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THE DEMOGRAPHIC DROP IN THE MOLISE REGION.

FROM 1861 TO 2011, WITH A LOOK TO THE FUTURE (*)

Abstract. – During the century between the 1870s and the twentieth century emigration flows strongly conditioned the history of Molise, even representing a peculiar and distinctive element. Over these hundred years, the triggering factors and causes, the destinations chosen and many other aspects deeply changed with regard to the figure of the migrant, but the process that came about was ‘charged’ with people to such an extent with their hopes and traditions, fears and nostalgia, their anger and desire for improvement, that it is possible to speak of an exodus that drained great part of the region. At present the migration balance shows positive values, with immigration from abroad beginning to acquire some significance, but the legacies of the past, which considerably altered the demographic structure, continue to produce effects on the natural balance. The main purpose of this paper is to give synthetic cross-sections on the long and short term dynamics and demographic variations, focussing the attention on the 2001-2011 decade and the possible future trends, after referring to emigration flows that in certain decades, above all in 1951-1971, undermined the pyramid of the population. Finally, the migration balance of the last decade will be examined which, on the other hand, makes it possible to curb the decreases which would otherwise acquire greater values. By applying various levels of detail and from a diachronic and distribution point of view, the objective is to give an overall picture that might highlight some of the important evolutionary events and territorial aspects, aimed at a reflection on the possible scenarios and the demographic components to be rectified in order to avoid the haemorrhage taking place from spreading to the whole region.

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Introduction. – During the years between the 1870s and the 20th century emigration flows strongly conditioned the history of Molise (the province of Campobasso until 1963), to the point of representing, given the entity of the values in relation to the resident population and the capillary network of relations that they generated, a peculiar and distinctive element, almost one of identity (N. Lombardi, 2010; Massullo, 2010) ⁽¹⁾, as if the transhumance, temporary movements and other practices and customs, typical of the peasant and pastoral world and particular forms of craftsmanship and commerce, had prepared for emigration (Simoncelli, 1969, p. 106; N. Lombardi, 1998, p. 9; Massullo, 2011, p. 44; Ciaschi and Pesaresi, 2007, p. 107). Over these hundred years, which were deeply affected by emigration, the triggering factors and causes, the destinations chosen and many other aspects regarding the figure of the migrant underwent a profound change, but the process that came about was so ‘charged’ with people, along with their hopes and traditions, fears and nostalgia, their anger and desire for improvement, that one can speak of a true ‘exodus’ (Orlando, 1956), an ‘exodus that “drained” the entire region, with the exception of the industrial area of Termoli and the two chief towns’ (Simoncelli, 1979, p. 299), of a ‘Molise outside Molise’ (N. Lombardi, 2006) ⁽²⁾. At present the migration balance shows positive values, with immigration from abroad beginning to acquire some significance, but the ‘legacies’ of the past, which considerably altered the demographic structure of the region, continue to produce effects on the natural balance.

The main purpose of this paper is thus to give, by means of the analysis of quantitative data, synthetic cross-sections of the long and short term dynamics and demographic variations, focussing the attention on the intercensal 2001-2011 decade and the possible future trends, referring to emigration flows that in certain decades, above all in the delicate and crucial period of 1951-1971, undermined the population pyramid, compromising its equilibriums. Lastly, the migration balance of the last decade will

(1) With regard to this see the paper in which N. Lombardi looks at the possibility that the terms ‘migration’ and ‘identity’, generally considered as contradictory, ‘almost an oxymoron’, can in the case of Molise be considered as two terms that are closely linked by an anomalous relationship. In fact, ‘As far as concerns Molise [...], its uncertain but necessary navigation in the global dimension is not only leading to the rediscovery in terms of opportunities the outcomes of its migration flow present at a number of the world’s crossroads, but also to a reflection on the incidence that its centuries-old phenomenon has had on its very own transformation from archaic society to modern reality, even though also crossed by unresolved contradictions. In short, if emigration, which is undoubtedly one of the deepest rifts that has marked the social structure of the region in the contemporary age, might not also represent a significant stigma of its identity profile’ (2010, pp. 187-188). Besides being a strong element of the history of Molise, owing to social, demographic, economic, psychological effects, emigration has also represented a means whereby to export, rediscover and strengthen one’s identity outside the regional boundaries. As stated by Massullo: ‘With all probability, emigration has been the experience that has most strongly led the people of Molise, [...], to identify their own identity, provincial, regional and even national reference, which is nonetheless broader than the local one. It has often culminated, [...], in the proclamation of an identity, of a need to belong to a community and identifiable memory, even before and more manifestly than what happened to the people of Molise who remained in the region, was nothing but as a reaction to the uprooting that the emigrants had to undergo’ (2010, pp. 107-108).

(2) Considerably outdistancing the other regions hit by emigration flows to other countries, Molise is first in the classification considering (17 April 2007) the number of additions to the A.I.R.E. records – Anagrafe Italiani Residenti all’Estero (Morri and Pesaresi, 2009, pp. 84-85): Molise 22.2%, Basilicata 15.8%, Calabria 15.6%, Abruzzo and Sicily 11.1% etc.

be examined which, on the other hand, makes it possible to curb the decreases which would otherwise acquire greater values. By applying various levels of detail and from a diachronic and distributional point of view, the objective is to give an overall picture that might highlight some of the important evolutionary events and territorial aspects, aimed at giving some critical thought to the possible scenarios and the demographic components to be rectified in order to avoid the ongoing haemorrhage from spreading to the whole region.

The demographic dynamics in the 1861-1951 period. – The demographic dynamics of the Molise region according to the first census of 1861 was characterised by an oscillatory trend which requires a two-phase analysis.

From 1861 to 1951 (fig. 1) the resident population went from 345,138 to 406,823 inhabitants, with a growing trend that was interrupted only in 1911-1931. Nevertheless, the blow delivered by these twenty years did not jeopardise the increase of the population which – driven by an extremely positive natural balance – recorded an increase of 17.9% between 1861 and 1951 and even reached its all-time high in 1951.

