



HERITAGE RAILWAYS AND STATIONS: FROM FOSSILS OF EMPIRE TO PLATFORMS FOR SUSTAINABLE REGIONAL PLANNING, RETROFITTING AND DEVELOPMENT

FERROVIAS HISTÓRICAS: DOS FÓSSEIS DO IMPÉRIO ÀS PLATAFORMAS PARA O PLANEJAMENTO REGIONAL, REESTRUTURAÇÃO E DESENVOLVIMENTO SUSTENTÁVEL

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ABSTRACT

This paper falls within the greater framework of doctoral research focusing on British Sicily as a case study in first globalisation with railways serving as a guide fossil to localise and characterise indirect rule by way of de-facto economic primacy, soft power and informal imperial intervention. It also provides the historical grounding to a tentative effort tailored towards the designing of a transnational pilot project focused on the retrofitting and revitalising vast sways of deserted and disarmed narrow gauge railway networks, lines and stations in Italy, Malta and Brazil dating to 1850-1914.

Keywords: Cultural Heritage. Tourism. Industrial archaeology. Railways. Logistics. Retrofitting. Sustainability. Negative Demographics. Socio-economic marginality. Greenways. Bicycle lanes. Horse tracks. Hiking footpaths.

RESUMO

Este artigo insere-se no âmbito mais amplo da pesquisa de doutorado que se concentra na Sicília britânica como um estudo de caso da primeira globalização, com as ferrovias servindo como um guia para localizar e caracterizar o domínio indireto por meio da primazia econômica de fato, do poder brando e da intervenção imperial informal. Ele também fornece a base histórica para um esforço preliminar voltado para a concepção de um projeto piloto transnacional focado na modernização e revitalização de vastas extensões de redes ferroviárias de bitola estreita, linhas e estações abandonadas e desativadas na Itália, Malta e Brasil, datadas de 1850 a 1914.

Palavras-chave: Patrimônio cultural. Turismo. Arqueologia industrial. Ferrovias. Logística. Requalificação. Sustentabilidade. Demografia desfavorável. Marginalidade socioeconômica. Vias verdes. Ciclovias. Trilhas para cavalos. Trilhas para caminhadas.

INTRODUCTION

The origin of the present project is completely contingent. In late 2012 the former mayor of Palermo asked all local cultural associations to support the city's application to become the next European Capital of Culture. Then and now, Palermo, just like Taubaté, boasted a very colourful history and one that was influenced by many people from around the world, each contributing to the cultural palimpsest. Indeed, Palermo and the rest of the surrounding region was essentially influenced by as many as 24 foreign people that came to Sicily and ruled it over the past three millennia plus one people, the Albanians, who were offered shelter in the 15th-16 centuries (fig.1).



Fig. 1: Palermo's bid to become the 2019 European Capital of Culture

When archaeologists look at time and space, we do so mostly from a sectional point of view through the lens of material culture that each civilisation by stratigraphic deposition from prehistory to the Contemporary age (fig. 2).



Fig. 2: An archaeologist's take on time and space

And as I was trying to make an original contribution to the bid for Palermo to become the next European Capital of Culture, I noticed that there might be missing a layer in the official cultural palimpsest, one that should have been spread over the top of the metaphorical cake, where the glazing is, seeing as it related to very recent historical data. Furthermore, when looking at the basic units of research (places, people and events) within the 1713-1936 timeframe, a major divergence emerged between what the authorities believed and what I as an individual researcher thought on the basis of previous research and unpublished research. The Sicilian Regional Authority for Heritage (it. *Assessorato regionale ai beni culturali e ambientali*) stated that there were only 6 Heritage sites, 27 individuals and no historically important events that may be correlated with the presence and the influence of the British community in Sicily. Whereas it did not take long for me to understand that there were as many as 500 heritage locations, 20,000+ individuals and thousands of minor and major events that they had contributed to (fig. 3).

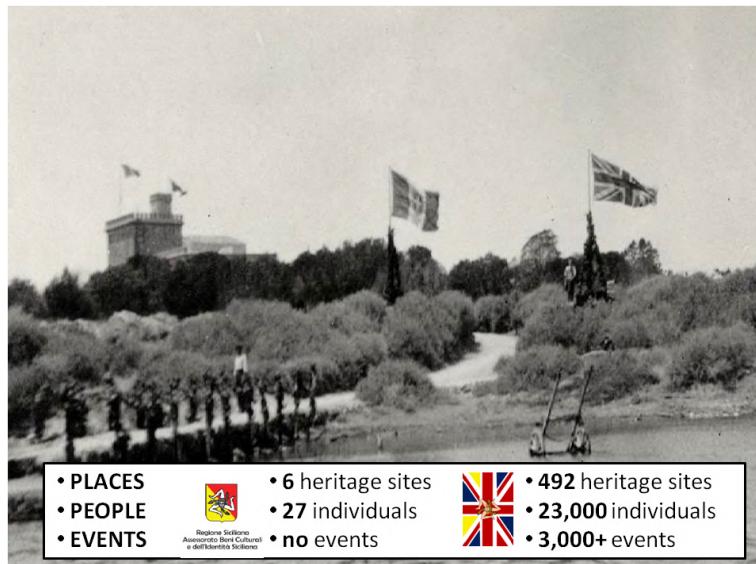


Fig. 3: British locations, people, and events in Sicily

Therefore, I went back to my historian's desktop and tried to figure out whether the proverbial tiger in the grass was really there and if we could perhaps reconstruct a part of the history of the island via hard and soft power tools and lasting legacy (fig. 4).



Fig. 4: The tiger in the historical grass

METHODS

On to the specific subject of this contribution, railways are the direct consequence of a long set of protracted conflicts, which historians refer to as World War Zero, i.e The Seven Years War (1756-1763), the American Revolutionary War (1776-1783), the French Revolutionary Wars (1792-1802) and the Napoleonic Wars (1805-1814), leading to the relatively peaceful 19th century. At the tail end of WW0, Napoleon Bonaparte and Horatio Nelson were carving out the globe were each taking a land and a maritime slice for France and Britain's (fig. 5).



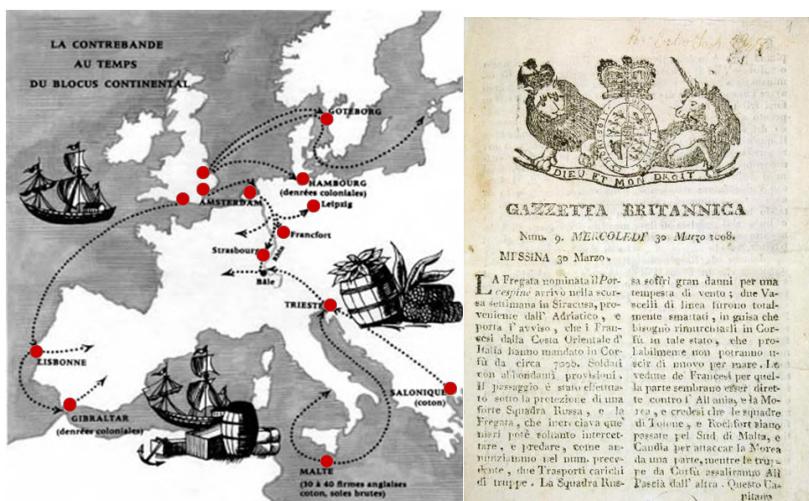
Fig. 5: Nelson and Napoleon fighting over global hegemony

In 1807 the French armed forces blockaded Europe to prevent the British from trading

with the continent while the British imposed a counter blockade by establishing a series of outposts which shown as red dots on the map. The purpose of those locations was to ensure that British manufactured goods could regain access into European markets. One of these dots was the island of Malta, 80 km South of Sicily, right at the centre of the Mediterranean (fig. 6).

