

Women entrepreneurship in Romania

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A*bstract: Considering entrepreneurship the domain with the greatest potential for creativity and innovation, any investigation on this field is recommended, in order to reveal new aspects that can influence the small enterprises development. From this point of view, female entrepreneurship represents an important source of innovation, only partially exploited or even forgotten.*

Keywords: entrepreneurial activity, women entrepreneurship, entrepreneurship gender barriers

JEL Classification: M12

1. Introduction

The introduction of the feminine perspective and the relationships between women and men in the analyses of sociologists, anthropologists, historians, psychologists, etc., as well as in interdisciplinary researches, brings forward social actors neglected in the traditional scientific discourse and contributes to the enrichment of the methodological and theoretical options.

One of the most gladdening realities of the present era is that the leading talents and abilities of women are acknowledged slowly and surely. More and more women in leading positions have proved not only that they can meet the requirements of their job, completing the assumed tasks, but that they make a change at the level of perceptions in what leadership and entrepreneurship practices are concerned. A large number of experts argue that the interactive

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and co-operant leading style, highly promoted nowadays, would be the traditional style practised and preferred by women. Despite the popularity of this idea, men are equally able to lead in an interactive way. Moreover, men and women are perfectly able to assume authoritarian as well as interactive leadership styles.

2. Research description and results

Our approach takes the direction of a reflexive analysis of the real state of the Romanian female entrepreneurship, as part of a greater study that aimed to reveal the real implication of the Romanian women in the decision making process, at the level of business, but also at the level of the entire national economy. Albeit partial, the study can complete the picture of gender diversity in business or any economic activity in our country.

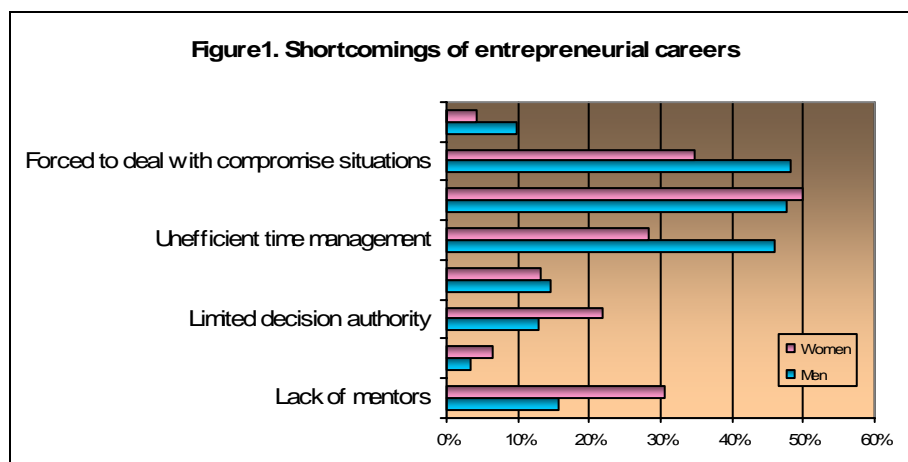
It has to be said that using *female* or *feminine entrepreneurship* doesn't mean we define a certain field of activity as strictly women's' appendage. The female or male entrepreneurship cannot be separated and treated as distinct activities. We are in the situation of trying to bring some light on those gendered aspects that influence the way business is conducted in a challenging entrepreneurial environment. Without judging business practices, or making considerations on the value of women's' (or men's') entrepreneurship, our attention is focused on entrepreneurs' perceptions regarding their businesses, how they see the future development of business, which are the key abilities they need or which are the most important shortcomings they felt in their careers.

The study (carried out in 2010) focused on the Transylvanian female entrepreneurship, included a number of 218 entrepreneurs (men and women), from three counties in the centre of the country: Mureş, Covasna and Harghita. The share of 21% of women entrepreneurs, in the sample included in the study, mainly corresponds to the participation of women in business at a national level, as it resulted from other reports of the sample researches representative at a national level. Therefore, our interpretations related to the general profile of Romanian women entrepreneurs, enjoys accuracy to a rather large extent, mainly because we aimed at the *qualitative aspects* of this profile (motivations, the level of studies, the necessary key abilities, gender barriers, etc.). Moreover, we can state that men and women entrepreneurs match this profile, the similarities being significant in almost all aspects investigated.

