

# Foreword

Is capitalism in crisis? Since the major financial crisis of 2007–2009 a number of people have wondered whether capitalism has outlived its usefulness and reached a fundamental dead end. What are the alternatives to a world dominated by large global corporations, many with greedy and manipulative senior managers who reward themselves with salaries, bonuses and payoffs, which are often widely perceived to be unfair and indeed nothing short of obscene? It is all too clear that shareholders lack the power to control these organisations and sovereign governments have lost the nerve and wit to regulate them. Maybe the politicians have wittingly or unwittingly colluded with big business, partly in a desire to generate economic growth and employment, and partly, let it be said, some are advancing their own pecuniary interests. Whatever the reasons, we need to seek alternative solutions to an economic system which is frankly failing billions of people across the world. Never was there a more critical time to provide workable economic and business solutions at the regional level.

These are big questions which people across the world are anxiously pondering but the answers to which are largely beyond the abilities and resources of ordinary people to resolve and, it appears, are largely beyond the abilities of politicians to resolve in any coherent and purposeful way. It is no small wonder then that many people are turning to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) as a more logical and attractive answer to the age-old problems of how to not only generate growth and employment but also make businesses more accountable at the local and regional levels. As the great European Union and Eurozone experiment appears to be unravelling, it is natural for people to be thinking about economic and business solutions at the regional and local levels, and in particular, the development of small social enterprises and cooperatives, each controlled by local people and accountable to local people. If the nation state has shown itself largely incapable of promoting sustainable economic growth, then perhaps the regional context for promoting businesses may prove more successful. That SMEs are the small acorns from which big economic rewards will flow seems self-evident but despite decades of SME and entrepreneurial research we appear to be no further forward in ensuring that economic growth results in a more equitable distribution of wealth.

We need to untangle and forcefully demonstrate the tangible benefits of cooperation and competition between SMEs at the level of the region, the city and the village. We need to understand how information flows between small and medium-sized businesses and the regional state, how knowledge is transferred from universities, science parks and scientific research institutes to businesses enterprises and vice versa. But above all, we need to raise awareness of current developments, best networking practices and the development of all-important explanatory and predictive theories, which can spark much-needed innovations in the SME world, and help ensure a much healthier competition among enterprises than we have seen to date.

The authors of the chapters in this very timely book are to be congratulated in bringing to our attention the important issues of cooperation, competition, networking, knowledge transfers and innovation within the regional SME context. Having brought these issues to our attention is it too unreasonable not to expect our regional and national politicians to stop prevaricating and actually do something tangible and long-lasting in the generation of wealth and its more equitable distribution, for all our sakes?

Gary Akehurst

Cooperation, Clusters, and Knowledge Transfer  
Universities and Firms Towards Regional  
Competitiveness

Ferreira, J.J.; Raposo, M.; Rutten, R.; Varga, A. (Eds.)

2013, XX, 263 p., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-3-642-33193-0