

# Collaborative Entrepreneurship

The case of female entrepreneurs in Luxembourg

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# Research project context

2 women entrepreneurs:

- SME - 300 employees - commerce & distribution sector
- Solo entrepreneur - conception of textile products

→ Met 10 years ago in a female network in Luxembourg

→ Built a business partnership, in order to get an important contract at the European level

→ Jointly bought a key commercial activity in Luxembourg, and manage it together

# Contributions

- Female networks as a source of business opportunities, through strong links and long-term collaborations
- Collaborative entrepreneurship as a business model based on complementarity, joint innovation, and economic and social value

# Women's Entrepreneurship and Female Networks

## What is reported in the literature?

- Women tend to take a holistic view and see their businesses as an integrated network of relationships
- In spite of this, characteristics of their networks are presented as detrimental for business success
  - Strong ties
  - Relational, 'soft' approaches
  - Female composition
  - Small number of over-invested contacts

# Collaboration in Entrepreneurship

## What is said in the literature?

- 4 ways to pursue opportunities (Ebbers, 2013):
  - Create a new concept, venture or business
  - Sell the idea to another entrepreneur
  - Share the information with others, who are in a better position to exploit the opportunity
    - Without a direct benefit (*tertius iungens*)
    - With a direct benefit as an intermediary (*tertius gaudens*)
  - **Collaborate with other entrepreneurs who have complementary resources**

# Research questions

- How do entrepreneurs build and develop business collaborations over time? (antecedents/process)
- How does the collaborative practice shape entrepreneurial success? (outcomes)
- What is the role of female networks in the building and development of business collaborations?

# Research methodology

- Longitudinal study of a in-depth case study: a business collaboration between two women entrepreneurs
  - Participant observation (meetings, networks, events...)
  - Document analysis (contracts, websites, media...)
  - Individual interviews with women entrepreneurs and key stakeholders
  - Joint interviews (longitudinal dimension)
- Complementary qualitative interviews with 10 men and women entrepreneurs working in collaboration

# The case

Sofia identifies the opportunity, but lack of resources

Calls Françoise:

- financial capacity
- market penetration
- 10-year relationship
- Mutual trust

Partnership

- high risk project
- strong competition

They win the contract

## Complementary competences and roles

Sofia 'the scientific artist'	Françoise 'the warrior accountant'
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Knowledge of the sector and creativity</li></ul> → Conception, design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Financial capacity</li><li>• Feels the potential, risk-taking propensity</li></ul> → Financial resources, guarantee
→ Negotiation of the production prices	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Local and international network</li></ul> → Partner search	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Maternal language and country culture</li><li>• Local market penetration</li></ul> → Lobbying
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Rigor, diplomacy, commercial ability:</li></ul> → Operational tasks, coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Expertise in accounting, finance, legal and administrative matters</li></ul>

# Collaboration antecedents

## Success factors

- Shared objectives, common mission
  - Some individual objectives (e.g. market penetration)
  - Know each other's interests, 'win-win'
- Shared values
  - Business and social values
- Transparency
  - Clear definition of respective objectives, roles and interests
- Complementarity of competences and roles
  - No ego, no competition

# Interview quotes

*On a cherché à **se compléter**, et on n'a pas cherché à se concurrencer, pas la surenchère qu'il y a chez les hommes. Les femmes ne sont **pas dans le pouvoir**. J'ai l'impression qu'ils cherchent toujours à gagner, alors qu'avec Sofia, c'est franc, ouvert, open book.*

*Les femmes regardent **beaucoup plus loin** [...] Une négociation, ça veut dire **non ego**, alors qu'ils sont dans l'ego, c'est 'je veux avoir raison'. Tandis que avec les femmes on fait de la négociation, parce que je vois dans 10 ans.*

# Collaboration development

- Long-term vision, seen as specific to women
- Importance of the relationship duration
- Progressive development of the collaboration
  - Meeting via a female network 10 years ago
  - Client-Supplier relationship (under conditions first, then products in the shop)
  - Joint collections
  - Business partnership and joint management of the punctual European project
  - Jointly bought a key commercial activity in Luxembourg and joint management
  - ...