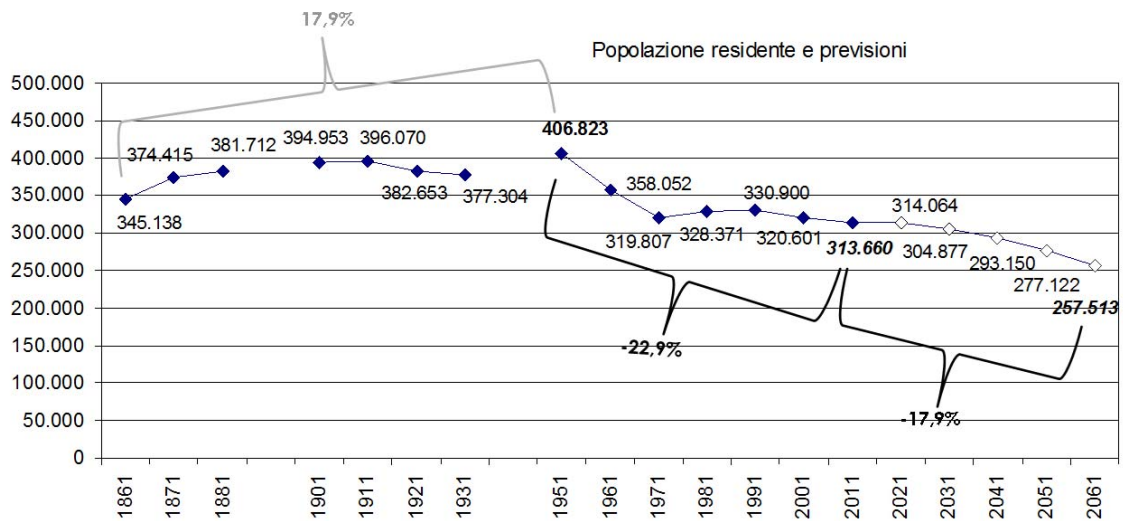


Fig. 1 – Population trend resident in Molise between 1861 and 2011 and forecasts, on the basis of the main scenario until 2061

Source: elaboration on ISTAT data (censuses and *Previsioni della Popolazione Anni 2011-2065*), various years

The Great emigration which hit the Molise region from the 1870s to the mid 1920s, however, began to create a rift in the structure and the future demographic equilibrium, bringing about disruptions which later on were to become all too evident ⁽³⁾. For this reason the emigration from Molise is ‘an early and significant example of a more general process that was gaining ground in wide areas of the South of Italy’ (N. Lombardi, 2011a, p. 15), becoming a sort of emblematic case, since with respect to the inhabitants of other regions of the south, those of the Molise moved early, ‘fuelling an intense and flowing current’ (N. Lombardi, 2010, p. 198) and such as to represent ‘an experience that is deeply rooted in the history of Molise, almost without any solution of continuity’ (Simoncelli, 1979, p. 249) ⁽⁴⁾. The Molise region of the end of the nineteenth century is in fact connoted ‘within a framework of considerable contradictions, rich in light and dark areas’, but above all marked by economic, production, infrastructural and isolation problems, with a practically inexistent manufacturing sector, an agriculture sector in dire straits, ‘notoriously undermined by the excessive burden of extensive cereal farming’ and subject to a process of ‘indiscriminate deforestation’ and the ‘consequent worsening of the hydrogeological fragility of the ground’ (Massullo, 2011, p. 36). However, the intense emigration process that was triggered – mainly to Argentina, Brazil and the United States, where the phenomenon took on dimensions of ‘exceptionalness’, and from 1905 to Canada – did not depend on push factors alone. A similar process, which often sprang up in the form of long chains ⁽⁵⁾, was the outcome of ‘a complex mix of *push and pull*’, supported by the setting up of ‘extensive relational interweaving’, true social transoceanic networks which made it possible to face, ‘perhaps more than once, the unforeseen events of journeys that otherwise would have appeared – or rather would have actually been – a leap into the unknown’ (*ibidem*, p. 47) ⁽⁶⁾. The huge emigration flow that was created ‘astoundingly’ in these years took place ‘both as the consequence of the regional situation, [...], and owing to the imbalances of local interest’, but it was not a ‘simple “escape from hunger”’, but, considering the entity of the returns, also a particular ‘form of “investment”’ (V. Lombardi, 2007, p. 47) ⁽⁷⁾. In quantitative terms,

(3) The history of Italian emigration can be divided into four phases: the first goes from 1876 to 1900 and ‘is characterised by a fair consistency in flows, but above all by a decidedly growing tendency’; the second goes from the early 1900 to the First World War and takes on the dimensions of an exodus, with years that represented ‘huge cusps’ as the phenomenon progressed (in 1913 numbers reached a peak); the third is between the two World Wars when ‘the emigration considerable decreases’; the fourth lasts from the end of World War II until the end of the 60s and is initially ‘a phase of growing emigration, but then in the 60s the migration push exhausts itself’ (Golini and Amato, 2001, pp. 48-56).

(4) For details see also Simoncelli, 1977, Massullo, 1994, and N. Lombardi, 2008.

(5) On the migration chains from some municipalities of the Molise to transoceanic countries, and in particular to Argentina, see Bailey, 1982, Gandolfo, 1988, and Massullo, 2006a, pp. 463-464. More generally, with regard to the social networks and the migration strategies that represented the ‘driving mechanism’ able to fuel and sustain such substantial flows from the different regions of Italy, see Ramella, 2001.

(6) As far as concerns these forms of transoceanic social networks, with reference to specific case studies, see also Bailey, 1992.

(7) “‘A fantastic shower of gold’”. This was how the observers of the time, between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, defined the flow of capital to Italy generated by the returns of emigration and distributed extensively over the rural areas of the entire peninsula, particularly in the poorest areas of marginal farming of the mountains, both in the Alpines and southern Apennines’ (Massullo, 2001, p. 161).

according to the data per region of origin (given in Prencipe and Sanfilippo, 2009, pp. 56-57), between 1876 and 1915 308,035 expatriations were recorded in Molise and went over the threshold of 10,000 units 12 times, with peak values in 1906 (16,762), 1905 (16,180) and 1902 (15,381), when there were over 15,000 expatriations ⁽⁸⁾.

At a later date, between the two World Wars, the fragility and economic marginalisation grew worse and worse and, following the liberation of Italy, the Molise region ‘deeply marked by destruction, found itself experiencing an extremely difficult situation’ (Heins, Fratejacci and Fanelli, 2013, p. 51), during a period in which the population had been able to find very few external solutions owing to the restrictive Fascist laws, the limitations imposed by a number of access countries (by the United States in the first place) and the 1929 crisis. Therefore an unconscious and repressed desire had grown for redress and escape to destinations that were potentially capable of offering them better conditions, in a painful emotional and psychological process which went side by side with states of economic-productive worry and the decay of the infrastructural system, heavily and widely damaged by World War II. Furthermore, the inhabitants of Molise had not forgotten ‘that other world that had welcomed their ancestors in search of work and which, [...], was once again ready to extend a welcoming hand’, making them hear ‘distant echoes’ (N. Lombardi, 2006, p. 585).

