

# 1. Introduction

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In this chapter we introduce the purpose of the book, which is to explore what the antecedents of firm growth in industrial districts are, through the conceptual lenses of entrepreneurship theory. This chapter proceeds as follows; first we discuss the relevance of investigating the phenomenon of district firm growth and its implications. On the basis of that, we proceed to introduce the theoretical approach adopted in this book and we discuss the method chosen to approach our research question, together with the overall research design. The concluding section of this chapter outlines the entire structure of the book.

## 1.1. THE PURPOSE OF THE BOOK

Researchers and practitioners have long recognised geographically defined regional clusters of specialised firms as relevant socio-economic engines for the competitiveness and growth of regions and countries (Porter, 1998; 1990; Krugman, 1991). The notion of regional groupings of firms has been the subject of research for over a century, beginning with Marshall (1950), who first defined the concept of industrial districts. Concepts like innovative milieu (Camagni, 1991), regional innovation systems (Cooke, 2001), learning regions (Asheim, 1996) and regional clusters (Porter, 2000) have underlined the importance of the phenomenon. The general claim is that firms might enjoy advantages related to spatial juxtaposition. Italian industrial districts (Becattini, 1979), in particular, have proven to be a model for local socio-economic development (Piore and Sabel, 1984; Pyke et al., 1990). As several studies have shown, industrial districts are core in today's economies (Becattini, 2002). In studies of strategic management, whether of sources of international competitive advantage (Porter, 1990), or of the structure and dynamics of various industries (Malerba and Orsenigo, 1996;

Dosi et al., 1997), researchers have likewise found successful regional clustering of firms to be important for understanding patterns of competitiveness in many industries (Tallman et al., 2004). Thus, deepening our understanding on such socio-economic systems and how they transformed in time becomes crucial in facilitating their survival and renewal. This is especially true for the so-called 'made in Italy' industries, which vastly overlap with the model of the industrial district (Becattini, 1998) and contributed to popularise it all over the world.

Prior research on industrial districts (Piore and Sabel, 1984; Becattini, 1990; Saxenian, 1994; Markusen, 1996; Porter, 1998) suggests that they are the result of path-dependent agglomerations of small flexibly-specialised firms, together with external economies, local resources and local labour pools, supported by specialised institutions. Since the 1970s a growing number of scholars has dealt with the topic of industrial districts, observing them through the lenses of different theoretical frameworks: industrial organisation (e.g. Becattini, 1979; Brusco, 1989), sociology (e.g. Bagnasco 1977; 1988; Provasi, 1995), economic geography (e.g. Storper and Scott, 1989; Markusen, 1996; Cooke, 1999; Sforzi, 2002) and business history (e.g. Amatori and Colli, 2001). A core implication in most such studies is that all firms in a district were treated as being one and the same, performing similarly (Tallman et al., 2004). Piore and Sabel's (1984) popularisation of industrial district firms as organisationally homogeneous and identical, with similar functions and tasks has inaccurately represented industrial district firms. In other words, district firms were represented as homogeneous organisations, characterised as small and medium-sized and with equal access to local resources and competencies being 'in the air' (Boschma and Ter Wal, 2007). If Marshall could take a look at today's industrial districts, the first thing that he might notice would be that they have changed greatly over these last decades. As Lazerson and Lorenzoni (1999: 237) argued, if what Piore and Sabel described as homogeneous 'ever reflected the reality of industrial district firms, it certainly no longer does so'. Indeed, the idea that industrial districts were merely composed of homogeneous small and medium-sized firms contrasts with empirical evidence exhibiting heterogeneity in district firms size, performance, structure and strategy (see for example Porter, 1998; Lazerson and Lorenzoni, 1999; Rabellotti and Schmitz, 1999; Boschma and Lambooy, 2002). Further, in recent years, there has been increasing awareness – most strongly expressed by the literature on Italian industrial districts – that the traditional view on industrial districts tended to overlook the emergence of powerful leading firms (Visconti, 1996; 2002; Lipparini and Lomi, 1999, Lazerson and Lorenzoni, 1999; Staber, 2001; Minoja, 2002). As a matter of fact, several industrial districts have experienced the emergence of leading firms, which control the supply chain

