

Italia di mezzo: The emerging marginality of intermediate territories between metropolises and inner areas*

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Abstract. The Italian debate concerning the relationship between cities and inner areas polarized around a few dichotomous – and somehow simplifying – positions. On the one hand exists the rhetoric addressing the “villages”, intended as remote places to re-inhabit, escaping from the pandemic. On the other hand is the narrative of the metropolis, envisioned as a place-fulcrum from which to start again – following the already-known patterns of growth and concentration – despite the fragilities made explicit by Covid. In order to overcome these juxtaposed approaches, our work wants to shed light on the importance of “intermediate territories” intended as priority places to rethink within a new geography of marginality. In Italy, such intermediate territories, named *Italia di mezzo*, occupy half of the national surface and host more than half of the population. Moreover, they embody extremely articulated geography: they include portions of twentieth-century urbanization (such as coastal settlements, industrial districts, various traits of “città diffusa”), medium-sized cities with different administrative and functional centrality levels, sectors of metropolitan belts and a substantial share of rural areas in plains and hills. Faced with the radical risks and uncertainties that characterize the contemporary condition, it is essential to take care of these territories not only because they urgently need investments aimed at solving forgotten critical issues (from the necessary reconversion of production chains to the impact of climate change). These territories can also play a strategic positive role in the face of crisis phenomena thanks to their characteristics of elasticity and plasticity. If we look at them from a relational point of view – and not only from a topological one – these intermediate territories can play the role of two-sided “intermediaries” and “hinges.” On the one hand, they can be prepared to provide assistance and support to the inner and less densely populated areas; on the other hand, by taking advantage of their infrastructural and social capital, they can offer decongesting opportunities for most polluted metropolitan areas and more accessible living and working conditions.

*The authors shared the contents and the general layout of the essay. However, the first (Introduction), third (Defining and mapping l’*Italia di mezzo*) and last (Conclusion) chapter must be attributed to the four authors together, the second (A multi-faceted debate) to Arturo Lanzani, the fourth (An introductory profile of *Italia di mezzo*) to Federico Zanfi, the fifth (*Italia di mezzo* and the geography of socio-economic and environmental fragility) to Francesco Curci and the sixth (A recent contraction) to Agim Kërçuku.

1 Introduction

In Italy the geography of marginal territories has changed cyclically. It continuously includes some areas and populations while cutting out others. It shrinks and expands constantly. Being marginal territories means being forgotten by public policies, excluded from plans and projects, overlooked by research and studies and ignored by public opinion and cultural institutions. But being marginal also has to do with the processes of territorial and social stigmatization, both exogenous and endogenous to the territory in question. It is possible to be a marginal territory if the socioeconomic and cultural development processes are always decided elsewhere. And one can feel forgotten, marginal or belonging to second-class regions while being at the centre of the public debate. Being marginal is a complex and unobvious condition that has substantial social, economic, political and spatial implications for societies and territories.

Since the second half of the twentieth century, a constant dichotomy has characterised the process of marginalization of the Italian territory. The margin was defined through a fracture and constantly alludes to an oppositional recognition. And at several moments, the different marginal territories were described almost exclusively within three large homogeneous images: the Mezzogiorno (Southern Italy), the peripheral and the inner areas. These images define three physical and conceptual spaces, unable to welcome and foresee anything else. Our work intends to shed light on the importance of “intermediate territories” and *Italia di mezzo* intended as priority places to rethink as a new geography of marginality.

At first, the North-South duality marked the marginality of the South (i.e., about one-third of the country) and fuelled a vital policy to reduce regional gaps. Subsequently, although the gap between Northern and Southern Italy persists and has worsened in recent years, the peripheral neighbourhoods within the metropolitan areas will be considered marginal compared to the centres, becoming a field of experimentation for new integrated urban policies. In recent years, a new series of studies and policies has given rise to the experience of the Strategia Nazionale per le Aree Interne (National Strategy for Inner Areas). This strategy identifies the geography of marginality in inland mountain areas and other areas at risk of depopulation. The geography of the Aree Interne (spatially extended but of limited demographic weight) is based on the criterion of the distance of these areas from the centres that provide essential services for a citizen: a hospital equipped with high-level first aid (DEA), high schools and a silver level railway station. Silver is one of the four station classification levels introduced by the RFI. In Italy, there are 594 silver stations. These are medium/small facilities, often unattended, equipped only with urban / suburban / metropolitan services ([Ministero delle Infrastrutture e Trasporti 2014](#)). As part of this strategy, a place-based policy was consequently developed to innovatively promote access to these essential services and introduce new economic initiatives capable of retaining and attracting the population.

However, there is a fuzzy part of the geography of marginalisation in Italy. This is a large portion of the Italian territory that does not belong to the suburbs of the metropolitan areas or even to the inner areas, that lies in the middle of these two polarities that we find both in the North and South of the country. *Italia di mezzo* (in-between Italy) is a substantial part of Italy; it comprises about half of the total area in which 55% of the Italian population lives. It is a part of Italy rarely subject to integrated policies and projects. Also, it is on the fringes of scientific research and political experimentation. This Italy needs an update to its representation and a substantial redefinition of territorial policies because of the ongoing processes of marginalisation and fragilization that could reach critical levels in the coming years, affecting the fate of the entire country system. This paper intends to help respond to the first of these urgencies through the conviction that this other Italy needs a new representation that considers its evolutionary dynamics and, above all, its possible differentiated futures. Such representation will have to focus on multiple aspects. It will have to recognise recurring social, cultural, economic, demographic and environmental elements and the internal spatial articulation of these territories. It will have to show how variety of life frameworks can host different populations and how it has given (even during the recent pandemic crisis) plasticity and

resilience to the country. It will have to interpret the complex geography of the dynamics of shrinkage and growth, investigating its numerous potentials and criticalities.

After presenting the hypothesis that moves our reflection on the introduction, in the first part of the article, some trajectories of study on the Italian specificity and the international context of the intermediate territories are reconstructed. It is a reconstruction that has guided us in the perimeter and mapping of that part of the territory called *Italia di mezzo*. And in the choice of indicators, in which we have caught a robust spy capable of offering some elements of reflection on the social, economic, cultural, and environmental relevance of *Italia di mezzo* within the Italian territory. In the second part of the paper, we illustrate the criteria that helped us define a new map of *Italia di mezzo*. The third, fourth and fifth parts describe an introductory profile, illustrate the socioeconomic, socio-demographic, real estate, and environmental conditions, and introduce recent shrinking processes. The last part summarizes the dynamics and the main challenges in the territories of *Italia di mezzo*.

2 A multi-faceted debate

Except for the production of Bruno Menegatti, contained in the results of the survey initiated in 1980 by the working group Rivalorizzazione della aree marginali (Menegatti 1986) of the Association of Italian Geographers (AGEI), *Italia di mezzo* has never been treated as a single subject, neither in terms of physical and socioeconomic features nor in terms of public policies. Several studies have, however, partially explored in-between Italy from five specific perspectives. It is a multi-faceted debate made up of many coexistences and overlaps that involve different contents, places, and types of settlement. It is a partial picture. The choices are linked to the need for research and to treat a comprehensive view with constantly accumulating literature.

The first group of studies focuses on the industrial and post-industrial territories in which small and medium enterprises and then the “pocket multinationals” were born and developed (Fua, Zacchia 1983, Garofoli 1991, Becattini et al. 2009, Calafati 2009, Lanzani et al. 2016, Bianchetti 2019, Tosi Tosi).

The second group of studies focuses on the spread of urbanised spaces beyond metropolitan fringes (different from urban sprawl) and their recent transformations and shrinking (Indovina 1990, 2009, Clementi et al. 1995, Munarin, Tosi 2001, Lanzani 2003, 2011, Bonomi, Abruzzese 2004, Fabian et al. 2012, De Rossi 2018, Curci et al. 2020). More specific studies can be subdivided according to three areas of focus: land-take dynamics, which strongly affect *Italia di mezzo* (Crcs 2017, Ispra 2020); unauthorised urbanisation processes, particularly in southern Italy (Zanfi 2013, Curci et al. 2017); and hybrid and fragile landscapes and recurrent building materials (Ingersoll 2004, Navarra 2017, Gioffre 2018, Ippolito 2019), expressly within peri-urban spaces (Magnaghi, Fanfani 2010, Mininni 2012) and coastal areas (Mininni 2010, Zanchini, Manigrasso 2017).

