



**THE USE OF INDICATORS AND BENCHMARKS IN TERRITORIAL COMPETITIVENESS POLICIES: THE
ITALIAN EXPERIENCE**

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1. Introduction

The promotion of a system of evaluation and monitoring of a large set of quantitative variables is designed in the Community Support Framework (CSF) 2000-2006 for Southern Italian Regions¹ as a fundamental instrument of planning, projects selection and monitoring of the impact of the interventions.

Italy has made extensive use of benchmarking for territorial policies – mainly through the design of the National Development Plan (NDP), which then became CSF for the 2000-06 funds. In order to enhance territorial convergence, the general target of the NDP is a rate of growth in the South of Italy significantly higher than the EU average, closing, to a considerable extent, the current gaps of Southern regions. Comparative regional data give Regions a clear picture of their positions regarding competitiveness policies and challenging spatial projects while medium and long-term perceptions of development targets help to position strategically the Region in its competitive environment. Moreover, innovative methods have been introduced to set and use the benchmarks to

¹ The 1999 agreement between Italy and the European Commission defines the actions and rules through which the National Development Plan for the South of Italy will be carried out in 2000-2006. Through the CSF, Italian Southern Regions are recipient of European Union Funds (around 55 billion euro, including national co-financing and performance reserve funds). Most of the guidelines and rules agreed by Regions and Central administrations under the CSF, were subsequently extended to all public investment policies in Southern Regions.

assess the impact of interventions, specifically during the ex-ante evaluation of the NDP and the definition of the Regional Programs².

Within the priorities of the CSF³ a set of indicators has been identified to describe the socio-economic situation of the South and to give indications for spatial and temporal comparisons which are used for a broad assessment of the impact of the program in terms of improvement of the attractiveness of the area. The indicators are linked – with different intensity - to the strategic choices of the CSF and they can be seen as quantifications of the objectives of the National and Regional Plans. If the expected growth in the South actually takes place, it must be caught by the evolution of this set of variables.

The set of indicators can be split into two groups according to the meaning of the variables in relation to the strategy of the CSF, to their possible use and to the different implications of benchmarking. Thus the *breakthrough variables* and the *context indicators* – which are the names of the two groups of variables - will be described separately.

In addition to territorial indicators, Italy has introduced benchmarking also for a set of institutional and capacity building indicators, with the aim of measuring the improvement and the modernisation of the Public Administration. For these indicators benchmarks were defined at the regional level and used to anticipate and describe the conditions through which other territorial benchmarks can be reached. The last paragraph gives a brief description of these indicators and their benchmarks which have been introduced in Italy in relation to the performance reserve for the CSF⁴.

2. Breakthrough variables

Through the ex-ante evaluation of the NDP, thirteen variables - called “breakthrough variables”⁵ – have been identified as those capable of directing strategic policy choices and, at the same time, of registering the effects of the program on the Southern socio-economic situation.

The implementation of each priority (policy), in reaching the system of identified objectives affects other variables, chosen as indicators of the Program’s objectives, and contributes to modifying the breakthrough points in varying degrees of intensity.

² In addition to the National Development Plan and the Community Support Framework, which regard the entire South, each recipient Region has drawn up and is responsible for a specific Regional Plan in the programming period 2000-06.

³ The CSF is structured in six priorities: Natural resources, Cultural resources, Human resources, Local development, Urban development, Material and information network.

⁴ One of the distinguishing features of the 2000-2006 CSF for the South is the provision of a significant performance reserve allocation (10 per cent of all resources) according to two different competitive criteria. The performance reserve represents a strong incentive to upgrading the effectiveness of public administration and the quality of public spending.

