

Special Economic Zones Planning for Sustainable Ports: General Approach for Administrative Simplifications and a Test Case

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Abstract. Special Economic Zones (SEZs) are geographical areas with regulatory regime where the enterprises receive incentives, through i.e. tax breaks, and have administrative simplifications, with the aim to increase the enterprises competitiveness, the attraction of direct investments especially by foreign subjects, the new increase in exports, the creation of jobs work and, more generally, the strengthening of the productive fabric by stimulating industrial growth and innovation.

A SEZ implies the implementation of regulatory and administrative simplification actions in order to rationalize the procedures and to make the relationship among administration, citizen and business simpler, transparent and direct.

Calabria Region has approved Strategic Development Plan for SEZ Calabria, that has its center in Gioia Tauro including the port and the industrial area. Gioia Tauro port is specialized in container transhipment operations and it has a great expansion capacity to become a third-generation port also due to the presence of the SEZ.

The paper proposes a general model, a graph, that defines the concept of administrative simplification and introduces a cost function associated with it. The paper presents a general framework of the administrative simplification system developed by Calabria Region for the SEZ. The deepening of this topic is very interesting in relation to its impacts on the economic and social sector of the region and the country.

Keywords: Special Economic Zones · Economic development · Ports · Administrative simplifications

1 Introduction

Special Economic Zones (SEZs) are parts of the territory in which companies are subjected to measures as incentives, tax breaks and regulatory derogation in order *primarily to encourage the formation of capital through the production of goods and services* [1] and for *attracting foreign direct investment, accelerating industrialization and creating*

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jobs [2]. There are about 4,000 SEZs in the world; in Europe there are about 90 SEZs and Free Zones, 14 of which are established in Poland, which represent some of the most virtuous examples.

The SEZ represents a powerful tool for the development of a region thanks to the presence of adequate financial, fiscal, simplification and bureaucratic support.

There are several interventions that can favor the businesses development and, in general, markets; among these, the cost of labor, infrastructural investments and bureaucratic simplification are of great importance. The latter one is an essential element.

The simplification element is one of the cornerstones of the SEZ which must be increasingly inclusive. It heavily conditions the processes of change in a region because it is very often organized by forms and not by goals. The organizational by form was probably useful during the organization of the unitary state, when it was necessary to unify a lot of microscopic states. Today, proceeding towards goals also becomes a form. And the procedure, the regulation, the paragraph, always prevail over the social need, over the difficulties of the company, over merit.

The different reforms made have removed the managerial responsibility from political executives, giving it to the bureaucracy, without reforming the bureaucracy. The effect has been devastating; it is enough to look at the systematic delays of some regions in spending, delays made up only by means of technical assistance. Bureaucracy that proceeds by forms that are given the responsibility to spend effectively and efficiently puts a strain on the most qualified programs.

Governments in many economies make or maintain regulations that burden entrepreneurs. Whether by intention or ignorance, such regulation limits the ability of entrepreneurs to freely manage a private enterprise. As a result, entrepreneurs resort to informal activities, away from the oversight of regulators and tax collectors, or seek opportunities abroad, or join the ranks of the unemployed.

Simplification therefore represents a goal to be pursued by administrations at different territorial levels; it is a fundamental component of the sustainability of a system [3]. Already in 1987, in the Brundtland report, one of the limits to sustainable development is attributed to the non-predisposition of governments to changes towards integrated and global approaches. *Yet most of the institutions facing those challenges tend to be independent, fragmented, working to relatively narrow mandates with closed decision processes. Those responsible for managing natural resources and protecting the environment are institutionally separated from those responsible for managing the economy. The real world of interlocked economic and ecological systems will not change; the policies and institutions concerned must* [4].

The 2030 Agenda also pays attention to sustainability relating to procedures and the business climate in the following goals and targets [5, 6]:

8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.

- *8.3 Promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage the formalization and growth of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, including through access to financial services.*

- *8.a Increase Aid for Trade support for developing countries, in particular least developed countries, including through the Enhanced Integrated Framework for Trade-related Technical Assistance to Least Developed Countries.*

10. Reduce inequality within and among countries.

- *10.5 Improve the regulation and monitoring of global financial markets and institutions and strengthen the implementation of such regulations,*

17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development.

- *17.13 Enhance global macroeconomic stability, including through policy coordination and policy coherence.*
- *17.14 Enhance policy coherence for sustainable development.*
- *17.15 Respect each country's policy space and leadership to establish and implement policies for poverty eradication and sustainable development.*

European Commission is in the same direction of the Agenda 2030; in fact, in the Country Report has set the objective 1: A *smarter Europe – innovative and smart industrial transformation* through [7]:

- *enhancing research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies*
- *promoting digitisation for citizens, companies and governments*
- *enhancing growth and competitiveness of small and medium sized enterprises.*

At national level, Italy has approved the 2020–2023 Simplification Agenda [8] to relaunch the country after the pandemic crisis, stimulate the ecological and digital transition, promote structural change in the economy, starting from contrast to gender, territorial and generational inequalities. The Agenda is focused on the emergency and on programs to relaunch the economy and employment, providing for interventions that contribute to restarting the country, counting on a simpler, faster public administration that is closer to the citizens. The Agenda implements a program of simplification interventions for the resumption of the epidemiological emergency aimed at pursuing the following objectives: systematic elimination of bureaucratic constraints on recovery; reduction of time and cost of procedures for business activities and for citizens.

Simplification is an objective of the Calabria Regional Transportation Plan, that has 4 main goals: regional economic development, external and internal accessibility, in a general framework of sustainability [9]. The objective 8 specifically regards *Sustainability and streamlining* and the action 8 is related to *Measures for sustainability, simplification and speeding up of procedures, controls and interventions in the regional transport and logistics sector*.

The World Bank has defined an indicator *easy doing business* analyzing aspects of regulation and business practice using specific case studies with standardized hypotheses

[10]. The score defines the strength of the business environment and is assessed on the basis of the performance of an economy. It allows to classify the economy of a country in relation to regulatory performance.

Table 1 reports the top and bottom 20 economies. The European Union ranks in the 45th position with a score of 76.2; Italy is in 67th place with a score of 72.9.

The 20 best performing economies have made around 464 regulatory changes and are aimed at improving the business climate through other reforms. Most of the top 20 economies come from the OECD high income group; vice-versa, the last 20 are mainly regions of sub-Saharan Africa. The top 20 economies have online business establishment processes, electronic tax return platforms and allow online procedures relating to property transfers. In addition, they have solid corporate regulation with a high degree of transparency.

It should be noted that some countries with very low scores have activated numerous regulatory reforms in the business environment; for example, Myanmar has launched a simplification program that has allowed it to move up from the last 20 positions to 165.

It is possible to make an evaluation of the business environment in countries also in relation to the time taken to obtain a license. For example, starting a business in economies ranked in the bottom 50 takes on average almost 6 times longer than in the top 20. Transfer of ownership in the top 20 economies takes less than 2 weeks, compared to about 3 months in the last 50. Getting an electrical connection in an average economy of the top 50 takes twice as long as it takes in an average economy of the top 20; the cost of this connection is 44 times higher if expressed as a share of per capita income.

Table 1. Ease of doing business score (0 = lowest performance to 100 = best performance) [10].

	Economy	Score		Economy	Score
1	New Zealand	86.8	219	Sudan	44.8
2	Singapore	86.2	220	Iraq	44.7
3	Hong Kong SAR, China	85.3	221	Afghanistan	44.1
4	Denmark	85.3	222	Guinea-Bissau	43.2
5	Korea, Rep.	84.0	223	Liberia	43.2
6	United States	84.0	224	Syrian Arab Republic	42.0
7	Georgia	83.7	225	Angola	41.3
8	United Kingdom	83.5	226	Equatorial Guinea	41.1
9	Norway	82.6	227	Haiti	40.7
10	Sweden	82.0	228	Congo, Rep.	39.5
11	North America	81.8	229	Timor-Leste	39.4
12	Lithuania	81.6	230	Chad	36.9
13	Malaysia	81.5	231	Congo, Dem. Rep.	36.2
14	Mauritius	81.5	232	Central African Republic	35.6

(*continued*)

Table 1. (*continued*)

	Economy	Score		Economy	Score
15	Australia	81.2	233	South Sudan	34.6
16	United Arab Emirates	80.8	234	Libya	32.7
17	North Macedonia	80.7	235	Yemen, Rep.	31.8
18	Estonia	80.6	236	Venezuela, RB	30.2
19	Latvia	80.3	237	Eritrea	21.6
20	Finland	80.2	238	Somalia	20.0

Most economies trade mainly through ports; however, they are very often characterized by the absence of a unitary approach in the management of bureaucratic processes and a total fragmentation of skills, thus causing diseconomies.

