

Restarting Businesses in the Creative and Arts Industry through Mentorship



RestART
EUROPE

www.restarteurope.org

Project Title: Mentoring Second-chance Female Entrepreneurs to Restart the European Arts and Creative Sector

Erasmus+ Key Actions 2: Strategic Partnerships

PR1: State of R-Art

Project Website: <https://www.restarteurope.org/>

The report is part of the European project, "RestART Europe-Mentoring Second-Chance Female Entrepreneurs to Restart the European Arts and Creative Sector", led by the Science-to-Business Marketing Research Centre at the FH Münster University of Applied Sciences. It brings together five partners from four countries. The project is funded by the ERASMUS+ Cooperation partnerships in adult education programme for a three-year timeframe, RestART Europe partners have ambitious plans to become pioneers in offering a mentoring program that seeks to train mentors to provide guidance, motivation, and role modelling to second-chance female entrepreneurs and equip them with the entrepreneurial skills in the arts and creative sector.

This publication was authored collectively by the members of the RestART partnership.

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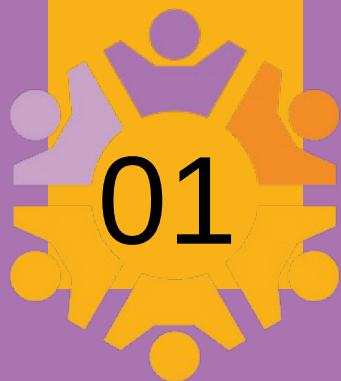
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Executive summary.

Our main takeaways



PROJECT SUMMARY

RestART Europe aims to bring together second-chance female entrepreneurs and potential mentors in the arts and creative industries to improve the quality of mentoring and generate a positive impact for both female entrepreneurs seeking a second chance, and the arts and creative industries that have been affected by the pandemic.

This goal will be achieved by providing flexible and innovative training to potential mentors to be the vehicle to equip second-chance female entrepreneurs with the entrepreneurial and 21st-century skills needed for both entrepreneurship and the arts and creative industries. In addition, the goal will be achieved by developing a set of instruments and courses that help mentors to address the business and psychological needs of female entrepreneurs seeking a second chance after failure.

The consortium of the project is composed of five partner organizations: FH Münster University of Applied Sciences (FH Münster), Accreditation Council for Engaged and Entrepreneurial Universities (ACEEU), Università Degli Studi Di Napoli Federico II (UNINA), Friesland College and Universidade Lusófona. The project is led by the Science-to-Business Marketing Research Centre at the FH Münster University of Applied Sciences.

AIMS

The project has the following aims:

- Facilitate the identification and understanding of the critical challenges and opportunities that women face in starting a new business for the second time in the arts and creative industry.
- Identify the main hard entrepreneurial skills and 21st-century skills required for second-chance female entrepreneurs who want to start a business in the arts and creative industries after a failure.
- Enhance entrepreneurial skills and capitalize on the innovative potential of second-chance female entrepreneurs by exposing them to real-life problems and projects, guiding them via trained mentors and promote their access to relevant networks
- Enhance the skills of mentors in an integrated way to replicate this effect and generate an impact on female entrepreneurs in the arts and creative industries.
- Create dynamic networking between mentors and second-chance female entrepreneurs in the art and creative sector through an online and interactive platform
- Stimulate collaboration, interdisciplinarity and innovation by bringing together actors from art, business, entrepreneurship.

PROJECT RESULTS

The project includes the following five Project Results (PRs):

PR1. State of R-ART Analysis Report

Identifying needs of second-chance female entrepreneurs and opportunities for the development of mentoring will allow a real impact on this population and contribute to the reactivation of the arts and creative industries. Besides, the State of R-Art will be tasked with identifying the main "hard" entrepreneurial skills and "soft" 21-century skills for female entrepreneurs and their relevance to the arts and creative sector. Also, the project consortium will document and create the Report with a set of guidelines detailing how to forge a successful mentoring for female entrepreneurs and the drivers to become a mentor, and the main capacities needed. The Report will include desk research, qualitative and quantitative data, and summarized findings and recommendations will be posted on the online platform Ment-Net.

PR2. Online Platform MENT-NET and Mentoring Scope

The online and interactive platform Men-Net aims to provide the necessary online resources for adequate interaction and exchange between mentors and second-chance female entrepreneurs (mentees), acting as a portfolio of knowledge, contacts and offering training and support of tools. Besides, the Mentoring Scope aims to specify the relationship between mentors and second-chance female entrepreneurs in the arts and creative industries, the interaction, and the main success factors.

PR3: The RESTART MENTOR's Toolkit

The project consortium will devise a set of tools to be utilized by mentors in training second-chance female entrepreneurs in the arts and creative industries. The tools will be stemming from the outcomes and lessons learned within PR1. The tools identified and collected will be digitized and, where possible, converted into an interactive format to increase the participation of mentors and related staff during and after the project.

PR4: Mentor Capacity Building Program and Handbook

The implementation of the Handbook will contribute to providing a tangible, precise, and efficient guide to the mentors on the proper use of the Toolkit (PR3), which will allow the mentors to get the most out of this Toolkit. At the same time, the online capacity-building program for mentors through different courses, developed according to the needs and wishes of the mentors collected in PR1, will contribute to strengthening the knowledge and skills of the mentors.



The Origins of RestART Europe.

