



## **Breaking Anglo American hegemony: an Italian success story?**

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*In recent years, the hegemonic role of Anglo American academia in human geography has been widely discussed. This discussion has highlighted the obstacles to publishing for non English speaking scholars in 'international' geography journals. This paper analyzes a 'success story' of multi-cultural cooperation in economic geography: the intellectual cross-fertilization between Anglo American New Regionalism and the Italian literature on industrial districts. It evidences the intellectual, economic and social issues enabling and shaping such cooperation. In doing so, it describes the geographies of inclusion/exclusion of Italian scholarship in the Anglo American academic press.*

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## 1. OUTLINE

Translation, i.e. the transmission of different forms of knowledge across language and spatial boundaries, has become an increasingly relevant topic of debate in Anglo American geography. In the past decade geographers have started to question the extent to which the knowledge they produce is truly international (Gutierrez and Lopez-Nieva, 2001; Kitchin, 2003; Rodriguez-Pose, 2004 and 2006). The first, and obvious, critique has been that the so called 'international' geographical journals are indeed British and American, and foreign scholars rarely get published unless they hold PhDs from universities in the US or UK (Aalbers, 2004; Aalbers and Rossi 2007). Theoretical pieces that build upon non Anglo American scholarly traditions are rarely accepted (Minca, 2000). Responding to this critique, several journal special issues have focused on the need to open up 'international' human geography to the contributions of non English speaking scholars and traditions (*Environment and Planning D* 2003; *European Urban and Regional Studies* 2004; *Geoforum* 2004).

This paper analyzes a 'success story' of multi-cultural cooperation: the intellectual cross-fertilization between Anglo American economic geographers and Italian industrial economists, sociologists, and geographers working on clusters and industrial districts. It argues that the following conditions have allowed scholars working from Italian universities to publish in international geography journals: an interest in similar sets of theoretical issues; the influence of economic changes in the 'real world'; and the practical aspects of intellectual cooperation. Changes in the real world included the emergence of successful regional economies in Italy in the 1970s and 1980s. Practical aspects included the existence of previous connections between Italian and British universities, and the support Italians gave to American scholars while researching Italy.

It was the convergence of those conditions that allowed Italians to publish in Anglo American geographical journals and edited books, while scholars from other traditions did not. Moreover *some*, not *all*, Italian scholars working on industrial districts published internationally. Specifically, Italian geographers had overall less international visibility than economists and sociologists. The Italian geographers who did achieve visibility were primarily based in one university (in Turin), where all the conditions described above happened simultaneously. Looking at their experience, this paper suggests that instead of thinking in terms of an exclusion of non English speaking traditions, Anglo American hegemony could be better represented in terms of differential permeability, with certain places and traditions having better access than others.

The paper is organized as follows. First, it reviews the Anglo American literature on regional economies, the so called New Regionalism (Markusen, 1996, 2003a, 2003b, and others). It focuses on the various schools of thought that utilized case studies from Italy. Second, it discusses the Italian literature, highlighting the role of theory in bridging the work of Italian and American scholars. In doing so, it emphasizes the role of the Italian economist Giacomo Becattini in the re-discovery of some parts of Alfred Marshall's work. Third, it describes the positive outcomes of



intellectual cooperation between Anglo American and Italian schools: the flows of ideas and the opening of outlets for publication. Fourth, it analyzes the practical aspects of intellectual cooperation between them. In doing so, it highlights Italian scholars' uneven access to publishing in the Anglo American academic press.

## 2. ANGLO AMERICAN LITERATURE: NEW REGIONALISM AND THE USE OF ITALIAN REGIONS AS CASE STUDIES

New Regionalism is a body of scholarly work that focuses on 'regions' (i.e. sub-national territorial units) as units of economic analysis. It emerged in the 1980s, in the aftermath of a world-wide economic recession that led to the crisis of Fordism. While large firms, mass producing standard items, were struggling to stay competitive, networks of small firms were being increasingly successful, thanks to their ability of producing flexibly in small batches. Such networks were emerging in specific regions throughout the developed world. Therefore, scholars began to argue that «there might be something fundamental that linked late 20th-century capitalism to regionalism and regionalization» (Storper, 1997: 3). New Regionalism developed as a top down, 'grand theory' approach. Analyzing the crisis of mass production, it looked for general rules that were able to explain the mechanisms of flexible production and applicable to regions very different from one another. International comparative analyses were performed to ascertain such rules. Within such broad international research, a few Italian regions became widely investigated case studies in New Regionalism.

