

## The Difficult Imitation Economic Societies, Development Projects and Human Capital in the Kingdom of Naples during the First Half of the Nineteenth Century

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### Abstract

*The economic Societies were born in the Kingdom of Naples after Napoleon Bonaparte imperial strategy, who at the end of the nineteenth Century, intended to modernize the agriculture of the conquered territories to adapt to England's economic growth. The Kingdom of Naples lacked almost completely the requirements needed for modernization so the state instituted Economic Societies, who had the dual objective of analyzing the particular economic vocations of the owned territory and to propose and implement development projects. So far, the historiographical debate has specifically emphasized the inability of Southern Economic Societies to implement a true structural transformation of local realities, relegating this historical experience in the category of success or failure. Considering that development may not in any way depend only and exclusively on the intervention of the State and its institutions, this article analyzes the role of human capital in Economic Societies and the consistency of elaborated development projects. From this angle, emerges the image of a circle of people who were well aware of their institutional goals. The members felt they were partakers of a civilizing mission and contributed to it by dedicating studies, knowledge and in certain cases invested their own capital.*

**Keywords:** economic associations, Kingdom of Naples, human capital, development agencies, economists, innovation

### 1.1 Introduction

In recent times, albeit in the face of globalization, economists have paid particular attention to the need to promote local development. The concept of globalization takes ever more meaning especially where it is clearly a need to adapt the panorama of globalization laws, culture and in general to the local realities, by putting in the centre the individual, the human person, the local, material and immaterial, heritage of the person and the group to which it belongs (Bauman, 2005). In the course of history, all of the “global” challenges have had “local” responses. That is why, even today there are development programs geared to the local realities rather than the acceptance *tout court* of pre-existing schemes. The processes of change need skills, tools and resources. Local communities are in need of design, education, services and infrastructures to grow local economies. Precisely for this reason, for example, the OECE has launched the “Program on Local Economic and Employment Development” (LEED), that provides for the existence of “Development Agencies” such a useful tool for the definition of an agenda (Huxley & Mountford, 2010).

The economic history can offer some interesting tips of reflection in this regard. For example, we can consider the difficulty that governments had to face in front of the “global” challenges, represented by the industrial revolution and the “local” responses. This essay, the result of extensive archival and bibliographic investigations, wants to attract the attention of scholars on some institutions created at the beginning of the XIX century in the Kingdom of Naples to encourage local development that is Economic Societies, which in many respects can be considered the forerunners of modern development agencies. The territory considered – the southern regions of pre-unification Italy – continues to have still today many characteristics of retardation or backwardness. This empirical evidence, that led many scholars to consider unsuccessful the Economic Societies, even though there have been those who have a positive judgement on the work of these institutions. It is not easy to measure or assess the actual impact of these organizations, as well as it would be too simplistic to give them the responsibility for the lack of economic development.

The economic literature defines economic development as a process of growth and transformation, as determined by the combination of the physical capital accumulation, of technical progress and the formation of adequate human capital. Anyone who has knowledge, even minimal of the economic history of southern Italy, immediately understands how in the first half of the nineteenth century, these requirements were not present to such an extent as to be able to trigger a “revolution” and can understand how the judgement on the feasibility of Economic Societies namely the ability of the latter to support and encourage a process of development, could only be negative.

In addition, we must consider that the geographical area examined is not a uniform set, but has structures, capital both physical and human, and availability of different resources from zone to zone, both in quality and quantity. However, if you look at the planning, the methodology, the objectives of the Economic Societies, the activities carried out by men in all of them, emerge aspects worth noting. The Economic Societies left a remarkable legacy, analysis, studies, memoirs, projects and initiatives, examples of human devotion to the common good, which deserves to be valued and appreciated.

This study is composed of five sections.

Section 1.2 goes in depth on the topic of associationism, used in Europe as an instrument of economic policy aimed at reducing the gap between the more industrialized countries. It dealt with public choices and not of private initiatives, because the State – at first guided by the French Empire and later by the restored Bourbon dynasty – had the need to be aware of the vocations of the provinces.

The characteristics of the territory are analyzed in the second section, 1.3. The purpose is to highlight the objective limits to economic development, given the lack of adequate communication routes, which resulted in serious difficulty to exploit the potential offered by domestic and external markets. Public resources allocated for the realization of a network of organic infrastructures was never adequate and most of the times public works were considered not as much in their direct benefit, but in the indirect benefit, or to promote employment during periods of great crisis or need.

Section 1.4 is devoted to the critical analysis of the institutive statutes of the Economic Societies. Programs and goals were well defined but financial sources and a cumbersome bureaucratic course heavily impeded the realization and embodiment.

