Foreword

In November 2005 we convened (in San Sebastián, Spain) a European Science Foundation Exploratory Workshop focused on the governance of networks as a determinant of local economic development. As a point of departure, the workshop aimed to explore the initial hypothesis that *the significant economic differences across various forms of networks arise from their respective modes of governance, defined in terms of strategic decision making*. Because an objective was to fuse different approaches, the workshop brought together an international group of scientists from economics, geography, sociology, political science and business, to present their ideas, refine the initial hypothesis and consider a related set of research questions.

This volume and each of its chapters is a result of that workshop. It brings together analysis first presented in San Sebastián and subsequently revised following the workshop discussions and deliberations. In doing so, the volume presents a series of contributions that address key issues and cases, thus providing new insights on the significance of networking and governance for economic development.

A focus on firms' networking as an 'engine' for local economic development is by no means a new approach, although one feature of this volume is particular recognition of the potential for networks to operate across localities, enabling specific places to develop and/or sustain positions as 'competitive hubs' in networks of global production activities. That contrasts with the emphasis seen in much of the earlier literature on geographical proximity as crucial in facilitating the production, knowledge and social relationships that characterize many successful networks.

Nor is it new to recognize that the concept of governance is particularly relevant for analysing economic development processes and the impacts of different actors (firms, governments, individuals). However, whilst up to now these two interests – in 'networks' and in 'governance' – have been kept largely separate when analysing local economic development, an aim of this volume is to bring them together. Such integration requires a significant bridging of boundaries between both disciplines and topics, incorporating different theoretical perspectives on the meanings and roles of territory, of economic development, of different forms of network and of different concepts of governance. Moreover, this bridging needs to be

done not only from a theoretical point of view but also by analysing empirical cases. This volume is intended to contribute understanding through each of these ways.

We would also stress that the volume, and the project that spawned it, highlight the necessity for, and the importance of, initiatives that enable and encourage scholars to come together in their research, to deliberate with each other to mutual benefit, thereby to improve research outcomes. We are especially grateful to the European Science Foundation for enabling this to happen in this particular instance, and we welcome this volume as not only an output but also as the catalyst of new ideas and research. We hope the response of readers to the pages that follow will generate increased debate and stimulate further innovative projects.

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