Piore and Sabel's *The Second Industrial Divide* is a clear example of the 'grand theory' approach that led Anglo American scholars to international comparative work aimed at finding alternatives to Fordism. They wrote it in 1984, capturing the atmosphere of the years in which the Fordist mode of production and the Keynesian approach to macroeconomic policies were in deep crisis, but the following neo-liberalist hegemony hadn't been consolidated yet. In this context, they challenged the widespread agreement that mass production was the only efficient way to organize a market economy (p. 10). Instead, they argued that the response to the crisis of mass production was going to be the resurgence of small firms and craft production. They highlighted the economic viability of agglomerations of small firms due to institutional arrangement at the local level. These arrangements balance inter-firm cooperation and competition, thus maximizing the efficiency of the whole district. To support their argument, they drew upon a constellation of regional economies in Italy, Germany, France, Japan and the USA, building careful historical analyses of the ways in which these countries had built mass production systems in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, and shifted back to a flexible, small firms based mode of production in the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

Others began their work with a US focus and later extended their analyses to international cases. Michael Storper and Allen Scott sought an explanation of the emergence of systems of small firms in areas previously dominated by large concentrations. Their main thesis was that vertical disintegration is adopted to resist



market uncertainties, minimizing the risks of excess in productive capacity and maximizing the benefits of technological specialization (Scott, 1986, 2002; Scott and Storper, 1986, 1987, 1991; Storper and Scott, 1989). However, this implies that inter-firm transactions become more frequent, complex and less foreseeable than in one large integrated firm (i.e., their 'cost' is higher). Territorial agglomeration is the way in which those transaction costs are minimized. Their empirical work focused initially on the apparel, high tech and entertainment industries in California (Scott, 1988; Storper and Christopherson, 1987). Later, especially Michael Storper extended his analysis by comparing regional economies of France, Italy, and the United States (Storper, 1997).

Looking back at New Regionalism's international comparative analyses, Italy stood out because the theoretical contributions of Italian scholars were included in the debates of the Anglo American academia to a greater extent than the contributions of Germans, French, and Japanese. As a direct consequence of such inclusion, several Italians began to publish their work on regions in English in the Anglo American academic press (Becattini et al., 2003; Rabellotti, 1997; Taylor and Conti, 1997; Guerrieri et al., 2001; Cainelli and Zoboli, 2004; Pietrobelli and Rabellotti, 2007). All these scholars have analyzed, in one way or another, the Italian industrial districts, i.e. «dense concentrations of interdependent small and medium enterprises in a single sector and in auxiliary industries and services» (Dunford, 2006: 27).

Thanks to both Anglo American and Italian scholars working on industrial districts, a few regions on the East coast of Italy – the so called Third Italy – became the paradigmatic example of a specific model of post Fordist development. The key components of the Italian model were: predominance of small firms, tight inter-connections between firms, civil society, professional traditions, and the transmission of tacit knowledge at the local level (Becattini et al., 2003). The Italian model has spawned further interest in the Italian economy among Anglo American scholars during three decades, starting with Piore and Sabel in the 1980s, to Locke, Putnam, Scott and Storper in the 1990s, up to Michael Dunford in the 2000s (Piore and Sabel, 1984; Storper, 1997; Berger and Locke, no date; Dunford, 2006).

The Anglo American interest in the Italian economy, as well as the access of Italian scholars to publishing in English, has endured despite the deep changes of the past thirty years, changes that include both the 'real world,' and theoretical debates. As for the 'real world', the key issue in the 1980s that sparked the interest in the Italian districts was the exceptional economic success of Third Italy in a national and international context of slow growth following the 1973 oil crisis (Dunford and Greco, 2006). By the 2000s, a prolonged crisis of the Italian economy made Third Italy a less attractive example for international scholars and policy makers (*The Times* December 22, 2007). As for theoretical debates, the New Regionalist approach became widely criticized in the late 1990s and in the early years of the current decade (Lovering, 1999; MaCleod, 2001; Markusen, 2003a,



2003b). Especially Ann Markusen questioned the use of the Italian model as a valid example of the ways in which industrial agglomerations operate (1996).

