

Preface

This volume aims at diffusing at international level the issue of midsize enterprises, which is quite relevant for the Italian economic and industrial development. Medium-sized enterprises are increasingly considered as a tool for the strengthening of the manufacturing industry, especially through a change in the “firm model”, which is typical of traditional small and medium enterprises, whose the Italian manufacturing midsize enterprise represents one of its highest expressions.

For a long time, the idea that for the Italian economy the strength, before, and the safety, after, was in the industrial districts has been cultivated, where the industrial district was considered as the representative unit of a myriad of just small enterprises. Nowadays, it is clear by now that the strength of the district is no longer attributable just to the quantity of small enterprises which are locally active, but also and above all to the quality of the midsize enterprises. The important thing is to have into the districts as a driving strength more structured firms which, starting from small dimensions, have been growing thanks to paths of strategic and organisational change and through the insertion of new managerial resources. Such a change in the structural asset of the industrial districts, pulled by medium-sized enterprises has served to put several districts in a position to face an international competitive context which is getting increasingly severe and demanding.

This volume focuses its attention, in particular, on a set of manufacturing medium enterprises which have shown over the last years a particularly relevant vitality through: significant and original product and services development processes; structural and organisational renewals; positioning and achievement capability at international level; development of distinctive experiences, competencies and capabilities. By synthesising, these companies have succeeded in providing themselves with business models which are coherent and time sustainable, rather than aiming at market power derived by growing firm dimensions.

The new generation midsize enterprises are the expression of an original and strong entrepreneurial vitality, sustained by the fabric of small and medium enterprises which are connected to them and are part of their business models. Successful midsize enterprises are able to develop a modern entrepreneurial culture, in order to overcome the limits of traditional localism. This happens by adopting pushed

outsourcing policies of parts, components or even final products, by referring in a systematic method to the excellent manufacturing capabilities, deeply-rooted in the industrial fabric of the small enterprises and industrial districts.

The volume starts by recognizing that the flattering economic and financial performances registered by Italian manufacturing medium enterprises in the last decade remain largely unexplained in their genesis and dynamics, by referring to the more popular theories of industrial economics and management. In most studies, economic results of medium enterprises are considered as a separate and, frequently, are compared with the results of large scale enterprises; the explaining factors about the functional originality and the competitive vitality of midsize enterprises are often neglected and not investigated. The research work on which this volume is based investigates exactly in this field.

This volume contains: a quantitative analysis of Italian manufacturing medium-sized enterprises, by highlighting their more significant economic and financial characteristics (Chaps. 2 and 3); a qualitative analysis, run at firm level, by developing twenty-three case studies about midsize enterprises of excellence, which are representative of different production industries and of different territorial contexts (Chap. 4).

This analysis aims at deeply understanding the peculiarities of the business models and of the policies of Italian successful midsize enterprises. The end of the volume presents a contribution about the German Mittelstand, by operating an interesting comparison with Italian manufacturing midsize enterprises and highlighting the German policies adopted to sustain this important section of the industry.

An important achievement of the empirical research work is that the roots of the success of the best Italian companies have to be searched in evolved entrepreneurial recipes, which are open to excellent managerial competencies, enabling to flexibly and dynamically modelling and re-modelling the product policy, with high contents in terms of stylish originality. The present work may also serve in justice to several stereotyped statements, which since too much time are dominant in the current literature about the *made in Italy* production. The examined companies are useful to clarify that their success marks a discontinuity with a traditional vision, exalting the importance of the manufacturing know-how, embedded in the culture and in the experience of the industrial districts and of *made in Italy*.

In the case of medium-sized enterprises, the success does no longer depend just on the product – even though it is always essential, as a typical distinctive factor of *made in Italy* – rather, it depends on their being a firm in a more complete and complex sense, and on their capability of: i) controlling the whole value chain, from the stylish research to the use of innovative materials, to the manufacture of excellence, and so on, up to the market control through the brand and increasingly through the retail distribution channel; ii) modelling strategies, resources/competences, vertical and horizontal relations coherently with the company's governance. In substance, the present work aims at achieving a sort of ennobling of *made in Italy*, in order to show which are the factors and the levers of its success at international level. At the centre of the analysis there are the entrepreneurial actors who have contributed to its

success and who are able to keep it vital even in conditions of increasing complexity of the economic and competitive context.

It is significant to note that the pushed evolution of the entrepreneurial asset of *made in Italy*, which has been achieved with the determinant contribution of medium enterprises, has taken place without any specific intervention of industrial or credit policy. Nay, medium-sized enterprises, with their evolutionary strength and their competitive vitality, have demonstrated to be able to grow despite the Italian political and institutional context and business environment, which present several obstacles, restraints and diseconomies for companies which stay on the international markets.

There is an evident delay of the industrial policy in passing from welfarist kind of intervention for small and medium enterprises to a vision oriented with a systematic method to sustain innovation and internationalisation of companies, regardless of their size.

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Riccardo Varaldo

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Coltorti, F.; Resciniti, R.; Tunisini, A.; Varaldo, R. (Eds.)

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