



# LA LETTRE DU GERPISA

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Editorial

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## LES CONCLUSIONS DU RAPPORT FINAL DU PROJET COCKEAS

Au terme des 30 mois du projet CoCKEAS (Coordinating Competencies and Knowledge in the European Automobile System) soutenu par l'Union Européenne (5ème PCRD, Action-clé 4, contrat HPSE-CT-1999-00022), le rapport final (téléchargeable d'ici peu sur [www.cockeas.org](http://www.cockeas.org)) a été remis à la Commission. Réunissant treize équipes de recherche réparties dans sept pays membres de l'Union Européenne et associé au troisième programme du GERPISA, le projet s'est attaché à analyser l'ensemble des changements structurels qui affectent le système automobile européen en privilégiant une approche centrée sur les nouveaux enjeux de la coordination des compétences et des connaissances des acteurs de ce système. Les travaux ont principalement porté sur les relations verticales, la dimension immatérielle (Finance, usages sociaux) et la nouvelle géographie de la production automobile. Les comparaisons avec les autres régions automobiles (Amérique du Nord, Japon, pays émergents) ont permis de mettre en évidence la spécificité du système automobile européen. L'ensemble des recherches présentées et discutées dans les travaux du réseau thématique ont permis de dégager les principaux résultats suivants.

L'industrie automobile est affectée par une réorganisation profonde de l'ensemble de la chaîne de valeur qui vise à rationaliser et mieux coordonner l'ensemble des activités de la conception à la production et la distribution du véhicule au consommateur final. Il s'agit d'un renversement nécessaire d'une logique "poussée" (*push*) vers une logique "tirée" (*pull*) dans un contexte où la différenciation croissante et la réactivité sont devenus les éléments clés de la compétitivité. Si les technologies de l'information et de la communication favorisent cette évolution, leur diffusion reste inégale et se heurte à plusieurs obstacles structurels. Cette réorganisation implique une restructuration profonde de la relation entre les constructeurs automobile et leurs fournisseurs, à travers la délégation croissante des fonctions de conception, de production et d'assemblage de sous-ensembles (modules) à des fournisseurs de premier rang.

## THE CONCLUSIONS OF THE COCKEAS FINAL REPORT

At the end of the 30 months of the CoCKEAS project (Coordinating Competencies and Knowledge in the European Automobile System) supported by the European Union (5th Framework Programme, Key action 4, contract HPSE-CT-1999-00022), the final report (downloadable on [www.cockeas.org](http://www.cockeas.org)) has been sent to the Commission. Bringing together 13 research teams from seven EU countries, and associated to the third GERPISA international programme, the report analyses the structural changes that affected the European Automobile System (EAS) via an approach focusing on the new issues involved in coordinating the competencies and knowledge of the system's actors. CoCKEAS project mostly looked at vertical relationships, intangible elements (finance, social usage) and changing geography of automobile production. Comparisons with other automobile regions (North America, Japan, the emerging countries) emphasised EAS distinctiveness. The following main findings reflect the sum total of the research output that was presented and discussed – especially during the GERPISA international conferences – as part of the work that this thematic network achieved.

The automobile industry's entire value chain has undergone a profound reorganisation. The purpose has been to rationalise and improve the coordination of all of its activities, from whole vehicle design to final product manufacturing to retail distribution. Part of a move from a push to a pull logic, this change took place in an environment where greater differentiation and responsiveness became key constituents of competitiveness. ICT may have driven this change, but the diffusion thereof varied greatly from one area to the next and often encountered a number of structural obstacles. The reorganisation inferred a deep-seated restructuring of the relationship between car manufacturers and their suppliers, marked by an increasing delegation of design, production and module assembly functions to first tier suppliers.

L'évolution vers une production modulaire semble particulièrement rapide en Europe, mais la hiérarchisation des fournisseurs se traduit par une concentration conduisant à la formation d'oligopoles mondiaux sur les principaux métiers et elle fragilise les PME.

Les travaux du réseau CoCKEAS ont mis en évidence le rôle clé des services dans la compétitivité du système automobile européen, par la consolidation d'un tissu très dense d'entreprises de design et d'ingénierie et compte tenu de l'importance stratégiques des services liés à la vente et à l'usage de l'automobile. Ils ont aussi permis d'ouvrir un nouvel agenda de recherche, d'une part, en soulignant les interactions plus étroites entre la Finance et l'industrie automobile et, d'autre part, en proposant une analyse des systèmes d'usage de l'automobile qui révèle des enjeux cachés.

Enfin, ces travaux ont mis en évidence deux éléments majeurs dans les nouvelles configurations de l'espace automobile européen. Si l'ouverture vers les pays d'Europe Centrale et Orientale a fait apparaître une nouvelle compétition territoriale, on ne constate pas une délocalisation massive au détriment des pays membres de l'Union Européenne du fait de la nécessaire mobilisation et de la coordination des connaissances entre acteurs. Ce facteur conduit au renforcement de l'agglomération spatiale des activités automobiles, aux niveaux de la conception comme de la production (parcs de fournisseurs).

L'analyse en profondeur des transformations en cours du système automobile européen et la comparaison avec les autres principaux pays automobiles ont trois principales implications en terme de politique automobile.

- ✓ Premièrement, il apparaît indispensable de renforcer la politique technologique européenne orientée vers l'industrie automobile.
- ✓ Deuxièmement, l'aide aux petites et moyennes entreprises automobiles apparaît essentielle pour canaliser les effets de la concurrence des territoires résultant à l'élargissement de l'UE, ce qui suppose de consolider les régions automobile, d'encourager les coopérations inter-firmes et de soutenir leur internationalisation.
- ✓ Troisièmement en matière de politique de la concurrence, l'existence d'un actionnaire de référence est un gage de stabilité pour les constructeurs qu'il importe de consolider sans céder aux illusions de la *corporate governance*.

The move to modular production seemed particularly rapid in Europe. At the same time, the concentration that resulted from this new tiering led to the formation of worldwide oligopolies covering the main businesses, an outcome that increased the vulnerability of small and medium-sized enterprises.

Studies by the CoCKEAS network have highlighted the key role the services play in EAS competitiveness by consolidating its extremely dense fabric of design and engineering companies and due to the strategic importance of automobile sales and motoring expenses. This has also paved the way for a new research agenda inasmuch as it underlined the ever-closer interactions between the world of finance and the automobile sector whilst offering an analysis of automobile utilisation systems that could delve into these new challenges.

Lastly, work focused on two main elements in the European automobile area's new configurations. Although the opening to Central and Eastern Europe led to the appearance of a new type of territorial competition, this did not cause any massive delocalisation to the detriment of EU member states.

The reason lay with the mobilisation and coordination of knowledge amongst actors – a factor that reinforces the spatial agglomeration of automobile activities at both the design and production levels (supplier parks).

In-depth analyses of ongoing transformations in the EAS and comparisons with other major automobile regions have led to three main implications for automobile policy.

- ✓ Firstly, European technological policy supporting the automobile industry has to be strengthened.
- ✓ Secondly, to channel the territorial competition effects that will result from EU enlargement, assistance will have to be given to small and medium-sized enterprises: consolidating automobile regions, supporting the SMEs' cooperative capabilities and their internationalisation.
- ✓ Thirdly and regarding competition policy, the existence of a shareholder of reference is a guarantee of stability for car companies. It is important that this be consolidated without any concessions being made to the mirages of corporate governance and free capital market.