BEHIND THE STORY



During the last years, Europe has taken the path to strengthen entrepreneurial culture and networks by assembling strategies and actions to enable everyone to start a successful and sustainable business, despite their gender, age, place of birth, or other personal characteristics (e.g., *The Missing Entrepreneurs*, 2019). However, entrepreneurship remains strongly male-dominated, and women's entrepreneurial potential is still underutilized.

In crises or problems such as those caused by the pandemic, most women do not have the necessary tools and skills to deal with them by themselves or with a mentor to support them (OECD, 2018). It is to highlight that the art and creative industries have been dramatically affected by the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic (European Parliament, 2021) or even have had to close, which has been economically and psychologically damaging to female entrepreneurs.

Due to the uncertainty created by the pandemic, female entrepreneurs in the cultural and creative sectors have been impacted disproportionately, namely their income, access to social security, freedom of movement, and artistic creation (OECD, 2021). Regardless of the pandemic, gender equality is a vital issue for the arts and creative industries and has been selected as one of the five sectoral priorities for EU action in the EU Roadmap for Culture 2019-2022 (UNESCO, 2020).

There is a need to investigate and understand the critical challenges and opportunities women face in starting a new business for the second time in the arts and creative industry and develop mentoring schemes accordingly to facilitate confidence-building and empowerment.

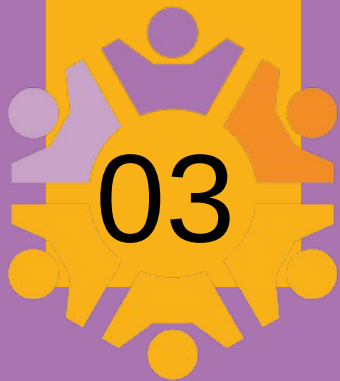
Our Motivation

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The NEED for a comprehensive analysis arises from the lack of data and visibility surrounding women's inequality in the art and creative industries.

While a large number of studies on female entrepreneurs exists, e.g., on their motivations, gender issues in culture, and entrepreneurship in culture and creative industries.

However, lack of empirical knowledge exists about the skills needed. Needs and desires of female entrepreneurs in the arts and creative industries, who are in the "loop of restarting", and about what are the primary skills and competencies that mentors need in order to become agents of impact for these female entrepreneurs when undertaking a business for a second time.



What is to Be Done.

A SILVER LINING



Although the second chance policies in Europe, mentoring and support programs are an excellent instrument to give some peace of mind to entrepreneurs to start again after a failure, they only focus on the legal and economic parts. Moreover, many of these policies aim to "produce" more entrepreneurs and not so much on the need to preserve the stock of entrepreneurs. People who started and failed are often left out, even if research shows that they are more likely to succeed when they start over again (European Commission, 2014). For this reason, there is a need to send the message that entrepreneurship cannot end up as a "life sentence" if things go wrong (European Commission, 2020). The failure of a venture should not be seen as the end of an entrepreneurial journey. While adverse psychological reactions to failure, such as grief or anxiety, research suggests that entrepreneurs can learn from failure, developing more mature entrepreneurial skills that can lead to personal growth and enhance the success of future ventures.

While discrimination and inequality hold women back in all countries and arts and creative sector subsections, the means to efficiently fight against discrimination and inequality varies according to country and subsection (Voices of culture, 2019). The inclusion of women entrepreneurs in the arts and creative industries is context-dependent. European countries have implemented various strategies to support the inclusion of female entrepreneurs and have dealt differently with the aftermath of the pandemic. In this way, the effectiveness of the pre-training for mentors and the mentoring for second-chance female entrepreneurs needs to be analyzed based on the various cultural contexts. In Germany, for instance, women continue to be underrepresented in leadership positions in the cultural policy sector, artistic professions, and cultural institutions (EIGE, 2016).

This context-dependent approach may enable us to truly represent the inclusion and empowerment of female entrepreneurs across Europe's arts and creative industries.

Project Aims

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This project aimed to investigate female entrepreneurship and mentorship in the arts and creative industries. With our initiative, we want to promote mentoring programs, particularly for female entrepreneurs in the arts and creative sectors who failed with their previous businesses or had to stop their operations due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Our first aim was to investigate the impact of the pandemic on female entrepreneurs in Germany, Italy, and Portugal within the arts and creative industries that had to pause their business operations or close their ventures as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, and now they are in the "loop of restarting". Ten extraordinary women entrepreneurs shared their experiences and specific challenges they faced during and after the pandemic, but also their motivations, challenges, aspirations, and their stories in the arts and creative industries.

Our second aim was to explore what role mentoring plays in (re-)starting the ventures of female entrepreneurs in Europe within the arts and creative industry. By surveying 125 mentors, (potential) mentors and mentees, we determined the skills and competencies needed to provide quality mentoring to women in the "loop of restarting" to leverage the necessary resources for adequate interaction and exchange between mentors and women entrepreneurs.



Female Entrepreneurship in Europe.

CURRENT OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES





Although entrepreneurial activities have existed for many years, the entrepreneurial economy did not take off until the 1990s (Audretsch, 2006). While many believed that globalization would benefit large international companies, it has given start-ups an advantage. Several reasons account for this development. In fact, technological changes have made economies of scale more complex. In addition, the volatility of the market has increased international competition, and finally, the increase in consumer needs has led companies to produce customized rather than standardized goods.

