

Economic Research and Large-Sized Enterprises during the *Golden Age* The Italian Case, 1945-1980

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Economic research became a daily activity among large-sized corporations both in the US and in Europe during the first half of the twentieth century. The establishment of economic research departments was linked with the growing technological intensity of the production processes and the growing competition on oligopolistic markets: with the need to manage the increasing organisational complexity and to forecast market trends. After World War II in Europe the spread of economic research among large-sized enterprises was also part of the process of Americanization of the European economic environment that took place along with the Marshall plan.

The paper aims at analysing the post-WWII developments, focussing on the Italian case and in particular on four prominent experiences: two state-owned enterprises, IRI and ENI, and two private corporations, Fiat and Olivetti. The paper will analyse the major outputs of these experiences both in term of econometric research and in the field of economic planning. The major role of these corporations' economic research offices was, in fact, to develop models that could be useful to forecast consumer behaviours, but they were also engaged in the planning of the development of the enterprise. Often their field of research shifted also from corporate planning to industry, regional or national economic planning as it is testified by the involvement of a large number of their members in the first attempts to establish a national economic planning system at the beginning of the 1960s. The paper will assess the contribution of Italian large-sized corporations' research departments in the fields of econometric and economic planning research till the end of the 1970s. This decade, in fact, recorded a downsizing of economic research activities inside manufacturing enterprises because of the shrinking of their dimension, because of the financial constraints produced by the 1970s downturn and, finally, because of the development of econometric research in the universities and of the establishment of private independent research centres.