Because of its proximity, size, resources and the economic-strategic relevance it commanded, Sicily acted as the prime supplier to the Malta station, home to the British Mediterranean fleet from the 1800 to 1960s. Indeed, for a long period (1799-1815) 17,000 British troops and 25,000 Neapolitan allies were based at all the main ports of the Island and provided the much needed protection that attracted hundreds of merchants according to the mercantile standard of trade following flag.

The influx of a great many agents of commerce and empire led to an economic boom because they set out to exploit and trade with the local resources, mainly sulphur, wine, cereals and citrus fruit, which they drove from Sicily out into the global destination markets. The accumulation of wealth was conducive of favourable conditions for the establishment of commercial banks and, eventually, set off the financialisation of the regional economy. Previously, Sicily did have two public banks, but they were the State run, offering very high interest rates. As a consequence, in the early 1800s, it was possible to break the glass ceiling of feudalism. Operators such as Gibbs, Wood-Crockatt, Morrison-Seager, Thomas, Thurnburn, Gardner-Rose and Ingham give rise to a early banks and insurance companies (fig. 7).



1798 -1802/1806-1815

"Trade follows the flag"

- 17,000 troops stationed at Palermo, Milazzo, Messina, Taormina, and Augusta.
- Hundreds of merchants followed.
- Sulphur, sumac, barilla soap, wine, cereals, citrus fruit started being exported from Sicily to Asia, Australia and the Americas by the Royal Navy.

Rise of merchant banking and insurance companies

- Falconnett-Gibbs Bank 1796
- Wood-Crockatt Bank 1805
- Morrison-Seager Bank 1805
- Gardner-Rose-Thurburn Bank 1805
- Thomas bros Bank 1806
- Ingham-Whitaker Bank 1811

Figs. 6 and 7: The French blockade and British counter-blockade

This was a an economic revolution that put Sicily at the centre of a newly established British Mediterranean insular empire, spanning Gibraltar to Cyprus, and eventually to Suez, as a liquid middle oceanic corridor connecting the imperial metropolis to the Indo-Pacific and Atlantic peripheries (fig. 8).

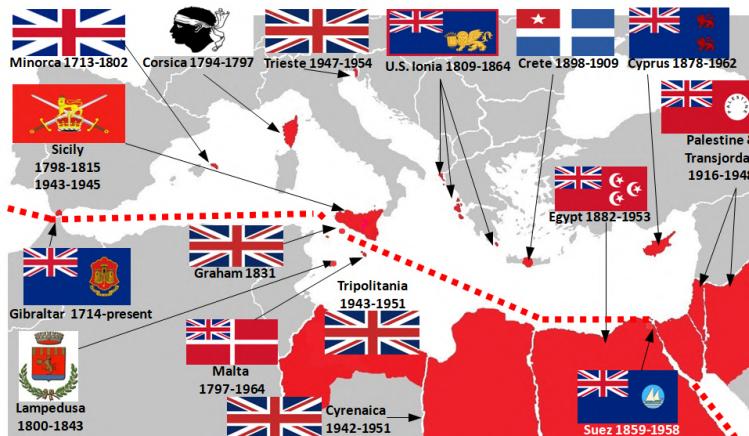


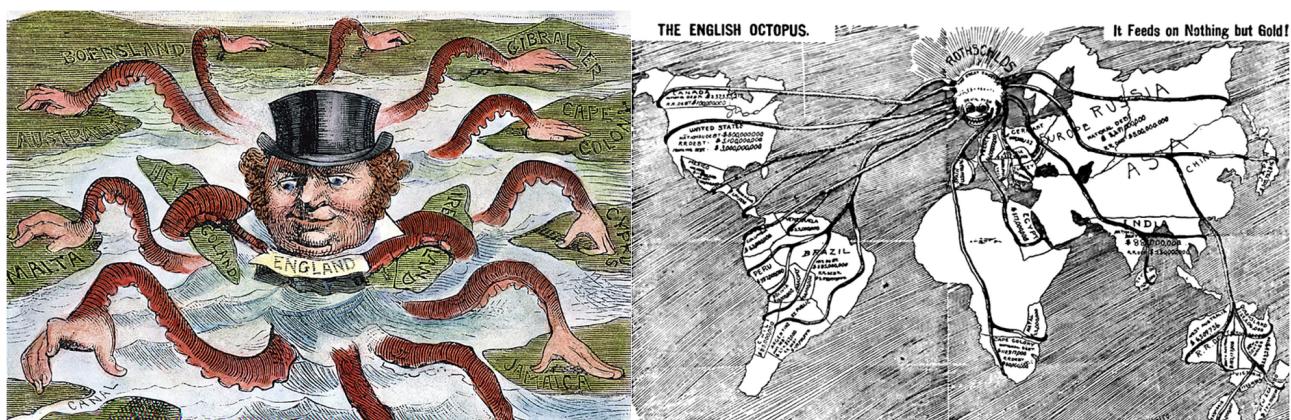
Fig. 8: The British Mediterranean insular empire

Unlike 16th-18th century models of European expansion based on territorial acquisition, the cost of governing remote colonies, the American revolutionary Wars, and the Napoleonic Wars led Whitehall to a paradigm shift epitomised by Lord Sainsbury later corollary: *"indirect rule when possible, direct rule when necessary"*. Therefore, in 1816 the British armed forces left Sicily as part of Secretary Castlereagh's policy aimed at restraining from *"the necessity of frequent acts of undisguised power"* and at reassuring the other powers sitting at the Congress of Vienna (Russia Prussia, Austria, and France) that Britain would not sacrifice the Peace of Europe for the sake of keeping Sicily (fig. 9).



Fig. 9: The great power representatives at the Congress of Vienna

However, it seems that *de facto* British influence post-1816 remained unscathed. A hypothetical framework to explain this is Barton and Bennett's informal empire formula. i.e. an empire without army, navy, or politics, yet capable to control a foreign region resource or a people by means of mostly to economic primacy. To visualise the two versions of empire we only need to turn to contemporary satirica vignettes of the so-called English octopus. The one occupying territories in Australia, Malta, Gibraltar, South Africa, Jamaica (fig. 10) represent the late modern formal empire (which contemporary termed "the military system"), the other enveloping most of the rest of the world, including Brazil and Europe, symbolises the informal empire (fig. 11). Let us therefore test Barton and Bennett's formula against the reality of the Restoration age. Is it possible that the British were controlling Sicily, its resources and people after 1816 when the Royal Navy left the Island. And if so, how? What is clear is that the 1816 Treaty of Commerce secured Britain first nation treatment, a 10% reduction on all export duties and the opportunity to establish 39 around the Island, each at the end of internal routes drawing resources from their origin to their closest ports of shipment prior to setting sail towards global destination markets (fig. 12). Given that policy provided the means to control the Island, the next step is to single out evidence pointing to primary (mining), secondary sector (wine and the citrus), tertiary (industry) and quaternary sectors (tourism).



Figs. 10 and 11: The two versions of the English octopus

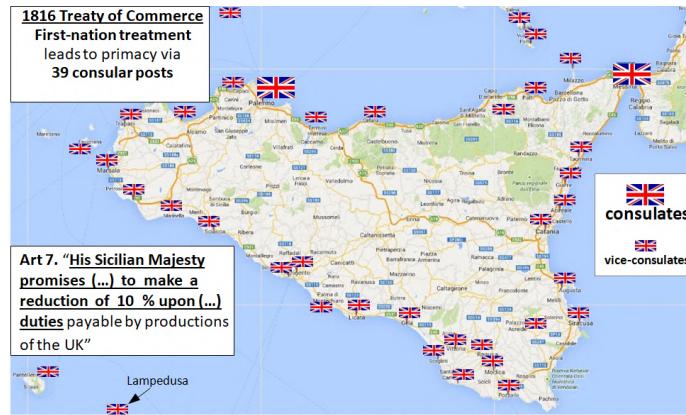


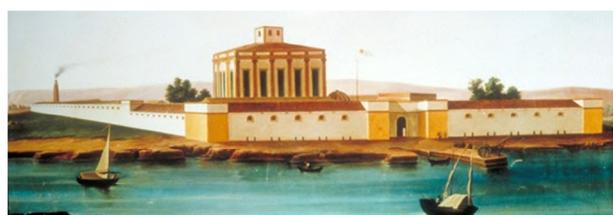
Fig. 12: The result of the Treaty of Commerce between the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies and the United Kingdom

All of the minerals for most of the 19th century (sulphur, asphalt, lead, silver, copper, gold, and iron) were controlled by foreign capitalists who extracted and transformed them in their chemical plants, so numerous and extensive that they required the creation of an early conglomerate, the Anglo-Sicilian Sulphur Company based in London (fig. 13).