The demographic dynamic in the 1951-2011 period and future forecasts. – Between 1951 and 2011 (fig. 1) there is an opposite *trend* with respect to that of the 1861-1951 period. In particular, between 1951 and 1971 there is a demographic drop, which in the space of just twenty years takes the population from its all-time-high to its first low in 1971, with 319,807 inhabitants.

In fact, in this space of time the return ‘with interests’ is felt of the migration flows which had been considerably restricted by the laws of the regime, the external criteria such as ‘quotas’ and by the after-effects linked to the fall of the New York stock exchange. Therefore an exodus took place that had been fuelled and ‘swollen’ in previous years, above all in the 30s, but without the proportionate possibilities for a gradual outlet and which exploded as soon as the brakes were lifted that had kept it in check, to the point of being described as reaching ‘dramatic proportions of demographic impoverishment’ (Migliorini and Salvatori, 1990, p. 465). At the end of ‘World War II the emigration flow started again as naturally as a custom’ and with alarming figures (V. Lombardi, 2007, p. 48); that is, it seems that ‘the socio-economic conditions of the Molisians could not offer any other choice except

(8) Over 10,000 expatriates, between 1876 and 1915, were then classified as follows: 1895 (10,942); 1896 (13,267); 1901 (12,896); 1903 (14,168); 1907 (14,804); 1909 (12,744); 1910 (11,545); 1912 (11,010); 1913 (13,912). In the 1916-1945 period the expatriates from Molise were instead 62,620; in the 1946-1976 period there were 248,344; between 1977 and 2005 there were 19,446 (Prencipe and Sanfilippo, 2009, pp. 56-57, 64-65, 70-71, 78-79). The total number of expatriates, from 1876 to 2005, thus amount to 638,445.

that of emigration' (Simoncelli, 1979, p. 247), to be considered in certain cases 'the only possibility for survival' (Golini, 1974, p. 67).

As highlighted by N. Lombardi (2011b):

The structural restraints of the provincial economy and the backwardness of the living conditions in which [in this period] most of the Molise population finds itself [...] such a as to set off, as well the support and welfare policies aimed in particular at the peasants, an expulsive spiral involving a considerable part of the population in a space of time that will last for about thirty years (p. 54).

And moreover:

Following the closure of the American outlets, the restraining policies of Fascism and the exaltation of the "national" role of the farmers, combined with the centuries old acclimatisation to conditions of hardship and poor nourishment, contribute towards perpetuating for some decades a static and closed perception of rural life with few feasible alternatives. Nevertheless, in the post war period, that model of work and life was to become increasingly unsustainable owing both to the backwardness of the types of work and the levels of retribution and to the rapid development of increasingly open and demanding cultural attitudes. The Molise peasant world, not unlike the one in the South of Italy, begins to thaw and the exodus represents one of its most evident and widespread expressions (p. 55).

Thus, according to the ISTAT data in the *Sommario storico di statistiche sulla popolazione* ⁽⁹⁾, the migration balance between 1952 and 1971 continued to be increasingly negative (only to be considerably downsized between 1972 and 1980), with particularly noticeable highs in 1956 (-10,029 units), 1957 (-10,198) and 1967 (-10,713). With respect to the flows recorded between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth and those of the first two decades of the twentieth century, in these crucially important twenty years for the imbalance caused in the demographic structure, big changes are recorded: *a*) spontaneous movements become systematic flows, encouraged by bilateral agreements; *b*) together with consolidated destinations, new ones appear which attempt to foster the arrivals to speed up the economic-production development and urban modernisation processes; *c*) other destinations are longed for that seem able to guarantee better conditions; *d*) more and more often people choose to move to European countries, which 'potentially'

(9) The data concerning the 1952-81 period 'are those that have been "reconstructed" by ISTAT on the basis of the outcome of successive population censuses' (1990, p. 9).

would make it possible to reduce the risk of a radical and definitive move; e) emigration towards other regions of Italy becomes the objective and in the 60s these become privileged destinations ⁽¹⁰⁾. In fact, during the 1962-1968 period, according to the data of the Italian Republic – Istituto Centrale di Statistica recorded in the *Annuari di statistiche demografiche*, there are 72,476 deletions from records of residence for other Italian municipalities and 35,515 deletions for abroad.

In the context of the internal component, apart from the movements within the Abruzzi and Molise structure, which absorbed 47.5% of the deletions, the flows mainly move towards Lazio (15.5%), Lombardy (8.4%), Campania (7.4%) and Piedmont (5.5%), to which can be added Apulia (4.2%), Emilia-Romagna (2.9%), Tuscany (2.1%), Marche (1.3%) and Liguria (1.1%). In terms of external emigration, Canada ⁽¹¹⁾ exerts a major attraction in this period (38%), becoming the most desirable foreign destination, followed by the United States (10.3%), which had been the most desirable one in the Great emigration period, Switzerland (8.4%), United Kingdom (7.3%), Australia (7.2%), Federal Republic of Germany (6.7%), France (6.6%), Belgium (6.1%), Venezuela (4.3%) and Argentina (3.1%), in a scenario that had considerably changed with respect to the first thirty years of the twentieth century ⁽¹²⁾.

Old and new motivations are mixed together with deeply rooted problems and contingent hardships, diverse opportunities for contact and exchange of information appear, psychological, cultural and anthropological aspects interweave and so on, and starting from the 1950s onwards,

the move overseas is not just a way of escaping from the misery and need, and perhaps an opportunity to prepare for an alternative lifestyle upon returning to Molise, but is also, and increasingly so, a manifestation of the refusal of a system of family connections and social organisation that has in time become no longer bearable. In the collective imagination the experiences of permanence in modern countries have now subsided [...]. The static nature of production and work relations and, above all, the lack of real prospects of change have been felt as a reason for psychological unrest and concern, as well as being a social restraint. Moreover, the passage of the allied forces, with their rich

(10) For a more detailed picture regarding internal regional migrations and the influence of specific socio-economic factors on their intensity and characteristics, see Golini, 1974, pp. 21-71. On the demographic effects of internal migrations see pp. 71-80, in which the attention is focussed, for the 1951-1871 period, on the evolution and the demographic structure of a number of regions, among which Molise (with the highest emigration balance).

