Local manufacturing systems and global economy:
are they compatible?
The case of the Italian eyewear district

Guido Nassimbeni*
Dipartimento di Ingegneria Elettrica, Gestionale e Meccanica, Università Degli Studi di Udine,
Viale delle Scienze 208, 33100 Udine, Italy
Received 12 October 2001; accepted 21 May 2002

Abstract
In the era of global economy, are local manufacturing systems still playing a role or are they destined to fade away? No unequivocal answer to this question can be found in the literature. Some think that globalization exposes all the limits of local industrial systems. Others consider the contrast between global and local to be only apparent. There could be, however, a clear relation between the firm’s competitiveness on the international market and its territorial roots. The present paper focuses on one of the most important local systems in Italy, i.e. the eyewear district. Based on empirical research, the study analyzes the evolution of the eyewear industry, the strategies used by the larger producers to face the current competitive challenges and the consequences of such actions on the local supply system. It is shown that the district has lost most of its traditional features and inter-organizational relations have significantly changed. Opportunities arising from new technologies and global economy seem to favor better equipped, large-sized enterprises rather than small suppliers, or in any case, single units or groups rather than the system. Finally, some suggestions are provided for entrepreneurs or managers operating in industrial districts, concerning vertical integration and sourcing choices (main-contracting firms), and technological and managerial levers that could better qualify the supply offer (sub-contracting firms).

© 2002 Elsevier Science B.V. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Operation strategy; Supplier management; International issue; Case study research

1. Introduction
The debate regarding local manufacturing systems, industrial districts and networks of small firms was topical during the 1980s, when the concept of “flexible specialization” (FS) was developed. Piore and Sabel (1984) made the first important contribution to these studies. They argue that the history of industrialization has kept one major alternative to the system of mass production open, namely clusters of small firms, connected by horizontal and vertical competitive and co-operative relationships that can be achieve through strong inter-firm division of labor, greater collective efficiency than larger-scale Fordist enterprises. Piore and Sabel has taken Japan, West Germany and Italy as examples, where flexible specialized firms are often clustered together. In these systems, producers increase their own capabilities by specializing, while having close, but not exclusive, relations with other specialists. Network systems flourish in regional agglomerations where repeated interaction fosters shared
Globalization, and modifying the district values of these units, whose external economies seem to be progressively weakening. Many local systems blame the excessive dispersion of added value and its territorial roots, since they are often in-adequate to such an extent that various producers are forced to shorten product development time, produce new models faster and more frequently, mix and volume flexibility. Today it is difficult for such a formula to satisfy the global market which requires the producers to shorten product development time, produce new models faster and more frequently, and better differentiate the product (especially quality and design) from that of international competitors, who are stronger in terms of innovation (Japan) and costs (south-east Asia). The local system is often inadequate to such an extent that various producers are internalizing some processes or rationalizing the supplier base, so as to achieve greater control of quality, times and costs. As a result, relations in the district, and kind and type of local sub-contracting firms involvement are gradually changing.

Based on an empirical research, the evolution of the eyewear industry and the strategic response of large producers to present-day changes are analyzed. Particular attention is given to supply policies and their effects on the local sub-contracting system. In addition, the characteristics, technological and managerial profiles of the local supply system are examined to determine weaknesses.

Finally, entrepreneurs or managers operating in the industrial districts are given some indications about vertical integration and sourcing choices (main-contracting firms), and technological and managerial tools and practices (sub-contracting firms).

The paper is arranged as follows: Section 2 reviews some of the main issues arising from the debate on local manufacturing systems and their evolution.
دریافت فوری
متن کامل مقاله

امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات