

# **‘Re-creating an Entrepreneurial Spirit in Germany’: A Review of the Public and Newspaper Discourse**

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## ***Introduction***

Entrepreneurship is generally viewed as contributing positively to economic development. In recent years, different policy measures have been initiated in Germany aiming at increasing the level of entrepreneurial activities. Yet, it appears as if the entrepreneurial spirit refused to leave its bottle. The purpose of this paper is twofold: Firstly, we will review the policy measures in place to foster entrepreneurship in Germany. Secondly, based on the argument that discourses play an important role in shaping the perception of phenomena and the value attributed to them, we review the public and newspaper discourse around entrepreneurship.

## ***The environment for entrepreneurship development in Germany***<sup>1</sup>

This section briefly describes the general context for entrepreneurship development in Germany, in particular focusing on the regulatory context and support infrastructures.

### **The regulatory environment**

Following the European Employment Strategy, German federal and state governments run several projects aiming to *improve the overall environment for entrepreneurship*. These include reducing red tape for business start-ups, simplifying laws and regulations, introducing tax relief for small enterprises, setting up one-stop-agencies, or creating an internet portal to facilitate succession in established ventures.

In the late 1990s, the then Federal Ministry of Economy and Labour (BMWA) started an initiative aimed at reducing bureaucracy, simplifying business regulations and creating a lean administrative structure, mainly through a working group at ministerial level. In 2006, this resulted in a law relieving small firms from a number of reporting burdens (BMWi 2006).

At the local level, different activities follow a ‘one-stop agency’ idea, involving both the intra-regional integration of various actors to facilitate access to local administration authorities for new

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<sup>1</sup> This section draws on Welter (2004b, 2004c).

entrepreneurs as well as reducing the effort needed to obtain locally available permits and permissions. Examples of other attempts to facilitate the start-up processes are the initiation of regular meetings between entrepreneurs and administration officers, where both sides can discuss and clarify bureaucratic obstacles, or the designing of an electronic filing system for planning and construction permissions, which allows for access by different administration agencies.<sup>2</sup>

A natural outcome of most initiatives that aspire to reduce bureaucracy is to provide more online-services. These include not only online-portals (such as the ‘Startothek’ on federal level where entrepreneurs can access contact addresses and relevant information for setting up a business), but also access to downloads for applications (offered already in several large German cities) and an electronic transfer to the relevant agencies. This indicates the increasing importance of the trend towards *e-government* at the local government level. However, this trend also involves the federal government, as laws need to be adapted to allow for an extensive use of electronic procedures. One important step in Germany was the legal introduction of the electronic signature in 2001.

Another trend is concerned with establishing *good practices in authorities in dealing with new and small ventures*. On federal level, the then BMWA supported an initiative to create criteria for ‘start-up friendly municipalities’ (*Gründerfreundliche Kommune*, 2001-2003), jointly conducted by the former SME bank DtA, the German Association of Towns and Municipalities and the German Association of Rural Districts. Similar projects have been carried out on state and local level.

### **The support infrastructure**

The entrepreneurship support infrastructure adds another element to the general environment in which entrepreneurship takes place. Here, the German system has often been heavily criticised for its unclear structure, which – at least from the entrepreneurs’ perspective – prevents access (e.g., Klemmer et al. 1996). Basically, it follows the political structure of the government with federal, state and local governments, and an increasingly strong role of public and private intermediaries. The main political actors involved in entrepreneurship and SME support therefore are the federal state, the 16 states, local governments such as districts and municipalities and the European Union.

On the level of the *federal state* there exists neither a specific law nor a central agency. The constitution (Grundgesetz) indirectly defines federal support for new and small ventures as a joint task of the federal and the state governments, with the latter being mainly responsible for executive tasks, whilst the federal government is responsible for legislative tasks. The federal government uses a variety of public and private organisations to deliver support. The idea here is to decentralise SME promotion as far as possible. This is due to the ‘principle of subsidiary support action’ (*Subsidiaritätsprinzip*) on behalf of the federal state. A prominent example of federal state involvement is the public ‘KfW SME Bank’, which administrates financial support programmes, although entrepreneurs have to hand in their applications to commercial banks.