The third group concerns the polycentric systems of medium-sized cities and their role in the Italian spatial and economic structure (Camagni 1993, Dematteis, Bonaverò 1997, Trigilia 2014, Ifel 2019, Mascarucci 2020). More limited is the literature that focuses on the evolution of intensive agricultural areas, mainly located within *Italia di mezzo*, and their ecological and environmental impacts (Cannata 1989, Basile, Cecchi 2003, Marangon 2006, Bocchi 2018, Bevilacqua 2018).

A final and more recent group of studies focuses on the different forms of unease and discontent among communities in *Italia di mezzo* and the political implications thereof (Vallerani, Varotto 2006, Bonomi 2008, Viesti, Simili 2017, Di Matteo, Mariotti 2021, Carrosio 2020).

In the international context, the issue of in-between areas has been tackled from different perspectives, with significant differences concerning the way in-betweenness is defined and interpreted, also due to the objective differences existing between the national and regional contexts under study. In France, the *territoires intermédiaires* have long been the subject of reflections and conceptualizations that have emerged in the debate on rural territories and in that on the forms of intercommunality: *Ville émergente* (Dubois-taine, Chalas 1997), *Métapolis* (Ascher 1995), *Tiers espace* (Vanier 2000). The Swiss

case is also interesting in which, looking outside the urban agglomerations, it is customary to distinguish between *territoires intermédiaires* and *régions périphériques* (Ruegg, Deschenaux 2003). All attempts to define in-betweenness still discount a dependence on the city-countryside gradient.

However, in addition to the tradition of Franco-Swiss studies, we can mention the works conducted on German and Dutch territories. The Dutch term *Tussenland* (middle land) was used by the Dutch National Agency for the Environment to identify those territories in which different actors interact outside the logic of spatial planning that in previous decades had focused everything on containing urban expansion and the safeguarding of green spaces, without, however, paying attention to the network organization and the connective potential, and not only of the intermediate territories (Wandl 2020). With the German term *Zwischenstadt* (middle city), Sieverts, on the other hand, told of intermediate spaces that are the result of multiple rationalities and the action of different actors (Sieverts 2003), with interesting hybridizations, both from the physical-settlement point of view, and from an economic point of view, between local roots and globalization, but also between planned and unplanned spaces, between static and dynamism, between investments and disinvestments, between growth and contraction. Furthermore, in Germany, by articulating the concept of peripheralization, it is possible to put a crisis on the various spatial categorizations based on structural distances. These are somewhat vague categorizations that do not capture the local realities of the territories considered in-between or non-core regions (Leick, Lang 2018). These works aim to claim the need for more studies on areas that are still little explored today, but deserve to be qualified through more accurate knowledge and targeted projects (Wandl 2020).

For this reason, Sieverts' work has aroused particular interest in post-suburbanization studies, for scholars such as Keil, Young (2010) and Nüssli, Schmid (2016). It is a line of research that aims to build new interpretations of the suburban by recognizing in these spaces, in addition to some intrinsic qualities from an environmental point of view, also their own positive identity, which can be emancipated from the urban one, but also an attractive and innovator. According to these approaches, the suburban area is not only the field of rescaling traditional social and environmental questions, but is also the heart of a new political tension (Fedeli 2017). Also for this reason the theme of the in-between territories has crossed the work of scholars who are involved in investigating the correlations between the geography of (electoral) discontent and places – often too hastily defined as peripheral – in which the perception of geographical disparities is stronger (McCann 2020) and in which socioeconomic and environmental conditions are condensed such as to induce some scholars to define them as places that don't matter (Rodríguez-Pose 2018).

Another area in which it is possible to find suggestions on in-betweenness is that of critical urban studies. The theories on planetary urbanization push towards an interpretation of urbanization as a phenomenon without limits; dynamic, complex, in which forces that push towards concentration co-act (concentrated urbanization) and forces that push towards extension (extended urbanization) (Brenner, Katsikis 2020). These theories decree the definitive dissolution of the hiatus between urban and non-urban to stop understanding urbanization as city growth but rather as a process that is actively supported by non-city spaces (Soja 2000). According to these authors, urban agendas should therefore start from a re-articulation of the suburbs free from city-centric logic, starting by recognizing, for example, that today it is no longer possible to associate a suburb with a single city and vice versa.

This body of studies constitutes a fundamental basis of knowledge for the research we propose but simultaneously allows two limits to emerge. Italian research has mainly focused on specific themes and territories of Italian *di mezzo*, failing to build an overall portrait in which demographic, socioeconomic, and mobility aspects are integrated. Italian and international research has maintained a predominantly oppositional approach, in which the presence of a relational perspective that these territories have with metropolitan and inner areas is scarce. The proposed essay intends to advance scientific knowledge by bridging these two limits and understanding the in-between space as a relational space.

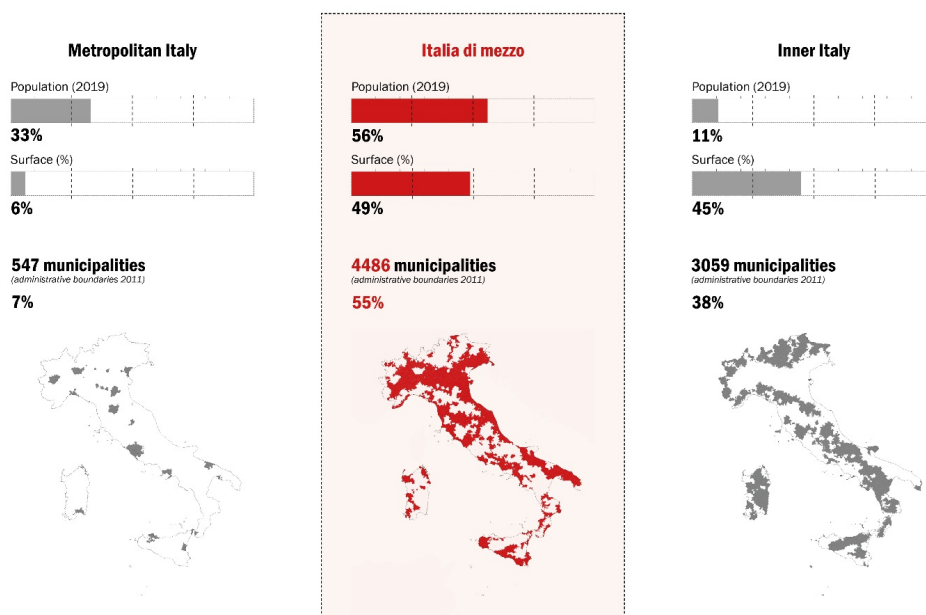


Figure 1: A significant portion of Italy

3 Defining and mapping *Italia di mezzo*

A first ‘negative’ delimitation of *Italia Mezzo* derives from the exclusion of the entirely mountainous ultra-peripheral, peripheral, and intermediate areas defined by the National Strategy for Inner Areas (SNAI). This deep or mountainous inland part of Italy represents 10% of the total population and 44% of the national area, as shown in Figure 1. Not even the de jure and de facto metropolitan cities, namely Milan, Rome, Naples, and Turin, are part of *Italia di mezzo*. Also excluded are the central municipalities of some functional metropolitan areas, as indicated by the OECD research (Brescia, Padua, Parma, Reggio Emilia, Modena, Prato, Pescara, and Taranto). Not even the de jure and non de facto metropolitan cities are part of it, as in the case of Messina and Reggio Calabria. Metropolitan Italy represents 33% of the population and 6% of the national surface, as shown in Figure 1. This is the first definition that, by subtraction, reveals a significant portion of the Italian territory, which has remained amid the dualism between inner areas and metropolitan cities.

A second ‘positive’ description can be made by portraying the Italian territory’s settlement structure and urban-rural relationship. A spatially articulated reality emerges. Within it, at least three major types of situations can be identified.

The first is defined di mezzo of medium-sized cities with different centrality levels. These are the ‘Cities’ of medium and small OECD-FUAs, the traditional medium-sized cities and some minor poles. Trieste, Foggia, Sassari, Ravenna, Ferrara, Rimini, Trento, Salerno, and Monza also belong to the second type of situation, which hosts 17% of the national population and covers 10% of the total national expanse, as shown in Figure 2.

The second type of situation is represented by *Italia di mezzo* of metropolitan fringes. The de facto but not de jure metropolitan areas are part of this first situation, as in the case of the extra-provincial areas of the Milanese and Neapolitan metropolises, the non-metropolitan territories of the provinces of Turin, Bologna and Bari and the entire functional areas of Reggio Calabria and Messina. About 12% of the national population lives in this territory, which represents 7% of the national surface area, as shown in Figure 2.