## Questions de recherche

Comme dans la précédente Lettre, on lira dans cette rubrique les notes des discutants des trois textes soumis à discussion lors de la Journée de travail du GERPISA du 15 novembre 2002, dont le thème était *L'innovation dans l'automobile: types, conditions de pertinence, organisation*. L'intérêt des travaux présentés pour la réflexion du GERPISA est amplement confirmé, chacun d'eux étant des « premières » sur des terrains quasiment vierges. Ils commencent tous à documenter des questions de recherche antérieurement ouvertes au sein du GERPISA et en suscitent de nouvelles. Les discutants ont mis l'accent sur plusieurs points. Ils rappellent la nécessité de développer plus encore les recherches sur la conception dans tous ses aspects (recherche, innovation, développement, design, architecture, politique produit, marketing, ingénierie des moyens, etc.), et sur les politiques publiques (notamment les politiques incitatives à des changements majeurs en matière de motorisation). Ils s'interrogent sur la possibilité de rendre compatibles les innovations conceptuelles avec des stratégies de profit de « volume et diversité » ou de « réduction permanente des coûts » ; sur la place de la relation salariale, de la division du travail et de la stratégie de profit dans l'évolution de l'organisation de la concep-

**« De la R.&D. à la R.I.D. : morphogenèse de la conception innovante dans les grandes entreprises. Le cas Sekurit-Saint-Gobain »**

Pascal Le Masson (Ingénieur, Maître de conférence, ENSMP) et Benoit Weil (Ingénieur, Professeur, ENSMP).

Rapport du discutant : Tommaso Pardi (doctorant EHESS en histoire, CSU-IRESO, CNRS).

Le texte de Le Masson et Weil traite du rapport entre innovation et organisation et de la question *a priori* paradoxale de la gestion de l'innovation. En effet, l'innovation apparaît traditionnellement comme un événement aléatoire, imprévisible et ponctuel, tandis que sa gestion impliquerait la maîtrise régulière de sa mise en oeuvre. Est-il donc possible d'innover de façon répétée et régulière tout en réduisant au minimum les risques normalement associés à une telle stratégie de profit ? Pour répondre à cette question les deux auteurs analysent le cas de Sekurit Saint-Gobain et en particulier la ré-organisation de son laboratoire de recherche entre 1995 et 2001. A partir de 1995, SSG, fournisseur mondial de verre dans la filière automobile, se trouve confronté à une demande inattendue d'innovation (le pare-brise athermique) de la part de Renault. Dans la nécessité de répondre rapidement à cette demande et sous la menace de voir Renault faire appel à un concurrent, le laboratoire de recherche de SSG s'engage sous l'impulsion de son nouveau directeur dans une ré-organisation « radicale » de son activité :

- ✓ d'abord, en concentrant les efforts de recherche sur un nombre limité de projets ;
- ✓ ensuite, en introduisant des lignées de projets pour gérer leur nombre croissant et l'augmentation de leur coût global, solution qui permet de capitaliser les apprentissages conjoints ;
- ✓ enfin, en définissant un champ d'innovation pertinent qui va orienter les activités d'exploration et d'anticipation des nouveaux produits innovants.

tion et des rapports entre ses différents compartiments. On peut compléter ces questions de recherche par celles de la définition de champs d'innovation susceptibles de générer des innovations commercialement pertinentes (en d'autres termes les relations entre marketing, vente, design, recherche, politique-produit, innovation, direction générale) ; des conditions d'émergence d'une nouvelle stratégie au sein d'une firme et des « conflits » qu'elle génère, des inventions organisationnelles qu'elle provoque dans sa confrontation avec la stratégie de profit en place ; de l'articulation entre stratégie de profit d'un fournisseur et d'un constructeur ; du rôle des politiques publiques, non seulement dans le choix des politiques-produit, mais aussi dans l'adoption des stratégies de profit ; des difficultés structurelles et stratégiques des firmes à s'engager dans des innovations radicales ; de la confrontation de deux orientations stratégiques au sein d'une firme, des incompatibilités qu'elles engendrent, et des conditions de prévalence de l'une sur l'autre au-delà de l'intention et de la volonté des acteurs.

Michel Freyssenet

L'émergence d'une fonction I (Innovation) au sein du laboratoire de R&D de SSG s'est donc faite à partir d'un pilotage de l'innovation par les concepts. Il s'agit d'un modèle d' « innovation prudentielle » (Hatchuel et Weil 1999) qui a déjà été identifié au sein d'autres firmes, notamment Tefal (Chapel 1997). D'où la question : est-ce que l'innovation organisée par lignée « conceptuelle » est suffisante pour limiter les risques de l'innovation conceptuelle et la rendre compatible avec une stratégie de « volume et diversité » comme décrite par Jean-Louis Beffa (*La construction d'une stratégie de profit, Le cas du Groupe Saint-Gobain*, 2002), ou bien au contraire n'est-elle pas une des conditions pour poursuivre cette stratégie ?.

**The role of public decision makers in the case of the California ZEV Mandate: lessons learned for European public authorities**

Philippe Larrue, (économiste, INSEAD).

Rapport du discutant : Patricio Neffa (ingénieur, doctorant en gestion, CGS, CNRS)

Sans grande concertation préalable, l'état californien a décidé en 1990 d'imposer aux constructeurs de vendre au plus tard en 2003 10% de « véhicules zéro émissions polluantes ». Les différents épisodes qui suivront cette décision seront tout aussi imprévisibles et chaotiques que les vraies raisons qui ont poussé l'état californien à imposer unilatéralement cette réglementation. Les intérêts divergents des parties prenantes n'ont pas été non plus de nature à pousser vers un compromis acceptable par tout le monde, en cours de route.

En 2000, 3750 ZEVs avaient été vendus au lieu de 62000. À partir de ce cas, Philippe Larrue montre la nécessité pour les autorités publiques de prendre en compte les stratégies des firmes et de concevoir une réglementation

adaptable en fonction de l'avancée des progrès technologiques dans le domaines des véhicules alternatifs.

La discussion a été consacrée d'une part à des demandes d'informations complémentaires et d'autre part aux cadres analytiques susceptibles d'éclairer le sujet. Les participants se sont beaucoup interrogés sur les motivations initiales du "ZEV mandate" : opération médiatique pour améliorer l'image d'un candidat politique, problème réel menaçant la côte ouest, intense lobbying des fabricants de batteries, etc.? De même, ils ont cherché à comprendre ce qui avait poussé de nombreuses petites et moyennes entreprises à risquer des capitaux importants pour fournir les constructeurs, voire pour produire eux-mêmes des ZEVs. La plupart en effet ont disparu depuis ou se sont converties depuis l'assouplissement de la réglementation en 1996 vers des marchés plus modestes et à court terme comme par exemple les batteries pour tondeuses à gazon ou la conception de voiture pour handicapés. Une cartographie des parties prenantes à cette histoire tumultueuse pourrait être dressée. Plusieurs cadres analytiques ont été évoqués pour rendre compte de ce cas. Les batailles de pouvoir de Callon –Latour pour comprendre les divergences non surmontées des parties prenantes. L'innovation intensive du CGS pour éclairer la ré-utilisation possible faite par les constructeurs d'automobiles ou d'autres de la technologie développée, ou l'accélération de l'amélioration des moteurs à combustion interne. Il a également été suggéré qu'un examen des analyses produites en économie de l'environnement pour éclairer les dispositifs politiques « efficaces » ou « soutenables » pourrait compléter l'approche d'économie de l'innovation privilégiée par l'auteur jusqu'ici. Le temps a manqué pour examiner ce que pouvait apporter une analyse gerpisienne en termes de stratégies de profit des firmes. La question des conditions que doivent remplir les politiques publiques pour influencer les politiques technologiques des constructeurs est certainement à inscrire au programme du GERPISA, au moment où s'impose politiquement la nécessité de trouver des solutions à la pollution automobile et où se dessinent des voies susceptibles de modifier le paysage de l'industrie automobile. Pour ce faire, l'étude d'autres cas serait très utile.