(11) Canada, despite its severe climatic conditions and the tangible lagging behind with respect to the United States, began to represent a destination able to instil a certain 'tranquillity' and to offer numerous job opportunities, giving a glimpse of the possibility of 'well being' right, from the early 1900s, when the construction projects and infrastructural improvement began for public works, road and railway networks, and many workers were taken on for lumbering and canalisation works and the image of the country, rich in natural resources and pleasant scenarios also spread to Italy and Molise (N. Lombardi, 2006, p. 577). Important accounts of Italian and Molisian emigrants in Canada are given in Ramirez, 1984, and Taschereau, 1987. An interesting collection of letters which, following World War II, were a 'bridge' between emigrants in Canada and the family left in Italy and Molise is to be found in Cancian, 2010.

(12) For further details, see Pesaresi, 2011, pp. 121-127, and Massullo, 2000, pp. 62-67. On emigration to Germany and Venezuela, see Heins, Fratejacci and Fanelli, 2013, and Castelli, 2013.

supply of consumer goods [...], contributes to highlighting the anachronistic poverty and backwardness of that condition. Then the gradual return of the soldiers and prisoners of war full of stories and information about other worlds and peoples, but also about less backward areas of Italy, with the spreading of news of the first experiences of work in open realities, gives a further push towards the search for broader perspectives. Even the family bond disintegrates more rapidly owing to the impatience of the young towards their strict family hierarchies [...]. In short, the weight of subjective and proactive factors gains awareness and, together with the backwardness of the social conditions and the opportunities offered by a system of international agreements, produces a strong drive towards mobility [...].

Therefore there begins a phase of movement from the inland municipalities towards the few towns of Molise with any urban allure, motivated by the need to abandon the underemployment of farming for jobs that might be more discontinuous but better paid, to achieve a less backward standard of living and to guarantee their children the possibility to study beyond primary school. This is often only a first stage of a longer mobility trajectory, aimed at arriving in other Italian regions or foreign countries (N. Lombardi, 2010, pp. 244-245).

A sore point hovers in this period of emigration, marked by the desire to free oneself of the state of backwardness and the sense of inferiority that the ‘crushing’ in the rural provinces, according to the Fascist regime propaganda, had brought about in the mind of many of the inhabitants of Molise. Emigration, unlike that of the first decades of the twentieth century which was also aimed at the reinvestment of earnings in the fatherland, to a certain extent takes on characteristics of ‘greater detachment’, since in the second half of the twentieth century the aim was to set up an activity in the place of arrival, leaving less room for sending back earnings to the place of origin.

In fact

in 1951, and for most of the following decade, the people of Molise found themselves having to come to terms with the implications of the adjective “*ruralissimo – profoundly rural*”, that the regime had tailor made for them, but which unfortunately mirrored a dominant feature of their economy and society. And while this almost bucolic picture of the serene tranquil life of the Molise with its just as hardworking and serene populations, [...], managed to deceive the rare tourists of that time, the life in the fields did not certainly seem so idyllic to the Molisian peasants themselves, who, not by chance, had started emigrating once again after the War to seek their fortune far from those fields and mountains (Zilli, 2011, pp. 119-120).

To the contrary, the people ‘reply “No!” to the spiritual rurality of the Molise region: they do not accept it as their specific vocation’ and by emigrating hope to ‘free themselves from the degrading condition of “peasant” and “bondsmen”, since they actually feel like servants in the context of today’s society’ (Carano, 1972, p. 277).

And so:

The nativity landscapes of the Molise, until then engulfed by autarchic rurality and Fascist populationism, emptied. It was then that the houses of the Fonte, the district of Bagnoli del Trigno [...] were locked up, without the keys being left in the *cavuta* (the cat flap), as had always been done until then, as a sign that the owners would only be away for a short time. The humble but dignified knick-knacks of the now dying peasant tradition, abandoned inside at the mercy of dust and time. Silence instead of the noisy bustle of the alleyway. Everything fell into a state of abandon making the poverty even more obvious. The returns of earnings of emigration were drastically reduced, as now any emigrant earnings were above all invested in their places of work; the social relations were also considerably downsized between the places of arrival and those of departure as the emigrants were now concentrated on building their future in the harsh reality of their new urban fatherlands, the social space of the few left behind became even poorer, if that was in any way possible (Massullo, 2010, p. 122).

The overall picture is desolate and during that twenty year period the prospects open to those who decide not to leave their native municipality are disheartening. Nevertheless, after 1971 there seem to be signs of a demographic revival, with two decades showing a slight rise, taking the population to 330,900 inhabitants in 1991, but this is a passing phenomenon. In fact, between 1991 and 2001 the population starts to decrease once again and 320,601 inhabitants are recorded, going very close to the minimum threshold of 1971. Between 2001 and 2011, there was a further decrease in the population and reached the new all-time-low of 313,660 inhabitants. Thus, while in the 2001-2011 decade the Italian population was characterised by a rise of 4.3%, from 56,995,744 to 59,433,744 inhabitants, and that of the South of Italy by an increase of 0.4%, from 13,914,865 to 13,977,431 inhabitants, the Molise population underwent a drop of 2.2%.

In general, in Molise the shrinking was equal to 22.9% between 1951 and 2011, with the inland and mountainous areas being affected by serious social imbalance and subject to phenomena of demographic ‘crumbling’, confirming and witnessing the evident ‘signs of a consolidated structural weakness’ (Lolli, Sassano and Di Pilla, 1995, p. 272) and where delays and hardship persist which have

for some time seemed to be destined to get worse rather than to decrease (Migliorini and Salvatori, 1990, p. 475).

The situation becomes even more critical if the ISTAT forecast for the next fifty years is considered, making it possible to close an historic period of 200 years (1861-2061). According to these forecasts (*Previsioni della Popolazione Anni 2011-2065*), carried out on the basis of the central scenario and the recent dynamics taking place, the population will undergo a standstill over the next decade, when a number of residents equal to ~314,000 inhabitants is forecast, to then give place to a forty year period of continuous and consistent changes. These reductions would bring the population to just ~257,500 inhabitants in 2061, with a decrease of 17.9% between 2011 and 2061 ⁽¹³⁾, in a worrying context of depopulation-ageing and the appearance of numerous small municipalities showing alarming conditions and completely upturned age pyramids which is why people have been speaking for thirty years now of the risk of a sentence to an inexorable and rapid dismantling process, without any concrete possibilities of revival (Bucci, 1984, p. 28).

Demographic variation in the 2001-2011 decade. – As far as concerns the short term demographic variation, referred to the 2001-2011 decade, the data distribution analysis makes it possible to highlight a rather widespread phenomenon of decrease, often with considerable values (fig. 2).