Concrete examples of design and critiqued results obtained are analyzed in section 1.5. The investigation is focusing on the amount of resources needed to bring a project to completion, on cultural training and skills of those who formulated it, but also of those who have the power to make decisions in the implementation phase, as well as additional contingent factors equally able to affect the final result, such as, for example, entrepreneurial spirit, movement of capital, risk aversion.

Finally, section 1.6 takes into account the ability of the Economic Societies to create human capital. Particular attention was paid toward people who had been given the task to carry out the mandate and trigger a process of development, toward their interpretative schemes, their ability to formulate analysis and program lines of concrete action.

### ***1.2 The associationism as an instrument of economic policy for development***

At the beginning of the XIX century, European countries passed yet through another transition phase, resulting from the revolutions at the end of the eighteenth century. In France, with the fall of the Bastille, fought for freedom, even in the economic sphere, while in Britain, the Industrial Revolution was spreading, characterized by profound social changes, modernization of agricultural production and the introduction of factories in the manufacturing field<sup>1</sup>.

The English Industrial Revolution put the other countries of continental Europe in a forceful position to undertake a similar process of economic change and not to allow the national economies to be oppressed by English competition, which was flooding the European markets with industrial products. The countries that planned to start the process of industrialization had the advantage of being able to follow in the proven footsteps that had given good results, but also had to deal with the English industrial and commercial competition.

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<sup>1</sup> The bibliography on the industrial revolution is now boundless. For a critical synthesis Allen (2009), Hudson (2014) and Žmolek (2013).

In general, the first emulator countries benefited from the presence, spontaneous or urged by their respective governments, of foreign technicians, which, as advisors or as entrepreneurs, facilitated the transfer of knowledge in the industrial field to the host countries. In spite of prohibitions on the export of machinery (in force until 1843) and emigration of craftsman (from 1719 to 1825), Great Britain was unsuccessful in preventing the transfer of know-how overseas, also due to the industrial espionage and journeys promoted precisely to purchase information on the operations of factories (Bairoch, 1997).

Another characteristic of the process of imitation was the predominant role of government intervention, with contrast to the British model. Especially in France and Belgium, the State favoured the creation of companies, the arrival of foreign technicians or the modernization of the banking system so that industrial investments were facilitated or promoted. The State was entrusted the task to develop an economic policy that favoured internal growth and at the same time protected it from international competition (Magnusson, 2009). It was also called upon to intervene in those investments of public utility would have been too expensive and risky for individuals as well as would regulate the economic freedoms (Bairoch, 1989).

With the exception of Belgium, defined by Bairoch (1997) the “small England”, history has shown how the process of change could be something more complex than mere imitation of a model. Availability of raw materials and capital, entrepreneurship, geopolitical conditions, State intervention and in general cultural values, have made unique and unrepeatable each path tending development (Easterly & Levine, 2001). The many variables involved made indispensable the relationship between the decision-making bodies in the economic field, both public and private, and the territory, which in many cases was fulfilled through the establishment of associations. The academies or cultural *clubs* were not born in the Nineteenth Century. Already as of the Sixteenth Century in England and in the period during the enlightenment in Europe different “schools” developed that proposed to deepen scientific themes of various nature, becoming, among other things, a privileged place for the evolution of economic thought. For example, in France in 1639 the French Academy was established and in 1666 the Royal Academy of Sciences (Hahn, 1971). Both always had the protection of the authorities, both local and central, and had a leading role in the emergence of the scientific spirit (Bachelard, 1965; Kuhn, 1962). Many economists, such as Quesnay, Lavoisier, Malesherbes, Trudaiul and Condorcet, were welcomed within these Academies. With the passing of time, many other similar institutions were established in France and gave rise to what has been termed as “academicism”, an intellectual environment very sophisticated and vital, but not always able to spread innovations (Roche, 1996).

During the Nineteenth Century, in continental Europe the economic associations became a real tool or instrument of economic policy not only for its ability to analyze the economic potential of the territory, but also for the opportunity to take responsibility for problems of a practical nature. So, alongside the birth of the cultural academies for private initiative, several countries promoted the concentration of the *intelligenza* in the academies, aimed at the promotion of economic progress (Arato et al., 1996). The role of economic associations, therefore, could be either to create, through correspondence, an international network of information and update in the technical field, and also to promote local economic development, highlighting regional “vocations”.