The instrument designed for our study was a complex questionnaire with 24 different items, from which we selected 6 items of relevance for qualitative characterization that we aimed.

Thus, from the data we got we can generally estimate that there are no significant differences regarding the age average of men and women entrepreneurs in the investigated sample; most of the women entrepreneurs perceive the influence of the business they run on their personal or family life as positive or neutral; the entrepreneurial motivations are layered in the same way by men and women: *financial independence, the lack of a hierarchic boss, and taking advantage of some business opportunities* ranking the first among the motivational positions; most of the subjects included in the study intend to develop their business and to maintain it at the current level (thus, there is a mainly positive optimistic perception related to the business environment, even under the circumstances of the current crisis); women entrepreneurs are ambitious persons, they take important responsibilities without restraints and they wish to control the environment they administrate (aspects also relatively homogenous from the point of view of the respondents' gender); perseverance and the ability of working in a team are considered the most important qualities of business women, which supported them in their careers, while the physical aspect is perceived as unimportant.

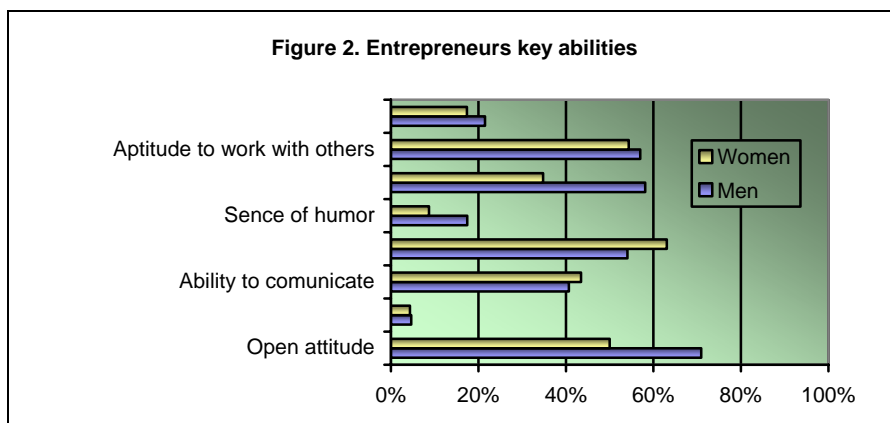
If the aspects presented above rather demonstrate the closeness between the two genders in what entrepreneurship is concerned, the *shortcomings* noticed by the respondents are clearly perceived differently. Business women consider that the lack of some real support networks between SMEs, the lack of models or mentors and insufficient authority for decision making, are the most important shortcomings felt in their careers. As shown in Figure 1, the differences between shortcoming perceptions are important for these three items, as the subjects of our study reported.



On the other hand, men are less efficient in time management and more frustrated in dealing with compromise decisions and situations.

Also interesting in our study was the investigation of the *key abilities* of the Romanian entrepreneurs, as the subjects themselves described them and put those selected abilities on the importance list. This was a manner of self-evaluation of their capabilities and strengths, pointing out the qualities that helped them through their careers.

Once again, the key abilities considered by Romanian entrepreneurs are not very homogenous as gender perspective is concerned (see Figure 2).



Three of these qualities, mostly linked together, are showing important differences by gender. From the female entrepreneurs' point of view the most important is the lack of self-confidence, which somehow has an impact on the other two qualities - sense of humour and open attitude. This important lack of a female personality was frequently brought out as the most obvious explanation for the modest participation of women in management positions, according to many researchers and management practitioners from all over the world. Less self-confidence generates fear in presenting new ideas, fear to innovate and adopt audacious decisions, a kind of reserved attitudes and behaviours in working groups, etc., all of them with negative impact on business volatile environment, in which normally the most courageous and creative entrepreneurs survive. Women are seeking therefore the secure path to success, even though it is the harder or the more difficult one. They are more serious and perseverant

in their actions, and this generates the perception of reduced sense of humour, compared with their male counterparts.

