**The long history of rural domestic manufacturing in the so called Third Italy.**

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Studies on protoindustrialization and industrious revolution have shown that an important pillar of industrialization was in European first comers countries the intensification of rural families manufacturing work, especially carried on by women and young boys. In XVIII and XIX century Italy rural domestic industries were, still more, a female’s matter, apparently marginal in the general economic context, but they had a long history, complementary or collateral to that of the factory.

Rural manufacture had in Italy very different territorial histories, relevant for the comprehension of the gap between regional evolutions growing in the second XIX century. In Northern Italy the born of mechanical spinning small factories multiplied, in the second XIX Century, the demand for rural domestic weaving. Weaving in the houses and spinning in the mills were both rural activities, manual or partly manual, carried on by women through hard work. The role of silk production for primitive capital accumulation was recognized by main Italian economic historians, but the centrality of women’s low cost, disciplined and specialized work in this sector was undervalued. Furthermore, an analogue role in the capital accumulation was exerted by other textile branches, still conducted on a domestic basis. In Sothern Italy every phase of textile industry, based for a longer time on a domestic organization, declined in the Eighties of XIX Century, but the tailoring skills of women reemerged in the Sixties of the successive century, after mass emigration, in Northern industrial cities.

In this framework, my contribution is intended to underline the peculiar relation between continuity and change in the small enterprise development of the so called Third Italy, an original industrialization path, at least in western world. In Veneto, Tuscany, and others central Italy regions, the figure of industrial entrepreneur was weak, but, after the decline of urban guilds, an extensive network of biggest and smallest merchant-entrepreneurs was constructed in the countryside, at the same time of the intensification of women’s manufacturing work. Emblematic of this evolution is the case of the production of straw hats, a rural domestic manufacture which flourished from XVIII to XX century. Merchants ability in joining new middle class consumers in every western country, family arrangements, women’s work quantity and quality, changes in sexual division of work were central to assure the duration of the manufacture till the 1929 crisis in the American market. Since that moment, electrification and domestic mechanization allowed rural women, children and nephews of the straw plaiters to dedicate their hard work to new productions: trench coats, overcoats, knitwear, shoes, bags and other fashion goods were the basis of this XIX century’s path of industrialization.