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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Complementary competences and roles</th>
<th>Sofia ‘the scientific artist’</th>
<th>Françoise ‘the warrior accountant’</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Knowledge of the sector and creativity</td>
<td>Conception, design</td>
<td>• Financial capacity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Negotiation of the production prices</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Feels the potential, risk-taking propensity</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Local and international network</td>
<td>Partner search</td>
<td>→ Financial resources, guarantee</td>
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<tr>
<td>→ Lobbying</td>
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<td>• Maternal language and country culture</td>
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<td>• Rigor, diplomacy, commercial ability:</td>
<td>Operational tasks, coordination</td>
<td>• Local market penetration</td>
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<tr>
<td>→ • Expertise in accounting, finance, legal and administrative matters</td>
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<td>→ Lobbying</td>
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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
  – …
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

Entrepreneur A
- Customers’ heterogeneous demands
- Different languages
- New political vision
- Candidates from different schools
- Change in the rules and regulations
- Increasing numbers of competitors
- Diverse suppliers on the market
- Tender bids offers
- Gen Y expectations at work

Entrepreneur B
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’approprie 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!