The same was true of the wine making industry, with the Lancastrian model being exported to Sicily. Huge factories such as this one (fig. 14) started producing wine, Wood, Gill, Corlett, Woodhouse, Clarkson to name but a few. It was not until 1831 that the first Italian producer emerged, Lipari, amongst the ranks of those who had previously been employed at British wine farms. The same was true of Florio who was a partner of Ingham's before the two separated. The wine industry in particular hints at informal empire being present in parts of Sicily for a very long time. Much at the same time, after Benjamin Ingham and Constantin Rafinesque's 1809 pioneering shipment to the US, the share of citrus fruit picked up very quickly (fig. 15).



Sulphur	Routh	Asphalt	Chemical plants
Lowell	Oates	Whitaker & H.-B.A.B	Ingham, Sarauw & Porry
Ruhrberg	Prior	Limmer & Worhole	
Baller	Turner	Val de Travers	
Stevenson	Dalgains	Aveline	Nascio & Aveline
Gardner & Rose	Leaf	Lead, iron, antimonium, copper, silver, gold and	Hamnett
Thurnburn	Ball		Trewella
Morrison & Seager	Trewella	Beck	Gill
Ingham	Pare-Brown	McLeod	Power & Unnett
Gill	Pumice	Carbon coke	Stevenson
Wood	Stevenson	Skurray	Sanderson & Barrett
Valentine			Reichenecker



1793 – Woodhouse at Marsala	1824 – Ingham at Vittoria (alcohol)
1807 – Caulton at Savoca	1826 – Ingham-Stephens at Balestrate
1809 – Hopps at Mazara	1827 – Ingham at Castellammare
1812 – Ingham at Marsala	1830 – Whyte at Marsala
1812 – Gill-Breck at Marsala	1831 – Lee Brown-Griffo at Partinico + Cossins, Hervey, Gordon, Higgins
1815 – Clarkson at Castelvetrano	1831 – Lipari at Marsala (former Whitaker workers)
1815 – Clarkson at Campobello	1833 – Florio at Marsala (former Ingham partners)
1815 – Ingham-Stephens at Salemi	1868 – Rainford at Taormina
1820 – Nelson at Maniace	1870 – Angus at Castellammare
1820s – Wood-Crokat at Marsala	1871 – Stevenson at Lipari
1820s – Ingham at Alcamo (alcohol)	1875 – Eaton at Bucceri

Figs. 13 and 14: British-Sicilian mining and wine industry

We are getting closer to the subject of this contribution as steam power and their prime application – railways – were instrumental in accelerating the land-section of supply chains. Sulphur, wine, and citrus fruit alike started requiring the speedier concentration into first class deep water seaports. Two such ports were Catania and Messina's, on the East Coast, whence ships sailed South towards Malta, the regional node, and thence to London, Liverpool or Glasgow and into the Atlantic to reach New York, São Paulo and Argentina (fig. 16).



Figs. 15 and 16: British-Sicilian citrus produce and logistics

A third dataset comes from the tourism industry. This is a San Domenico's Convent (fig. 17), the first of several religious buildings to be converted into hotels as the result of the Italian government's 1866 seizures, fashioned along the lines of Henry VIII's dissolution and capture of monasteries (1536-1541)

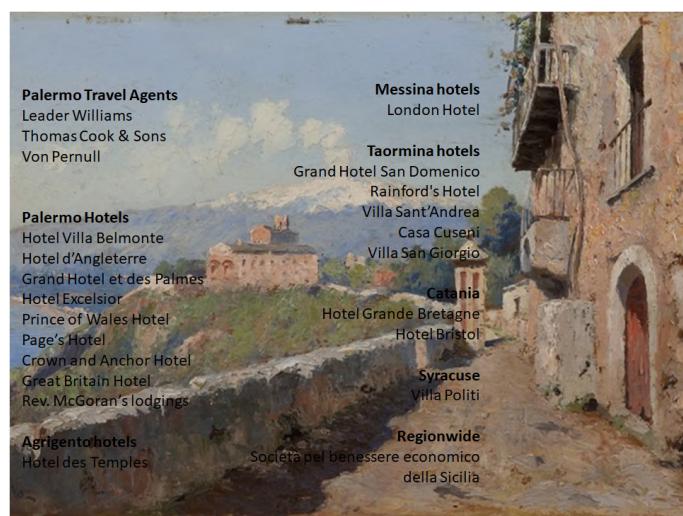
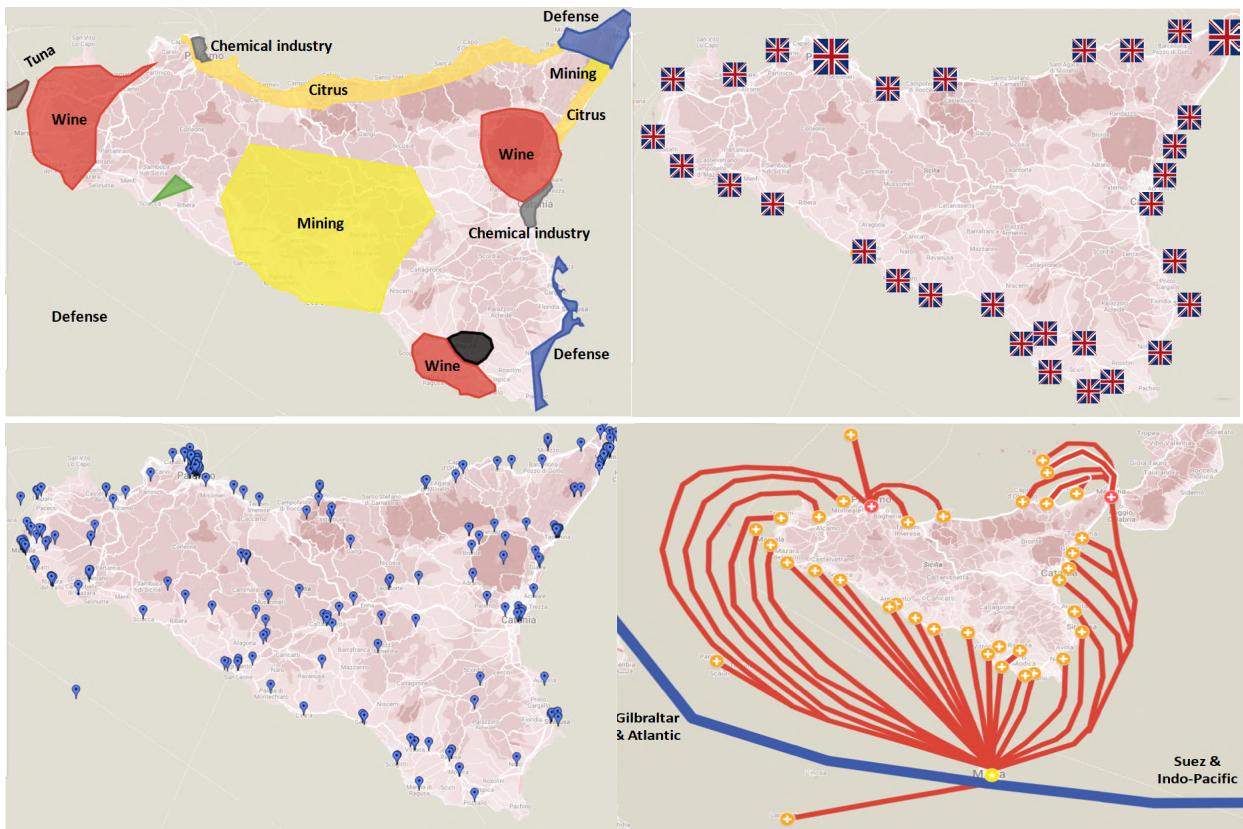


Fig. 17: San Domenico's suppressed convent And the origins of British-Sicilian tourism

RESULTS

A tentative map of the production districts in British Sicily should have looked a little bit like this (fig. 18). There was mining in the middle, wine at the three ends, the chemical industry concentrated at the two main cities, Palermo and Catania, while most of the citrus production took place on the coastline with British consulates (fig. 19) conveniently placed to monitor and protect production and producers' interests (fig. 20).