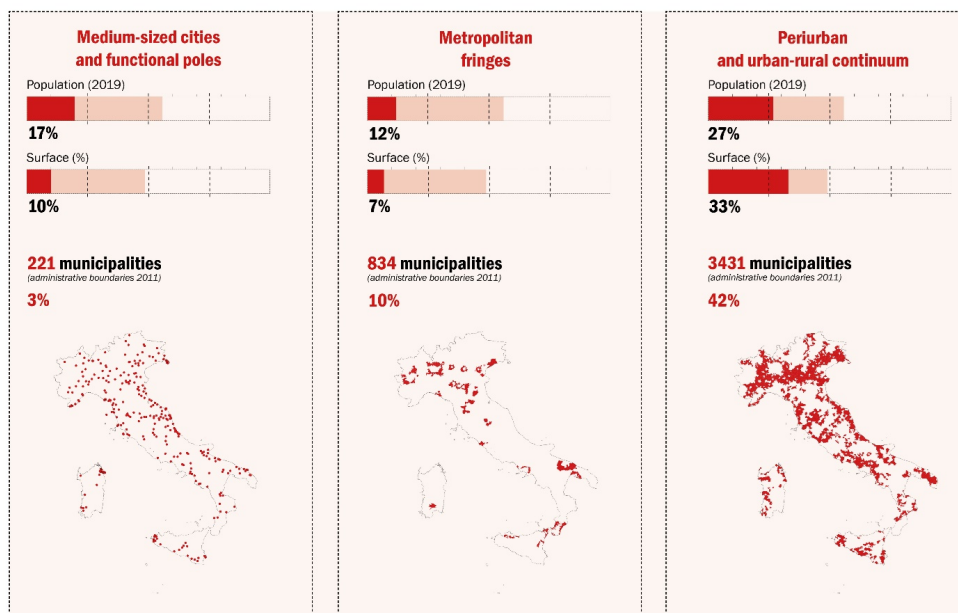


Figure 2: An articulated reality in which we can distinguish at least three settlement typologies

Finally, the third type of situation is composed of *Italia di mezzo* of the urban-rural continuum characterised by suburban belt municipalities and intermediate municipalities, with an average size of 5,000 inhabitants. *Italia di mezzo* of the suburbs and the rural-urban continuum of plains and hills are characterized by a widespread, linear, comb or reticular urbanisation. It represents 27% of the national population and covers 33% of the national surface area, as shown in Figure 2.

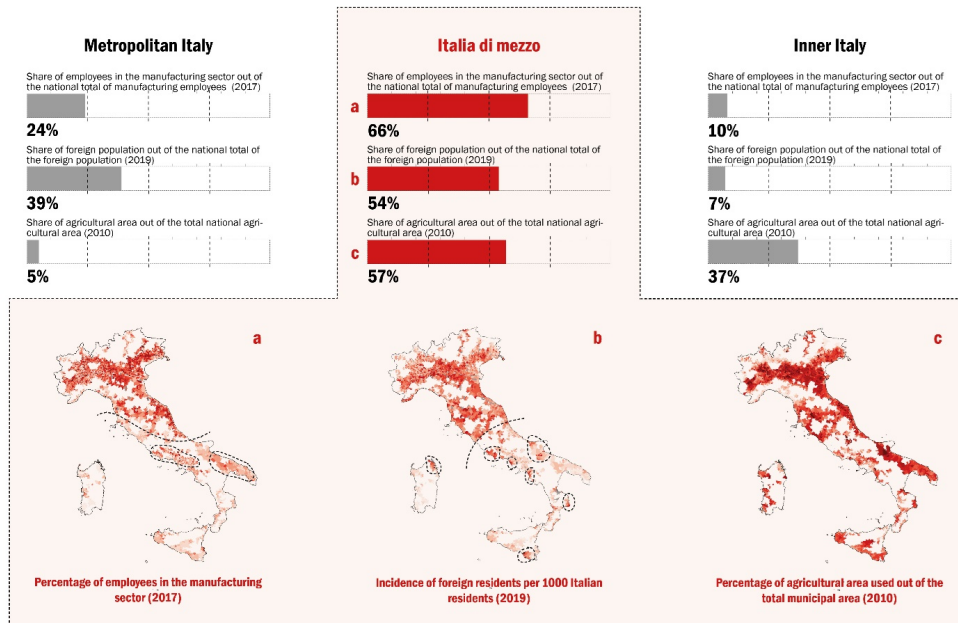
Adding up the three major situations, *Italia di mezzo* takes on a decisive role if we consider its weight on a national scale: 56% of the Italian population lives here and it comprises 50% of the entire national surface area.

4 An introductory profile of *Italia di mezzo*

To observe the specific characteristics and trends of *Italia di mezzo*, it is necessary to consider some specific data. With the help, above all, of the vast national and international literature observed and briefly described in the second part of this essay, we have selected 39 indicators capable of recounting the socioeconomic, socio-demographic, real estate, and environmental conditions of this part of Italy.

This investigation results from intensive research carried out to prepare a public intervention for the seminar Ricomporre i divari. Politiche e progetti territoriali contro le disuguaglianze held at Politecnico di Milano on February 2020¹. For this reason, we used the latest available data on that date, including those of the fifteenth general census of the Italian population and dwellings (October 2011) ISPRA, Copernicus, DiPE Urbanindex, INGV, AdE-MEF, ISTAT (A misura di comune), DemoISTAT and 8milaCensus ISTAT, as shown in Table A.1. While realizing the limits of this temporal distance, we still decided to use these data for their statistical relevance and homogeneity. To facilitate

¹Public presentation: *L' Italia di mezzo. tra metropoli e aree interne*, together with A. Lanzani, F. Curci e D. De Leo. On the occasion of the Prima sessione – Periferie in Italia: processi, geografie e risposta delle politiche of the public seminar, Ricomporre i divari. Politiche e progetti territoriali contro le disuguaglianze. Organized by A. Coppola, M. Del Fabbro, A. Lanzani, G. Pessina e F. Zanfi. DASTU, Politecnico di Milano

Figure 3: Common features of *Italia di mezzo*

the reading of the essay, we have inserted a summary table of the selected indicators at the end of the paper (Table A.1).

Strong manufacturing and agricultural profiles emerge if we look at the socioeconomic connotation of *Italia di mezzo*, as shown in Figure 3. In fact, this is where, in 2011, the most significant number of municipalities in the industrial district are located. About 90% of the municipalities included in the Italian industrial districts are part of *Italia di mezzo*. However, this district characterisation is more limited in the region of Piedmont, Liguria, and Friuli-Venezia Giulia, in the Tyrrhenian area of central Italy, in the south and in the islands. Furthermore, a more significant presence emerges in metropolitan fringes and urban-rural continuum if we look at the percentage of employees in the manufacturing sector in 2017. The manufacturing sector employees' rate is significantly reduced in medium-sized cities. If we examine the spatial distribution, we observe a stronger manufacturing connotation in the whole of the centre-north and along the Adriatic coast than in the rest of the country. However, looking at the number of large active companies per 1,000 employees in the municipality in 2017, we can see an inverted trend. The maximum values are reached in medium-sized cities and metropolitan Italy. A more pronounced presence of large companies emerges in the territories of *Italia di mezzo* along the Piedmont–Lombardy–Veneto foothills axis, along the Via Emilia and along the Adriatic route. On the other hand, the presence is limited along the course of the Po River, along the Tyrrhenian coast, in the south and on the islands. Alternatively, or sometimes in combination with manufacturing, there is also a solid agricultural connotation of *Italia di mezzo*, as shown in Figure 3. To confirm this, it can be noted that the percentage of the agricultural area used of the total municipal area in the urban-rural continuum is 56.6%. The geography on a municipal basis is complementary to manufacturing, with higher values in the lower Po Valley and some areas of Apulia and Sicily.

As for the socio-demographic connotation, a not-so-evident trend in the presence of immigrants must be pointed out. If we look at the incidence of foreign residents, in 2011, the highest values can be found in *Italia di mezzo* and not in metropolitan Italy, as one would imagine, as shown in Figure 3. Although the presence of immigrants increased in 2019, especially in metropolitan Italy, *Italia di mezzo* is still the area where

the greater incidence of foreigners can be observed. This data can be justified by more significant employment of the immigrant population in less skilled commercial, personal services, manufacturing, and agricultural jobs. The location pattern of foreign residents in Italy is higher in metropolitan Italy but lower in the metropolitan fringe. It returns to be higher in the urban-rural continuum and decreases in inland areas. A significant element concerns the change from 2011 to 2019 in the localisation of immigrants in large geographical areas. If the homogeneous distribution was evident in 2011, a more significant presence in the country's north could be revealed in 2019.