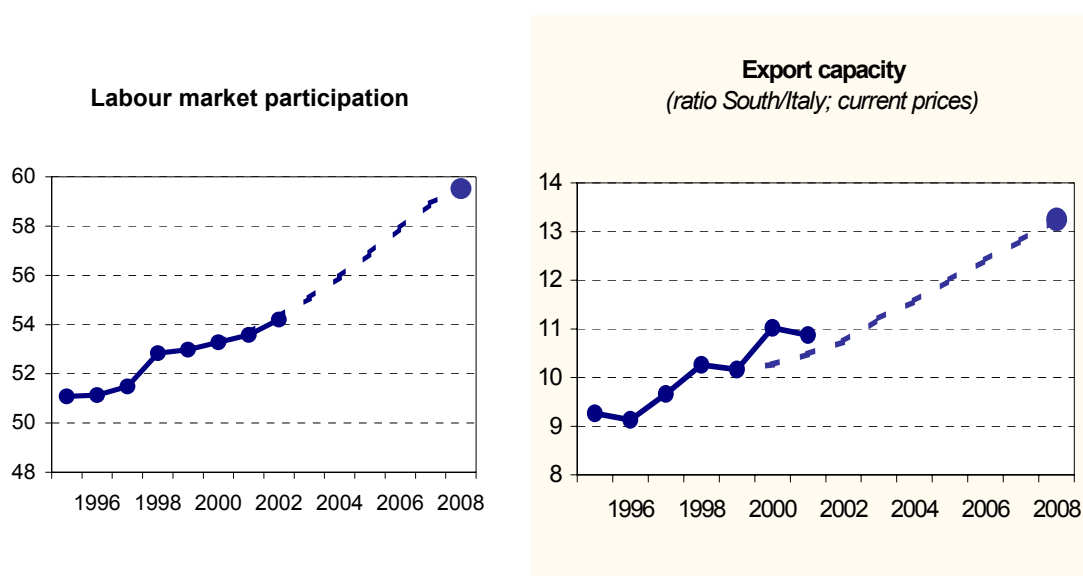
⁵ Annex 1 contains the complete list of the breakthrough variables with the associated indicators.

Improvements in the general socio-economic environment and in expectations are approximated by the trajectories of the breakthrough variables which are themselves considered intermediate objectives for the strategies. Independent sectoral experts, coordinated by the Department of Development policies, have designed the dynamics across the programming time of the breakthrough variables and have quantified target values at the end of the programming period, taking into account the available information at the starting point (values and dynamics) and the situation of more developed areas. The benchmarks, in this case, are coherent with the sustainable path of the entire growth model and the trajectories of the breakthrough variables are thus included in the macro econometric model designed for the ex-ante evaluation exercise of the general impact of the CSF program.

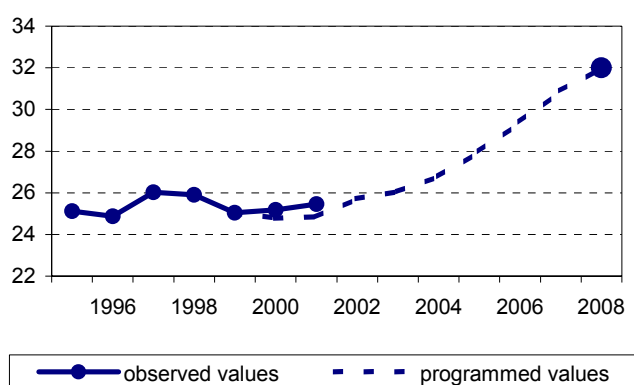
The dynamics of the breakthrough variables can help the evaluation of the impact of the Program on the macro-area (the set of Southern regions). Although the values of breakthrough variables are computed also for each region, the dynamics and benchmarks are set only for the entire South, because it is impossible to distinguish the contribution of each individual regional policy in the interactions of these phenomena. As described in the next paragraph, regional benchmarks have been defined for a different set of indicators, closer to territorial policies.

The monitoring and analysis of the dynamics of Southern economy compared to the dynamics of the breakthrough variables and to the quantified objectives, (especially growth, employment and public and private investments), enable the assessment of results gained during the convergence period. Figure 1 describes three examples of expected paths and targets for breakthrough variables.

Figure 1: Observed and expected values for labour market participation, export capacity and rate of capital accumulation in the South of Italy.



Rate of capital accumulation
(ratio South/Italy ; constant prices)



The observed values of the labour market participation (up to 2002), the rate of capital accumulation and the export capacity (up to 2001) are very close to the programmed values which were computed in 1998.

3. Context indicators

Together with the breakthrough variables the Italian CSF identifies a large set of variables (58) – called context indicators – as the key elements to describe synthetically the Southern socio-economic situation⁶. Some of the context indicators are expressions of policy effort and are directly controlled by the policy maker, others are expressions of key sectors for the measurement of the socio-economic development of the area and thus a direct link between the policy effort and their dynamics cannot be established, being the last ones dependent on the interactions of many phenomena. Nevertheless, the set of context indicators ultimately offers elements for a broad assessment of the impact of the program.