through their market power and orchestrate production phases and resources/knowledge flows in the district as well in global markets. In some cases, leading firms have grown through local mergers and acquisitions and/or takeovers by foreign multinational corporations (for example Dei Ottati, 1996; Boari and Lipparini, 1999; Albino et al., 1999; Whitford, 2001; Cainelli, Iacobucci and Moranti, 2006). In others, growth is mainly organic, thus driven by the productive opportunities of a single district firm (Penrose, 1959). To this regard, in recent years literature on industrial districts has increasingly reported evidence of district firm growth (see for example Lorenzoni and Baden-Fuller, 1995; Boari and Lipparini, 1999; Morrison, 2004; Malipiero et al., 2005), contrasting with the general assumption that being embedded in an industrial district restrains the possibility for firm growth in terms of attitude, opportunities and resources. Likewise, anecdotic evidence on district firm growth has acquired a central stage in the debate around industrial districts. We refer for instance to the cases of Benetton, Prada, Natuzzi, Filodoro, Zegna and Ducati, just to mention a few world-known cases of Italian district firms who experienced growth becoming global players.

However, despite the recent research interest on those district firms that have experienced growth, detaching from the industrial district cliché of being small, local and homogeneous, little is known on district firm growth. In this book we aim at filling such a research gap exploring the phenomenon of firm growth in industrial districts, looking at its antecedents. More precisely this book is guided by the following research question: 'what are the antecedents of firm growth in industrial districts?' This research question implies the use of proper conceptual and methodological lenses, which can allow a deep understanding of the phenomenon of firm growth in industrial districts. In order to do so, we propose a shift in the research approach from mainstream literature on industrial districts towards the conceptual lenses offered by firm-level entrepreneurship, given that growth may be a reasonable reflection of entrepreneurship (Davidsson et al., 2002). On the methodological side, we designed our study with the aim of building theory on the issue at hand. Thus, we used a comparative case study approach to explore the antecedents of district firm growth in four well-known cases of Italian district firms: Alessi, Geox, Illycaffè and Luxottica.

In the next sections, we introduce our theoretical approach, then we discuss the method we adopted to approach our research question and finally we outline the entire structure of the book.

## 1.2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF ANALYSIS

The study of the antecedents of district firm growth calls for a plurality of possible approaches: growth is in fact a major theme both in economics and management studies (see for example Penrose, 1959; Greiner, 1972; Evans, 1987; Kazanjian and Drazin, 1989; Acs and Audretsch, 1990). Likewise, firm growth has become a major theme in the rapidly expanding field of entrepreneurship research.

Entrepreneurship theory suggests that a preoccupation with growth is the distinguishing feature that sets entrepreneurial businesses apart from other small firms (Penrose, 1959). As the field of entrepreneurship has developed, firm growth has been almost implicitly construed as a condition or assumption of entrepreneurship.

Many researchers associate 'growth' with 'entrepreneurship' and vice versa (Gartner, 1990; Livesay, 1995; Delmar, 1997; Wiklund, 1998). To this regard, Davidsson et al. (2002) debate upon the questions: 'is entrepreneurship growth?' and 'is growth entrepreneurship?' arriving at the conclusion that entrepreneurship is growth and vice versa under certain conditions, discussed hereafter.

First, there are several opposing views on what 'entrepreneurship' is. Sharma and Chrisman (1999) propose two main alternative views on the meaning of 'entrepreneurship'. The first holds that the major characteristic of entrepreneurship is the creation of organisations (Gartner, 1985) or new enterprises (Low and MacMillan, 1988). Along this view, there is no explicit consideration for innovation and new combinations (Schumpeter, 1934), neither the possibility of alternative ways of exploitation for a given opportunity (Shane and Venkataraman, 2000). Thus, setting the term 'entrepreneurship' equal to 'start-up of a new, independent business' reduces its empirical content so that it does not fully reflect contemporary theoretical definitions of entrepreneurship. The second view holds that entrepreneurship is the creation of new economic activity, that is, the pursuit of opportunity without regard to resources currently controlled (Stevenson et al., 1989), or the discovery and potential exploitation of profitable opportunities for creation of both private and social wealth (Venkataraman, 1997). According to this second view of entrepreneurship, opportunity is the central concept of entrepreneurship, and especially opportunities for new economic activities. Stevenson and Jarillo state that '[A]n opportunity is, by definition, something beyond the current activities of the firm...' (1990: 23). Moreover, Stevenson and Jarillo (1990) explicitly include growth, stating that 'Entrepreneurship is the function through which growth is achieved (thus not only the act of starting new businesses)' (1990: 21) and describe entrepreneurial behaviour as 'the quest for growth through innovation' (1990: 25). Venkataraman (1997) shares with Stevenson and Jarillo (1990) the strong focus on opportunity. Entrepreneurship deals with opportunities for future goods and

