

# **Relationships between Universities, Research Centers and District Firms: the Italian Case**

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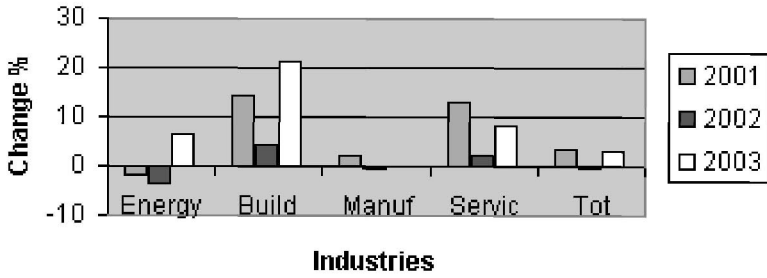
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## **1. The Italian Case and the International Competition**

Italian system of large firms clearly appears to be today progressively marginalized compared to international competitors (Quadrio Curzio, Fortis 2004). In Italy we have, together with the so called ‘Pillars’ according to Quadrio Curzio and Fortis terminology to designate large firms that shaped Italian economic history and development, also a district system of firms that allowed, since the 70’s, a broad diffusion of industrial production and wealth in the country (Quadrio Curzio, Fortis 2002). Nevertheless also this system appears today to be in serious troubles. For this reason the issue of Italian industrial development must be faced, by now, under a global perspective. This means having a confrontation on the capacity to generate added value within a strongly competitive context in continuous transformation.

The persistent troubles of Italian economy come evidently out when looking at the turnover and export trends in the first years of 2000 (Figure 1). In those years not only industrial production has experienced difficulties in growing, but, above all, exports, that always have represented the real engine of Italian growth, have significantly decreased (Figure 2).

Sectors belonging to the so called ‘Made in Italy’ have particularly contributed to this result, in spite of the fact that in the past they have pulled Italian industrial innovation and growth. Within the manufacturing sector, in fact, precisely the industries of textile, clothing, shoes, furniture, ceramic tiles, as well as machinery and equipment have slow down while, at the same time, services, particularly state-regulated ones, and the building sector have compensated the difficulties of those industries more exposed to international competition (Figure 3).



**Fig 1.** Turnover Yearly Variation in Different Industries (%)  
**Source:** Mediobanca, 2004



**Fig 2.** Turnover Variation Italy vs Exports, Years 2001-2003 (%)  
**Source:** Mediobanca, 2004