Figs. 17-21: British-Sicilian industrial districts, consulates, companies and Sicilian-Maltese hub and spoke system

Once the districts were consolidated and construction costs were viable, the foreign capitalists started pondering upon ways to efficiently push the goods out of Sicily into the Valletta's Grand Harbour. **Fig 21** hypothesises that the Sicily-Malta routes coupled with the Grand Harbour collector lay the ground for an early hub and spoke system. Fig. 22 shows how metropolis, regional hubs, routes and the system operated (fig. 22).

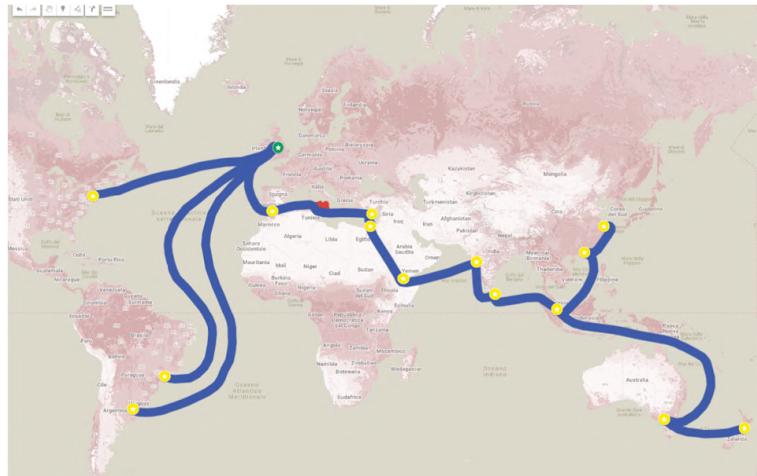


Fig. 22: First globalisation British imperial trade routes

The concentration of capital was a major opportunity for conglomerate creation from as early as 1825. Throughout the 19th century, all local corporations bear an English name (fig. 23). They were market-driven during the first and the second industrial revolution until the Italian government started wrestling itself out of suzerainty by nationalising all industries and turn them into such consortia or enti as ENIT, the public body responsible for the tourist industry.

Yet, nationalisation was never a success.

One example was the sulphur industry; production and revenue had skyrocketed throughout the 19th century, leading Sicily to hold a monopoly on global production (fig. 24). But, when the Anglo-Sicilian Sulphur Company was disbanded, the combined effect of nationalisation and Fraasch engineered mechanised extraction in the US, Sicilian sulphur production declined steeply down to total closure of 800 mines between 1950s and early 1980s (fig. 25).

		The dusk of British Sicily: From market to state-driven capitalism.	
		1825 Sicilian Silk Company 1870 Sicilian Sulphur Mines Company 1872 Anglo-Sicilian Rock Asphalte Company 1885 Sicilian Railways Company 1888 Sicilian United Copper Mines Company 1893 Sardinian-Sicilian Mining Syndicate 1896 Anglo-Sicilian Sulphur Company 1905 Sicilian Pumice Stone Company 1910 Anglo-Sicilian Construction Company 1915 Anglo-Sicilian Asphalte Company 1915 Sicilian Marble Company 1921 Anglo-Sicilian Steamship Company 1917 Consorzio Obbligatorio per l'Industria Soffiera Siciliana 1918 Stazione sperimentale per le industrie delle essenze e dei derivati agrumari 1919 Ente Nazionale Industrie Turistiche 1924 Società grandi alberghi siciliani 1927 Società Anonima Vini Italiani 1927 Asfalti, bitumi, cementi e derivati	
		FIRST REVOLUTION	
MARKET DRIVEN		SECOND REVOLUTION	
STATE DRIVEN		SULPHUR	
BUREAUCRATIC SOCIALISM		CITRUS	
FASCIST CORPORATIVISM		TOURISM	
		TOURISM	
		WINE	
		ASPHALT	

Fig. 23: private British-Sicilian corporations and public consortia and enti

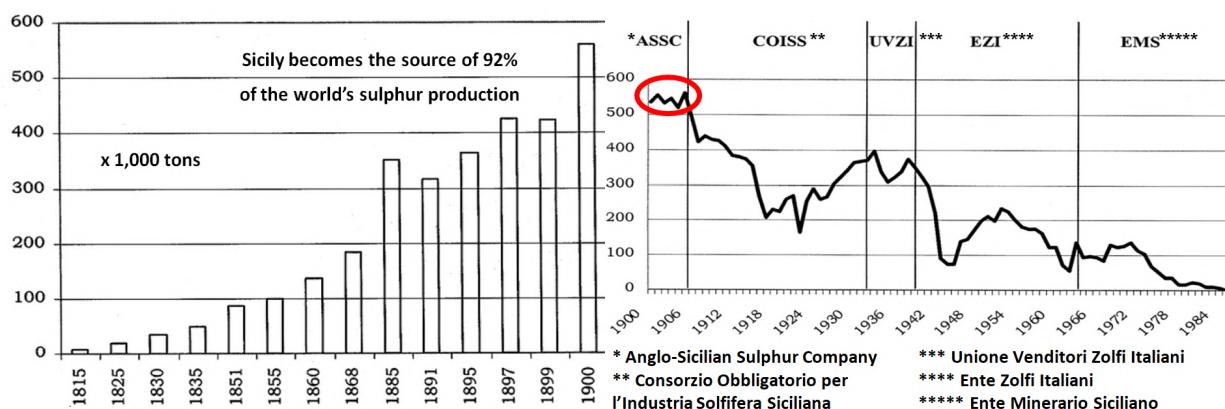


Fig. 24 and 25: Flames to dust. The rise (1815-1906) and fall (1907-1984) of Sicilian sulphur production

The demise of Sicilian extractive industry was by no means inevitable. Indeed, recent research by the Bank of Italy has shown that productivity and industrialisation rates in Sicily were comparable to those of Northern Italy throughout the first half century since the country's unification (1861-1901) (fig. 26).

It was the Giolitti government's decision to concentrate capital and industry in the Northwestern triangle (Milan-Turin-Genoa) at the dawn of the 20th century that drained the South of Italy of its financial and industrial resources, infrastructure, markets and production, making freight train traffic and railways redundant at a faster rate than elsewhere in the country.

Fig. 27 shows as late as 1881, 4 out of 8 Sicilian provinces (Trapani, Caltanissetta, Modica, and Catania) experienced the greatest leaps forward (+20% and over) in added value. In the case of Trapani, that was due to the phylloxera crisis in France that led to a surge in wine production, while Caltanissetta and Modica fed the growth of Catania's industrial boom, which contemporaries dubbed "the Southern Milan" consequent to the concentration of sulphur processing at such plants as Robert Trehella's Phoenix refinery. However, industrial malaise affected the remaining provinces, with decline in added value visible in Palermo in 1881, then Palermo, Messina, and Modica in 1901, and finally in every province in 1911 as a consequence of the loss of sulphur monopoly and the great 1908 Messina earthquake (fig. 28). A similar picture is told by fig. 29 whereby internal made adult migration (workers) to wine making province of Trapani and mining provinces of Caltanissetta, Modica, and Catania peaks in 1881-1901 and stops in 1911 (with the notable exception of Catania).