In Italy, strategies have been launched to overcome this problem which have not produced any results; the creation of the National Logistics Platform gives only prototypes and studies without any real operational effect.

Many Port System Authorities have been forced to continue investing resources to support the development of their traffic, doing so without any coordination and managing, in some cases, to create valuable ITS systems commonly called Port Community Systems, which have simplified many procedures and supported the action of private operators as well as their own administrations.

EU has proposed a *Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI)* to monitor the digital progress of the member state. Italy ranks 20th among the 27 EU [11].

One of the pillars of the most developed ports in the world is precisely linked to administrative simplification; examples are the ports of Tangier Med, Shenzhen and Dubai. Tangier Med port, one of the main hubs of the Mediterranean for the movement of containers and ships, has a structured Free Zone which has produced a great acceleration in the growth of the area; in the port logistics area and the Free Zone a total of about 600 companies is placed that carries out a total export of over 4 billion euro [12].

The SEZ plays a key-role in this context, especially, for the disadvantaged territories which need to be more supported in order to compete in the world trade where there are countries in which the facilitations and simplifications proposed by the SEZ are unsustainable standards; in this sense, the SEZ is a powerful engine for the socio-economic development of a country.

This prompted the proposal of a SEZ in the Calabria Region, an economically disadvantaged region of southern Italy, a country where the time for export is about 19 days: 11 for documentation, 2 for custom, 6 for transport. The inefficiency linked to the preparation phase of the documentation is evident, which takes up more than half of the total time (for bill of lading, customs declaration, commercial invoice and certificates of technical/health standards, etc.). Not only is the export operation slower than many countries (Netherlands: 6; Cyprus, Germany: 7) but it is also expensive considering $ 1,195 against 577 in Morocco, 613 Egypt, 790 Cyprus [13, 14].

The paper presents the administrative simplifications proposed by Calabria Region for SEZ, of its own competence, in the general approach finalized to increase economic development. The impacts from the SEZ also arise from a special regulatory regime, fiscal benefit, infrastructures and services for the companies already present and for the new one that want to settle down. The SEZ for Calabria can be a source of development in a country where there is a strong delay also due to the bureaucratic machine characterized by many authorities and licenses/permits. On one hand the presence of the port is the minimum requirement for the establishment of the SEZ in Italy, on the other hand the port benefits from it to become a third-generation port [15, 16].

2 General Model

The SEZ can be considered "special" from various points of view, due to the regulatory regime, tax and non-tax benefits, infrastructures and services for businesses [17]. Special regulatory regime is applied by a set of policy instruments that are not generally applicable to the rest of the country. Tax regime, including customs, is applied with capital freedoms, tax incentives, subsidies, and duty or value-added tax, free or deferred. No-tax benefits include the set of administrative simplifications to reduce procedures time. Infrastructures and services are available, starting with efficient transport infrastructures. Then, companies in the SEZ have excellent conditions to grow economically and to attract new investors, contributing to the country economic development.

The general model of the SEZ can be represented as a tree diagram which operates at different levels. In the first level, there are concessions and realizations, on the one hand; the incentives package is on the other side. In turn, these are divided into other links that go to a second level, and so on.

Making a focus on incentives package, the no-tax benefits are given to companies mainly thought simplification of administrative services that allows for a significant reduction in the time and costs required to complete the procedures.

Many countries, especially those with an economic delay, are characterized by a very complex bureaucratic system that forces companies to interface with numerous entities and provide for numerous practices to complete a procedure. In this sense, the simplification proposed by SEZ represents an important tool to solve this problem, to bridge the gap with those countries where simplification is an ordinary guarantee.

To better explain the concept of simplification, it is possible to refer to a graph composed of nodes and links (Fig. 1). The nodes represent the stockholders involved in the process, the links represent the relationships among them, the interconnections. Each company to have an authorization, from the origin to the final node, is forced to cross a multiplicity of nodes (a) which translates into losses in terms of time and costs.

A cost function can be associated to this graph which can be expressed in a simplest form as a linear combination of cost attributes X_{hi} (time, monetary cost, etc.) with coefficients α_i to be calibrated:

$$\sum_{i=1}^{N} a_i \cdot X_{hi} \tag{1}$$

where N is the number of nodes crossed.