Let us consider the percentage of employees in the advanced services sectors, and social and health sectors in 2017. There is a more significant presence in metropolitan Italy and medium-sized cities compared to other parts of *Italia di mezzo* and inland areas. There is no notable regional variability, and this returns a homogeneous distribution within the national territory. A similar spatial distribution can also be found in the indicator of the average purchase and sale value of residential properties in 2019, affecting the cost of living for residents. This indicator has maximum values in metropolitan Italy and minimum values in inland areas. It ranks medium-low values in the three components of *Italia di mezzo*. The geographical representation shows a hold on the real estate values of *Italia di mezzo* affected by tourist phenomena, as in the case of the Liguria, Marche, Romagna, and Sardinian coasts and in the case of the territories around the great lakes in the north and in Tuscany. A similar trend is also found for the percentage of real-estate units reached by ultra-broadband 30Mb in 2016, with higher values in metropolitan Italy and medium-sized cities, followed at a great distance by the metropolitan fringes, inland areas, and urban-rural continuum. The latter has even lower values than inland areas. A further significant element is the better endowment in *Italia di mezzo* of the Tuscan territories and southern Italy compared with northern Italy. This may be influenced by the availability of structural funds for ultra-broadband investments in the south and by the presence of some critical tourist areas with high demand. Artificial land cover per capita 2018 reaches maximum values in inner areas due to urbanisation models and the value of second homes, and minimum values in metropolitan Italy. The land consumption per capita 2018 in *Italia di mezzo* assumes intermediate values. Geographically, a greater land consumption is found along the Po River, in Friuli-Venezia Giulia and Tuscany. The percentage of use of buildings 2011 is, on the other hand, minimal in inner areas and highest in metropolitan Italy. The picture of *Italia di mezzo* is not homogeneous. Minimum values similar to those of inland areas can be found in the geographical contexts of *Italia di mezzo* marked by tourism and migration, as in the case of the south, Sardinia, western Liguria, Valle d'Aosta, Abruzzo and also in the northern territories between Piedmont and Lombardy and in Friuli-Venezia Giulia. Let's also look at the data relating to the percentage of use of real estate owned by municipalities in 2016. It is possible to find a classic distinction between northern Italy and southern Italy, where the values are lower.

A final element that can help us understand the introductory profile of *Italia di mezzo* is its morphological-environmental character. In fact, *Italia di mezzo* is characterised by three settlement situations. The first situation concerns those portions of the territory with a Christallerian geography of medium-sized cities and small rural-urban centres connected through many urbanised strands. Two exemplary cases of this first situation of *Italia di mezzo* are the territories of the lower Po Valley and Apulia. However, a similar condition is also found in Tuscany, Lazio, and south-eastern Sicily. The second situation contains those complex linear urbanisations that incorporate many medium-sized centres on the coasts of peninsular Italy and Liguria. Furthermore, this second settlement situation can also be traced in some Apennine and Alpine valley bottoms. The third situation relates to widespread urbanisation outside the metropolitan areas. This is the most varied morphology of the urbanised area in terms of urbanisation density. In fact, the north of Milan metropolitan area, the widespread Lombard-Venetian Piedmont urbanisation and the sparser one of southern Piedmont, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, the Umbrian valley, and the Tiber around Perugia fall into this situation. The third situation also includes a wide variety of urbanised figures: filaments, comb, and reticular urbanised plates.

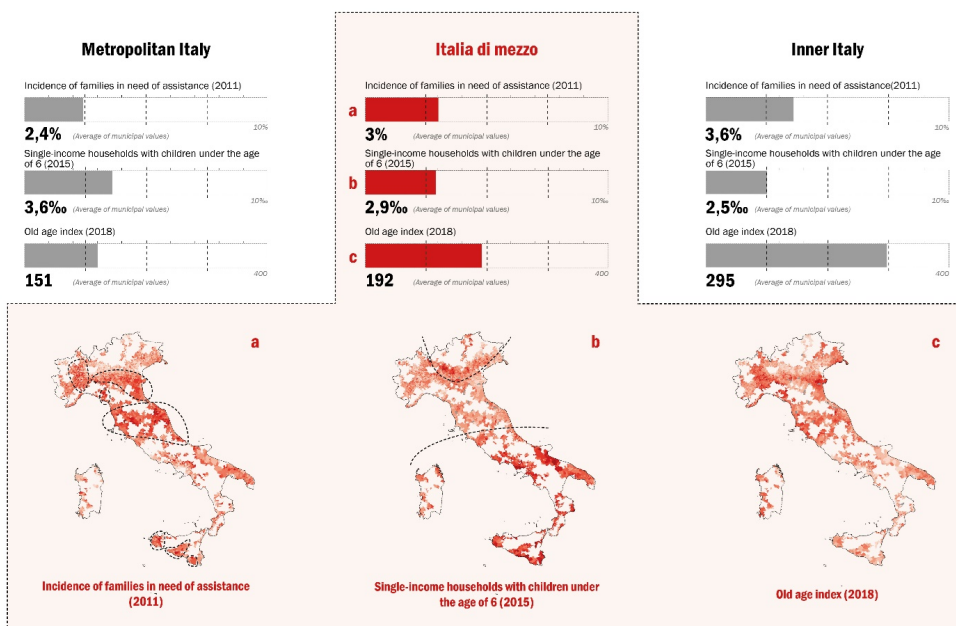


Figure 4: *Italia di mezzo* “in the middle” for some social hardships

5 *Italia di mezzo* and the geography of socioeconomic and environmental fragility

Overall, concerning the socio-demographic, socioeconomic, real estate, and environmental indicators that we have observed, *Italia di mezzo* has at least three main profiles. For some indicators, *Italia di mezzo* is in a lower fragile situation. For others it seems to be in the middle, and for some other indicators it is at greater fragility and discomfort than metropolitan Italy and inland areas.

A less problematic situation in *Italia di mezzo* than in the rest of the country seems to emerge if we look at the incidence of families with potential economic hardship in 2011. In this case, the highest values are found in metropolitan Italy, albeit with significant variance between the different municipalities, and the lowest in the urban-rural continuum, while in the average values, the medium-sized cities, inland areas, and metropolitan fringes are placed in decreasing order. Observation of the spatialized data confirms a clear distinction between the country’s north and south, with a very problematic profile in the south, where only Apulia and Sardinia have lower values. Another critical spatial pattern can also be highlighted in the ‘dust’ of municipalities about 50km from Milan, Turin, Rome, and Naples: a sign of expulsive dynamics and long-term commuting growing solidly after 2011. A further indicator that confirms the lesser problems faced by *Italia di mezzo* concerns the incidence of young people outside the labour market and training in 2011. In this case, the maximum values can be found mainly in metropolitan Italy and the territories of inland areas. The lowest values are recorded in the three components of *Italia di mezzo*. The geographic representation presents a greater criticality in the south, where, however, Apulia – excluding the Tavoliere – Sardinia and Abruzzo report fewer problematic profiles. A particularly critical situation is recorded between Biella and Alessandria, and in lower Brescia area.

Italia di mezzo finds itself in the middle of the geography of fragility and discomfort concerning the incidence of families in need of assistance in 2011, as shown in Figure 4. In this case, the maximum value is recorded in inland areas and the minimum in metropolitan Italy. There are very high values in medium-sized cities and urban-rural

continuum. At the same time, the values of metropolitan fringes approach those of the metropolitan areas. In this case, the regional geography inside *Italia di mezzo* does not propose a condition of maximum criticality in the south, as the population remains younger, and it is rarer for the elderly to live alone. Instead, the critical conditions occur along the Po riverbank, central Italy, and medium-sized cities in general. Similarly, the old-age index in 2018 is also relatively homogeneous in *Italia di mezzo*, halfway between the higher values of inland areas and the lowest of metropolitan Italy, as shown in Figure 4. It is possible to distinguish a higher old-age index in Piedmont, along the axis of the Po River, in Friuli-Venezia Giulia and central Italy, whereas the lower levels are found in the new Lombardy-Veneto-Emilia “industrial triangle” and in the south.