Criticisms notwithstanding, the persistency of the Italian contributions – rather than their objective importance – is remarkable. Indeed, the number of Italian scholars publishing in the Anglo American academic press is small, and they are less quoted than their North American counterparts. However, their constant presence in the debates represents a success story of inclusion of foreigners in the Anglo American academia. The following sections discuss Italian contributions to New Regionalism, and the conditions allowing this rare case of cross-cultural cooperation.

### 3. ITALIAN LITERATURE: THE RE-DISCOVERY OF ALFRED MARSHALL AS COMMON GROUND

In the 1980s, Italian scholars (primarily industrial economists, but also sociologists and geographers) re-discovered the region as unit of economic analysis, roughly at the same time as their Anglo American colleagues. Two fundamental issues distinguish the work of Italian scholars from their Anglo American counterparts: a) the interest in developing a local model of industrial development instead of an analysis of global capitalism; and b) a theoretical debate framed around the definition of industry instead of globalization and the crisis of Fordism. Perhaps the most important merit of the Italian schools was the rediscovery of a minor and nearly forgotten part of Alfred Marshall's work. Giacomo Becattini, an economist based at the University of Florence, adapted and compared Marshall's late 19<sup>th</sup> Century analysis of the cotton industry in Lancashire to the conditions of Tuscany in the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century (1979). Thanks to his work, since the 1990s the term 'Marshallian district' or 'industrial district' has become part of the language of Anglo American geography.

The local, rather than global, focus of the Italians was rooted in debates – published mostly in Italian – on industrial development within Italy. In the 1960s the debate was centered around the dichotomy between the developed North, where large, Fordist enterprises guaranteed (relatively) high wages, high productivity and innovation, and the under-developed South, where small firms offered low wages and inefficient productivity (Lutz, 1962 – one of the few works in English; Graziani, 1972 – in Italian). Later, Garofoli began to pay attention to the role of small firms as a source of innovation (1978 – in Italian). At the same time, Arnaldo Bagnasco put into question the dichotomy between North and South. He selected an area, which he called 'Third Italy' in which economic dynamism and rapid economic growth were based on networks of small firms serving the large agglomerates of the Northwest (1977 – in Italian). Other peculiarities that scholars identified were the regional rural and artisan traditions, the common social background of workers and entrepreneurs, and family as the central unit of the enterprise (Fuà: 1983 – in Italian). However, the conditions allowing small firms' successes against larger competitors were yet to be found.



Giacomo Becattini provided a good explanation of the success of small firms in Tuscany's countryside while investigating broader theoretical issues. He was primarily concerned with the problematic relation between the construction of theoretical models of industry and applied research. He criticized unidirectional fluxes of ideas in which theoretical economists produce models that are then applied in empirical research. Particularly, he criticized those models that consider that actors in the economy can reach only one (rational) decision. Against this approach, he proposed an understanding of the economy based on multiple possible choices, in which firms make 'irrational' and therefore 'unsuccessful' decisions. In his vision 'successful' and 'unsuccessful' firms, through their interactions, are part and parcel of the same dynamic system. Therefore, he envisioned a non-reductionist approach to economics, characterized by models able to capture complexity, and a theory building approach based on continuous feedback between theoreticians and applied researchers. He wrote his first article on Marshallian industrial districts in order to find an explanatory model for the development of third Italy in line with these characteristics (Becattini, 1979 - in Italian; Becattini et al., 2003 - in English). In Becattini's argument, the concept of Marshallian districts captured a complex web of relationships operating between large groups of interrelated industries.

Along with Becattini, Sebastiano Brusco (1934-2002) was another founding father of the literature on industrial districts. His main interest was innovation at the level of small firms. He developed his vision of industrial districts from empirical research on the metalworking industries in Emilia Romagna (1975a; 1975b; Brusco et al., 1990; Brusco and Paba, 1997 - in Italian). In the early 1970s he challenged the dominant view among economists, which considered innovation in the metalworking sector as dependent upon scale economies. Therefore, only large firms could be innovative. Brusco explained patterns of innovation among small firms building upon Piero Sraffa (1925 - in Italian, 1926 - in English). He also attempted to identify the best policies to support districts' firms (1986 a, 1993; Brusco and Bigarelli 1995; Brusco et al. 2002 - in Italian). Charles Sabel summarized Brusco's approach as follows: «From Sraffa's demonstration that interest rates did not determine a unique choice of technology he drew, with evident pleasure, the heterodox, ultimately un-Marxist conclusion that at any stage of development different bundles of machines and institutions - small factories as well as large, to cite the crucial example - could be equally efficient» (2003 - in English; 2004a - in Italian). Charles Sabel's paper on Brusco is one of the few cases in which an American scholar published in both English and Italian, and it is an example of the personal friendship and professional cooperation between the two scholars.

