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1 Introduction

Many social changes are encouraging more and more women to create businesses as it provides economic opportunity for disadvantaged groups, low-wage earners and minorities (Halladay Coughlin & Thomas, 2002). Women-owned businesses are one of the fastest growing entrepreneurial populations in the world, making a valuable contribution to innovation, employment, and wealth creation. Contemporary political and socio-economic discourse provide an important space to entrepreneurship with a focus on individuality, self-efficacy, and personal achievement, suggesting it as a solution to a diverse range of global challenges (Marlow & Martinez Dy, 2018). However, female entrepreneurs are understudied (Brush, Bruin, & Welter, 2009), although understanding deeply female entrepreneurship and the experiences and frameworks of it allows to help women and girls become independent and successful entrepreneurs, contributing to the economic growth and diversification, innovation and most important, to shape a more equal and sustainable society (Halladay Coughlin & Thomas, 2002).

One way of achieving this locates in the intersection between social mission and business activity. Social entrepreneurship has been unfolding as a space for growth and innovation, aiming at large and positive social impact being economically sustainable and viable. This type of organization has an enormous potential to help society develop towards an economy where social and economic progress are more positively and closely connected (Huysentruyt, 2014). Moreover, with regards to its intersection with gender, on average, women seem to favour social goals over economic goals (Hechavarria et al., 2017), social entrepreneurship provides a more egalitarian environment for women (Temple, 2017), and there is a firm stream of gender scholarship. However, there are only few reports of social entrepreneurship and gender. Additionally, entrepreneurship has still a male label. Globally, more men than women are entrepreneurs (Gawell & Sundin, 2014), and male social entrepreneurs are positioned as hyper-masculine heroes while women social entrepreneurs are supposed to contribute because of, and in addition to, the responsibilities of their domestic domains (McAdam, 2013). Therefore, this research inquires in a little discussed field, analysing gender, and social entrepreneurship in Germany and specially the potential of combining social businesses with feminist approaches to transform the entrepreneurial system.

This study includes a theoretical frame stressing the definition of social entrepreneurship and the intersections of gender and social entrepreneurship, concluding with the discussion of the epistemological and methodological frame, the description of the research design and methods. Finally, I present the results and analysis, as well as final conclusions and recommendations.

2 General Literature Overview on Social Entrepreneurship

2.1 Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship has been a topic of economic, political, and social importance throughout the years. It is known as an employment feature of times of pre-industrial revolution that has been growing and changing ever since (Kariv, 2011). Entrepreneurs are portrayed as the heroes of today's market, so that the global economy embraces them as the most significant force of economic development (Frederick, O'Connor, & Kuratko, 2018), and the predominant form of business organization. The OECD (2016) states that in all countries, between 70% and 95% of all firms are micro-enterprises¹. Moreover, start-ups² with employees, represent between 20% and 35% of all employing firms in the OECD area.

'In most countries, entrepreneurship is emerging as the major factor paving the way of economic development, by having a synergistic impact through job creation, innovation, helping to increase female, ethnic and minority participation in the workforce and alleviating local poverty in inner cities and suburban areas' (Kariv, 2011, p. 2).

The entrance of new enterprises in a market influences the processes of growth and renovation of the economy, invigorating the competition, creating employment, causing the exit or adaptation of enterprises, and promoting structural change and economic growth (Pott & Pott, 2012). Moreover, its study and practice are a way for achieving greater social justice and fairness and as such, striving for social beneficial and sustainable outcomes that lead to human flourishing. In this way, the perceived divide between society and economy is artificial, as they are inseparable. The economy is an invention of society, so that it can and should be reinvented to guarantee the two are compatible (Clark Muntean & Ozkazanc-Pan, 2015). This makes addressing social issues through entrepreneurship a natural fit (Kickul & Lyons, 2016). One alternative to achieve this is through social entrepreneurship. Thus, next, I present the definition of entrepreneurship as a foundation for the following conceptualization of social entrepreneurship.

¹ Micro-enterprises have less than ten employees

² Start-ups are up to two years old

2.1.1 Origin and Definition of Entrepreneurship

Widespread conceptions of entrepreneurship have evolved over time and these different understandings reflect its history; a history that does not propose a coherent and clear theoretical framework (Ricketts, 2008). However, the description of the origin and brief history of the concept of entrepreneurship and the progress of the different approaches follow next.

