# ARTICLES

## *Urbanization and industrialization in Italy (1861-1921)*

Luigi De Rosa
Faculty of Transport Economics and International Trade, Naples

1. Paul Bairoch has pointed out that in XVIIIth century Britain, the country in which the modern process of industrialization began, the rate of urbanization was lower than in any other European state. Amongst the late-comer industrializers, Italy was the one with the highest levels of urbanization and Bairoch has argued that in Italy and in Holland in the XVIIIth and early XIXth century "levels of urbanization no longer corresponded to the original economic function of urbanization". In this respect, Bairoch argues, the character of the Italian and Dutch cities were closer to those of the Third World in the last twenty or thirty years than to the modern industrial city.

Where levels of urbanization were high they had negative consequences on economic growth, Bairoch claims, because the high demand for consumption and building materials which resulted: i) reduced opportunities for productive investment, especially in new sectors; ii) and produced urban unemployment which contributed to the pathological growth of the tertiary sector.[1]

[1] P. BAIROCH, *Urbanisation and economic development in the western world: some provisional conclusions of an empirical study*, in M. SCHMAL (*ed.*), "Patterns of European Urbanisation since 1500", London, Croom Helm, 1981, pp. 64-65.

Bairoch's conclusions are in part true and in part false. They are correct, for example, when applied to the cities of Southern Italy, but less accurate in the context of Northern Italy. Naples, for example, with a population of 437,000 was not only the largest city in Italy but also one of the largest in Europe after London, Paris and Berlin. The description also holds for Palermo which with 202,000 inhabitants was the second largest city in Italy, but not for Rome, Venice or Milan with 153,000, 140,000 and 135,000 inhabitants respectively.

These five cities were the only ones in Italy with more than 100,000 inhabitants at the start of the XIXth century. Even in Great Britain in the same period there were not as many cities of this size. Mortara noted that in "1800 Italy still held the first place amongst the civilized nations in terms of the number and importance of its cities".[2] Yet none of these could be described as industrial. Naples and Palermo, the capitals of what was then the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies certainly were not, nor was Rome, the capital of the Papal States, the centre of the Catholic world and the meeting place of pilgrims from all over Christendom. Nor was Venice, which had lost its independence at the end of the XVIIIth century and like Milan became part ot the Cisalpine Republic, then of the Napoleonic Kingdom of Italy and finally of the Austrian state of Lombardy-Venetia.

In each of these cities there was a range of artisan trades and domestic manufactures. The capital and former capital cities were centres of administration, services and trade, and here it was possible to find virtually everything that was needed, either made locally or else imported. Yet mechanized production and factory production was as yet unknown. But the crowds of unemployed and under-employed people that existed in Naples and Palermo, and which persuaded Bairoch to compare the Italian cities to those of the Third World, were not to be found in Milan and Venice.

[2] G. MORTARA, *Le popolazioni delle grandi città italiane* al principio del secolo ventesimo, Torino, UTET, 1908, p. 508.

2. Sixty years later when Italy was unified another five cities exceeded 100,000 inhabitants and Bairoch's conclusions require further modification. While still applicable to Naples and Palermo they no longer make sense of the changes taking place in Central and Northern Italy where considerable urban demographic expansion was occurring.

Leaving aside Messina, which experienced one of the fastest rates of demographic growth in Italy (124%) and more than doubled its population, urban demographic expansion was concentrated mainly in the Centre and North: Turin (163%), Genoa (89%), Milan (79%), Florence (77%).[3] Milan had grown to 242,000 inhabitants, Turin to 205,000, Genoa to 151,000, Florence to 143,000, Bologna to 109,000.[4] Since Palermo's population had fallen slightly whereas that of Naples had remained static, it would appear that even before Unification there was a clear economic dualism in Italy. The South was becoming more backward while the North and Centre were beginning to experience more rapid growth. The case of Messina does not invalidate this model since Messina's expansion came after a period of prolonged economic decay which was reversed after 1848 as a result of the concession of free port status which enabled the city to take advantage of its strategic commercial position at the centre of the Mediterranean.[5]

The importance of the changes that were taking place in these years in Genoa, Turin and Milan have been recognised by historians. As a result these cities became less like those of the

[3] My own calculations from the data given in G. MORTARA, *op. cit.*, p. 508.

[4] *Ivi.*

[5] Messina functioned as a transit point for shipping of all nationalities. It was a loading point for the agricultural produce which the industrial nations sought in Sicily and southern Calabria and it was also a precious supply point for the rapidly growing number of steam-ships that needed water, coal and foodstuffs. This was the reason for its commercial expansion, which enabled it to overcome the terrible mortality that followed the cholera epidemic of 1854 and continue its expansion. Cfr. R. BATTAGLIA, *Porto e Commercio a Messina 1840-1880*, Reggio Calabria, Editori Meridionali Riuniti, 1977, p. 13 ff.