### **Les « Fondamentaux en Design » Renault : un nouveau modèle de relation design – ingénierie ?**

Olivier Hirt, (Doctorant, CGS, Ecole des Mines).  
Rapport du discutant : Pierre Bitard (Professeur, ESSC Angers)

Dans "Les « fondamentaux en design » Renault : un nouveau modèle de relation design – ingénierie », Olivier Hirt propose une analyse des formes de coordination entre le design et l'ingénierie dans la conception d'un véhicule. Le caractère exemplaire du travail proposé tient à la nature du métier de la conception abordée : « le design » (autrefois nommé « le style »), métier méconnu. En effet, il est le plus souvent abordé comme une dimension des processus d'ingénierie, et fait dès lors l'objet de bien peu d'attention. A partir de l'expérimentation d'une nouvelle forme de coopération qu'il a accompagnée chez Renault, Olivier Hirt s'attache à caractériser un nouveau rapport design-ingénierie et à proposer un dispositif s'articulant autour de la notion d'« objet de conception ». Cette proposition découle de l'analyse faite des difficultés rencontrées à la fin des années 90, au sein des projets véhicules entre acteurs de l'ingénierie

et designers, les premiers étant collectivement soumis directement à la loi du QCDP, les seconds étant en concurrence sur leur capacités créatrices. La ligne de partage, division du travail, ainsi décrite ressemble, selon nous, à celle conceptualisée par L. Boltanski et L. Thévenot entre « monde industriel » et « monde inspiré »... et avec le même impératif : l'établissement de compromis robustes au fil du projet. Le dispositif proposé doit donc à la fois permettre l'expression de la créativité des designers mais aussi garantir l'intercompréhension, support d'établissement de la convergence souhaitée, *via* l'invention d'un langage commun dont Olivier Hirt suggère un vocabulaire et un ensemble de règles de grammaire. Si l'on adopte un point de vue d'économiste industriel et des organisations, on peut s'interroger sur la nature du changement décrit : dans quelle mesure s'agit-il d'une inflexion dans le modèle de production et d'innovation de Renault, dans quelle mesure doit-on y voir l'approfondissement du modèle déjà à l'œuvre auparavant ? Au-delà, durcissant le trait, il est possible de se demander si cette évolution, qui semble bien avoir vocation à ancrer plus profondément le processus d'innovation de l'entreprise dans un « modèle de réactivité » (Gaffard, Cohendet, 1990), empruntant un nombre de traits plus importants à la « firme J » de Aoki (1986, 1990) ne contient pas en puissance une contradiction forte : dans quelle mesure le durcissement envisagé, *via* l'objectivation des processus de création de connaissance et des dispositifs de coordination associés va-t-il effectivement favoriser une stratégie « d'innovation et de flexibilité » (Boyer, Freyssenet, 2000) ?

En effet, la dimension stratégique du changement implique qu'il corresponde à la recherche d'une cohérence à l'égard d'une certaine vision de l'environnement concurrentiel au sein duquel Renault formule ses propositions d'offre mais aussi d'une certaine vision des caractéristiques de la relation salariale, en particulier dans ses composantes de GRH. Or, sur le premier point, Olivier Hirt analyse l'évolution engagée comme nécessitée par le constat de problèmes liés à des évolutions de modes de management et d'organisation de la conception, sans mentionner de liens avec une perception particulière de l'environnement concurrentiel<sup>1</sup>. Sur le deuxième point, fidèle à l'orientation que nous pourrions qualifier de cognitiviste les travaux dans lesquels s'inscrit sa recherche (nous faisons ici référence aux travaux sur la conception menés par le CGS de l'Ecole des Mines), la connaissance nous semble être considéré comme « la variable régulatrice de la coordination », laissant ouverte les questions de la relation salariale : quid de la vision stratégique des besoins en RH tant au niveau qualitatif que quantitatif entre ces deux secteurs ?, quid des dispositifs incitatifs ?, i.e. quelle composition trouver entre promotion et valorisation individuelle et collective ? Le compromis de gouvernement est à bien à ce prix, cette question étant d'autant plus prégnante ici que les deux « mondes » dont il s'agit de favoriser le compromis relèvent de conventions collectives différentes, traduction concrète de différences de fond que la relation salariale instaurée par la firme se doit de réguler

<sup>1</sup>. Olivier est tout à fait en accord avec l'analyse qui en est faite en interne par Renault comme les débats ont permis de le montrer avec la présence de deux membres de Renault, observateurs attentifs et avertis de ces changements (ils ont en particulier suivi et accompagné le travail de terrain d'Olivier).

## A New Column

## WORKING ON THE GERPISA ANALYTICAL SCHEMA

*Michel Freyssenet et Yannick Lung*

On 18-19 October 2002, the GERPISA's International Committee confirmed that it was committed to advancing as far and as collectively as possible towards the development and dissemination of the GERPISA enterprise change analytical schema, whose foundations were established by Robert Boyer and Michel Freyssenet in the aftermath of the first GERPISA programme (see *Productive Models, La Découverte, 2000*). Above and beyond ongoing differences of opinion and heretofore unsettled issues, what has become apparent is that the areas of agreement are sufficiently important to constitute a solid basis, a hard core, a line of argumentation and a "inference engine" based on which the GERPISA's analytical schema can be enhanced. This will involve capitalising upon the results of the second and third programmes over the next two years, that is, using their findings to question the analytical schema, to amend it and to enrich it. The present column will be a way of reporting on work in progress, and can be a forum for debating salient issues. You are already more than welcome to react to the proposals contained below by sending the *Lettre du GERPISA* a text that can be published right here.

**Seven questions to start out with.** We hereby confirm the launch of a work project whose purpose is to develop the GERPISA analytical schema. This was preceded by a clarification of relevant issues, objections and recurring criticisms of the said schema's objectives and philosophy.

The first criticism related to the ultimate goal of the work that GERPISA does. Is it because the GERPISA, subject as it is to the vagaries of time and circumstance, highlights problems relating to firms' longevity and profitability that company directors have not made better use of its ability to act as a theoretician or consultant capable of offering useful advice about the many different ways to turn a profit? Is this even an objective that everyone shares, and is it a legitimate activity for a researcher? This question led to other related ones, notably involving the political or moral message that may or may not be associated with our work. The text below is meant to synthesise the international committee's thinking on this first question, but also it develops them to re-launch the debate. In our future newsletters and in this column, we will offer (ostensibly acceptable) answers to the six following questions.

The second question, which is often connected to the first one, pertains to the GERPISA's having steadily abandoned as a research orientation and topic of debate themes relating to work, its contents and organisation, working conditions and workers themselves. Is it not true that the fundamental source of value is still the mobilisation and utilisation of working capacities (specifically within workshops)? The subject is far from having been exhausted.

A symmetrical criticism is that the GERPISA has always emphasised production, as witnessed by its use of the expression "productive models". And yet, just as much value (and probably much more nowadays) is produced in the upstream and downstream phases, and in financial activities.

The term "productive" is not an appropriate one. As a corollary to this idea but going much further is a criticism focused on the financialisation of the world economy. This implies that we radically rethink our vision of the firm and talk about models in entirely different terms.

The fourth question is whether by generalising conclusions drawn from the automotive industry to other sectors of activity the GERPISA isn't guilty of committing the same error as the IMVP, to wit, that of presenting a "one best way", the only difference being that we have devised several solutions instead of just the one.