Even though numerous experts, business analysts, and researchers agree that entrepreneurs positively impact the global economy, this does not mean that entrepreneurial activity is equally developed worldwide. There are both notable entrepreneurial differences and similarities between countries, although the latter may not always be positive. For example, we saw that women are underrepresented in entrepreneurship internationally (Female Founder Monitor (FFM, 2020). This gap cannot be explained globally as each country offers a different environment for its population and businesses. In Europe, for instance, entrepreneurial activity has increased due to institutional factors such as politics, economics, and laws that provide a favourable environment for start-ups.

To analyse these women entrepreneurs' environments, many researchers have written country-specific reports and articles (Eib, 2019; Ferri, 2018; Noguera, 2015). As a result of all this research, as well as due to national (Wom'energy in France) and international programs (Women's Entrepreneurship Development Programme), women entrepreneurs have gained more visibility in recent years.

Despite various initiatives targeted at supporting women entrepreneurs, the entrepreneurial ecosystem remains heavily male-dominated.

Women often have a smaller network because the business world, especially in the world of investors, is still dominated by men who prefer to invest in men (Cardella et al., 2020); this also discourages female founders from starting their own businesses. Therefore, access to funding is also more difficult for female entrepreneurs, 68% of whom had challenges acquiring money at the beginning of their project. In comparison, only 51% of male entrepreneurs experience such issues (OECD, 2016). The difficulties women face in convincing investors of their financial forecasts and funding needs can also be observed because only 5.2% of women raised more than EUR 1 million, compared to men with 27.8% (FFM, 2020).

Moreover, male and female entrepreneurs do not seem to have the same priorities. While men are more focused on economic objectives, women are at the same time more concerned about their projects' social and green aspects (FFM, 2020). This is also reflected in the way they perceive entrepreneurial success. For instance, for women, it means having more freedom and a more balanced life between work and family while engaging in things that are meaningful to them. For man, on the other hand, success traditionally means earning money (Eib et al, 2019).

Supporting women's entrepreneurship can make a significant contribution to entrepreneurial activity (Noguera et al., 2013) and economic development (Hechevarría et al., 2019) in terms of creating new jobs and increasing the regional and national performance (Brush et al., 2018). While the European Commission, the OECD and other organisations acknowledge the economic benefits of women's entrepreneurship, they urgently call for immediate action since women entrepreneurs face numerous challenges.

OECD and the European Union have taken significant steps to combat gender inequality, but significant disparities remain in educational and occupational choices.

- The OECD's Women's Entrepreneurship Initiative (WE Initiative) forms an umbrella for the various thematic pillars of the Centre for Entrepreneurship's (CFE) work with a gender lens, including SME access to finance, Social Economy and Social Innovation, Women in Tech, Business Development Services, Inclusive Entrepreneurship and national/regional country reviews.
- In collaboration with the European Commission, the OECD released The Missing Entrepreneurs 2021 in November 2021. This volume examines how public policies at national, regional and local levels can overcome barriers to business start-ups and self-employment. The May 2021 report Entrepreneurship Policies through a Gender Lens was prepared in collaboration with the Global Women's Entrepreneurship Policy Research Project. The report presents evidence on the gender gap in entrepreneurship and its causes and examines how to strengthen the scope and effectiveness of entrepreneurship policies for women.

- The OECD/EU Better Entrepreneurship Policy Tool is an online tool designed for policy-makers and other interested parties at local, regional and national levels who wish to explore how public policy can: support youth, women, migrants and the unemployed in business creation and self-employment, and support the development of social enterprises.

More information on the most recent activities to advance gender equality can be found here:

<https://www.oecd.org/gender/ongoingwork/>
<https://wagate.eu/>

The Reality of Equality in Entrepreneurship

The assumption that underlies most entrepreneurial ecosystems is that all entrepreneurs can equally access the ecosystem's support. In theory, this assumption is valid. However, this is not always the case (Brush et al., 2019).

Entrepreneurship remains heavily male-dominated (Wu et al., 2019). Women are less well represented in incubators and scale-up programs and face substantial challenges such as fewer opportunities in start-up capital acquisition (National Women's Business Council, 2017) and a lower perception of the possibility of business creation.



The Arts and Creative Sector in Europe.

THE HIDDEN POTENTIAL



The arts and creative industries, also known as the cultural and creative sectors, are becoming a cross-cultural industries with a high potential to help other sectors. Based on cultural values, activities, and creative artistic expression, it is an increasingly important sector for economic and societal development on a global scale. The arts and creative industry contribute to implementing innovative processes, digital and knowledge-based economies or customer-centric approaches (Menzel, 2021).

To understand better the current context of the gender gap in the arts and creative industry, a look into the history of the arts and creative industry is necessary. A big part of art history derives from men since women artists were excluded and often did not have access to art school before the 20th century (Menzel, 2021). That is why female artists have fought for their rights. Countries across Europe have recently developed programs to give more visibility to female entrepreneurs in the arts and creative industry. In Europe, 47% of females and 53% of males are employed in the arts and creative industry.

Research shows that the arts and creative industry provide a more flexible and adaptable environment that fits the female entrepreneur's wish (Menzel, 2021; Eib, 2019). Nonetheless, by going deeper into the analysis, it was found that several constraints disadvantage these artistic and creative entrepreneurs, especially women, in precarious situations. Lack of access to social welfare support such as parental leave or childcare, fewer opportunities to build a professional career, gendered stereotypes or lack of resources and access to funding (Graeber, 2021). Those were exacerbated during the crisis.

