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Rostocker Business Start-Up Training for Immigrants in Berlin

Exotic goods at the market in Hall No. 8 and solutions of striking simplicity in the seminar room: these are the vertices of the exceptional Business Start-Up Training for immigrants. The Hanseatic Institute for Entrepreneurship at the University of Rostock repeatedly holds this seminar in Berlin at the "Import Shop" fair which becomes the practical field for exercise for participants. Those are coming from countries like Russia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Syria and can be described as elite, they graduated from university and often are rich in ideas and above all they are interested in founding a business.

The next seminar of this kind will be hold 15 – 18 November 2006 in Berlin.

The seminar kicks off with an active round of self-introductions, a collage containing the life story and the personal aims of each participant. Creative methods help to extend existing business ideas in more detail, own strengths and weaknesses are checked and detailed exercises help to put ideas into practice. How does my idea become sustainable, what can be learnt from the failures of other business founders, how do I gradually develop projects and make them manageable in a business plan. The teaching methods are orientated towards action instead of theory.

Nevertheless the highlight of the seminar is the "Market Research"- Exercise on the "Import Shop" fair with its 500 exhibitors from 60 different countries. Which stands are the successful ones and what do they do different compared to the others? In what things are the customers interested in and which are the bought goods? The participants of the training seminar watch the exhibitors with the help of a manual and speak to them: How is business? Are you attending for the first time or what is different this time? What is the best business time for you? Are you satisfied with your location and neighbouring displays? What experiences do you have with German customers?

And a female participant reports the following: "Most astonishing for me is that the dealers treated me seriously as if I am a business partner for them. Therefore I experienced a lot more than being just the buyer of something. I would never have expected so."

Back in the seminar room: presentation of the results in a group competition and nominating the best. Very often the groups demonstrate goods they have bought at the fair during their presentations. But then back again to the evaluation: analysing the own presentation, strengths and weaknesses. How did one come to a decision and why? What could be optimised? Practical work and theoretical evaluation in combination, just like in business reality.

Obviously, the more bleak topics like legal form of a company, taxes, financial budgeting, funding and promotion are included in the seminar, too. But they are more background information and means for acting. Thus the priorities of the participants are removed. At the beginning of the training many are interested in public aids for start-ups and business. But during the course this is changing towards market, customers, and own idea development. And when this happens the seminar has reached its objective and what is possible in three to four days of training: an entrepreneurial point of view.

The idea of the concept is the integration of immigrants, assistance in helping oneself, even those who do not start their own business will benefit from the training. This approach of integration aid supports active participation in business life, the combination of ones own ideas, expectations and realities with those in business and society. The integration of immigrants and the founding of a business are at this point nearly identical.

The Hanseatic Institute for Entrepreneurship and Regional Development at the University of Rostock is responsible for the concept and the implementation of the training in close cooperation with the project ROXI¹ (The Rostock Business Start-Up Initiative). The approach was further developed and internationally oriented in cooperation with the BEPART² (Baltic Entrepreneurship Partners) network. The Otto Bennecke Foundation is cooperating partner of this project with its scholarship holders.



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