

Sustainable Economy and Sustainable Employment:
Approaches to Measuring Sustainability in
Regional and Local Labour Market Monitoring

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(Eds.)

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FOREWORD

Unemployment rates in Europe range from around 5% in Germany and Austria to more than 25% in countries like Spain or Greece. In such a situation, it is clear that national labor market disparities are at the center of attention. The Annual Meeting of the European Network on Regional Labor Market Monitoring reminds us of the fact that regional disparities easily match national ones, in size, persistence, and importance. For example, unemployment rates within Germany vary between 2% north of Munich to over 15% in the north-east. As some regions enjoy full employment, the only chance to further reduce unemployment will be to address the situation in those areas with higher rates, and this requires regional strategies.

Monitoring and understanding regional differences as well as the structural factors underlying them is thus an important task in itself. It is also a precondition for better policy solutions with respect to the European challenges ahead of us. Against the backdrop of these challenges, it is difficult to imagine how a “sustainable development” of regional labor markets could look like in the years to come:

- With respect to the social and economic dimensions of sustainability, it will already be extremely difficult to resolve the macro-economic issues underlying national disparities. These, in turn, interact with the more structural factors underlying regional disparities, such as the demographic situation faced by many regions in Europe.
- With respect to the relation between labor markets and the ecological dimension of sustainability, there is further problem. Green labor markets are changing quickly and abruptly, for example as a consequence of discontinuities in government schemes to promote certain technologies. In regions strongly dependent on green sectors, this might create undesired labor market volatility.

Given the uncertainty resulting from these issues, further advancing regional monitoring activities is key to better policy prescriptions.

As financial institutions, regional employers and communal actors, the Sparkassen in the Federal States of Hesse and Thuringia are deeply interwoven with their respective regions. Consequently, they also have a role in discussing and addressing structural labor market challenges, such as those resulting from demographic change. Moreover, the Sparkassen finance and accompany the transformation to greener modes of production, especially in rural areas. Finally, they also have to confront the economic consequences of regional disparities and abrupt changes in their regulatory environment.

Our experience as regional financial intermediaries shows that there are at least three ingredients for a successful response to these challenges. First, a crucial pre-condition for co-operation among regions is to take the individual experience of each region seriously. Second, inter-regional co-operation requires a continuous effort to improve monitoring tools, techniques, and institutions. Third, the only way to address long-term structural issues in an abruptly changing environment is to work closely and continuously with employees, management and other stakeholders, for example within a system of lifelong education.

This year's meeting of the European Network on Regional Labor Market Monitoring contained all these elements: A commitment to take regional experiences seriously, a focus on improved monitoring and the perspectives of a diverse set of stakeholders. In supporting the anthology of the conference, the Sparkassen in Hesse and Thuringia, through their Sparkassen-Kulturstiftung, thus support an effort that closely matches their own experiences. More importantly, the anthology will hopefully contribute to better measurement and better monitoring. As regional employers supporting efforts to make our economies greener and more sustainable, the Sparkassen would benefit from these improvements.

Dr Ulrich Klüh

Director of Sparkassenakademie Hessen-Thüringen/ Savings Banks Academy
Hesse-Thuringia

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