South and more similar to the great metropolises of Britain and France. An important role in these transformations was played by another of the major factors in economic growth in this period: railway building. At the time of Unification the South had only two lines (Naples-Salerno and Naples-Capua), whereas the entire Po Valley — from Turin and Genoa to Milan, Bologna and Venice — was already linked by rail. Since Venice remained under Austrian domination until 1866 it was unable to draw advantage from this advanced infrastructure, but it was the railways that had enabled Genoa to establish itself as the principal commercial port not only for Liguria and Piedmont but for Lombardy as well. This expansion was reinforced by the development in the region around Genoa of major engineering and ship-building industries that employed a rapidly growing workforce.

3. The expansion of Milan, Turin and Bologna has to be set first of all in the context of the changes that were taking place in the agricultural economy. A number of recent studies have confirmed the progress that had been achieved after 1800, beginning in Piedmont in the decade prior to Unification and then spreading to Lombardy, Emilia Romagna and finally the Veneto. The first developments took the form of improved road systems and the building of new canals, but these soon encouraged agricultural development. Improvements in methods of cultivation and the widespread adoption of stall-based livestock rearing, which was possible thanks to the abundance of forage crops produced on artificial meadows, led to higher returns from agriculture. This meant higher levels of consumption, but it also meant more investment capital and in particular reinvestment in agriculture.

The construction of the railways did the rest, and as the area in which products could be traded grew wider so did profit levels. But this was not all. As a number of historians have noted, the railways also helped draw the Lombard engineering industries out of the depressed situation they had been in and

created new demand for track, rolling stock, mechanical parts, boilers and so forth. In the twenty years prior to Unification a mass of new engineering and metal-working shops sprang up around Brescia and Milan.

As well as the railways, the textile industry also played an important part in the expansion of the engineering industry. The gradual adoption of mechanized spinning mules and looms created work for engineering shops first for repairing the machinery and then either reproducing imported machines or adapting them to local conditions.

As in Britain in the XVIIIth century it was the cotton industry that gave the engineering and metal shops their most important stimulus. Althouth 'putting-out' continued in many branches of the industry, mechanized and factory-based spinning was spreading quickly. Water-powered spinning mills accounted for over 50% of the output of cotton yarn. Although there were a few mechanized looms, these were still an exception.

The wool and silk industries had also begun to adopt mechanized spinning and weaving, but textile production tended to be based not on the lower Piedmontese, Lombard and Venetian plain but in areas where agriculture was poorer, where as a result labour was more plentiful and the rivers were less likely to flood. The pre-Alpine valleys were the region where these conditions were best combined. The waters of the rivers Dora Riparia in Piedmont, of the Olona, the Lambro and the Brembo in Lombardy, of the Leogra, the Sile and the Noncello in the Veneto drove dozens of water-wheels that powered a variety of different textile works.[6] In Piedmont and Lombardy the use of mechanized spinning and weaving was widespread, although in

[6] The industry was located in Lombardy in the Upper Milan area, especially in the district of Busto Arsizio, Legnano, Castellanza, Olgiate, Solbiate Olona; in the region around Como; in the hill country around Varese; in the Bergamo and Brescia regions. In Piedmont the engineering industry was concentrated mainly in and around Turin, Chieri, Pont Canavese, and Cuogne. See B. Caizzi, *Storia dell'Industria Italiana*, Turin, UTET, 1965, pp. 210 ff.

the Veneto cotton spinning was still carried out along traditional lines although there was one mechanized mill at Pordenone and another smaller one in the same region.

The principal textile industry in Lombardy was cotton, but woollen production had made great steps forward in Piedmont and in the Veneto. Biella, on the Trona river in Piedmont, was the most important woollen textile centre in Italy. The industry made use of machines imported from Britain and France, and spinning and carding was done mainly in centralized mills. In terms of centralization of production and levels of technological innovation, Borgosesia on the Sesia river came second to Biella.

The progress of the Venetian woollen industry was most evident at Schio on the Leogra river. Here there were water-powered looms as well as mechanized spinning and French Jacquard looms were used to work imported wool. Follina on the river Soligo was another major Venetian woollen centre.

4. Silk production also flourished in the Po Valley, although it did not undergo the same technical advances as cotton and woollen production. Silk worms were reared throughout Italy, but especially in the North. The principal manufacturing operation was reeling since most Italian silk was exported unworked. It was only in the region around Bergamo and Como that more mechanised forms of silk spinning and throwing had been adopted, and this was carried out in workshops that were sited not in the countryside but in city suburbs, giving the industry an urban and capitalist character. Silk weaving was also prevalently urban, and had made progess in Turin, Genoa, Milan and Como. There were also a number of other industries that had begun to make progress in the Po Valley region. These included pottery, paper and suger-beet refining, and provided work for a considerable workforce.