The fifth question is whether the GERPISA, by emphasising capitalism's diversity and periodic renewal (plus the fact that there are many different types of productive models) is not under-estimating (even if it does affirm the limited nature of this diversity elsewhere) the power that convergence factors can wield, at least in a given industry (for example, in the automotive industry, what with energy constraints, oligopolisation, sectorial globalisation, etc.). Furthermore, are we not also guilty of under-estimating the deep-seated unity and systemic constraints that are a feature of capitalism? The sixth and the seventh question go together inasmuch as they too are symmetrical in nature. Some observers have told us that GERPISA's analytical schema is already being called a "lot of hot air". If we make it even more complex by adding other considerations, it could become incomprehensible and unusable. Actors need practical tools that can help them to analyse the situations they are living in, and which can conceivably be used as tools for action. Inversely, some have criticised the GERPISA's analytical schema as being overly structured, lacking in nuances, not flexible enough and even deterministic. They feel that that this gets in the way of its usefulness, especially for researchers.

The international committee, after having come up with answers to these questions (responses deemed good enough to justify our continuing to work together), discussed what our common cause could be, i.e., the hard core of the GERPISA's arguments.

**The hard core** (meaning the principles, hypotheses and essential methodological rules underlying the GERPISA's analytical schema, constructs that people have agreed to use, at the very least as useful working hypotheses) that the committee has come up with will be presented in the near future in a more in-depth text. However, we can already provide a brief overview of its main elements.

**Principles relating to the way the model is built**

- ✓ Relevancy: a firm's strategy must be relevant to the context(s) in which it finds itself
- ✓ Coherency and compatibility: the means employed to implement the strategy must be coherent with said strategy and compatible amongst themselves

- ✓ Acceptability: the means being applied should *de facto* be acceptable to the actors
- ✓ Dynamism and contradiction: over time, the outcomes of the means used will alter the relationships between actors and their context, necessitating the discovery of other means

**Hypotheses relating to the process underlying a diversity that is limited and constantly renewed in capitalist enterprise models**

- ✓ The capital-work relationship that connects actors to one another is a non-egalitarian, conflictual and contradictory social relationship - but it does force them to work together
- ✓ Capitalist firms evolve in national environments that differ from one another and which will continue to do so under their renewed forms.
- ✓ A country is not free to choose its own mode of growth. This choice is limited by the “international regime”, by the way the country fits into the international system, by the resources it can mobilise, and by its national compromise.
- ✓ Several possible profit sources exist for a company.
- ✓ Each growth mode makes it easier to exploit certain profit sources rather than others
- ✓ Profit strategies differ from one another by the profit sources that each stresses
- ✓ Strategy will have its own demands, if it is to be implemented: some of these demands will relate to its environment, others to the means being used
- ✓ Each mode of growth only allows for certain profit strategies
- ✓ A compromise has to be developed between actors (even if they are opposed to this) so that the means being developed are acceptable to them and satisfy the requirements of the strategy that is being followed in three respects: product policy; productive organisation (design, sourcing, manufacturing, distribution and service); and employment relationship
- ✓ The model that results from actors’ compromising on coherent means has a shelf life that is limited by the way this modifies actors’ respective bargaining strengths and by changes in the context
- ✓ A model can be transferred as long as its conditions of feasibility (context) and viability (compromise) can be reproduced elsewhere.

**Methodological rules for developing a usable analytical schema**

- ✓ ascertain real practices through field work, above and beyond what people say or write
- ✓ -understand the real meaning of these practices and systems, above and beyond their similarities or differences, by reconstituting the trajectory of the entity under study (firm, subsidiary, socio-political space),

especially the issues and problems that this entity and actors will be contending with

- ✓ clarify and distinguish the concepts being used before questioning or processing them
- ✓ define the concepts that have been developed strictly so as to be able to test them rapidly in other cases and make clear changes if need be
- ✓ build up an analytical schema that accounts for a maximum of facts with a minimum of hypotheses and concepts, and which at the same time is “open”, i.e., which allows for different articulations between the basic concepts whilst encouraging new explorations.

For a visual representation of the aforementioned points, you can consult “*The productive model in its environment*” (Boyer, Freyssenet, 2002, p.21).

As we can see, this minimal hard core raises a number of questions and offers numerous possibilities for a variety of developments: the characterisation of contexts, the components of national growth modes, how market and work can be structured, the number and nature of profit sources and strategies, the number and importance of the actors involved, the modalities by which compromises and bargaining positions are built up, the means used, the models that are actually in place, developmental scenarios, etc.

**Let’s dream a little** and turn to an IT analogy, without forgetting the dangers inherent to this sort of exercise. The aforementioned hard core could be applied as a sort of “operating system”, a Linux type “inference engine” (c.f., *Questions de recherché* by Marie Coris) each GERPISA member could freely appropriate to develop, document and process a particular question (module). In this case, GERPISA’s findings can be leveraged not on a thematic basis (something that could not help but generate incompatible theoretical constructs) but by dealing with the issues born out of the confrontation between the “inference engine” and the findings from specific studies.

The international supervisory committee has started to compile a list of such questions. It will be diffused in the near future and everyone is invited to take one issue (or suggest another one that the committee may have forgotten or neglected) and use GERPISA’s past studies, all of which are available on the network’s website, to document the topic and offer a solution. The various answers that are sent in could then be presented at an upcoming colloquium. At a wider level, they can be transmitted to everyone via GERPISA’s administrative services. Each contribution could be evaluated from point of view of the development of GERPISA analytical framework.

The Two Following Texte Were Published in French in the Previous Lettre du GERPISA

### WHOM ARE WE WORKING FOR?

*Michel Freyssenet*

It is worth exploring this issue as it summarises many of the questions the network's members have raised about GERPISA's work, and more specifically about the automobile firm analytical schema that Robert Boyer and Michel Freyssenet developed on the basis of this work. Having constantly focused on the conditions in which corporate profitability occurs, is GERPISA in a position to act as a theoretician and consultant who makes firms aware of the many different ways there are to make money? Turning a profit is far from being the main preoccupation of many corporate actors, notably employees and labour unions who are currently much more concerned by the rapid deterioration in working conditions and by the new threats to weigh on employment. So whom are we working for today? Research cannot be neutral. Do we have another message to deliver?

Last 18 October the international community succeeded in clarifying this issue to a sufficient extent to keep it from becoming de facto an obstacle to our cooperation. The text below reproduces but also enhances and extends the exchanges that took place on this occasion. More than the simple minutes of a meeting, it expands our discussions and helps open up the debate on the ultimate purpose of our work. By so doing, it contributes to a refocusing of our intellectual trajectory.

Back in the 1970s (hence before our network was born), many of the GERPISA's first members were already contributing to the scientific and public debate of the time on changes in the division of labour, "Taylorism" and working processes and conditions – in an era when people believed that the economic dysfunctions they were witnessing could be no more than temporary in nature. With the passing time, however, disagreements about the contents and organisation of work (with employees often victorious) were succeeded by desperate battles against the elimination of jobs and the closure of entire areas of activity. Labour unions were taken unawares, lacking an appropriate strategy and unable to come up with one to help them to fight with any efficiency in those firms that found themselves in a state of crisis or indeed close to bankruptcy. Unions were not the only ones in this position. Many business executives had problems seeing the inefficiency of the measures they were taking and were unable to define a strategy that was viable for this new environment. Many researchers were also taken aback by the way things were shaping up. Previously they had been ready to accept the received wisdom that a profit margin is ultimately proportional to the degree of employee exploitation (understood here as the extent to which work is intensified). They therefore restricted themselves to simplistic explanations (company directors' lack of competency, ukases from supra-national authorities, technological gap, etc.) - after all, they were not about to say that the companies going bankrupt were the ones that had been unable to exploit their employees!