The French example had a historic significance particularly accentuated also in the Italian tradition. The specialized bodies of French engineers were considered among the best in the world, especially in the mining and metallurgic field. The State gave its contribution to the progress through the *grand écoles*, that is the economic institutions, formed mainly by talented engineers, who enjoyed broad powers, who studied problems, gave opinions, sometimes binding, and could also be assigned temporarily as technical support to private companies (Kemp, 1989).

The fisiocratic ideas, and in particular the economic core attributed to agriculture as the main source of wealth, suggested to several European governments the creation of institutions and academies, aimed mostly at analyzing the dynamics of what was considered to be the most important activity of mankind (Allocati, 1961). Maria Theresa of Austria, Charles III of Spain, Peter Leopold, Gran Duke of Tuscany, for example, favoured and supported for this purpose agro-economic associations. The European noble class took great interest almost in a “manic” way to modernize agriculture, engaged in the adaption of new products, in the promotion of agro-industries and improving animal breeds. In particular the suburbs, that is the areas in which it was felt as being behind with respect with that of the centre of the world economy, lived a singular economic activism that was reflected also in politics and culture (Petruşewicz, 1991).

This particular dynamism of “agrarian *élites*” stemmed from the conviction that some economic and institutional reform, accompanied by a certain amount of “sacrifice”, would have been sufficient to achieve the conditions of progress experienced for the first time in Great Britain. Thus the Russian, Austrian, Spanish, Polish, Neapolitan and Irish agricultural innovators were convinced that in order to promote modernization it was necessary to overcome two major obstacles. The first one concerned the peasant question. In many areas, as for example Russia, Austria, Hungary, the servitude of serfs and the subjection of hereditary farmer were still widespread, in others such as the Kingdom of the two Sicilies, even though the agrarian reforms were carried out, a condition of precariousness continued to persist in the rural context. The second obstacle was represented by the eighteenth century idea of progress. It was considered necessary in fact, overcoming the universalistic idea of development, by reformulating the concept in a “local” key. Therefore it wanted to stem cosmopolitanism, as imposition of the classic foreigner’s models, favouring the exploitation of the local situation and the development that bases its roots in their own land.

After 1830 the phenomenon of economic associations asserted itself with steady growth, so much as to arouse some fear among sovereigns, still concerned about insurrectionary attempts promoted by Masonic and Carbonari associations. According to Petruszewicz (1991), precisely because of the danger that these associations could be a cover-up for these subversive groups, associationism was institutionalized. In this way, on one hand the associations received economic support from the monarchs, and on the other hand the latter were insured an intellectual participation in economic activity and at the same time could supervise their work.

All of the territory of the Italian peninsula, since the end of the eighteenth century was affected by a phenomena of economic associationism. The Academy of Science, Letters, and Arts was born in Udine with a special section of “practical agriculture”, in Florence the Academy of Georgofili was affirmed, as well as other associations developed in Vicenza, in Turin and many other cities (De Rosa, 1996). Similar initiatives were undertaken in the Kingdom of Naples in the late Eighteenth Century, when the Bourbon instituted in L’Aquila, Teramo, Chieti the patriotic societies for the promotion of agriculture, arts and industries (Guidi, Ridolfi & Scappucci, 2000).

Thereafter, the French Decade, Joseph Bonaparte sustained with particular attention these associative phenomena, so much so that in 1808, in imitation of the *Royal Society* of London, he instituted the “Società Reale”, divided in the academies of History and Letters, Sciences and Fine Art (the academies became of archaeology, sciences, and fine arts)<sup>2</sup>. Still, in 1812 the Pontaniana Society was founded and two years later the *Sebezia*, both joined the *Accademia Pontaniana* (Bianchini, 1859; Alessandro, 2000).

To the associationism of cultural type, be it voluntary or favoured by the State, then added the institutionalized one with purposes typically economic. In 1810 the Murattian government instituted an Agricultural Society in each province, transformed two years later to Economic Society, with the task of promoting the increase of production (Allocati, 1961)<sup>3</sup>.

The French with the Napoleonic campaigns had evidently hegemonic objectives, specifically the need to know with particular interest the economic potential of the conquered territories, both as commodity markets and as sales markets. For this reason, the institutionalized economic associations arose in the Kingdom of Naples, subject to France in 1806, more than to be reconnected to the fears for possible conspiracy, should be interpreted as a response to the need of the government to know the economic potential of the conquered territories. By establishing the Economic Society, Bonaparte and Murat did not want academies of intellectuals, but “observers” able to collaborate in the economic growth of the country.

### ***1.3 The Kingdom of Naples: a backward and inaccessible territory.***

The Kingdom of Naples appeared to be an impenetrable territory because the poor or inexistent means of communication made it difficult even for inspections in the regions further south.