The key Italian theoretical contribution to New Regionalism was probably Becattini's work on Marshall. British economist Alfred Marshall (1842-1924) coined the term 'industrial districts' to describe the cotton industry in Lancashire, and especially to explain the mechanisms allowing small firms to survive the competition of large manufacturers. It is a minor part of his work, limited to two brief excerpts from *Industry and Trade* (1919: 244-249, 285-288). He investigated Lancashire during an extended fieldwork, aimed at analyzing the ways in which firms calculate





costs and prices (Becattini, 1981 – in Italian). Marshall's main objective was to produce a theory of equilibrium between demand and supply – an objective he achieved in the fifth book of the *Principles of Economics* – and not to write about small firms or England's countryside. Moreover, Lancashire's cotton industry collapsed in the 1920s, causing Marshall's analysis to be out of date. As a consequence, by the early 1960s, 'Industrial Districts' was a nearly forgotten concept.

The work on Marshall constituted theoretical common ground, enabling the communication between Italian and Anglo American schools of thought. First, Becattini and his disciples – Marco Bellandi, Gabi Dei Ottati and Fabio Sforzi, the so called 'Florentine School,' – Brusco, and Bagnasco became well known in the Anglo American context. Thus, Americans got to know the Italian reading of Marshall. Michael Storper, in particular, relied heavily on the Florentine School to write the Italian case study in *The Regional World*, his masterpiece on regional economies (1997: footnotes to Chapter 6), and Ann Markusen wrote about «Marshallian districts of the Italianate form» (1996). Piore and Sabel were less explicitly Marshallian, because they wrote their chapters on Italy relying on the work of Bagnasco and Brusco (1984: footnotes to Chapter 9).

Independently from Becattini's work, some of the themes of Alfred Marshall's research acquired a new relevance in the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century/early 21<sup>st</sup> Century Anglo American geography. New trends in economic geography tend to consider economic activities such as patterns of technological development, consumption and production as path dependent and influenced by contingencies (Barnes, 1997). A similar understanding of the economy traces back to some parts of Marshall's work, especially in the way he treated time. Specifically, in the fifth book of the *Principles of Economics*, Marshall discussed the equilibrium between demand and supply. Time is a central element of his analysis: equilibrium is the consequence of a succession of choices done by both producers and consumers (1920). Each choice influences the future options of producers and consumers, until demand and supply meet in equilibrium. Therefore, Marshall opened up the possibility of economic analyses based upon the concept of path dependency.

Michael Storper's 'relational turn' was consistent with both Becattini's and American geographers' readings of Marshall (Storper, 1997). He proposed to shift from an approach which «continues to be controlled by the metaphor of economic systems as machines» (p. 28) to an approach in which «The guiding metaphor is economy as relations, the economic processes as conversation and coordination... and the nature of economic accumulation as not only material assets, but as relational assets» (ibid). In this reading, the region plays two key roles in shaping economic activities. First, it is a place of proximity, within which working men and women can perform face to face interactions, communicate at a deeper level, and therefore share knowledge more efficiently. Second, the region is the place of shared experiences, where professional traditions can develop over time: social



reproduction guarantees that professional knowledge is transmitted and refined over time.

In sum, Anglo American New Regionalism and Italian Industrial Districts literature had developed independently of one another, sharing an interest for similar, but not identical, subject matters and theoretical approaches. In both cases, heterodox economic theories – with particular reference to Marshall – were mobilized to explain the emergence of regionally specific, de-verticalized systems of production. Such theoretical common ground, together with the Anglo American interest in the Italian case, facilitated a fruitful cooperation between the two schools. The following section describes the nature and the outcomes of their cooperation.