Most *states* have SME laws which, however, do not specify any support measures. Generally, these laws establish the responsibility of the state government to support small and new enterprises and to

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<sup>2</sup> The good practice referred to here was developed in the late 1990s, within the “Media@Komm” competition of the federal Ministry of Economics and Labour. Five Bavarian municipalities collaborated in this project. Electronic submission for entrepreneurs would have been the next step, although in 1999 the legal requirements were not yet established.

regularly report to parliament. The states also have different models to institutionalise their support policies. These models range from an uncoordinated approach (where a number of ministries and departments are involved and co-ordination often is problematic), to special state banks or investment agencies responsible for administrating (sometimes also for implementing) all state programmes. In the latter case, the idea is to provide a one-stop-agency which should ideally result in simple procedures and transparent structures for small enterprises.

*Local governments*, i.e., municipalities and districts, are interested in local economic development through fostering investments in their regions. This might include some support for new and existing small firms, but it is not restricted to this group of businesses. Main actors at the local level are business and economic development corporations, (partly) owned by municipalities.<sup>3</sup> They offer a variety of services such as company-related information and consulting services, advice regarding public support programmes or for establishing new ventures, generally acting as an intermediary between local administration and investors. Yet, although many business development corporations now offer orientation services for new businesses, their main focus is still on established firms.<sup>4</sup>

A number of new approaches to support entrepreneurship evolved from the mid-1990s onwards without losing momentum after the elections in September 1998, which ended the 16-year-government of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and Chancellor Kohl. The late 1990s saw a *general focus on supporting start-ups* in an attempt to increase the number of new businesses, creating new employment possibilities. But, several of these initiatives on state level simply bundle existing instruments and programmes without developing a coherent or new strategy. Most German policies for start-ups concentrate on extending and stabilising the financial base of new ventures whilst consultancy plays a less important role (although more recently there has been a shift towards integrated packages). The approach on federal level is more coherent, at least with regard to the institutional infrastructure.

Growing unemployment and increasing budget constraints forced local, state and federal governments to identify new possibilities for financing their SME and entrepreneurship policies, e.g. through public-private or federal-state partnerships. Federal and state governments have also initiated *competitions with an emphasis on public-private partnerships and networks* as well as using public-private juries to select innovative concepts for government funding. Moreover, several new instruments on federal and state level alike emphasize *education in venture creation to pupils, students or graduates*.

Another support trend focuses on *fostering women entrepreneurship* (cf. Welter 2004a). Most German support programmes for women entrepreneurs take care of (assumed) support needs in terms of financial or human capital, yet neglecting the impact of the overall legal and institutional framework. Most programmes on the federal level do not separate specific instruments for fostering female entrepreneurship; such specific support measures can mainly be found on state level.

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<sup>3</sup> Business development corporations (Wirtschaftsförderergesellschaften) also exist on state level, aiming at attracting foreign investors to the respective state and in opening up foreign markets for local enterprises. See [www.gfw-nrw.de](http://www.gfw-nrw.de) for one example.

<sup>4</sup> According to a verdict of the district court Trier (25.5. 2000, cf. DST et al. [2001]), business development corporations are not allowed to offer individual consultancy for nascent and young entrepreneurs, assistance in developing a business plan and in finding risk and venture capital.

