

Introduction

The latest, improved and updated edition of the Regional Statistical Yearbook is coming out and I would like to extend my thanks to the Statistics Department of the Regione Siciliana, which has produced the work that I am presenting here; I sincerely hope that this booklet may reach as wide a readership as possible.

I would also like to offer my own, modest, personal contribution towards a greater distribution of the Yearbook, convinced as I am that the image of our Region, among other things, suffers from a certain misinformation. One often comes across statements that are not based on actual fact, totally at variance with objective data and, above all, often passed off as fideistic truths.

I do not imagine for a moment that the publication of a statistical yearbook might protect us in the future from certain inconsistent observations, but it would certainly rate as a great success if, in Sicily, over the coming months and years, there emerged an all-consuming desire to be informed of the true facts.

I am not referring here to political debate or the malicious manipulation of information; I am thinking more of the general public, journalists, teachers, professionals, and anybody playing a role in our society, who, when formulating their opinions or expressing their beliefs, ought to endeavour to vouch for the sources of their information (if nothing else, as a token of respect for their audience).

Of course it would be implausible to expect everybody to devote themselves to the study of the Yearbook, but it is plausible, or rather desirable, for as many Sicilians as possible to keep such a precious source as this close to hand, and, consequently, to be in a position to acquire, whenever necessary, any information that might be required.

The quest for more and better knowledge is not only a moral duty but also a fundamental right that needs to be recognised. It is with these motivations and goals in mind that I am driven to pledging my offices to ever greater efforts in publicising the 2005 Yearbook, in the certain knowledge of procuring benefits for the image of this Region.

The Yearbook provides answers, illustrates and helps to understand many important phenomena; it helps to winkle out hidden (maybe even uncomfortable) truths, which are nonetheless always backed up by numbers.

It is no use resorting to the extraordinary wit of Trilussa with his famous rhymes about chickens and statistics, in order to understand how easy it is, unfortunately, to manipulate numbers to fabricate distorted versions of the truth. If we cannot completely exclude this eventuality we should at least tackle facts rather than hypotheses.

By merely browsing through this yearbook it is easy to grasp the fact that Sicily and its inhabitants make up almost 9% of the population of Italy. Although there are more complex factors to be taken into consideration, this statistical figure should, nevertheless, be a point of reference, a parameter not to be underestimated and quite a useful element of comparison. Allow me to provide an example: if we look at the data regarding bank deposits and investments, it turns out that this Region accounts for fewer than 5% of bank deposits, and only 3% of the investments carried out by Italian banks. We are all free to draw our own conclusions from this data, but examining these figures it is rather difficult to claim, as a national daily newspaper did not so long ago, that Sicily's banks are coffers, with considerable funds (also of a dubious provenance) pouring in and out; of course, on the other hand, one might question how adequate the flow of bank credit is for a Region of this size. Sicily has a population that comprises 9% of the national population, but it is striking that, for example, the revenue raised in Sicily amounts to

less than 6% of the national whole, or that Sicily accounts for “only” 7% of the crimes (of all types) committed in Italy, or that barely 1.8% of our youngsters have obtained a professional qualification.

I have intentionally referred to phenomena of a very diverse nature, in order to underline what an infinite number of combinations there may be, and, therefore, how much direct and cross-referenced data may be obtained from the 2005 Yearbook. By doing so I am hoping to stimulate in the reader a desire to know more.

Knowledge is understanding. Being able to reason for oneself, and not on hearsay, or from the conclusions of others, represents a founding characteristic for an evolving and democratic people.

Nowadays, unfortunately, there is an increasing tendency to express trenchant judgements rather than move from a detached documentation of the facts (and the Regional Statistical Yearbook can here make its contribution) to the acquisition of poised and precise information that might provide the basis for a serious debate; after that, of course, we are free to make up our own minds, but we'll be able to say that we at least got our facts right!

**Councillor for the Budget and Finance of
Regione Siciliana
The Honourable Salvatore Cintola**

The fourth edition of the Regional Statistical Yearbook continues a policy initiated many years ago, which entailed focusing the statistical function of the Regional Department for the Budget and Finance (General accountancy) more and more towards the world outside; this was done through the diffusion of data and information that represented an unwavering point of reference. Moreover, statistical data is the basis for every decisional process and provides those working in the fields of the arts, the economic and social spheres with the necessary tools for carrying out their work with ever greater awareness.

We therefore intend to champion this approach in the future, with the aim of fulfilling the needs of whoever, and for whatever reason, might need to elaborate data, and also in the hope of offering each and every citizen easier access to a wider understanding of the actual situation in Sicily.

Palermo, December 2005

**Chief Accountant of the Regione
Vincenzo Emanuele**