The Covid-19 pandemic significantly impacted entrepreneurship, both positively and negatively. It created opportunities for some and threats for others. The arts and creative industries were the ones that were deeply affected worldwide (Menzel, 2021). Businesses dependent on physical experience suffered the sharpest economic losses relative term between 20% to 40% in 2020. (Naylor et al., 2021). The artistic and creative self-employed entrepreneurs were the ones who struggled the most, especially in the field of circus, theatre, music, and dance (Menzel, 2021). The ACI concerned with exhibitions, public talks, or travel were hit strongly.

Besides, we saw that the arts and creative industry is one of the industries with a higher rate of females. Because the Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated gender inequalities in the arts and creative industry, they have been more affected by job and income losses (Menzel, 2021). Moreover, female entrepreneurs were more impacted by this crisis because of government-mandated measures. For example, with schools closing, more women than men are willing to spend time with their children rather than working (Graeber et al., 2021; Eib, 2019). That is also why female entrepreneurs were one-third more likely to know about a financial loss (Graeber et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the European Commission provided additional help for female entrepreneurs during the pandemic, with Wegate as the perfect example (European Commission, n.d.). The initial goal of this online platform was to support female entrepreneurs during the COVID-19 pandemic regarding their needs in strategy, financing, or managing their businesses. The second goal was to create a European network of women.



At the "end" of this crisis, it can be said that the challenges that female entrepreneurs will have to face in the arts and creative industry are still the same but becoming harder (Menzel, 2021). The first one remains the gender stereotypes (less visibility, less money, less valuation) related to societal and sectorial expectations.

Linked to this one, finding a balanced professional and personal life is also difficult for women in this sector. Moreover, access to high-business skills, resources, and funding remains a big issue for women underrepresented in art galleries, in the network of film directors, and in many other areas. In the future, the "gender poverty gaps are expected to worsen as a result of the crisis" (Menzel, 2021).

The measures taken by the governments and especially by the German one during the pandemic have increased the fear and the apprehension of women to start their business, especially in the arts and creative industry, a sector which was strongly affected.

These measures highlight the gender disparities that discouraged more women who were already not confident enough before the crisis started. Research shows that women are 50% more likely than men to be uncertain about their future in the arts and creative industry (Menzel, 2021). Moreover, 72% of parents/child-carers consider abandoning their careers in the arts and creative industry.

After the Pandemic: Ensuring the Gap Doesn't Grow.

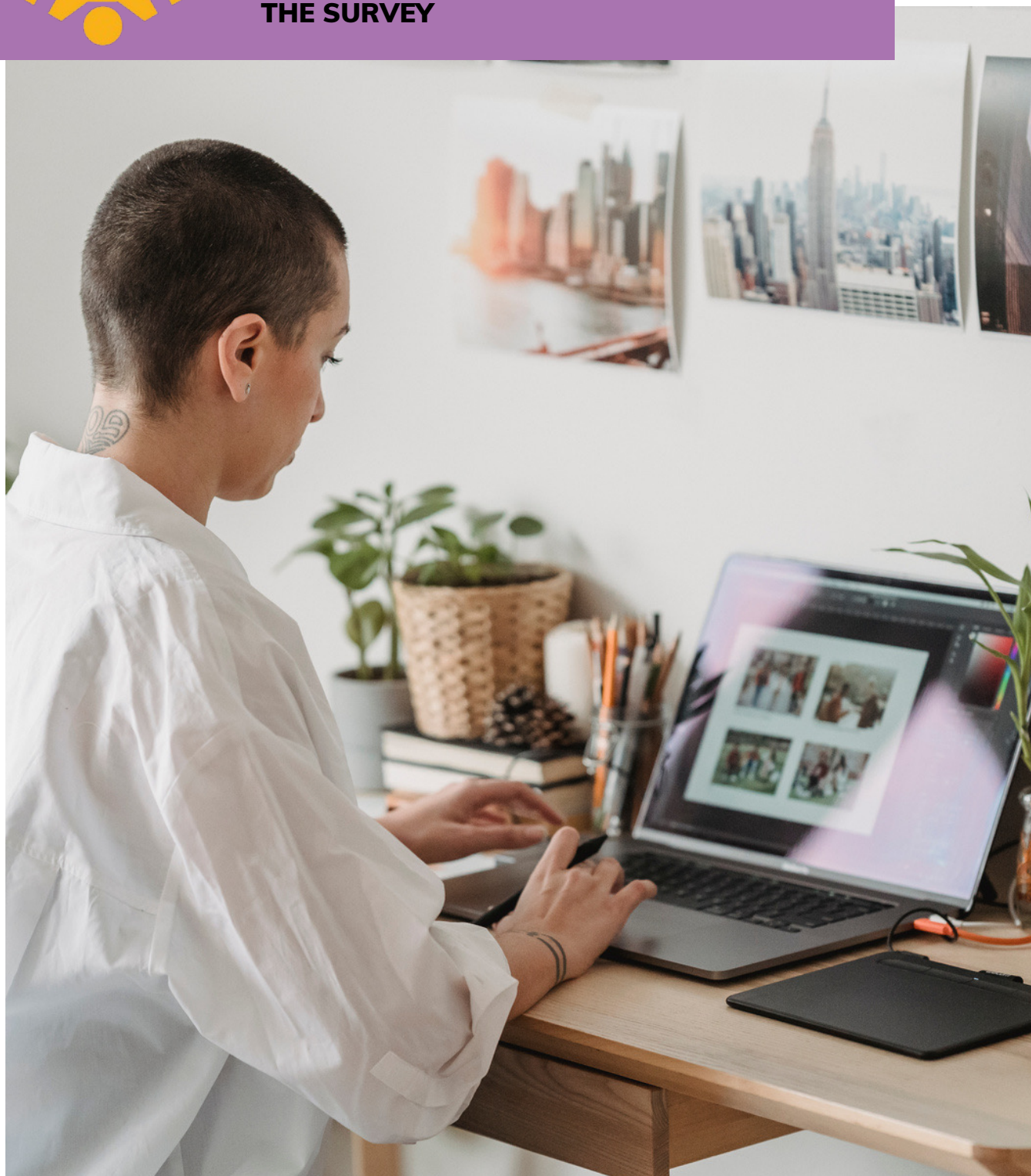
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A new map of challenges in the entrepreneurship domain arises. There is a risk that COVID-19 will undo decades of progress in advancing female entrepreneurship, especially in the arts and creative industry.