#### 4. THE POSITIVE OUTCOMES OF INTELLECTUAL COOPERATION: FLOWS OF IDEAS AND OPENING OUTLETS FOR PUBLICATION

Michael Storper acknowledged the influence of the Italian schools on his work in the following passage of *The Regional World*:

The argument that emerged... took what seemed to be the fact in the Italian cases and created an economic model of the agglomeration process (p. 9)... We held that agglomerations... constituted industrial communities where endogenous dynamics of knowledge and technology development occurred, drawing on the example of technology development in Sassuolo documented by Russo and extending this to our Californian case (Storper, 1997: 11).

This citation shows that: 1) Storper, as Piore and Sabel before him, used the Italian case as a blue-print to develop an economic model, and 2) he relied on his Italian colleague Russo to access the empirical data upon which this model was built (Russo no date – in English). At the same time, American scholars influenced their Italian colleagues, especially Italian geographers. The first article introducing the topic of regional economies/industrial districts in a leading Italian geographical journal analyzed at length the work of Allen Scott on the movie industry in California (Capineri, 1987). Capineri's work is a remarkable sign of the influence of American geographers, especially considering that in the same years industrial economists Becattini and Brusco, and geographer Fabio Sforzi were producing the very concepts of Industrial Districts, looking at the domestic examples of Tuscany and Emilia Romagna. This section argues that the interest of Anglo American scholars in the Italian case opened up channels that allowed a few of their Italian colleagues to reach a broader disciplinary audience in the English speaking academic press. In doing so, they expanded an already existing flow of ideas between the Italian and Anglo American academia.

Both discipline-based professional associations and informal networks have allowed ideas to flow throughout Europe, and Italy's connections with the UK are not an exception. Giacomo Becattini (like Piero Sraffa in an earlier period) had extensive





contacts and made several visits to Cambridge, UK, where he studied the work of Marshall. He published on Marshall in Italian in the early stages of his career; more recently he, with two other scholars, published in English a summary of Italian contributions to Marshallian studies in English (Raffaelli et al., 2006). In his first book he analyzed the concepts of industry and theory of value in Marshall and in early Twentieth Century scholars who drew on Marshall (Becattini, 1962 - in Italian). In doing so, he drew the attention of Italian economists on Marshall: influenced by Becattini, Alberto Campolongo translated the *Principles of Economics* (Marshall, 1972). In 1975, Becattini edited the Italian translation of *Economics of Industry*, originally published by Alfred Marshall with his wife Mary Paley Marshall in 1879; he also edited the Italian translation of selected Marshall's essays (1981). Therefore, Becattini played the role of the 'translator' twice: in his early work, he renewed the interest of Italian economists in Alfred Marshall. In his 1979 paper on industrial districts, he adapted Marshall to the Italian context. Later he published his work both in Italian (1998, 2000a, 2000b) and English (Pyke et al., 1990; Becattini et al., 2003), thus contributing to the rediscovery of industrial districts by Anglo American New Regionalism.

Overall, the work of both Becattini and Brusco is well known among Anglo American economists, and has been recently labeled «the most original Italian line of research in industrial economics» (De Jong and Shepherd, 2007). Brusco played a key role in presenting to an international audience the findings of Italian scholars by publishing in English a seminal paper in industrial economics in the *Cambridge Journal of Economics* (1982). That article drew a connection between industrial de-verticalization and tight social networks before Anglo American scholars reached similar conclusions (Piore and Sabel, 1984). Since the late 1980s, the notoriety of the Italian industrial districts, as well as the interdisciplinary character of New Regionalism, broadened the visibility of Italian scholars across disciplinary boundaries, and increased their opportunity of publication in the English speaking academic press.

Soon after Piore and Sabel brought the Italian case to a broader international audience, Italian scholars began to contribute to (Anglo-American) edited books on regional economies. Examples of these early steps are *Small Firms and Industrial Districts in Italy* (Goodman et al., 1989) and *Industrial Districts and Inter-Firm Cooperation in Italy* (Pyke et al., 1990). These early works had a very ambitious scope, in which the Italian model was studied in order to understand whether or not «Industrial districts do indeed constitute a blueprint for the regeneration of local and regional economies» (Amin and Robins, 1990: 185).

