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Kinship and economic crisis in the shoe district of the Marche region

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Abstract

This paper investigates the extent to which kin groups can play a creative role in affecting the occupational choices of new(er) generations of workers and small business people in environments undergoing significant economic stress. Analysis of three extended cases of intergenerational changes in kin group occupational choices from among those included in a longitudinal study of the shoe industrial district in the Marche region of central Italy suggests that kin groups have helped their members anticipate future problems in local job markets and supported individual designs of careers with more promise than sticking with the shoe industry might have presented earlier generations. Renewed emphasis on the importance of the social context in economic decision-making affords a closer, and in some respects better look at the possible future directions of local economies in transition.

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1 Introduction

If the long lines of history, as so well Fernand Braudel¹ understood them, offer little comfort and even fewer powers of economic prediction, then pity the rest of us, reduced to the odds of betting as in “Totocalcio” in playing the paramount game of economic well being. The vast operations of economies, when summarized statistically as so many rates, and presented as the sum of so many individual outcomes, creates the impression that our fates are just so much Brownian motion. We are the pollen; the economy is the water in which we swim.

Statistical descriptions are indispensable to important purposes at hand. Economies require coordination, long and short-term, if they are to cut down the friction of unmet or competing needs. Firms allocate private goods, and states allocate public goods. A state cannot run a welfare system, an unemployment relief program, power or transit systems without a continuous and reliable flow of data and their aggregate descriptions. For firms, the economic world picture is but a rolling average of transactions great and small in which only massive monopoly players possess the advantage of planning much beyond the upcoming business quarter.

Yet, we, the proverbial pollen whose movements in water enabled Albert Einstein to prove the botanist Robert Brown right, seek to control our caroms across the field of economic play. With interest and intentionality, we make our moves, often though not always in coordination with or for the mutual benefit of others. The highly regarded notion of “embedding”, first described by Karl Polanyi (1957) and later developed by Mark Granovetter (1985), disguises how tangled and often contradictory our social relationships are, as they typically involve commitments to significant others in households, kin groups, occupational orders and status groups. Our capacity to act can be both enabled and constrained by our affiliations, and the pull of each upon our loyalties can mitigate the pull of others. As Weber (1947) well noted, each relationship we acquire includes some while excluding others; the excluded, even if they can be denominated, become Simmel’s (1950) strangers, deprived of the rights and devoid of the duties of the insiders.

The insiders, for the purposes of this paper, are members of several local kin groups caught up in an economic climate marked by chronic crisis and the uncertain future of a shoe-producing industrial district located in the provinces of Macerata and Fermo in the Marche Region. These diverse sets of *parentela* have been heavily involved in the shoe industry since the mid-1950s. They are comprised of kin groups: that is, they are sets of households stitched together with threads of consanguineal and affinal ties² binding each person at least in part with corporate obligations of members to one another and to the well being of the group as a totality.³

¹ “Only a few years ago, when I outlined these arguments in a lecture, my prognosis of a long-term crisis made my audiences smile. To make forecasts like this in the name of history, and in the name of a long sequence of secular cycles in the past which we can only identify without being able to explain them, is of course a risky business. But today’s economists, armed with all the data about the present experience, also seem to be reduced to hypotheses. Are they not just as incapable as the rest of us of predicting the length or of even of explaining the nature of the crisis into which we are plunging a litter further every day?” (Braudel, 1984, p. 618).

² Because the focus is on cases produced by marriage and resulting consanguineal bonds between parents, children, and in two cases grandchildren, affinal bonds, though present in extending the kin groups in question, are not an object of study here. In a formal sense, kin terms and the organization of the kindred, including estensional terms such as “amici della famiglia” remain the same as when Sydel Silverman in her classic study *Three Bells of Civilization: The Life of an Italian Hill Town*, (Silverman, 1975, pp. 202-209), described them for the Umbrian town Citta del Castello in the early 1960s. A colloquial term, *mezzo-parente*, is used in Monte San Giusto to refer most often to affines whom one treats as a *cugino*.

³ Yanagisako (2002, pp- 80-83) argues quite convincingly that the strong social structuralist position anthro-

They have faced serious challenges to their collective well being over the past decade, as have individuals comprising the groups. The “golden age” of the Marche regional shoe district has passed. A once widely dispersed popular artisanal mode of production has given way to a district dominated by Tod’s, a multinational firm with a turnover of close to a billion Euros a year, and three smaller firms, that together with Tod’s account for two-thirds of the district’s sales (Goffi, 2013; Balloni and Iacobucci, 2012; MPS, ANCI, Nomisma, 2010). In brief, the once Marshallian productive artisanal beehive of a district has become, as have others, as Carlo Carboni puts it, “un distretto con nocciolo” (Carboni, 2011).

This shift in the character of the shoe district economy, along with firm closures and the decline in employment opportunities, has generated a great deal of reflection and triggered consideration of different employment options inside kin groups once a generation ago fully committed to work and/or firm ownership in shoe manufacturing. Three issues have surfaced. First, given that one and sometimes two generations had already committed themselves to the shoe industry as artisans, industrialists, or workers, many have found it necessary to manage the probability of their increased economic vulnerability so that reduced or eliminated income streams do not capsize economically their kin groups. Second, a new(er) generation has made job and career decisions mindful of the frailties of long-term employment in the shoe industry for them as well as for older kin already engaged in shoe production. Third, the economic opportunity structure of the shoe district has shifted, as more new jobs are found in services rather than manufacturing, and educational preparation becomes more important for success in the labor market.

Surprisingly enough, as Paul Ginsborg and Francesco Ramella point out in the introduction to their study of the Valdelsa in Toscana (Ginsborg and Ramella, 1999, p. 11), the family and the role of kin groups, once taken as a crucial factor propelling the historical development of the Third Italy economy, has been left behind in studies that seek to press the argument for district economies ahead once more. They write: “Nelle ricchissima serie di studi dedicati alla Terza Italia, la famiglia ha fatto la sua comparsa principalmente come fattore causale. In altri termini, l’attenzione degli studiosi si è concentrata essenzialmente sul grado con cui le risorse, i meccanismi di solidarietà e la capacità della famiglia, di quella mezzadrile in particolare, hanno contribuito alla creazione dell’originale rete dei distretti industriali”.⁴

In sympathy with Ginsborg and Ramella’s concerns, it is shown below that kin groups continue to play a significant role in the occupational choices of new(er) generations, but in this period by supporting the search of the new(er) generations for ways of living less vulnerable to the vicissitudes of an industrial district increasingly economically fragile and deemed untrustworthy.

