INDEPENDENT FROM TIME AND SPACE? VIRTUAL NETWORKS OF WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS (INTERACTIVE PAPER)

Friederike Welter
U. of Siegen & RWI Essen, welter@uni-siegen.de

Lutz Trettin
RWI Essen

Lena Jacobi
RWI Essen

Ursula Ammon
SFS Dortmund

Recommended Citation
Welter, Friederike; Trettin, Lutz; Jacobi, Lena; and Ammon, Ursula (2006) "INDEPENDENT FROM TIME AND SPACE? VIRTUAL NETWORKS OF WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS (INTERACTIVE PAPER)," Frontiers of Entrepreneurship Research: Vol. 26: Iss. 11, Article 8.
Available at: http://digitalknowledge.babson.edu/fer/vol26/iss11/8
INTERACTIVE PAPER SESSION

INDEPENDENT FROM TIME AND SPACE? VIRTUAL NETWORKS OF WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

Friederike Welter, U. of Siegen & RWI Essen
Lutz Trettin, RWI Essen
Lena Jacobi, RWI Essen
Ursula Ammon, SFS Dortmund

Principal Topic

With the advent of Information Technology (IT) the last decade saw the emergence of several Internet based business networks, i.e., virtual communities which permit an intensive Internet based communication between spatiotemporal disconnected participants. The technique itself is seen as a means to create trust between the members of a virtual community and to enable joint activities irrespective of the location and spatial distribution of the participants. In this context, the paper discusses the implementation and use of modern IT in networks of and for women entrepreneurs. We investigate similarities and differences between virtual and ‘traditional’ entrepreneur networks, focusing on the importance of spatial proximity for the participants of both types of networks.

Method

Empirically, the paper draws on an online survey with 241 network participants and in-depth interviews with seven ‘traditional’ networks and three virtual women entrepreneur communities in Germany. We used bivariate and multivariate methods to analyse the data.

Results and Implications

Our results indicate that modern IT does not mechanically substitute spatial proximity as a success factor for networking and networks. On the contrary, our analysis provides evidence of a growing importance of spatial proximity from the perspective of participants as well as organisers of virtual women entrepreneur networks. Trust remains an element for successful networking, as became apparent in the importance interviewed members of both ‘traditional’ and virtual networks put on personal and face-to-face contacts. IT takes on a complementary role, in providing tools to better arrange face-to-face contacts. In this way IT may facilitate spatial proximity, through contributing to the emergence of local social capital and fostering the local embeddedness of entrepreneurship.

In terms of implications for policy makers and practitioners, our results indicate a need for network promoters to concentrate on offering sufficient space for personal exchange and meetings. Support for modernising and upgrading IT solutions for networks obviously is of less value both for network participants and promoters. In this regard, the paper contributes to the identification and understanding of the potentials and limits of modern IT applications for networking activities of entrepreneurs.

CONTACT: Friederike Welter; U. of Siegen, Hölderlinstr. 3, D-57068 Siegen, D-57068 Siegen; (T): 49 271 740 2844; (F): 0049 271 740 2279, welter@uni-siegen.de