In addition, *micro financing* is a recent (and indeed innovative) element in entrepreneurship support in Germany.<sup>5</sup> At the local level, with limited local outreach, some successful micro-finance initiatives have been in place for a number of years. Following an initiative of the International Labour Organisation<sup>6</sup>, the German government introduced this type of micro-credit programmes on a nationwide level during the late 1990s. These include the ‘StartGeld’ with loans amounting up to 50.000 Euro, and the new ‘Micro Loans’ which offers 25.000 Euro loans for new (less than three years) start-ups (for an overview on local and/or regional micro loan programmes in Germany, see Evers and Habschick 2001; Evers 2002). Both programmes allow for applications of full-time and (at least initially) part-time start-ups, thus recognising the diverse paths into entrepreneurship. Banks receive a lump sum for processing applications while the KfW bears 80% of non-recoverable debts, from January 2007 onwards 100%. So far, such programmes appear to be successful in reaching those entrepreneurs (e.g. women, unemployed persons) who perceive themselves (and often are) ‘neglected’ by banks. More recently, within the ‘Initiative for Small Firms’, the KfW took over the risk evaluation of new applications within these programmes, also announcing plans to develop a standardised micro loan programme for existing small firms.

### ***The public and media discourse on entrepreneurship***

We will now turn to the analysis of the public and media discourse on entrepreneurship in Germany. Broadly speaking, discourses refer to the practices of writing and speaking (Woodilla, 1998). “[S]ocial reality is produced and made real through discourses, and social interactions cannot be fully understood without reference to the discourses that give them meaning.” (Phillips and Hardy, 2002: 3). The analysis of media discourses can help us to better understand contemporary processes of social and cultural change in the entrepreneurship context (cf. Fairclough, 1995: 2). The underlying assumption is that discourses have power implications (Foucault, 1972/1991: 11), in the sense that they play an important role in producing social realities, as they have an impact on for example entrepreneurial identities, activities and perceptions (cf. Philips and Hardy, 2002: 1-2). Discourse analysis can reconstruct patterns of these social realities and thus identify the structuring of phenomena (Bublitz, 2001: 228). For a detailed discussion of the methodology employed, see Achtenhagen and Welter (2006).

### **Creating a ‘culture of entrepreneurship’ – political slogan of the 1990s**

During the early 1990s, the public discourse increasingly diagnosed Germany as a non-entrepreneurial country, criticising the economy’s lack of entrepreneurial spirit and consequently calling for a new ‘culture of entrepreneurship’ – arguing that otherwise Germany would not be able to manage the challenges of globalisation and (post-)industrial change. The call for a new ‘culture of entrepreneurship’ can be traced back to 1991, to the symposia held by one of Germany’s most well-known entrepreneurs and company-owners, Reinhard Mohn of Bertelsmann (cf. Mohn 1991). The public discourse sug-

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<sup>5</sup> The most successful example of micro credits, which has been widely copied, is the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh. In the late 1960s, its founder, Prof. Yunus, started handing out micro credits to the rural poor without asking for collateral. Instead, the Grameen Bank operates on a peer-group concept, which is based on mutual trust, accountability and participation of all group members.

<sup>6</sup> namely the ‘Action Research Programme on Micro Credit and Business Creation of Unemployed’.

gested that this perceived lack of an entrepreneurial culture – or entrepreneurial spirit – in Germany could only be remedied by political actions, however, without specifying the general concept.

Politicians and practitioners were quick to adopt the slogan, blaming the lack of an entrepreneurial culture for the economic problems to be observed in Germany during the 1990s. Moreover, politicians attempted to turn the slogan into viable political actions. In the late 1990s, this resulted for example in the ‘Reform Committee’, which was initiated by the Bertelsmann-Foundation. It was staffed with prominent politicians and researchers, and investigated ways to create a ‘renaissance of entrepreneurship’.

However, analysing this particular discussion in its wider context, Lageman and Welter (1999) illustrated that there was no agreement as to what might constitute a new ‘culture of entrepreneurship’, what would be ‘new’ about this culture, or whether there really existed a lack of entrepreneurial spirit in Germany. In critically reviewing the concept, the authors rather identified three main streams of interpretation: *Economic actors* (managers, industrialists, entrepreneurs and small business owners) expected an improvement of their societal acceptance and a substantial improvement of the general conditions for entrepreneurship. This was mainly related to the negative image of entrepreneurs (not: entrepreneurship!) in Germany. The second interpretation was put forward by *intellectuals*, who mainly discussed the potential of new information and communication technologies, expecting personal accountability and intrapreneurship to thrive in all parts of society and economy. Thirdly, for *politicians* the concept of a new ‘culture of entrepreneurship’ signalled a simple recipe to increase innovation and employment, by fostering more start-ups in an ageing economy.

