

Facing Global Competition through Participation in Global Innovation Networks: The Case of Mechatronics District in the Veneto Region

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Abstract : Many firms belonging to Italian industrial districts faced a crisis starting from 2000 and upsurging during 2008-2014. To remain competitive in the global market, these firms and their local systems need to renovate their traditional competitive advantages, strengthen their link with global flows of knowledge. This may be particularly relevant in sectors such as the mechatronics, that combine traditional knowledge domain with new knowledge domains (e.g. mechanics, electronics, and informatics). This sector is nowadays one of the key sectors within the so-called 'smart specialization strategy' that can lead part of the Italian traditional industry towards new economic developmental opportunities. This paper, by investigating the mechatronics district of the Veneto region, wants to shed new light on how firms of a local system can gain from the globalization of innovation and innovation networks. Methodologically, the paper relies on primary data collected through a survey targeting firms of the local system, as well as on a number of qualitative case studies. The relevant role of medium size companies in the district emerges as evident, as they have wider opportunities to be involved in different processes of globalization of innovation. Indeed, with respect to small companies, the size of medium firms allows them to exploit strategically international markets and globally distributed knowledge. Supporting medium firms' global innovation strategies, and incentivizing their role as district gatekeepers, may strengthen the competitive capability of the local system and provide new opportunities to positively face global competition.

Keywords : global innovation network, industrial district, internationalization, innovation, mechatronics, Veneto region

Conference Title : ICEG 2017 : International Conference on Economic Geography

Conference Location : Venice, Italy

Conference Dates : June 21-22, 2017