The expansion of Florence requires a different explanation, but this is not difficult since of the pre-Unification states Tuscany had adopted the lowest customs tarriffs and had as a result

experienced rapid agricultural and industrial development after 1815. Florence was also linked by railway with virtually all the other cities in the region, which encouraged the development of a wide range of industries. Iron ores from the island of Elba were either exported or worked in foundries along the coast, especially at Follonica and Pietrasanta, while there was also a naval dockyard at Livorno. At Prato, on the Bisenzio river, wool was produced with mechanical spindles and looms, while cloths made from wool and cotton, wool and linen and wool and hemp were also produced. There were also numerous tanneries in Tuscany, and leather was then worked mainly in and around Florence. There were also glass, pottery and porcelain, paper, straw and felt hat making factories in the city.[7]

5. There were also a number of factories in the South. Cotton mills using water and steam powered machinery had been established by Swiss entrepreneurs along the Torano, Sarno and Irno rivers at Piedimonte d'Alife, Scafati and Fratte. But unlike the Tuscan and northern industries, these enterprises were shielded by high protective duties and relied exclusively on local markets. But since production was dispersed it was not accompanied by any significant concentration of population. The recent study by De Matteo has demonstrated, for example, the weak stimulus that the woollen industry provided for urbanization despite its size.[9]

The engineering industry in and around Naples showed greater evidence of technological development. This had been created in part by foreign entrepreneurs, particulary English, and in part by state intervention, but it too relied on a very slen-

[7] C. Barbagallo, *Le origini della grande industria contemporanea (1750-1850)*, Perugia-Venezia, La Nuova Italia editrice, 1930, vol. II, p. 292 sgg.

[8] G. Wenner, *L'industria tessile salernitana dal 1824 al 1918*, Salerno, Camera di Commercio, 1953.

[9] L. De Matteo, *Governo, credito e industria laniera nel Mezzogiorno* da Murat alla crisi post-unitaria, Napoli, Istituto Italiano per gli Studi Filosofici, 1984.

der market which it controlled only because of the high tariff protection that the industry enjoyed.[10] The engineering workers were only a tiny section of the inhabitants of Naples amongst whom — as we have said — unemployment and underemployment was extremely high.

6. At the time of Unification, therefore, Italy's industrial geography had already been sketched out. The most advanced sectors of industrial production were located: a) in the South, between Naples and Salerno; b) in Central Italy, along the Tuscan coast, at Livorno, Prato and Florence; c) in Northern Italy in the so-called triangle formed by Milan, Turin and Genoa but with important outposts in the Veneto. But it was in Northern Italy that industrial development was the most dynamic and its was here that the most impressive advances were made.[11]

In the years that followed these tendencies became more or less pronounced. By the end of the XIXth century the industrial triangle and especially its pre-Alpine region was still the most important industrial region in Italy. As has been shown in a recent study,[12] the pre-Alpine region represented some 30% of the surface area of the industrial region, and contained 68% of the industrial work-force. The highest concentration of textile production occurred in the region between the Ticino and Oglio rivers on the northern Lombard plain. The industries were distributed along three axes running towards the main valleys and pre-Alpine lakes: 1) Legnano, Busto Arsizio, Gallarate, Varese; 2) Monza, Desio, Seregno, Meda and the Brianza; 3) Cassano

[10] L. De Rosa, *Iniziativa e capitale straniero nell'industria metalmeccanica del Mezzogiorno*, Napoli, Giannini, 1968.

[11] R. Benini *La demografia italiana nell'ultimo cinquantennio*, in "Cinquant'anni di storia italiana, 1860-1910", Milano, Hoepli, 1911, vol. I, p. 35) who also shows that many of the major factores that were operating in 1911 had originated before Unification.

[12] G. Dematteis, G. Lusso e G. Di Meglio, *La distribuzione territoriale dell'industria nell'Italia nord-occidentale, 1887-1927*, in "Storia Urbana", n. 8. maggio-agosto 1979, pp. 117 e sgg.

and the Brembo valley. These main arteries were supported by a series of lesser industrial agglomerations, which included: 1) the Brescia region and the Val Trompia; 2) the Cusio and Verbano districts to the north of Novara; 3) the Biella district; 4) Turin with its satellite textile industries in the Pellice, Chisona, Dora Riparia, Stura and Orco valleys.

There were also industries in the other parts of the triangle. These included a scattering of iron-works in the Aosta and Ossola valleys and a small industrial complex in the Val Camonica. But even in the area bounded by the Cuneo plateau, Turin, the southern Piedmontese hills and the lower Po Valley between Vercelli and Mantua, where agriculture was the principal activity, industrial workers amounted to 18% of the active population. There were important industries in many of the more important provincial towns, such as the silk-works at Racconigi which in 1880 employed about a thousand workers or the cement works at Casale Monferrato which alone produced enough to meet the demand of the whole of Piedmont. Liguria was also relatively industrialized, and although it constituted only 9% of the surface area of the triangle its engineering and textile industries employed 13% of the total number of industrial workers. But half of these worked in Genoa while La Spezia was a second major industrial centre.

Of the industries that were established in the triangle and which had achieved full mechanization, textiles remained far and away the most important and employed 53.6% of the total industrial labour force. They were followed by agricultural industries, which employed 17.4% of industrial labour, the engineering industries which were expanding into a variety of new subsectors as a result of international technological development, which employed 13.5% of industrial workers. After these came the building industry with 6.9%; the chemical industries with 3.94%; mining with 2% and so forth.

