

## INTRODUCTION

The Regional Statistical Yearbook for 2006 comes out in a slightly different form as a result of efforts at innovation to offer the reader a more complete and more easily accessible set of data. The Regional ISTAT office for Sicily and the Sicilian Regional Statistical Services have entered into an agreement which has as its goal future collaboration on three editions of the Regional Statistical Yearbook, whilst aiming, at the same time, for “data-quality control and the editing of meta-data (definitions, statistical sources etc.), as well as the study and diagnosis of the main phenomena of Sicily’s socio-economic situation”.

In order to achieve these aims, a special scientific committee was put together from the two structures and included a member of the teaching staff in Economic Sociology from Palermo University. In this way the body responsible for the precision of the data (ISTAT) was co-operating with those working to utilise and interpret the data in the social science context (University) and those who had the institutional duty (Statistical Services) to supply the worlds of politics and the Regional administration with the necessary information and data to give shape to the scenarios emerging from the collective action.

The project is proceeding with activities already launched by ISTAT and the Statistical Services, through official accords regarding *Operational Protocols* aimed to disseminate statistical data. These included the 2005 “Statistical Information and Territory” Congress, during which there was the presentation of a volume of municipal information and a fostering of greater inter-institutional collaboration, with the aim of utilising, for statistical purposes, the accumulation of information available at the administrative offices.

With the help of invaluable experience gained over the previous years producing the *Regional Statistical Yearbook for Sicily* for the years 2002 to 2005, the Scientific Committee monitored the various phases of the activity in order to try to improve both configuration and user-friendliness. Nine plenary sessions and an indeterminate number of informal meetings were held in addition to the work on texts and collection and elaboration of data. It was,

above all, the participants that were rewarded by the activity, as usually happens when different points of view and functions are compared. Of course, users will be the eventual judges of the quality of the results, but, as previously mentioned, the reason why the work (with regard to method) might be considered innovative lies with the attempts, here in Sicily, to experiment with an active relationship between the various functions of statistical information, scientific research and the public administration, whilst not forgetting that the goal of the Yearbook is, on the one hand, to offer all citizens (above all, administrators and politicians) correct and precise data, and on the other, easily accessible data that adequately describes the on-going scenario.

The yearbook's lay-out reflects these objectives; the introductory comments to each chapter aim to be user-friendly in describing the most significant and important indicators. The tables have been arranged in a new and, as far as possible, uniform fashion. A historical series of Regional data has been provided, which might help delineate the mid-period trends; there is also a decomposition at the Provincial level of the final year of the time series. There are constant comparisons between Regional data and the North/centre and South/islands, as well as the overall national figures, and the glossary of terminology has also been extended.

Two new sections have been introduced in the list of chapters. In the first, devoted to Regional differences, data from the 20 Regions is compared with the North/centre and South/islands divisions, and Italy as a whole, through a series of tables, graphs and charts regarding the environment, socio-demography, welfare, the labour market, etc. The second is more innovative and is devoted to socio-economic differences in the Mediterranean area; on the one hand Sicily is compared with areas on the southern shores of the Mediterranean, and on the other hand, with the European areas on the northern shores. Above all, with the launching of the free-market zone in mind, measuring the changes is one way of understanding the role that might be undertaken and the opportunities that the geographical position might offer the Region.

The tables, graphs and series of data offered to the user, are the result of choices geared towards accessibility and visibility of all that is deemed most useful and significant. The volume has been made available via the web-site of the Regional Statistical Services: [www.regione.sicilia.it/bilancio/statistica](http://www.regione.sicilia.it/bilancio/statistica), (also in an English version). It should perhaps be pointed out that the work carried out so far is to be seen merely as an initial step, bearing in mind the inter-institutional collaboration that has been undertaken. Any observations, criticisms and suggestions are warmly welcomed, especially with regard to the yearbook's user-friendliness and accessibility for the ordinary citizen and the specialised user.

*The Scientific Committee*