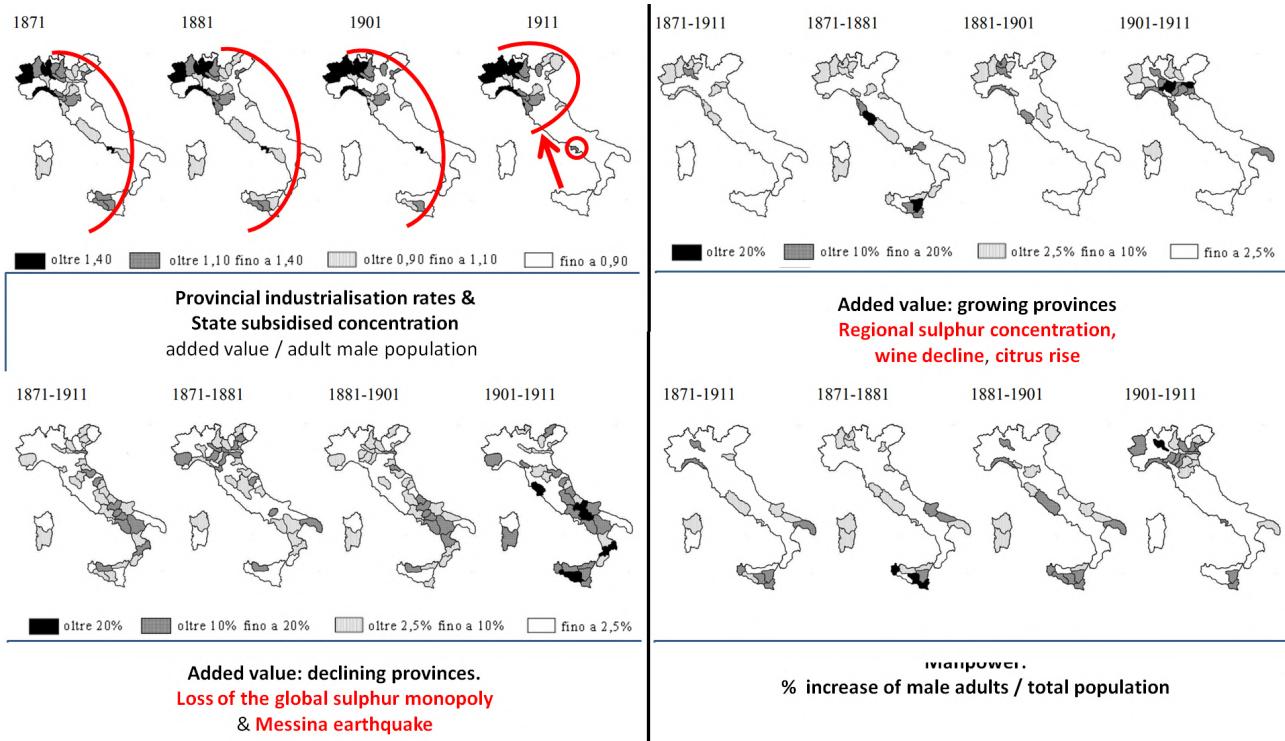


Fig. 26-29: Industrialisation rates, added value, declining and growing provinces

That is the reason why mass emigration from Sicily only emerged in the 1900s, while it was endemic in Northern regions from as early 1876 (figs. 30-31).

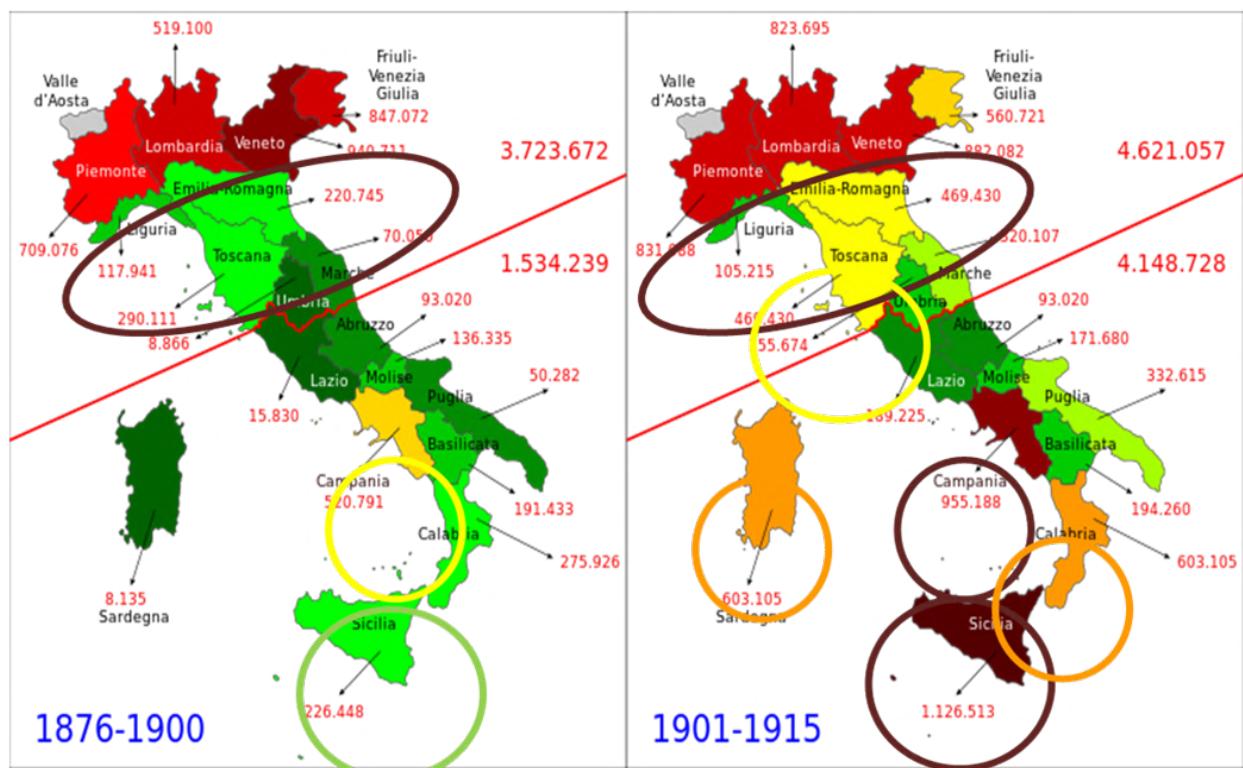


Fig. 30-31: Italian regional emigration figures

Before then, Sicilian-based capitalists commanded enough financial clout as to look out to North America for opportunities. One such man was Benjamin Ingham, who made a fortune by reinvesting his wine and sulphur revenue across the Atlantic, first into the Great Lakes canals (1830s-1840s) (fig. 32) and, later, into the New York and Michigan Central Railroads (figs. 33-34) to a degree that he became the first foreign investor in the US economy, all while sitting in Palermo, in West Sicily.



Fig. 32: Benjamin Ingham and the Great Lakes canals



Fig. 33: Benjamin Ingham and the New York Central Railroad



Fig. 34: Benjamin Ingham and the Michigan Central Railroad

Likewise, British financiers were very active in Brazil too if we are to believe the complaints of its ambassador to the United Kingdom: *"the commerce between the two countries Brazil and England is carried on with English Capital ships and companies and that the profits the interest and the payments for insurance and the dividends all go into the pockets of English men"* (1854) (fig. 35).