Another indicator that shows an inverted trend but maintains the median value of *Italia di mezzo* is the indicator of single-income households with children under the age of six. In this case, the highest values are found in metropolitan Italy rather than in inland areas, as shown in Figure 4. In *Italia di mezzo*, major criticalities are in the metropolitan fringes with high values recorded in the south and the lower Po Valley. Another significant indicator is the per capita gross income 2015, where the lowest values are found in deep inland areas, as shown in Figure 5. The urban-rural continuum also has similar values, whereas the values in the metropolitan fringes and medium-sized cities are higher. These are the values with the most significant variation between south and north, with the maximum in Emilia-Romagna, Trentino, and Lombardy and slightly lower in Veneto and Aosta Valley. A similar trend is also recorded in the differences in income and taxes within the municipalities, in the gaps in pre-tax income, as shown in Figure 5. The gaps are more remarkable for metropolitan Italy and minimal in inland areas with medium-sized cities that tend to resemble metropolitan Italy more. Conversely, the metropolitan fringes and the urban-rural continuum resemble inland areas more. In *Italia di mezzo*, the gaps are more significant in the south than in the centre-north and occur in the outer metropolitan fringes and the urban-rural continuum of metropolises such as Milan, Naples, Genoa, Modena, Reggio Emilia, and Parma. The gaps also arise in the widespread and rural Tuscan urbanisation. Finally, the incidence of adults with a diploma or degree also has an urban profile with higher values in metropolitan Italy and medium-sized cities. Observation of the data at the municipal level indicates higher values in the Emilia, Marche, Umbrian, and Tuscan territories of *Italia di mezzo*. In the south, the lowest values are reached in Calabria, Sicily and Sardinia.

The highest disadvantage and fragile profiles in *Italia di mezzo* emerge on the environmental and settlement-territorial terrain. If we examine the percentage of municipal area occupied by sites of national interest (SIN) in 2014, we can observe randomized geography with leopard spots. We find a more significant presence mainly in urban-rural continuum and medium-sized cities. Their presence in metropolitan fringes and metropolitan Italy is lower. It is almost absent in inland areas. The Number of industrial plants with relevant risk of accident (RIR) in 2015 also shows high values in *Italia di mezzo*, as shown in Figure 6. Also in this case, there is randomized geography where the sites of Brindisi, Porto Torres, Ravenna, Alessandra, Novara, Ferrara, Cremona, Gela, some municipalities between Frosinone and Latina and the province of Terni are reported. An analogy in the spatial distribution is also found in the percentage of the resident population at risk in areas with moderate hydraulic hazards in 2017, as shown in Figure 6. Also in this regard, we can see randomized geography with a maximum criticality in medium-sized cities. As for air pollution, Pollutants Particulate Matter 10 microns (PM10) and Matter 2.5 microns (PM2.5) are highest in metropolitan areas and metropolitan fringes, as shown in Figure 6. We can highlight the particularly critical situation in the Po Valley, especially in those of Lombardy and Veneto. In this case, the contribution of the Milanese metropolitan areas, in particular the province of Monza, is decisive. We also find high values in the medium-sized cities and the urban-rural continuum of Campania, south-eastern Sicily, and central Apulia. A clearer gradient emerges from metropolitan Italy to the inland areas if we consider the pollutant’s nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) values instead. In this case, the intensity of urbanisation and the presence of infrastructural beams are relevant to determining the value of the pollutants. Therefore, the exceptionally high values are found in the Piedmont-Veneto area, along the axis of

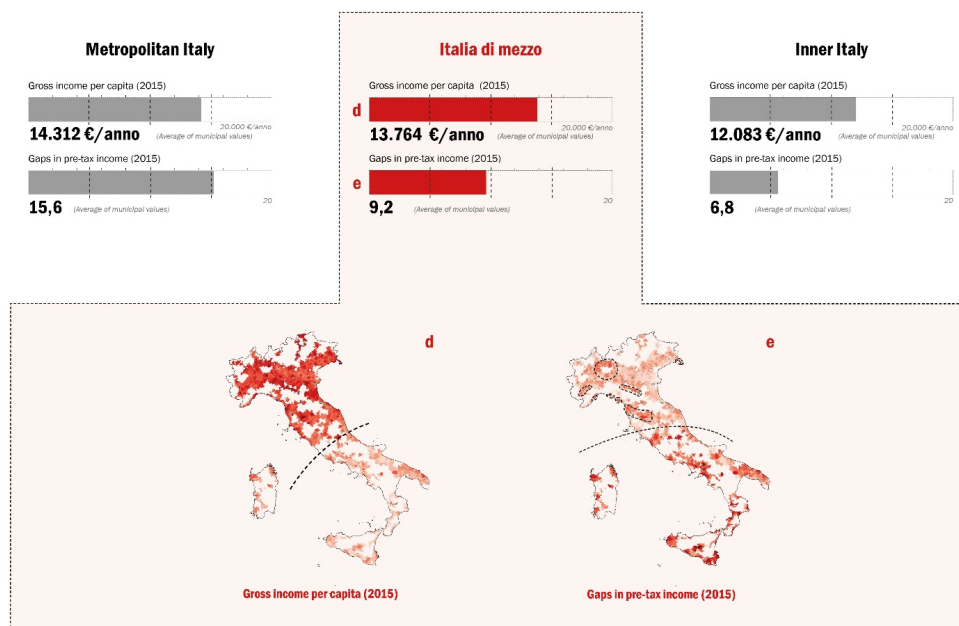


Figure 5: *Italia di mezzo* “in the middle” for some social hardships

the Via Emilia, in the highly urbanised area of Naples, in the highly urbanised oval between Pisa, Pistoia, Prato and Florence, in the urban archipelago around Rome and finally in the Emilia-Marche coastal strip of the Adriatic Sea. Ozone pollutants (O₃), on the other hand, have an overturned geography, with maximum values in inland areas and minimum values in metropolitan Italy.

6 A recent shrinking

The simplest yet most significant indicator to capture the demographic contraction remains the percentage change in resident population, which in this case was between 2011 and 2019. It effectively signals how substantial portions of *Italia di mezzo* are now flanking inland areas in the dynamics of demographic contraction. The inland areas of Italy are confirmed as territories of contraction par excellence. However, the high internal variance indicates some counter-history. Cartographic observation allows us to capture anomalous positive demographic trends in many Alpine municipalities of Trentino-Alto Adige and some municipalities of Lombardy and Piedmont. After years of growth, urban-rural continuum, especially in the suburban municipalities, has entered a contraction process. Medium-sized cities and metropolitan fringes grew but presented a significant variance. In particular, medium-sized cities in the south and the belt municipalities of Messina and Reggio Calabria are decreasing, while the de facto and non de jure municipalities in the northern metropolitan area have positive dynamics. Some medium-sized non-coastal cities in southern Italy are also in decline. If we look at the map of the three components of *Italia di mezzo* in northern Italy, four areas in contraction emerge. The first one can be observed in the Piedmont Biella-Asti axes, the second one in the Po River Delta, the third one in the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region and the fourth one in the municipalities of the Liguria coastal arc. In peninsular Italy, the population still grows in most coastal municipalities – albeit in contained forms. However, some contraction processes are beginning to be seen on the Tyrrhenian coast of Calabria, Sicily, and Sardinia. The demographic contraction is more limited on the Apulian and Abruzzese shores. Instead, it is the valleys perpendicular to the sea, the municipalities in the second line of the

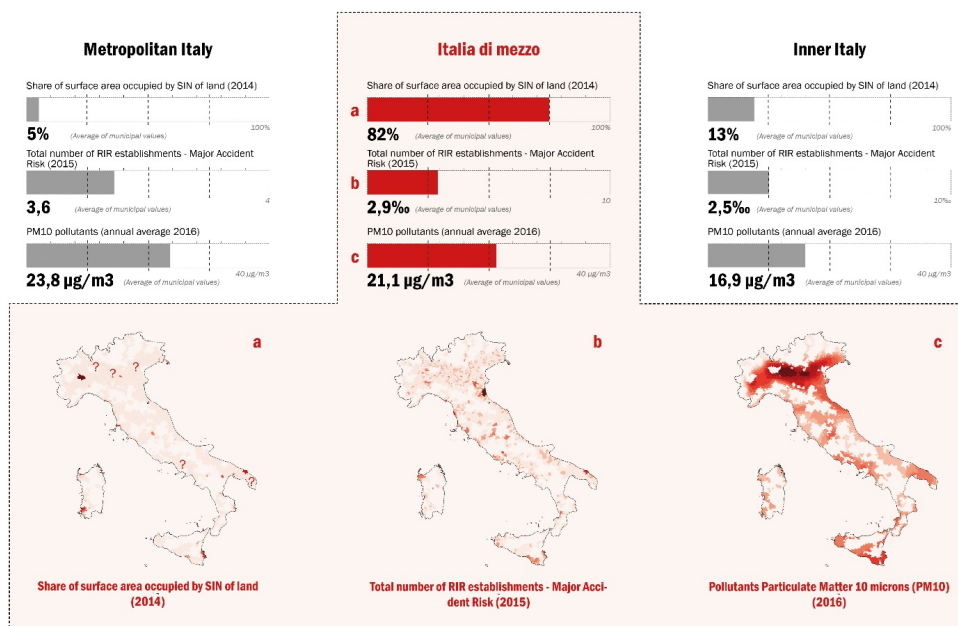


Figure 6: *Italia di mezzo* with strong environmental problems, sometimes higher than metropolitan Italy

coastal strip and the internal basins that record strong contraction dynamics, such as in the valleys and hills of Marche, across the Umbria region, in Irpinia, in the Daunia and some inland basins of southern Italy. The population of southern Italy is the only one to grow significantly but not homogeneously. The de jure and de facto metropolitan areas of Turin, Genoa and Venice are negative, and the metropolitan areas of Bari and Naples and the cities of Perugia and Taranto are stagnant.

