

Mid-size cities in the
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Mid-size cities in Italy

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I am going to talk about mid-size cities in Italy. To be more precise: cities with a population range between 2 hundred thousand and 1 million.

I will try to explain the position of mid-size cities within the overall scheme of urban centres right across the country, by reference to changes in demographic data.

I will then compare urban trends with the Italian institutional system and the innovations introduced into the law in the last few years, particularly those innovations that affect mid-size cities.

1. The mid-size European city.

Italian medium sized cities form a specific group within the general category of European medium sized city, which itself can be distinguished from those of other continents.

We know that the "re-urbanisation" which is currently happening all over the world is also occurring in Europe, but in a particular way.

The process of metropolitanisation is less accentuated

We have, in Europe, few cities that can be defined as world class urban agglomerations (that is to say mega-cities): Paris (2.2 million inhabitants in the city and 9.9 million including the hinterland) and London (7.6 million in the city and 8.6 million within the Greater London area). However, these are smaller than cities in the USA (New York 8.3 million and 21.9 million or Los Angeles 3.8 million and 18 million) or in Japan (Tokyo 8.7 million and 33.8 million).

Furthermore, the size of European cities with more than 2 hundred thousand inhabitants is, on average, 8 hundred thousand, whereas in the United States the average is 1.2 million.

As regards urban agglomerations of more than 10 thousand people, while we have 3,500 in Europe, there are only 1,000 in the USA

We can conclude that processes of urbanization in Europe are more balanced than those in North America or Asia. and tend to show more stability within the overall European urban scene.

Mega-cities have not emerged in Europe. Mid-size cities still play a role, and are based on an outward expansion of the old original settlements. The urban fabric in Europe, characteristically a close-knit network of largely medieval towns, continues to be stable.

2. The Italian mid-size cities and the Italian urban scene

The urban scene in Italy also has similar characteristics to that in the other main European countries.

Italy does not have a dominant metropolis such as in France or Great Britain, but, instead, has three large cities: Rome, Milan and Naples.

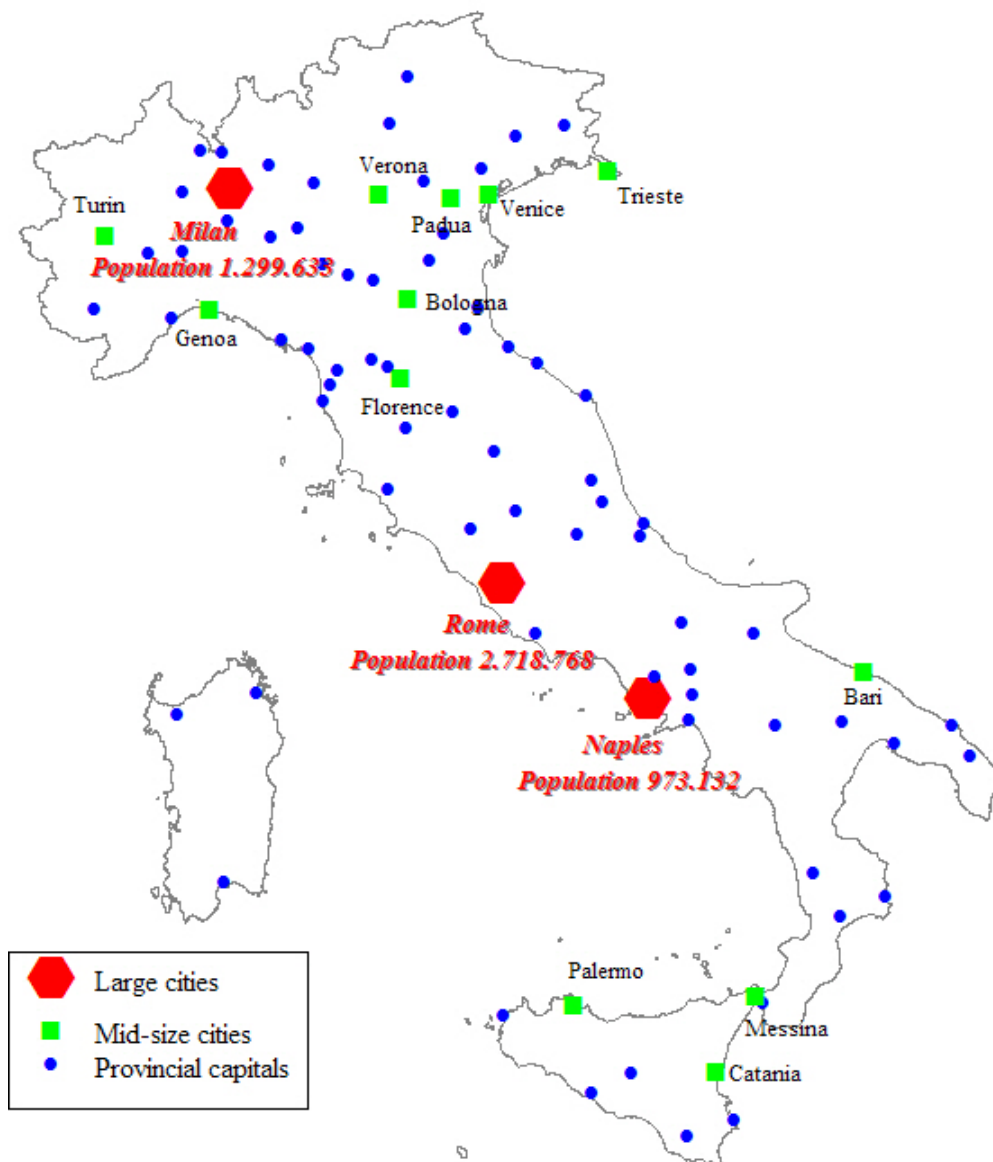
Rome has 2.7 million inhabitants and its with urban hinterland contains just over 4 million people. Milan has 1.3 million inhabitants (3.9 million when including its hinterland) while Naples has 973 thousand (just over 3 million when including its hinterland). The total population of these cities is nearly 5 million, which is equivalent to 8.4% of the entire national population.