Let it be stressed at the outset that it cannot be assumed that members always or even strictly take actions to support the kin group, or conversely undertake only actions which are self-serving. The notion that kin groups pursue collective strategies, productive and

pology inherited from the British tradition, as notably voiced by A.R. Radcliffe-Brown and dutifully followed by his important student Meyer Fortes, creates the distinct and unhelpful bias in contemporary practice that structures dictate a set of specific norms and resulting beliefs that are prescriptive and proscriptive of specific behaviors. While this paper shows a significant amount of comity rather than conflict between and among generations studied, my judgment is that this is the result of the times my informants live in, wherein persons are expected to have to enjoy an individual destiny with which kin must strive to understand and to some at least minimal degree, respect. See Taylor. Also from the standpoint of those “respecting their parents’ wishes”, something like Wittgenstein’s following a rule applies.

⁴ Their evocative opening description of the Valdelsa (see page 9) as an exemplar of “Italia minore” could well fit the industrial district straddling the provinces of Macerata and Fermo under discussion here.

reproductive, at the complete expense of individual interests and designs, finds little standing today among sociology's truisms. Durkheim's insistence on the supremacy of social solidarity in the governance of social life has found notable dissenters even in the French tradition like the late Pierre Bourdieu, whose notions of strategy, shown to particular advantage in his discussion of matrimonial arrangements in his by now canonical *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977), assumes *a priori* an actor's interest in personal gain, albeit embedded in socially sanctioned contests over spouses. Moreover, the mix of motives that an actor carries, even in such a critical social reproductive task as making a marriage, lend an air of indeterminacy to the outcome that make the reduction of a personal choice as the obedience to group norms impossible to be, as well as to prove.⁵ As Sylvia Yanagisako (2002, p. 83) in writing about industrial capitalist families in northern Italy notes "which norms should be followed, which kinship sentiments should have priority, how precisely legal rules should be obeyed, and what is considered fair and just, as well as practical and efficient, are constantly being rethought and renegotiated".

In fact, individuals may manipulate kin group solidarity to the advance their specific interests. In sense, interested individuals can convert the corporate ties of the kin group into ego-centered networks, as was observed so acutely by Stack (1974). But perhaps Fortunata Piselli in her classic study of migration and kin ties among households in the Cosentino zone of Calabria during the late 1970s most explicitly and carefully demonstrates how the corporate ties of kinship are reconstructed by actors into networks for personal advantage. As Piselli shows, migration opened up, and effectively broke up, the once more coercive kin group ties, and allowing kin with varying degrees of power and authority to seek upward social mobility through advantageous alliances in Italy and abroad. A young man with poor career prospects, for instance, forsakes his fiancé in Italy for a sight-unseen marriage to a young Cosentino woman born and living in the United States. A Cosentino couple seeks to improve their social position by emigrating to Canada under the sponsorship of their son-in-law who gains in return the hand of the couple's youngest daughter for a Italo-Canadian of his acquaintance. The daughter, in turn, breaks her engagement to a Cosentino youth who in desperation emigrates to Switzerland. The parents also obtain a good marriage for their youngest son, a dull, unpromising boy unlikely to make a good marriage match in the Cosentino. Piselli's remarkable investigation alerts us to treat the skeins of kin group solidarity skeptically, and to appreciate that economic changes like emigration introduce ego-centered and dyadic network strategies as tools of actors bent on pursuing their interests, even from within an ostensibly solidary kin group (Piselli, 1981).

Thus, one cannot *a priori* assume in the face of economic crisis and uncertainty in the Marche shoe district over a decade or more that the occupational choices of new(er) generation individuals are to support the kin group, the individuals in question, or both. Surely, it is the case, though, that one can observe in their actions responses to the changing opportunity structure of the local economy under the stress of transition from shoe manufacturing to other forms of livelihood. And one can observe how kin groups via discussion, dispute and reaction to individual actions, pull themselves forward however uncertainly in an uncertain economic world. It is proposed to investigate some dimensions of this practical as well as theoretical problem by analysis of kinship data collected by over the past 33 years by Michael Blim in Monte San Giusto, one of the key shoe-producing towns (population 7,700) in the

⁵ See also Hareven (1982) for the elaboration of the concept of family strategies in which the author skillfully shows normative patterns among households making adaptations to the rise of industrial labor in a New England factory town.

shoe district of the Marche Region. The occupational histories (thusfar) of two (and three when possible) generations of three kin groups, two formerly headed by small shoemaking artisans and one currently headed by former shoe workers, are presented. Save for representing the distinction between small business owners and workers, the three have not been chosen particularly to stand as ideal-types; they happen to be among the families with whom the closest and most continuous contact have been kept over the years. Their small number is due to space limitations. It is hoped that whatever advantage is sacrificed by not constructing a typology and using paradigmatic cases will be compensated for by the close observations brought to this discussion of how individuals navigate the shifting seas of economic difficulty, albeit in the context of the salience of their membership in kin groups.

The vicissitudes of the footwear district have to be framed in the more general debate on industrial districts. The enormous changes in external and market conditions are also illustrated in the paper, which tries to figure out what could be the economic future of the Marche regional economy and of the Third Italy model, built by now historically on the backs of industrial districts. The gaps in the industrial district literature are discussed. They have precluded a more objective assessment of the weaknesses of the Third Italy model, and probably its future success.

2 Three case studies

2.1 Redistributing Collective Risk via Personal Choices: La Famiglia Rossi-Fermi

Claudio Rossi (b. 1940) and Sara Fermi (b. 1945) raised four boys, Rodolfo (b. 1970), Massimo (b. 1973), Fabio (b. 1977), and Alessandro (b. 1983), he working as foreman of several shoe factories, and she as a shoe top-sole stitcher working illegally at home. Sara's father was a fruit wholesaler, but her mother's kin were shoemakers whose lineage stretched back into Monte San Giusto's past as a center of protoindustrial shoe production after the Risorgimento. Her five siblings were small artisans or workers in one or another of the town's shoe firms. Claudio's kin on his father's side were sharecroppers in the countryside near Fermo and his father a *muratore*, while his mother's kin were shoemaking artisans in a nearby town. After Claudio's mother died in 1956, he moved to Monte San Giusto to apprentice shoemaking with his mother's brother, an artisan with small shoe shop. He then went to work for one of Sara's brothers making shoes before moving on to work in a small factory in the early 1960s. By the mid-seventies, he was head foreman at a small firm that closed in the mid-eighties. After a period of working transiently and illegally in a friend's small workshop, he found work again as head foreman in a firm with a good-size production and something of a reputation in children's shoes.