Methodology

HOW WE CONDUCTED THE INTERVIEWS AND THE SURVEY



INTERVIEW STRATEGY

We have collected **31** interviews with female entrepreneurs in the arts and creative industries in Portugal, Italy, and Germany.

The interview aims to address the following four fundamental pillars:



Acknowledging the broad field of sectors in the arts and creative industries, the interviews aimed to cover as many different fields as possible to include diverse perspectives.

Therefore, female entrepreneurs were defined according to the following criteria:

- Part-time female entrepreneurs: students and entrepreneurs at the same time or employees and entrepreneurs at the same time
- One-person enterprises and the self-employed: businesses that employ no staff or freelancers
- Nascent female entrepreneurs: women that are planning a new venture
- New firm female entrepreneurs: with a new business that is between four and 42 months old
- Established business owners: over 42 months old

TARGET GROUP

The target group for the interviews is 'female entrepreneurs in the arts and creative industries who had struggles or hardships during the COVID-19 pandemic and, as a result, had to stop/pause their business operations or close their businesses. Hence, they are in 'the loop of restarting' and looking for a second chance to either continue their business operations or start a new business.

SURVEY STRATEGY

We have collected **130** survey responses from mentors in Germany, Italy, Netherlands, and Portugal.

The survey aims to get a deeper understanding of the motivation and ability that individuals require to serve as mentors for female entrepreneurs in the arts and creative industries. The interview aims to address the following four fundamental pillars:



TARGET GROUP

The main target for the survey is already experienced and potential mentors residing and working within Germany, Italy, Netherlands, and Portugal, regardless of gender or industry. The primary function of a mentor is to help their mentees set goals, make plans to accomplish them, and keep them on track to reach those goals. They might also offer professional advice and new business contacts and act as a resource for the business world. Therefore, relevant potential survey candidates were defined accordingly:

- o Successful entrepreneurs, managers, professionals, or business owners
- o Graduate entrepreneurial students from higher education institutions
- o Expert actors in arts and creative industries (consultants) and others



Results from Interviews.

INSIGHTS FROM FEMALE ENTREPRENEURS IN EUROPE



INTRODUCTION - ITALY

In order to reflect the opinions of women entrepreneurs from the arts and creative sectors who faced difficulties during the COVID-19 pandemic and, as a result, had to suspend or interrupt their business activities or close their companies, a wide range of different individuals were interviewed in Italy, Germany and Portugal. First of all, enclosed are the results of interviews from Italy.

These showed that both the fields in which the women entrepreneurs work and their motives for starting a business differ. Even more diverse is the academic and professional background of the women. Participants in the interviews, for example, come from a natural science orientation such as environmental engineering, renewable energy, or business and commerce.

A large part, however, can be counted among the more creative or humanistic fields, such as anthropology and cultural design, archaeology and ancient cultures, business and commerce, advertising and communications, architecture, as well as cultural management. Their businesses were founded spread over the last 10 years, with the longest business established in 2012 and the most recent ones during the pandemic in 2021.

A great part of the entrepreneurs opened a business with a focus on the cultural context of their city or tourism. For instance, one female entrepreneur would like to ensure the enhancement of cultural heritage using innovative tools.

The goal is thereby to implement initiatives and projects in the field of culture and hospitality by acting on the educational offer, both as an orientation centre for school tourism in particular and for cultural tourism in general. There are two reasons for them to do so:

" [...] the first is due to the possibility, for those who start a business, to be able to choose their job and therefore, in essence, to be able to do what they like, the second is linked to the desire to enhance the vast heritage artistic, cultural and naturalistic that surrounds us that too often is left to the neglect of our institutions" (Interviewee 2).

While for one entrepreneur, it is mainly the general impact in her business with a focus on sustainable tourism (Interviewee), another one mentioned that her motives for founding the business were mainly due to the wish to have something that fully reflects herself (Interviewee 4).

