

URBAN SHRINKAGE. ITALIAN GEOGRAPHIES BETWEEN DECLINE AND RESILIENCE

Carlo Salone

**DIST, Politecnico e Università di
Torino**



1. The work

Contents: discussion of urban shrinkage paradigm (usp) and its application to Italy

Purpose: to assess the overall validity of the usp

Methods:

- deconstruction of the conceptual framework
- analysis of demographic dynamics of the Italian urban systems

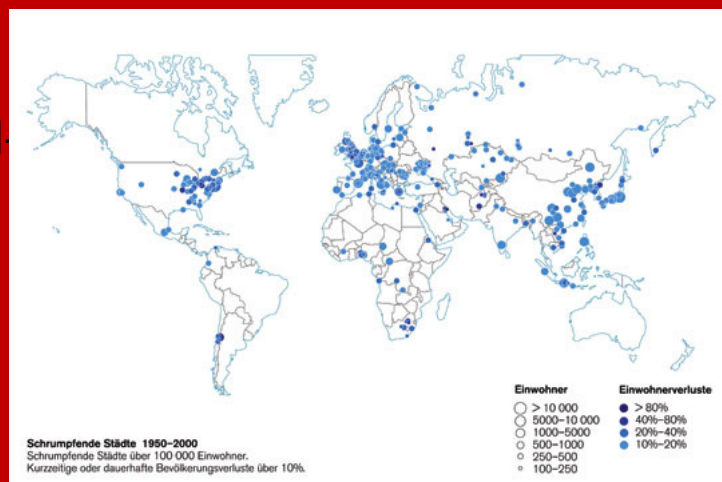
2. What is urban shrinkage?

- processes of physical abandonment and economic decline involving many urban areas of old industrialisation affected by the production crisis during the transition to post-Fordism
- A multifaceted phenomenon:
 - demographic trends
 - employment dynamics
 - urban intervention policies

3. From a fashionable concept to an embryonic theory

Starting from a selected number of national experiences:

- East Germany (and post-socialist Central eastern European countries)
- American Rust Belt
- Japan
- Attempts to include French and British industrial cities



4. Theory: strengths and weaknesses

Strengths

- Focusing on a worldwide phenomenon, encompassing different countries
- Clear and conceptually effective explanation of the spatial shrinkage
- Sensitive to need for planning responses

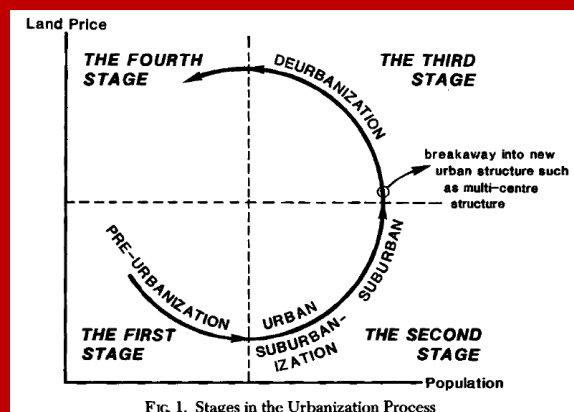
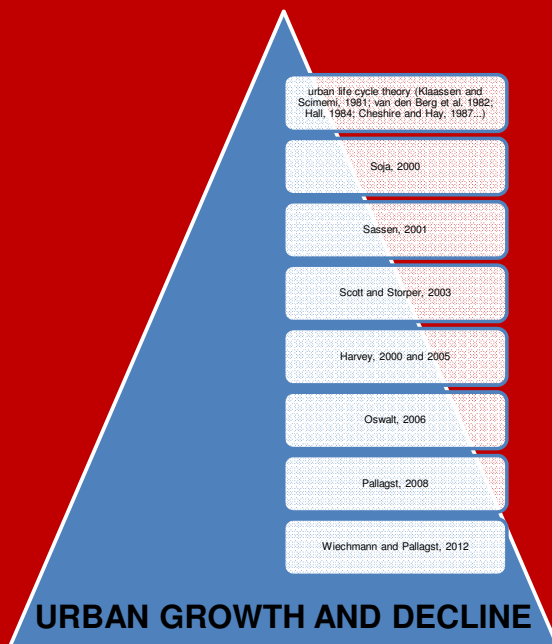
Weaknesses

