

PR-08-YL-1-E***Synopsis of the Research Project (Head : Yveline Lecler)******Starting date : Autumn 2008*****Japanese innovation policies and SMEs : The revitalization of Regional Areas.**

This research project intends to participate to the present theoretical debate in terms of Regional Innovation System and the correlated issue of multi-level governance. It takes into account the present context of the emergence of a knowledge society which not only places innovation at the core of future competitiveness, but also raises the questions of knowledge acquisition, public policies efficiency, technology management and governance patterns.

The starting point of the research project lies in the difficulties experienced by the numerous industrial districts mainly composed of SMEs, resulting in a deterioration (firms number reduction, employment losses etc.) of regional areas where they are located. Until recently mostly engaged in subcontracting activities, today taken over by emerging Asian economies, these SMEs have no other choice than to innovate to survive, although innovating is not an easy task for them. Thus, considering their weight in national economy their progressive decline is a major problem.

This led public authorities to implement, since the 90s, initiatives for the revitalization of regional areas through innovation. So, the impact of innovation policies on the future competitiveness cannot be limited to analyzing large national showcases. It is also worth to take into account all what is done in favor of SMEs and precisely at the regional or local levels, directly facing the problem.

After having made an inventory of the situation of districts in general then in several prefectures taken as case studies, the research will focus on both, the diverse measures implemented at the national level or those elaborated at the local one. Indeed, former studies have shown that a lot of prefectures but also cities tend to develop their own policies, often overlapping with national frameworks. They set up scientific or technological parks, incubation centers or regional clusters, giving birth to a complex landscape where projects/realizations' governance levels are confused. In depth case studies in some selected prefectures, will be implemented putting emphasis on objectives, decision mode and legal framework used, pre-existing conditions, distribution of roles between actors involved (whatever in terms of governance, funding, intellectual property...), evaluation procedures, and results achieved.