To reduce these costs, it is possible to intervene mainly in two ways. The first one is to eliminate some nodes (b), but it is obvious that this leads to "dangerous" situations; the second one is to group some nodes (c), so that there is a single interface for carrying out different procedures. This is the best solution and is the one provided by the SEZ.

In this sense, simplification does not represent a single administrative action, but it has a scientific basis.

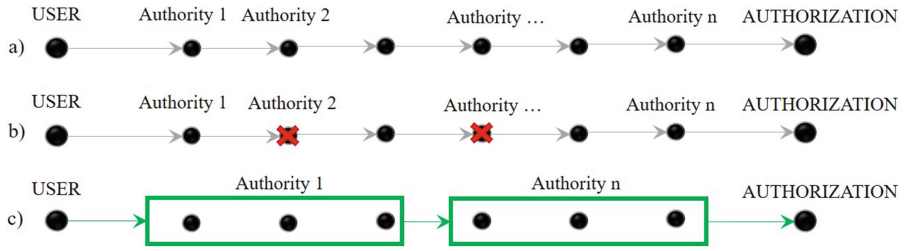

Fig. 1. Graph of administrative procedures

The solution c), in the SEZ areas, is realized by the One Stop Shop (OSS) for Productive Activities which represents the interface between companies and public institutions to deal with all the practices relating to the company opening and management; it allows to have a single public contact for the management of all bureaucratic procedures. The OSS works electronically; so, a practice that requires a lot of requirements can be carried out at the One Stop Shop, that forwards the documents to the entities and offices of destination (Provinces, Municipalities, etc.).

3 A Test Case

In Italy, SEZ program was established with Law Decree no. 91/2017 [17]. A SEZ is defined as a geographically delimited area, uniquely identified, located within the borders of the country, also consisting of areas not territorially adjacent as long as present a functional economic link, and one that includes at least a port area with the characteristics established by the Regulation (EU) no. 1315/2013 for the development of the TEN-T network [18].

New and existing businesses that start a program of business economic activities or of investments incremental in the SEZ, can take advantage of an incentives package by:

- fiscal benefits;
- administrative simplifications.

Subsequently, the Decree of the President of Council of Ministers (DPCM) no. 12/2018 defined the Regulation for the establishment of the SEZ respect to [19]:

- requirements, in terms of business access criteria;
- program characteristics, in terms of definition time and program characteristics

– modalities for the SEZ establishment, including SEZs interregional;
– criteria for the identification and delimitation of the SEZ area;

and general coordination of development objectives.

In March 2018, Calabria Region elaborated and approved the Strategic Development Plan for SEZ [20], according to DPCM no. 12/2018 and Regional Transport Plan [9]. In May 2018, the SEZ Calabria was legally established with another DPCM.

SEZ Calabria has the center in Gioia Tauro area including the core port, one of the main commercial hubs in Italy. Today, Gioia Tauro port is specialized in container transhipment operations and it has a great expansion capacity to become a third-generation port [21–28].

The Plan identifies administrative simplifications, of regional competence, for the realization of the investments that the Region undertakes to adopt for the entrepreneurial initiatives located in the SEZ.

Administrative simplifications include simplification already implemented by the region and executive, and new simplifications. The simplification already implemented and executive are:

- establishment of the Associated OSS of the Gioia Tauro Plain;
- harmonization and digitization of the procedures of the Port Authority;
- territorial marketing.

The Associated OSS of the Gioia Tauro Plain, the SUAP, has the aim to simplify and guarantee the conclusion of procedures quickly and with certainty. The main advantage of SUAP is that the entrepreneur turns to a single office to start or develop a business and receive all the clarifications on the necessary requirements and obligations. SUAP is a tool of public administrations, present by law also in every municipality, and is responsible for all administrative procedures relating to the economic and productive activities of goods and services and for all administrative procedures relating to the construction, expansion, termination, reactivation, localization and relocation of production plants, including the issue of building permits or authorizations. Figure 2 shows a scheme of administrative flow with SUAP.

In 2012, Calabria Region established the SURAP Office for the coordination of the regional network of SUAPs of Municipalities, Local Authorities and other Public Administrations, which constitute the set of users of the regional information system.