The GERPISA is specifically born out of a need felt by researchers from several different social science disciplines to

pool their knowledge so as to be able to analyse as rapidly and rigorously as possible (in the case of the automotive sector) the processes underlying the crises that were breaking out in many firms; the reasons why so many other firms were doing so well; and the possibilities these different situations were opening up for labour unions and employees. By so doing, the network's first members were also providing themselves with ways to de-compartmentalise work-related research. Previously work had been seen as a topic of study in and of itself, but now it was to be re-situated in the context of the social relationship that acts as its main catalyst, to wit, the capital-work relationship. At a scientific level, this was a major step. After all, it is impossible to understand how work develops without accounting for capital, its obverse yet inseparable alter ego. Interdisciplinary collaboration, at least between economics, history and sociology, became indispensable.

In some countries nationalisation was seen as a way to save entire industries. Employers, over the moon at having survived at all, were willing to ignore any soft violence that might occur. And yet, it was already clear that nationalisation could never become a definitive general solution (unless it could turn nationalised firms into monopolies and constituted the first wave of an administrated economy). Capitalism being what it is, companies, including nationalised ones, have to be profitable to ensure their longevity.

For many, this was the real crossroads. Analysts who had once considered the whole profitability issue to be full of contradictions began to change their opinion. After all, if profit making is inevitable, how can it be contradictory? Forgetting the "criticism of work" they had undertaken during their younger days, some yielded to the sirens of the "the new productive model" (*lean production*), something that was supposed to simultaneously resolve the crisis in productivity and the crisis of work. Inversely, others sought refuge in their former convictions and criticised "the new productive model" as a new form of exploitation, one that was even more pernicious inasmuch as it was being implemented with employees' consent. They did not doubt its existence, however. The GERPISA, which used fieldwork to keep close tabs on developments affecting automakers, was intellectually geared towards checking what the two symmetrical positions (the fairy tale and the apocalyptic vision) had in common, to wit their certainty as to the emergence and inevitable généralisation of the "new productive model".

By highlighting the processes that drive the different models for profitable firms at a given moment in time and in a specific space, we showed that actors in a firm, employees in particular, are not condemned to suffer humiliating defeats at the hands of a single feasible profitable if its profit strategy is macro-economically and societally relevant and if its actors have devised a de facto

or explicit compromise on the means that are to be used (product-policy, work organisation, employment relationship), we revealed the room to manoeuvre actors have at their disposal, both at a macro level as regards the national mode of growth they can choose, and also at a micro level with respect to the compromise they can put together. Was this a finding we could be satisfied with, at both a scientific and practical level? Scientifically this was not an insignificant advance.

A serious macro-micro connection was created, where people in general had once been happy to project the macro onto the micro, or to extend the micro to the macro. Vague discussions on work were no longer possible, nor was it acceptable any more to take refuge in local descriptions. The discovery of a wide variety of productive models, like the identification of incoherent socio-productive configurations, helped us to better understand the diversity of work situations and employee practices. At a practical level, our results probably constituted precious analytical tools for actors, enabling them to free themselves of the pressure of a unique model and to have at their disposal an intellectual framework making it easier for them to choose a strategy and devise a compromise.

Yet all we did was identify actors' room to manoeuvre. Was this enough? Some consider the very idea of a "room to manoeuvre" as being scientifically weak. On a practical plane, is compromise definitely the best way forward for employees? How important is it that they have some room to manoeuvre? Does this suffice for employees' needs? Are such findings merely conveying, under the cloak of a scientific approach, a pale and relatively desperate form of social reformism? Even worse, if the rules of profitability we listed were to be applied, would they create strife amongst the various actors in a firm, and more specifically amongst its employees? Is it possible to affirm that other possibilities and perspectives exist for such actors? Should we maintain the position of neutrality that all scientists are supposed to follow, consisting of providing actors with analytical tools and leaving it up to them as to whether they want to use such tools for their own purposes? Or should we adopt the more modest position that consists of saying that unfortunately these are the only conclusions we can come up with for the moment?

Such issues may seem outdated, naive or to the contrary perfectly legitimate. In any event, there are at least two good reasons why we should examine them. Not talking about them would create a highly avoidable impediment to shared work. Besides from the fact that discussing them in the light of our findings would help us to avoid falling prey to considerations that are more general in nature, new paths might also be opened up.

*Do employees get the best results by compromising on strategy and means or else by battling endlessly for the best working conditions and employment guarantees and trying to force company directors (whose job this is) to devise new solutions so that the company can remain profitable? Was it not the intransigence of Toyota's employees with regards to their employment guarantee that forced the company's executives to invent an original productive model, one that effectively enabled them to offer beneficiaries lifelong employment? Yet we know that this guarantee (which was such a priority for Japanese employees in the prevailing*

context of mass unemployment that marked the immediate post-War period) and the regular career progression that came along with it were only obtained by Toyota's personnel because they made major concessions, to wit, a daily participation in the reduction of standard times, systematic overtime and internal mobility. At Honda, the employment guarantee (accompanied by the sector's shortest working hours and best working conditions) was obtained in exchange for wages and promotions being based on expertise and initiative, for employees' immediate participation in any and all product and production organisation changes, etc. In both cases, a compromise was only reached after a struggle lasting nearly a decade. Now, such compromises did not necessarily mean that everything would suddenly become hunky dory - quite the contrary, it was often the very attempt to strike a compromise (which was not always explicit) that created the conflict. In fact, compromises often engendered a state of equilibrium, an "armed peace" that more or less intentionally ensured the coherence of the means being used. Regardless of whether they were voluntary, such compromises were durable and served to weaken employees and unions' positions in the labour market. In and of itself, a compromise is not a guarantee of profitability. The means that actors agree upon have to be coherent. Compromises often did not ensure sufficiently coherent means, either because actors did not realise that the means they had found were not fully satisfying the requirements of the profit strategy being adopted or else because their respective bargaining strengths did not allow them to render such means completely compatible.

*Is compromise on coherent means indispensable to a firm's profitability and longevity?* The permanent reduction of costs in all circumstances strategy which Toyota pursued was only able to turn it into an actor capable of being rapidly and durably competitive first on its national and then on the international market (and thus guarantee employment) after a sustained involvement by employees in its cost-cutting efforts. As for Honda, it was only able to guarantee employment by getting its staff members to accept the responsiveness that is indispensable if an "innovation and flexibility" strategy is to be implemented - this being one of the few strategies available to late arrivals in a business such as car manufacturing, firms that have to find a spot for themselves despite the presence of powerful competitors who are already established.

A number of constraints are clearly born out of the search for means that can be coherent with this strategy - but does this have to be the case? There are scores of firms that have experienced episodes of non-profitability (sometimes for extremely long periods of time) yet which have survived thanks apparently to State intervention, the use of resources originally generated by other activities or juicy financial operations. Experience shows that such solutions do not last forever, even in politically sensitive areas like steel making or situations where the owners were very attached to the activity, like Fiat-Auto and the Agnelli family.

*Is there no choice but to seek to find a compromise at the level of the individual firm?* In fact, there are other possibilities.

The employment relationship can be negotiated at a national level, and then adapted by each branch (in more or less detail) before being imposed to a great or lesser extent upon individual companies. In this case, wage policies are not as much of a factor in inter-firm competition; employees are under less pressure and are not subject to as much competition from one another. This is quite a social advance for them, but even here a compromise must be concocted.