On the other hand, the total population of the 3 cities and their hinterlands is about 11 million inhabitants.

The situation in Italy is, therefore, similar to that of Spain with the populations of Madrid and Barcelona and even more like Germany which has three large cities in Berlin, Hamburg and Munich.

This multi-centre configuration reflects the late unification of Italy as a National State, which prevented the development of a single large metropolis that could operate as a national capital.

Let's turn now to the mid-size cities.



Italy has 12 mid-size cities with populations ranging from two hundred thousand to one million. All together, some 4.7 million people live in these twelve cities; a number approaching that of the combined population of the three large cities.

They have an average population of almost 400 thousand (394,455) inhabitants. This is a slightly higher average than that of the other European states (362,000 in France, 331,000 in Spain and 324,000 in Germany).

These mid-size cities are found throughout Italy: Turin, Genoa (North west), Trieste, Venice, Verona, Padua and Bologna (Northeast), Florence (Centre), Bari, Palermo, Catania and Messina (South).

But we cannot fully explain the position of mid-size cities without including a brief description of small cities.

We have 132 small cities (50 thousand to 200 thousand inhabitants) with an average of just over 83 thousand inhabitants. Some of these lie within the hinterlands of the 3 large cities, but 70 are independent urban centres and Provincial "Capitals".

Let me remind you that, in Italy, Provinces form an autonomous layer of government run by elected bodies.

At the centre of each Province there is a city. Sometimes is a large city – such as Rome or Milan - sometimes is a mid-size city, sometimes is a small city. When the size of this city exceeds 50 thousand inhabitants we referred to it as a Provincial "Capital".

The Provincial "Capitals", as we shall see, represent an important element in the Italian urban fabric.

3. DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

I will now compare the demographic trends affecting mid-size Italian cities with the 3 large cities and with the Provincial Capitals.

3.1 Population

Between 2003 and 2008 the population of Italy grew by 4%.

The 3 large cities grew by 4.1%, the mid- size cities grew by 0.9% and the Provincial Capitals by 3.4%.