Meanwhile, another entrepreneur explains her motivation as follows: "My motivation to start the activity is linked to the need to enhance and disseminate the circuit of Bourbon royal sites, as well as history, art and nature, architecture, theatre, archaeology, industries, and agriculture, as well as the typical products of Naples and Southern Italy" (Interviewee 6). The non-profit association, therefore, aims to contribute to a better action of conservation, enhancement, and development of the identity and universal values of the historical-cultural context, the landscape, and environmental environment, etc., with a view to sustainable local development.

A company of one of the co-founders, which has been in existence for some time, focuses on managing sites based on the experience and studies the founders have made at the university.

The female entrepreneur stated: " I am a cultural manager, so our goal right from the start was precisely not to leave our city [...]. We came up with the idea of creating the association [...], among other things that was the time when Naples was a disaster, there was garbage around. In short, the enhancement of our territory was not exactly 100% and the adventure begins, and we initially fall in love with a church [...]" (Interviewee 10).

In contrast, a freelancer also from Naples, who works in the renewable energy sector in the creative industry, explained her motivation for starting her own business as follows:

"In addition to a penchant for the creative sector and a passion for literature, I wanted to create a centre of aggregation and cultural sharing in my city." (Interviewee 1).

In addition, an entrepreneur was also interviewed, who opened a startup that should be the first to focus on "planning to develop crowdfunding and blockchain products and services for art and culture" (Interviewee 8).

In contrast to the business from the cultural field, another entrepreneur founded an all-female think tank, an independent network that works with young people, women, culture, and regeneration projects.

This is how she explained her motives for founding the think tank:

"The need to reverse the stereotype that young people do not want to take action and that women do not know how to network. The willingness to work with European and national institutions. Setting up a think tank that would act as a bridge between communities, people, and institutions, focusing on research and participatory projects" (Interviewee 5).

Another entrepreneur focused on the European planning, monitoring, and impact assessment of programs and projects funded at national, local, and regional levels and related to the creative and artistic sectors.

She took over the company: "I decided to activate the company to strengthen my autonomy and deploy skills that are particularly in focus in this period, especially in our field" (Interviewee 7). But also, an architect shares her experience of how she combined her classic profession, namely interior design in the residential sector, for 10 years also with the world of digitalization.

BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

General Perception

Although the backgrounds of the interviewed participants are diverse, their general perception of the business environment in Italy is even more consistent with each other.

Several female entrepreneurs mention that the business environment for women during the start-up of their own businesses is hostile, challenging, and competitive. For one entrepreneur, it is not only women but young people in general.

She emphasizes the following challenges when starting a business: "The suffocating bureaucracy, I bought a property together with my 4 partners in 2020, to date, June 2022 we have not yet been able to start work a due to extremely delayed times to obtain authorizations from superintendence, state property, fire brigade, local health authority, municipality and other bodies" (Interviewee 1).

Another one fears that it is still a very male-dominated world: "I hope that in the future things can change and that there is more and more space for female entrepreneurs and that the salary of an [female] entrepreneur is the same as that of an [male] entrepreneur" (Interviewee 2).

Similarly, one other female entrepreneur is aware that she is prevented from certain situations due to her collaboration with her male partner: "ugly! I have a male partner who within the company arrogates the right to exclude me in a good-natured way from situations that are too manly!" (Interviewee 4). Moreover, one argues: "I believe that Italy is not a country for women, the country is not ready, there is a macho mentality, overt and creeping." (Interviewee 8).

However, despite the uniform opinions on numerous issues, there are also a few different perceptions of the business environment for women when starting their businesses.

For example, one female entrepreneur sees no challenges based on gender: "[...] I believe in gender equality. I believe that women are certainly less facilitated than men in the business environment, but a lot also depends on the ability and desire to get involved on the part of people in general. Obviously, if you follow the challenges that follow those that are the challenges defined at a macro level by the 2030 Agenda, obviously dropped in our territories." (Interviewee 7).

Further, a more positive perception of the environment is shared by an entrepreneur in the south of Italy: "Doing activities in the South is inspiring and motivating, it certainly hides the pitfalls and stops caused by the economic and social environment. However, the same "necessity" becomes a virtue in having to take action to study process and planning innovations that have a concrete impact on people's lives. In summary, not easy but certainly a proactive challenge" (Interviewee 5).

Barriers Facing Female Entrepreneurs

It emerged strongly that the business environment for female entrepreneurs is perceived as challenging.

It is, therefore, interesting to hear what barriers those entrepreneurs perceive. Thus, it was investigated which challenges female entrepreneurs face the most and which resources are missing that could help them to start their business.

From the barriers mentioned by women, it quickly becomes apparent that for many female entrepreneurs, it is a question of access to financial and general support:

- Less structured social network
- Lack of funding and resistance to entry
- Lack of startup support
- Excessive bureaucracy
- Difficulty in accessing forms of financial support

In fact, it can also lead to women being discouraged from pursuing their ideas or feeling left alone as they have to struggle with some challenges that emerge only because of their gender, such as:

- Greater difficulties in reconciling private and professional life due to stereotypes, i.e., as women are still seen as caregivers for the family unit today
- General mistrust of female role

One female business owner described her experience with this as follows:

„However, with ridiculous resources and therefore I on this, how to say, I find it very difficult for a woman to work and I often feel unmotivated with the desire to say, that's enough, that is, I open e-commerce of fabrics. I realize that there is still a form of male chauvinism during that yes. I have experienced it, for example, in the request for funds for the Startup. The fact of having a female team is not well seen, that is, it is considered by both the bank and the entrepreneur as well as by venture capital as something moody and unsafe. This is not something overt and said, but it is something between the lines, and this is an aspect.“ (Interviewee 8).