# Interview quotes

*Je pense qu'on n'aurait pas fait ce dossier si on n'avait pas eu un **background de 10 ans**, voir comment on travaillait*

*On a **appris** à s'apprécier*

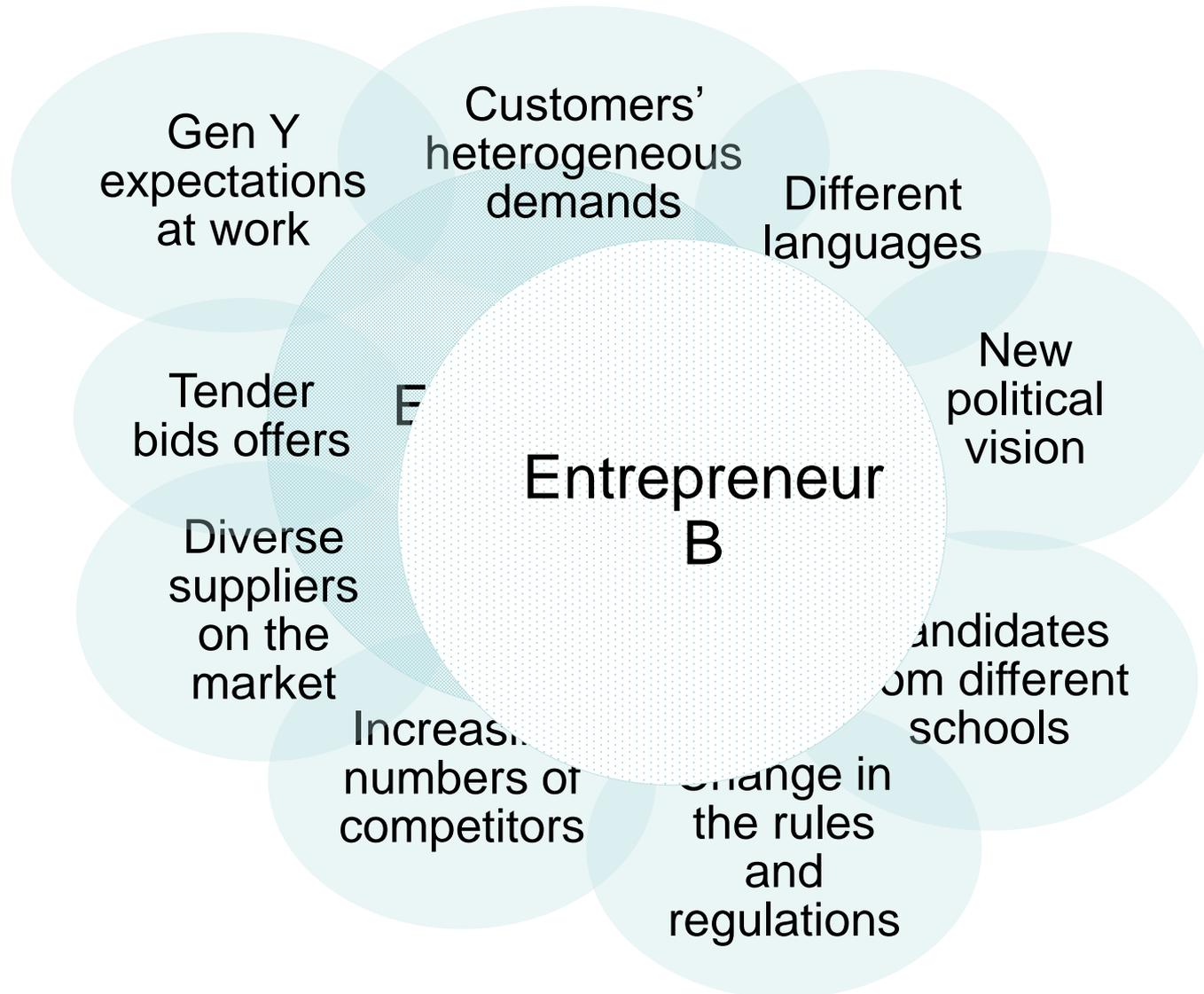
*On voit la fin, le **résultat** à atteindre,  
puis on rembobine*

