

# Sustainable Development and Innovation

A future perspective

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Part IV  
**Historical and Social Section**

- 333 Mediterranean Migrations. A historical profile of Italy from the Middle Ages to the present day  
*Alessandro Abbate, Salvatore Bottari*
- 353 Two cases of forced migration in the Ancien Régime. The expulsion of the Jews from Sicily (1492) and the exiles from Messina after the failure of the Anti-Spanish revolt (1678)  
*Giuseppe Campagna, Marco Cesareo*
- 363 The theory of good policy and of the freedom of trade within the framework of a new international peaceful order. The case of “Le Nouveau Cynée” (Paris, 1623)  
*Francesca Russo*
- 371 Social Media at the heart of lifelong learning  
*Francesco Benedetto, Fabio Fragomeni, Rosalba Rizzo*

**Appendix**

- 393 Storie di confine  
*Alessandro Anastasi*

# Mediterranean Migrations

A historical profile of Italy from the Middle Ages to the present day

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## Abstract

*Objectives.* The aim of this study is to draw a summary of the history of migrations arriving and departing from Italy between the Middle Ages and the present day.

*Methodology.* In fact, due to its particular position in the Mediterranean context, the history of Italy has been marked by intense inward and outward mobility. Even the Alps, rather than being a barrier, have historically constituted a passage for arriving and departing peoples.

Moreover, there have also been political and socio-economic reasons that have contributed to making Italy a crossroads of migratory paths: the recurring wars have pushed the exiles in different directions, the invasions have also led to migratory phenomena of entering and leaving. Since the Middle Ages, cultural institutions and universities have favoured the arrival and circulation of intellectuals. The role of trade and manufacturing activities, and the phenomena of agricultural colonization have led to an intense circulation of the population on the Italian territory.

We will focus on the role of the immigrants and foreign communities in the Italian states. We shall investigate patterns of settlement of migrants as well as issues related to coexistence between local populations and immigrants.

We will also examine Italian emigration to European and extra-European territories

*Findings.* Through a comparative analysis of the available data it will be possible to identify the elements of continuity in the long term as well as the peculiarities that have characterized every single migratory phenomenon.

*Research limits.* We will provide only a summary of a wider investigation that we have been carrying out for years.

*Practical implications.* A historical and long-term analysis of the migratory phenomenon can provide a balanced response to the current migratory phenomenon that invests the Mediterranean and European countries

*Originality of the study.* The originality of the proposed paper consists precisely in studying the migratory phenomenon on the Italian territory through a long-term historical survey.

**Key Words:** Migration; Italy; Mediterranean; Foreign communities

: . An historical perspective, – . Current migration in Italy, .

## 1. An historical perspective

In his book *L’Invasion* ( ), the French colonialist writer Louis Bertrand described the Italian immigrants in Marseilles as hordes of Barbarians. Yet the migrations of

\* Alessandro Abbate, University of Messina, is author of the paragraph one entitled *An historical perspective*. Salvatore Bottari, University of Messina, is author of the paragraph two entitled *Current migration in Italy*.

peoples are not a novelty of the contemporary age. The displacement of populations crosses many historical periods. Therefore, it should be stressed that human migrations do not have the character of exceptionality. Moreover, the most accredited theory of the origin of man asserts that the first human groups originated in sub-Saharan Africa and then spread to various continents. Among the geneticists who support this theory was Luigi Cavalli Sforza, recently deceased, who made a good synthesis of genetic and linguistic data to support his hypothesis. Further paleoanthropological and archaeological evidence corroborated this thesis.

Since ancient times, Italy and the Mediterranean have been a bridge for the peoples who migrated there. Research on migrations, therefore, has developed broadly and has looked at the mobility of human beings in various historical periods.

A further push towards a chronological extension on the study of migrations came with the publication of the Cambridge Survey of World Migration ( ) which covers a wide time span. It begins in the sixteenth century «with the establishment of European colonies and covers the history of migration to the late twentieth century, when political conflict, global communications and transport systems stimulated immense and complex flows of displaced persons, labour migrants and skilled professionals».

The Roman Empire practiced the more or less forced transfer of entire tribal groups or portions of ethnic populations for the purpose of security or rebuilding the population. Marcus Aurelius, after the depopulation due to a terrible epidemic of smallpox, made settlements of subjugated Danubians in Italy. The experiment did not succeed because the Barbarians who settled near Ravenna rebelled and took possession of the city. After defeating them, Marcus Aurelius had all the Barbarians who were stationed in Italy deported elsewhere. There was a similar initiative with Constantine in the 3rd century after Christ, when the Sarmatians, driven from the Trans-Danubian region by pressure from the Goths, asked the emperor to be sent to various areas of the Empire, including Italy. Constantine granted this concession to the refugees. Fifteen military prefectures were then established to manage the settlement and covered an area that included Puglia, Calabria, Bruzio, Lucania, Sannio, Friuli, Oderzo, Padua, Cremona, Bologna, Turin, Acqui-Tortona, Novara, Vercelli, Ivrea, and Pollenzo. The deportation of the Alamanni ( 4th a.D) from the plains of the Reno — after their defeat — was less extensive. They were settled in the Po Valley by Valentinian, where they lived by paying a tribute. Seven years later the Goti and Taifali, defeated in the Balkans, were deported to the depopulated lands around Modena, Reggio and Parma. Therefore, we have a complex migratory phenomenon because the free choice to migrate of some groups was added to the element of constraint of the deported populations. However, deportees or refugees were welcome because they were needed to fill the population vacuums.

The Middle Ages opened with the allocations of the Barbaric peoples initially approved of by the imperial authorities. In fact, during the 5th and 6th centuries the ethnic composition on the Italian territory changed further, although the Barbarian populations who arrived with the invasions did not have distinctive characteristics. Theodoric and the Ostrogoths who came to Italy in 476 — made a pact with the