During the ex-ante evaluation of the NDP the context indicators and the breakthrough variables were computed at different territorial levels (regions, macro-areas, Italy) and annually starting generally since 1995 (the breakthrough variables from 1985). The characteristics required for the indicators are: the availability at regional level, the availability with short delay and at certain

⁶ Annex 2 contains a sample list of context indicators.

moments in time to offer to policy makers useful monitoring instruments (the delay is limited on average to one year) and the recognised quality of data⁷.

After the approval of the CSF by the European Commission (August 2000), the need to improve the statistical information available and to obtain more detailed information led to an agreement with the National Statistical Office to establish a monitoring committee and a working group with the aim to improve the availability and quality of information at the territorial level. Technical assistance was supplied in order to better measure available information (choice of indicators, sources, updates, etc.) and to detect the gap of information to be filled and define adequate indicators in either specific sectors not previously available (for example water supply and poverty estimates) or in strategic sectors not adequately exploited by statistical information (as for example information society and ICT). In order to obtain better information, *ad hoc* surveys were carried out and collaboration has been offered to improve existing ones.

So far the list of context indicators includes 87 indicators of which 67 have spatial and temporal values available.

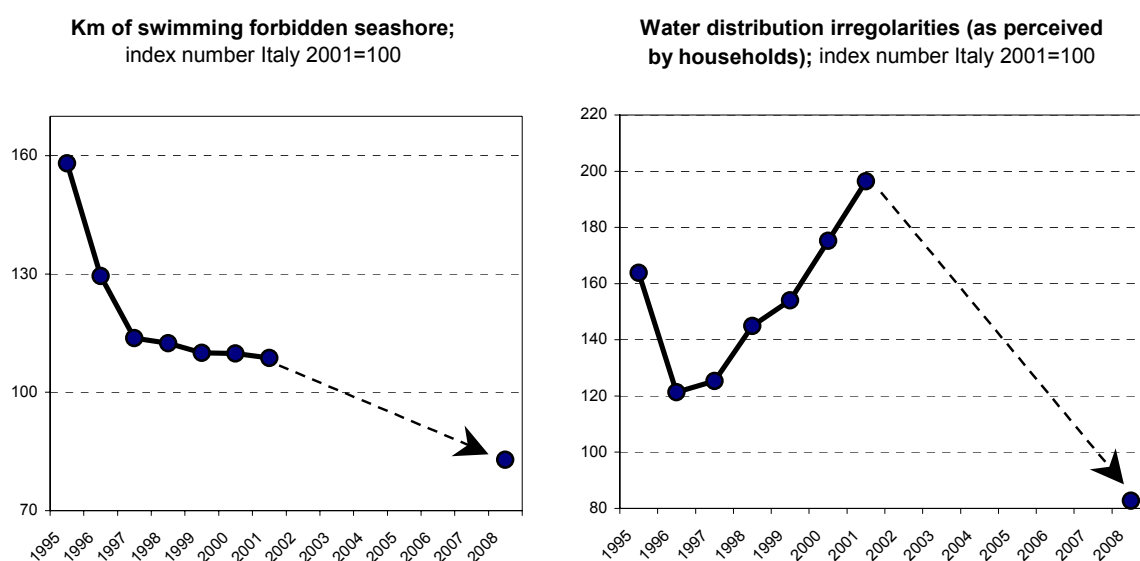
The set of context indicators is the same for the CSF and for each Regional Program. Targets were established for the South of Italy to be reached by the end of the CSF programming period. The identification of these benchmarks was carried out by experts, evaluating the dynamics of variables, the comparative position of the area with more developed ones and relating the expected results to objectives and strategies of the CSF⁸. Generally the benchmarks for the context indicators are with a known best, for example the last available value for Italy, but in some cases they are very ambitious for the South, reflecting the emphasis the CSF gives to certain strategies and territorial competitiveness policies. Figure 2 contains two examples of context indicators for natural resources, their targets set in the CSF and the updates of observed values⁹.

⁷ The source is generally the National Statistical Office (ISTAT) or equally reliable institutions.