As can be heard in the quote and other statements by the founders, the general perception of the role of a woman in society still seems to be associated with many stereotypes. It is often the case that women entrepreneurs feel powerless, as they find it difficult to go against the prevailing social norms that have been established over decades:

„Absolutely yes, women are still the weak link in the chain (together with young people) even though they represent more than the productive half of this country. Doing businesses or in any case, taking action by challenging patriarchal rules that have been present for years often puts you in a situation of loneliness and discouragement feeling.“ (Interviewee 5).

One founder describes why women, in general, always face challenges in their working lives:

„I think that for women, life as an entrepreneur and the world of work in general is in many respects much more complicated to manage than men, as women are still considered the reference subject of the family unit today.“ (Interviewee 2).

In addition, it is expressed that the highest positions, in which the important decisions are made, are mostly not occupied by women, which leads to additional barriers: “The perception of women entrepreneurs is not often shared at the institutional level or in trade associations. Access to forms of facilitation and financing for female entrepreneurs is still too low, at least in Italy.” (Interviewee 6).

Overall, the entrepreneur's statement very aptly sums up the emergence of barriers in general, with a clear approach to solving this challenge for everyone in the process:

„The challenges are simply related to the initial perception that one has in meeting a team of female owners and entrepreneurs. However, with the right mix of skills mixed with a behaviour that I would define as “assertive” these biases are overcome, and you can assert yourself for what one is, simply a person who wants to do business beyond gender and sex.” (Interviewee 1).

Drivers as Forms of Startup Support

Regarding the drivers, opinions differ somewhat more. Two of the participating entrepreneurs express criticism of the insufficient availability of different funds which could be used as a form of start-up support: “More non-repayable loans are needed for those who start a business, and I believe that greater support for families is essential” (Interviewee 2).

Here, too, it is emphasized: “Certainly the use of the various social cohesion funds and the ESF, and now with all the calls of the PNRR dedicated to female entrepreneurship” (Interviewee 5).

In contrast, another founder finds that it is not a question of (public) funds, which are used, but rather a question of bureaucratic hurdles, such as:

“Regarding the drivers, there are many public funds, in fact, we intend to use them as a women's enterprise fund or also Cultura Crea and other municipal calls and notices and regional with gender awards. But they are not enough. It is not a question of funds. There must be more legislation and administrative procedure lean and agile that does not hinder but, on the contrary, pushes the initiative entrepreneurial” (Interviewee 1).

Another entrepreneur has a completely different answer as she believes that, above all, mentorship and tutoring can be used as drivers in the business environment.

Effects of COVID-19

Clearly, the Covid-19 pandemic played an important role in the assessment of the business environment for female entrepreneurs, as many have been put in a critical situation.

For instance, two of the founders started their businesses even during the pandemic. While for one, there was mainly the lack of support to help her start her business, for another founder, there were even additional bureaucratic challenges:

"My start-up was hit by the COVID-19 epidemic, postponing the time for obtaining authorizations even further" (Interviewee 1).

The already prevailing barriers for female founders, such as lack of social network, were also reinforced during the pandemic and were accordingly detrimental to the businesses:

"[It] had a stop, especially with regard to the possibility of networking events, part of the core of the project" (Interviewee 5).

Due to the enormous restrictions on activities, events, and in general daily life, several companies faced the challenge of adapting their business during and even after the most challenging part of the pandemic. Below, the founders share their approaches:

"The collaboration with schools for school visits should have started, but the pandemic events of the last two years have forced us to reflect deeply on how a social enterprise should proactively and effectively carry out its role and its social objective. For this reason, we have enriched and adapted our range of services by opening up to multimedia and IT services." (Interviewee 2).

"After Covid, I had to analyse what was going on. In the analysis, I realized that I could no longer work on quantity because since the dynamics had changed, I could no longer face many projects at the same time.

The first step I took was to try to understand whether to eliminate some types of activities that I did that in economic terms had a small response and perhaps focus more on qualitatively and economically higher projects." (Interviewee 9).

"It was as hard as it was for everyone, but we didn't give up, even during the pandemic, [...]. We were open, but for other activities, we, being a church and also having links with the Community [...], we made sure we transformed our church into a meeting point.

At a collection point for all people in need. This gave us the opportunity to not go crazy staying at home, so to be able to go out at least 2 3 times a week and to be able to continue our business in the area [...]" (Interviewee 10).

However, there were also positive comments about the support and company management during the pandemic. While one founder received a contribution as startup support, for another founder, little has changed during the pandemic. As the people in the company were already working remotely before the pandemic, the followed closure of physical offices even reduced the company's expenses.

One founder also emphasized that COVID has actually moved the process forward in terms of funding opportunities, although of course she still faced the challenges of closing the operational headquarters due to the costs being too high:

"There are many forms of financing to support the development of female entrepreneurship, both through facilitated finance and through both direct and indirect projects. COVID has revolutionized a little bit of the processes [...]. And then we also had the opportunity to take advantage of a series of loans to support businesses, to cope with the crisis we have had to face." (Interviewee 7).

