHERN QUESTION

The aim of this series is to encourage some research and studies that would overcome the conventional reading of Southern Italy and would focus on its territorial values so as to promote territorial identity, its natural and cultural heritages and to turn its potentials into productive processes. Moreover, these studies have to promote its geographical role as a bridge between Europe and the Mediterranean. Therefore, it is important to focus on those studies, which combine theory and methodological studies with practice because they have to be a cause for reflection and a stimulus for plans and laboratories enforced by institutions in their territories. The aim is to enrich the scientific-cultural debate on Southern Italy from a historical, geographical, and economic point of view, by involving academics, politicians and institutions which are linked to specific territories but also expression of the glocal dimension.

The scientific committee submits the texts to anonymous reviewers. Furthermore, it can make use of linguistic revisers.

For the book, *A Geo–historical overview of Southern Italy. Geographical issues, historiographical tendencies, innovative strategies* (2024), Dr. Orazio Ambrosone collaborated as linguistic reviser for the first part and Dr. Valeria Curcio for the second part.

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ELINA GUGLIUZZO, EMILIA SARNO

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GEOGRAPHICAL ISSUES, HISTORIOGRAPHICAL  
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## INTRODUCTION

ELINA GUGLIUZZO, EMILIA SARNO

There are several reasons for this volume. One is a deeply rooted interest in Southern Italy as territorial as cultural challenge; another is that it is our birthplace. Such an interest is what originated this path valued by the Pegaso Online University which wanted to promote the research project of the authors entitled *The geoeconomic, geopolitical and geocultural role of the Southern between Europe and the Mediterranean* (CUPFR 2022 0013), and of which we show here some of the results.

The starting point of every discussion on Southern Italy cannot overlook considering it as a critical area from a socio-economic point of view. Despite its potentials and prospects, the problems of South Italy, legacies from the past, are not just evident from the main macroeconomic indexes, but also from the underdevelopment of the infrastructures and from some issues regarding the urban and inner areas. The congestion of metropolitan cities and the weakness of intermediate cities pile up with the socio-demographic and economic problems of hilly and mountainous areas.

Moreover, a complex anthropological and environmental situation is stigmatizing the South. And, we should include some historiographic papers, which have shown a distorted and simplified reality of Southern Italy imprisoning it under demonizations and distortions.

Such scenario got worse with the pandemic, which increased a feeling of uncertainty and scepticism. The 2021 recovery even seemed weak due to the persistence of problems. However, the scientific research should focus on the problems and be a *trait d'union* between the theoretical dimension and the practical commitment. Therefore, it has to put forward some changes and suggest some approaches for the regeneration of the territories. Concretely, it has to guide the establishment of some rational policies for a sensible local growth in South Italy, eliminating that mismatch between the employment of a considerable amount of energy and resources and the lack of positive outcomes. This research, therefore, examines some key factors, that is the most significant geo-historical paths, the developmental processes and the ongoing transformations so as to put forward practical suggestions.

For such a study, we used a methodological framework based on the geo-historical method and on the analysis of quantitative and qualitative data. The geo-historical method encourages an integrated study given that investigations on different scales require the comparison of different sources. In such an approach, an always updated literature and the statistical analysis of data are necessary. Moreover, it has been fundamental to focus on the different historiographical events that have caused and fueled the cultural paradigm of the southern question. Therein, specific symbolic places of South Italy such as the inner areas are addressed.

The study area includes the geographical-administrative regions of South Italy — Basilicata, Calabria, Campania, Apulia — together with Sicily. For historical-political reasons though, we are going to take into consideration Abruzzo, Molise and Sardinia as well.

The first part by Emilia Sarno clarifies that the southern question, despite it being well established in historiography, had geographical roots thanks to the enlightenment Antonio Genovesi who values geography as a knowledge useful for the development of South Italy and passes on such a vision to his disciples. If the southern question arose in the decades following the Unification of Italy thanks to Giustino Fortunato, a study of the works and activities by Genovesi School lets use anticipate its origin and define its main features. In fact, Genovesi disciples focus on some core concepts: environmental concerns, socio-demographic

problems, political responsibilities which are all going to represent the ideological foundations of the southern question in the second part of the Nineteenth century. Genovesi School elaborates the vision according to which South Italy is “a problem” and contributes to the creation of a paradigm that will influence the cultural and political history of the Country after the Unification. However, their method, which considered the South as a melting pot of landscapes, cultures and settlements, was disregarded over time.