During the period being considered, 104 municipalities recorded a decrease in the population and only 32 an increase. Not even 1/4 of the municipalities in the region shows positive variations therefore, too little to hope to strengthen a ‘frayed’ mesh, made up of too many weak municipalities unable to generate dynamism or at the most to be included among those that benefit from the effects brought by others. We are before an ‘extremely attenuated urban system’, which for some time has needed ad hoc ‘organisation’ and ‘rebalancing’ interventions (Scarpelli, 1989, p. 427). ‘The demographic induction effect’ highlighted over twenty years ago remains limited in a territorial framework that plainly shows ‘a poor capacity to propagate widespread effects’ (Migliorini and Salvatori, 1990, pp. 468-469). The idea remains of a set of ‘nativity landscapes’ with such a level of emargination that it is increasingly difficult to imagine a real recovery, and which will become more problematic with the expansion of the imbalances between the inland and mountain areas (the clear majority), absorbed in a spiral of decadence, and the ‘limited areas that show a greater susceptiveness to development’ (Migliorini, 1982, p. 232), or the coastal area, the two main towns with their administrative districts and few other municipalities, like Venafro and Bojano. Overall, the region is made up of ‘some specific areas of demographic density’, with plausible prospects, ‘drops in larger areas’ which have ‘features of

(13) This is a potential dynamic which according to the ISTAT forecasts tends to take place, with values a little below (-17%), also in southern Italy considered in its entirety (from 13,977,431 to 11,603,001 inh.), showing evidence of a phenomenon that in the context of planning and programming must be carefully controlled and assessed.

diversified fragility and marginality', with a significant scattering of villages of tiny dimensions marked by differentiated features of socio-economic weakness, but which can be summarised in homogenous areas (Forleo, Pascotto and Pilati, 2007, pp. 288, 293), necessary to identify 'similarities' that make it possible to reason in a systems viewpoint (Fanelli, 2006) and to draw up strategies aimed at fostering processes of autonomous development, recalibrated on the driving prerogatives of contexts that share such aspects and potential (Argiolas and Cannata, 1989).

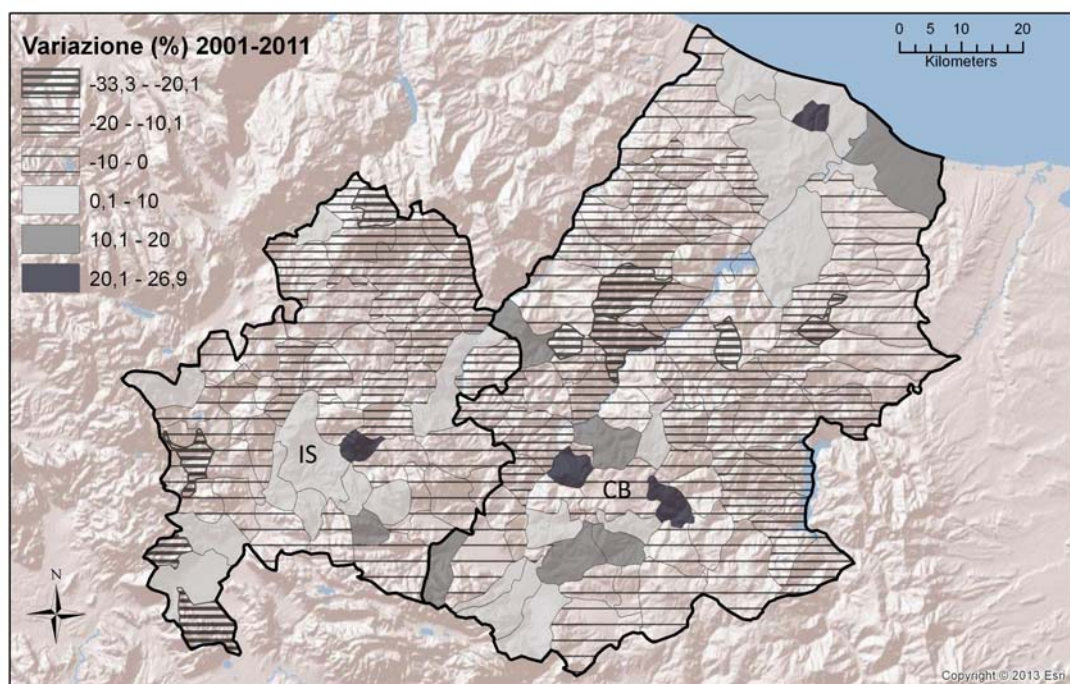


Fig. 2 – Demographic variation (%) recorded in the municipalities of Molise between 2001 and 2011

Source: elaboration on ISTAT data, 2001 and 2011, and basis ESRI World Shaded Relief, ArcGIS Online

Narrowing down the observation of the municipalities characterised by strong variations (between 10.1 and 20%; between -10.1 and -20%) and very strong (>20% and <-20%), it can be seen that: a) 4 municipalities (San Giacomo degli Schiavoni 26.9%, Campodipietra 24.6%, Oratino 21% and Pesche 20.2%) show very noticeable increases and 9 analogous decreases (with maximum values in Civitacampomarano -33.3%, Provvidenti -26.5%, Lucito -23.5%, San Biase -22.9% and Pescopennataro

-22.5%); *b*) 7 municipalities show considerable increases and, on the contrary, even 42 analogous decreases.

The process of demographic decrease therefore is not only widely spread over the regional territory, but is also worsened by the many losses of considerable entity.

At territorial level the increases mainly concern the municipalities around Campobasso and those near Isernia, the chief provincial town included, and the coastal area, plus a few other scattered municipalities. Vice versa, the biggest decreases are to be found in the municipalities of Alto Molise, in the eastern sector of Central Molise and in some municipalities in the western strip of the Valle del Volturno.