On the other hand, if we look at the trends in the natural balance 2011–2018 per 100 initial residents, a negative value is recorded everywhere. It should be noted that the natural balance reaches maximum negative values in inland areas and minimum negative values in metropolitan Italy and metropolitan fringes. The migratory balance 2011–2018 per 100 initial residents that records long- and short-range movements of the Italian and foreign population is moderately positive everywhere, even in inland areas. Instead, the maximum values are reached in metropolitan Italy and medium-sized cities. The metropolitan fringes and urban-rural continuum achieve slightly lower values. The best trends are recorded along the entire Milan-Udine axis, in Trento, in the Parma-Bologna axis, in the Cuneo area, in Costa Smeralda, in the province of Latina, in the Neapolitan area and in the Foggia-Bari axis. The Change in the old-age index 2011–2019, on the other hand, shows us an ageing process of the population that is particularly relevant in inland areas but also significantly present in the urban-rural continuum and metropolitan fringes.

Of considerable interest is the evolutionary profile that emerges from the data on the percentage variation of employees. However, this confirms the trend towards territorial centralisation which is underway in Italy. Between 2012 and 2017, only metropolitan Italy and medium-sized cities saw an increase in employees, whereas other parts of Italy contracted. The maximum contraction is not recorded in inland areas, however, but in the urban-rural continuum. The geography of contraction always sees the Biella-Alessandra axis and the Po River axis emerge. Overall, the *Italia di mezzo* of Umbria and Calabria have a negative trend as well as the Marche-Abruzzo Adriatic axis and the Campagna region. Such dynamics are the product of a decline in manufacturing. In metropolitan

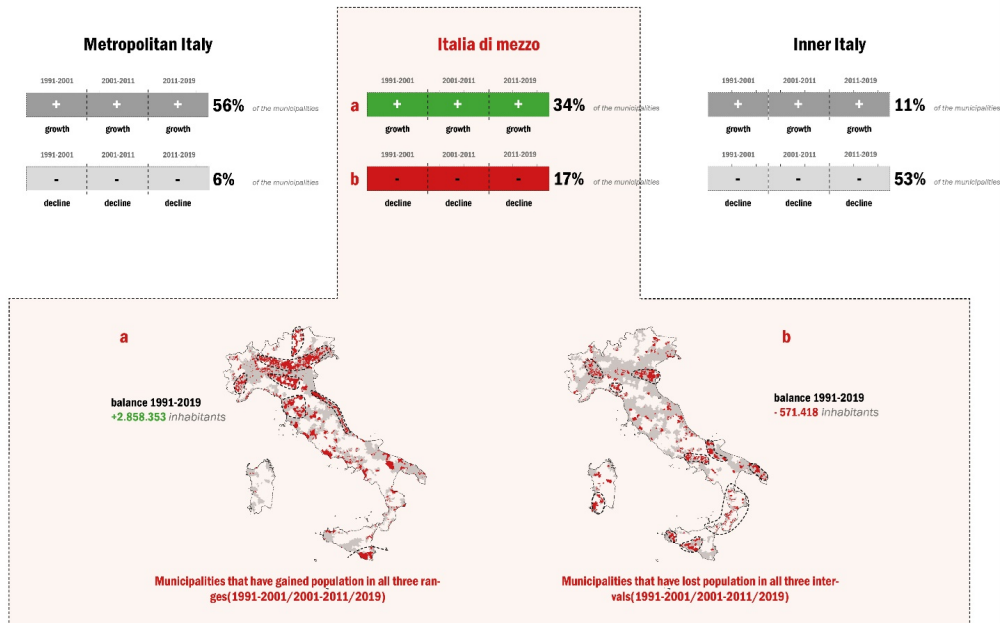


Figure 7: In many of its parts Italy is entering contraction processes after experiencing growth

Italy and some areas of *Italia di mezzo* with strong manufacturing traditions, such as in Piedmont and Friuli-Venezia Giulia, there are significant reductions of percentage change in the manufacturing sector 2012–2017. On the other hand, if we look at the percentage change in the advanced services sector for production and business 2012–2017, we can find favourable percentage variations, with maximum values in the urban-rural continuum. On the other hand, the change in percentage variation of employees in the social and health sectors 2012–2017 is positive everywhere, with high values in inland areas, following the metropolitan fringes and metropolitan Italy. But growth is more contained in medium-sized cities.

A further indicator that helps us describe a recent contracting condition is the percentage change in the average purchase and sale value of residential properties. Between 2012 and 2019, in the context of contraction in general sales prices, the slightest significant contraction is recorded in inland areas, in urban-rural continuum and in metropolitan fringes. This fact might seem to be in contrast with the demographic and employment dynamics; however, it can be explained by the still-present effects of the pre-2011 real-estate “bubble” in Italy in medium-sized cities and metropolitan Italy. There are extreme contractions in the Turin area, in Friuli-Venezia Giulia, in the Piacenza area, in the Caserta-Neapolitan area, in Tuscany, and throughout the Marche Adriatic coast south of Ancona. The latest indicator of the geography of the recent contraction concerns the per capita land take in the period 2012–2018. A high soil consumption is confirmed in inland areas and urban-rural continuum due to the robust construction production of second homes, the low-density building types, and the coexistence between abandoned and newly built properties following a land-use policy distorted by fiscal intent.

7 Conclusion

A fragment of Italy is blurred on the margins of scientific research, which is rarely the subject of integrated policies. National and EU policies have often represented an overly simplified description of Italy’s territorial and urban articulation, almost solely through

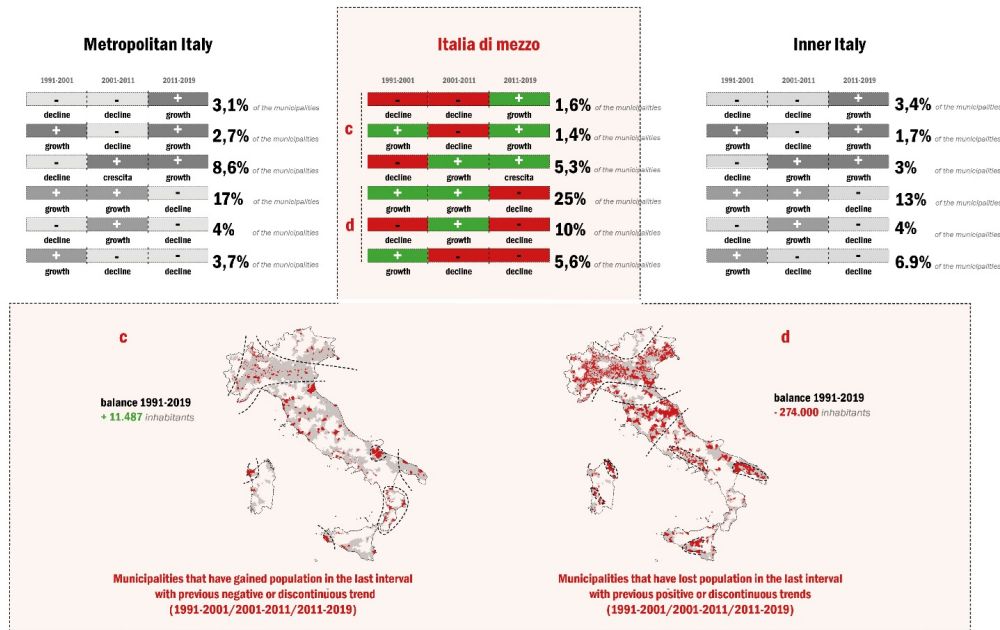


Figure 8: Contraction in non-homogeneous performances

the orientation towards inland and mountain areas on the one hand, sometimes reductively rethought as places suitable for a possible different domicile thanks to quality villages (see the recent announcement on villages by the Ministry of Culture linked to PNRR - National Recovery and Resilience Plan). On the other hand, there is a much stronger orientation towards metropolitan cities on which the country's possible progressive destinies tend to rely, thus sanctioning an apparent flaw in the territory. Within this fragmentation, in our opinion the question of *Italia di mezzo* arises, which is little observed and even less represented in its spatial, social and economic expressions and which offers alternative geography in its articulation, characterised by new imaginaries and policies for the territory.