⁸ To obtain a balanced evaluation on how the sector strategies affect context indicators in different sectors, an iterative Delphi-like method has been used, through which the experts' opinions on the expected targets are assessed and then compared and revised in subsequent cycles.

⁹ When the targets were set, the last available year was 1998.

Figure 2: Observed values and benchmarks for the indicators Km of swimming forbidden seashore and water distribution irregularities in the South of Italy.



The observed values for the indicator “km of swimming forbidden seashore” follow the expected ones to reach the target. The target for the indicator “water distribution irregularities” - set equal to 13,5% - has become even more difficult to reach due to the observed deterioration of the trend of the indicator in recent years; at the same time recent large investments in the water sector in Southern Regions and the current reform of the sector, should - in the next few years – affect the trend of the indicator and reduce the gap.

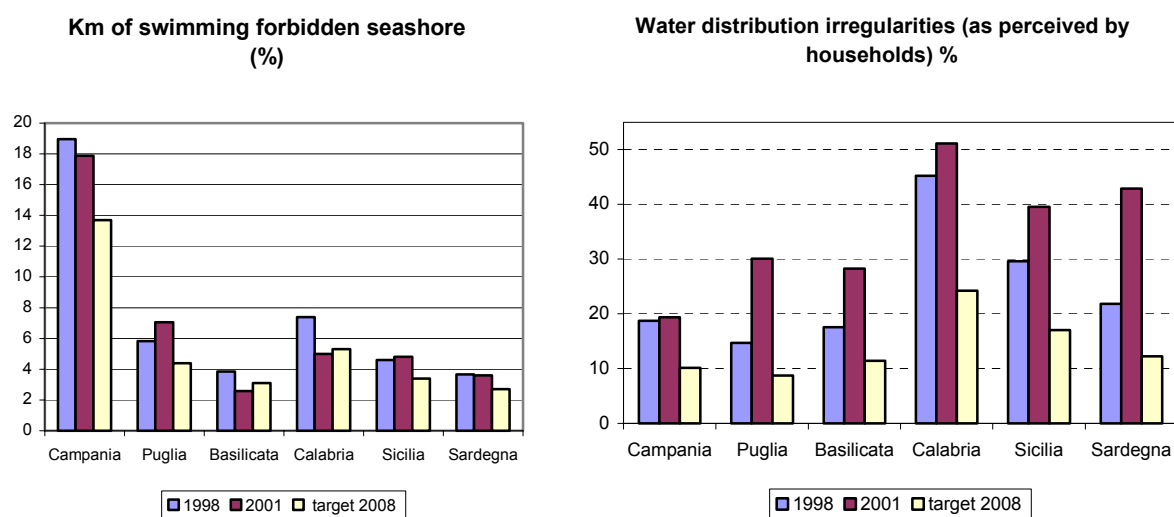
The benchmarks of the context indicators set in the CSF were then adapted to the regional level. The setting of benchmarks for specific sectors and the use of the evaluation of the coherence between national and regional objectives and actions represent an important innovation in regional programming and ex-ante evaluation. The purpose of introducing regional benchmarks is based on the idea that conditions of regional competitiveness can be improved through interregional comparisons of competitive advantages, territorial policies and extensive use of evaluation and monitoring systems. Furthermore the monitoring of the competitive position of each region with regard to quantitative benchmarks helps policy makers to evaluate and, if necessary, readdress policy choices and projects' selection.

Context indicators are thus considered closer to regional objectives and territorial effects of regional policies, than the breakthrough variables. Each region not only knows the desired value for the context indicators to be reached in the macro-area (South) at the end of the CSF programming

period (2006), but also sets its own benchmarks, considering the regional current situation, planned strategies and the general coherence between its own targets and those for the entire macro-area.

Figure 3 shows for two context indicators the most recent values, the known values when targets were set and the benchmarks for Southern regions and gives a flavour of the variance observed among Southern regions.

Figure 3: Values at the year 1998, last available values and benchmarks for the indicators Km of swimming forbidden seashore and Water distribution irregularities in the Southern Regions.



The adaptation of benchmarks to the regional context reflects both Regional comparative advantage and their effort to achieve specific objectives (assessed by the percentage of investment and the actions planned in that sector).

Indicators and benchmarks are tools for Regional policies and the evaluation of the impact of investments at territorial level; for this reason the set of context indicators and breakthrough variables, together with their updated values as soon as they become available, are of public domain on the web site of the National Statistical Office¹⁰.

