

Inclusive Entrepreneurship in Rheinhessen

Summary (ten lines max)

Who what when where

- We tested a revised and extended version of the COPIE tool on the basis of version 2 between February and April 2008 in the German region Rheinhessen (about 600.000 inhabitants). Coming along with two consecutive EQUAL-development partnerships, the regional and local agents developed a strong commitment to support entrepreneurship in the region. The overall findings for policy makers and business advisers about the regional support structure are quite positive with some fields for improvement like entrepreneurial culture and finance. The entrepreneurs predominantly express their satisfaction with offered business advice and training. A critical point of the entire survey is the current influence of EQUAL on strategy and offers especially. Because of EQUAL, the current results of the COPIE-tool seem to be a temporarily limited snapshot of the regional support situation.

Findings

- Policy makers possess knowledge about their field of responsibility, but scarcely have a detailed knowledge about the entire support structure for entrepreneurs. Averagely, about 25% of the answers of policy makers to the questions are "I don't know". We see this as an evidence for the necessity to extend the basis of information among policy makers.
- The offers of the two EQUAL-development partnerships in Rheinhessen filled a support gap for disadvantaged groups. Entrepreneurs who used business advice and training before and after start-up assess the offers as very important. Common offers, e.g. by chambers, were not seen as sufficient to match their needs.
- Even though the opinions of policy makers about strategy and support situation are predominantly positive regarding the statistical mean values, the answers of the respondents are often widely distributed on the scale.
- In comparison of the opinions of policy makers and advisers, both groups show a large degree of conformity.
- Information about entrepreneurship and support offers is available generally, but many entrepreneurs do not feel very well informed about support offers for setting up their business by labour administrations in particular.
- Unanimous is the opinion of policy makers, advisers and entrepreneurs that schools could be more active to sensitise for entrepreneurship.
- Whereas policy makers and advisers are rather satisfied about the regional media and public events for new entrepreneurs, entrepreneurs are much more critical about these points.

- The availability of debt counselling is an issue which should be improved from the opinion of policy makers and business advisers.
- The question about the easiness to take up a bank loan is estimated quite difficult by entrepreneurs, because of missing bank guarantees.

The process

- This version of the COPIE-tool was tested with 16 policy makers, 15 business advisers and 47 entrepreneurs.
- The description and analyses of socio-economic data and information was suitable for a short introduction into the topic. It enabled the identification for structural strengths and weaknesses in the region.
- Interviewees did not have difficulties to understand and answer the revised and enlarged questionnaires of the COPIE-tool.
- Interviews by e-mail, by personal interviews and by workshops were offered to the interviewees. In comparison with e-mail-questionnaires, personal interviews offered the possibility to collect additional information in excess of a questionnaire.
- On the one hand, workshops or focus groups respectively seem to be an appropriate method to enlarge the basis of information of each respondent and to work out common and most objective results. On the other hand, it is difficult to active very important persons to participate in workshops. The offered workshops in Rheinhessen did not take place, because respondents preferred e-mail-questionnaires or personal interviews.
- Additionally, it was attempted to introduce a fourth stakeholder group: disseminators and experts like members of advisory boards for the immigrant people or self-help organisations for disabled persons. Finally, it was not successful to collect enough answers or interviews respectively to allow detailed analyses and comparisons with other stakeholder groups.
- A second open field was included in the questionnaire to collect “possibilities for improvement” explicitly. It was possible to collect some new proposals for strengthening the regional support structure.
- The interviews with entrepreneurs did not allow detailed analyses of different target groups. For example, we did not reach a necessary number of migrants and disabled persons.
- It is very likely that two consecutive EQUAL-development partnerships in the region Rheinhessen had a strong impact on the opinions of the stakeholders. EQUAL offered the chance for a common large-scaled project which gave the opportunity and sense to assemble different institutions and organisations as well as financial power to set up aligned offers for target groups. Both aspects were predominant and assessed positively in the answers of the stakeholders.

- Because of rapidly changing policies for the support of new entrepreneurs, there is a risk of a temporal mismatch between the current support offers and the opinion of the entrepreneurs about support offers, which are not available anymore.

Ways forward

- The COPIE-tool can be used to sensitize policy makers and additional regional agents. For this reason, the results will be presented and discussed in a public workshop, probably at the end of May 2008.
- To facilitate the collection of socio-economic data in the future, it would be useful to compile the sources of information.
- For the description of the entrepreneurial profile, it could be worthwhile to collect data about the percentage of start-ups of unemployed.
- The current way of interviews in a single survey is not sufficient to reach all groups and a large number of entrepreneurs. A continuous individual questioning during or after advice and training seems to be more appropriate. However, it could be difficult to convince all support providers to agree about the regular use of a common set of questions.