The difference is that this is achieved at the national instead of at the individual firm level. This should not be construed as meaning that everything will run absolutely smoothly – as a matter of fact, a compromise is not even always feasible at the national level, since so many more actors have to agree for it to be enacted. There can be a lot of tension between a nationwide labour union forced to negotiate average conditions that are acceptable to all firms and some of its “base”, unhappy with any concessions that are surplus to its own specific requirements. This was often the case during the post-War boom years. We now know that this way of building up an employment relationship was seriously destabilised when the different national economies suddenly engaged in full-scale competition following the oil crises, at a time when most were not prepared for this. Proponents of free trade and minimal State intervention stormed through the breach to subsequently obtain a complete or partial dismantling (depending on the country or part of the world) of the rules that had once governed the national employment relationships. Inter-firm competition intensified markedly, and the question became whether the practice of forcing all firms in a given space to accept a negotiated employment relationship was now something out of the past? The answer is not necessarily. The ravages of neo-liberalism in its currently unbridled form (including as regards capital movements) can lead to a constitution of regional spaces that are governed by employment rules that are applicable to all concerned. As we know, this is a key issue in European construction.

*Are employees prisoners of past compromises?* Sure, but they are not the only ones in this position and experience shows that they do not remain prisoners forever. Unless we are dealing with a mandatory and imposed pseudo-compromise that in any event will not last, such agreements are not one-directional. Under certain circumstances, employees are happy to be able to rely upon earlier compromises, even where they had never been entirely satisfactory. Remember the sudden turnaround in attitudes in France during the mid-1970s. Whereas earlier in the decade employees had wanted to break up the post-War employment compromise, rejecting the work organisation that had gone along with regular increases in the purchasing power of wages, post-1974 they strived to defend this very same compromise against initial attempts by employers and the government to decouple wages and living costs. Moreover, union representatives all understand that it is easier to obtain new improvements when a compromise ensures a firm’s profitability than when employees are uncertain about their company’s future. Last but not least, it is a strength to be able to demonstrate and affirm that profitability can only be durable if the particular compromise which is being built is acceptable (especially to employees) and based on means that are coherent.

This is a particularly strong argument whenever labour unions and employees find themselves in a weakened position. Moreover, there are at least three reasons why a

compromise is neither static nor eternal. It possesses a dynamic that modifies actors’ respective bargaining strengths, often in a way they do not expect. The contradictions it bears mean that sooner or later it will blow up, especially where it was initially set up between actors who were unequal and who each hold different visions of the future. Finally, it will have to be redefined anytime that changes in international relationships and modes of growth force people to modify their profit strategy.

*How much room do actors have to manoeuvre?* Volvo-Uddevalla exemplifies the relative freedom at actors’ disposal, as well as the dynamics and limitations of a particular compromise. First of all, heuristic and holistic production principles offer interesting possibilities. They allow employees working at fixed workstations in small teams of 2 to 4 persons to manufacture complex objects or undertake complex operations without such tasks having to be predetermined and organised at locations and work sites situated alongside an assembly line that is being run at a given pace – the system that has characterised industrial production for nearly a century now. The compromise at the heart of this choice has shown that it is possible to advance rapidly towards an effective inversion of the division of the intelligence of labour; and that employees can actually acquire a power they never possessed before in the production process, besides from doing something negative like going absent or resigning.

After a few months, instead of only being able to make ad hoc suggestions about some limited operation (ideas generally lacking in much value due to their proponents’ lack of familiarity with the consequences for the rest of the process, something that frequently occurs in assembly line work), assemblers were in a position to make proposals relating to product re-design, the purpose being to make it easier to assemble the product, thus increasing its usefulness to customers. This was because such operators now possessed a broader vision than ever before. As we know, “reflexive production” was abandoned after more than a decade of implementation. This happened after Volvo was taken over by Ford, although the dynamic underlying this compromise had already begun to stumble well before, starting with Volvo’s 1993 financial crisis that had first led to the closure of the Uddevalla plant (which was subsequently re-opened once the situation cleared up). The reason was not insufficient performance or the impossibility of generalising this type of production to all of the carmakers’ Swedish plants. We believe that we have proven, even if this remains to be discussed within the GERPISA, that for reasons that are more structural in nature “reflexive production” provides superior results.

The 1994 closure, senior management’s inconsistent positions and hesitations plus labour union tensions following the crisis of Swedish social democracy, all of these factors hampered the initial dynamic. The Uddevalla workers, whilst working to the deadlines they had been given, ultimately used the significant time-savings they achieved for their own purposes, hiding them instead of converting them into a monetary form as some had expected. They did this to further increase their control over the production process and product and to further reduce the division of the intelligence of labour.

Did the other actors in the company predict that “reflexive production” might lead to employees’ growing and direct involvement in the firm’s product-policy and strategy, at a time when labour unions in Sweden were already deemed to be wielding too much power in companies? Hard to say for the moment given the stage our survey has reached, but there is no reason not to believe that the “reflexive production” logic did raise serious questions about who should be wielding power in a firm, hence about the compatibility of this approach with the extant capital-labour relationship.

Is it possible to extend this line of thinking without any excessive proliferation of hypotheses or suppositions? This might be difficult, but at the very least we can mention a number of different ways of broaching this topic or researching it. The capital-labour relationship may have effectively demonstrated its historical ability to revolutionise production, techniques and lifestyles more than any other social relationship had done before, but it will not necessarily monopolise efficiency forever and ever. A ready-made example that should be studied attentively from this point of view is the Linux operating system (see the report written by Marie Coris, a doctoral student and member of our network) that has been designed, developed and diffused according to the tenets of the cooperative mode – and which specifically because of its cooperative nature has turned out to be simpler, more reliable, more inventive and quicker to develop. In fact, for certain applications Linux has become a serious competitor for Microsoft’s operating systems, even though nothing major was organised to help Linux force its way into the marketplace. Another line of thinking is that since the beginning of capitalism there are no durable or significant examples of an industry that has been able to develop without its technical and organisational choices having divided the intelligence of work in such a way as to control work execution and make the profits its expects - to such an extent that this form of the division of labour appears to be consubstantial to all industrial developments, with other forms ostensibly belonging to the past or being utopian in nature.

*Are some compromises on coherent means better than others?* From the perspective of the firm’s longevity, this question is not really meaningful – that is, as long as the firm’s profitability is guaranteed for a sufficiently long period of time. From the perspective of each of the actors’ medium and long-term outlook, the situation is quite different. Based on the example of “reflexive production”, note that a compromise does not necessarily postpone until some indeterminate date in the future any and all attempts by employees to set up whatever social relationship they think could satisfy them more than the capital-work relationship by which they are currently governed. Union strategy at Volvo was not clear and unified enough to consolidate and develop the compromise that was taking shape, and therefore to reveal all of its dynamic and social and political impact. We can say that the “right compromise” on coherent means is the one that not only does not close the door on the main actors’ medium and long-term perspectives but also the one that allows them to progress towards their goals in one way or the other. Clearly our analysis provides employees and labour unions with ways of assessing the situation in their own firm, developing an action strategy they can pursue in case problems do arise, instead of belatedly waging a losing battle.

Moreover, if thought through deeply enough, this will also allow them to put together, as other actors do, medium and long-term strategies that can serve as a framework for the compromises they agree to. This latter possibility does not appear clearly in the analytical schema in its current form (which stresses the profitability issue). This is a task we should be tackling in the future. Remains a final major issue that albeit idle in appearance should not be avoided - reality being what it is.

*Are our findings simply providing actors with means to accentuate competition amongst themselves, and notably amongst employees?* To be as succinct as possible, for actors in a company does the profit-making imperative signify that those employees who by coming up with a compromise contribute to the development of a profitable productive model are directly working to solve the problems that beset other employees, ones who find themselves at the end of their rope? Thankfully this is not always the case. Firms are the first to try to avoid competitive confrontations, especially when they are unlikely to benefit from them. Asides from entente-like agreements and arrangements between competitors (carefully hidden from public view even though they are very frequent) and despite all sorts of obstacles that have been raised to block the arrival of new competitors, one of the best ways is to choose a different profit strategy, in other words, not to get boxed into the same category.