Their lesson, today still valid, has allowed us to highlight, in the chapters in the first part of the volume, how the complexity of the southern question depends on the co-presence of different questions: the geography of the territory, the dualism between inner /coastal areas and the complex organization of urban spaces. In addition, economic issues and fluctuating demographical dynamics are persistent. In such highlighted scenario, we analysed the settlement structures and processes. We particularly focused on the progressive decrease in the population in the South as well as on the so-called brain drain; this process includes not only researchers but also talented young people who are looking for professional opportunities in line with their education and level of competence. Although the brain drain favours professional and human exchanges, the South does not get any advantage from it since what happens here is the brain drain and not the brain circulation. This situation is closely linked to the depopulation of some areas as well as to the economic processes that are less reactive. Nevertheless, the economic framework highlights opportunities and potentials despite the presence of some gaps. Indeed, there has been an actual recovery in the agriculture of South Italy respect to that of the North and the Centre thanks to several factors: a process of productive renovation, an increase in the size of companies and a more importance to the food industry. At the same time, we have to debunk the myth that industries are unproductive or non-existent. For example, the manufacturing production represents an integral part of the national manufacturing system and, thanks to its semi-finished products, it contributes to finished goods and services. However, South Italy is still a heterogeneous territory where there is the coexistence of undeveloped areas and peaks of excellence both in the primary and industrial sector. Moreover, issues

such as production costs, organization of transports, strengthening of telematics are those, which penalize small and medium sized companies. The tourist sector shows a certain stability, but the situation is not uniform. In fact, some regions are more resilient while there are others where the gap in services and infrastructures are more evident.

On the other hand, the settlements are full of contradictions and problems too, even if there are some ongoing changes thanks to the establishment of metropolitan areas. This is because, despite the persistence of small and tiny municipalities, some paragraphs are devoted to the metropolitan areas, as an innovative process, without neglecting the still partially potential role of medium sized cities.

In the first part of the volume, therefore, we tried to propose an interpretation of Southern Italy by taking into account the different landscapes and environments, the progresses and the delays, the potentials underneath the issues. We considered this *iter* fundamental and unavoidable in order to propose, in the third part of the volume, strategies and actions that will give value to Southern Italy without dismissing the previously mentioned historiographical events.

The second part by Elina Gugliuzzo firstly focuses on the Annales School. The French historiography of the Annales School greatly contributed to knowing unexplored territories, to gaining a new perception of territories, spaces, geographies where human history takes place. It goes without saying that the authoritative and majestic figure that influenced the Historians of the Mediterranean area was Fernand Braudel (1902–1985). His “The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean world in the Age of Phillip II”, firstly published in 1949, was one of the most original and influential historic books of the Nineteenth century. From 1950 on, Braudel led the research of dozens and dozens of academics on the history of Mediterranean for the period of time he covered as well as for the previous and following ones. Showing his encyclopaedic knowledge of the history of the whole Mediterranean and not only that of XVI century, Braudel offered a new and fascinating answer to the interaction problems among the societies of this area. His assumption was that history is “a slow course” and men “are embedded in a destiny they hardly shape”. In this part of the volume, what is analysed is the geography of the places, the characteristics of the Mediterranean area