*Il faut toujours **demander plus**, ne pas s'arrêter,  
ce sont les **projets** qui font vivre un partenariat*

# Collaboration outcomes

- Enlarging the perspective on the complex and rapidly changing environment
- Co-creating innovation at the intersection of different worlds
- Shaping the environment, with economic as well as social impact

# Collaboration: Enlarging the perspective

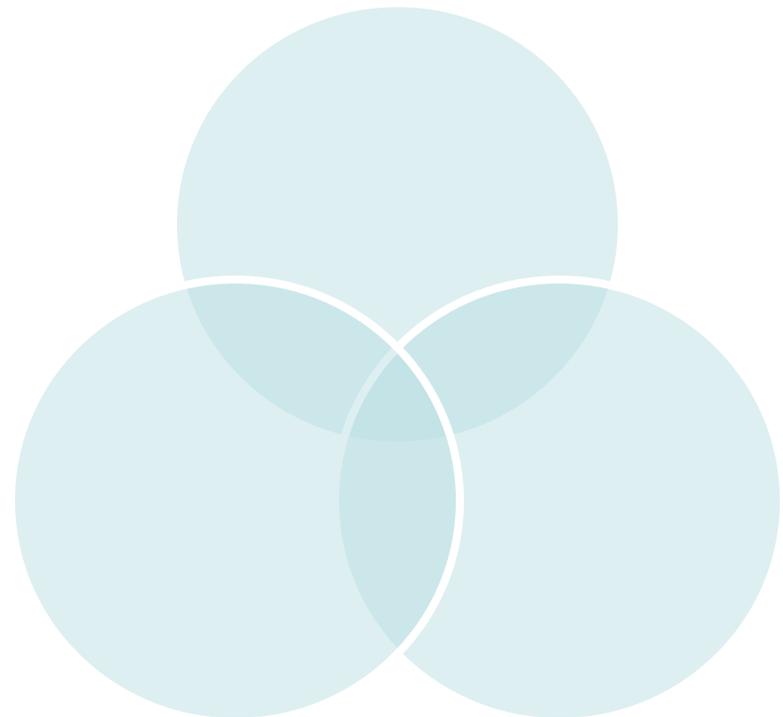


# Collaboration: Co-creating innovation

- Collaborative entrepreneurs exploit opportunities at the intersection between their different worlds

## → **Co-create innovation**

- New products & services
- New business models
- Improved products & services
- New clients



# Collaboration: Economic and Social impact

- Collaborative entrepreneurship leads to a stronger shaping of the environment
- Women entrepreneurs mobilize their resources to create **social** as well as **economic** added value
  - Economic performance
  - Products and services that make sense for the client
  - Longevity of relationships, that bring new opportunities
  - Development of diverse actors of society (youth, women, employees...) through 'collaborative communities'
  - Transmission of the entrepreneurial spirit

*« It is a puzzle that everyone contributes to build; it evolves, and we do not know where it ends »*

# The business case for female networks (I)

- Difficulties of women entrepreneurs in 'mixed' networks
  - Short term vision only, immediate profits
  - Larger businesses, risks of absorption
  - Less time for informal exchanges
  - Competition, ego
    - « *il faut se créer sa distance cravate* »
  - Increased time required to become legitimate
    - « *Entre femmes on a la parole tout de suite, avec un homme on doit se battre pour l'avoir* »

# The business case for female networks (II)

- Create business opportunities
- Bring solutions, « business accelerator »
- Female role models
- Fighting against stereotypes
- Support the socio-professional integration in society
- Mixed network perceived as more dynamic; female networks need to mature
  - « *on gagne en maturité, on apprend, on s'approprié les bons côtés des hommes, tandis que dans l'autre sens moins* »

# Conclusive comments

- Female networks can lead to long-term collaborations and are a source of business opportunities
  - Strong links, relational dimension, trust
  - Linked with gendered perceptions
- Entrepreneurs in collaboration:
  - **Move quickly and flexibly** in the environment and cover the market diversity
  - **Co-create innovation and novelty** through pursuing opportunities at the intersection of their various worlds
  - **Have economic and social impact**, create new trends, business opportunities and answers to societal challenges

***Thank you for your attention***

***Any feedback welcomed !***