Because of its non-committal nature and its openness to manifold interpretations, the concept was widely accepted in the German public discourse, by most social strata of German society and economy. This is a remarkable contrast compared to the British debate on ‘enterprise culture’: the British concept never became common property of the British society, economists were mainly disinterested, and critical sociologists scoffed at it (Richie, 1991).

For Germany, Lageman and Welter (1999) pointed out the surprising use of cultural ideas by economic policy, as economists and politicians intruded into a domain normally reserved for sociologists and anthropologists and which is difficult to integrate into modern economic theories. Interestingly, the public discourse implicitly picked up ideas from economic development theory, where cultural ‘peculiarities’ are often used as *the* universal explanation for underdevelopment (e.g. Elwert, 1997), arguing that ‘culture’ prevents the adoption of technological, organisational, as well as societal innovations.

### **Creating an entrepreneurial spirit – the media discourse from 1995-2004**

We will now analyse how this ‘political’ discourse is taken up in several important German newspapers, and how it has evolved over the past decade. The newspapers included into the analysis range from the leftist paper ‘Tagesanzeiger’ (TAZ), the East-German ‘Berliner Zeitung’ (BZ), the progressive paper ‘Süddeutsche Zeitung’ (SZ) and the moderately conservative ‘Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung’ (FAZ), to the conservative ‘Die Welt’ (Welt) and the tabloid ‘Die Bild-Zeitung’ (Bild) (see Table 1 below). A total of 1279 newspaper articles containing the notion of entrepreneurial spirit (‘Unternehmergeist’) were analysed regarding the characteristics and valuations ascribed to the entrepreneurial spirit, as well as to regulatory issues discussed within those articles.

	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	Total
BZ	4	9	13	11	7	6	8	3	5	8	74
Bild	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	1	1	3	1	0	4	10
FAZ	16	19	36	32	31	41	41	45	33	30	324
SZ	26	31	38	49	55	54	93	137	102	116	701
TAZ	3	7	5	11	7	8	6	6	2	10	65
Welt	0	4	1	6	10	17	20	14	18	12	102
Total	49	70	93	98	111	127	171	206	160	180	1279

Note: For Bild, no articles were available online in the newspaper's archive for the years 1995-1998.

**Table 1: Articles on 'Unternehmergeist' in German newspapers**

Whilst the early 1990s had seen decreasing rates of venture creation in Germany, both business creation rates and the media discussion around the 'entrepreneurial spirit' gained momentum from the mid-1990s onwards, the period in focus here. The political discussion of how best to foster and renew a 'culture of entrepreneurship' introduced above is reflected in the increasing number of articles around the entrepreneurial spirit. However, both the extent and development of coverage differ across different newspapers (see Table 1).

In terms of *article content*, many articles link entrepreneurial spirit to historic or cultural events, such as theatre plays or books. Political articles often discuss entrepreneurial spirit related to an international context. Less surprisingly, the discourse on entrepreneurial spirit mostly is taking place within the business sections of the newspapers. Here, it is mainly related to the economic and institutional environment, focusing on its strengths and weaknesses. These articles refer to a broad range of topics, which analyze, for example, the influence of tax policies, laws, and sector regulations on business start-ups, or which illustrate national, regional, and individual examples of entrepreneurial spirit. Several articles take a strong position towards a (desired) link between the creation of new employment and an increase in entrepreneurial spirit, thus reflecting the overall political interpretation of the discourse as outlined above. This applies especially where articles report on progress with the European Employment Strategy and the National Action Plan for Employment in Germany.

Interestingly, while the official, political discourse praises the entrepreneurial spirit as a panacea to economic problems, this is not necessarily reflected in the newspapers. This can best be illustrated by the example of the leftist paper TAZ, in which the valuation of entrepreneurship changes from a rather positive tone to a rather negative and even cynic tone over the decade under investigation (see Table 2 below).