services (Shane and Venkataraman, 2000: 220), that is, new economic activities. With respect to growth, it is important to note that Venkataraman (1997) includes not only discovery (or opportunity recognition) in his delineation of the field, but also exploitation. Davidsson et al. (2002: 332) suggest that 'If exploitation is included in the definition of entrepreneurship, it must logically follow that the growth that results from a better exploitation strategy of a given opportunity (relative to a worse exploitation strategy) is entrepreneurship manifested as growth'. Thus, according to this view of entrepreneurship as the creation of new economic activities – that is the recognition and exploitation of opportunities – an organisation grows as a result of developing new activities, therefore growth is a reflection of the firm's entrepreneurship (Davidsson et al., 2002). When new economic activities are added to old ones in existing organisations, this is entrepreneurship manifested as growth. Thus, entrepreneurship is growth, given that new economic activities add to the size of an established organisation.

Second, if it is accepted that entrepreneurship could be growth, then even the opposite must be true. This is clearly expressed by Davidsson (1989: 7) when he argues:

[I]s growth entrepreneurship? The answer to that question is contingent on to which extent the manager is free to choose. If economic behaviour is discretionary, pursuing continued development of the firm is the more entrepreneurial choice when refraining from doing so is another feasible alternative, just like founding a firm is more entrepreneurial than not doing so.

But what kind of growth can justifiably be regarded as entrepreneurial growth, that is a manifestation of entrepreneurship? We know that firms come to grow through acquisition or by growing organically. To this regard, Penrose (1959) suggested that firms that exhibit organic growth have the ability to detect emerging expansion opportunities and to recombine existing resources in new ways so as to take advantage of these opportunities. In other words, organic growth could justifiably be considered as entrepreneurship and this is consistent with the idea that when a firm grows by adding new activities we have a case of entrepreneurship manifested as growth. Thus, the distinction between organic and acquired growth appears crucial for whether firm growth can be regarded as entrepreneurial or not. However, on the basis of empirically informed conceptual reasoning, Salvato, Lassinini and Wiklund (2006) contend that even acquisition growth may generate entrepreneurial benefits over the long term.

Third, there are cases where growth does not involve addition of new activities, but only growth in volume of an existing activity of the firm. If we regard entrepreneurship not as a dichotomous but as a continuous phenomenon, that is continued entrepreneurship (Davidsson, 1991), we can

find some justification for regarding growth as a reflection of entrepreneurship – even when it is only a volume growth based on the original activity – in the concept of opportunity recognition and exploitation (Venkataraman, 1997). In fact, Davidsson et al. (2002) suggest that the quality of the opportunity recognition determines the growth potential, and, in turn, the quality of the opportunity exploitation determines the actual volume of growth. They state: ‘organic growth in volume can be regarded as a ... measure of the “amount” of entrepreneurship that a particular instance of new economic activity represents’ (2002: 336).

In conclusion, firm growth – which represents either the introduction of new economic activity or the quality of the discovery and exploitation of opportunity for such activity – remains a proxy for entrepreneurship. There is, however, one last fundamental condition to consider when associating entrepreneurship with growth: a firm ‘can only grow if it is successful’ (Davidsson et al., 2002: 338).

### 1.3. RESEARCH METHOD

If the aim of this book is to study what the antecedents of district firm growth are with the lenses of firm-level entrepreneurship – that is, to study the antecedents of entrepreneurial growth in district firms – we now have to define a proper research design. As argued by Yin (1989: 17), ‘what’ questions do not call for a specific research design if the nature of the study is exploratory, as in the case of the present book. Each research strategy is suitable (for example, an experiment, a survey, an archival analysis, a history, a case study). However, the study of the entrepreneurial growth of district firms needs direct and close observation of complex sequences of events. Opportunity recognition and exploitation occur in articulated contexts where several variables influence entrepreneurial growth over time. Hence, we decided to adopt a case study approach that allows obtaining a deep and rich empirical understanding of those research topics that received little attention by scholars, especially when they occur in dynamic settings (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 1989).