A second globalist dealt with railways within Sicily (fig. 36). Robert Trewhella was able to built 1,200 kilometers of railways and to create three companies controlling construction of the infrastructure (fig. 37) as well as management of lines (fig. 38), locomotives (fig. 39), and trains.

Much alike Ingham, Robert Trewhella did it all while living in Catania, on the East side of Sicily.

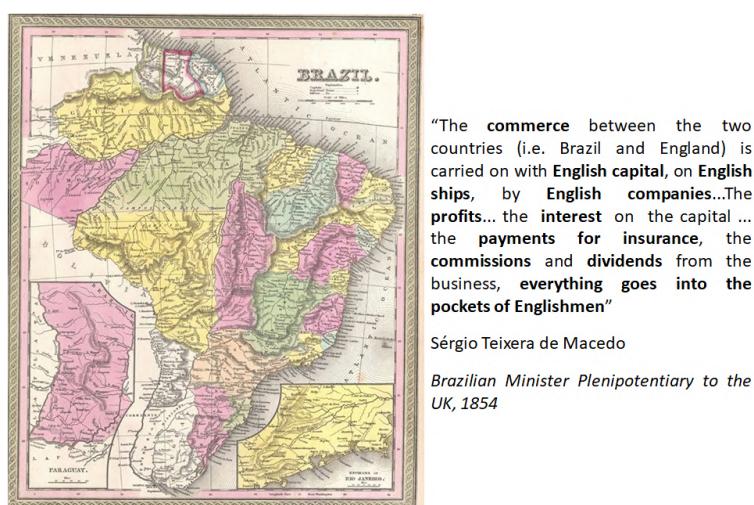
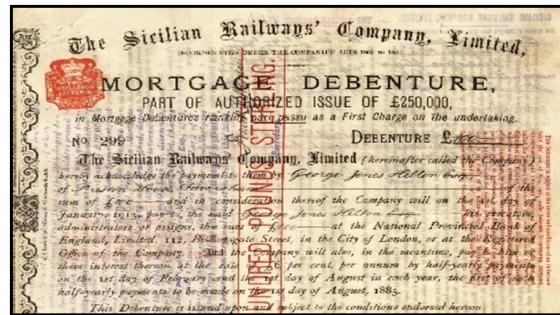


Fig. 35: Minister Teixeira's complaint



1824 Imperial Continental Gas Association
 1862 Imperial Continental Water Corporation
 1882 Sicilian Railways Company
 1886 Società Siciliana Lavori Pubblici
 1886 James Kitson & Company



Electricity	Shipping and Logistics	Railways
Trewella	Routh & Valentine	Trewella
	Ingham & Florio	Woodhouse
	Morrison & Seager	Ingham
	Peirce Becker	Oneto & Gordon
	Barrett	Garbutt



Construction
Transportation:
Società Siciliana di
Lavori Pubblici



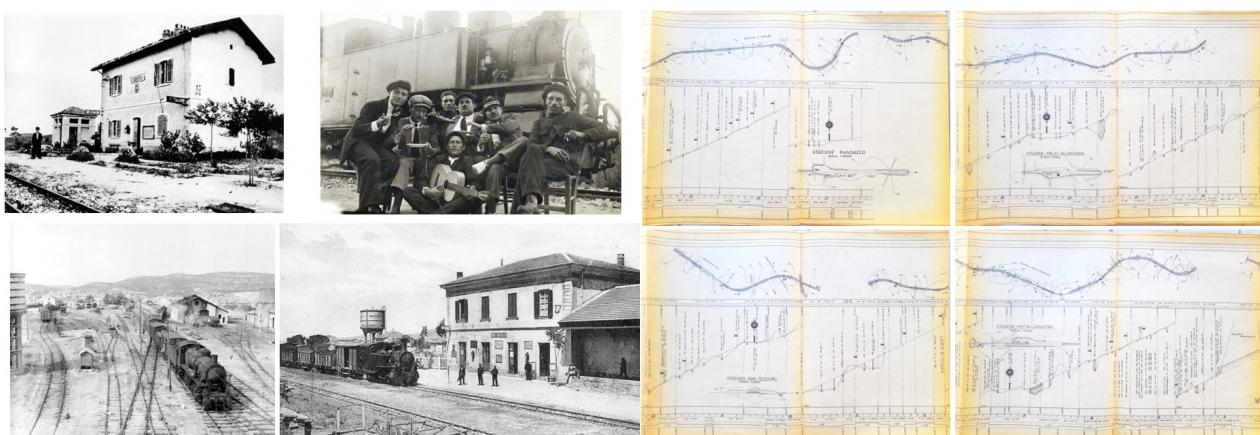
Locomotors Company:
James Kitson & Company, Leeds.

The very company providing the
Manchester-Liverpool line
produced **bespoke models** for
the Sicilian network.



Fig. 36-39: Robert Trewella's railway management, construction, and transport companies in Sicily

Images of the stations, lines, trains, and workers as well as the blueprints are now at the National Railway Archive in Rome (fig.), a very rich and interesting collection (truly running as far as the past of our present (fig. 40-41).



Figs.40 and 41: stations, workers, lines and blueprints from The Italian National Railway Archive in Rome

So why was did railway infrastructure go into disrepair?

They were all abandoned as the result of two major contingencies:

1. sulphur industry seized to exist (1907-1975); and
2. the automotive industry based in the North Italy industrial triangle encouraged mass motorisation after WW2 so the railway lines became redundant soon after 1954-1984).

What is left of them?

Extensive specialist literature dealing with Mediterranean and regional railway lines and locomotors is bountiful (**fig. 42**).

There is even a quite a famous board game called *1849. The Game of Sicilian Railways*, that makes it possible for players to become a railway financier, build the lines and the stations and play around the idea of becoming a Sicilian railway baron (**fig. 43**).

And yet, at the time this paper was drafted (2025), it was possible to book a biking holiday using only a fraction of the abandoned lines (80 kilometers out of the 1,200 abandoned kilometres) (**fig. 44**).

