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Summary in English

Stated locational preferences of entrepreneurs in Italy

The objective of the thesis is to study and analyse the stated locational preferences of entrepreneurs in Italy: that is, their mental maps, their characteristics (pattern, shape, etc.), and their explanatory factors. The research was undertaken following the conceptual, theoretical and methodological approach of a long line of research started by Pellenbarg and Meester (1983), and which was focused on the study of entrepreneurs' spatial preferences in the Netherlands (1986, 1993, 1997, 2003) in Germany (1996), in Czech Republic (2005), and in Hungary (1997/98). The behavioural approach defines the theoretical basis of this thesis. The goal of the thesis is, therefore, to investigate in depth the case of Italy, highlighting the new and original evidence emerging from Italy's complex and rich economic, social and cultural geography.

The thesis in particular presents and discusses the outcomes of the quantitative and qualitative analyses of the findings from: (1) a questionnaire survey conducted in Italy in 2010-2011 in which entrepreneurs, belonging to selected industrial and services sectors, were asked to rate, on a 5-point ordinal scale, Italian regions and provinces as hypothetical locations for their firm. The survey was conducted by means of an electronic questionnaire using an interactive map which represented all the regions and provinces to be rated; (2) a set of verbal semi-structured interviews conducted with key economic actors, aimed at providing an in-depth explanation of the mental maps of entrepreneurs. Chapter 1 illustrates the theoretical and empirical background of this line of research, and the methodology applied to the Italian case study. Chapter 2 introduces and discusses in depth the two predominant patterns of spatial economic development in Italy: the North-South divide, and the industrial districts, which are considered to be very relevant for the explanatory analyses of the entrepreneurs' mental maps. Chapter 3 presents the main results of the questionnaire survey, using, in particular, the maps to represent the results (average ratings) for the regions and provinces, and tries to identify the main patterns as they emerge from the visual analysis. Chapter 4 shows and comments on the outcomes of the statistical analyses of the data obtained from the questionnaire survey: a multivariate variance analysis, aimed at exploring the breakdown of the by kind of firms (by size, sector, place of residence, and export-orientation) and kind of entrepreneurs (by sex, age, and education level); and a principal component analysis, aimed at discovering the unrevealed patterns that pervade their mental maps, i.e. the explanatory role of underlying social, economic, cultural, political, and locational factors. Chapter 5 focuses on the results of the qualitative analyses (content analysis and thematic analysis), based on the findings from both the verbal interviews and the open questions included in the questionnaire. Chapter 6 is devoted to a comparative analysis of the results of the Italian survey and those of the Dutch and the German surveys, highlighting the similarities, but in particular the differences. Lastly, Chapter 7, briefly makes some conclusions, and discusses the broad policy implications.

The evidence gained from the surveys and from the analyses indicates that the *North-South divide* emerges as the spatial pattern which most clearly characterises the mental maps of Italian entrepreneurs. This persistent and so-evident pattern of Italian geography, which is not only economic but also social and cultural, is definitely very important, and may be the most important pattern which gives shape to their mental maps. The other

very important pattern which characterises the entrepreneurs' mental maps, although less predictable, is the *centre-periphery dichotomy*, which is quite visible in the Northern part of Italy, and which can be extended to the country as a whole. The centre-periphery dichotomy is not an issue that clearly emerges from the main 'real' economic data about the Northern regions and provinces (for example GDP). Moreover, it is not an issue usually addressed in the literature on the economic geography of Italy. That is why the observation of this pattern can be considered to be a rather new outcome of this research. Of course, the question of entrepreneurial density and of the agglomeration of economic activities and people, and of geographical centrality, are all key location factors that should be kept in mind in order to understand why this pattern is so important in the minds of Italian entrepreneurs. Together with these two patterns (*North-South divide* and *centre-periphery dichotomy*), the pattern defined by the presence of *industrial districts* also became apparent.

Thinking about the relevance of the mental map patterns, we could conclude that the image that entrepreneurs have of the Italian geographical space is largely associated with the real economic geography of Italy, which illustrates on the coincidence of perception with reality. However, other results highlight some inconsistencies between the entrepreneurs' image of Italy and the socio-economic characteristics of Italian geography. One of these concerns the quite limited internal differences in terms of the average ratings registered in Southern Italy, when compared with the North and the Centre of Italy. In fact, the impression is that entrepreneurs have either a limited knowledge of Southern Italy, or little interest in it. Hence, they excessively generalise their evaluation of this macro-area, making it much too homogeneous compared with the real socio-economic regional differences. Or, they might also have a kind of 'prejudice', i.e. a mental barrier against Southern Italy, as observed from the thematic analysis of the direct interviews. Another inconsistency between perception and reality is shown by the width of what is called the 'perception gap', which turned out to be bigger than the 'reality gap'. These inconsistencies reveal that reality does not exhaustively explain the shape and the characteristics of the entrepreneurs' mental maps. But, other factors, of a non-economic, subjective, kind, related either to the society, the culture, the psychology, the personal attitudes and idiosyncrasies of the entrepreneurs or to the action of intermediate agents, such as the media, are also likely to play an important role.

The range of explanatory elements that emerged from the analyses includes, therefore, both objective and subjective factors, and strictly economic and clearly non-economic factors. For example, as seen above, the questions of accessibility and centrality, together with the agglomeration economies, turned out to be key location factors for the high attractiveness of the Padana region. The area of Milan, with its high business orientation and its remarkable endowment in terms of transport infrastructures and services, clearly plays the role of the centre of this highly appreciated macro-area in the mind of entrepreneurs. At the same time, the lack of these factors contributes to explaining the low attractiveness of Southern Italy, which is also related to the presence and the influence of organised crime, a clear extra-economic factor, and by the low efficiency of the local bureaucracy and government (the opposite of which is frequently mentioned as a locational advantage of the Northern regions). But there is also a kind of 'prejudice' against the South of Italy, that, as said above, might play an important role, and that therefore calls for further investigations involving other social science fields, such as sociology, anthropology, and psychology.