1996	„More than 500 stickers and 250 t-shirts have been sold by the Leibniz shop since April – School with a hint of entrepreneurial spirit”
1997	<p>“When employers continue to be depicted as exploiters, it is not surprising that less and less people want to become entrepreneurs”, warns Stoiber. “Our people of poets and thinkers has changed into a people of brakesmen and impeters.” Stoiber does not appear to know about the study conducted by the Vereinsbank, which found that the entrepreneurial spirit reputed to be dead is in fact alive and kicking. And the prime minister apparently does not know that the statistical bureaus in Germany have counted more self-employed entrepreneurs than ever before.”</p> <p>“When Hans Estermann, CEO of the support agency Wirtschaftsförderung Berlin GmbH (WFB) calculates, he knows the missing variable: a lack of commitment. To get the real entrepreneurial spirit swinging, the WFB has presented the first modest results of its ‚Push for Entrepreneurship’ yesterday. The aim of the programme initiated by the economic senate was to coordinate and align existing consultancy and support institutions, explained Estermann. This led to more transparency within the offers of different entrepreneurship institutions that previously were difficult to find out about.”</p>
1998	„Social security enhances the entrepreneurial spirit. When the social system allows for a second chance, people are more willing to take risks than if failure directly threatens the existence of people.”
2000	“The question is addressed to a member of parliament of the Christian Democratic Union holding his first long speech. (...) Entrepreneurial spirit and social responsibility, liberality and interior security – he already plays the piano of contradictions equally virtuously as his mentor.”
2001	„Whoever is unemployed or poor bears the blame – and has not achieved enough. Gladly one can read at <a href="http://www.chancenfueraalle.de">www.chancenfueraalle.de</a> : "To be proactive, to show willingness to achieve and take risks as well as entrepreneurial spirit help you to become successful in your job! Become active even you!"“
2002	„Don’t worry sky-high numbers of company failures and lack of consumption – all banks will finance private equity. And if you happen to fail, you just contact the bankruptcy agency and social services... It is your own fault, you must have been lacking self-confidence, creativity and entrepreneurial spirit.”

**Table 2: Examples: Entrepreneurial Spirit in the TAZ**

At the same time, the official (political) discourse argues that an entrepreneurial spirit should become part of the (German) mentality. This would imply a necessary change in cultural values towards attributing higher value to entrepreneurship. If such a value change was taking place, it might be reflected in a change in discourse. This might not only be seen directly in the content of the articles, but also in the sections the articles referring to the entrepreneurial spirit are published. Indeed, the increasing number of articles on entrepreneurial spirit is not due to an increasing number being published in the business pages. Rather, the entrepreneurial spirit ‘appears’ also on political and cultural pages, albeit often not as the main focus (such as portraits of entrepreneurs or presentations of support measures or political actions), but within articles with a completely different topic. For example, in the tabloid Bild the term ‘entrepreneurial spirit’ is used to characterize a famous pop star who after her concerts still had the energy to go out (showing ‘entrepreneurial spirit’). Interestingly, here we can see no fundamental differences across newspapers of different political orientation. Thus, the tremendous increase in coverage – which is mainly due to more articles published on the political and cultural pages and less to the increase on the business pages – goes hand in hand with an increasing side focus, questioning the overall importance assigned to the entrepreneurship discourse.

Different *strands of themes* in the discourse on entrepreneurial spirit can be identified. The first sees entrepreneurship as a solution to high unemployment, renewing declining econo-

mies, bringing innovation, and letting people use their creativity for productive use. Here, the entrepreneurial spirit is represented as a medium of entrepreneurial behavior, which can be learned. The second strand describes success stories of individual entrepreneurs. Here, entrepreneurial spirit is an innate or, again, a learnable trait. However, both trends of discourse implicitly rely on a person-bound definition of entrepreneurial spirit which for years has been critically discussed by entrepreneurship researchers. Thus, there apparently is a gap between the public discourse on entrepreneurial spirit and entrepreneurship research results.