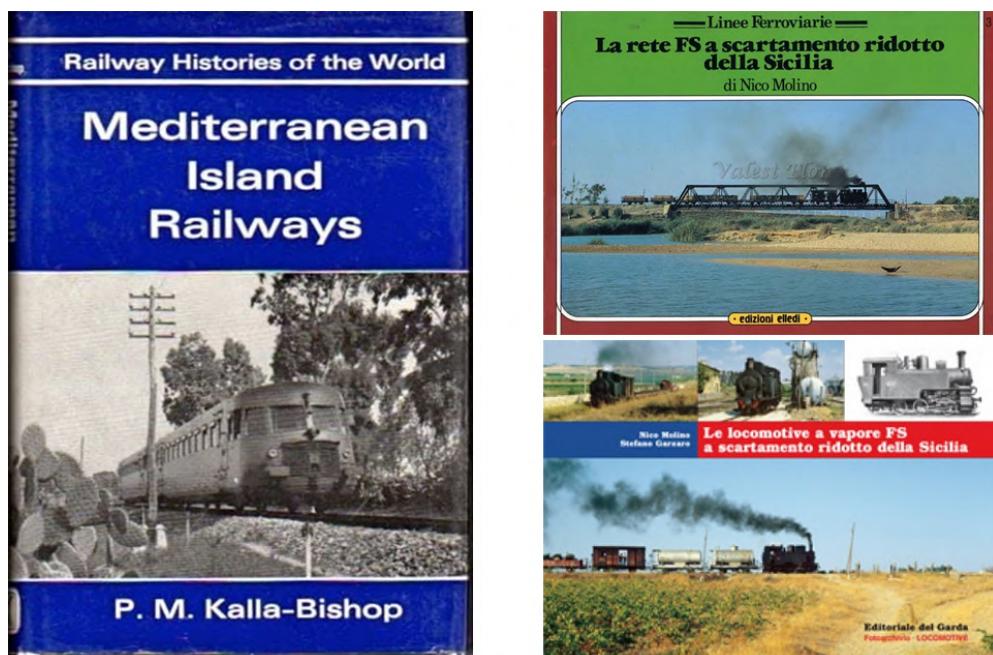


Fig. 42: Existing literature



Fig. 43: 1849. The Game of Sicilian Railways



Fig. 44: Retrofitted railways into greenways

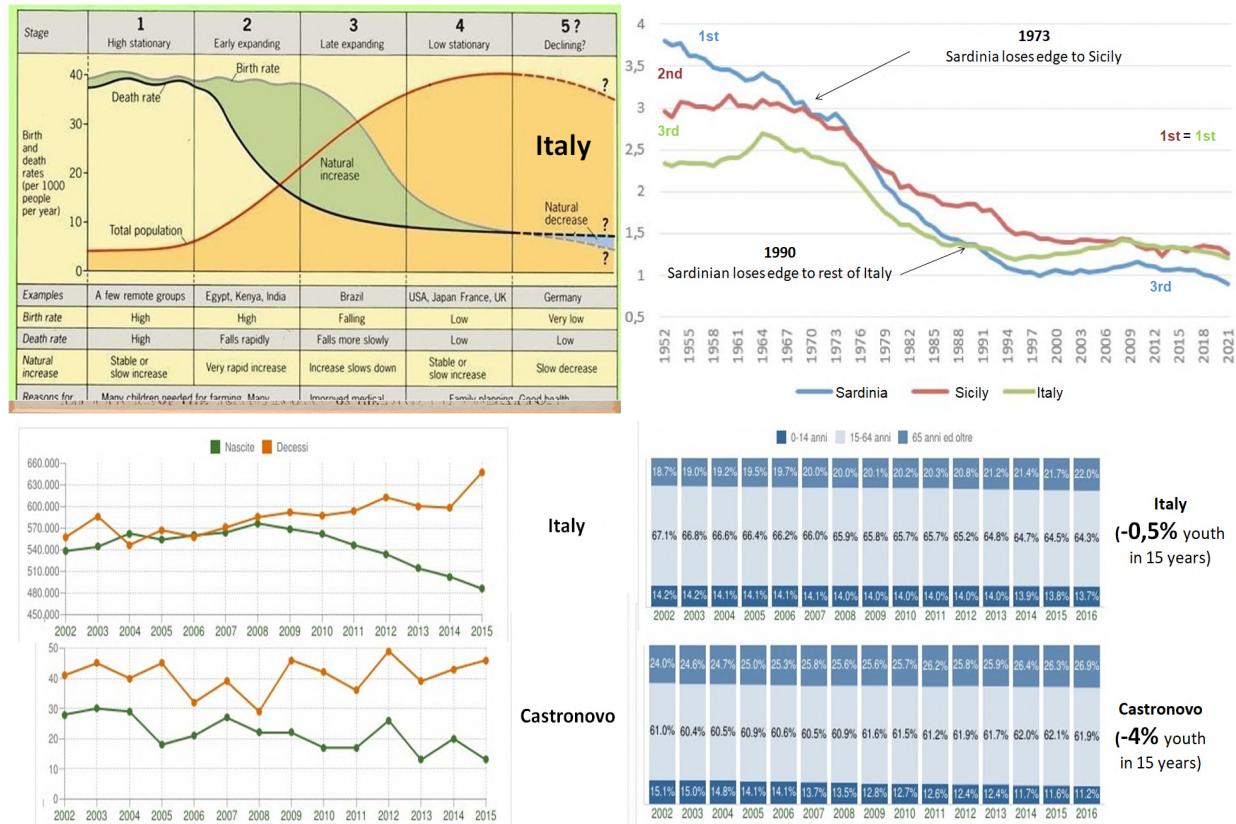
It follows that a future for those former railways is not only imaginable, but plausible and desirable, one that may very well start in 2026 on the bicentennial anniversary of the earliest passenger line connecting Manchester to Liverpool (fig. 45).



Fig. 45: The invention of the present. From horse to steam power.

Railways might equally be important in reshaping the present and future of rural Italy, which is experiencing a widespread demographic emergency; herein the population is declining at similar rates seen at Brazil's inland *paises mortos*.

It is noteworthy that while the decline nationwide is structural, locally it only takes a little stimulus to mitigate the effect of negative demographics. There is still hope that good-willing local government can put into place effective strategies, but time is ticking. Castronovo di Sicilia (pop. 3,000), the hilltown sandwiched between the coast cities of Palermo and Agrigento serving as a sample settlement, has lost 4% of its youth pool in just 15 years (fig. 46-48). The human capital is rapidly declining and local administrations need to take action at once if the shrinking cohort of the today's teens and tomorrow's adults are to benefit from the retrofitting of the 450+ stations dotting the soft-rolling landscape.



Figs. 46-49: Italian negative demographics at National, regional and local level

Quite uniquely, this priceless built and natural heritage asset and development opportunity originated from natural disaster (fig. 49). In the wake of the 1968 Belice earthquake that shook South Western Sicily, the Italian State transferred ownership of 40%+ of the abandoned railway lines from National Railways (it. *Ferrovie dello Stato*) to local councils as a form of compensation, on condition that the latter would use them to meet the population's social needs. And yet, ever since the passing of the 1971 purpose-made ownership transfer bill, conversions have been very few and far between (fig. 50).



National Law 491/1971, art. 8 bis: "Areas and properties which are have remained clear as a consequence of the abandonment of the Palermo-Salaparuta narrow-gauge line are ceded transferred free of charge to local councils each within their land area. The areas and properties must us exclusively used for the purpose of primary, secondary planning or public interest."

Fig. 50: Natural disaster as an opportunity. The transfer of lines and stations from the National Railways to local councils.

DISCUSSION

This paper posits that this extensive and widespread culturally rich and architecturally significant assemblage should be acknowledged as a valuable asset by the national tourism industry, especially so in the current predicament where the offer side features predominantly cities grappling with issues of overcrowding while demand pulls for sustainable solutions in thinly populated, little polluted, rural areas (fig. 51-53). This recognition ought to enter policy and be formalised prior to neglect throwing a decaying assemblage into irreversible oblivion.

Caught in the tourist trap

If beautiful places are to survive when the whole world is affluent, they'll have to be reserved for a fortunate few

My first epiphany came in Taormina. I was writing about the glories of western Sicily and the Aeolians, and I was particularly looking forward to Taormina. Loved in its time by Goethe, Wagner, Yeats, Oscar Wilde, D.H. Lawrence, this pearl of Sicily was once described by Ernest Hemingway as being so pretty 'it hurts to look at it.'

Yet I loathed Taormina. Why? Because as soon as I stepped out of my hotel I was swamped, engulfed, drowned, swept away in a sea of Germans, Americans, Japanese and Brits. The hordes of trippers were so dense that people were literally queueing to get into the town, then queuing to walk down the main street, where they queued to take exactly the same photo. Eventually I gave up queueing to see queues, and nipped into the celebrated Hotel Timeo for a gin and tonic, which cost me £30.

In short: Taormina has been ruined by tourists. And as I sipped my ludicrously overpriced G&T, I realised that this ruination is spreading. And also that this situation cannot go on. We are running out of Europe. We are running out of world.