Anthropology studies have shown that entrepreneurial wealth creation has existed for millennia, such as the Phoenicia in the 11th century BCE, a nation of merchants and traders. Whereas in Muslim communities, trade and commerce were allowed and compensated, in Europe in the Middle Ages wealth and power came from military conquest. Moving from a feudal economy to nascent capitalism, merchant entrepreneurs became major players in European politics (Frederick et al., 2018). ‘The whole enterprise may have been statist at heart, but it relied on people to develop overseas markets, to build great trading companies, to strengthen domestic industry and to generate a large tax base’ (Ricketts, 2008, p. 36).

The term entrepreneur comes from the French verb ‘entreprendre’ which means ‘to begin, tackle, undertake’. The word appeared for the first time in the 1437 in the *Dictionnaire de la langue française*, commonly meaning ‘celui qui entreprend quelque chose’, referring to a person who is active and achieves something. Many French authors referred to this term during the medieval period, often in connection with war-like activities or with someone who is tough and willing to risk his life and fortune (Blundel, Lockett, & Wang, 2018; Landström, 2005). The first official use of the concept was in the 17th century, by a Parisian banker and economist, Richard Cantillon (1680-1734) who introduced the term entrepreneur with his ‘*Essai sur la Nature du Commerce en général*’ and presented his first definition of entrepreneurship as self-employment of any kind taking a financial risk (Blundel et al., 2018). It was however the agricultural and industrial revolutions of the 18th and 19th centuries that finally produced the modern multi-faceted image of the entrepreneur. Entrepreneurship represented in the 19th century a new social phenomenon, which derived in the idea of the heroic entrepreneur. In the 20th century, the entrepreneurship trend initially decreased as large-scale corporations started establishing their business more managerial than entrepreneurial. Later in the century, some industries, like computer technology, re-established entrepreneurship (Ricketts, 2008).

One of the economists mostly referred to in entrepreneurship literature is Joseph Alois Schumpeter (1883 – 1950), who was the first to emphasise the role of innovation in entrepreneurship (Kariv, 2011), and who embossed the term ‘creative destruction’, assuring that capitalism is a form of continuous economic change, where new substitute old, through processes of creative destruction (De, 2005). Throughout history many other economists and theorists

have been developing the understanding of entrepreneurship. In general, these tend to be grouped into three main streams of research, which include a focus on the results of entrepreneurship, the causes of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial management (Austin, Stevenson, & Wei-Skillern, 2006). Methodological and theoretical disagreements are still current, and a general theory of entrepreneurship is not officially available (Ricketts, 2008), as entrepreneurship is studied from broad disciplinary perspectives, such as psychology, sociology and anthropology, economics, historical studies, and political science (Blundel et al., 2018). The phenomenon has been studied focussing on a macro level (social, cultural, financial, displacement and ecological aspects) or on a micro level (traits, venture opportunity and strategic planning aspects) (Frederick et al., 2018).

Entrepreneurship is associated nowadays with many different qualities and it is until now not clearly defined (Frederick et al., 2018). Thus, the OECD-Eurostat Entrepreneurship Indicators Programme (EIP) defines entrepreneurship as the

‘phenomenon associated with entrepreneurial activity, which is the enterprising human action in pursuit of the generation of value, through the creation or expansion of economic activity, by identifying and exploiting new products, processes or markets. In this sense, entrepreneurship is a phenomenon that manifests itself throughout the economy and in many different forms with many different outcomes, not always related to the creation of financial wealth’ (OECD, 2016, p. 12).

A general and broad definition, that includes the recognition of opportunities, as well as their translation into marketable ideas and value creation, assuming risk and implementation, underlining innovation, comes from Frederick et al. (2018, p. 8):

‘An entrepreneur today is considered to be a social or business innovator who recognises and seizes opportunities; converts those opportunities into marketable ideas, adds value through time, effort, money or skills; assumes the risks of the competitive marketplace to implement these ideas; and realises the rewards from those efforts’.

Therefore, as a summarized way of defining entrepreneurship for the present dissertation, the concept is understood as: ‘an undertaking, embedded in a social, cultural, economic and political context, where an individual or team discover and evaluate opportunities or their own visions and ideas and bring them into reality by creating something innovative, generating economic and social value’.

This definition underlines that the phenomenon of entrepreneurship occurs within a certain context, influencing and being influenced by it. It includes an undertaking, which means taking concrete action, referring to the agency of the individual or the team. This undertaking comprises discovering and therefore identifying, evaluating, and bringing into reality opportunities or the own visions and ideas. Bringing them to reality comprehends creating something