Later, a new generation of Italian scholars began to publish autonomously in the Anglo American press. Rabellotti first noticed the discrepancies between Becattini's model and concrete case studies. She was the first to detect the phenomenon of de-localization of production abroad, which she connected with a social and economic crisis within the district (1997). Guerrieri, Iammarino and Pietrobelli included multinational companies and global production networks in the study of industrial



districts by considering the reciprocal spillovers between multinational companies and districts, and comparing small firms in Italy and Taiwan (2001). Paniccia analyzed the research methods used to study the districts, and suggested some lines of research to improve the theoretical model of the districts (2002). Cainelli and Zoboli showed the ways in which the Italian districts were responding to competitive pressure and globalization modifying their structure through mergers, acquisitions and re-location of production abroad (2004). Besides this, they noticed that firms in the districts were shifting from a model of innovation based upon tacit and informal knowledge towards a more widespread use of formal knowledge.

In the present decade, changes in the world economy – namely, the increasing competitive pressure brought by globalization to firms and regional economies – and the emergence of new theoretical paradigms have changed both the Italian and Anglo American literatures. For example, the Global Value Chains (GVC) approach – developed by Anglo American sociologists (Gereffi, 1994) has impacted Anglo American New Regionalism. Influenced by their American colleagues, some Italian scholars have used a GVC approach to analyze the new trends of development in the districts.

Both New Regionalism and GVC are concerned with upgrading of firms, innovation, flexibility, and generation of profit. In these theories, innovation and upgrading is produced and circulated through networks. However, New Regionalism considers a blend of cooperation and competition in informal networks as the source of innovation, while GVC considers vertical relations and co-ordination from the leader of the chain as the sources of upgrading. There are also important complementarities between the two theories. Particularly, New Regionalism leaves out the issue of power among the actors involved and is still weak as a tool to analyze the relations external to the region, while GVC can help in accounting for external relations and power issues. However, GVC doesn't consider institutional arrangements at the local level.

It is because of these complementarities that the two theories have been compared and used together by Humphrey and Schmitz (2002), Bair and Gereffi (2001), Schmitz and Knorriga (2000), and Smith (2003). Thanks to the mechanisms of intellectual cooperation described in the previous sections, some of the Italian industrial economists working on Industrial Districts joined their American and British colleagues in blending New Regionalist and GVC approaches. Particularly, scholars from the University of Eastern Piedmont (examples of their work in English are Rabellotti 2001, Amighini et al 2007) and a group of scholars connected with the Tedis Center at Venice International University have used GVC side by side with Industrial Districts approaches to analyze the impact of globalization on their districts, and the consequent re-organization of firms and internationalization (Di Maria and Micelli, 2006; Corò and Volpe, 2006; Corò and Micelli, 2006; Chiarvesio, 2005; Chiarvesio and Micelli, 2006; Chiarvesio et al., 2006b). All these scholars are fluent in English. Moreover, Venice International University (VIU) is an association of local institutions and eight universities from Italy, the US, China, Japan, Germany,



and Israel ([http://www2.univiu.org/tedis/index\\_2.htm](http://www2.univiu.org/tedis/index_2.htm)). The international structure of VIU leads its teachers and scholars to use English often as a working language, and therefore a significant amount of their scholarly work is published in English.

The main argument of this 'Venice school' (1) is that the economic crisis in Italy, the competitive pressure brought by globalization, and the inclusion of districts' firms in the value chains of global buyers have fundamentally altered the structure of several districts. Industrial districts changed from being relatively closed systems to «open networks» (Chiarvesio et al., 2006a). District's firms are 'stretching out' their value chains, establishing contracting relations and/or foreign direct investments abroad, mostly in Central Eastern Europe. In their view, the extension of Italian firms' value chains abroad is leading to a new kind of internationalization. They argue that Italian firms are recreating industrial districts abroad. Thanks to these 'district to district (D2D)' relations the Italian districts have turned into managing hubs of international networks (Corò and Volpe, 2006 – in English; Rullani, 2002 and no date – in Italian). Moreover, Italian scholars are now part and parcel of the international debates, and are extending their insights and analyses to international cases and globalization, as the last book by Pietrobelli and Rabellotti *Upgrading to Compete. Global Value Chains, Clusters, and SMEs in Latin America* shows (2007).