Yet another stream links entrepreneurial spirit to regions or countries, implicitly emphasizing the role different levels of culture play in fostering entrepreneurship. In the newspaper articles, this is reflected in characterizing different national and regional cultures by the presence or absence of an entrepreneurial spirit, referring to, for example, a distinctive Anglo-Saxon, Saxonian, Chinese, US American, Russian or Senegalese entrepreneurial spirit. In the same vein, an entrepreneurial spirit is stated to be a characteristic of a region, city, and on economic level a trait of an industry, company or investment fund. Here, the newspaper discourse implicitly reflects findings of national and international entrepreneurship research, which demonstrate the overall embeddedness of entrepreneurship in different contexts, be it organizational, regional or cultural ones (Johannisson, 1991). This refers to research that emphasizes the importance of regional factor endowments (such as human capital, physical and institutional infrastructure) in determining entrepreneurial activities across regions and countries (e.g. Sternberg 2003). It also refers to studies such as the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) or its regional equivalent in Germany, the Regional Entrepreneurship Monitor (REM), which call attention to the influence of 'soft' factors (such as the 'climate' for start-ups) on entrepreneurial spirit (e.g. Tamasy 2003, Sternberg 2002, Wagner and Sternberg 2002).

One distinctive trend emerging in the discourse relates to a lacking entrepreneurial spirit in Germany and a high entrepreneurial spirit in the USA. This is especially pronounced in the conservative FAZ, but true for all papers except the tabloid Bild. However, we need to take into account the distorting effect of September 11, 2001, because half of the positive valuations on the USA in 2001 were published after this date. Interestingly, in the years before the Internet boom, a high share of articles in the newspapers showed a negative valuation. The main tenor was that entrepreneurial spirit would be lacking in Germany but great in the US. In this regard the newspaper discourse obviously goes hand in hand with the political discourse outlined above. Contrary to this trend, the FAZ also displayed a high share of positive portraits of regions and countries, whilst for example the Berliner Zeitung mainly concentrated on portraits of individuals or firms. After 2001, and thus after the Internet hype, we can identify major changes. The newspapers printed fewer articles with a negative valuation of the entrepreneurial spirit in Germany, but they increased their comparisons to the US. Even more interesting is the fact that in the BZ we can observe an increase in critical valuations, questioning the need for entrepreneurial spirit, which goes hand in hand with a decreasing overall coverage, but also an increase in regional and country portraits. The FAZ on the other hand



showed an increase in negative portraits of regions and countries and a pronounced tendency towards a positive valuation of the key term in Germany.

Lastly, let us turn to analyze how the article themes summarized above relates to the *language used when discussing the entrepreneurial spirit*. Interestingly, the entrepreneurial spirit is voiced as being both active and passive. Thus, it is attributed with the ability to actively operate: it slumbers, creates jobs, and permeates society. But, other articles view the entrepreneurial spirit as passive. For example, it can be increased, exported and destroyed. This view is crucial for the attempt of increasing the entrepreneurial activity, as it suggests the possibility of externally influencing it. Nouns are used to further describe or identify entrepreneurial spirit. For example, it is specified as an innate trait, a male trait, a skill, and a source of value. While a number of these predicate nouns are supposedly meant to be positive, the entrepreneurial spirit is also viewed as the contrary to professionalism, fairness and ethical behavior. Assumed effects of entrepreneurial spirit are mainly that it would lead to a more dynamic, flexible, and wealthier economy, as well as to more jobs and positive market sentiments. Thus, this is very much in line with the assumption of the entrepreneurial spirit as a panacea for economic problems and the overall political discourse related to an entrepreneurial culture. The same accounts for factors that are assumed to create or enhance entrepreneurial spirit. Examples are a reduction of bureaucratic barriers, a better infrastructure, more risk capital or stock options. Lastly, factors the entrepreneurial spirit is related to are, for example, hard work, involvement and creativity, but also a spirit of adventure, German discipline, or clan politics and religious communitarism.

