

KMU in der deutschen Volkswirtschaft: Vergangenheit, Gegenwart, Zukunft

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Abstract

Empirical research on SME as well as policies to promote SME have a long tradition in (West-)Germany, dating back into the 19th century. Until the mid-20th century most researchers considered SME as an impediment to further economic development and SME policies were thus designed in the framework of social policies. Only the ordo-liberal school, the founding fathers of Germany's social market economy, discovered their strengths, considered SME as a solution to mid-20th century economic problems (mass unemployment, abuse of economic power), and laid the foundations for non-selective (functional) industrial policies to promote SMEs.

In recent times, SME perform below their potential in terms of generating employment generation, driving sectoral change, and innovating mainly not because of internal weaknesses but because both of a general structural weakness of the German economy and unbalanced economic policies. Predictions on the future size distribution of enterprises diverge: Strategic management theories, theories based on Gibrat's Law, neo-Schumpeterians and the sociological scenario analysis all arrive at different conclusions regarding the role of SMEs in 21st century economies. However, the common feature in all predictions is that the readiness for innovation is the most critical factor for SMEs to continue to play their pivotal role in the German economy.

Key Words: SME, middle classes, start-ups, Schmoller, Marx, Schumpeter, ordo-liberal school, innovation, industrial organisation, size-specific economic policies, Strategic Management, Gibrat's Law, neo-Schumpeterians, sociology of organization