

Foreword

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MULTINATIONAL NETWORKING IN RESEARCH AND LEARNING

The activities that have resulted in this volume have been undertaken under the auspices of L'institute, a joint venture between the Universities of Birmingham (UK), Ferrara (Italy) and Wisconsin-Milwaukee (US). Established in 1997, L'institute was born and has grown out of a multinational network of scholars engaged in the study of regional economic development. It strives to engage international scholars in the process of such development. Whilst doing so, it is also evolving a multinational networking process that stimulates open scholarly interaction in the search for policies that recognise and foster region-specific development goals. The current volume is a reflection of both of these concerns.

The roots of L'institute lie particularly in two Summer Research Workshops hosted jointly by the Universities of Warwick and Birmingham (UK) in the early 1990s. These two workshops may be seen as constituting the first phase of a long-run, evolving process. The aim was to provide a small yet expanding group of scholars – drawn from across Europe and to a more limited extent from the US – with the time and space to discuss emerging issues in industrial development policy. It was on these foundations that an approach was made to the European Commission for Human Capital and Mobility funding to take the project into its next phase. As a result, a partnership spanning nine institutions across eight European countries succeeded in attaining support for a series of workshops and graduate research initiatives over the period 1994–97. This project led to the creation of the European Network on Industrial Policy (EUNIP), which soon grew to encompass many institutions and well over 200 individual scientists, mostly in Europe and the Americas. Its aims, objectives and payoffs were neither designed nor realised exclusively for the advantage of the core partners in the original Human Capital and Mobility project, and the intention was to create links between scientists in an emerging environment of mutual cooperation and support.

Building on these initiatives, the project moved into a third phase. Most notably, in 1997 EUNIP was given independent life through the establishment

of its Annual Conference (see www.eunip.com for further information). In the same year and based on the emergence of EUNIP, L'institute (Institute for Industrial Development Policy) was established.

The aim of L'institute is to provide an ongoing focal point for analysis and discussion of industrial development processes, and to give a stimulus to the dynamic networking that goes beyond the confines of specific, self-contained projects by opening new possibilities for scholarly interaction and cooperation. Moreover, by creating an organisation that sits firmly within established universities, vital roots are provided; they give networking a concrete presence, lifting it beyond comparatively short-run initiatives and abstract theorising. The intention is to nurture multinationalism amongst scholars and others concerned about industrial economic development and public policy.

The activities of L'institute are grounded in the scholarship of the individual people involved rather than the institutional objectives of the three sponsoring universities. Likewise, to foster openness, L'institute has a minimal structure that enables and facilitates individuals drawn from a far wider set of organisations than those that are its formal sponsors. The emphasis on multinationalism implies a coming together of individuals across nations, a process based on and respecting the different experiences, histories, traditions and cultures of various localities in various parts of the world. These differences are seen as a source of strength, providing opportunities for mutual benefit, and for identifying and pursuing efficient ways forward. Such multinationalism is arguably in stark contrast to the transnationalism of today's typical global corporations; to transnationalise is to have a transverse structure that crosses nations and localities, taking advantage of opportunities to serve sectional interests without being rooted in the localities that make up those nations. The benefit of multinationalism is in the quality of research and learning, in unique and otherwise unobtainable outputs. (See Sugden, 2000 on one interpretation of the implications for multinationalism versus transnationalism in the pursuit of efficient and equitable industrial development policy.) L'institute draws together varied expertise from across nations, rooting the research and learning agenda in the concerns of those nations, and in the interests of the peoples of those nations.

Moreover, it is recognition of those regional interests that drives another of the prime aims of L'institute: the desire to include international scholars in the process of regional economic development, bringing to bear multinational expertise that might be able to offer new insights into the development possibilities that might satisfy the aims and objectives of the people of a region.

Among the specific projects that have been pursued by L'institute have been two workshops at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. (For details of further activities, and more on the strategy and operation of L'institute, see www.linstitute.org.) An initial intention was to extend and reinforce the

networking process in North America by recreating the environment of the aforementioned Warwick–Birmingham Summer Research Workshops of the early 1990s; the First L'institute–Milwaukee Workshop on 'Enterprise strategies and regional growth policies in the new global economy', held in July 2000, was intended to tighten and extend links between scholars in North America and Europe. Moreover, the success of the event led to the Second L'institute–Milwaukee Workshop on 'Urban and regional prosperity in a globalised economy', held in July 2001. Again, there was concern to nurture the multinational network. In addition, however, the Second Workshop was intended to explore the ways in which an international group of scholars might contribute to processes of regional economic development being discussed within the specific context of the current challenges facing South-eastern Wisconsin.

This volume is an outcome of these two workshops. It is a reflection both of multinational networking, and of the attempt to participate in the process of regional economic development. It is also a contribution to both of those concerns.

REFERENCE

- Sugden, R. (2000), 'Small firm networking and the internationalisation of universities: a multinational approach', L'institute Discussion Paper 7, Universities of Birmingham, Ferrara and Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Available at www.linstitute.org. Original version presented at the First L'institute–Milwaukee Workshop, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, July 2000.