<sup>2</sup> The Royal Bourbon Society boasts very remote origins, traceable to the Palatine Academy born around 1698 Cfr. (Lepore, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> Allocati noted that the transformation of Society of Agriculture in Economic Society happened in all the provinces in 1812; in fact for example, in Calabria Citeriore this change took place in 1813. The constitutive law of the Society of Agriculture, as well as the decrees of transformation in Economic Society, are in *Bullettino delle leggi del Regno di Napoli*, 2, I, Napoli 1812, pp. 92-93, 130-36, 162-63.

At the end of the Eighteenth Century, the road conditions of the Kingdom of Naples were not the best, even though around the capital a plan for road construction had been launched, the more internal areas remained substantially isolated<sup>4</sup>. With the arrival of the French, the conditions of the infrastructures gained a prominent place on the government political agenda, even if it was more for military logistics rather than economic (Giura, 1988). The French government main objective was to allow rapid movements of the army toward Sicily and therefore designed the great road of the Calabria later called "Consular", that still in 1815 was nothing but rough. The only stretches completed were in Calabria Citeriore<sup>5</sup>, thanks to the labour of five thousand workers. But, apart from the impact on employment, the construction of the road as planned proved very soon to be rather inefficient (Marcelli, 2006). It was enough, in fact, the changing of the seasons and the road was nothing but a simple path. The progress of the works, moreover, was slowed by the need to carry out reclamation works of marshlands and construction of bridges to cross the water courses, without considering the maintenance work made necessary by a territory rather impervious (Bevilacqua, 1985). The "Consular" brought very few benefits to the local economy, when to this central track none of the peripheral arteries connected, so that the food produced struggled to reach even the neighbouring areas, if not for exorbitant freight costs.

The difficulty of crossing the territory had been previously underlined by various travellers, who could not avoid but to communicate the situation of serious neglect of the road network and to emphasize the negative consequences of this on the economy<sup>6</sup>. "I can easily understand how you can bear to travel to Calabria only for necessity, especially in this season when all the elements unleash and seem to want to prevent access". This is how a French officer was expressing himself with his troop sought to fording the streams of the Crati valley, between treacherous paths and bandits assaults<sup>7</sup>.

Charles Afan de Rivera (1844), director of the Corps of Engineers of bridges and roads, identified lack of infrastructure as the main obstacle to economic development and - foresaw more than hundred years earlier the Keynesian intuitions - suggested that the Government invest in public works. Already in 1824, he argued that the construction of infrastructures would be entailed in the short-term advantage of movement of wealth through the wages of workers, and in the medium to long term would have contributed to the valorisation of the territory through the establishment of markets<sup>8</sup>. The organs of local government, however, did not have sufficient economic resources to implement a plan of construction of ports, roads, but were using the funds available only as an instrument of labour market policy in years of famine (Marcelli, 2006).

#### **1.4 The bureaucratization of the development**

In the face of such disadvantage, the Economic Societies would have had to play a very important function, but also a very difficult one. According to the Statute, they had to promote the improvement of existing manufacturing and encourage new industries by providing money rewards to be distributed among the farmers by way of "encouragement" (Demarco, 1952).

The royal institutive decree established that each Economic Society would have had to create two sections: one of rural economy, devoted to agriculture and grazing, and another of civilian economy, addressed to a deeper understanding of issues related to the factories and to trade. To obtain the wanted results, it was thought necessary to entwine the relationship between the various institutions, operation in a way understandable, considering that the funds were public, but that slowed the realization of the projects.

In the first place it established a relationship of subordination between the provincial Economic Societies and the Institute of Encouragement of Naples. The first, after finding eventual local development problems, had to submit to the second the initiatives and lines of action deemed most appropriate.

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<sup>4</sup> The theme of the infrastructure in Southern Italy has been addressed by Bulgarelli Lukacs (1976), Giura (1988), and Ostuni (1991).

<sup>5</sup> "Calabria Citeriore" corresponds to the current province of Cosenza.

<sup>6</sup> Cfr. The famous textes of Galanti (1792) and Malpica (1845). Among the foreign travellers, you can see, by way of example of Gissing (1901), Hill (1792), Keppel-Craven (1821), Lear (1852), Strutt (1842), Swinburne (1783). On the subject you can see Mozzillo (1964) and Rossi (2001).

<sup>7</sup> The permanence of Duret de Tavel (1996) in Calabria began in 1807 and ended three years later. The sentence quoted the *incipit* of the letter dated December 6th, 1807.

<sup>8</sup> For the bibliography and the works of de Rivera cfr. Di Biasio (1991) and Motta (1989).