Table 3: A language view on the discourse on the entrepreneurial spirit

<p><i>What the entrepreneurial spirit does: The entrepreneurial spirit</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• arises out of distress, permeates the USA, permeates society, slumbers in everyone, creates jobs, opposes the quest for security, acts self-dependently, can be destroyed, can be lacking, can be exported, can be awakened, can pass on from business founder to company, can be mobilized and practiced, must be enhanced; is temporary, decreases with company growth, has increased in management, is attractive</li> </ul>
<p><i>The entrepreneurial spirit is describes or characterized as:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a success factor, a professional skill, a qualification for the knowledge economy, a competence in great demand, a virtue, a pioneering spirit needed by managers, a cultural phenomenon, a leading cultural force, a trait of male entrepreneurs, an innate trait, an aim of education, a source of value</li> <li>• present in ordinary activities, opposite of fairness, opposite of ethics, opposite of professionalism, neo-capitalist, not part of the zeitgeist</li> </ul>
<p><i>The entrepreneurial spirit leads to</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• increased innovation and dynamics, fresh ideas, a dynamic economy, flexibility and profitability, reduced misery, job creation, positive market sentiments, wild ideas</li> </ul>
<p><i>Factors leading to or enhancing an entrepreneurial spirit)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• flexibility and large imagination, risk capital, reducing bureaucratic barriers, better infrastructure, stock options, highly qualified labor, financial capital, knowledge and daringness; public support</li> </ul>
<p><i>The entrepreneurial spirit is related to</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hard word and creativity, leading to wealth; involvement, leading to self-confidence; willpower and spiritedness, creating an economy's spine; success and grandomania; luck and talent; economic cycles; competitiveness; initiative, achievement and risk orientation; high risk orientation and high resilience; independence of state, strive for freedom, self-sustainability and belief in market powers; adaptability; inventiveness; daringness; German discipline; spirit of adventure; clan politics, and religious communitarism; state support for investments and scientific genius; provincial pride and sense for marketing; aim for security</li> </ul>

## ***Conclusions***

The analysis of the public and newspaper statements underline that there is not only one newspaper discourse on entrepreneurship, but that the discourse also consists of many facets. Entrepreneurial spirit and entrepreneurial culture are understood in a variety of ways, not all of them reflecting an ‘entrepreneurial myth’ (Nodoushani and Nodoushani, 2000, p. 7), but also critically examining its components. Thus, there is not one correct and comprehensive definition of the discourse and its content, rather it is produced and reproduced differently by different social actors. This corresponds to Alvensson and Kärreman’s appeal for ‘discursive pragmatism’ (2000b, p. 147), which recognizes the various meanings of a discourse stemming from the multitude of social realities.

The increasing importance attributed to entrepreneurship is reflected in the increasing coverage across most newspapers. Moreover, the discourse on entrepreneurial spirit has moved beyond the business pages. With regard to (re-)creating the entrepreneurial spirit in Germany, the analysis illustrates that after the Internet hype newspapers’ valuation has changed, from mainly criticizing a lack of entrepreneurial spirit in Germany and praising the US towards a more differentiated valuation. The images transported thus influence the role ascribed to entrepreneurs and their identity, in consequence determining the extent and nature of entrepreneurship. Our findings also stress the importance of listening to the different voices in the discourse, as very different interpretations of the ‘official’ policy discourse exist.

With regard to implications for policy makers and actors involved in supporting entrepreneurship and business start-ups in Germany, our findings suggest that there is a gap between the aim to foster entrepreneurial activities and the way entrepreneurship is discussed in media. As public and media discourses influence the activities taken, a predominantly negative discourse stressing the lack of entrepreneurial spirit might set the ‘wrong’ signals to potential entrepreneurs; and policy measures as outlined in the first section will not contribute much to fostering an ‘entrepreneurial culture’. Similarly, it is problematic that the discourse ‘lacks’ knowledge gained from empirical studies in the entrepreneurship field or from practitioners experiences. Here, an enhanced dialogue between academia, practice and the public sphere is definitely called for.

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