But the dynamics behind these data are more complex.

First of all, demographic growth in Italy is very different from macro region to macro region. The Northwest grew by 5.0%, the Northeast by 5.5% and the Centre by 6.3%. The South, instead, grew by only 1.3%

POPULATION GROWTH IN LARGE CITIES

	Inner City (LAU 2)	Metropolitan Area (NUTS 3)	Region (NUTS 2)	Trend
Rome	7,0%	9,1%	8,1%	Suburbanization
Milan	4,2%	5,0%	5,9%	Counter-urbanization
Naples	-3,5%	0,2%	1,5%	Large counter-urbanization

Source: Cittalia reworking of National Statistic Institutes (Istat) data.

In Rome, the population grew by 7%, whereas if including the population of its urban hinterland the rate of growth was 9.1%, also revealing a greater rate of growth than in the Lazio Region at 8.1%. Milan increased by 4.2%, again less than 5% when including its hinterland, while the population of the Lombardy Region grew even more, reaching a growth rate of 5.9%.

By contrast, in the same period, the population of Naples decreased by 3.5%, whereas the population of the city and its hinterland remained stable and the Campania Region grew by just 1.5%.

We have, therefore, two large cities in a phase of growth and one in demographic decline.

Mid-size cities also show different trends

POPULATION GROWTH IN MID-SIZE CITIES

	Inner City (LAU 2)	Metropolitan Area (NUTS 3)	Region (NUTS 2)	Trend
Turin	5,4%	4,9%	4,0%	<i>Re-urbanization</i>
Bari	2,4%	2,3%	1,3%	
Verona	3,2%	6,9%	5,6%	<i>Suburbanization</i>
Padua	2,2%	6,1%	5,6%	
Catania	-3,1%	2,2%	1,2%	
Genoa	1,0%	1,2%	2,4%	<i>Counter-urbanization</i>
Venice	-0,2%	3,9%	5,6%	
Trieste	-2,0%	-1,7%	2,6%	
Bologna	-0,2%	4,0%	6,1%	
Florence	3,3%	4,4%	4,6%	
Palermo	-2,9%	0,5%	1,2%	
Messina	-2,1%	-0,8%	1,2%	

Source: Cittalia reworking of National Statistic Institutes (Istat) data.

Here, we can see cases of **re-urbanisation**. In Turin, for example, the population of the city grew by 5.4%, but when including its hinterland, by 4.9%, while the Piedmont Region grew by only 4.0%. Turin has a population close to one million and with its hinterland is approaching 2.2 million (half the population of the Piedmont Region), showing a dominant dynamic over growth in the Region.

A similar situation, but with a weaker dynamic, is evident at Bari. The city grew by 2.4% and by 2.3% with its hinterland; more than the Puglia Region as a whole which grew by only 1.3% in the same period.

There are also cases of **sub-urbanisation**, when the population of the urban area including the hinterland grows more than the population of the Region, while the city itself grows less.

This is the case in Verona and Padua. The population of Verona increased by 3.2% but together with its hinterland rose by 6.9%. The population of Padua grew by 2.2% within the city whereas when the hinterland is included it rose by 6.1%. The population of the Veneto Region in the same period rose by only 5.6%.

This is also the case for Florence. The figures for the city showed a growth of 3.3%, but for the area including the hinterland this was more (4.4%), in line with population growth for the Tuscany Region (4.6%).

Then we have cases of **counter-urbanization**, when population growth within the city is less than that of the area including the hinterland, and where both are less than the population growth of the Region as a whole. In the same period the populations of the Provincial "Capitals" grew.

A case in point is Venice: the population in the city remained stable while that including the hinterland rose, but only by 3.9%, while the population of the Veneto Region rose by 5.6%.

Then there is the case of Bologna which shows a fairly stable population within the city (-0.2%), but when taken together with its hinterland it grew (4.0%), but by less than the population of the Emilia Romagna Region which grew by 6.1%.

The situation is even more accentuated in Genoa: the city grew by 1.0% and together with its urban hinterland by 1.2%, whereas the Liguria Region increased its population by 2.4%.