From the socioeconomic point of view, a solid manufacturing and agricultural profile emerges as well as a significant presence of services that are suitable for people and businesses. More specifically, *Italia di mezzo* is the territory in which we can find the most important number of municipalities in the de jure industrial districts, although the significant presence of immigrants who have settled there is less obvious. Immigration is a strong presence linked to the employment of medium-low labour offered by the manufacturing / agricultural industry and personal services. A further common connotation is of a morphological-environmental type, far from the images of metropolitan polarities and those of sparsely populated inner areas. Overall, this very Italy is characterised by three settlement patterns: the first one encompasses territorial portions where a geography of urban nuclei, medium-sized or urban-rural cities and small towns is combined with many urbanised strands connected to each other. The second pattern relates to complex linear urbanisations (which incorporate various medium-sized coastal centres), whereas the third one refers to territories of widespread urbanisation (outside metropolitan areas).

In the various "Italies" investigated in this paper, two dynamics are combined: social polarization and the consolidated and recent demographic contraction. At the same time, being both in metropolitan Italy and inland areas, each of these dynamics in *Italia di mezzo* takes on its own specificity. Looking at social and economic indicators, *Italia di mezzo* has different profiles. A portion of the territory ranks in national average values such as the index of families in need of assistance, that of single-income families with

children under the age of six and the old age index. In some more limited cases, the values of social indicators reflect situations of lesser or greater discomfort; however, they maintain significant internal differences (especially with the classic distinction between north and south, where social distress is more concentrated with some exceptions). Following a long season of population and construction growth, which affected the metropolitan fringe territories to the detriment of metropolitan Italy and medium-sized cities, this process was reversed after 2011, highlighting a return to the centre. Most of the widespread urban-rural continuum seem to bring their behaviour closer to inland areas, marking the beginning of a new contraction that can be read in the trend of the population, employees, and value of the real-estate market. This contraction is undoubtedly linked to a re-centralisation of employment itself but is partly related to the residential preferences of urban inter-municipal markets. It is not a matter of homogeneous behaviours, especially since there are different critical situations in contrast to these dynamics: sometimes tourist filling, replacing residential filling, or actual depopulation.

Italia di mezzo has within it a little-recognised but fairly widespread combination of environmental discomfort and settlement malfunction. Above all, it becomes a critical issue because of its internal environmental problems. In this regard, it should be noted that this fragment of Italy records the highest percentage of the surface area occupied by polluted sites of environmental interest and the number of industrial plants with relevant risk of accident (RIR). The values of PM10, PM2.5 and NO2 reach very high indices, sometimes similar to those of some highly polluted metropolitan cities, especially those of the Po Valley. To these critical issues, the increased land consumption is added, albeit not with as relevant values as in the past. Still, substantial for already highly urbanised contexts, characterised by a strong dependence on cars for mobility.

What is perhaps the most perceived fragility condition in these territories remains to be explored. It is not a matter of the environmental-settlement condition, and it is not related to given socioeconomic patterns, but it is linked to an evolutionary trajectory. We are witnessing a transition from thirty years of solid growth (1960s–1990s) to twenty years of stagnation to more recent years which, although not everywhere, are marked by processes of relegation. A significant indicator is the unprecedented demographic contraction and perhaps a reduction in income from dependent and self-employed work, which is a hypothesis yet to be verified. Against this background, favouring multi-sectoral policies more attentive to socio-cultural and urban-environmental aspects is needed. We are witnessing a socio-demographic transition of the *Italia di mezzo* and the formation of new social fractures and differences within it. The increasingly different situations require new interdisciplinary analyses and interpretations. Producing scientific evidence becomes, then, fundamental also to support the initiatives of local authorities, increasingly faced with structures of municipal governance unable to address issues that are systemic, exogenous and conjunctural. It is also essential to connect a topological gaze, such as the one developed so far in this article, to a relational gaze in order to configure the *Italia di mezzo* territories no longer as simply middle or in-between, but as a possible intermediary and hinge between metropolitan areas and inland areas. On the one hand, they can provide assistance and support to less densely populated areas; on the other hand, by exploiting their infrastructural, social and accessibility capital, they can offer opportunities for decongesting the densest metropolitan areas.

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A Appendix:

Table A.1: List of indicators

Indicators	Year	Unit of measure	Source	Description
<i>socio-demographic</i>				
Old-age index	2018	index	ISTAT (A misura di comune)	Percentage ratio of the population aged 65 and over to the one aged 0-14
Incidence of adults with a diploma or degree	2011	%	8milaCensus ISTAT	Percentage ratio between the resident population aged 25-64 with a high school diploma or university degree and the resident population aged 25-64
Incidence of foreign residents	2011	‰	8milaCensus ISTAT	Incidence of foreign residents per 1,000 Italian residents as of 9 October 2011
Incidence of foreign residents	2019	‰	DemoISTAT	Incidence of foreign residents per 1,000 Italian residents as of 1 January 2019
Incidence of families with potential economic hardship	2011	%	8milaCensus ISTAT	Percentage ratio between the number of families with children with the reference person aged up to 64 in which no member is employed or retired from work and the total number of families
Incidence of young people outside the labour market and training	2011	%	8milaCensus ISTAT	Percentage ratio of residents aged 15-29 in a non-professional status other than students to residents of the same age
Incidence of families in need of assistance	2011	%	8milaCensus ISTAT	Percentage ratio between the number of families with at least two members, without cohabitants, with all members aged 65+ with at least one member aged 80+, and the total number of households.
Percentage change in resident population 2011-2019	2011-2019	%	ISTAT	Percentage change in resident population 2011 (9 October) - 2019 (31 December).
Natural balance 2011-2018 per 100 initial residents	2011-2018	%	DemoISTAT	Natural balance 2011 (9 October) - 2018 (31 December) per 100 initial residents
Migratory balance 2011-2018 per 100 initial residents	2011-2018	%	DemoISTAT	2011-2018 migratory balance (9 October) - 2018 (31 December) per 100 initial residents

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Table A.1: List of indicators (continued)

Indicators	Year	Unit of measure	Source	Description
Change in the old-age index <i>socio-economic</i>	2011–2019	index	ISTAT	
Per capita gross income	2015	€/year	ISTAT (A misura di comune)	Total gross income of registry families / number of members of registry families.
Number of large active companies per 1,000 employees in the municipality	2017	%	ISTAT-Asia	
Percentage of employees in the manufacturing sector 2017	2017	%	ISTAT-Asia	Percentage ratio between the number of employees in the Ateco C sector and the total number of employees in active Uls (Unità Locali– Local units)
Percentage of employees in the advanced services sectors	2017	%	ISTAT-Asia	Percentage ratio between the number of employees in the Ateco J, K, M sectors and the total number of employees in active Uls (Unità Locali– Local units)
Percentage of employees in the social and health sectors	2017	%	ISTAT-Asia	Percentage ratio between the number of employees in the Ateco P, Q sectors and the total number of employees in active Uls (Unità Locali– Local units)
Municipality in an industrial district	2011	0/1	ISTAT	Municipality that is or is not part of one of the 2011 industrial districts defined by ISTAT
Percentage of real-estate units reached by ultra-broadband 30Mb	2016	%	ISTAT (A misura di comune)	Real-estate units reached by the broadband / Total real-estate units per 100
Single-income households with children under the age of 6	2015	%	ISTAT (A misura di comune)	Households in which there is at least one minor under the age of 6 and a single income earner / Single-income households per 100

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Table A.1: List of indicators (continued)

