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# Entrepreneurial Progress: Climbing the Entrepreneurial Ladder in Europe and the United States

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Abstract

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VAN DER ZWAN P., VERHEUL I., THURIK R. and GRILO I. Entrepreneurial progress: climbing the entrepreneurial ladder in Europe and the United States, *Regional Studies*. This study examines the countries that show the highest potential for achieving entrepreneurial progress. We define this progress as an entrepreneurial ladder with five rungs: 'I have never thought of creating a business'; 'I think about it'; 'I take steps'; 'I manage a young business', 'I manage a business at the maturity stage'. We analyze the influence of variables relative to the individual and the country on the progress at each stage. We use data from twenty-seven European countries and the United States (from the 2007 Flash Barometer survey on the spirit of entrepreneurship). The results show that many people in the United States think of creating a business, while Europeans succeed better in getting involved. The differences are due to the higher risk aversion and the higher probability of a business failure in Europe. The differences are also due to the fact that entrepreneurs in Europe are more likely to be self-employed than in the United States.

Entrepreneurial progress: climbing the entrepreneurial ladder in Europe and the United States

VAN DER ZWAN P., VERHEUL I., THURIK R. et GRILO I. Le progrès entrepreneurial: monter l'échelle entrepreneuriale en Europe et aux Etats-Unis, *Regional Studies*. Cette étude examine les pays qui font preuve du potentiel le plus élevé pour réaliser le progrès entrepreneurial. On définit ce progrès comme une échelle entrepreneuriale à cinq barreaux: 'Je n'ai jamais pensé à créer une entreprise'; 'j'y pense'; 'je prends des mesures'; 'je gère une jeune entreprise', 'je gère une entreprise à l'étape de la maturité'. On analyse l'influence des variables relatives à l'individu et au pays sur le progrès à chaque étape. On emploie des données auprès de vingt-sept pays européens et des Etats-Unis (provenant du sondage Baromètre Flash 2007 sur l'esprit d'entreprise). Les résultats laissent voir que beaucoup de gens aux Etats-Unis pensent à créer une entreprise, alors que les Européens réussissent mieux à s'y engager. Les différences sont dues au risque plus élevé et à la probabilité plus élevée d'un échec d'entreprise en Europe. Les différences sont également dues au fait que les entrepreneurs en Europe sont plus susceptibles d'être auto-entrepreneurs qu'aux Etats-Unis.

Esprit d'entreprise: le progrès entrepreneurial en Europe et aux Etats-Unis

VAN DER ZWAN P., VERHEUL I., THURIK R. et GRILO I. Entrepreneurial progress: climbing the entrepreneurial ladder in Europe and the United States, *Regional Studies*. In dieser Studie wird der Einfluss von individuellen und landesebenen Variablen auf die Progression durch die Stufen der Entrepreneurial Ladder in Europa und den USA untersucht. Die Entrepreneurial Ladder besteht aus fünf Stufen: 'Ich habe noch nie daran gedacht, ein Unternehmen zu gründen'; 'Ich überlege mir das'; 'Ich mache Schritte'; 'Ich betreibe ein junges Unternehmen', 'Ich betreibe ein Unternehmen in der Reifephase'. Wir analysieren den Einfluss von Variablen auf individueller und Landesebene auf die Progression durch die Stufen der Entrepreneurial Ladder. Wir verwenden Daten aus 27 europäischen Ländern und den USA (aus dem Flash Barometer 2007 zum Geist der Entrepreneurship). Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass viele Menschen in den USA daran denken, ein Unternehmen zu gründen, während die Europäer es besser schaffen, sich daran zu beteiligen. Die Unterschiede sind auf die höhere Risikopräferenz und die höhere Wahrscheinlichkeit eines Scheiterns in Europa zurückzuführen. Die Unterschiede sind auch auf die Tatsache zurückzuführen, dass Unternehmer in Europa eher Selbstständige sind als in den USA.



diese Phasen. Zum Einsatz kommen Daten aus 27 europäischen Ländern sowie aus den USA (Flash-Eurobarometer-Umfrage von 2007 über Unternehmertum). Aus den Ergebnissen geht hervor, dass viele Menschen in den USA an eine Unternehmensgründung denken, während die Europäer bei der Erzielung eines höheren Engagementniveaus erfolgreicher sind. Die Unterschiede zwischen den einzelnen Ländern lassen sich vor allem durch das Niveau der Risikotoleranz und Wirtschaftsentwicklung erklären. Das Niveau der administrativen Komplexität in einem Land spielt keine Rolle, wohl aber sind die Auffassungen der einzelnen Personen hinsichtlich dieser Komplexität ein behindernder Faktor.

Unternehmertum   Determinanten   Neuunternehmertum   Unternehmerischer Fortschritt   Administrative Komplexität

VAN DER ZWAN P., VERHEUL I., THURIK R. y GRILO I. Progreso empresarial: trepando la escalera empresarial en Europa y los Estados Unidos, *Regional Studies*. En este estudio investigamos qué países tienen el máximo potencial de conseguir el progreso empresarial. Este progreso es definido como una escalera empresarial con cinco peldaños sucesivos: 'nunca pensé en abrir un negocio', 'lo estoy pensando', 'estoy preparando el terreno', 'gestiono un negocio nuevo', y 'gestiono un negocio establecido'. Analizamos la influencia de las variables a nivel individual y por países en la progresión a través de estas fases. Utilizamos los datos de veintisiete países

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## Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank André van Stel and three anonymous reviewers for their helpful suggestions; as well as the participants of the Workshop on Entrepreneurship and Regional Competitiveness (Orkestra, Basque Institute of Competitiveness, San Sebastian, Spain, 19–20 June 2009). The views expressed here are those of the authors themselves and should not be attributed to the European Commission. For the first three authors, the paper was written in cooperation with the research programme SCALES, which is carried out by EIM and is financed by the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs. This study benefitted from a grant by the Van Cappellen Stichting.

## Notes

Note that the concept of competitiveness is surrounded by complexity and elusiveness (KITSON et al., [2004](#); KRUGMAN, [1991](#)), where some see productivity (growth) as an indicator of competitiveness (PORTER, [1990](#)) and others refer to measures such as (un)employment rates.

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Because country differences are controlled for (by including country dummies), it is believed that the self-perceived location variable is a proper measurement of location density.

Competitiveness is measured as labour productivity growth per person employed. The fifth section devotes more attention to this variable.

However, these differences vanish when unregistered firms are included in the analysis (CAPELLERAS et al., 2008). DJANKOV et al. (2002) found that countries with stricter entry regulation are characterized by more corruption and larger unofficial economies.

These interviews were conducted by the Gallup Organization Hungary/Europe, 9–16 January 2007. In many countries (including the United States) the target sample size amounted to 1000 respondents. In Austria, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Norway, Slovakia, Slovenia and Sweden the target size was 500. For background information on this data set, see [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/flash/fl\\_192\\_en.pdf/](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/flash/fl_192_en.pdf/).

In the original survey, respondents first had to answer 'yes' or 'no' to the question 'Have you ever started a business or are you taking steps to start one?' Subsequently, they had to select either one of the five 'yes statements' or one of the three 'no statements'. As a consequence, entrepreneurs who have 'completed' a cycle by

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Note that, given the data set, it is not possible to test for the direction of causality in this relationship. It could be that labour productivity growth results from start-up and young business activity, rather than vice versa.

The country-level risk tolerance variable results from the country average of the agreement with the statement: 'One should not start a business if there is a risk it might fail.'

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