Still more marked are the cases of Palermo and Messina. The number of inhabitants declined (-2.9% in the first case and -2.1% in the second) while remaining stable when including their hinterlands (0.5% for the first; -0.8% for the second). However, the population of Sicily grew in the same period by 1.2%.

The overall scene

Overall, it seems possible to draw the following conclusions:

- Italy: shows a moderate degree of metropolitansation: the 3 major cities grew at the same rate as the national rate.
- We have general demographic stability in the South showing a decline in population levels in Naples and the mid-size cities in Sicily, but with the southern Provincial "Capitals" holding their own or growing.
- One mid-size city, Turin - which is almost a large city - has a dominant position in its Region.
- There has been growth in three regional urban areas (Veneto, Emilia Romagna and Tuscany), plus balanced growth in the medium sizes cities and the Provincial "Capitals".

3.2 The foreign resident population

It is also interesting to briefly analyze those trends regarding the foreign resident population

Flows in the foreign resident population are an important indicator of the economic dynamic and of social mobility.

In the period 2003-2008 the foreign population resident in Italy grew in absolute terms from 1.5 million to 3.4, million. In percentage terms (foreigners per head of resident Italians) from 2.7% to 5.8%.

PERCENTAGE OF FOREIGN RESIDENT POPULATION PER HEAD OF ITALIAN POPULATION

	2008
Large cities	8,3%
Mid-size cities	7,1%
Provincial Capitals	6,5%

Source: Cittalia reworking of National Statistic Institutes (Istat) data.

In the 3 major cities the average size of the resident foreign population is 8.3%.

But there are differences between the cities: in Milan 13%, in Rome 8% and in Naples 2.2%.

In the mid-size cities the average is 7.1% of the resident population. However, there are substantial variations: the mid-size cities of the Centre-North have a foreign resident population of between 6% and 12% of the total number of residents, with the maximum in Verona (11.7%) and Turin (11.3%), while mid-size cities in the South have percentages that vary between 2 and 3%: Bari (1.9%), Catania (2.2%), Palermo (2.4%) and Messina (2.9%).

In the Provincial "Capitals" this grew less; the average rate being 6.5%.

The trend shown by this data is of a concentration of the foreign resident population in the larger cities: the bigger the city, the higher the percentage of foreigners.

But, shifting attention from a still shot of the situation to the film sequence involved in this process, we have a rather different picture.

The dynamics of the situation that emerge from the data on the rate of growth of the resident foreign population in the period 2003-2008 are interesting.

We have some instances where there is a high concentration of foreigners in some mid-size cities in the Northeast. In Venice and Verona there is higher rate of growth than in the Provincial "Capitals" and than in the entire Region. The same situation appears for Turin and Piedmont.

However, in general, the situation is going in the other direction.

RATE OF GROWTH OF FOREIGN RESIDENT POPULATION

		Growth 03/08
Large cities	Inner city	92%
	Including the hinterland	114%
Mid-size cities	Inner city	102%
	Including the hinterland	116%
Provincial Capitals		129%

Source: Cittalia reworking of National Statistic Institutes (Istat) data.

The rate of increase in the foreign resident population is higher in the hinterland of the mid-size cities and highest in the Provincial "Capitals".

This is happening both in the Centre - North (with the highest percentage of foreigners per head of resident population) and in the South (where the percentage of foreigners is still very low).

3.3 The Student Population

We can find a similar situation if we turn to another useful indicator which can help explain the urban scene and its dynamics: the student population; the numbers enrolled in the universities.

DISTRIBUTION OF UNIVERSITY STUDENT

	Share 2001	Share 2008
Large cities	29%	28%
Mid-size cities	32%	29%
Provincial Capitals	28%	30%

Source: Cittalia reworking of Ministry of Education data.

In 2008, 29% of university students had chosen to enroll in universities based in mid-size cities (it had been 32% in 2001), while about 28% were enrolled in universities based in the 3 major cities (it had been 29% in 2001), and 30% in the Provincial "Capitals" (it had been 28% in 2001).