They raised four boys in a small three bedroom cooperative apartment in a new district outside the old Monte San Giusto town center. From first to last, none of the boys wanted to become shoemakers. Rodolfo, the oldest, was the only in fact to try shoe factory work after finishing middle school, and his dislike of the work influenced his siblings to reject shoe factory futures as well. He chose instead to take up the metal-mechanical work of making shoe moulds, an activity that soon attracted his next-to-last brother Fabio with whom and he and three others founded their own firm. Massimo, the second son, shared with Rodolfo a passion as well as an aptitude for mechanics, but as Rodolfo settled into metal-working rather than automobile and motorcycle repair, Massimo cast about for a steady job. He had gotten a taste

for motorcycles and engine repair during his compulsory stint in the Army, and followed his father Claudio's advice to pursue an appointment to the state highway patrol. He succeeded and with Claudio's help through the husband of Sara's cousin was assigned to the state police barracks in the nearby provincial capital of Macerata.

Despite the success of the firm Rodolfo and Massimo had founded with others, they no longer after half a dozen years saw eye-to-eye about its future direction. Rodolfo and one other partner were fascinated by the prospect of producing injection moulds, an advanced industrial process based upon revolutions in materials science, lasers, and computer-directed manufacture. They took their share of the accumulated capital of the firm and started a new one, betting heavily and very expensively on the future of injection moulds to fundamentally change shoe manufacture – which it has. Massimo preferred to stay with metal-working mould making, though he would later take his share of the firm's accumulated capital out, buy an apartment without a spouse on the horizon (something unusual), and go to work as a factory foreman in the same field. Three years later, he married Roberta (b. 1985), a sales person for a chic *pronta moda* women's wear chain who became unemployed with the onset of the 2012 recession.

Their youngest brother Alessandro proved a difficult character to place in the world of work. Like his brothers, he stopped his education after middle school, and also rejected work in a shoe factory, something that could have been easily arranged by Claudio. Instead, he worked for a while at the brother's old firm, not covering himself with glory with a diffident work attitude that incited bitter criticism from his brother Fabio. When the old firm split up, Alessandro went to work at his brother Rodolfo's new injection moulding firm. Within a year, he had gone from being a millstone around his older brother's neck to an instrumental part of the production team, developing a mastery of the computer-aided design process that a certified engineer would have had trouble grasping in such a short time. He has joined Rodolfo in expanding the firm's business through investment and production in Tunisia. In addition, Rodolfo's wife Cristina (b. 1980) manages the firm's financial accounts.

Parents Claudio and Sara managed their sons' transition to the world of work very carefully. Until their marriages, Sara received and kept their wages, saving collectively for the successive marriages and first apartments of her sons. Though not all of their earnings were comingled as the brothers individually reached 21, enough was held as capital to finance each son's first apartment upon marriage. In Massimo's case, the savings and his policeman's salary were not enough to rebuild a potentially beautiful apartment in ruinous condition inside the old town walls. He and his wife Sabina (b. 1978), responsible for inventory at Claudio's factory with his sponsorship, lived after marriage for an excruciatingly long four years in Claudio and Sara's apartment (according to the couple) while Massimo and his cousin and Claudio's brother's son Giordano, a *muratore*, rebuilt the new flat from the ground up. Alessandro, unmarried, lives at home, and his mother keeps some part of his wages as savings.⁶

Having grown up and prospered with the shoe boom, Claudio and Sara nonetheless did not insist that their sons stop their educations after middle school and go into the remaining nearby shoe factories. They could have continued their educations if they had showed both interest and promise, but if they did not, the parents insisted that their sons go to work in a trade or occupation with a future. They didn't interfere, for instance, when Rodolfo and Massimo clashed over the direction of their shoe-moulding firm, nor did they intervene to prevent its break-up, even though Rodolfo was taking up a financially risky new venture in

⁶ Del Boca (1997, p. 230) points out that 2 in 5 Italian families obtain their house via a gift from their natal households.

injection moulding. Suffice it say, however, that Claudio was ideally positioned to steer work from his factory and the larger firm to his son, by which both the metal-making and injection moulding firms gained credibility and much needed turnover.

Nor did their sons' dislike of a future in shoemaking dismay or offend them. Sara never liked sewing shoe-tops, but it was work she had learned as a teen-ager and working illegally at home had enabled her to make cash more quickly and still supervise her children. Claudio, on the other hand, has been rewarded well as factory foreman, and he has enjoyed travel as far as China to support his firm's production. Privately he confesses to doubts about future shoe employment in the zone, and is relieved that his sons have chosen factory leadership as a foreman in metal-making (in the case of Fabio), a state police job (Massimo), and run a cutting edge firm involving both Rodolfo and Alessandro. He reasons that only a complete economic disaster would catch up all of his sons in its nets. Both parents have strongly encouraged their sons to settle close to home (fixed it in the cases of Rodolfo and Massimo), but have not expressed great worry over Rodolfo and Alessandro's frequent trips to Tunisia.

Thus, one might say that the Rossi household, now with the neolocality of their sons becoming kin groups in their own right, has skillfully sidestepped the declining economic opportunities that other worker families of their generations have suffered. All but one of the sons is still tied to shoes, but they have advanced quickly in their preferred niches of metal-making, some of the skills of which are indeed transferable to other areas of industrial fabrication, should they along with others succeed in generating new products in shoe district and the surrounding economic zones.

2.2 The Lifeboat Welfare Economy of the Bianchi-Grimaldi

Spouses Tiziano Bianchi (b. 1926-d. 1999) and Giulia Grimaldi (b. 1935), along with Giulia's unmarried sister, Elisabetta Grimaldi (b. 1940-d. 2012), created a formidable household from the mid-fifties and a viable firm as the principals of an artisanal shoe parts production shop from the mid-sixties to its demise in 2009. They provided work until retirement for two of Tiziano's younger siblings, as well as a sister-in-law of Giulia and Elisabetta's. Though the three were born to artisanal shoemaking families, Tiziano's father, overwhelmed by debt and business failure in 1929, committed suicide; Tiziano was placed in *collegio* until he was 16, an experience he found difficult though he did allow that it enabled him to get a diploma in *studi agrari*. Giulia and Elisabetta were two of ten children, and the first born of four to their father's second wife. They were quite poor, as their father worked as a shoemaker for another *a cottimo*, and the town was visited at any rate by depression and war that made the lives of all save a few miserable and mean.