Therefore, in the present state of things, there is a very large number of municipalities subject to demographic 'crumbling', where 23 villages have a population that is under or equal to 500 inhabitants and 45 are in the range between 501 and 1,000 inhabitants (fig. 3). Exactly half of the municipalities of Molise (68 out of 136) is therefore marked by a demographic dimension that is either less or equal to 1,000 residents and by a series of social problems linked to this concerning the daily supply of the main services, which are in fact territorial and show alarming conditions of marginality and isolation. Worthy of note among these as being symptomatic of contexts subject to disappearance, are the villages of Provvidenti (122 inh.), Castelverrino (124 inh.), Castelpizzuto (159 inh.)⁽¹⁴⁾ and Molise (162 inh.), far from the threshold of the 200 residents. Instead, there are just 11 municipalities with over 5,000 inhabitants⁽¹⁵⁾ – of which only 3 with more than 20,000 residents⁽¹⁶⁾ – and yet within this narrow circle there are a some that in the last intercensal decade have recorded decreases that cannot be ignored. In fact, Agnone, the main pole of Alto Molise, underwent a decrease of 10.3% (from 5,842 to 5,240 inh.), following the negative trend that has been steadily ongoing since 1951. In the same period of time Riccia and Bojano lost 5.2% of the population (from 5,701 to 5,403 inh.) and 4.4% (from 8,312 to 7,946 inh.) and even Campobasso recorded a reduction of 4% (from 50,762 to 48,747 inh.). Among the municipalities with over 5,000 inhabitants those that are most active demographically are, on the other hand, Campomarino and Termoli, which stand out for increases equal to 12% (from 6,310 to 7,068 inh.) and 8.4% (from 30,255 to 32,793 inh.).

(14) Unlike the other villages with fewer than 200 inhabitants, Castelpizzuto is the only one to show a population increase in the 2001-2011 period (from 143 to 159 inh., equal to 11.2%), but in the previous years it was subject to a real demographic collapse (790 inh. in 1861 and 401 in 1951).

(15) These are the municipalities of: Campobasso (48,747 inh.), Termoli (32,793 inh.), Isernia (22,025 inh.), Venafro (11,236 inh.), Bojano (7,946 inh.), Larino (7,142 inh.), Campomarino (7,068 inh.), Montenero di Bisaccia (6,649 inh.), Guglionesi (5,449 inh.), Riccia (5,403 inh.) and Agnone (5,240 inh.).

(16) 'A steady settlement configuration' continues to be 'basically absent' and the 'three major towns are the only ones with a settlement recognition that, even though having evident weaknesses in the urban structure, makes it possible to define them as urban centres. The rest of the settlements is instead characterised by extreme settlement fragmentation' (Cialdea, 1996, pp. 60-61).

The Molise region therefore bears the signs of the vertical decline that has befallen most of the region in the long term and the still huge demographic drops, which undermine the already sorely tested territories, with astronomical imbalances coming out of the 1861-2011 comparison, in which 111 municipalities have negative values and 25 positive ones (fig. 3). Above all however, compared with a myriad of municipalities (44) in which the population has decreased by over 2/3 – with the extreme cases of Ripabottoni (-87.7%), Castelverrino (-86.6%), Provvidenti (-84.7%), Civitacampomarano (-84.3%), Sant'Elena Sannita (-83%), Morrone del Sannio (-82.5%), San Biase (-82.1%), Bagnoli del Trigno (-81.2%), Pizzone (-81.1%), Pietracupa (-80.4%) and Molise (-80.1%), which have lost over 80% of the inhabitants – are a number of municipalities subject to an explosive growth, of which Termoli is the best example (1,194.6%), but in which also Petacciato (396.3%) and Campomarino (337.4%), on the coast ⁽¹⁷⁾, to the north and south of Termoli, as well as Campobasso (280.8%) and Isernia (149%), to which Venafro can be added (146.1%), act as double value axes, as they are municipalities of reference but also emblems of accentuated internal discrepancies.

(17) The long term demographic variations denote, for the short coastal stretch of Molise, features of 'coastal settlement of the population' with Termoli as the main 'centre of gravity' (Cortese, 1992, p. 130).

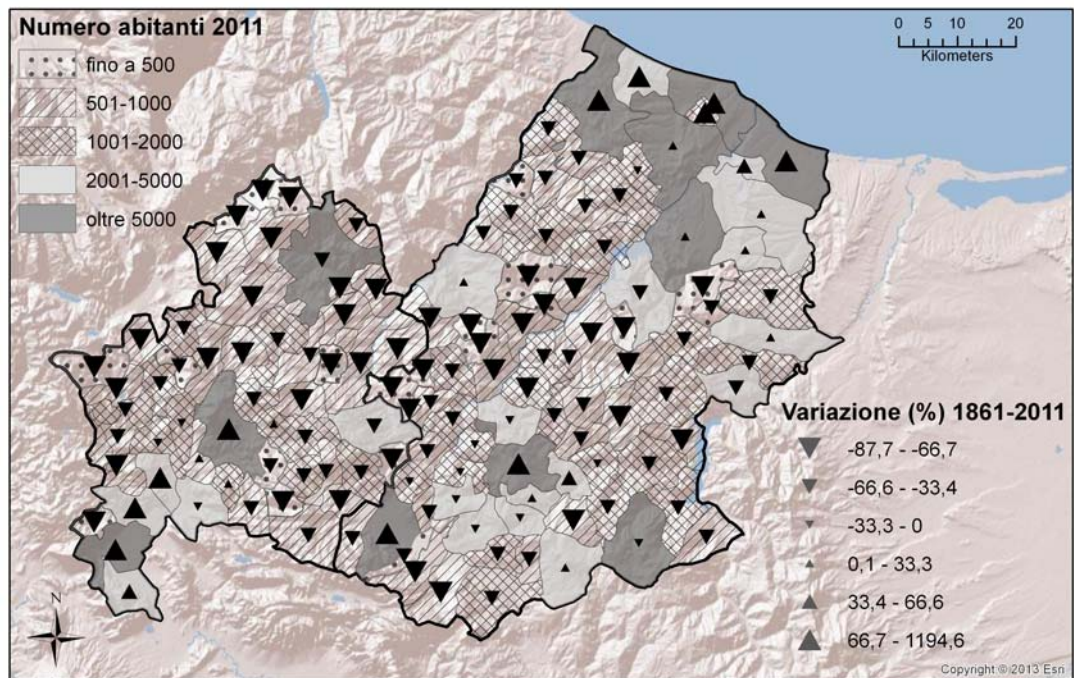


Fig. 3 – Demographic dimension of the municipalities of Molise, in 2011, and variation (%) recorded between 1861 and 2011

Source: elaboration on ISTAT data, 1861 and 2011, and basis ESRI World Shaded Relief, ArcGIS Online

Natural balance and migration balance, for a first analysis. – In order to understand what is afflicting the present demographic decrease, ISTAT's *Bilancio Demografico e popolazione residente per sesso al 31 dicembre* was used, for the 2002-2011 period.