- Rare and not well-developed references to previous spatial cycle models
- Lack of reflection on the historical legacy influencing the current urban dynamics
- Improper generalisation of the empirical findings

5. The main sections of the work

- Reconstruction of the theoretical framework of urbanisation processes, including the urban life cycle model
- Retrospective outlook on Italian urban systems, since 1951 until 2011
- Highlighting the limits of concepts applied to structurally different phenomena

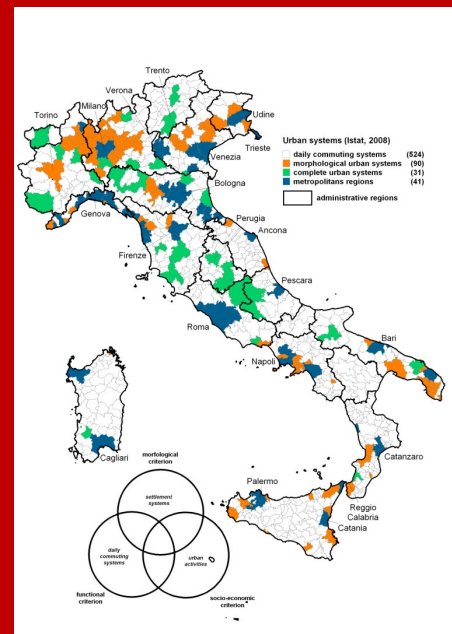
6. Different clusters of theory



7. The Italian urban systems

3 categories of urban systems (162 out of 686 LLSs):

- 1) Morphologically urban (90): 14.5 million residents
- 2) Vocationally urban (31): 3.9 million
- 3) Metropolitan regions (41): 20.4 million

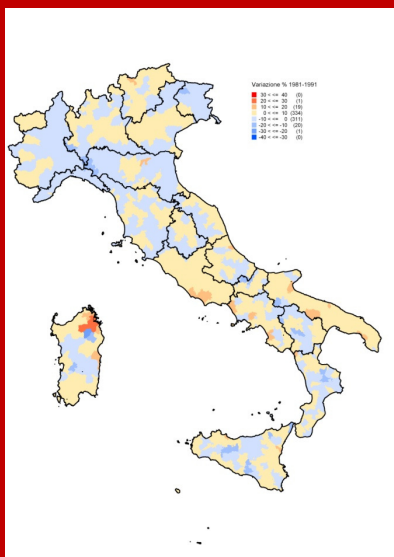


8. A retrospective outlook: 1951-2011

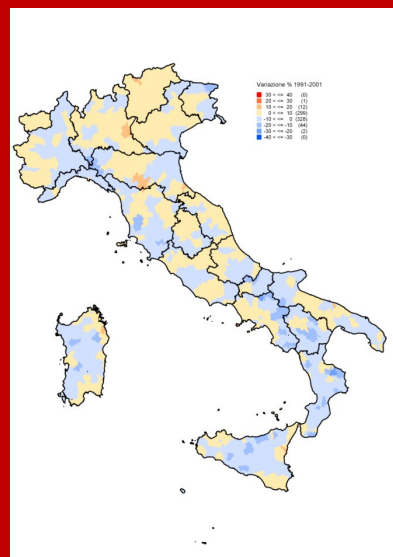
- **51-61:** all peripheral and rural local systems lose a large part of their population to urban systems and, in particular, metropolitan regions
- **61-71:** massive depopulation (from -30% to -20%) at the expense of systems located in internal mountainous areas, especially in the Apennines
- **71-81:** slowdown of industrial development → the growth rate in Northern large industrial concentrations clearly decreased; positive trends persisted in 'peripheral' systems of district economies; public investments in the South: → metropolitan growth
- **81-91:** a significant and generalised contraction in many Northern and Central urban systems and the continuation of the demographic crisis in the Southern peripheral systems
- **91-01:** all of the country's metropolitan systems appear to be in demographic crisis, whilst the local urban and non-urban systems of the peripheral areas of Northern and Central Italy start growing again; South falls down
- **01-11:** the macro-regional North-South divide has returned to be the protagonist; The inland areas of Southern Italy are those most affected by demographic haemorrhage:

9. Shrinking decades?

81-91

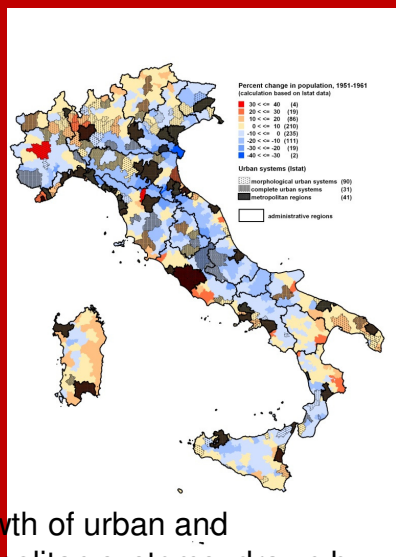


91-01



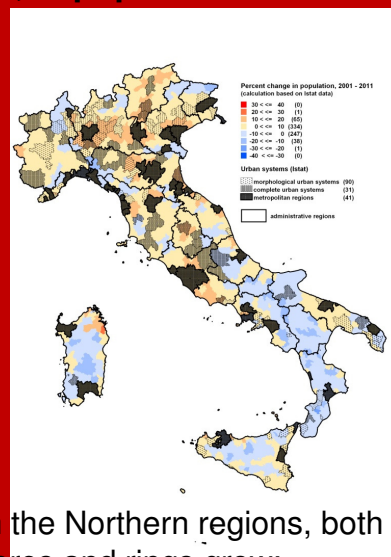
10. Is the N/S dichotomy coming back?

51-61: impulse to urbanisation, also in the Southern cities



A growth of urban and metropolitan systems, drawn by the intense industrialisation, in a general dichotomous scheme

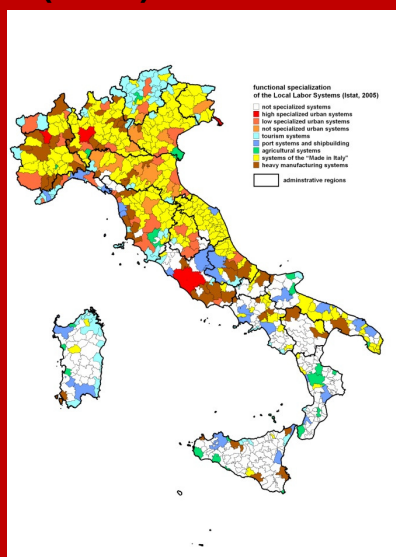
01-11: Northern urban systems grow, depopulation in the South



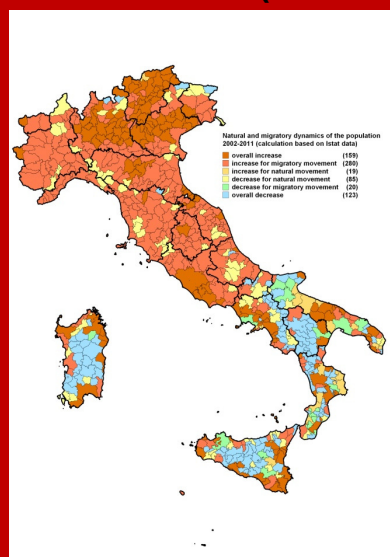
In the Northern regions, both cores and rings grow; generalised loss of population in the urban and non-urban South

11. Demographic trends and economic structure

Functional specialisation of LLSs (2005)



Natural and migratory dynamic in LLSs (2002-2010)



12. Concluding remarks

- Both natural and migration increase concern Northern systems, notably along the Milan-Venice axis;
- the same positive trend can be observed in Central Emilia, Adriatic coast and the Rome system;
- in the South growth is far less scattered, and the positive trend looks strongly affected by the attraction of historical metropolitan poles
- while in the Southern regions all internal areas have declined, in most systems of North and Centre, furthermore, both internal and coastal areas have grown, thanks to a positive migration rate (Italian districts of Made in Italy which remain attractive for migratory flows despite the industrial crisis);
- The shrinkage hits the less industrialised cities of the South, but it is not perceivable in the large and middle-sized cities of North and Centre. It could mean that in a country where the basic structure of the urban systems was already established before the industrialisation, differently from many other European countries, the shrinking tendencies are less common and require specific tools of analysis