As the authors of the study we have been citing show, the primacy of the pre-Alpine region within the industrial triangle

became even stronger in the years that followed so that by 1911 it contained 71% of the total number of industrial workers in Italy — according to the census of 1927 that figure had then risen to 73%. They conclude that "the area covered by the upper plain to the north of Milan and stretching out towards Varese, Como, Brescia and Bergamo continued to become more intensively industrialized. As new lateral extensions were added the area began to assume the appearance of a continuous industrial zone running without interruption from Biella to Brescia". At the same time the valleys of southern Piedmont were also beginning "to take on the form of a star whose centre lay in the provincial capital, Turin, and around which a crown of industrial townships had come into being". On the other hand, the importance of Liguria and Genoa within the triangle steadily declined in relation to the level of industrialization in the Po Valley in the years between 1901 and 1927.[13]

But the process of industrial growth was not continuous and was subject to various short-term recessions. The expansion of the industrial base, like the quantitative and qualitative growth of its structures, was influenced by both external and domestic factors as well as by the general state of the economy. But except during periods of major recession, the pace of industrial development in this region was lively. The most favourable periods for expansion were between 1867 and 1873, especially the three years 1871-3. Important progress was also made in the 1880s, but the period of most rapid expansion came between 1896 and 1914.[14]

[13] *Ivi* p. 128. On the problems that arose from the industrialization of the Piedmontese city see: V. CASTRONOVO "Lo sviluppo urbano in Torino nell'età del 'decollo industriale'" in *Storia Urbana* n. 2, 1977. For an attempt to construct a model of Italian industrilization see: G. ALIBERTI 'Sviluppo urbano e industrializzazione nell'Italia liberale: note su un modello di interdipendenza' in *Storia Contemporanea*, 1975, n. 2-3.

[14] L. DE ROSA, *La Rivoluzione Industriale in Italia*, Bari, Laterza, 1983, p. 5 ff.

7. But this expansion did not amount to an industrial revolution — in Italy this would only be completed much later, after the Second World War. Despite the progress that was made in industry, agriculture remained the principal sector of the economy at least down to the outbreak of the First World War. Although the numbers employed in agriculture fell, they were still over 50% of the active population.[15]

Agriculture experienced rationalization and mechanization, and vast numbers of Italians were forced to find other forms of employment. But they were not absorbed by the expansion of the industrial and tertiary sectors, even though the latter also experienced conspicuous growth.

A large part of the excess population was forced to leave Italy, and for this reason virtually every Italian region suffered a loss of population. Between 1871 and 1921 the total net emigration from Italy was over 5 million, of whom 3,137,000 were from the mainland South.[16] The majority of these emigrants went to

[15] In 1871 32.5% of the active population (56.1% of the total population) were agricultural workers; in 1921 the active population was 47.5% of the total population, and the agricultural workers had fallen to 26.5%. In other words, of Italy's 26,801,154 population in 1871, 8,700,387 were engaged in agriculture; of the 37,142,886 Italians in 1921, 9,085,598 were engaged in agriculture. The largest proportional decline in the number of agricultural workers occurred between 1901 and 1921. The total population rose from 32,475,253 (in 1901) to 37,142,886 (1921), those engaged in agriculture rose from 9,666,467 (1901) to 9,841,363 (1921): see SVIMEZ, *Un Secolo di Statistiche Italiane: Nord e Sud 1861-1961*, Rome, 1961, p. 50.

[16] The following Table illustrates this very clearly:

| | Increase from Migration (1000s +/-) 1871-1921 |
|---|---|
| North-West Italy | − 789 |
| North-East Italy | − 970 |
| Central Italy | − 188 |
| (Lazio | + 682) |
| Southern Italy | − 730 |
| Italy | −5084 |
| Centre-North | −1947 |
| South | −3137 |

Source: A. GOLINI, *Distribuzione della Popolazione, Migrazioni Interne e Urbanizzazione in Italia*, Rome, University, 1974, p. 2.

other European countries and to the Americas, but there were also many who emigrated to other parts of Italy.

The principal flow of migration was from the countryside and above all from the mountains, from the Alpine and Apennine villages. As early as 1871 Benini noted that some 600 smaller communities had seen their population fall since the 1861 census. By the census of 1881 the number of communities whose populations had declined since 1871 had risen to 2144, and in 1901 the number rose to 1935 with respect to the census of 1881. The census returns show clearly that the smaller communities — those with less than 500 inhabitants — fell by a half: in 1861 there were 1112; by 1901 they had fallen to 575; in 1921 there were only 540. The communities with populations of between 500 and 1000 also fell: in 1861 there were 1707; in 1901 only 1198, and even less in 1921. The same was true for those with between 1000 and 2000 inhabitants which fell from 2491 in 1861, to 2079 in 1901[17] before falling again in 1921. On the other hand, towns with over 2000 inhabitants began to increase, while those with over 20,000 increased fastest. The total population of the latter rose from 4,886,182 in 1861 to 9,146,317 in 1921 and their number rose from 89 in 1861 to 216 in 1921.