¹⁰ See <http://www.istat.it>

4. Enhancing the quality of public spending

The increased responsibilities allocated to regional governments with the 2000-2006 National Development Plan (more than 70 per cent of total EU structural funds are directly managed by southern Regions) highlighted the present inadequacies of both central and regional administrations and the need to guarantee the quality of projects to be financed. This led to the set up of a series of incentive devices to spur implementation of administrative reforms and pursue high quality projects, integration and concentration of resources by regional and central authorities. One of these devices is the performance reserve allocation (10 per cent of all resources, corresponding to 4 billion euro) according to two different competitive criteria. General provisions for EU Structural Funds provide for the implementation of a 4 per cent performance reserve to be allocated according to a list of indicators of effectiveness, management and financial criteria. Another 6 per cent national reserve was then added. The resulting 10 per cent reserve represents a strong incentive to upgrading the effectiveness of public administration and the quality of public spending. The two reserves are based on the same general principles and are complementary.

The 4 per cent reserve targets effectiveness, management and financial planning criteria. The first criterion is captured by the capacity of administrations to achieve their final objective in terms of physical outputs. Management indicators measure the actual implementation of devices (control, monitoring and evaluation systems, capabilities of analysing the local labour market, etc.) deemed to be necessary to guarantee the sound management of the programme. As for financial indicators, they refer to the capacity of the administration to make an adequate yearly financial planning, to absorb planned financial resources and to foster the involvement of private partners in investment projects. All the indicators are directly linked to aspects of the Regional Programs of the CSF 2000-06.

The 6 per cent reserve is conceived as an incentive to a) implement specific administrative reforms considered essential to get final results and b) ensure quality of projects in terms of integration (among several "sector" actions aimed at achieving a common territorial target) and concentration. As regards the first objective, indicators measure processes of modernisation in the Administration and the degree to which reforms are being implemented in some of the sectors crucial to the achievement of the program.

The performance reserve's indicators and their benchmarks are used as incentive devices to spur implementation of administrative reforms and pursue high quality projects by Regional and Central Authorities in the CSF 2000-2006¹¹.

The benchmarks for the 4 per cent reserve indicators and for the criterion of institutional enhancement in the 6 per cent reserve are fixed exogenously; while for the criteria of integration

¹¹ The complete list of the performance's indicators together with a description of their benchmarks can be found in Annex 3.

and concentration, the benchmarks are fixed pegged on the average performance of all programmes; in this case, the standard is not exogenously fixed but depends upon the behaviour of all administrations. For the 6 per cent reserve, when a benchmark is satisfied, a percentage of the initial budget appropriation is allocated to the administration, while for the 4 per cent reserve, 6 out of 8 benchmarks have to be satisfied in order to receive the funds. The evaluation of the achievement of targets is done by a Technical Group on the basis of the results obtained by September 2002 (for the 6% reserve) and June 2003 (for the 4% reserve). The Technical group for the monitoring of the performance reserve indicators is composed by experts from the National Evaluation Task Force (Department of Development Policies), experts from Regional Evaluation Task Forces and independent experts appointed by the European Commission.

Indicators were fixed with reference to measurable entities. Benchmarks, for the indicators related to institutional enhancement in 6 per cent and management in 4 per cent, were fixed with reference to the accomplishment of some requirements. For some of them, it was decided to set guidelines to give stricter qualitative requisites to the requirements to be satisfied. For other indicators, it was decided to be less specific in defining requirements since they were dependent on the specific needs of each region. This explains why, in some cases, targets are expressed in a rather general form. On the other hand generality presents the risk that intermediate targets do not necessarily lead to final results, *i.e.*, the procedural requirement (for example awarding the concession) could be satisfied without truly enhancing administrative effectiveness (for example services deemed very relevant by the local business community or by would-be investors are not provided, etc.). To avoid this risk, for those intermediate targets expressed in terms of procedural requirements, technical assistance and diagnostic monitoring to regional and central administrations were set. Anyway, the same benchmark is set for all the administrations.

The incentive device governing the reserve is designed both to enhance competition among administrations¹² in timely upgrading the Public Administration and to provide equal opportunities of participation to all administrations, limiting the handicap of administrations that history, tradition and dimension make weaker than others.

