

EUROPEAN BUSINESS: CORPORATE AND SOCIAL VALUES

**Hubert Bonin
and Luciano Segreto
(eds.)**



P.I.E. Peter Lang

European Business: Corporate and Social Values



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Bruxelles · Bern · Berlin · Frankfurt am Main · New York · Oxford · Wien

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This book investigates the adaptation of companies to the trend towards Europeanisation, through the renewal of their business values, their corporate culture, their portfolio of skills and their transnationalisation. It also considers the spillover effects in terms of knowledge management, accountability and commercial opportunities.

The examination of case studies involving several different European countries and corporations leads to stimulating arguments about the steady building of a European culture of management, fuelled by local experiences and cross-over corporate cultures. The writers in the volume consider how individual managers contribute to the outline of a European business culture, taking advantage of new methods of management and the converging mobilisation of human resources. Another important issue examined in the book is that of brands, which have to be managed according to their perceptions in different European countries.

HUBERT BONIN is Professor of Modern Economic History at Sciences Po Bordeaux and a member of the GRETHA research centre at Bordeaux University. His research focuses on the history of services companies, French and overseas banking history and European business history.

LUCIANO SEGRETO is Professor of International Economic History and the History of Finance in the Faculty of Political Science at the University of Florence. His main research interests are the history of Italian industry, the Italian banking system and European business history.

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Università degli Studi di Firenze

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Regional and National Corporate Cultures Confronted with the Challenges of the Europeanisation of Business

Hubert BONIN

Many academic studies have been devoted to the Americanisation of Europe during the 20th century¹: the spread of American methods, concepts and technologies, as well as the offensive by American firms to conquer companies and market shares. The issue of European competitiveness against such American threats has also been well tackled by conferences and books. The resurgence of a competitive Europe in the 1960s and 1970s was well planned. European firms and societies succeeded in transforming "Fordism" by "civilising" it perhaps, by adapting it to European minds and their ways of managing society and firms. When the European Economic Community took shape on a large scale (from six to fifteen countries) at the turn of the 1990s, some balance seemed to be reached.

Debate could thus be raised about the design of this new European unity, especially as European firms, like American and even Japanese companies, all of a sudden had to deal with a complete rebuilding of their business model. This was because of the "great crisis" that marked the transition from the second industrial revolution to the third industrial revolution, from the mid-1970s to the mid-1990s. While America questioned its very competitiveness, and even its ability to avoid being transformed into huge "rust belts", European elites, companies and

¹ As a synthesis: Harm Schröter, *The Americanization of the European Economy. A Compact Survey of American Economic Influence in Europe since the 1880s*, Dordrecht, Springer, 2005. Jonathan Zeitlin & Gary Herrigel (eds.), *Americanization and its Limits* Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000. And about France and Germany: Ralph Willett, *The Americanization of Germany, 1945-1949*, London, Routledge, 1989. Egbert Klautke, *Unbegrenzte Möglichkeiten: "Amerikanisierung" in Deutschland und Frankreich (1900-1933)*, Stuttgart, Steiner, 2003. Anselm Doering-Manteuffel, *Wie westlich sind die Deutschen? Amerikanisierung und Westernisierung im 20. Jahrhundert*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999.

states had to think about the future of European business within the framework of “global capitalism”², which seems to have triumphed at the turn of the 21st century.

1. In Search of Business and Society Models

When the “great crisis” of the 1970s-1980s drastically impacted on the industrial structures inherited from the second industrial revolution – and when new technologies and productive processes paved the way for the third industrial revolution in the name of information technologies, flexibility and outsourcing – experts and elites struggled to define a “model” that could preserve the “traditions” of each firm, region or country, while at the same time open up doors to modernity and competitiveness. Debate about the fate of the “productive model” that came from the “Fordist system”³ – which had balanced requirements in productivity and distribution of welfare – were accompanied by a parallel debate on the feasibility of the durability and efficiency of the “Toyotist system” – which appeared as the triumphant model proposed to reshape industrial societies. Several books and arguments (in political, trade-union or academic circles) seemed to succeed in defining such models, even “varieties of capitalism”⁴. Some “competition” gathered momentum to pit model against model, country against country, and of course firms against firms. Each model was perceived as the relevant key to assuage concerns about people being victims of an intense reshuffling of the workforce and the productive sectors.

From a French point of view – French elites are forever looking for inspiration to reignite French entrepreneurial spirit against the threat of “decline” – the “Swedish model”, for a time accompanied by the Volvo system of enriching productive tasks in the 1970s, was held up as a beacon of a peaceful and negotiated transition from ancient times to the future. This, above all, was among social-democratic circles attempting to alleviate the weight of “Marxist thought”, which was paralysing more and more the inventiveness of French leftists. Some kind of a myth circulated throughout Western Europe, before the Swedish themselves

² Geoffrey Jones, *Multinationals and Global capitalism: From the Nineteenth to the Twenty-First century*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005. Richard Kozul-Wright & Bob Rowthorn, *Transnational Corporations and the Global Economy*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1998.

³ Marie-Laure Djelic, *Exporting the American Model. The Post-War Transformation of European Business*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998.

⁴ See Peter Hall & David Soskice, *Varieties of Capitalism: The Institutional Foundations of Comparative Advantage*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2001.