8 Urbanization was a phenomenon that touched on every aspect of Italy's economic history, yet it is not something that can be identified simply with industrialization. Carozzi and Mioni[18] have argued, for example, that although the rate of urban growth in Italy was high it was not comparable to what occurred in Britain. Although the populations of the two countries were roughly equal at the end of the XIXth century, the degree of urbanization was quite different. There were 28 cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants in Great Britain, and 11 in

[17] R. Benini, *op. cit.*, pp. 8-9.

[18] C. Carozzi - A. Mioni, *L'Italia in formazione*, Ricerche e saggi sullo sviluppo urbanistico del territorio nazionale, Bari, Dedalo editore, 1970, p. 35.

Italy. But Britain had a far greater number of middling cities, a contrast which became even more pronounced in the decades that followed.[19]

However, there is not much agreement amongst the various authorities on the distinctions between towns and rural settlements. Carozzi and Mioni argue that 20,000 is the minimum size for a town,[20] so that any community with fewer inhabitants in classified as a rural settlement. But this seems very arbitrary. The Italian census of 1861 described all settlements with more than 6,000 inhabitants as towns; and the 1871 census also took 6,000 as the minimum size for a town. The following censuses glossed over the problem, but the 1936 census introduced a new definition and defined those communities in which fewer than half the population were engaged in agriculture as towns.[21]

In other words, the rural or urban character of a community is determined in large part by the level of economic and industrial development which the country as a whole has reached. Of necessity, this varies according to the period we are studying. Chiassino is right to argue, therefore, that it makes no sense to work from a fixed numerical base to decide whether individual communities should be classified as rural or urban. He also shows that if we take 20,000 inhabitants as the basis for classifying "urban" centres, then we finish up with the paradoxical conclusion that Southern Italy was more urbanized than the North.[22]

Ornello Vitali has discussed the very different approaches that exist to these problems and has suggested a different solution to the problem of distinguishing between urban and rural

[19] *Ivi*, pp. 30 sgg.

[20] *Ivi*, p. 35.

[21] F. Spagnoli, *Popolazione urbana e rurale*, in "Sviluppo della popolazione italiana dal 1861 al 1961", *in Annali di Statistica*, serie VIII, vol. 17, Roma, 1965, pp. 180 e sgg.

[22] G. Chiassino, *L'urbanizzazione in Italia dal punto di vista demografico*, in "Rassegna economica" 1970, n. 5, p. 140 e sgg.

centres.[23] But certainly in Southern Italy urban growth was not a product of industrial development, and this was particularly true when it comes to the smaller and middling towns. Throughout the South and the islands (Sicily and Sardinia) the most typical type of town was the "peasant town", in other words dormitory towns from which thousands of peasants and farm hands took their leave every morning at dawn to work and returned only after sunset when they had finished their work in the fields.[24]

9 Emigration was an important aspect of the phenomenon of urban growth. Leaving aside Lazio and Rome, which was a bureaucratic and service city not an industrial centre, immigration flowed primarily towards the regions in which industrial expansion was strongest. The rate of in-migration in each region has been calculated for each of the census returns. The heaviest rates of in-migration were recorded in North-Western Italy, that is to say in the industrial triangle formed by Lombardy, Piedmont and Liguria where the pace of industrial growth was strongest. The 1901 census shows that 15.8 per 1000 inhabitants of this region were recent immigrants: in 1911 the figure had risen to 27.6 per 1000, in 1921 to 29.3. The influx from other regions was continuous and increasing.

No other Italian regions experienced similar immigration. The census returns show that in the North-East (Trentino-Alto Adige, Veneto, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Emilia-Romagna) the ratio between emigrants and immigrants was negative. Overall these regions were losing 22.4% of their population in 1901;

[23] O. VITALI, *L'evoluzione rurale-urbana in Italia*, Milano, Franco Angeli editore, 1983, pp. 11 e sgg.

[24] This conclusion was noted in the official report on the 1901 census, which divided Italy into three zones. The first zone consisted of those regions where the settlements with more than 500 inhabitants showed a very high degree of population concentration. This first zone included the South, Sardinia, Sicily and Lazio. The coefficient of concentration was 96% in Agrigento, 94.4% at Foggia and Palermo; 93.8% at Bari and so forth. On this see R. BENINI, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

24.1% in 1911; 11.2% in 1921.[25] In the case of Central Italy the immigrants were less numerous than in North-Western Italy and exceeded the number of emigrants, but this was entirely due to Rome. If we leave Lazio aside, the other regions of Central Italy (Tuscany, Umbria and the Marche) all showed net losses of population. One hardly needs add that in the South and islands the net losses of population through emigration were even greater in this period.[26].