So, the trio started from scratch, each first working for another before accruing the minimum necessary to *mettersi in proprio*. Though Tiziano and Giulia's two daughters, Lucia (b. 1957) and Daniela (b. 1964) helped out in the firm when they were young, both took up work outside the shoe sector, Lucia as a town clerk and Daniela as a physical therapist and for the past five years state employee at a nearby rehabilitation hospital. Lucia helped her father with the invoices, and after his death in 1999, became the effective head of the firm.

By the time Lucia took over the firm, it was being kept alive only to forward pension payments to the state for her husband, Andrea (b. 1957), who still needed at time of the closing of the firm almost four years of regular employment to become pension eligible. Indeed, the firm functioned as an albeit restricted kin group income and pension system, in which decisions were made to accommodate every person's need for income and a pension. As the shoe business

declined locally in the nineties, shoe production, particularly shoe parts production was shifted to the Balkans, and local producers like the Bianchi-Grimaldis suffered badly. After a spate of kin retirements, the three partners along with son-in-law Andrea carried on with the remains of their business. Even as the partners were retired and drawing pensions (though Tiziano and Elisabetta still worked fulltime), Andrea, the sole worker on the books, was being issued salary checks he never cashed because doing so would have bankrupted the firm, while his pension payments were made with regularity in the hope that the firm would last long enough to render him pension eligible. He and Lucia lived on Maria's town hall salary in a cooperative apartment less than one hundred meters from the house of her parents and her aunt that was purchased by the parents of both spouses. Andrea worked irregularly and illegally as a leather cutter in his apartment garage until a space could be made for him at his maternal uncle's shoe factory, where his brother and sister-in-law had worked for over thirty years.⁷ It is now likely that he will reach the required contribution years to receive a worker pension.

Lucia's parents were keen that she get a job in the town hall in the mid-eighties, even though the firm then was doing very well. She was intelligent and had completed some exams at university. More importantly, slight of build and rail thin, she was not considered for labor in the household workshop, and as the single mother of two young girls (she and Andrea were separated for several years), they felt she needed the relatively easier workload and guaranteed employee benefits of state employment to manage in part her children's lives.

Daniela, the second daughter, struck out on her own early on, settling on physical therapy for an occupation and seeking training in France in a program then not recognized as valid for Italian licensure. Her parents supported her studies in France, albeit reluctantly, while accurately foreseeing that this would lead to employment problems for Daniela on return to Italy. She became romantically involved with a man living on his parents' farm an hour's drive from Monte San Giusto, and they undertook care of a foster child. Her subsequent hire as a physical therapist by an Italian state hospital definitively stabilized her economically.

The children of Lucia and Andrea have broken with the shoe business altogether. Paola (b. 1977) has completed a *laurea* with a specialization in recreational therapy for handicapped children, moved to the provincial capital of Macerata, and works as a partner in a cooperative providing services for children. For a time, she co-owned an apartment and lived with a young man from Monte San Giusto who worked for a firm wholesaling articles for shoemaking. They broke up after four years, and she remained in Macerata, renting an apartment with another young woman with whom she works.

Debora (b. 1981), Lucia and Andrea's second daughter, helped out in her aunt and grandparents' shoe part firm as a teenager, and then moved on to work in several shoe factories, each time becoming unemployed after her time as an apprentice ended and a long-term contract was not offered. With shoe jobs hard to come by, Debora received unemployment compensation and worked with her companion Giordano (b. 1981) at his parents' bread bakery, though once more it was not a good fit, as there was not enough work (or pay) for four adults. In 2011, she took a part-time job as a cashier in a supermarket, and one year later was assumed part-time but permanently in her post. She decided that working less than full time would allow her to spend more time with her son, Alex (b. 2010) and now Amelia (b. 2014). Along with her companion, she lives in an apartment across from Giordano's parents' bakery in the town

⁷ Andrea's uncle's factory was operating under a labor-management "solidarity" compact whereby job security would be guaranteed only to a fixed number of workers, and the owner was restricted from hiring any additional workers if those still on his rolls were without work. Thus Andrea could not be assumed until one of the workers under the compact either quit or retired.

center.

Tiziano Bianchi, Giulia Grimaldi and Elisabetta Grimaldi were born into Monte San Giusto households active in shoemaking since the Risorgimento, but by the time of Tiziano and Giulia's children young adulthood in the mid-eighties, work in the shoe industry was becoming foreclosed, save as we have seen for a son-in-law who narrowly missed losing his pension in the district economic decline that not only knocked out the household firm but scores of others like it. It was hard, back-breaking work creating shoe parts with shearing machines (*trance*), running the pieces through a dangerous folding machine, bending over glue tubs and coating each piece with thermoplastic resins, and wrapping the thousands of tiny shoe inserts in plastic for shipping to the factories. No one spoke pleasantly about it; pride was taken in the firm and for the older generation of possessing a *mestiere*, but not in the work itself. Lucia and Daniela were encouraged to pursue their education, as were Lucia's children. Lucia's Paola was the first in her immediate kin group to have been awarded the *laurea* – the only in fact among all her first cousins.

But it was not the only attempt to move the next generation(s) out of shoes: Giulia and Elisabetta's younger brother Angelo Grimaldi, a leather-cutter who had worked illegally all of his life and whose wife Federica Ramponi had worked in the shoe parts firm of her in-laws for over 25 years set his two sons up with a small pizza shop (which eventually became two, one for each son) in the provincial capital of Macerata. As he expressed to me often, there was no future in shoes, and he wanted his sons, neither of whom were especially strong in school, to run a small business suited to their habits of hard work and modest academic achievement. The expansion to two small pizza restaurants was justified by their success, but also reckoned as a necessity because the brothers had developed an antagonistic working relationship in managing the one restaurant.

In retrospect, it is evident that the family elders possessed foresight and displayed a great deal of altruism, given that they continued to do the dirty work while they offered their children (who in the case of Lucia and Andrea's children were the elders' grandchildren and nieces) the opportunity to study and to seek qualified work outside the shoe industry. Giulia and Elisabetta's brother Angelo and his wife Federica virtually directed their sons out of the industry in which they had worked all of their lives and made the pizza shop a family business anew, as he and his wife spent hours in the early years gathering and preparing pizza condiments for use by their sons. Leaving nothing to chance, Angelo in anticipation of his sons' marriages supervised the construction of a two-apartment home for them in the countryside with his capital and the retained profits of the pizza shops.