and the aspects closely linked to the environmental history of Southern Italy, from the modern to the contemporary age, in the light of the latest historiographical events. What we can say is that, regardless of traditions and opinions, the environmental history recognizes nature as a historical subject, conditioned and shaped by men, and whose evolution keeps a certain independence from human actions. Evolution that reveals itself in specific processes which must be investigated by making use of multidisciplinary instruments; processes and phenomena that affect the human conditions and history. The study of the environment is indeed complex because it intertwines with approaches and studies including natural sciences, biology, economics, demography, religions and different cultures. They are all different ways of observing the same topic, so the historian will find himself at a disadvantage when he has to identify and understand the sources. Certainly, the environmental history involves taking a real “epistemological leak” respect to the whole historiographical tradition founded only on the humanistic subjects of the previous centuries. The geographical space is not just a scenario, but it aims at becoming a co-protagonist of the human events. Proofs are the development of environmental and climate stories as well as the New Talassography in which oceans and seas (even our Mediterranean) are the subject of historical narrative. Everything we left behind will remain silent unless we bring it up out of our curiosity, our current spiritual, political and social needs. For this reason, the history of Southern Italy is examined by taking into account the things that are commonly regarded as dividing geographical entities: the mountains. The analysis aims at subverting the stereotypical image of the mountains; in fact Southern Italy geographically borders with the Mediterranean, and this sea, as highlighted by Fernand Braudel, is a sea not just within lands, but mountains. The mountain is going to be “mentioned” as a resource, an economic resource rather than a limit. The *fil rouge*, which links these historiographical horizons and, specifically, this investigation, is the demolition of cultural and physical barriers. After all, mountainous and hilly areas have always been a test bed for all economic theories and for the branches of social sciences and public politics. A historical analysis, so, allows us to focus on the theoretical heritage which was put forward to understand Southern Italy.

The third part, as mentioned above, puts forward suggestions for developing processes of territorial regeneration. In the first chapter, Elina Gugliuzzo examines the anthropological and environmental factors that have characterized the history of Southern Italy. Since when men started creating culture, they have organized the world of other beings according to their supremacy. Domestication and hunt represent two different ways to regulate the relationship between men and biosphere, two paths of co-evolution that are still occurring today. It is important to remember that men appeared on earth 4 million years ago when viruses and bacteria had already been present for 2 billions of years and they were the most widespread form of life; the real rulers of the earth which contributed to the climate, geology, and life. In actual fact, if we debunk some well-established myths in the collective imagination, the very passage of microbes and parasites reveal that men are good pathogen vehicles; something that undermines men's idea of being at the centre of the universe. Men is often a vulnerable final transmitter. Modern science is based on the well-established "Germ Theory of Disease" to explain infectious diseases and it recognizes that external factors (temperature, precipitations, humidity, etc.) can affect the presence and distribution of viruses, bacteria and other viral carriers. Unfortunately, Southern Italy involuntarily becomes the protagonist of "this story". We will take into account the ways of thinking, the false beliefs and the measures adopted to contrast or, at least, control the pandemics. The analysis of the reactions to these catastrophic events can help to better understand the relationship between man and territory; it will serve as a magnifying glass through which it is possible to more clearly "read" the "unstable" story of Southern Italy.

In the second chapter, Emilia Sarno highlights that the key element to create and strengthen future perspectives for Southern Italy is territorial planning, that is the ability, in line with the potentials of a place, to identify a systematic vision of its spatial organization and the achievable transformations. The planning, intended as an overall vision, regards the economic dimension, the urban structures, and the different territorial areas. It must be coherent with the landscapes of South Italy, whilst the political decisions must put together and integrate the differences still respecting their uniqueness. A unique solution for all regions



or areas do not exist. *Ad hoc* models devised in a way that they integrate with one another for the regeneration of rural, coastal or urban areas are suitable. Therefore, we are going to put forward guidelines, strategies and good practices that should be integrated with a detailed plan.

In addition, we are going to highlight the importance of cooperation and the role of the European Union, which gives value to the know-how of every territory and fosters the establishment of some partnerships useful for making South Italy a bridge between Europe and the Mediterranean. The different elements discussed may have a practical value; indeed these reflections can be useful for projects that local and regional bodies may aim to launch. Particularly, for the National Recovery and Resilience Plan.

Overall, we aimed at overcoming the conventional interpretation of Southern Italy and the dualism between the North and the South, because we maintained that a discussion on this geographical area, which is as authentic and clear as possible, is fundamental to turn potentials, perspectives and resources into concrete actions.