This, for example, is how Honda could develop despite being surrounded by companies that were already giants, Toyota and Nissan. Hence it is possible for two productive models that are just as profitable as each another to avoid confrontation. The other main way of doing this is to make products for a market that is in its initial equipment phase, and which generally has room for a lot of actors before demand turns into the product renewal variety. Note another (partial) solution that consists of taking wages, working conditions, forms of employment and inter-firm competition out of the equation via branch-wide and national level agreements.

However, there is no doubt but that all this has a temporary life span, as we have seen. The strength of capitalism is that it constantly produces, productive organisations and employment relationships to be renewed. Its weakness is that it is rudderless and has no goal other than to reproduce itself on a wider scale. We all know the efforts that have been made to channel this drive and even to tame it, but such initiatives can only be successful for a limited period of time. This has been enough to convince some observers that capitalism will have to be replaced one day.

As we can see, solutions do exist to the issues our colleagues have raised. These problems are neither excessively general nor extraneous to the scope of our research. Quite the contrary, they call for further research. Our analytical schema, far from shutting the door on further questioning and possibly contrary to appearances, creates an opportunity to document this and to progress towards finding answers. In any event, these efforts attest to the will to go as far as possible towards understanding the social relationships by which we are governed. It is for this very reason that we are researchers.

## L'actualité du produit

Christian Mory

**LE MERIVA OU LE VENT NOUVEAU CHEZ OPEL**

Après avoir lancé sa nouvelle Vectra, Opel s'apprête à mettre sur le marché le Meriva, un type de véhicule assez original puisqu'il s'agit d'un concept de monospace appliqué au segment des petites voitures telles que les Clio ou 206. Alors que la marque allemande applique son plan de redressement baptisé Olympia et tente de mettre en place son alliance avec Fiat, le Meriva pourrait être le signe annonciateur que le printemps est là chez le constructeur, après un long hiver marqué par d'importantes difficultés, tant financières que commerciales. Le Meriva constitue en effet une approche assez nouvelle chez Opel et son apparition doit être soulignée sous plusieurs aspects :

1. Le concept de monospace est d'abord apparu en haut de gamme : le Renault Espace et le Chrysler Voyager ont été suivis de divers modèles dans la plupart des marques européennes (essentiellement les paires Volkswagen-Ford et PSA-Fiat) à l'exception sans doute de... Opel qui s'est contenté de distribuer des modèles américains inadaptés aux conditions européennes. Le concept a ensuite été conjugué en milieu de gamme avec Renault jouant le rôle de pionnier (son Scénic qui s'est révélé un succès commercial et financier), suivi de Opel (avec un original Zafira qui réalisait la synthèse du monospace et du break et avec la possibilité d'accueillir sept personnes à bord) et de Citroën (le Picasso). Le Zafira, avec ses sept places, présentait l'avantage de pouvoir mordre autant sur le segment des grands monospaces que sur celui des monospaces compacts. Le Meriva constitue véritablement la première conjugaison du concept au bas de gamme si l'on met à part les petits fourgons asiatiques (dont le Suzuki Wagon R+ qui a donné naissance au clone Opel Agila), parfois rebaptisés minispaces, et la Twingo qui se présente plus comme une voiture pour personnes seules que comme une familiale (la Twingo se situe par ailleurs sous la Clio alors que le Meriva est plutôt au dessus de la Corsa). D'ailleurs le Meriva, tout comme le Zafira, se distingue également par la flexibilité de la disposition des sièges arrière comme dans les « grands » monospaces.
2. La plupart des constructeurs européens élargissent leur offre dans les segments inférieurs avec des modèles originaux qui s'ajoutent à la traditionnelle « petite voiture polyvalente ». On a ainsi vu naître les petites voitures urbaines à faible gabarit (Fiat Seicento et Volkswagen Lupo), les petites voitures branchées (Lancia Y, Renault Twingo), les concepts chic (206 CC), les breaks (206 SW, Fiat Palio) et les simili tout terrain (Ford Fusion). Opel met sur le tapis un concept dérivé du Zafira qui se démarque nettement de ces autres concepts.
3. D'une façon générale Opel tend à multiplier les modèles originaux dans sa gamme. Alors qu'en 2001, celle-ci se composait à 80 % de modèles traditionnels, 7 % de modèles de niche et 13 % de modèles innovants, celle-ci se décomposera en 2006 en 40 % de modèles traditionnels, 20 % de modèles de niche et 40 % de modèles innovants.

Le Meriva et le Signum sont des exemples de ces modèles innovants.

4. Autrefois, les voitures mondiales étaient conçues exclusivement par Opel dont le bureau d'études croulait sous le travail et qui était contraint d'effectuer des compromis (en tenant compte par exemple des contraintes du réseau routier brésilien) au détriment des exigences de la clientèle allemande. Le Meriva est le fruit d'une collaboration entre les bureaux d'études allemand et brésilien de General Motors. On devrait voir de plus en plus Opel bénéficier du concours des différents bureaux d'études des partenaires du réseau mondial de General Motors.
5. Le développement du Meriva constitue une évolution intelligente par rapport au concept traditionnel de plates-formes. Cette évolution, baptisée de concept « d'architectures », consiste à puiser des organes et des modules dans l'ensemble de la gamme afin de constituer un véhicule original mais bénéficiant d'économies d'échelle. Cette approche devrait d'ailleurs être retenue pour les prochaines Opel Corsa et Fiat Punto (2005 et 2006) qui utiliseront de nombreuses pièces communes sans partager forcément la même plate-forme.  
  
Au départ, l'Opel Meriva devait être un Zafira raccourci de 25 cm. Comme cela aurait coûté trop cher, les centres de développement de General Motors en Allemagne et au Brésil (ce dernier centre est spécialisé dans les carrosseries) ont imaginé de combiner la plate-forme de la Corsa (partie avant) avec celle de l'Astra (qui est aussi celle du Zafira). Le Meriva reprend le groupe motopropulseur de la Corsa, la suspension avant de l'Astra, la suspension arrière du break Astra et la colonne de direction de la Vectra.
6. Opel semble avoir tiré un trait sur son approche du bas de gamme. Initialement, le segment devait être ratissé par deux modèles : la Corsa pour le haut du segment et l'Agila pour le bas ; malheureusement, la Corsa n'a pas été en mesure de se hisser au niveau des modèles phares de Volkswagen, PSA ou Renault. Le constructeur lui assigne donc la mission de viser le bas du segment et c'est le Meriva qui doit écrémer la clientèle huppée. D'ailleurs, General Motors compte produire 200 000 Meriva par an en Espagne et 40 000 à 50 000 par an au Brésil (à titre de comparaison, 510 327 Corsa ont été produites en Espagne et en Allemagne en 2001 et 381 315 au Brésil).

Le Meriva est par ailleurs capable d'aller chercher une clientèle sur le segment des monospaces compacts comme le Zafira a été capable de mordre sur le créneau des grands monospaces. Le futur Renault Scénic, avec ses deux configurations, courte (cinq places) et longue (sept places) sera donc confronté à la fois au Meriva et au Zafira..

Le Meriva doit donc permettre à Opel d'offrir l'image d'un constructeur sortant des schémas traditionnels et disposant d'une certaine créativité, tout en maintenant un souci constant de ses coûts. Néanmoins, le Meriva pourrait également ne constituer qu'un feu de paille sur un marché européen exigeant et l'originalité du modèle pourrait ne pas

suffire pour lui permettre de s'affranchir de l'image de banalité qui a collé pendant de nombreuses années à la carrosserie des modèles Opel. Il faut se souvenir que, il n'y a pas si longtemps, Opel avait joué la carte de la surprise avec un petit coupé baptisé Tigra, dérivé de la Corsa, et qui n'a duré qu'un ou deux printemps...