SURAP supports the smaller municipal SUAPs that are not equipped in terms of organization and skills. It promotes associative forms to improve the overall efficiency of the municipal SUAPs and the quality of the administrative action of the municipalities themselves, with respect to requests from the business world.

SURAP operates through the CalabriaSUAP telematic platform, that is a multifunctional digital desk that manages administrative procedures with the aim of speeding up the time for their conclusion [29].

In 2016, SURAP promoted the Associated OSS of the Gioia Tauro Plain by the three Municipalities: Gioia Tauro, Rosarno and San Ferdinando. SURAP thus anticipated some of the tools already envisaged for the SEZ establishment, for the integrated development

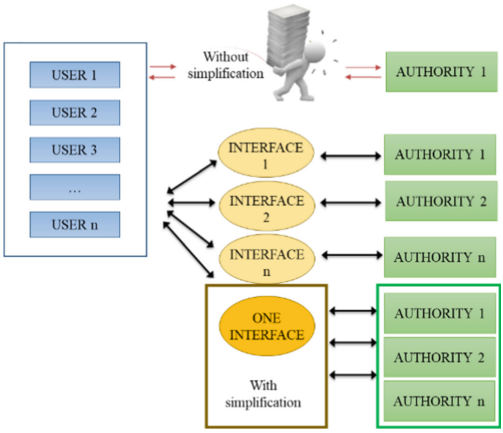

Fig. 2. Scheme of administrative flow with SUAP

of the territory, both in terms of setting up companies in the logistics and manufacturing sector, and in terms of accelerating the procedures for establishment/changing of businesses.

The Associated OSS transmits the necessary impetus for the economic development of the entire territory, with particular reference to the industrial area which falls within the territories of the Municipalities affected by the associated management. It provides a lot of information on activities, such as: location, construction, transformation, restructuring, conversion, extension, transfer, termination and reactivation.

The organizational model chosen for the Associated OSS consists of a "network structure", composed of a central coordination that organizes the service, takes care of the information phase, provides advice and assistance, addresses the most complex problems and deals with relations with external entities. The Associated OSS makes use of the Regional Consortium for the development of Productive Activities (CORAP) technical-organizational structure, in particular for the technical and administrative assistance functions in the verification of the practices presented in the area for industrial settlements as they fall within the area of the SEZ.

Before the adoption of this new procedure, the companies had to submit the request to CORAP, acquire any opinions and/or authorizations or clearances on their own and, after the acquisition of the authorization for the establishment, request the authorizations for the construction of the intervention. at the individual municipal SUAPs.

With the new procedure, the establishment requests within the industrial area (rear-port) are presented in electronic format on a special portal. The Associated OSS of Gioia Tauro is responsible for carrying out the entire procedure until the authorization is obtained. It is estimated that the ordinary time of completion of the procedure will be reduced by 50%. The harmonization and digitization of the procedures of the Port Authority is a process initiated by SURAP in collaboration with the Port Authority of Gioia Tauro in relation to the complex procedure for issuing the state concession in the port area. The telematic configuration of this complex procedure allows the insertion and telematic management of applications for the start of entrepreneurial activities, with

the request for a state concession, for the port areas under the jurisdiction of the Gioia Tauro Port Authority and, in particular, for the port area of the Gioia Tauro Plain. It also provides that it is the municipal office SUAP, on the proposal of the Port Authority, to involve the various competent bodies regarding opinions, clearances and authorizations to be acquired for the issue of the state concession through the convocation of a service conference.

Before the adoption of this new procedure, the companies had to submit the request to the Port Authority, acquire the information and the forms necessary to present the application for the release of the state concession, therefore, they had to submit the project and the required documentation in multiple copies. During the procedure, the companies also had to independently acquire the authorizations and permits necessary for awarding the state-owned concession by contacting each competent body directly. The terms of the administrative procedure, in this case, were not predictable, leaving the company in absolute uncertainty about the timing of the procedure.

With the new procedure, the Associate OSS of the Gioia Tauro Plain takes care of carrying out the entire procedural process until the concession is obtained. Territorial marketing is another activity launched by SURAP as an online service for the systematic promotion of the future SEZ area aimed at potential international investors. The descriptions make it possible to improve the quality and completeness of information on the entire industrial area of Gioia Tauro and on the regional territory, in terms of infrastructures and services, production and economic opportunities, and settlement opportunities. The contents provide useful information for entrepreneurs to evaluate the opportunity to allocate the activity in the SEZ area, with insights on: production context, territory and environment, transport system and culture and events.