In turn, the Institute of Encouragement worked to coordinate and control the peripheral associations, in addition to exercising an advisory role and for the promotion of initiatives that the Societies would have to plead. Strong connections or ties between the Institute of Encouragement and the government were provided. All the initiatives proposed by the peripheries and evaluated by the central organ of control, had to be approved by the Ministry of the Interior until 1848 and subsequently by the Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce (Dell'Orefice, 1973).

Once the decision making process ended, the operative phase would begin, equally slow and tedious. In this phase, very often it was necessary to find funding, through the Intendancies, members of provincial government, not without having first passed through a further process of an accounting-financial nature. Starting in 1806, the Minister of the Interior began to restrict funds being awarded to Intendancies so that they could be utilized for "special expenditure", such as construction and maintenance of public establishments and roads, subsidies for libraries for the economic Societies. In addition to ministerial funds being tied, the Intendancies, if they felt the need for additional liquidity, they would have been able to fund the provincial work through an additional tax on land.

Thus, although the role of government remained that of laying down the guidelines for economic policy, in regards to the local development the last word belonged to the Intendancy, which had wide discretion in managing their own resources on the basis of the requirements considered to be a priority for the province, even disregarding some central directives, for which there was no financial coverage.

It is natural then, that if we wanted to evaluate the direct effects of the development project that the Economic Societies had to bring to completion we should take into account the funds invested. What is to conclude, however, if the appropriations were totally inconsistent? The available sources do not allow quantifying the total of the amounts allocated to development projects, but the case of Calabria Citeriore is emblematic. The Intendancy of Cosenza, in fact, while allocating annually sums in the form of projects proposed by the Economic Society, it would not release them until there was approval from the Council of Intendancy, which often would divert them for the benefit of other works.

Therefore, it is good to see, the institutive law of the Economic Societies postulated a general intervention in favour of economic growth of each province and foresaw that this task was entrusted to co-opted members. The royal decree and the statute would not make it unambiguously clear exactly what and how to do things, although it was a catchall program, comprehensively systematic, which pointed to the obtainment of improvements in agriculture, industry, trade and infrastructure, and that also applied a change in the social and economic context.

Thus described, the project seems to be as ambitious as impracticable because it is not structured. It seems that you can configure it rather as a "smoke screen for ignorance" (Hirschmann, 1995), that is only a formal interest, that suggests to want to refine the characteristics of the territory, but does not have the strength to do so. A project, that is, with little chance of implementation and, among other things, hardly appreciated by the civil society, which, while sharing widely its initial objectives and even in the presence of partial results, will be brought to complain about the inevitable surrender to some aspects of the program.

However, in the face of a mandate too vague, the peripheral Economic Societies could have moved away from that "smokescreen" to get closer to selected projects, even of minor value, but workable. That is why beyond the organization itself, of the statute, bureaucratic process, it seems appropriate to analyze these organizations but not aiming at the evaluation of the results, which would otherwise be non-measurable, but rather focusing on the ability of these institutions to generate skill sets, human capital and consequently positive externalities.

### ***1.5 Development projects between successes and failures***

Since the establishment of the Agricultural Societies, it was precisely the government that gave great importance to practical and experimental instructions, with the conviction that an innovative culture, to avoid that it would turn out unsuccessful, should be previously tested and taught in the places where you want to implement or apply it. Very interesting in this regard are the agrarian Catechisms drawn up by the Economic Societies, as well as the effort made to draw up the annual meteorological observations, or to study epizootic phenomena that struck the herds. The agrarian gardens, conceived as tangible evidence of government involvement in the development of agriculture, were responding precisely to the need to be able to practice and disseminate the innovations. Practical instruction seemed the immediate way to go to pressure land owners, and give greater dignity to farming activities and reassess the job of the farmer; the agrarian gardens were recognized as privileged instruments for the achievement of these goals.

The importance of agricultural education was a conducive motive which accompanied the Societies for the entire period in which they were active. The opportunity to grow an agrarian garden on its territory was considered by all of the Economic Societies of the Kingdom. It dealt with public places where peasants were able to be trained through real life experience or exposure, rather than publications hardly usable by a population almost completely illiterate. The main problem of the peasant world, in fact, was believed to be the reluctance to apply new techniques, or to use different crops and unknown equipment. The model taken mostly in consideration was Hofwyl's school near Bern, designed in 1799 by Emmanuel Fellenberg, intended for the education of poor children (Mirri, 2004).