#### 1.3.1. The Need for a Comparative-Case Design

Adopting a case study approach means to study a set of periods longitudinally in time (Pettigrew, 1979), in order to provide a transparent look on the evolution of the phenomenon of interest. Moreover, such an approach calls to rely on several methods and empirical sources to gather and construct empirical material in order to offer a holistic understanding of the phenomenon of interest. More precisely, we adopted a comparative-case

studies method: we targeted four cases to be studied in depth and longitudinally in order to develop insights through a comparative logic.

Studies on firm-level entrepreneurship and growth have been mostly conducted adopting a quantitative approach. Surveys have been carried out in order to quantify the relative influence of different classes of constructs on the dependent variable. Quantitative studies achieve results that scholars can widely generalise at the expenses of the richness and concreteness of theories built. Areas of inquiries like the one we are approaching require qualitative studies in order to grasp higher levels of complexity in the generation of theory.

### **1.3.2. Case Selection**

When running a multiple-case study a core issue is the choice of the number of cases. Cases have not to be chosen to represent a larger pool of respondents, according to the sampling logic, thus the typical criteria regarding sample size are irrelevant (Yin, 1989). The replication logic is to be adopted instead, just like in multiple experiments; each case must be carefully selected so that it either predicts similar results (a literal replication) or produces contrary results but for predictable reasons (a theoretical replication). Moreover, the opportunity to learn is important, that means the possibility to access to the organisation and to the subject of inquiry (Pettigrew, 1990). The choice of the number of cases studies, thus, was also influenced by the possibility to follow the companies over an extended period of time and to get the necessary depth of analysis for a subject of such a complexity. Including more than four cases would have limited the possibility to reach the needed depth.

Cases were selected on a convenience basis, choosing among district firms operating within the so-called 'made in Italy' industries. Selected companies emerged as leading firms within the industrial district they are located: Alessi in the Verbanco-Cusio-Ossola houseware district, Illycaffè in the Trieste coffee district, Luxottica in the Belluno eyewear district and Geox in the Montebelluna shoes district. We compared their growth rates with the average growth rates of the firms operating within their own industrial district. Growth was measured in terms of turnover and employees; details on such figures are included in Chapters 5 to 8, devoted to single cases analyses. The time span of reference, for both case selection and analysis, was variable on the basis of data availability and the fact that companies have different years of foundation. Cases were also selected looking at those district firms where growth was mostly a reflection of continued recognition and exploitation of opportunities, that is, there was a pre-understanding that they could be considered cases of entrepreneurial growth. Moreover, cases were

selected only if growth was coupled with satisfactory financial results: we wanted to exclude those cases of firms growing at the expenses of their capacity to generate profits. Details on the financial results of the four companies, showing their positive returns on assets and equity, are reported in Chapters 5 to 8.

Despite an exploratory multiple-case study excluding the adoption of any sampling criteria, we tried to provide some kind of variety among case studies, in terms of industry, size, age and ownership. As shown in Table 1.1, although all four selected firms operate in the so-called ‘made in Italy’ sector (food, furniture and fashion), their specific industry differs; their company size varies considerably from 461 (Alessi) to 49 325 (Luxottica) employees; in terms of ownership, Geox and Luxottica are listed on the stock exchange, while Illycaffè and Alessi are family-owned companies; and as far as company age is concerned, selected cases include old firms like Alessi (founded in 1921) and younger firms like Geox (founded in 1989). We considered case heterogeneity as a way to generate as much variation as possible in the data, in order to grasp the complexity of the phenomenon of entrepreneurial growth in industrial districts.

*Table 1.1 Cases comparison*

<b>Company</b>	<b>Industry</b>	<b>Year of Foundation</b>	<b>Ownership</b>	<b>Employees</b>	<b>Turnover (€M)</b>
Alessi	Houseware	1921	Family	461	83
Geox	Shoes	1989	Listed	3 206	612
Illycaffè	Coffee	1933	Family	700	246
Luxottica	Eyewear	1961	Listed	49 325	4 676

*Source: elaboration on annual reports of Alessi, Geox, Illycaffè and Luxottica, 2006*

### **1.3.3. Data Collection**

Case studies typically combine different sources of evidence and data collection methods (Yin, 1989; Eisenhardt, 1989). Entrepreneurial growth is such a rich and complex phenomenon that multifaceted sources of evidence are needed to understand it. For these reasons, the present study relies on several sources of evidence.