Possible motives or explanations for these differences perceived by entrepreneurs regarding their key abilities are the so-called *gender barriers* to business. According to a 2006 ANIMMC study¹ (The National Agency for Small and Medium Enterprises), the barriers to Romanian businesses are listed in two different categories, as follows (Table 1):

**Table 1. Common and gender barriers to business
(ANIMMC, 2006)**

Common barriers to business	Gender barriers
Financial difficulties	Professional stereotypes (smaller medium wages for women, difficulties in getting specific jobs, etc.)
Difficulties in finding proper contacts for business	Traditional collective mentality, plenty of prejudices
Lack of information/consultancy	Balancing professional and family/private life;
Lack of modern technology	Maternity and child care
Less qualified personnel	Stereotyping women promotion in mass-media
Pressure of taxation	
Birocracy	

The common barriers are listed by importance, with financial constraints carrying the greater weight in doing business, and bureaucracy the lesser. The gender barriers instead are listed randomly, observing that three of them are linked to traditional mentalities and stereotypes, while only two are very precise, pointing to family or private life of women entrepreneurs.

According to this barriers list we can have the picture of different gendered ways of doing business, in which female entrepreneurs are facing more obstacles, with important consequences for their lives. Some of these consequences are:

- Having less spare time because of the double burden (family and career);

¹ *The National Council for Romanian SMEs (CNIPMMR) also drew the picture of the Romanian entrepreneur, by investigating over 1000 small enterprises in 2009. Important characteristics of this picture, regarding the entrepreneurs' level of qualification, age average, gender etc. are available on <http://www.cnipmmr.ro/presa/conferinte/30.07.2009.pdf>.*

- A sense of unappreciated efforts, in business and family, not being able to fully dedicate in either of the two;
- The pressure of high performance (women have to prove their business abilities at least at the level of their male counterparts);
- Passive attitude regarding implication in political or social life of the community.

The fact that *gender barriers* decisively influence women's decision of starting or doing business is very important and was reported in many studies. For example, the prejudice and collective patriarchal mentality still act against them, being factors that limit their access to the entrepreneurial field.

The positive entrepreneurial models usually stimulate the start-up of a business and have an important impact on entrepreneurs; unfortunately women have few feminine models, as compared to men, because of their long exclusion from the leadership of the economic and social life, but also because women who enjoy success in business are not assuming mentor roles. This thing leads to the reduction of the positive effect on the decision of starting business of the potential entrepreneurs.

3. Conclusion

We certainly live in a patriarchal society, equally supported by men and women in Romania. Moreover, the history of gender relations is the history of changing one form of domination of men with another¹. These short remarks of Vladimir Pasti (2003) in his description of the Romanian patriarchy are interesting and provocative at the same time. They are intended to determine the research of the current state of relationships between the two genders, to eliminate the presumed influences of modernity on these, of the expected changes or, on the contrary, of the confirmations regarding the perpetuation of some secular social relations.

Our course of action follows this direction, especially by the research on the Romanian female entrepreneurship and this in its turn can offer us a picture (of course, partial) of the patriarchal society we live in. Any course of research on this direction may reveal previously ignored aspects or evaluated from a wrong

¹ Pasti V., (2003), *Ultima inegalitate. Relațiile de gen în România*, Polirom Publishing House, Iași, p. 173.

perspective; it may identify new causes that lead to unexpected effects in so complex and delicate relationships between the two genders.

Our thesis is by excellence the apology of talent, as unique arbiter that has to govern entrepreneurship and managerial activity irrespective the hierarchical level where it is performed. Talent is equally divided between sexes and it needs to be enhanced, because it is the only one able to make *capital dance*,¹ as Nordström and Ridderstråle (2003) stated in the title of their success book.

The changes at the level of our society are imminent, and women will be part of the relevant answer to these changes. As for businesses and their management, women are able to find new solutions, although the most suitable business model will integrate the male approaches as well as the female ones, without being a separation, or denial, from the model attributed to the *other gender*.

The studies that have been carried out up to now, which tried to reveal the differences in practising business by men as compared to women, begin to be irrelevant. On the contrary, the researches on *the contexts in which individuals can show their special talents* are added more weight, which can make the difference (for example; at the level of the organization), in a world without national frontiers, without linguistic or ethnic obstacles, practically in a world without limits regarding the possibilities of talent advancement.

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