In addition, the portion of Italy's total population resident in the North-West, the region of the industrial triangle, in 1871 was 26.4% with 24.8% in the South, a difference of 1.6%. Half a century later, in 1921, the difference had increased to 3.6%.[27] Over the same period Italy's total population had grown from 28.15 million to 37.9 million, but the percentage of the population resident in the industrial triangle had stayed at 26.4% while that of the south had fallen to 22.8% of the total.[28]

10. Demographic growth in the period between 1861 and 1921 was strongest in the largest cities and especially those whose suburbs were becoming industrialized. We should make an exception of Naples and Rome, the first because as the capital of the largest of the Italian states for six centuries it had always been a highly populated city, and Rome because once its attraction for immigrants was due to its position as capital of the new Italian state. The other cities that exceeded 300,000 inhabitants were (in chronological order): Milan (in 1881); Turin and Genoa (in 1901). In the years that followed Milan and Turin experienced even more dramatic growth. By 1921 Milan had 701,431 inhabitants, Turin 499,823. No other Italian cities experienced growth of this rapidity, and Milan and Turin were the two principal cities of the industrial triangle.

[25] A. GOLINI, *op. cit.*, p. 32.
[26] *Ibid.*
[27] *Ibid.*, p. 11.
[28] *Ibid.*

It was not only the principal cities that experienced rapid urbanization, however. Throughout the industrial triangle industries also sprang up in the smaller towns, but the growth of the population was particularly evident in towns with over 200,000 inhabitants. It has been suggested that 60% of the growth in the size of the urban population between 1861 and 1911 came from emigration from the countryside, although for the period 1911-21 the figure fell to 47%.[29] Within the triangle there were many cases of dramatic expansion. In Lombardy, Busto Arsizio more than doubled its population between 1861 and 1921, and the same occurred at Olgiate, Olona, Saronno, Tradate, Varese, Cantù, Como, Lecco, Desio, and Monza. Castellanza and Greco Milanese grew sixfold, as did Crescenzago, Paderno, Mugnano, Rho. Legnano and Sesto San Giovanni grew fourfold, while Musocco increased to ten times its original population. Bergamo grew from 41,000 to over 62,000, Brescia from 38,000 to 98,000; Pavia from 26,000 to 40,000; Vigevano from 17,000 to 30,000; Voghera from 12,000 to 25,000, Cremona from 32,000 to 58,000. Although to a lesser extent similar increases also occurred in Piedmont and Liguria.[30]

It was not only industrial centres that experienced rapid demographic growth, however. Because of lower costs, many workers preferred to live in towns close to the main industrial centres with the result that they too expanded. Many former agricultural workers also found their way to commercial cities, to ports and the main railway junctions.

11. In pace with the country's industrial development, living standards rose. The remittances that flooded back into Italy from emigrants overseas and the gradual improvement in Italy's

[29] CAROZZI-MIONI, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

[30] In Piedmont Biella grew from c. 10,000 in 1861 to c. 25,000 in 1921; Novara from 25,000 to 55,000; Borgosesia and Novi Ligure doubled in size. In Liguria the engineering and port town of Savona grew from 20,000 to 59,000; the dock town Vado Ligure grew from 1,400 to over 8,000; La Spezia from c. 12,000 to over 89,000.

balance of payments also contributed to this relative increase in prosperity. As a result a new and varied range of consumer goods flowed into the cities for sale and distribution. The organization and sale of these goods created new forms of employment. Whether the cities had been created by industrialization like those of North-Western Italy or performed bureaucratic functions like Rome or Naples or else provided services that rural centres were not able to support, urbanization in turn became the cause of further industrialization.

The influx of large numbers of workers was an important stimulant for the building industry. From 1875 the debate on the best way of building houses for the urban poor assumed growing importance and involved not only the leading architects, economists, sociologists, physicians and town planners of the day but also the whole structure of local government and local finances.[31] But the size of the influx from the countryside meant that it was rarely possible to adhere to the principles that were put forward in the course of these debates. Financial concerns invariably overruled aesthetic and humanitarian considerations, and during the 1870s and 1880s this gave way to unbridled speculation that ended inevitably in a massive crisis from which the building industry took many years to recover. But the pace of house building recovered rapidly in 1906-7, and in 1908 Mortara noted that on average 14,000 new rooms for habitation or other purposes were built every year, and in 1904 alone 600 new houses were built in Turin.

As well as houses there was a need for roads, schools, markets, churches, hospitals, public offices, recreational facilities and so forth. The rapidly expanding cities needed to build and pave new roads and to construct new water supplies. According to Mortara 78 million lire were spent in Milan alone between

[31] On the debate on the best techniques for building subsidized housing see: V. FONTANA, *Il Nuovo Paesaggio dell'Italia Giolittiana*, Bari, Laterza, 1981, p. 57 ff and the sources cited there.

1885 and 1906 on rebuilding and on providing sewers, with another 51 million on the reorganization of existing roads and the building of new ones, 7 millions on water supplies and so forth.[32]

Urbanization brought these needs into being and with them the industries for meeting these needs. The first company specializing in urban water conduits was formed in 1880.[33] but even before Unification there had been many foreign companies (mainly English and Belgian) that specialized in building aqueducts or providing gas lighting. As well as water supplies and sewers the towns also needed street lighting (first gas then electricity), while all these things stimulated the growth of other industries as well. The cement industry had expanded rapidly from early in the century, while the same occurred in industries specializing in the production of building materials, domestic furnaces, metal tubing, glassware, wooden furnishings, etc.