Although the project to start a serious organization of agricultural education was considered particularly useful, the problems linked to the achievement of agrarian gardens were different, starting with the difficulty in expropriating land, and ending with finding the funding. The results were of course various, depending on the area and availability. In some cases interesting experiments were conducted on the adaptation of new crops within local agricultural systems. Thanks to some Economic Societies artificial hay was introduced, and others became leaders in the preservation of forests, forcing landowners to comply with the forestry legislation.

Even if it cannot be generalized, it is still interesting to note that in some cases, thanks to studies and the promotional material published by the Economic Societies, the private sector undertook serious innovative interventions. For example, the Economic Society of Cosenza advised landowners in the Silan mountain area to abandon the growing of cereals and devote themselves to growing potatoes. Gabriele Silvagni, permanent secretary of the Society, published a practical guide that, in addition to clarify the different qualities and techniques of cultivation, also made known the many different uses of the potato, from being utilized to making bread to being utilized as swine feed. More than the informational booklet, nevertheless, the success in the cultivation of the tubers was attributed to the experimentation of private members Tommaso Cosentini and Gaetano Spiriti. The first one cultivated it in his own property in Sila, the second in Cerisano, Morano and Castelfranco, and from there the cultivation of the potato spread to many other areas, also in the district of Paola and Rossano (Marcelli, 2006). It is not possible to quantify the production of this type of potatoes, because during the period in question, the statistics were not carried out in the Kingdom of Naples.

The Economic Societies had particular success in the introduction of textile colouring plants some of which are the rubia and the saffron, thanks always to the publication of product brochures that explained exactly which roots to choose and how to obtain a perfect fabric dye (Montaudo, 1996). The general principle followed by the Bourbon Restauration was to restore competitiveness in the traditional manufacturing sectors, such as oil, silk, wine which in the French Decade suffered a contraction, caused by the imperial policy that considered as subordinates the suburbs. For example, particular attention was directed toward the spread of olive and grape cultivation in the Gargano area (Ottolino, 1996).

In addition, the members of the institution sought to guarantee assistance to the agrarian class through studies on the characteristics of the territory, the adaptation of the animal species to different climates, as well as meteorological observations and surveys of possible technical innovations to introduce in the provinces (Montaudo, 1996). The particularly innovative aspect of these southern Societies was to highlight in their memories the potential of the market, especially in the aftermath of the cessation of the Continental Blockade.

The contributions of the Societies to the improvement of the manufacturing, moreover hardly assessable, were faint, but not entirely absent. It seems, in fact, particularly problematic to attribute the expansion of some sectors to the activities of the institutions rather than the economic success in the market. However, we may say, even with the benefit of the doubt, that the activities of the Economic Societies have in some way contributed to the formation of a small entrepreneurial class willing to invest in industrial activities, such as the silk sector or the liquorice production. In any case, running through the reports presented, very coherent planning emerges. Preliminary studies took into account the potential of the market and the increasing importance of the industry, commerce in national economies, but at the same time, also considered eventual localization issue, retrieval of skilled manpower, technical facilities and availability of raw materials.

On the methodological level, each proactive initiative made by the Societies was preceded by a timely analysis of the available resources and human capital of reference; in addition all of the projects presented took account of entrepreneurial expertise, not neglecting to ascertain each specific matter necessary for the implementation. The Economic Societies always understood to give priority to labour intensive activities, as a mean to absorb unemployed labour, and also to overcome the poor readiness of the holders of capital to invest in fixed assets.

In the absence of banks, the latter were dedicated, in fact, in a lucrative loan activity and demonstrated therefore a poor propensity to invest their assets in activities considered very risky. In 1820, for example, Mollo, a member of the Society, had designed the creation of a textile industry within the orphanage of Cosenza. The vastness of the building and the high number of girls it hosted – alleged Mollo – could ensure a considerable volume of production. In addition, for the purchase of the equipment, it called for the establishment of a business enterprise made up by the major landowners (Mollo, 1820). The design went on for years, the project was slowed down first by the aversion of the risk taking of the capital holders and then by the rejection of bodies of the government to grant funding (Marcelli, 2006). The story came to an end only in the 1840s, exactly when a capital funding company was born, which also received sovereign approval to operate within the orphanage<sup>9</sup>. Thus in Cosenza a significant private initiative began, which, while exploiting the labour of young orphans, represented one of the most important manufactures of the province.

Also Catanzaro had particular success with the promotion of the silk and cotton industry within the orphanage called “Santa Maria della Stella”, which was followed by the opening of six other spinning mills for the production of the precious organza silk (Grimaldi, 1845). In the area around Reggio Calabria, also thanks to the stimuli introduced by the local Economic Society, spread a valuable silk processing, also being marketed abroad. Although the silk production received great impetus, thanks to its value and high demand on the international market, the cultivation of cotton, hemp and linen were not neglected, as was the case in L’Aquila and Chieti<sup>10</sup>. Despite the undeniable presence of various problems, in many cases, the work of the Economic Societies proved to have had a positive trend in local economy. For example, Demarco (1952) linked the industrial growth that took place beginning in 1824 to both a better economic situation, and with the “effects of tireless action carried out by the Economic Society”. Then there is agreement in believing that the Economic Societies and the Royal Institute of Encouragement be credited with having stimulated and influenced the government in its choices of economic policy, especially duty customs, but more specifically to be the spokesman by deepening the knowledge, and showing as perhaps never happened before the true local needs. It is necessary to repeat it; the almost total lack of statistical information does not allow carrying out a more comprehensive analysis.

### ***1.6 The human capital within the Economic Societies: economists or development agents?***

The study of cultural, political, and economic experiences of individuals connected to the Economic Societies can offer interesting hints for thought on the ability of these *èlites* to compare them against territorial analysis. The spirit of initiative and the willingness to change encouraged the workings of these men and are closely linked to a series of factors, such as family ties, cultural stimuli, entrepreneurial vocations and the contextual social origin of each.

The functions performed by the various members inside the Economic Societies were not the same. The founding act stipulated that the membership should be composed of a president and a vice president, a permanent secretary and three categories of members: regular, honorary and corresponding. The charge of ordinary members could be covered only by educated men equipped with both theoretical and practical knowledge. The *ratio* of the legal provision resided on the assumption that to be able to rationally deal with the economic problems it was no longer enough just imitating the economic practices or rely on the ability of arts and crafts, but the necessity to have technical knowledge.

Each Society, on the basis of the regulatory text, had to select 18 ordinary members, subdivided into equal numbers in the rural economy section and the civil economy one and an undetermined number of corresponding and honorary members. While the corresponding members, non-resident in the province of reference were chosen utilizing the same criteria as the ordinary members, the honorary members were selected from the “most prominent and well-to-do owner’s class” that voiced willingness to contribute along with the Society to the public welfare. Also of regal appointment, and elected in the context of the members, were the secretaries, that held a crucial directional role; they maintained all the registers, the minutes of the meetings, analyzed the notes of the members, maintained contact with the other Societies of the Kingdom, and with the Institute of Encouragement.

<sup>9</sup> «Giornale Economico Scientifico della Real Società Economica di Calabria Citra», 1840. The Society of stakeholders became effectively operational in 1843.

<sup>10</sup> Particularly positive reviews were expressed by Pennetta (1954). According to Maria Ottolino (1996), such a judgement must be resized in light of the lack of funding and the absentee landlords that were not therefore in condition to evaluate the importance and effectiveness of technical tips offered by the Society.

According to Renata De Lorenzo (1993), the secretary was the central figure of the institution, not only because he held a very vital position, as for the multiplicity of tasks which he had to perform. The secretary's role involved then the choice of a figure with polyhedric ability, equipped with entrepreneurial spirit, of critical thinking and organizational skills; it was not by chance that in many Economic Societies were illustrious men, whose fame went beyond their province, to carry out such a delicate task<sup>11</sup>.

In the pre-united Nineteenth Century, different professional figures alternated in the performance of tasks forecasted in the institutive laws of the Economic Societies, but all were sharing the unique interpretation of their responsibility within the community. The members, in fact, considered themselves given a fundamental role for the public welfare, as if the future of the territory depended on them. All the self-proclaiming speeches given at the beginning of the term by the elected president – in this case Francesco Golia – reminded members of their precise duty to “target mainly the country's economy”, slaving to it “researches, experiments and observations” (Marcelli, 2006). Among the constituents of the Economic Societies there were members of the judiciary, lawyer, scientists, or senior officials of the State that showed the image of a bureaucratic class of professionals who enjoyed both fixed income and annuity, who wrote of agronomy and grappled, in some cases, in risky economic enterprises or experimentations.

In the most general terms, the objective of the Economic Societies, has been reiterated several times, was to promote local development through various initiatives. The cornerstone of all was the acquisition of information, that the members could learn individually or in common events, and after the dissemination translate into practice what was learned. Each member, then, was called to study themes of economic significance and to investigate the reality that he knew best summarizing the most important traits in a relationship defined *memoir*.

