INTRODUCTION

The Statistical Yearbook, “Sicily 2009”, again presents itself this year as an updated synthesis of facts and figures responding to the best of its efforts to the need for data, on the part of the general public, regarding the situation in Sicily. Since the 2006 edition this work has been carried out in collaboration with the ISTAT Office for Sicily, on the basis of an agreement that provided for this co-operation involving not only sources and instruments, but also several effective methodological innovations. The data collected in the tables represents the most important variables for describing the Regional context and is organised in uniform manner for each section. In fact, a historic series of Regional data is provided for each indicator, consenting an outline of mid-period trends and the decomposition at the Provincial level of the last year in the time series. There is almost always a comparison between the Regional figures, those of the North/centre and South/islands division, and the figures for the country as a whole.

The sequences of statistics per sector, which had been a feature of previous editions, has remained unaltered in the arrangement of the chapters, from 1st (Environment and Territory) to 17th (Industry). The two final sections deal with Sicilian healthcare, analysed by comparing the principal Regional indicators in the sector (Ch.18), and the socio-economic differences between the countries of the Mediterranean; these had already been examined in a previous edition and provide information about the *Area of Free Trade* planned for 2010, as well as showing the specific placements of Sicily with regard to the selected statistics (Ch.19)

The data regarding healthcare is discussed in three subsequent paragraphs which deal with the various aspects of the services provided, their functionality and the efficacy of the various operations; this should contribute towards casting new light on a theme of extreme interest for public debate and Regional planning. Although the reference years for the available information do not go beyond 2006 (because of the unavoidably long time required for nation-wide surveys) an overall picture can be obtained of the structural differences between Sicily and southern Italy, on the one hand, with their abundance of technical

equipment and medical personnel (auxiliary staff, less so) and, on the other hand, the services offered by the other Regions of Italy, which might be similar in terms of size, but perform better in terms of efficacy. The 19th and final chapter highlights the differences in the Mediterranean area, documenting them in two separate sections, devoted, respectively, to the 23 countries on the shores of the Mediterranean and the 39 regions in the Nuts2 level (the one corresponding to Sicily in the Eurostat table) and singled out with the same criteria; Sicily can thus be classified in a hypothetical table of environmental, socio-demographic and economic indicators.

The Yearbook provides an overview of Sicily and outlines, in its 152 tables and 303 pages, previously-recognised structural failings and a performance regarding social quality that is none too encouraging, such as the gap between the Regional employment-rate (44.1%) and the national one (58.7%) or Sicilian spending on R&D as a percentage (4.4%) of the figure for Italy, which is lower than the analogous (and already poor) incidence (5.6%) on the nation's GNP. Moreover the recent values of these variables do not indicate an improvement in trend, and the economic cycle, in the short term, does not offer prospects of tangible recovery. In any case, statistical evidence induces observers and policy-makers to update their reference material and may occasionally bring about changes in our approach to criticality, both in terms of analysis and intervention policy.

As in previous years the handbook aims to reach out to a whole range of readers. For this reason it is also published on the web-page of the Regional Statistics Service (www.regione.sicilia.it/bilancio/statistica), where tables and comments are easy to down-load and where there is also a version in English. Indications regarding further information on the various topics are listed in each section, both as links to consultable on-line sites and as written material; these will enable the user to pursue his/her own lines of research in the individual areas of interest.

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