Most popular

Katy Balls

Nigel's next target: Reform has Labour in its sights



Fig. 51: Urban overtourism

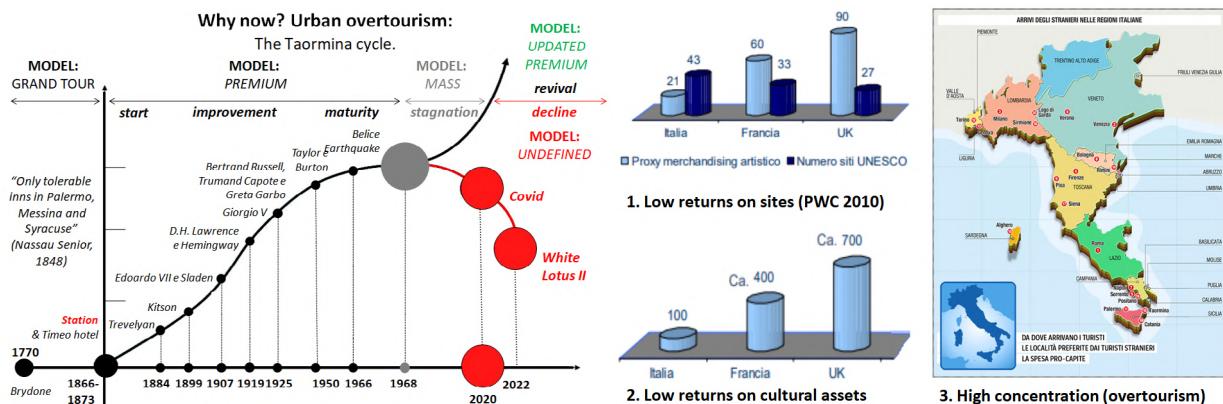


Fig. 52: the vicious tourism cycle at Taormina

Fig. 53: Regional imbalances in tourist arrivals and return on cultural asset

So what is to be done with such vast network of abandoned heritage railways and stations? Quite a lot. By way of practical example, we may meet the demand for sustainable tourism services at existing destinations, the most obvious hotspots being Palermo and Agrigento, respectively home to UNESCO World Heritage Listed dating Arab-Norman and Greek sites by. In this case, the retrofitting of the railway infrastructure could be the bearer of novel bicycle lanes, horse tracks, hiking footpaths connecting cultural nodes (fig. 54) intercepting several geographically, demographically, and economically marginal settlements in need of revitalisation.

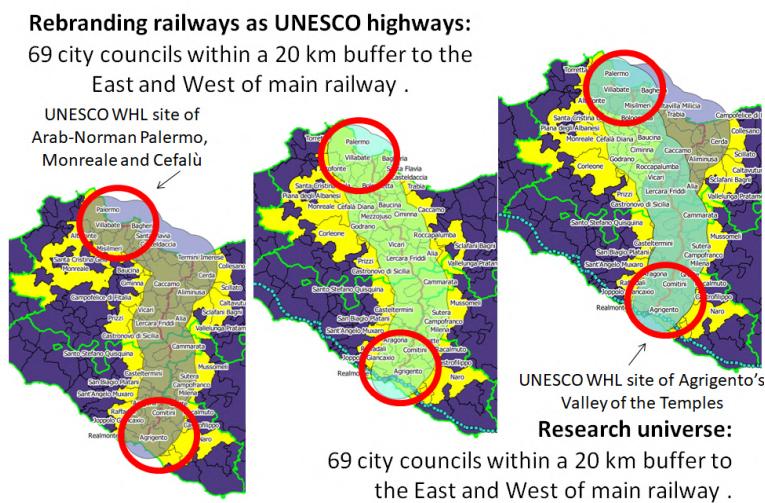


Fig. 54: Sowing up UNESCO sites via greenways

The idea has been floated at a number of Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) sessions held with representatives from local government, business, and non-profit organisations at Castronovo (fig. 55) and a 25 other small towns over the course of the past eight years (2017-2025). Cultural and environmental resources have been remapped (fig. 56) and tested on horseback, bicycle and foot (fig. 57), in view of tweaking tourism policy from quantity to quality (fig. 58), pushing territorial pressure down, and perceived experience, value, and brand up (fig. 59).



Fig. 55-59: CLLD greenway planning, mapping, and testing

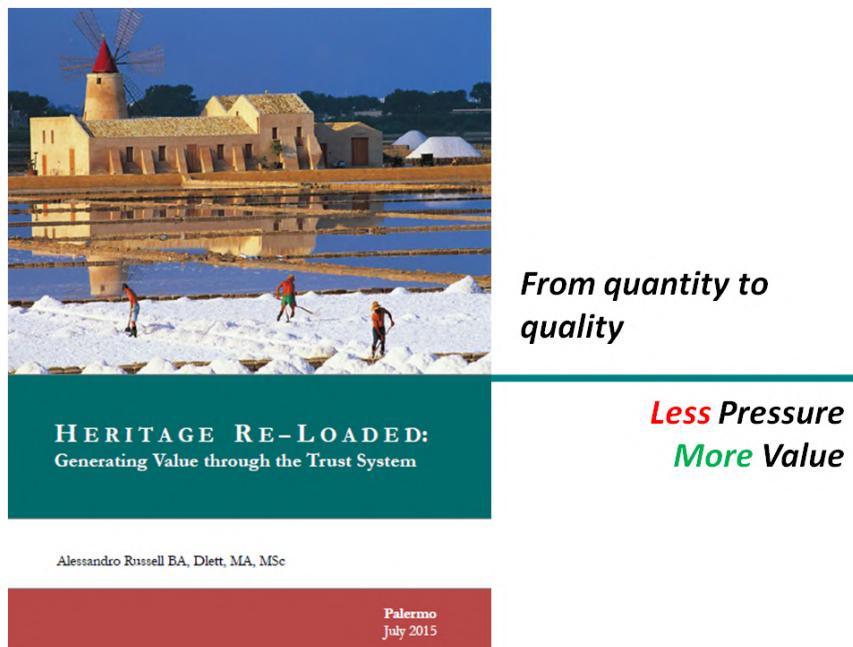


Fig. 59: Shifting paradigm. From quantity to quality, less pressure, more value

At the CLLD, the stakeholders and I imagined to retrofit the station buildings into:

1. economically sustainable hubs tailored for hospitality at all levels (camp sites, hikers' shelters, hostels, family farm hotels, boutique hotels, terraces, excursion starting-ending points), as well as for food, beverage and catering (waterpoints, organic restaurants, kitchen gardens, farm to table markets) (**fig. 60**);
2. socially sustainable gathering centres (first-aid shelters, social housing condominiums, alternative youth detentive centres, training schools) (**fig. 61**);
3. environmentally sustainable renewable agroenergy stations (hydroponic farms, and micro-wind, solar, biomass plants).



Fig. 60-61: Economic, social, and agro-energetic conversions in Sicily

Elsewhere, in parts of Brazil (Guararema, Quiririm), conversions are gaining momentum so much so that Taubaté's own Old Railway Station expects to be renovated by the end of 2026 (**fig. 62-65**).





Fig. 62-65: Tourism and citizen-purpose retrofitting stations in Brazil

Closer to home, a vast cycle lane network stretches out over most of the Peninsula (fig. 66).

Next comes a series of opportunities such as a recent pilot project proposal from the University of Palermo with the objective of turning one sample narrow-gauge line into a greenway. This has gathered interest from Spanish, Maltese, Cypriot, and British partners in local government, research, and no-profit organisations, and should lead to higher tier calls drawing on EU's flagship programmes (Interreg, Horizon, Life, Erasmus+, CreativeEurope), all fostering sustainable actions complying with the UN's Agenda 2030 goals.



Fig. 66: A view of the Adriatic section of the Italian National Greenway

Finally, in consideration of the shared history, engineering, functional-morphological features observed in pre-nationalised 19th century networks across the Mediterranean and South America, there is hope and scope for larger collaboration between Italian and Brazilian universities by way of

cross-border initiatives in the fields of culture, heritage, and agro-food such as those promoted by Fapesp and the Italian Foreign Ministry. The pilot project might also be conducive of a dual doctoral programme in Regional Planning and Development drawing on SNAI (*Strategie Nazionale Aree Interne*) funding, Italy's governmental aiming to tackle multi-dimensional issues stemming from geographic-demographic marginality.

Finally, although the road ahead of us is steep, let us be reminded that "*all dreams can come true if we have the courage to pursue them*" (W. Disney) (fig. 67).



Fig. 67: "all dreams can come true if we have the courage to pursue them"

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