The idea behind this volume originates from the awareness of the deep crisis of the Italian university system and the various calls for reforms happening there as well as over Europe and beyond. During long discussions about this crisis and the feasible solutions, we became aware of the need for a thorough exploration of the reform process under way in Italy and in Europe. This volume represents our attempt to collect different views on this process and, by this, to develop solutions for the situation in Italy.

Our emotional involvement as Italian academics (even though two of us have only minor involvement in the Italian university) has progressively shifted towards a research interest in the transition of the university system as a sign of the changing role of university in society. For this reason, we organized an international workshop in Venice (May 2006), at the Fondazione Giorgio Cini, to convene scholars, researchers, policy makers, and business people and discuss the role of universities in society and the economy. This volume is the outcome of the reflections made during the workshop.

As the volume is the outcome of an articulated research reflection, we need to thank many people for this undertaking. Firstly, we thank all the participants who took part in the Venice workshop and those who then also contributed to the realization of this volume. Their discipline and respect of all deadlines have been a key asset to finalize this collective endeavour.

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If this volume still presents errors and misunderstandings despite this wonderful array of collaboration, the fault lies with no one but us.