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Document name: **03- Study and analysis of the professional skills of business women, applicable to housewives-Italy**
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**Employment and Women on the 21st century in Europe:
From Household economy to SME economy (Small and Medium enterprises) – MUPYME Project**

03.- Study and analysis of the professional skills of business women, applicable to housewives – Syntesis Report -Italy

General information

This report aims to summarize the analysis of the cases of five women entrepreneurs made in the months of April, May and June 2016 through semi-structured interviews of the European MUPYME project.

The entrepreneurs were chosen as representatives of the Italian and local women business enterprise; the sectors where women are working more in Tuscany are catering, clothing, education, culture and tourism.

All the interviewed entrepreneurs have a higher degree, 4 graduated, 1 has a diploma; three are Tuscan, one of the center of Italy and one from the North.

They have between 43 and 65 years, and represent two different generations.

Only one works with her husband, the others are separated or single. All have devoted much of their private life to the work and complain about the little time available to spend in other things besides work in the profession of entrepreneur.

They had to follow complex ways in which family and friends have been essential for them to develop and expand their businesses or to support them economically.

The interviews went on between two and four hours and were held in a positive and friendly environment in which entrepreneurs were telling their own stories with pleasure, and also the key moments of their choices and career paths.

All agreed that they are very happy to be able to devote some time to talk about their own story if it can be useful to others.

Despite the limited sample and the qualitative approach of the interviews, the analysis of the surveyed cases was a useful overview of the female working reality in the Italian business sector. In a particular historical moment characterized by the economic crisis, the relocation of Italian companies in foreign countries, the merging of small companies into new ventures, the acquisitions of companies on the credit side by foreign multinationals and the technological

revolution, in Italy the small female entrepreneurship has succeeded to continue unchanged and to withstand more than the male one. These interviews describe the stories of five Italian entrepreneurs who have continued to keep their Companies while others closed theirs.

The beginning of the business

In the international ranking of the countries at ease in starting a business activity and helped with reforms initiated by the government, Italy is in the 56th place after Hungary and Turkey, indicating the bureaucratic and legislative difficulties and high taxation to start a Company in Italy.

All our women taking part in this study have underlined bureaucratic difficulties of opening and of management, in addition to the high taxation of their business activities.

Despite the national and regional legislation not in favor of launching businesses, the five entrepreneurs have managed to start to develop and consolidate their activities thanks to relational, family, associations, friends or experts networks. They were therefore relying upon neighborhood networks, of friends or members, rather than municipal or regional desks of female entrepreneurship, to solve problems or to have explanations.

In addition, the demand for bank loans to start business is seen as a risk of indebtedness (interview n.4) or an affair between men (interview n.5) rather than as one of the instruments offered by the market to start a Company.

So it is better to borrow money from family and friends (int. 1) or to sell small properties that provide liquidity and then invest in own company (int.5)

The beginning of entrepreneurial activity have coincided with :

- A) realization of passions and interests (Int. 1 and 4)
- B) personal change, separation (Int. 2) or inheritance (Int. 5)
- C) business change (Int.3)

It's the youngest interviewed who finds herself to be an entrepreneur as a result of the crisis affecting her organization. In Italy, the increase in the number of sole traders, self-employers and freelances in the last six years is partly due to the crisis of 2008 that led to the closure of businesses and the reduction of employees, moving former employees from employment to self-employment.

The consolidation of the business

Italy is second place in Europe in the rate of feminization of enterprises, 1 on 5 run by women. In the years of economic crisis, they were the female micro companies to resist, demonstrating how the "**resilience**" of women is one of the competence that fosters entrepreneurship.

All the interviewed entrepreneurs have in fact shown courage and gumption, characteristics that have strengthened during periods of economic crisis in which their "resilience" capacity has made them not only resist but also renew the skills and activities. It was precisely between 2008 and 2012 that women entrepreneurs had to reinvent new marketing strategies (int. 1, 4), find new customers (int 5), update their self (int. 2, 3) reorganize the company and invest more (int. 4,5).

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All that has caused the survival and then the economic revival.

The consolidation phase has also shown another power common to all interviewees, the pursuit of the **customization of the activities**, the creation of niches that could compete in the various sectors. All of them have invested in creating an environment welcoming, informal, attentive to customer sociability, offering not only products but also meeting places.

Restaurant Gilda, Bianca's Library, the Language school of Barbara, Polimoda with Tiziana and the farm of Donatella, are not just "traditional" companies but places for learning, socializing and meeting.

The future of the business

The generational difference of female entrepreneurs is evident in their vision of the future: the youngest are not able to predict it and therefore it is for them less manageable and less possible to plan it (int. 3); it is clear that the context, the market will prevail over personal choices and entrepreneur skills.

The other respondents expect new strategies (Int. 5), training and extension of activities (int. 4) improvements (int. 1) and also to think of a safe future: retirement (int. 2).

All entrepreneurs believe that the external environment is crucial to the success of their business, such as:

- a country system that invests in infrastructure;
- entrepreneurship support desks and not only informative desks;
- less taxes and less bureaucracy;
- targeted policies in key sectors (tourism, culture, local business) in which municipalities and regions encourage entrepreneurial activities via festivals, theme paths, enhancing of local products, competitions etc (for example the libraries festival; the one of young fashion designers, Open cellars, gastronomic tourism, the day of languages etc)

Enterprising women

All of the interviewed women say that their work was formed from domestic activities and the organization of the house is right, in miniature, a small business.

This is evident if we compare the list of skills required to entrepreneurs with a list of the skills learned in housekeeping.

Quality of a successful business woman

The **interviewed business women** show the following competences as common features of their work:

organizational, relational skills, administrative, managerial, educational, mediation, social and decision-making, tenacity, pragmatism, creativity, innovation, flexibility, acumen, vision, risk taking small steps, adaptability, resilience, commitment and determination, independence, ability to predict events, change, will, passion, self-training and continuing education, use the moments of

crisis to rethink and re-launch the activities, investing in people and in the instructions of themselves.

Among the aspects to be strengthened, they point out: new technologies, timing, administrative and bureaucratic issues, networking among colleague

Skills, competences, knowledge, abilities learned at household which contribute to run the business:

Organizational, interpersonal, administrative, management, microeconomics, education, mediation, social, care-attention to others, volunteering, multitasking, problem solving, flexibility, pragmatism.

Looking for the differences in businesses run by women and by men, it emerges that the gumption and the policy of small steps of women, that made surviving small women-owned businesses during the economic crisis, is at odds with one of the traditional male entrepreneur principles, the *risk*. The young business woman Bianca feels that soft skills, passion, resilience, gumption and creativity are all necessary for a company wanting to differ from the others, but that do not have the attitude to risk may be a limit in the long run .

Suggestions

All our entrepreneurs stress the importance of networks and relationships to create an innovative business culture.

In this sense, we can define, rather than female leadership models, **female membership** models, that is business organizations based on relationships rather than on hierarchy, on the enhancement of team work more than on individual work, and on continuous training.

At the end of the interviews, we were able to detect five kinds of female membership models, characterized by the competences and the personality of our entrepreneurs :

Gilda, Born Businesswoman: passion, attention to the clients' needs;

Tiziana, Businesswoman of opportunities: seizing the opportunities, forming;

Bianca, Acrobat Businesswoman: flexibility, previewer within the "creative chaos";

Barbara, Businesswoman with soft skills : collaborating, enhancing colleagues;

Donatella, Steel Businesswoman: believing in projects, planning day by day.