

## Culture and leisure

### Statistics on leisure activities

The first ISTAT surveys of activities performed by the population during leisure time date back to the 1950s, when the Institute conducted occasional surveys (1957, 1959, 1965, 1973) aimed at collecting information on the main aspects of the population's quality of life, including some activities dedicated to free time (reading, radio, television, films and sport).

In the 1980s, the increased level of attention paid to social phenomena resulted in an intense amount of research producing four different surveys between 1982 and 1991 (1982, 1984<sup>1</sup>, 1985, 1987-1991) on different aspects, including leisure time. These were also occasional surveys which, similar to those conducted in the previous two decades, were not yet part of a systematic project monitoring social issues.

In the mid-1990s ISTAT began to dedicate greater attention to the subject. In 1993 the multipurpose system of surveys on families was launched, with a group of surveys designed to record in a systematic and ongoing manner the most important social issues, including leisure activities (see [Households](#)).

This new system included a set of questions on cultural participation. In particular, starting in 1993, the annual "Aspects of daily life" survey provided a basic set of social indicators on the main theme areas associated with the sphere of leisure time (use of radio and television, attendance of shows and entertainment outside the home, books and magazines, use of new technology, sports), areas that were later developed and extended from 1995 in the *ad hoc* five-year survey "Citizens and leisure".

The first survey on leisure was the "Special survey on certain aspects of holidays and sport", conducted in 1959, in a sample survey combined with the survey on the work force through paper questionnaires and an interview with the head of the family or other qualified person. The survey units were families. The size of the sample was of nearly 75,000 families, for a total number of 1,374 sample municipalities. The survey aimed to collect data on the main aspects concerning the sports practiced by Italians. Interviewees were asked to indicate if they practiced sport and, if so, what type of sport. The sporting activities considered were amateur sports practiced on a regular basis by the members of the family interviewed.

In 1982 the "Survey on holidays and sport in Italy" was conducted together with that on the work force, followed by the "Sport and holidays" survey in 1985. The aim of the surveys was to find the number of people who practiced sport (in a regular and amateur manner), the type of sport practiced, how much time was dedicated to it, the type of organisation and the facilities used. The reasons for not practicing sport were also recorded for the first time. The survey was performed with a paper questionnaire, through an interview with the members of each family.

The survey units were families and the figures recorded regarded all the members of the family who practiced or did not practice sport. The survey sample in 1982 was composed of 975 municipalities and 28,560 families, while the 1985 survey involved 833 municipalities and more than 24,000 families.

Reading started to be observed as a use of leisure in 1965 with the "Special survey of reading in Italy", repeated in 1973. This was also a sample survey combined with the survey of the work force. In both years the survey was performed using a paper questionnaire and an interview with the head of

---

<sup>1</sup> In May 1984 ISTAT conducted the *Survey of reading and other aspects of leisure*. The questions were structured in a significantly different manner to both previous and subsequent surveys. Since the possibility of comparing the data with that in the time series is very limited, they do not appear in the data presented here.

the family or other qualified person. In 1965, the figures recorded covered both books and magazines, the size of family libraries, the type of ownership of books (purchase, gift, borrowing) and the expenses paid for reading. In 1973 new questions were introduced and some of those already present in the 1965 survey were modified. The number of books read, the place of purchase and method of payment were recorded for the first time. New genres of book read were introduced in addition to those included in the 1965 survey (novels and various literature, childrens' books and other genres), to include books about art, science and technical subjects. The sample size for both surveys was of more than 83,000 families for a total of more than 1,400 municipalities.

In 1987-1988 the first "Multipurpose survey" was launched (with the first cycle from December 1987 to May 1988 and the second cycle from June 1988 to November 1988), collecting information on the various activities performed by the population in leisure time. The survey was designed in such a way as to ensure that several phenomena could be covered jointly<sup>2</sup>. The information relating to the use of free time included the use of radio and television and reading books and newspapers in the first cycle and sport in the second cycle. The first cycle also recorded the possession of books by the family. The survey was conducted on a monthly basis and part of the information surveyed was changed every six months. The survey was conducted using samples with a survey unit of de facto families, i.e. a group of people living together and bound by marriage, relation, affinity, adoption, guardianship or affection, using a paper questionnaire. While in the past the questionnaire was entirely filled out by an interviewer, the new survey collected data both through direct interview (sport, radio, tv) and through the compilation of the questionnaire directly by the interviewee (reading). The survey was composed of 25,878 families for a total of 1,132 municipalities.

From 1993 onwards, estimates were drawn from the annual "Aspects of daily life" survey which was part of an integrated system of multipurpose surveys of families. The aim of the survey was to record fundamental information regarding the daily life of individuals and families. Among the various theme areas, the survey also covered cultural and sporting activities in leisure time. Furthermore, from 2001 data was also collected regarding the use of new technology: personal computers and the internet; these figures have not been included in this section because the number of observations is still very low.

In addition to the "Aspects of daily life" survey, the multipurpose system of surveys on families involves five-year studies on specific themes. Regarding leisure, every five years a "Citizens and leisure" survey is conducted (1995, 2000 and 2006) collecting information on the use of leisure and cultural participation by individuals and families. Some of the most important themes studied in this survey are the reading of books and magazines, the use of radio, television, cinema, theatres and museums, sport and the use of new technology. The survey is conducted in the same way as the other surveys in the multipurpose system.

It is important to note that the figures drawn from the multipurpose survey refer exclusively to levels of use of cultural activities by the resident population in Italy. Therefore, the estimates obtained are not directly comparable with the figures on the levels of use collected through administrative sources (for example, the SIAE and the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities). Furthermore, these latter figures refer to the number of tickets sold and entrances recorded (rather than individuals), and also take account of use by foreign tourists.

### *Warnings for time series comparisons*

- Up until 1985, the survey unit was the family, while from 1987-1988 the survey unit changed to the de facto family.
- For the years 1959, 1965, 1973 and 1982, the questionnaire is combined with the survey on the work force. The 1985 survey on sport was combined with the survey on holidays.
- In all the surveys from 1959 onwards, sport refers to a sport practiced in an ongoing manner. Only in 1982 and 1985 did the survey refer to sport practiced on a regular basis.
- Regarding cultural activities, the surveys in 1959, 1965, 1973, 1982 and 1985 were conducted via direct interview. In 1987/1988, figures on sport and the use of radio and television were collected through direct interview while reading was recorded through direct

<sup>2</sup> For information on the multipurpose survey system, please refer to: [Households](#).

compilation of the questionnaire by the interviewee. From 1993 onwards only sporting activities were surveyed through direct interview, while all other activities (attendance of shows and entertainment outside the home, use of radio and TV, reading books and newspapers) were recorded with a self-compiled questionnaire.

- In 1987-1988, the questions on the use of radio and television were presented to the population of age 6 and over, lowered to age 3 and over in 1993. To make the figures comparable, only those relating to the population of 6 and over are presented in the tables.
- In 1987-1988, 1993 and 1994 the questions on reading books and newspapers were presented to the population of age 11 and over, lowered to age 6 and over in 1995. To make the figures comparable, only those relating to the population of 11 and over are presented in the tables.