From the analysis of the data regarding the natural balance and the migration balance (fig. 4) it is evident how the decrease of the last decade can be attributed to the natural balance, which recorded negative values by and large close to 1,000 units each year (from a minimum of 802 in 2002 to a maximum of 1,257 in 2011), as a reflection of the demographic 'depopulation' in crucial age groups that had taken place previously and as the direct consequence of the considerable ageing of the population. On the contrary, the migration balance (and for other reasons, including also the headings 'others registered' and 'others deleted') was characterised by constant positive values (from an 'unusual' minimum of 305 units in 2006 to a maximum of 1,682 units in 2007) – with the exception of 2005

which was an anomalous year (-17 units) – even if in 2009-2011 less pronounced with respect to the years before (in 2006 alone an inferior value was recorded).

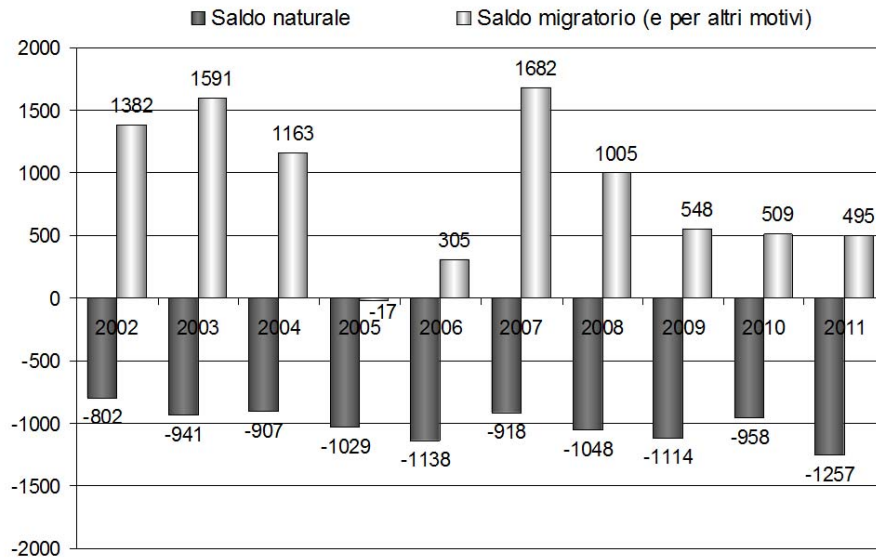


Fig. 4 – Natural balance and migration balance (and for other reasons), in Molise, between 2002 and 2011

Source: elaboration on ISTAT data (*Bilancio Demografico e popolazione residente per sesso al 31 dicembre*), various years

Focussing the attention on the number of people registered (fig. 5), it would appear that an important contribution is given by those coming from other Italian municipalities, which usually amount to about 5,000 units (from a minimum of 4,849 in 2003 to a maximum of 5,487 in 2011). These values must nonetheless be seen in relation to those concerning the deleted ones (fig. 6) for other Italian municipalities, which more or less range along the same threshold (from a minimum of 4,643 in 2002 to a maximum of 5,615 in 2009), almost always going above the number of those registered. The positive migration balance therefore depends on the international component, since the number of those registered from abroad (from a minimum of 944 in 2002 to a maximum of 2,200 in 2007) is constantly and consistently above the number of those deleted for overseas (from a minimum of 300 in 2002 to a maximum of 554 in 2006).

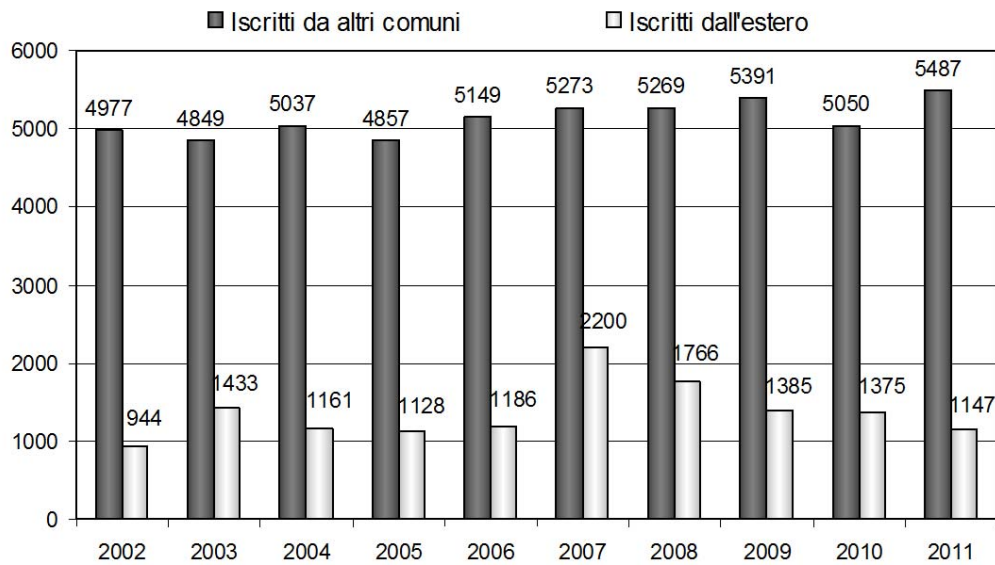


Fig. 5 – Those people registered in Molise from other municipalities and from abroad between 2002 and 2011

Source: elaboration on ISTAT data (*Bilancio Demografico e popolazione residente per sesso al 31 dicembre*), various years