Indicators	Year	Unit of measure	Source	Description
Gaps in pre-tax income	2015	index	ISTAT (A misura di comune)	Ratio of the income of the richest households to the income of the poorest households. Total equivalent pre-tax income owned by 20% of those registered in the registry with the highest income / Total equivalent pre-tax income owned by 20% of those registered in the registry with the lowest income
Percentage variation of employees	2012–2017	%	ISTAT-Asia	
Percentage change in the manufacturing sector	2012–2017	%	ISTAT-Asia	
Percentage change in the advanced services sector for production and business	2012–2017	%	ISTAT-Asia	
Percentage variation of employees in the social and health sectors	2012–2017	%	ISTAT-Asia	
Percentage of agricultural area used (SAU) of the total municipal area	2010	%	Istat Censimento Agricoltura	
<i>real estate</i>				
Percentage of use of buildings	2011	%	Censimento ISTAT	Percentage ratio between unused buildings and total buildings
Percentage of use of real estate owned by municipalities	2016	%	AdE-MEF	Percentage ratio between the sum of unusable properties and unused properties owned by the municipality and the total buildings owned by the municipality
Average purchase and sale value of residential properties	2019, I sem.	€/m ²	AdE-MEF	Average purchase and sale values (max + min / 2) of properties in normal condition of all residential types

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Table A.1: List of indicators (continued)

Indicators	Year	Unit of measure	Source	Description
Percentage change in the average purchase and sale value of residential properties	2012–2019, I sem.	%	AdE-MEF	Percentage change between the first half of 2012 and the first half of 2019 in the municipal average purchase and sale value of residential properties
<i>environmental</i> Artificial land cover per capita	2018	m ² / resident	ISPRA	
Percentage of municipal area occupied by “sites of national interest” (SIN)	2014	%	Ministero dell’Ambiente e della Tutela e del Mare (from Atlante web dei territori post-metropolitani)	
Maximum value of the maximum ground acceleration of the values of the grid points falling within the municipal area	2004	cm/s ²	INGV (from ISTAT-Casa Italia: Mappa dei rischi dei Comuni Italiani)	Maximum ground acceleration (50th percentile) calculated on a grid with 0.02° step: maximum (MAX) of the values of the grid points falling within the municipal area
Percentage of resident population at risk in areas with average hydraulic hazard - P2	2017	%	ISPRA (from ISTAT-Casa Italia: Mappa dei rischi dei Comuni Italiani)	
Total number of industrial plants with relevant risk of accident (RIR)	2015	num	Ministero dell’Ambiente e della Tutela e del Mare (from DiPE: Urbanindex.it)	
Ozone pollutants (O3)	2016	µg/m ³	Copernicus	Average value for the ozone (O3): AOT40, AOT60, SOMO35, T40, T50, T80, T120, T240
Pollutants Nitrogen dioxide (NO2)	2016	µg/ ³	Copernicus	Average value for nitrogen dioxide (NO2): T40, T200, T400
Pollutants Particulate Matter 10 microns (PM10)	2016	µg/ ³	Copernicus	Average value for Particulate Matter 10 microns (PM10): T40, T50, T80.

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Table A.1: List of indicators (continued)

Indicators	Year	Unit of measure	Source	Description
Pollutants Particulate Matter 2.5 microns (PM2.5)	2016	µg/m ³	Copernicus	Average value for Particulate Matter 2.5 microns (PM2.5): T25
Per capita land take in the period 2012-2018	2012-2018	m ² / resident	ISPRA	Artificial land cover 2018 - Artificial land cover 2012 / Resident population 2018

Table A.2: Descriptions of the Italian municipalities

Municipalities	Description
ultra-peripheral municipalities	The municipalities that are part of the classification: SNAI Ultra-Peripheral Municipalities with more than 5,000 inhabitants; SNAI Ultra-Peripheral Municipalities with 5,000 or fewer inhabitants. Considered peripheral are the municipalities that are part of the classification: SNAI Peripheral Municipalities with more than 5,000 inhabitants; SNAI Peripheral Municipalities with 5,000 or fewer inhabitants. Considered intermediate are the municipalities that are part of the classification: totally mountainous SNAI intermediate municipalities with more than 10,000 inhabitants; Totally mountainous SNAI intermediate municipalities with 10,000 or fewer inhabitants.
large de facto and de jure metropolitan areas	The municipalities that are part of the classification: Municipalities in Cities of FUA Large Metropolitan OECD capitals of Metropolitan Cities (Naples, Rome, Turin, Milan); Municipalities in Cities of FUA Large Metropolitan OECD, not capital cities; Municipalities in Commuting zones of FUA Large Metropolitan OECD included in Metropolitan Cities.
de facto and de jure metropolitan areas	The municipalities that are part of the classification: Municipalities in Cities of FUA Metropolitan OECD included in Metropolitan Cities (Cagliari, Palermo-Bagheria, Catania, Bari-Bitonto-Molfetta, Florence, Genoa, Bologna, Venice); Municipalities in Commuting zones of FUA Metropolitan OECD included in Metropolitan Cities.
de facto or de jure Metropolitan Area Centres	Considered de facto or de jure Metropolitan Area Centres are the municipalities that are part of the classification: Municipalities in Cities of FUA Metropolitan OECD not included in Metropolitan Cities (Bergamo, Brescia, Verona, Padua, Parma, Reggio Emilia, Modena, Perugia, Prato, Taranto); Municipalities in Cities of FUA Medium OECD capitals of Metropolitan Cities (Messina, Reggio Calabria)

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Table A.2: Descriptions of the Italian municipalities (continued)

Municipalities	Description
de facto but not de jure metropolitan areas	The municipalities that are part of the classification: Municipalities in Cities of FUA Large Metropolitan but outside Metropolitan Cities (valid only for Milan); Municipalities in Commuting zones of FUA Large Metropolitan but outside Metropolitan Cities; Municipalities in Commuting zones of Metropolitan FUA but outside Metropolitan Cities; Municipalities in Commuting zones of FUA Medium included in Metropolitan Cities; Other Municipalities with more than 50,000 inhabitants in Metropolitan Cities; Other Municipalities with populations between 20,001 and 50,000 inhabitants in Metropolitan Cities; Other Municipalities with populations between 5,001 and 20,000 inhabitants in Metropolitan Cities; Other Municipalities with 5000 inhabitants or less in Metropolitan Cities.
cities with functional centrality	The municipalities that are part of the classification: Municipalities in Cities of FUA Medium and Small OECD provincial capitals (Alessandria, Asti, Novara; Como, Cremona, Lecco, Pavia, Varese; Treviso, Vicenza; Bolzano, Trento; Savona, La Spezia; Ferrara, Forlì, Piacenza, Ravenna, Rimini; Pordenone, Udine, Trieste; Arezzo, Grosseto, Livorno, Massa, Pisa; Terni; Ancona, Pesaro; Latina; L'Aquila, Pescara; Campobasso; Avellino, Caserta, Salerno; Andria, Barletta, Brindisi, Foggia, Lecce with Surbo, Trani; Matera, Potenza; Catanzaro, Cosenza; Gela, Ragusa, Syracuse, Trapani; Sassari); Municipalities Cities of FUA Medium and Small OECD that are not provincial capitals (Gallarate, Carpi, Sassuolo, Battipaglia, Cerignola, Bisceglie, Gela).
traditional medium-sized cities	The municipalities that are part of the classification: Capital cities with more than 50,000 inhabitants (Cuneo, Rovigo, Cesena, Lucca, Pistoia, Siena, Viterbo, Benevento, Teramo, Chieti, Agrigento, Caltanissetta, Crotone, Olbia); Non-regional centres with more than 50,000 inhabitants (Saunremo, Faenza, Fano, Carrara, Viareggio, Foligno, Cava de 'Tirreni, Manfredonia, San Severo, Lamezia Terme, Marsala, Modica, Vittoria); Provincial capitals with between 20,001 and 50,000 inhabitants (Aosta, Biella, Verbania; Vercelli, Sondrio, Mantua; Belluno; Gorizia; Imperia; Ascoli, Macerata, Fermo; Rieti, Frosinone; Vibo Valentia; Enna; Nuoro, Carbonia, Iglesias, Oristano).
minor poles	The municipalities that are part of the classification: Other municipalities Polo SNAI with 50,000 or fewer inhabitants; Other municipalities SNAI inter-municipal hub with 50,000 or fewer inhabitants.
suburban belt municipalities	The municipalities that are part of the classification: Other municipalities SNAI belt with more than 10,000 inhabitants; Other municipalities SNAI belt with 10,000 or fewer inhabitants.
intermediate municipalities	The municipalities that are part of the classification: Other SNAI intermediate municipalities with more than 10,000 inhabitants; Other municipalities Intermediate SNAI with 10,000 or fewer inhabitants.