Before the adoption of the new procedure, the companies had to contact the bodies involved (CORAP, Port Authority) for information on the availability of the lots.

With the new procedure, by accessing the portal www.calabriasuap.it, the potential user/investor has the possibility to check online the availability of areas that meet their settlement needs, in terms of surface, cost, existing infrastructures, type of companies already established, name of the contact person to contact.

The new simplifications to be implemented are: Information Desk, Ecologically Equipped Production Areas; further provisions concerning the procedures relating to certain economic activities.

The proposed establishment of a virtual Information Desk aims to provide further support to the productive subjects interested in setting up. The service, dedicated to the SEZ, coordinated to SUAP of Port Authority, has the aim is to contain information and services in a single point to facilitate the process of establishing/strengthening economic activities and attracting investments.

The proposed establishment of Ecologically Equipped Production Areas (APEA) is related to definition of a production area/agglomeration “equipped with the infrastructures and systems necessary to ensure the protection of health, safety and the environment”, regulated by low. APEAs represent a regulatory and economic planning tool available to public entities to better guide territorial planning and, at the same time, to ensure that companies that choose to settle there are regulated, sustainable and competitive. APEA is characterized by the presence of common infrastructures and services

managed jointly in ways that allow environmental performance higher than the sum of the benefits obtainable from the optimization of the production process of each company. This new perspective, through the activation of the typical advantages of territorial systems of enterprises (clusters), allows to combine the sustainability of production development with the possibility of improving the competitiveness of enterprises.

The proposal to establish further provisions concerning the procedures relating to certain economic activities implies simplifications of the: process; procedures; times.

The simplifications of the process are: identification of the single regional contact person for service conferences; identification of the OSS for the purposes of "administrative concentration"; provision of the substitutive powers of the Region through the SURAP, against the defaulting SUAP; identification of areas of particular interest regional; identification of the competent Authorities for the issuance of the Single Environmental Authorizations and the reorganization of the related procedural process; preparation of agreements to regulate the carrying out in collaboration of activities of common interest with the entities involved in the administrative procedures of interest to the SEZ; preparation of protocols and conventions between the local and state administrations concerned, aimed at regulating simplified procedures and special procedural regimes, as well as intervention proposed at national level to implement the regulation containing rules for simplification and acceleration of the admins operational procedures functional to the SEZ.

The procedural simplifications are: reorganization of the procedural flow for the issuance of similar authorizations; reorganization of the procedural flow for the approval of projects in variant to urban planning instruments; rationalization of the procedural flow for landscape authorizations; reduction of the terms for issuing permits to settle in industrial areas; reduction of investigation costs required in the context of administrative procedures limited to SEZ areas.

The simplifications of the times are: reduction of the time of administrative procedures relating to building permits; reduction of the terms for issuing permits for settlement in industrial areas.

4 Conclusion

A SEZ is a geographical area with regulatory regime and tax and no-tax incentives to attract direct investments especially from foreign subjects, increase in exports and create jobs.

The administrative simplifications are the mainly no-tax incentives, provided by the SEZ, that intervene on the reduction of costs and time to create/manage a business. Simplification is a goal to be pursued by administrations at various territorial levels; it is a fundamental component of the system sustainability according to the goals of the Agenda 2030.

The paper has presented a general model that defines the concept of simplification and has introduced a cost function associated with it. It would be interesting to calibrate the parameters of the cost function considering the average times and monetary costs over each administrative link.

The case study has concerned the administrative simplifications proposed by the Calabria Region, defined in its Strategic Development Plan of the SEZ.

SEZ Calabria has at its center the Gioia Tauro area which includes the port and the rear port with an industrial vocation. On the one hand, the presence of the port is the minimum requirement for the SEZ establishment in Italy, on the other hand, the port benefits from it to become a third-generation port.

Part of simplifications of Calabria is already executive and focuses on the functions of Associated OSS of Gioia Tauro Plain, that allows the investor to have only one interlocutor who implements the practice with a strong reduction in costs. To be implemented is a prototype features and consists in the creation of a virtual Information Desk to strengthen investor support, and of APEA to ensure that companies that choose to establish themselves are competitive in sustainable terms.

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