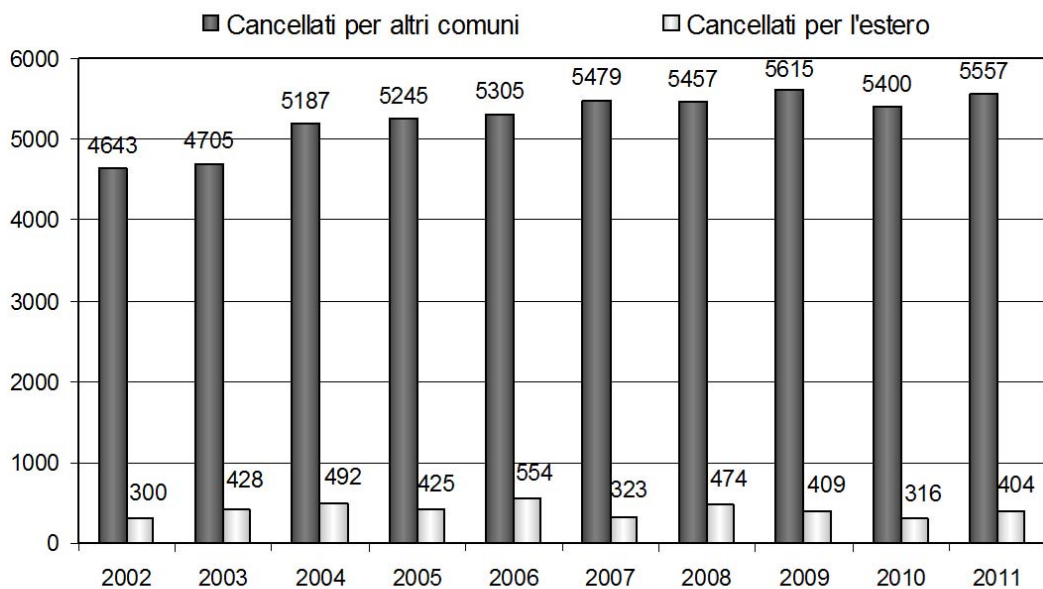


Fig. 6 – Those deleted for other municipalities and abroad from Molise between 2002 and 2011

Source: elaboration on ISTAT data (*Bilancio Demografico e popolazione residente per sesso al 31 dicembre*), various years

From these data – which provide fundamental elements for future in-depth analyses of the principle foreign resident communities and the programmes to set up to strengthen the image and economic structure of the region – arises the need to actively intervene in order to reduce the number of deletions for other municipalities, introducing solutions and carefully weighed up remedies, since such a drop would bring about an increase of the migration balance (already positive), and in a chain reaction would also drag the natural balance (instead negative) towards better values for a greater presence of young people in the region.

As highlighted almost twenty years ago, it is necessary to embark on new paths, open up to befitting and innovative ‘possibilities that must be pursued by means of local development projects’, fostering an ad hoc improvement in professional skills and guaranteeing capillary ‘involvement by both the institutions and the population’ (Orefice, 1995, pp. 61-62). A univocal and shared project-making, circumspect and dynamic, that might suitably bear in mind the processes taking place and set out to resolve the really critical issues with determination, appears to be an unavoidable requisite to foster inversions in trends that must begin to take shape. Therefore an appreciable reduction in the number of deletions for other municipalities must be considered an essential priority if action is to be taken in parallel on the socio-demographic and economic-production component, so as to not run the risk of a chronic crystallisation of the conditions of marginality that have for some time now characterised a large part of the region (Salvatori and Migliorini, 1986, p. 67). The ‘territory needs ad hoc policies for the young that manage to encourage the active population of Molise not to abandon the region’ and marketing strategies that are successful in attracting labour, with specific skills, talents and experiences, from other municipalities and other countries (Laura Frattura, 2011, p. 217).

Conclusions. – From 1951 to 2011 the Molise population decreased by 22.9% and in the last intercensal decade, in contraposition with respect to the national trend there was a decrease of 2.2%. There is a considerable imbalance between the few municipalities situated mostly along the coast and within the influence of the two chief towns (to which some other cases can be added), as these show a certain amount of vitality and the great majority of the towns that on the contrary are in serious decline and which, according to the forecasts, seem destined to a further worsening in their situation.

In the decades between the 1870s and the mid 1920s, the Great emigration had a determining role for the future process of demographic decline, as it started to undermine the population structure, paving the way for a critical condition. Between 1951 and 1971 emigration was a heavy blow to this and there was a drastic drop in the number of residents, from an all-time-high to the first all-time-low.

From 1991 on the contraction phase began again following twenty years showing a slight revival and in 2011 it reached the new all-time-low, but it is the negative natural balance that is to play its role of destabilisation, as a consequence of the inexorable work of erosion produced by the massive departing flows leading to the 'emptying' and ageing of most of the region.

In terms of migration there remains the problem of the deletions for other Italian municipalities, which are generally more than the additions. In particular, there is great concern with regard to the distancing of 'young people with higher educational or professional profiles, which results in a poor entrepreneurial culture and a low inclination to innovation' (Pazzagli, 2012, p. 71) and which causes a weakening of the social fabric, making the carrying out of possible organisational or operational measures very difficult for the relaunching of the region. Molise is thus at the same time subject to intellectual emigration and youth unemployment owing to the absence of 'social elevators' (Alberto Tramontano, in Ruggieri, 2012, p. 115) and because specific coordination, planning and realisation strategies are difficult to promote resolutely.

Furthermore, as well as the official data, it is important to bear in mind the 'silent emigration of the young people of Molise who go and live temporarily in other Italian regions without changing their place of residence outside Molise'. It has been highlighted that: 'In Molise the percentage of graduates out of the 25 year-old population is the highest among the regions of the South of Italy (24%), but having a degree gives increasingly fewer guarantees of finding a job. With respect to the early 90s the graduate employment rate in Molise has gone down by 10%, from 81% to 71%, while the national one has remained just above 80%. [...]. Migration is an option considered highly ranked by many young people and which seems to pay: 60% of the people of Molise who stayed in the South after graduating is still unemployed three years later, compared with just 2% of those who chose to go to another region of the Centre-North. None of the southern regions show as high a difference between the unemployment rate of the graduates who decide to leave and those who stay. The factors pushing the young Molisians towards emigration are therefore quite considerable' (Crisci, 2011, pp. 273-274).

In order to advance possible interventions within analytical and proactive cross-sections whereby to strengthen the regional economic fabric and to counter the demographic drop, stemming old and new problems and consolidating strong points, a two-scale research approach becomes necessary.

Therefore in separate research work: *a)* an analysis will be made at regional level of the activities which, included in an organic planning framework, according to suitably established stages, could lead to positive results in the economic-production and socio-demographic field, also on the basis of the ongoing immigration trends, considering that a specific integration and valorisation policy of the foreign component is needed (Pesaresi, in publication *a*); *b)* the results will be given of detailed surveys, concentrated on areas of study which, moreover, can represent significant examples of issues which

could spread over a vast radius and potential that could diffuse effects on a systems basis (Pesaresi, in publication b).

In a beautiful book that looks at the Molise with great anthropological sensitivity and in her search for her roots through the tales of her mother who emigrated to Montreal decades ago, the author, Mary Melfi a Canadian of Molise origins, writes how the elderly woman used to say: “my village is one of poverty”. Poverty was in fact the condition of Molise until not more than forty years ago’ (Lombardi, 2012, p. 94).

The emigration from Molise, even though triggered by a state of indigence, cost – to those departing and to those that were left – great suffering and physical, mental and emotional exhaustion... It is time that all their efforts were repaid.

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