Keeping the firm open to cover the pension needs of all the kin (up through son-in-law Andrea) in the face of declining business and rising debts almost cost Giulia and Elisabetta their home (Tiziano had died in 1999), as it was used as security for a bank loan necessary to keep the firm afloat and making pension payments for Andrea. The firm was finally closed, and the home was re-mortgaged. The two heirs, Lucia and Daniela, contribute with their mother Giulia (Elisabetta died in 2012) in making the monthly mortgage payments.

2.3 “New” and “Old” Economies under One Roof: La Famiglia Verdi-Cecchi

The home of Raffaele Verdi (b. 1927-d. 2006) and Milena Cecchi (b. 1931) had stood like a great sentinel guarding the ingress to Monte San Giusto from two directions, the mountains

and the provincial center of Macerata. It was part of what remained of a great patriarchal kin group of co-resident, multi-family households of former sharecroppers who by the turn of the 20th Century had become the principal mechanical grain-threshers for Monte San Giusto and nearby towns. They maintained several large farms in the adjacent town, processed local olive oil, and lived well in a resident domestic kin group that at the end of World War II numbered 24.

Raffaele was bright, graduated from *liceo classico* in Macerata, rode horses in the countryside, and found friends among the sons of the town pharmacist and the *fattori* that supervised the sharecroppers for the local nobility. He wanted to be a veterinarian, but the only program was at a university too far from home. After a short, unpleasant stint in the faculty of law at the university in Macerata, he found himself at 21 in 1948 facing the declining economic prospects of his father's large residential kin group (his father was the third son and thus long down in the line of patriarchal succession as the *vergaro*). The large kin group broke up into autonomous extended households in 1950, and Raffaele was constrained to strike out on his own just as the Italian economy had bottomed out from the ruins of Fascist autarky and foreign occupation. One of his paternal uncles ran an artisanal shoemaking firm, and Raffaele undertook to take consignments of his uncle's production and wholesale the shoes in Belgium. Armed with his serviceable *liceo* French, his first foray went well, but on the second, he was cheated out of the inventory and returned home empty-handed. He was lucky to find a job in the office of a shoe factory that proved to be a long-term business success – the same factory where 60 years later, Andrea, the son-in-law of the Bianchi-Grimaldis household discussed above, finally found work that would help him complete his pension contributions. After 30 years as a white-collar employee with the firm, Raffaele retired, and with an assembly line worker from the same plant, opened a small artisan shoe production firm that manufactured the same line of shoes that he and his partner had worked on over many years. They achieved some financial success producing under their own label as well as for upscale chains of international boutiques operated by Swiss and English wholesalers.

Raffaele's wife, Milena, had trained as a school teacher and was determined against odds and the custom of the time to have a career. Starting at the bottom of the seniority ladder in the province, she spent 10 years commuting six days a week to schools in the mountains before obtaining an assignment within a car ride of Monte San Giusto. Though her mother-in-law looked after her children Anna (b. 1957) and Enrico (b. 1964), Milena still faced her share of the cooking, cleaning, and child care as Raffaele, having been raised in a patriarchal household, had never considered these responsibilities as part of his spousal duties.

Anna took a diploma in bookkeeping, worked part-time keeping the books for a shoebox maker nearby, and married Fabrizio Fontanelli (b. 1957) who partnered with his father in wholesaling leather for shoes; they had two children, Giacomo (b. 1985) and Cecilia (b. 1992). After the death of Raffaele's mother in 1982, he and Milena bought out Raffaele's sister's share of the family home and remodeled it to accommodate an apartment on the second floor for Fabrizio and Anna. Their son Giacomo earned a diploma in information sciences, but found work in leather selling with his father congenial, and after ten years seems to have found his niche. Daughter Cecilia, on the other hand, has proved to be a talented and motivated student of languages, having completed *liceo scientifico* with high marks, and having finished an initial *laurea* in languages at the university in Macerata. As part of her studies, she has already studied in the United States and China.

Downstairs and living with his parents (and now with his mother Milena since the passing of Raffaele in 2009) is Enrico, director and part-owner since 2011 of a center for language and

culture in Macerata providing educated tourists with an intensive immersion in the Italian language and way of life. It has not been a straight path. Enrico graduated with high grades from *liceo scientifico*, earned a *laurea con lode* at a local university in economics. The faculty offered him admission and a fellowship to complete a Ph.D. in economics and he spent a year in the United States brushing up on his English and taking a full course load in economics. However, Enrico was not lucky to find himself a mentor, or in effect, an academic sponsor, and did not complete his Ph.D. thesis. After teaching labor economics part-time for a provincial labor federation for a half a dozen years, he and his sister Anna pooled their resources and opened up an ice cream store in a nearby town, much to the disdain of many in Monte San Giusto who thought it a waste of his scholarly preparation. Enrico shrugged off local disapproval and accepted the drudgery of scooping out ice cream because he wanted to learn how to manage a business. He had refused to work with his father in the shoe business, as much out of lack of desire to work in shoes as his discomfort working for his father, Raffaele, a man who never strayed from the patriarchal norms instilled in him in his youth. Raffaele gave up the firm to the last remaining partner in 2004, and it failed not long after.

Enrico was a puzzle to his parents and to many in Monte San Giusto, if well respected and equipped with a spotless though circumspect and highly formal character. After he and his sister sold off the ice cream shop at a modest profit, he accepted the offer to take over the business in Portugal of a shoe accessory wholesaler who had begun to tap the shoe district that lay east of Porto. Enrico made good money, both in salary and commissions over three years; he also received a living allowance that reduced his living expenses in Portugal to zero. His success enabled him to invest with a partner in the new Italian cultural center for foreigners that aimed via a painstakingly wrought “business model” at wealthier tourists able to part with more money in exchange for an “authentic experience” of Italian life. The firm’s immediate future is not yet secure, but their business is expanding, and now includes a growing clientele from China.

Raffaele and Milena started with their own family home in a town where at the end of World War II when only one in five households could say the same. With his *liceo classico* diploma, Raffaele was one of perhaps a dozen in the town who had gone beyond a middle school education. Though his family’s capital was depleted, he carried a good name and found work as one of the few white-collar employees in town. Milena had grown up in the provincial capital of Macerata, and pursued a career as a teacher that eventually brought her back to Monte San Giusto as one of the key teachers in the town middle school. Neither had worked with their hands, and though Raffaele made a living after he retired as an artisan, making a success of himself on his own, rather than making shoes, was what he desired. Even Fabrizio, Anna’s husband, and her son Giacomo, though deeply connected to shoemaking, have begun to sell leather in Portugal and Spain and rely less on the Marche shoe district strictly for their income.