## 5. THE PRACTICAL ASPECTS OF COOPERATION: AN ILLUSTRATION USING THE EXAMPLE OF ITALIAN GEOGRAPHY

Theoretical analogies, the economic success of Italy and common analytical interests were strong reasons underpinning the long standing engagement between the Anglo American and Italian schools. Informal networks of scholars, interpersonal communication, the desire of reaching out and working together were the practical means allowing the two schools to engage each other. Suzanne Berger described with clarity the practice of their cooperation:

TWENTY-SEVEN YEARS AGO, under the generous and energetic tutelage of Fabio Luca Cavazza, a group of foreign scholars came to Italy as first-time students of the «Italian case.» We shared our puzzlement over this complex country with a group of more seasoned and distinguished Italians. In the essays we wrote together for the 1974 *Il Caso Italiano*, we tried to analyze a society in which economic dynamism coexisted with stalemated and polarized politics (Berger and Locke, no date).

A careful reading of this excerpt reveals the ways in which transcultural cooperation actually worked, especially in the difficult moment of translating ideas and findings from the Italian tradition into the format of Anglo American academic writing. Specifically, a three step process is identified: 1) Anglo American scholars, following their own research agendas, began to study the Italian «economic dynamism... and stalemated politics»; 2) once in Italy, they met representatives of the Italian academic establishment, the «more seasoned and distinguished



Italians,» and these 'distinguished Italians' debriefed their American colleagues, providing them with their key findings and bibliography; finally, 3) the Americans helped the Italians publish in English.

Obviously, the Anglo American engagement of Italian scholarship through interpersonal relationships – instead of direct access to published works – was built on power relationships as well as the institutional structure within the Italian academia. The Italians needed to be 'distinguished' (i.e. they had a good enough position in their host institutions to be references for foreign colleagues), they needed to have a good working level of English, which not every Italian scholar had, and finally they needed the time and willingness to work with foreign scholars. As for instructional structure, the Italian academia suffers from an endogamous labor market, which leads – in some cases – to the establishment of rather closed and insular schools of thought. Also, the peer review system is unevenly developed across disciplines. Moreover, the grant system was not well developed in Italy until recent years. Because most of the funding from research came either from some key private firms (especially for engineering departments) or local governments, most of the research tended to have a local focus. These issues combined – power within the Italian academia, a certain insularity of the schools of thought, localized research, and availability to work with Anglo American scholars – determined which Italian scholars and whose ideas engaged the Anglo American literature. Mostly, the ideas that travelled from the Italian to the Anglo American schools were developed in a few key departments, all of which employed leading scholars with a specific interest in working with British or American colleagues.

The engagement of Italian geographers with Anglo American New Regionalism illustrates some of the bottlenecks illustrated above. Notwithstanding New Regionalism developed primarily within Anglo American geography, the work of Italian geographers on industrial districts and local development had less international exposure than the work of heterodox economists and sociologists. The geographers who did contribute – in very important ways – to the study of industrial districts and local *milieux* were primarily based in Turin; they published in both Italian and English. Fabio Sforzi was widely quoted, thanks to his work closely connected with Becattini's. The National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) produced maps of the Italian districts building upon models he developed (Sforzi, 1990 – in English; Sforzi, 2000, and Sforzi, 2003 – in Italian). Together with Sforzi, Sergio Conti and Giuseppe Dematteis were the leading geographers working on local development in Turin. Dematteis published his contributions in the Italian (2007b), Brazilian (2007a, Spanish (2006) and Anglo American (2001) presses. Sergio Conti published his work on the role of networks in urban and industrial geography (that he called *spazi reticolari* – network spaces) in the Italian press (1991, 1997), as well in international journals (1993). Sergio Conti shares similar academic interests and has a long standing collaboration with Michael Taylor (University of Birmingham). A major outcome of their collaboration is the book *Interdependent and Uneven Development: Global-local Perspectives* which they co-authored in 1997.



Apparently, the access of Italian scholars to the Anglo American publishers has specific geographies. Besides Turin, geographers from universities in Milan, Pescara, and Venice wrote on issues concerning industrial districts, small firms and de-verticalization. However, they published only in Italian and received hardly any international exposure. Flora Pagetti 'discovered' productive de-verticalization in Milan (1984); however, she used location theory instead of the new ideas that Becattini and Brusco were developing at the time. Landini and Cardinale discussed the role of policy intervention on the development of SMEs networks in South Eastern Italy (1997). Soriani discussed the weaknesses brought by the fast pace of industrialization of the districts in Northeastern Italy against the example of the more established districts of Emilia Romagna (1999). Along with them, a few other Italian geographers worked on industrial districts without publishing or being quoted outside Italy (Salone, 2001; Lazzeroni, 1998; Bizzarri, 2000).