Our primary sources include semi-structured interviews – that is, interviews with open questions focused on specific topics – we made to different interviewees at the managerial level. We carried on and transcribed interviews according to the most established methodologies (see for example

Miller and Glassner, 1997; Holstein and Gubrium, 1997; Bailey, 1982). At least six interviews were done per each case.

Secondary sources of data – gathered and written for purposes other than those of the present research – were used to corroborate and reinforce the evidence drawn from primary sources. Precautions in this sense were taken (Bailey, 1982) including several secondary sources of data:

- documentation, like a company's internal publications, articles from newspapers and magazines, administrative documents, written reports;
- archival records, like organisational charts and budgets, service records, lists of names, previously collected survey data, personal records;
- physical and cultural artefacts, observed and, when possible, gathered (for example, pictures, printouts, samples of products).

Data were collected between January 2000 and January 2007. A formal, retrievable database was produced per each case, organising data and evidentiary base. Each database comprised case study notes, transcripts, documents, files and records, available evidence of physical artefacts. We checked for triangulation of different data sources in order to obtain more robust evidence (Jick, 1979). Data collection was done at least by two researchers per each case: such couples were all different to each other.

#### **1.3.4. Data Analysis**

Data collected was analysed using the conceptual lenses offered by firm-level entrepreneurship. The unit of analysis was the district firm: a case study report was produced per each case by the same couple of researchers in charge of data collection. Although only two researchers wrote each case report, the remaining researchers read several draft versions in order to provide comments and share information. Chapters 5 to 8 report the main within-case analyses. Each case is contextualised within the industry and the district where the firm operates. Industry background and trends are analysed at both the Italian and the world level; industrial districts are analysed in terms of structure and dynamics. Finally, the entrepreneurial growth of each firm is analysed as a process of continuous recognition and exploitation of opportunities, along several stages.

Further, the complete team of researchers interpreted all four case studies in cross-sectional terms. Cross-case analysis enables the comparison of multiple cases in many divergent ways, which would not be possible within a single case analysis. Six meetings devoted to cross-case analysis were done between January and April 2007. According to Eisenhardt (1989), the overall idea of cross-case analysis is to force the researcher to go beyond the initial

impressions using structured and diverse lenses on the data. Thus, we analysed data across all cases in order to identify the antecedents of firm growth through the lenses of firm-level entrepreneurship. The set of areas of inquiry is presented in Chapter 4. We reported on the different types of opportunities identified and exploited in the four district firms, the sources of entrepreneurial opportunities, the resources possessed by the firms that allowed the identification and exploitation of the entrepreneurial opportunities and the organisational mechanisms of resources acquisition and exploitation employed. We looked for within-group similarities coupled with inter-group differences so as to explore if any pattern could be identified concerning the process of entrepreneurial growth in industrial districts. We produced a cross-case report as a result of this activity, offering a holistic interpretation of the phenomena investigated.

### **1.3.5. Theory Building**

The cross-case analysis allowed us to build a logical chain of evidence (Yin, 1989; Miles and Huberman, 1994) for understanding the antecedents of district firm growth. Next, we conducted further analysis of consistencies identified across the cases (Miles and Huberman, 1994) in search of patterns (Eisenhardt, 1989) as characterised according to the theoretical lenses of firm-level entrepreneurship. Thus, we could answer our research question on the antecedents of district firms' growth, proposing a model. Our model was then developed into a theory that became the vehicle for generalisation to other cases of district firms not studied in this book. The process of generalising from one case to other cases that belong to the scope of the theory involved is called analytical generalisation (Yin, 1989) or theoretical generalisation (Seale, 2004).

On the basis of our theory of entrepreneurial growth within industrial districts, we examined the growth process according to specific combinations of antecedents. To this regard, we argued that varying the weight of these antecedents leads to different growth configurations. For this reason, we therefore discussed possible variations in the proposed model.

## **1.4. MAIN CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE BOOK**

This book is intended to stimulate entrepreneurs, managers and academic researchers to think of how firms in industrial districts can grow to become global players, offering the evidence drawn from four well-known cases of Italian district firms.