Both the three major cities and the mid-size cities therefore lost out to the Provincial "Capitals" in terms of the percentage of students enrolled in their universities.

If we look at the numbers enrolled as a proportion of the resident population, it emerges that the "university cities" contain: in Tuscany (Pisa 58%, Siena 27%, Florence 14%), in Abruzzo (Chieti 30%, L'Aquila 29%, Teramo 13%) in Emilia Romagna (Bologna 17%, Parma 15%).

A rebalancing process can therefore be seen within the student population which is bringing about the growth of university centres not only in mid-size cities but also in Provincial "Capitals".

4. The Italian mid-size cities in the institutional system

Let's turn to the institution system.

We have seen some general trends in urban dynamics, centered on mid-size cities within Italy.

Let's quickly look at how the institutions have responded in the last few years in their attempt to find an adequate way of managing these dynamics.

In particular, as far as mid-size cities are concerned, national legislation had already foreseen the possibility of creating so-called "metropolitan cities". This happened back in 1990. The objective was to unify governance of the city and of the towns and villages making up its hinterland under a single administrative body. The specific metropolitan cities were identified by central government and by those special Regions which were autonomous

In the recent reform of the Italian Constitution of 2001, the Metropolitan City was introduced as a level of governance alongside the State, the Regions, the Provinces and the local authorities.

Very well, do you know how many Metropolitan Cities have been established since 1990, that is, in the past 19 years?

None.

Only in a few cases (Bologna, Genoa, Venice and Florence) have the first steps been taken: a definition of the area, that is to say, of the new metropolitan boundaries. However, in the last 19 years a further 15 new local government bodies have been created in Italy. There were 95 Provinces in 1990 but today there are 110. Fifteen new Provinces have been created.

However, we have not managed in practice to reach any new institutional solution for mid-size cities.

One reason is due to the hostility of the Regions, which do not favour the creation of institutions such as Metropolitan Cities that might become competitors, above all as regards planning and development within their area.

Moreover, there has also been effective resistance from local authorities within the hinterland of the cities involved.

We have seen how development of the Italian urban scene is characterized by a marked multi-centralism and by strong differences between areas.

However, our institutional system is still based on administrative uniformity. At the moment all Italian local authorities, from Rome to the smallest village authority, have a similar institutional and administrative setup and a similar system of public funding.

Urban multi-centralism is a national characteristic. But that does not mean that size is not a factor for every centre and that all are equal.

While public institutions adapt to the ongoing social and economic processes, they also influence them.

So, although our large cities are smaller than in other European countries, is this not a consequence of the institutional set up? Is this not also a consequence of problems in providing services at a metropolitan level?

And is this not, in turn, a consequence of the lack of power in Rome, Naples and Milan, and a consequence of the small size of the area in which local institutions are allowed to operate?

We have seen how even mid size cities do not manage to play a dominant role at Regional level, to decide larger issues beyond their walls and to build Region-wide area networks.

But is this weakness not also the result of the failure to create Metropolitan Cities in 1990? Multi-centralism is part of Italy's wealth, but the institutions need to adapt to differences between the various urban situations and to the substantial differences that exist between the various areas.

Conclusion

Good news! At the moment the Italian parliament is working, even if very belatedly, on the application of the new constitutional reforms introduced in 2001.

The issue of the Metropolitan city has come to the surface again and has a central role in this process.

It is important for Italy to introduce this innovation, to do so soon, and to do it well.

We need to differentiate between the functions of the Metropolitan City and to give these institutions greater powers. We need to allow them greater fiscal autonomy with the possibility of raising taxes themselves in order to carry out activities in a much wider area. These elements are contained in the legal proposals currently under discussion in Parliament. They will provide useful opportunities for mid-size cities.

But it is also necessary to adopt flexible measures. We have seen how mid-size cities differ amongst themselves. There is no one good solution for all. Some have a dominant role in their Region, others are at the centre of a network of Provincial "Capitals".

The success of this process depends on the ability to find the right solution for every situation. These solutions will have to be found in the new Statutes that the Metropolitan Cities have to adopt, but also through the relationships that they are able to build with the Regions and the other local authorities.