## Une année d'un constructeur

*Kémal Bécirspahic dit Bécir*

### SAAB

(réalisé grâce à la *Revue quotidienne de presse* du CCFA)

*Dagens Nyheter* du 19 novembre 2002 analyse les raisons pour lesquelles Saab et Volvo Voitures, deux marques actives dans la même branche, ciblant la même clientèle sur les mêmes marchés et ayant toutes deux des maisons mère américaines, obtiennent des résultats si différents. Tout comme le groupe Ford, qui a racheté Jaguar et Volvo pour rehausser son image, General Motors a acquis Saab, une petite marque susceptible de jouer le rôle d'un levier pour les autres marques du groupe.

Il aura fallu dix ans à Saab - depuis son rachat en 1990 - pour acquérir le prestige nécessaire. En 1990, ses ventes ne portent que sur 93 000 unités ; il n'était pas possible de pratiquer des prix élevés ne correspondant pas à l'image de la marque. Cinq ans après son lancement en 1993, le prix de la Série 900 n'avait pas changé, ce qui lui permettait de concurrencer la Ford Mondeo et l'Opel Vectra, dont les volumes de production étaient cependant dix fois plus élevés. Or, les coûts de développement de tous ces modèles étaient semblables - d'où les pertes enregistrées par Saab. General Motors a quand même fait le choix de continuer à soutenir sa filiale, dans le but d'en faire une marque de prestige rentable.

A l'inverse, Volvo est parvenu d'emblée à jouer au sein de Ford le rôle qu'on lui avait assigné. Il a dégagé l'an dernier un bénéfice de 4,6 milliards de CS (510 millions d'euros), Amérique du Nord non incluse, et a affiché des bénéfices sans discontinuer depuis une décennie - au contraire de sa maison mère qui a toutes les raisons de se réjouir de l'acquisition réalisée au printemps de 1999.

Le plan de restructuration d'urgence, baptisé Viggen ("foudre", nom donné à des avions Saab et des versions de voitures de la marque) que Saab Automobile est en train d'élaborer sera présenté en décembre. Il aurait été décidé en août 2002 et s'inspire du Plan Olympia de dix-huit mois instauré chez Opel. Le programme commercial Saab Unlimited d'implantation de concessionnaires dans des aéroports et de concessions de luxe en milieu urbain sera immédiatement suspendu en raison de son coût élevé. Un rapprochement de points de vente Opel et Saab sur des marchés-clé est à l'étude ; ce projet pourrait se heurter à la résistance de certains responsables d'Opel et de Saab.

Le constructeur rencontre d'autres difficultés. Le moteur Isuzu V6 à rampe commune de 3 litres présente des défauts ; la production et la livraison ont été stoppées et ne devraient pas reprendre avant mars 2003.

La presse mondiale cite en novembre M. Peter Augustsson, président: Saab Automobile devrait renouer avec les bénéfices d'ici à quatre ans grâce au plan de réduction d'un cinquième de ses effectifs en Suède. Il faudra pour cela atteindre un objectif de ventes de 200 000 unités par an, volume qui permettra de financer le développement des produits.

### **Pourquoi Saab et Volvo Voitures, deux marques actives dans la même branche, ciblant la même clientèle sur les mêmes marchés et ayant toutes deux des maisons mère américaines, obtiennent-elles des résultats si différents ?**

Cette année, la production et les ventes devraient porter sur 124 000 à 125 000 unités contre un objectif initial de 140 000 unités. Le constructeur vise une production totale de 135 000 unités en 2003. Des analystes estiment que Saab enregistrera cette année une perte d'exploitation de l'ordre de 500 millions d'euros.

Par ailleurs, les fournisseurs établis dans la région seront durement touchés par les effets du plan Viggen. Des experts pensent que la suppression des 1300 emplois chez Saab sera suivie par trois fois plus de suppressions de postes en amont. La réorganisation de la production en une équipe à Trollhättan, notamment, devrait se répercuter directement sur les activités de l'usine de ceintures de sécurité de Lear dont la production se calque sur celle de Saab. L'équipe de nuit de Lear est ainsi appelée à disparaître...

## Centre documentaire

Danielle Lacroix

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- TOUFFUT Jean-Philippe (dir.), *Institutions et innovation. De la recherche aux systèmes sociaux d'innovation*, Paris, Éditions Albin Michel, 2002, 352 p.

**Rapports, thèses et mémoires reçus**

- MENARD Séverin, *Étude géographique des relations entre les constructeurs automobiles français et leurs fournisseurs*, Mémoire de maîtrise de géographie, Université Paris X-Nanterre, 2002, 182 p et annexes.
- PLIHON Dominique, *Rentabilité et risque dans le nouveau régime de croissance*, Rapport du Commissariat Général au Plan, Groupe « Rentabilité et Risques », Paris, La Documentation Française, Octobre 2002, 210 p.

**CALENDRIER DES RÉUNIONS DU RÉSEAU 2002-2003**

- Vendredi, 6 décembre 2002 (salle 215)  
 Vendredi, 10 janvier 2003 (salle 214)  
 Vendredi, 7 février 2003 (salle 214)  
 Vendredi, 7 mars 2003 (salle 214)  
 Vendredi, 4 avril 2003 (salle 214)  
 Vendredi, 16 mai 2003 (salle 214)

**Journée du 6 décembre 2002****« Marchés régionaux et distribution automobile »**

Cette journée, un peu plus hétérogène, ne comprendra que deux sessions de discussion de travaux. La première session aura pour objet l'impact du Mercosur sur l'industrie automobile, la deuxième: les exigences des différentes formes de distribution sur l'organisation de la production. La troisième session sera consacrée à un bilan des trois premières journées. Les textes devront être envoyés au GERPISA au plus tard le 22 novembre.

- ✓ 11h00-12h30, Tanguy Jacopin (docteur de l'Institut des Hautes Etudes de l'Amérique Latine, Paris 3, économiste): *L'impact du Mercosur sur l'industrie automobile* (discutant Rodolphe Greggio, à confirmer).
- ✓ 14h00-15h30, Noémie Behr (ingénieure, doctorante, Ecole des Mines de Paris, CERNA, Centre d'Economie Industrielle): *Formes de distribution et organisation de la production* (discutant: Cédric Lomba).
- ✓ 15h30-17h00; Bilan des journées du trimestre.

**Journée du 10 janvier 2003****« La conception : usage des TIC, outillage, architecture modulaire »**

- ✓ 11h00-12h30, Vincent Frigant (économiste, maître de conférence, Bordeaux 4) : La conception modulaire dans l'aéronautique (discutant : Olivier Hirt, ingénieur, doctorant, CGS)
- ✓ 14h00-15h30, Pierre Bitard (économiste, professeur, ESSC Angers) : L'usage des TIC en conception (discutant : Pascal Le Masson, ingénieur, maître de conférence, ENSMP)
- ✓ 15h30-17h00, David Urso (ingénieur, doctorant, École des Mines d'Albi-Carmaux) : La conception des outillage de mise en forme (discutant : Philippe Larue, économiste, INSEAD).

## LA LETTRE DU GERPISA

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*Yannick Lung*
- P.2. Questions de recherche : (Notes des discutants des trois textes soumis à la journée de travail du 15 novembre 2002)
- P.5. Une nouvelle rubrique: Working on the GERPISA Analytical Schema  
*Michel Freyssenet , Yannick Lung*  
Whom are We Working For ?  
*Michel Freyssenet*
- P.11. L'actualité du produit : Le Meriva ou le vent nouveau chez Opel  
*Christian Mory*
- P.12. Une année d'un constructeur : SAAB  
*Kémal Bécirspahic dit Bécir*
- P.13. Centre documentaire
- P.13. Calendrier des réunions du Réseau 2002/2003
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