Raffaele decided to quit his small firm just as the wholesalers from abroad who gave him product orders were shifting to lower-cost countries. His son-in-law with positive results has gone global too, seeking opportunities outside the district, and trying to reduce his vulnerability to regional downturns. Fabrizio began with the capital, contacts, and business his father had built. Sound, cautious, and capable, he now builds a business with his son Giacomo that appears prosperous and durable.

One can observe in Enrico’s career trajectory the desire to create economic activity outside the shoe industry – a desire as well of regional planners looking to move the area beyond the Marche districts’ mono-industrial cultures to a more balanced economy with more valued

created in services of precisely the sort that Enrico and his business partner are seeking to provide. A close friend of Enrico's since liceo and comrade at university, Massimiliano Carli (b. 1964) also strongly desired to create a firm or economic activity that was modern, efficient, everything up to date, of the sort he would read about in American business magazines. Massimiliano grew up in and still lives in an expansive palazzo composed of apartments dedicated to himself, his wife Rossana Spinelli (b. 1970), their two children, his parents, his maiden aunt, and his two sisters that sits close by the walls of Corridonia, a town adjacent to Monte San Giusto, and is situated at the beginning of a grand plot of land that his kin group has farmed independently for over a hundred years. Both Massimiliano and Rossana, an elementary school teacher hoping to take on more administrative responsibility for school improvement in the region, prefer to be an autonomous household within the remaining kin group setting, along with their children, twin boys (b. 1999); and after Massimiliano's highly anxious and protective mother agreed to knock or call first, they settled happily into the kin group compound. After Massimiliano's father's death (2011), he has assumed management of the estate, including the programming of the valuable agricultural land holdings for eventual commercial development.

The story thus far contains no hint of disillusion and struggle, but again, as in Enrico's case, there was plenty. Massimiliano also received a *laurea* with a concentration in economics, but it provided him with little hint of a possible future direction. For several years, he continued *lavoretti* such as working in the betting booths of the local race track, and he traveled abroad, particularly the United States which fostered his idea to create a well-run, "modern" firm, either as a manager of someone else's firm or as *titolare*.

Marriage generated a shift in his outlook. He went to work for a successful and expanding construction hardware firm in Corridonia, and took a promotion that involved working fulltime at the firm's office in Bari, Puglia. For three years, he was in effect the manager of the firm in Puglia, commuting home most weekends. After re-assignment back to Corridonia, he left the hardware firm and invested in and managed a start-up firm that computer-manufactured prototypes for a variety of industrial projects, including yachts and other watercraft for shipbuilders in Ancona. The firm is small, two other partners and three employees that provide state-of-the-art, three-dimensional models for complicated and expensive big products. As with injection moulding business in which Rodolfo Rossi placed himself, computer-aided prototype production uses expensive laser-guided machines and highly sophisticated software. Massimiliano has risked some of the family capital and his labor time to put himself at the leading edge of an industrial sector in which, unlike for Rodolfo, the local demand is not yet sufficient to yield a good return on his investment, and the need for national markets keenly felt. In 2013, he reported that frequent disagreements among the partners, non-kin, was likely leading him to sell his interest in the firm to the others.

The efforts by Enrico Verdi and Massimiliano Carli are suggestive of economic development being generated by a generation for whom the shoe district profits and the more generalized prosperity they brought are being transformed into new industrial segments. Two questions remain: First, can the regional market provide the linkages and demand necessary to stimulate the growth of their ventures? Second, can they successfully reach clients in national and international markets?

3 The Industrial Districts, the Region and the Cases

3.1 The Industrial Districts

These last questions beg the larger question: what is the economic future of the Marche regional economy, built by now historically on the backs of industrial districts of the Third Italy model?

Industrial districts of the well-known ‘Third Italy’ with their small craft industries stand as a standard points of reference for other regional economies. It was the sociologist Arnaldo Bagnasco (1977) who coined the expression ‘Third Italy’, to distinguish this region from the industrial triangle of the North West Italy and to the less developed Southern Italy. This important socio-economic model has been studied by many researchers from different disciplines. The intellectual foundation of the related concept of “industrial district” originated with Alfred Marshall, but the rereading of his work (see Marshall, 1920) made by Giacomo Becattini was fundamental (Becattini, 1979, 1981, 1985).

In the *Principles of Economics* (1920), Marshall used the term “industrial district” mostly in a descriptive sense to refer to the concentration of specialized industries in a particular geographic area encompassed by small companies that make production decisions locally, and characterized by external economies available to each firm from its spatial conjunction with other companies or suppliers of services. Behind the term “industrial district”, many different forms of organization of labor and many different models of production could be found. Researchers supporting the idea of “industrial district” considered the deterioration of the Fordist production model as the initiator of a new industrial model, characterized by the flexible specialization and a networked organization of production among small and medium-sized firms (Piore and Sabel, 1984).

Becattini made a significant advancement over previous conceptions by stressing the social rather than business origins of industrial district activities. In his definition, Becattini relies on the ideas of: 1) limited area; 2) geographical proximity; 3) interaction between companies; 4) interaction between local social structure; 5) strong links between local businesses; 6) important role culture and history; and 7) common interest (Blanc, 1997).

Boschma (1996) states that this form of industrial development took place in the Third Italy region because of a local culture of entrepreneurship and cooperation which seems to be lacking to some degree in the other regions in Italy. Becattini interprets the industrial organization from the side of the local community, rather than from the company: instead of proceeding from the industry to its location, Becattini proceeds from the place to industrialization (Sforzi, 2008). The district is seen as a stable community that allows the evolution of durable local cultural identity and common industrial expertise. The concept of community is also reflected in the writings of Enright (1996), following the conceptualization of Porter, who considers the Italian notion of industrial districts as a special case of cluster economies (Porter, 1990, 1998). Bianchi (1995) writes about common “social culture” among the workers, entrepreneurs and politicians enveloped by an “industrial atmosphere”. The degree to which the entrepreneurial spirit that originated small businesses of the industrial districts in the Third Italy originated in the historical experience of sharecropping (“mezzadria”⁸), however, has been subject to long debate (Paci, 1980; Sabbatucci Severini, 1990).

