
Editorial

Luca Dezi and Francesco Schiavone*

Department of Business Studies
Faculty of Economics
University Parthenope of Naples
Via Medina 40, 80133, Napoli, Italy
Fax: +39-081 5522313
E-mail: luca.dezi@uniparthenope.it
E-mail: francesco.schiavone@uniparthenope.it
*Corresponding author

Biographical notes: Luca Dezi is a Full Professor of General Management at University Parthenope of Naples (Italy). He holds a PhD in Business Management from the University of Catania. His main research interests are public utilities, energy management, alliances and networks of SMEs.

Francesco Schiavone is the Assistant Professor of General Management at University Parthenope of Naples, Italy. He holds a PhD in Network Economy and Knowledge Management from the University Ca' Foscari of Venice. His main research interests are innovation management, entrepreneurship, industrial districts and high-tech clusters.

We are pleased to present the second special issue of the *International Journal of Globalisation and Small Business* (IJGSB), about 'Networks of SMEs and globalisation'. In this special issue of IJGSB we collect six valuable papers that describe, from different points of view and research methods, how networks help the international development and expansion of SMEs.

The authors of the first paper are Eiriz and Areias (University of Minho, Portugal). Their article focuses on the competitive and cooperative issues that arise from the management of interdependence within international supply networks of major international retailers. It analyses how the cooperative capability of manufacturing firms positioned within a major retailer's international supply network contributes to their competitive position. The article presents a case study developed within the Portuguese clothing industry and explores evidence on how several small and medium manufacturers develop their relationships with Zara, a major international retailer. The case was studied based on document analysis and data gathered through semistructured interviews with several clothing manufacturers. The interviews allowed the collection of personal views of managers. They were carried out in the first quarter of 2007. The main results of the research showed several key pieces of evidence and suggested interesting managerial implications about cooperation initiatives within international networks of retailers.

The second paper comes from Canada. The paper of Hadaya and Pellerin seeks to improve our understanding of the role of virtual enterprises in supporting manufacturing SMEs' internationalisation process and proposes a stage model describing how business-to-business e-commerce and a supply chain strategy can develop in such a context. Data gathered from 438 Canadian manufacturing SMEs show that those that are active on international markets are more inclined to adopt the structure of a virtual enterprise to conduct business electronically and make more extensive use of e-commerce than SMEs that are active only on local markets. This research makes some important contributions to the field of international e-commerce. First, this study demonstrates that manufacturing SMEs are likely to join virtual enterprises in order to penetrate international markets. Second, this research shows that manufacturing SMEs begin their internationalisation process by changing the characteristics of their supply chain relationships to better reflect those of virtual enterprises. Finally, it demonstrates that manufacturing firms go through a similar internationalisation process whether they decide to increase their import or increase their export.

Mason (University of Udine, Italy) investigates the internationalisation of 150 SMEs in the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region, in the northeast corner of Italy, close to the border of Central East Europe (CEE). Their study was carried out in order to explore the entrepreneurial motivations and strategic characteristics on which international activity in these companies is based. The focus is primarily on owner and manager attributes, such as education and prior experience, with the objective of highlighting how these factors have influenced the willingness of company entrepreneurs and managers to internationalise. In a second stage, these characteristics are analysed in relation to the various international strategies adopted by the described companies and also by highlighting the main barriers they have to face when entering foreign markets. The results show that in these family businesses, where the entrepreneurs are the only persons responsible for internationalisation, there is a net prevalence of 'personalised' international strategies. They derive from the organisational routines due to the interaction between culture, experience and values connected to entrepreneurs.

The paper of Dangelico *et al.* (Politecnico of Bari, Italy) adopts a system dynamics model in order to describe and formalise the complex dynamics generated by knowledge and proximity inside global networks of economic actors operating in technology industries. The model analyses the evolution of these networks, studying the relationships between knowledge and proximity dimensions. The model analyses the evolution of technology clusters, studying the agglomeration processes of actors at the cluster level. For each model variable, suitable proxies, mainly based on the notion of patent, are defined. Then, a simulation is provided in order to investigate how proximity dimensions, namely geographical, organisational and cognitive, affect the cluster's evolution. Results show that only when all the three proximity dimensions are equally exploited and are characterised by medium values does the cluster evolve and is able to attract new actors. It is due to the fact that only in this case are knowledge sharing and transfer effective, activated through processes of learning by interaction and by imitation, and that economic actors can thus benefit from knowledge externalities. In fact, in all the other cases the number of actors inside the cluster increases much more slowly.

Gilroy *et al.* (University of Paderborn, Germany) explore in their paper the role of SMEs in R&D networks in international settings. They carried out a valuable critical review of economic and managerial literature about recent findings concerning the role of SMEs in international R&D networks. The analysis suggests that SMEs – with the

exception of technologically specialised ‘born globals’ – rarely engage in international R&D activities without teaming up with large partners. Furthermore, while SMEs are attractive for large companies because they provide a link to localised knowledge (spillovers) and new technological niches, large companies are attractive for SMEs because they provide SMEs with the opportunity to exploit economics of scale and scope and thus may act as catalysts that facilitate the international expansion of SMEs. In addition to this, smaller enterprises benefit through international R&D networks with more prestigious larger enterprises owing to reputation effects.

Finally, the paper of Westerlund *et al.* (from the Helsinki School of Economics, Finland and Laurea University, Finland) examines the responses of industrial SMEs to a globalising competition through two constructs:

- 1 the nature of offerings
- 2 the collaboration strategy that is pursued.

The paper presents an explorative quantitative analysis based on a survey of 91 firms. The results suggest that firms emphasising the international expansion strategy distribute standardised offerings with additional services, provide tailored offerings through international multitier networks, or specialise in customer-specific offerings with additional services through dyadic international relationships. Conversely, a fourth group of firms responds to globalising competition by providing basic offerings for the domestic market through dyadic relationships. The main conclusion is that a firm’s response to globalisation is closely connected to its business model, which is manifested through the firm’s networking strategy and the nature of the offering. Moreover, the business model seems to affect the firm’s profitability.

Before concluding this editorial, we want to deeply acknowledge Professor Adriana Calvelli, Director of the Department of Business Studies at University Parthenope of Naples, who supported and counselled us in preparing this issue. Furthermore, we have to thank our excellent reviewers, who made this second special issue possible: Jason MacVaugh (University of Gloucestershire, UK), Federica Ceccotti (University of Rome ‘La Sapienza’, Italy), Luca Simone Rizzo (University of Trieste, Italy), Manuel Villasalero Diaz and Fatima Guadamillas Gomez (University of Castilla La Mancha, Spain), Rossella Canestrino and Michele Simoni (University Parthenope of Naples, Italy).

We dedicate this issue to the memory of Lelio Raffa, one of the authors of our first special issue who sadly and unexpectedly passed away on 26th December 2007.