At the beginning of March 2003 more than a billion euro of Structural Funds were allocated among twelve regional and central administrations, according to their performance with regard to the 6% performance reserve's indicators. The incentive system proved to be very effective: if one considers the total number of targets to be achieved by all administrations, in the 60% of cases these were achieved. A few administrations even satisfied all their targets. Incentives proved to be very

¹² Competition between programmes occurs directly only for the share of the 6 per cent reserve devoted to integration and concentration: programmes performing as or better than the average will qualify for their share of the reserve. Both for 4 per cent and 6 per cent reserve institutional enhancement criterion, competition occurs only in the second round: All programmes can be allocated their share if benchmarks are satisfied according to rules. Only if some programmes fall below the benchmarks, the redistribution of the unallocated reserve to other programmes takes place on the basis of a direct competition.

powerful if we consider that, even in the most successful administrations, targets requiring specific accomplishments were often reached immediately before the deadline.

In most of the cases reserve indicators represent intermediate objectives, conditions considered necessary for attaining the final objective of upgrading the effectiveness of public administration action and the quality of public spending. To be effective, the reward system was focused on clearly stated indicators, strongly dependent on the actions of the administration managing the programme, either directly or by stimulating local government through reverse mechanisms. At the same time indicators and incentives were chosen also to influence the decision-making process within a specific political, electoral and organizational system.

As a result, the performance reserve's system has proved to make both the political and the administrative level accountable. The most successful administrations were those where the political level was aware since the beginning of the performance reserve objectives and, with the support of the administrative and technical level, put into action all appropriate measures.

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Annex 1: The breakthrough variables and their indicators

Breakthrough variable	Indicator	Most recent value of the indicator		Targets for the South	
		South	Italy	low externalities	high externalities
Export capacity	Exports/GDP	10,8%	25,8%	13,9%	15,4%
Economic dependence	Net Imports /GDP	16,5%	-1,8%	17,6%	16,7%
Attraction of tourism	Time (days per person) spent in touristic accomodation/population	2,7	5,2	3,7	4,3
Rate of Capital accumulation	Gross fixed investment/GDP	16,6%	18%	23,7%	27%
Attraction of foreign direct investment	FDI/gross fixed investment	0,34%	1,30%	0,35%	0,37%
Labour market participation	Participation rate	48,5%	53,9%	51,7%	52,9%
Supply of regular employment	Non regular employment/employment	20,60%	9,90%	20,0%	19,8%
Expansion of personal qualified services	Index of social work	0,3	1	0,34	0,37
High productivity export	Index of production of specialised goods	0,83	1	0,93	1,01
Innovation	Index of technology intensity	17,4	35,3	26,3	39
Expansion of business services	Employed in business services/ total employed in services	33,70%	36,50%	36,4%	38,3%
Development of financial markets	Interest rate differential between the Centre North and the South	2,1	–	1,85	1,19
Law enforcement and social cohesion	Index of crime level	169	100	154	148

Annex 2: A sample list of context indicators

(Italy=100)

<i>Sector</i>	<i>Indicator</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Centre-North</i>	<i>South</i>	<i>Italy</i>
Priority I "Natural Resources"					
Water	Water distribution irregularities (as perceived by households)	2000	55,56	190,92	100,00
Water	Km of swimming forbidden seashore	2001	74,58	108,74	100,00
Pollution and waste	Urban recycled waste over total urban waste	1999	142,17	15,45	100,00
Priority II "Cultural Resources"					
Cultural resources	Per capita average expenses for theatre and concerts	1999	131,21	45,08	100,00
Cultural resources	Tickets sold for theatre and concerts per person	1999	123,64	58,41	100,00
Priority III "Human Resources"					
Labour	Unemployment rate (age 15-24)	2001	14,56	50,76	28,20
Labour	Gender difference between labour participation rates	2001	21,64	34,62	26,34
Research	Expenditure of the public and private enterprises for R&D (percentage over GDP)	1999	121,93	32,53	100,00
Priority IV "Local development"					
Local development	Industry added value	1999	101,94	89,61	100,00
Local development	Added value in the turistic sector	1999	102,22	92,32	100,00
Local development	Net birth rate of enterprises	2001	88,47	126,95	100,00
Priority V "Urban development"					
Urban development	Difficulty to reach grocery stores (as perceived by households)	2000	97,85	104,40	100,00
Urban development	Availability of air monitoring devices	2000	127,07	52,12	100,00
Priority VI "Material and information network"					
Transportation	Passengers in airports over regional population	2000	125,55	54,44	100,00
Transportation	Air pollution (CO2) due to transportation	1999	102,31	95,93	100,00

Annex 3: Performance reserve's indicators and their benchmarks

CRITERIA FOR THE ALLOCATION OF THE 4% RESERVE

CRITERIA	DESCRIPTION OF THE INDICATOR	BENCHMARK
A1. EFFECTIVENESS		
A.1.1. Basket of outputs	Comparison of actual and planned results for some outputs (covering at least half of the value of the programme)	Reach at least 80% of the planned results
A.2 MANAGEMENT		
A.2.1. Quality of the Monitoring System	Introduction of a system of indicators and monitoring procedures responding to national agreed standards and guaranteeing the availability of financial, physical and procedural data starting from January 2001	Computation of the financial, physical and procedural data at fixed times, starting from January 2001
A.2.2. Quality of Financial Control	Upgrade the control system to the model proposed in the CSF	Meet the benchmark of the control system's evaluation
A.2.3. Quality of Project Selection Systems	Application of selection procedures based on feasibility studies and on criteria favouring environmental sustainability and equal opportunities	Feasibility studies for at least 60% in value of the financed projects; criteria favouring environmental sustainability in at least 50% in value and equal opportunities in at least 30% of financed projects.
A.2.4. Quality of the Evaluation System	Appointment of the independent evaluator and definition of terms of reference responding to national standards	Appointment of the independent evaluator by September 2001
A.2.5. Quality of the labour market analysis system	Set up within the managing authority of a system of analysis of the most significant aspects of labour market and of employment effects of interventions; diffusion of results	Definition of a system of analysis of the most significant aspects of labour market and of employment effects of interventions by December 2001
A.3 FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT		
A.3.1. Financial absorption	Attainment of 100% of declared expenditure in relation to planned	Attainment of 100% of declared expenditure for 2000 and 2001 by

	expenditure in the financial plan for 2000 and 2001	September 2001
A.3.2. Public-private partnership	Application of public-private partnership schemes for the financing of projects	At least 4 projects financed by public-private partnership

CRITERIA FOR THE ALLOCATION OF THE 6% RESERVE

CRITERIA	DESCRIPTION OF THE INDICATOR	BENCHMARK
A. INSTITUTIONAL ENHANCEMENT		
A.1	Delegation of managerial responsibilities to officials	Adoption of the decree 29/93 and managers' evaluation for the year 2002
A.2	Set up and implementation of an internal control management unit	Set up and proof of activity of the internal control management unit
A.3	Set up of regional and central administration evaluation units	Set up of the evaluation unit by April 2001, appointment of the director and experts by July 2001
A.4	Development of the information society in the P.A.	Transmission of data regarding at least 60% of total expenditure
A.5	Implementation of one stop shop for enterprise	At least 80% of the regional population covered by the one-stop shop and at least 90% of papers processed on time
A.6	Implementation of employment services	At least 50% of the regional population covered by employment offices
A.7	Preparation and approval of territorial and landscape programming documents	Meet regional benchmarks of territorial landscape programming
A.8	Implementation of water management	Concession or management by a private-public operator of integrated water services
A.9	Implementation of optimal service areas for urban solid waste	Choice of management mode and its implementation for urban solid waste within optimal service areas
A.10	Set up and operational performance of regional environmental agencies	Appointment of the director of the agency and approval of management rules, allocation of resources and personnel to the agency.

B.2 INTEGRATION		
B.1 For regional administrations	Implementation of territorial integrated projects	Incidence of commitments and disbursements of integrated territorial projects on the total amount of resources budgeted for integrated territorial projects in the operational programme higher than the average over the regions
B.2 For central administrations	Degree of integration of national operational programmes with regional planning	Share of commitments of the investments programmed within a programme framework agreement (Accordo di programma quadro) or any other negotiated agreement between central and regional administrations over total commitments, higher than the average over the central administrations
C CONCENTRATION		
C. for regional administrations	Concentration of financial resources	Concentration of financial resources within a lower amount of measures than the average over the regions