We will not go into this debate here (see Blim and Goffi, 2014), but we want to underline that the situation has now changed, and consequently, the prevailing conceptualizations of industrial districts and the Third Italy should be rethought. Industrial districts characterized

⁸ “Mezzadria” is the agricultural land tenure and sharecropping production system that dominated central Italian regional economies for almost 700 years, from the 14th Century until forty years ago (see Anselmi, 2001).

by low intensity of technology, low rates of value-added production, and saturated markets have faced strong competition from low-wage countries. Hadjimichalis (2006) recognized three interrelated restructuring processes of industrial districts: (1) mergers and acquisitions and the formation of large, vertically integrated firms and groups of firms; (2) de-localization of part of production to low labor cost countries; (3) extensive replacement of Italian craft-workers by non-EU immigrants, to compensate for the lack of skilled labor remaining in the district.

Much of de-localization had the sole objective to significantly reduce production costs (cheap labor paid in weak currencies) with negative effects on domestic employment (Paradisi, 2004). This has begun to undermine the foundations of the industrial districts, which were based on the concept of community. As recognized by Sforzi (2008), the district set by Becattini is first a local community: a socio-cultural and institutional environment within which individual companies operate that is a condition of the firms' existence. This condition began to disappear, as many local firms were forced to close due to de-localization. De-localization broke down local clusters and networks, while mergers and acquisitions generated local hierarchies. From the point of view of network governance, industrial districts have been moving increasingly towards quasi-hierarchical or hierarchical governance Humphrey and Schmitz (according to the definitions of 2000).⁹

Employers and workers together used to confront each other in the piazzas and other public spaces of the community over important labor and work issues, but these processes do not work anymore now due to social modifications generated by economic decline (Calza Bini, 2004). What distinguished the industrial district was the quality of the local labor market: workers were committed to the district in a sort of symbiosis between production activity and community life (Becattini, 1989). But the erosion of the virtual full employment guarantee in the industrial districts has led local young people to lessen the importance of work and the work ethic as a vital component of their everyday lives (Carboni, 1991). In addition, many young people have started to look for other opportunities away from the district, as they are no longer interested in reproducing themselves as skilled workers there. Many surveys found the same lack of interest among children of small entrepreneurs despite attempts to convince them to continue the business (Mingione, 1998). Moreover, the transfer of power to the children from parents has remained limited: it is more as an employer-employee relationship than a real succession in the management (Cucculelli, 2004).

External and market conditions have changed significantly in recent years. The world recession of the late Nineties caused a significant reduction of demand for Italian fashion goods. At the same time, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, new markets, but also new competitors in Eastern Europe and Asia entered strongly into the market of low to medium quality textiles, footwear and furniture. After the Maastricht agreement (1992), Italy could not devalue the "lira" anymore; moreover, after the introduction of the Euro (2001), Italian products became very expensive due to the Euro's favorable exchange rate with US dollar.

Then, in 2008 the current economic crisis that affected first the mechanical and wood furniture sectors of the Marche Region (Osservatorio Mercato del Lavoro Regione Marche, 2014), spread to all sectors. As a result, the extended period of low demand and the high pressure from international competitors, have affected small independent firms and subcontractors. The

⁹ (a) "Network", implying cooperation between firms of more or less equal power which share their competencies within the chain; (b) "quasi-hierarchy", involving relationships between legally independent firms in which one is subordinated to the other, with a leader in the chain defining the rules to which the rest of the actors have to comply; and (c) "hierarchy", when a firm is owned by an external firm (Humphrey and Schmitz, 2000).

number of small firms has dropped since 2008 in the Marche region and they have lost employment and profitability.

Employment in the small firms of the handicraft sector has dropped from 92,477 in 2007 to 85,384 in 2011; companies spending on salaries has fell by -9.8% from 2007 to 2012, while sales in the same period has dropped by -26.1% (Goffi and Dini, 2013). Goffi (2013) points out that the indicator of productive activity, has recorded a first decreasing phase from 2000 to 2004, has resumed until 2006 and thereafter (except for 2007) has tended to decline significantly and systematically until 2009; after the short-lived revival at the turn of 2010 and 2011, started to drop systematically. The long and persistent period of crisis has made clear to many firms that previous levels of activity cannot be achieved anymore. Blim and Goffi (2014) show that the number of micro firms (handicraft sector) has grown by 7.6% from 2000 to 2008, while the total number of firms in the Marche has grown by 5.3%. Instead, from 2008 to 2012, the number of micro firms has declined by 5.1% while the total number by 2.1%, bringing back the number of small active firms (48,790) to the same levels of the year 2000 (48,771), from the peak of 52,499 small active firms in 2008.

Italian industrial districts have faced several crises over the years. Some think that they will also overcome the current crisis, thanks to their flexibility and learning capabilities. Empirical evidence (Humphrey, 1995; Nadvi and Schmitz, 1999) shows that small firms in clusters, both in developed and developing countries, can overcome some of the main limitations they habitually face (e.g. lack of specialized skills, difficult access to technology, inputs, market, information, credit, and external services). Nevertheless, it should be considered that this is not a crisis like all others, not only for its long duration, but given the changes of historic proportions that we have listed.

3.2 The Region and the Cases

In the case of the shoe district, the growth of a local monopoly in Tod's that sub-contracts its work to small firms fosters the illusion that autonomous artisanal production of thirty and forty years ago is still characteristic of the district, even, as noted above, Tod's and three other firms (from 29 times to 56 times smaller than Tod's, considering sales) produce or supervise the production of the lion's share of the region's shoes.¹⁰ Providing the capital intensive, high-tech

¹⁰ The largest company of the district is by far Tod's with a turnover of 963 million euro in 2012, followed by few much smaller companies as Giusti Leombruni, Calzaturificio G. Fabiani and Nando Muzi ranging from 17 to 33 million euro (Coltorti, 2014). Tod's is also the third largest firm of Marche as total turnover. We report here some data on the shoe district. The Fermano-Maceratese district consists of a total of 4,155 companies, 76% of which is located in the footwear district of Fermo. They represent the 21% of companies in the Marche manufacturing sector; from 2010 to 2013, the companies in the sector fell by 5.5% (-241) (Sistar Marche, 2014). In the Fermano-Maceratese district 98.2% of the firms have less than 50 employees. Fermo district has 29,164 employees, while the Maceratese district 9,008, for a total of 38 thousand employees (Unioncamere, 2014). In the Fermo district about 75% of labor demand is concentrated in five municipalities: Porto Sant'Elpidio (18.9%), followed by Montelupone (15,3%), Monte Urano (15%), Sant'Elpidio a Mare (14.3%) and Fermo (11,7%) (Osservatorio Mercato del Lavoro ARMAL, 2005). The sector employs 7.5% of workers in the Marche and almost 29% of employment in regional manufacturing; footwear industry is the first sector of the Marche exports: the value of exports is over 2 billion euro in 2013, representing 18% of Marche exports (Sistar Marche, 2014). The main market for the Fermano-Maceratese shoe district has traditionally been Europe, particularly Germany and France, and to a more limited extent Great Britain and the rest of the EU. Now the main market has become by far Russia (329 million euro exports in 2013), followed by Germany (194 million), France (185), United States (127) Great Britain (101) and Belgium (86). It is seriously rising the concern of the footwear industry for trade relations with Russia,

