Preface

The study of cross-national diffusion of production systems has a certain tradition. We know a lot about how carefully designed programmes of change that focus primarily on the conditions for the 'successful' diffusion of production systems affect local or national management and industrial relations. We have come to understand that parts of the effect, notably in Britain, may be due to a more general 'greenfield site' effect, that is to say the fact that the plant can be built up anew from scratch, and the focus on diffusing explicit, as opposed to tacit, elements of production systems.

The present study, which has been conducted in order to obtain a PhD at Warwick Business School, continues this line of inquiry. It is particularly geared to decompose effects by comparing greenfield with brownfield foreign direct investments and alliance formations. It therefore shows us results which had been anticipated, more clearly on the basis of a two-step comparative historical analysis. But this is not all, and maybe not the most important message which comes out. For it calls into question the conceptual slant which has undergirded much previous research, by inquiring into effects of transfer, of initially Japanese practices. What we now see is that 'transfer' is not really an appropriate notion. For what we witness, the author tells us, is translation rather than transfer. Transfer evokes a more passive or submissive stance whilst translation brackets the more active interpretation, adaptation and implementation of recipes. In this manner, the study reminds us, lest we forget at a time when superficial slogans like globalization or 'global village' are bandied about, that local practice always has an inventive side to it and points to the continuation or invention of local specificities, even if that practice is dependent on much more general concepts and levels of governance.

I would also recommend this study in a more general way, beyond the specific topic and its disciplinary ambit, for the combination of methodological rigour with qualitative sensitivity in interviewing and analysis. This shows what theoretically meaningful research in the more qualitative veneer, beyond genuflections towards Ragin or Eisenstadt, looks like.

Arndt Sorge
Groningen, October 2002