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Organizing Logistics within Italian Industrial Districts

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Since the beginning of the nineties, logistics and supply chain management have been increasingly object of scholars' attention within business management literature (Christopher, 1992; Gattorna, Walters, 1995; Cox, Hines, 1997; Cox, Lamming, 1997; Hines et al., 2000). They represent a real critical issue for companies acting in business markets. In these markets exchange relationship processes and interdependencies among buyers and sellers occur to develop and deliver superior value to the final customer. Because of the increased specialization and outsourcing single enterprises are continuously more dependent on each other. The need for timing, efficiency and customized offering of one company is supported and satisfied through its effective coordinating and integrating with the set of its suppliers and downstream actors. The synchronizing and the interconnecting of its own logistic processes with those of the actors of its supply chain are thus critical issues for the industrial enterprise. Logistics cannot therefore be viewed as an isolated management problem by the individual company. Rather, it is an inter-organizational relationship problem involving the individual company's interconnecting with other companies.

The paper develops an inter-organizational view of logistic processes and discusses the structure and the dynamics of such processes within Italian industrial districts. Within these industrial contexts we observe the emergence of leading actors that are experiencing the re-organizing of their business relationships with the actors of their supply chain. Particular attention is devoted to relationships with local suppliers and more in general to inbound logistics. (Lipparini, Lorenzoni, 2000; Pilotti, 1998; Corò, Grandinetti, 1999). The traditional mode guiding the division of labor among small and mid-sized companies in local production systems is put into serious discussion. Integration processes and multi-centered networks

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around focal leading companies are in progress. The paper adopts the perspective of such leading companies and debates some management issues in their re-organizing of logistics processes and in their coping and co-ordinating with local suppliers.