

Poster scientifico

THE EFFECT OF THE ITALIAN UNIFICATION ON THE COMPARATIVE REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN LITERACY, 1821-1911

Abstract:

This paper provides the first ever diachronic homogenous estimates of literacy rates in Italian provinces (roughly NUTS 3 units) during 1821-1911, by gender. The estimates exploit the age structure of literate people reported in the population censuses of 1881 and 1911 to back cast literacy rates to the early decades of the 19th century.

We show that after the political unification of the country in 1861, along with the gradual diffusion of a free and mandatory public primary school system, the rate of growth of literacy rates more than doubled on average during 1861-1913, when compared to 1821-1861. The effect is particularly marked for Central and Southern regions, and especially in the case of women. However, when North-Western regions are considered the unification effect is less pronounced (in the case of men), or even statistically insignificant (in the case of women).

Understanding the links between the early rapid growth of female literacy rates and subsequent regional economic development constitutes a potentially promising field of analysis to be further investigated.

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