Article 20 of the Statute expressly provides that all members of the Society should report any finding or news that could benefit the wealth of the Nation by formulating reports on economic activities in the province, carrying out studies on the various methods used in agriculture, providing small farmers the results of their own experiences and providing statistical data, geological, mineralogical or agronomic. Both the object and the final purpose of these memoirs then could be heterogeneous. From the examination of the programs, surfaced a commitment to concrete objectives that addressed not only to identify new agricultural practices, which was however the main topic, but also to problems linked to the territory, specialization in production and the influence of the public works on economic growth. As stated before, beginning in 1821, when the Institute of Encouragement was given the task to coordinate the activities of the peripheral Societies, some directives regarding surveys or experiments to complete were arriving also from Naples.

The individual knowledge or skill, expressed in the memoirs, would become subject of collegial discussion in the meetings, which took place annually. The secretary was entrusted with the delicate task of summarizing all the activities of the year, giving emphasis to the work he considered most effective and choosing among all the memoirs the most important of all, which would be read in the gathering by its spokesman. All of these decisions, as is evident, gave the secretary a wide margin of discretion. In the timeframe under consideration, you can note some peculiarities in the way the assemblies were managed, which can be traced to the leadership of the various perpetual secretaries. From the document analysis, it is clear that the Secretaries impressed their fingerprint on the Societies that they were leading. Some adopted individualistic policies, focusing in their own introduction all the shareholders' work. Others placed greater emphasis on the description of the economic potential of the province, neglecting the individual assessments of the authors of the memoirs being analyzed. Still others imprinted on the Society a much more dynamic attitude, also in being able to obtain greater involvement from the individual members, which gave ample space in their official publications (Marcelli, 2009).

Overall it is undeniable, that the result obtained was that of drawing a valuable analytical cognitive map, from which can be obtained useful information on major crops and on more relevant factories in the different districts. Regardless of the interpretation that each secretary gave to the work of the assembly, the common thread was that the meeting was to serve as an exchange of knowledge acquired with the individuals. Once the knowledge was shared, the Society could proceed to fulfil other duties for which it was called.

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<sup>11</sup> Many perpetual secretaries of Economic Societies in southern Italy were objects of an in-depth analysis, such as Gabriele Silvagni, of Cosenza (Marcelli, 2007), Federico Cassitto, of Avellino (Di Vittorio, 1978; Palmieri, 1998); Ignazio Rozzi (De Lucia, 1971; Zilli, 1996); Giacinto Farina of Salerno (Cosimato, 1965).

If on the one hand, as provided on the Statute, the Society had the obligation to inform the government regarding the conditions of the provinces, on the other hand was called to share with the population the new knowledge that was found to be most useful<sup>12</sup>. The first task of the Society was accomplished, as has already been stated, by sending a copy of all the work to the Royal Institute of Encouragement of Naples, the second was exteriorized in a series of activities and publications whose actual impact on the rural population was rather limited, given the high rate of illiteracy. The exchange of knowledge, then, was also addressed outside of the Kingdom. Members, in fact, were worried to maintain contact with related associations, exchanging predominantly information on agricultural methods. The one that received most attention was the Academy of Georgofili of Florence, to which many members of the Neapolitan Economic Societies boasted honorary aggregation (Allocati, 1961)<sup>13</sup>.

From the documentation available of all the Economic Societies of the Kingdom, emerges a picture perhaps still too blurry, which deserves further investigation. The historiographical debate concentrated itself mostly on the capacity or less of these types of associations to produce economic thought. Thus, it created a paradigm, on the basis of which within these organizations there could be on one extreme the academic economists, educated, aristocratic, and detached from the real world and on the other extreme the amateurism.

In this specific case, inside of the Economic Societies there were not economists in the technical sense, men willing to disseminate scientific knowledge or theorize economic laws. The economic knowledge, for these individuals, was not the goal, but a means through which to promote local development. Given these circumstances, it is logical that inside the Economic Societies you would not find true economists nor amateurs. If you truly need to find a definition that comes as close as possible to the specific skills of these men, then perhaps we should say that they were an embryonic form of agents of local development. In the reports exposed within the meetings, in fact, it is not noticeable the attempt to consider their innate knowledge to reach generalizations. Rather, it is evident that the members preferred to start with general knowledge, of new agronomic knowledge or other type to adapt to suit local needs. The inner teaching was of a practical nature, not cultural or theoretical.

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<sup>12</sup> Although the Statute does not clarify categorically this aspect of the activities of the Economic Societies, in fact this "invitation" became an obligation (there were not however provisions of sanctions in the event of of incompleteness or default). The Institute of Encouragement or directly the Ministers of the Interior of Agriculture and Commerce, would send circulars with which they required specific activities.

<sup>13</sup> From surveys carried out in the Archives of the Academy of Georgofili we find that in reality the presence of the correspondent members resident in the Kingdom of Naples was also numerous.

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