With this study, we aimed at contributing to the development of two fields of inquiry: entrepreneurship and industrial districts. In order to assess the theoretical contribution of the model, it could be helpful to take a definition of what a theory of entrepreneurship could be. As Amit argued in 1995, it should be a verifiable and logically coherent formulation of relationships or underlying principles that either predict entrepreneurial activity and performance or provide normative guidance. This definition is applicable also to the specific case of entrepreneurial growth. We believe that the model respects the above listed criteria. It could therefore be considered as a meaningful contribution to the study of entrepreneurial growth in industrial districts. Likewise, we believe our study is contributive to the field of industrial districts as well, since little is known on firm growth within the specific context of industrial districts. In conclusion, this book is intended to stimulate both academic researchers and practitioners to think of how firms in industrial districts can grow to become global players, adopting a different perspective on the phenomenon: growth as entrepreneurship.

## 1.5. OUTLINE OF THE BOOK

The book is comprised of ten chapters. First, in Chapter 2 we introduce the reader to an overview of main contributions in the field of industrial districts research, from its inception to contemporary literature. After a review of the main contributions on the concept of industrial district and its main features, we focus on the so-called Italianate variant of the model, which is at central stage in our work. Finally, we offer a focus on the heterogeneity of district firms and the growth of district firms, in order to proceed towards our main arguments in the conclusion of the book. This part is followed by two chapters (Chapter 3 and 4), where we present and discuss the theoretical lenses used to explore the core issue of this book. With Chapter 3 we introduce firm-level entrepreneurship – or corporate entrepreneurship – as a key concept in interpreting the transformation process of industrial district firms, described in the previous chapter. The chapter has a threefold aim: to present the concepts of firm-level entrepreneurship; to justify the relevance of its adoption for the present study; and to review the relevant literature, looking particularly at the so-called knowledge-based approach to corporate entrepreneurship. In Chapter 4 we build on the literature on firm-level entrepreneurship introduced above in order to develop a framework of analysis, which is subsequently adopted in the rest of the book as a set of areas of inquiry to explore district firms' growth.

This first part of the book is followed by the four case study analyses. The aim of Chapters 5 to 8 is to describe the entrepreneurial growth processes of

the four district firms studied in this book, setting each of them within the context of their respective industries and industrial districts, and providing a closer look at each case's history, growth and performance. In particular, Chapter 5 presents the case study of Alessi, a company based in the houseware district of Verbania-Cusio-Ossola (north-western Italy) and specialised in the manufacture of household articles, including design-based articles and objects with a high artistic-symbolic content. Chapter 6 presents the case study of Geox, a manufacturing company located in the area of Montebelluna (north-eastern Italy) and specialised in classic/casual leather shoes with a breathing impermeable membrane into the sole to eliminate the uncomfortable sensation of dampness in wet and rainy conditions. Chapter 7 is devoted to the case analysis of Illycaffè, a company based in the Trieste coffee district (north-eastern Italy) and specialised in the production of high quality coffee. Since the early 1930s Illycaffè revolutionised the coffee industry with the invention of the first espresso machine and the development of the technique of vacuum packing to maintain the freshness of the coffee for a longer time. Chapter 8 presents the case study of Luxottica, a company specialised in the manufacture and distribution of eyewear and based in the district of Belluno (north-eastern Italy). Luxottica – listed at the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) and the Italian stock market – is world leader in the manufacture and distribution of prescription frames and sunglasses in the premium and luxury market segments.

Finally, in Chapters 9 and 10 we discuss within-case and cross-case analyses results and we build theory on the basis of the chain of evidence resulting from such analyses. In particular, in Chapter 9 we report the first group of results of the cross-case analysis, along the set of areas of inquiry presented in Chapter 4. We report on the different types of opportunities identified and exploited in the four companies, the sources of them, the resources possessed by the firms that allowed the identification and exploitation of the entrepreneurial opportunities and the organisational mechanisms of knowledge acquisition and exploitation employed. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the consistencies identified among cases regarding the antecedents of firm growth. On the basis of that, in Chapter 10 we discuss the antecedents of district firms' growth, identified in the four case studies. Then, we proceed to elaborate a framework of entrepreneurial growth of firms within industrial districts. The concluding section of this chapter summarizes and discusses the main findings of the study and examines implications, limitations and future research paths.