A combination of theoretical and funding issues contributed to further limit the visibility of Italian geographers in the New Regionalist debates. Looking at funding, the limitations to travelling for conferences led even the Turin School to develop mostly European connections, and to engage the British, rather than American, geography. Indeed, Italian participation to the meetings of the Association of American Geographers had been traditionally very weak. Instead, prominent Italian geographers had been very active in the International Geographical Union, which had a minor role in North America. Sergio Conti had been president of the IGU Commission on the Reorganization of Industrial Space from 1992 to 1998. Looking at theory, Christaller and the quantitative revolution influenced the Italian geography much longer than the Anglo American. This long standing influence of Christaller had led Italian geographers to produce hybrid works, in which they interpreted the production of their Anglo American colleagues within a traditional paradigm of industrial geography. For example, Cesare Emmanuel (1990, 1994) and Sergio Conti (1991) quoted Piore and Sabel, Storper, Scott, Walker, and Dicken. In doing so, they criticized Christaller, but ended up building a model structurally not too far from his. Obviously, this kind of work put Italian economic geographers behind the cutting edge of Anglo American geography. Italian geographers will shift away from the quantitative revolution more than a decade later than their Anglo American colleagues. One example of the new trends in the Italian economic geography is a paper by Fabio Pollice (Pollice, 2005), which analyzes the mechanisms allowing the emergence of shared identities at local level, as well as their impact on firms' competitiveness.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This paper has discussed the relationships among various strands of literature on regional economies, clusters and industrial districts, showing how a group of scholars from Italy contributed to the debates in Anglo American geography. This inclusion had positive effects on both New Regionalism and on the Italian literature on industrial districts. The resulting intellectual cross fertilization was a successful exception, due to the theoretical common ground created by the parallel rediscovery





of Alfred Marshall, the success of 'Third Italy' at the time when American scholars were looking for viable alternatives to Fordism, and the pre-existing connections that a few Italian scholars already had with the Anglo American (especially British) academia.

By telling a success story, this paper has highlighted the importance of *difference*. In the case of the New Regionalism, Anglo American and Italian traditions combined their strengths. Italians updated and brought into cutting edge debates a part of Marshall's work that had been criticized and (wrongly) dismissed in the 1920s (Becattini, 1979; Sraffa, 1925). Anglo American geographers paid back helping their Italian colleagues to publish in international journals. It was, and still is, an obviously uneven power relation. English *is* the lingua franca, and this fact alone gives an obvious advantage to native speakers. However, it is possible to look at Anglo American hegemony in a positive fashion. Claudio Minca, an Italian who migrated from the edges to the core of the Anglo American academic empire, (2) stated «I believe that it is time to accept this fact [Anglo American hegemony] in a serene and intellectually honest fashion» (Minca, 2000). A few Italian scholars accepted it, worked within the existing system, and found spaces of openness to introduce their own ideas.

The experience of the Italians contributing to New Regionalism suggest that, rather than thinking in terms of an exclusion of the non English speaking traditions, Anglo American hegemony could be better represented in terms of differential permeability, with certain places/traditions having better access than others. Indeed, David Slater (2004) pointed out that intellectuals from the Global South have suffered from an 'imperiality of knowledge' and have been put in a subordinate position by the modernizing impetus of the Western mainstream academia. In this respect, Italy, a European country with an impressive tradition in several cultural domains and well established ties with the Anglo Saxon world, is in a much better shape than the Global South to export its ideas in the Anglo American academia. At the same time, Italy itself shows a differential access to Anglo American New Regionalism. While economists like Becattini and Brusco were able to establish connections with Cambridge, UK and geographers from Turin had distinct advantages when publishing in English, geographers from other areas were not able or willing to establish the necessary connections to promote the diffusion of their ideas in the Anglo American academia. Indeed, further research is needed to explore differential permeability/accessibility to publishing in the Anglo American academic press. We geographers could ask which places, spaces, and scale are better suited to guarantee scholars international visibility. Ideas must flow. We can work to let them flow better.



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## NOTES

(1) The definition is mine. These are scholars working in North eastern Italy, the area with the highest level of outsourcing and FDI towards Eastern Europe, in the universities of Padua, Udine, and Venice.

(2) He is Professor of Geography at Royal Holloway, University of London.