The daily movement of masses of workers into and out of the cities also created the need for faster and safer transport. This first became an important issue in the 1860s when it was decided after a lively series of debates in Parliament and the Press that the railways linking provincial centres to the major cities should be built of lighter material and with narrower gauges that were used for the main lines to reduce costs.[34]

These low cost "subsidiary railways", as they were called, completed the railway network and greatly increased the mobility of the population making it easier to obtain access to places where the demand for labour was greatest. The first lines to be

[32] G. MORTARA, *op. cit.*, p. 903. Sulla costruzione di case popolari a Milano, cf. L. PIZZETTI, *La questione delle abitazioni popolari a Milano 1859-1908* ed ancora: O. SELVAFOLTA, *La Società Umanitaria e le case popolari a Milano 1900-1910*. On government intervention to provide cheap housing, see: A. DA ROS, *Rassegna dei provvedimenti legislativi per l'edilizia popolare 1861-1949*. The three essay are all in "Storia Urbana", n. 11, aprile-giugno 1980, pp. 3-27, 29-65, e 165-194.

[33] *Società italiana per le condotte d'acqua* cf. L. DE ROSA, *Storia del Banco di Roma*, Roma, 1982, vol. I p. 27 et. seq.

[34] L. DE ROSA, *Iniziativa e capitale straniero* ecc., op. cit., p. 240 et. seq.

built were those that promised the largest returns, which it hardly needs to be said were those in the principal industrial regions.[35] It was not until after the turn of the century that subsidiary lines began to be built in the South as well.

As well as the need for better communications with other centres of population, the growth of the cities also created the need to improve transport facilities within the cities.[36] The first solution were the horse-drawn *Omnibuses,* then *tramways* on which horse-drawn vehicles travelled along fixed track. With the advent of electrical power came the electric tram. The adoption of each of these means of transport was closely related to the level of economic development that had been achieved. These forms of urban transport were in use in all the larger cities; in Palermo and Rome,[37] Naples and Milan by the early 1870s, and in Milan had begun as early as the 1840s, and in turn made their own contribution to the process of industrial development.

Unlike railway stock and carriages which were generally imported, since the Italian railways had been connected with the French and Swiss systems since the 1870s, urban trams had to be produced locally and imported products were very costly. A number of companies specializing in the construction of tram cars were established in Milan, and Naples and thereby added to the demand for industrial labour.

12. If urban expansion supported further industrial growth it also gave rise to a wide range of new commercial and financial

[35] Cf. e.g. A. Marcarini, *Nascita e sviluppo delle linee tramviarie extraurbane in Lombardia, 1876-1919,* in "Storia Urbana", n. 7, gennaio-aprile 1979, pp. 3-46; G. Bezzi, *La costruzione della rete tramviaria in provincia di Bologna, 1880-1900,* in "Storia Urbana" n. 17, ottobre-dicembre 1981, pp. 3-47.

[36] Cf., per esempio, V. Balzarotti Barbieri, *Nascita e sviluppo dei trasporti pubblici milanesi, 1860-1900;* G. Trevisini, *Il problema del traffico e dei trasporti nell'area urbana milanese, 1900-1948;* F. Tommasetti, *Trasporti pubblici nella città e nel territorio di Firenze, 1860-1915;* in "Storia Urbana", n. 7, gennaio-aprile 1979.

[37] Su Palermo e Roma, cf. L. De Rosa, *Storia del Banco di Roma,* vol. I. cit. p. 49 et seq. 73 et seq.

activities. Supplying the larger cities with food was a massive operation that involved complex marketing and distributive organizations, the investment of considerable capital and provided a wide range of jobs. All the larger cities had to build central wholesale markets to receive the agricultural products, the meat and fish that entered the city each day. Slaughter houses were also needed. The size of these buildings varied according to the size of the city, but they required different skills and equipment than for building private houses or public offices. The wholesale markets also created the need for a variety of warehousing facilities for storing drinks, oil, cheeses and other foodstuffs. The markets, abattoirs and warehouses also created demand for a variety of specialist equipment, as well as scales and carts, which brought new industries into being and contributed to the process of urban growth.

All the larger towns and cities also needed to build clinics and hospitals, which also drew in more inhabitants. As these facilities which were not available in the smaller towns came into being, so more people moved in to benefit from them.

At the time of Unification, illiteracy rates in Italy were very high and varied between 50% and 90%, depending on the region and sex. Since the government was eager to improve the situation, it had to create a new education system from primary schools to training colleges and universities. The expansion of the school system not only gave further stimulus to the building industry but also created new demands for stationery and the publishing industry and contributed to the concentration of the population in the larger cities.

By creating a broad mass of wage-earners and by reducing the cost of consumer goods, industrialization left increasing numbers of workers with greater purchasing power. One clear indication of this was the steady growth in the deposits held by local Saving and Post Office Banks, as well as in the ordinary banks whose numbers were rapidly increasing as a result of industrial development.