produced products for the very large producers as done by the Rossi sons is one way to survive and perhaps thrive. Expanding a leather wholesaling business to serve a greater European shoe manufacturing sector as undertaken by Verdi son-in-law Fabrizio and his son is another. But between the objections of the new generation(s) and the doubts of the elder generation, working in the shoe district in factories and workshops is something young(er) people have been and are avoiding, if they can help it. In a sense, we have seen that they are voting with their feet, exploring other options new to them and to their family histories.

The shoe district labor market, per se, has been shrinking steadily for several decades, and the belief that the “Wild West” times of the industry were over was widespread even as Blim’s fieldwork in the Marche Region began in 1981. Yet, one must acknowledge the notable perspicacity with which the three kin groups analyzed market trends and the needs of the new(er) for employment in the zone. While it is clear, as it turned out, that the informants were better placed than many to take up options apart from artisanal shoemaking or factory work, the two occupational categories badly hit by the shoe zone economic rationalization and as a popular zone, economic decline,¹¹ they nonetheless had no access to the employment data or projections over the past 30-odd years. Their appraisals were based upon quotidian observations, conversations, passing local knowledge from a producer friend in the piazza or a client in the local bar, or a get-together of neighborhood women at a kitchen table over a Coca-Cola. The decline in clients and in orders led to the most obvious of inferences: the industry would encounter conjunctural crises or one-off events like the imposition of protective tariffs by an important export destination nation, and then the industry would recover – though never quite returning to its former robustness.

The Marche unemployment rate, historically much lower than the national rate, has moved decisively higher since the onset of the current financial crisis, such that in 2012 it was only 1.7% lower than the 10.7% national rate. As Goffi (2013) notes, the closer the Marche region approaches the national unemployment mean, the less it shares in common with the ‘Third Italy’, and the more it has in common with the aging, deindustrializing regions of the Italian Northeast.

If the first finding summarized is that persons accumulate observations of important economic happenings typically without necessary recourse to information aggregated and interpreted for planning purposes and devise long-term strategies based upon those observations, the second major finding offered is senior members of kin groups can exert significant influence on the economic courses of action that members of new(er) generations undertake. Taken in its most universal sense, such a finding would as banal as it would be unnecessary, as kin interventions in the economic futures of the younger generation(s) is manifested historically via inheritance, dowries and other gifts, as well as employment in elders’ professions and firms. Too little credit is given, however, to the seasoned insights of ordinary persons, in this case non-expert observers of the economy, and the impact of their influence, if macro-economically slight in the micro-economics of things, on the underlying long-term flow of the economy. A more restrictive and useful way of putting the argument is that ongoing conversations among kin generate

after the serious political crisis between Russia and Ukraine: there has been a sharp drop in exports: -15% from 2012 to 2013, -25% from the 1st semester 2013 to the same period of 2014 (Sistar Marche, 2014). For applied studies on the Fermano-Maceratese shoe district see Morganti (2007), Trend Marche (2008), Corradini and Dini (2009), or more generally on the Fermano area see Dini and Goffi (2008).

¹¹ Fortunata Piselli has effectively combined network analysis with a sophisticated appraisal of how families build and use social capital in new economic opportunities, including “modern”, high-tech artisanal firms. See Piselli (2003) and Piselli (2006).

something of an informed forecast of what might be a prudent course of economic action.¹²

As the cases offered above suggest, people can be highly informed and yet make big errors. The Bianchi-Grimaldi household played out the pension game too long, came close to losing their home, and are saddled now with a long-term mortgage to pay off their debts. Yet, Angelo, Giulia Grimaldi and Elisabetta Grimaldi's brother, in moving his two sons into the pizza business showed remarkable good sense. Kin groups could provide no finally useful guidance at all for young searchers like Enrico Verdi and his friend Massimiliano Carli. Instead and fortunately for them, their households could provide the minimal economic security necessary during the period of doubt and trial both experienced in pursuit of their "new" economy alternatives.

These cases do not in any sense prove the continued viability of kin groups in the determination of economic action in the Marche region, or anywhere else in Italy for that matter. But they illustrate in some detail how, as Italian population surveys indicate¹³, kin groups, in some sense attenuated by individual interests and intents, are active sites of significant social interaction where meaningful judgments about life and labor are made.

¹² In Stephen Gudeman's rich, if restricted notion of "the base", there is a strong implication of the development of a common outlook on the needs of the household as a community. See [Gudeman and Rivera \(1990\)](#). Though it is customary in regional economic research to survey entrepreneurs, bankers, and opinion leaders in formulating the "economic outlook", more attention might be paid to polling residents, particularly in industrial districts where the destinies of many in the population are tied to one or two key industries.

¹³ See [Cioni \(1997\)](#). Martine [Segalen \(1984\)](#) makes similar observations of heightened social interaction among networks of households in rural French domestic groups.

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Rapporti di parentela e crisi economica nel distretto calzaturiero marchigiano

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Sommario

L'obiettivo del paper è quello di analizzare se i gruppi parentali possano continuare a svolgere un ruolo significativo nelle scelte professionali delle nuove generazioni in un contesto economico incerto e turbolento. L'analisi di tre casi estesi di cambiamenti intergenerazionali delle scelte professionali nei gruppi parentali (fra quelli inclusi in uno studio longitudinale sul distretto calzaturiero marchigiano) suggerisce che i gruppi parentali hanno aiutato i loro membri ad anticipare i problemi futuri nel mercato del lavoro locale e supportato i progetti di carriera con maggior successo rispetto a quanto offerto dal distretto alle generazioni precedenti. Una rinnovata enfasi sull'importanza del contesto sociale nel processo decisionale economico consente di avere una visuale più stretta, e per certi versi migliore, sulle possibili direzioni future delle economie locali in transizione.

Classificazione JEL: *L67; O14; R11; Z13*

Parole Chiave: *Imprese familiari; Piccole e medie imprese; Rapporti di parentela; Distretto calzaturiero; Terza Italia; Crisi economica.*