

## Foreword to the Survey

by Marco Fortis

The current global crisis has redrawn general attention to the importance of the real economy as opposed to the financial distortions that led to the real estate and speculation «bubbles» which upset the markets, giving rise to one of the worst global recessions since 1929.

Therefore it is important that the economists, especially the younger generations, refocus their attention on the structural dynamics of the manufacturing and exchange of real goods as well as on the specialties whose production in Italy is centered on the territorial systems, by emphasizing their impact on the Italian economic system. Essential in this light is the work of Giacomo Becattini, who has fostered research on the industrial districts and produced important international works also in collaboration with foreign experts. An example is the volume *A Handbook of Italian Districts* drawn up by Giacomo Becattini with Marco Belandi and Lisa De Propris, exhaustively reviewed here by Gabi Dei Ottati. The review summarizes the contents of the volume and recaps the basic subjects of the technical literature on districts providing details of some of them, which justifies its placement in the «Survey» section of the Journal.

Industrial districts are a major item in the study activity of the Fondazione Edison, that sponsors also the journal *Economia Politica*. The Fondazione has devoted a number of publications to industrial districts, which were analysed at several Meetings. To Giacomo Becattini, the «father» of the studies on the Italian industrial districts, the Fondazione paid a special tribute through the publication of an emblematic volume, *Ritorno al territorio*, in 2009. The volume, the fifteenth in the Fondazione Edison series published by Il Mulino, is a collection of the most recent and significant essays of his scientific production, with an introduction by G. Becattini himself. G. Becattini has contributed directly to a number of Fondazione Edison projects where his work, together with that of Giorgio Fuà, represent a fundamental reference point also thanks to the positive participation of the writer and of Alberto Quadrio Curzio.

In 2000 Giacomo Becattini contributed with his essay «I distretti industriali: un arcipelago di economie sociali di mercato» to the volume *Il made in*

*Italy oltre il 2000: Innovazione e comunità locali*, which started the Series of the Fondazione Edison; in 2001, on the occasion of the international meeting *Complessità e distretti industriali. Dinamiche, modelli, casi reali*, organized with the support of the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, he wrote the essay *Dal distretto industriale marshalliano alla distrettualistica italiana. Una breve ricostruzione critica* published under the same title in the volume that followed the Meeting in 2002. Finally, in 2003 he wrote the essay *Il distretto industriale: un paradigma socio-economico* with Marco Bellandi, a paper presented at the Meeting «Distretti, pilastri, reti» Italia e Europa, held in Rome in collaboration with the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, which later appeared not only in the *Atti dei Convegni Lincei*, but was also added to the volume *Industria e distretti. Un paradigma di perdurante competitività italiana*, published by the Fondazione Edison in 2006.

The debt of gratitude to G. Becattini is great. His contribution to the analysis of the industrial districts has been fundamental and led to the development of a most original theory of the Italian economic thought applied to the interpretation of facts. His theory is close to the one devised by another great scholar, Giorgio Fuà, the man of the *North-East-Centre model*, or *Adriatic line to development*, which was also based on small and medium-sized enterprises with a strong vocation to innovation and international development, where environment and entrepreneurial potentialities join up to start a growth process without disruptions whenever any technological, demand or cultural conditions change. All our country, not only the Italian economists, owe gratitude to G. Fuà and he will be remembered early in November at the Meeting to be held in Ancona ten years after his death.

In his analysis G. Becattini identifies the driving force of the growth of the «contextual knowledge» taking place inside a district through the enhancement of local, sometimes even century-old craft traditions or of industrial experience recently gathered by pioneer firms. These firms are then sources (by «gemination») of technicians and workers who in turn start new businesses, resulting in the development model of the typical Italian districts, based on small and medium-sized enterprises, or sometimes on relatively big companies essentially managed by the owning families. It is this type of firms, both inside and outside the districts, that Italy should rely on also in the future to excel in the global competition, by fostering their growth in size and capital without trying to reproduce models which, though successful elsewhere, do not fit in the history and characteristics of our country.