In 1893 the number of the Central Issue Banks was reduced from six to three — the Bank of Italy, the Bank of Naples and the Bank of Sicily. All three were situated in major cities (Rome, Naples and Palermo). But the most important development came with the expansion of four major short and medium term credit banks, three of which had their head offices in the industrial triangle and one at Rome. These were the leaders, but behind them came a mass of smaller banks most of which were located in smaller centres and collectively numbered several thousand.

Alongside the banks, insurance companies also began to expand rapidly. These covered all forms of insurance, but the growth in life assurance was another indicator of the progress in the economic and cultural life of the country. The profits made by the life assurance companies were so great, especially those of the foreign companies, that in 1911 they were nationalized. Both the banks and the insurance companies were sited primarily in the main towns and cities and if they owed their existence to the county's economic growth they were themselves additional factors in the process of industrial and urban expansion.

13. Another very important indication of the rising standard of living in Italy was the increased demand for recreation. The period from 1890 to 1914 that Gershenkron described as the golden age of Italian industrialization also saw the expansion of another type of industry: the entertainment industry. This included the theatre and especially the opera since this was the golden age of the melodrama with the late Verdi operas and the new works by Puccini, Mascagni, Cilea and Giordano. But light entertainment was also becoming popular, especially operetta and popular songs, and it was in these years that Neapolitan songs began to find a mass audience. In the same period the cinema made its first appearance, as did the first cinematographical studios. Some quite large companies were formed, the

most important being *Cines*, which sold films throughout the world.[38]

The entertainment industry was based mainly in the larger towns and cities, even though tours of lesser centres were part of the routine. It too contributed to the process of urban expansion and attracted large numbers of young people from rural areas.

The industries catering for cultural tastes also expanded. A new range of publishing houses with specialist interests and markets came into being. The greaer part (such as Treves, Mondadori, Salani, Sonzogno, etc) specialized in literature, but there were also technical publishers (Hoepli). It was in these years that daily newspapers expanded in numbers and circulation, in particular the *Corriere della Sera, La Stampa*, or *Il Mattino* and weekly or monthly reviews like *Lettura*, or *L'Illustrazione Italiana*.

Tourism was another rapidly expanding industry. The *Italian Touring Club* came into being in 1896 in the midst of Italy's industrial take-off.[39] First the train and the bicycle and later the car had also created a taste for travelling amongst the new middle classes — businessmen, trained engineers, bankers, skilled workers, company directors, administrators, and professional people. This appetite was increased by the great sporting competitions that were organized from the beginning of the century, like the *Tour de France* and *Giro d'Italia* cycle races, the Florio motor-racing shield and winter-sports. This was also evident in the growing demand for travel books by Italian and foreign authors, and was increased by the letters and correspondence that reached Italians from relatives who had emigrated to the Americas and other countries.

The taste for sport and travel was again mainly evident in the larger cities and towns. It was here, too, that the universities were

[38] A Bernardini, *Cinema muto Italiano*. Industria e organizzazione dello spettacolo, 1905-1909, Bari, Laterza, 1981.

situated and that new political and cultural movements like socialism, nationalism, positivism, idealism and futurism were most evident. But then cities had always been places where ideas originated, where problems were posed, defined and resolved.

As in the rest of Europe, Italy's industrial cities were also hot-houses of political debate and organization. Italy's leading industrial city, Milan, also took the lead in this sense. It was here that the protectionist movement began; here that the campaign for a programme of social welfare began with the founding of the *Umanitaria* association; it was here too that mass politics and trade unionism was born.

But Milan was no longer just the city itself — it was the whole Po Valley. Ideas that originated in Milan radiated out across the surrounding region, but at the same time other ideas were imported back into the city. Liberals, conservatives, catholics and socialists all came to Milan to try to create a nationwide audience for their causes and their programmes. For example: the Italian Socialist Party was founded in Milan; the largest Chamber of Labour in Italy was Milanese, as were the leading socialist journals and the principal anarchist and liberal publications. When Mussolini broke with the Socialist Party, he came to Milan to found his new newspaper *Il Popolo d'Italia* and it was there that he set up his new movement.

It was only later, on the eve of the First World War, that Turin became a major industrial city thanks to the expansion of the motor industry and of FIAT in particular, and it then also became a major political centre as journals like Gobetti's *Rivoluzione Liberale* and Gramsci's *Quarto Stato* that had a readership throughout Italy were launched there.

14. Industrial growth did not only produce this fervour of political debate, but in so far as it led to real improvements in the living standards of the workers it reduced the discontents of working people. It was this that lay behind the policies advocated by the *Critica Sociale* which led the journal's editor, Filippo

Turati, to collaborate (albeit covertly) with the leader of Italy's pre-war governments. It contributed therefore to the efforts made by Giolitti to strengthen and broaden Italian democracy, and once he had brought the Catholics back into the political system he also sought to include the less privileged classes, and especially those of the cities.

To conclude. During the years between 1861 and 1921 the economic and social fabric of Italy underwent profound changes owing to industrialization and the relations between town and countryside were transformed. Even though Italy had not yet become an industrial nation in the fullest sense of the term, it was nonetheless and despite being the youngest state in southern European the only one to establish the base for an industrial revolution which would become a reality only a few decades later.