ENTREPRENEURIAL FAILURE AND RECOVERY

Reasons and Impact

As noted, the business environment for female entrepreneurs is fraught with many challenges. Especially during the pandemic, however, entrepreneurial failure and recovery became all the more visible.

Therefore, it seems important to understand how the founders reacted to the new challenges and what reasons there were for closing the company or stopping the business operations. In addition, the entrepreneurs were asked about their reaction to failure, their perception of risks, and what they learned in the process.

Finally, they were interviewed about whether attitudes towards risk changed with the pandemic and whether there was a lack of support for start-ups during the pandemic, or whether enough institutions offered help for start-ups or founders in general.

During the interviews, it became noticeable that the challenges that arose during the pandemic were often seen as an opportunity to completely change or adapt aspects of one's business:

"Let's say by reformulating the communication and dissemination activities. [...]. Certainly, the restrictions due to Covid have created a slowdown in activities. However, it was an opportunity to reconfigure the association at the same time" (Interviewee 6). Another female founder explained that the company's responded to new challenges by "trying to imagine projects that adapt to the new way of conceiving remote work and the need to network" (Interviewee 5).

As mentioned, the challenges during the pandemic naturally led to the need to realign, with some women entrepreneurs managing to do so quite quickly at the start of COVID-19:

"Fortunately, we were able to reshape our offer and, already in the second half of 2020, we have undertaken the design and development of a communication and interaction platform with the school world that makes the best use of technologies, the network and non-social media channels. [Not] to replace but to complement and integrate the more conventional forms of teaching and training support" (Interviewee 2).

Another entrepreneur succeeded in the course of the pandemic because she realized that with the previous classical orientation of her profession, she would rather lose in economic terms since she was dependent on working with clients and construction sites while the investment of the clients decreased:

"What I thought at this point was to try to focus much more, instead on this digital accompaniment and mentoring work that gives me a different security about the future and certainly there is also a request in the field of design, different" (Interviewee 9).

However, the reasons for the closure of businesses are more diverse than one might think. It is not necessarily the financial aspect that one would assume at the beginning.

The explanations range from inadequate strategic positions to a general move out of the city to build up a new business, as well as because the previous business "was not centred anymore on the interests and will of the other partners. (Interviewee 3).

For another founder, selling her shares was not an entrepreneurial failure because she realized that at the time of the pandemic, the company was not profitable, and she used the shares to establish a new startup.

Sensemaking and Learning

The pandemic has brought many challenges, but the female founders have been able to draw their learnings. Both the greater motivation and resilience as well as the importance of staying consistent "[...] and never stop studying and keeping up-to-date about evolutions also in other business and markets" (Interviewee 3).

It was emphasized that people used this time to develop and reinvent themselves personally. Moreover, also for a team within the startup, it seemed to be a good time as people bonded even more. There was even more mutual support within the company, especially when there was no external support.

So, the conclusion was drawn that a regular review of both the firm and the team performance is important: "So let's say a purely internal work and we say that what we have learned from this experience is the importance of periodically reflecting on the growth objectives of the association and of the team" (Interviewee 6).

Outcome

Based on the interviews, it was found that support for female entrepreneurs during the pandemic was not sufficient.

While some founders received no or very little support from national institutions, others had some support thanks to the help of other project teams they worked with.

Furthermore, despite receiving non-repayable bonuses for micro-enterprises forced to close and subsidized loans for SMEs, one company still had to close its business for a short period, continuing only later with a new partner. There the recovery succeeded rather thanks to the team works within the organization. It was also still difficult for some to cope with the relatively low contributions, let alone to apply for support at all, as this appeared to be difficult.

One founder, therefore, sees the whole situation as very challenging:

"The fact of starting to innovate in a country where in my opinion it is not possible, the mentality is too backward, there is no such step that they want to force at all costs. We are too far behind" (Interviewee 8).

Through the lessons learned, some have also changed their attitude toward risk in general. Now, teams see themselves forced to include even more risks in the planning of the projects they imagine and want to implement. Accordingly, one entrepreneur expresses the following opinion:

"Yes, something has certainly changed, and we certainly have a more prudent attitude in choosing the projects to be implemented" (Interviewee 6).

MENTORING

General Perception

Due to both the existing barriers and the additional challenges that have arisen with the pandemic, it is interesting to understand the entrepreneur's perception of mentoring and what exactly it means to them i.e., what reasons they might have for receiving mentoring.

Discussing mentoring, some of the female entrepreneurs thought of the comparison between mentoring and coaching.

Here it was emphasized that mentoring is a "two-way exchange relationship" (Interviewee 1) and does not have the characteristic of "subordination" (Interviewee 5) as in typical coaching.

In this context, it was emphasized that mentoring is primarily about two people coming together, one of whom is more experienced in the area where the less experienced person is looking for support to develop her skills.

Thereby, a mentor should, above all, be capable of guiding one with her visions and help to move forward. From this perspective, one of the participating founders summed it up as follows: "Mentoring is a form of support for personal and professional growth through a path of sharing." (Interviewee 6)

The following reasons for seeking out a mentor were cited by the female entrepreneurs:

- Guidance to pursue dreams and aspirations
- An external, more logical and rational perspective

- Taking a look at reality in a less emotional way
- More opportunities for constructive exchange
- Having someone for moments of accompaniment, support, and training to be able to grow and learn
- Receiving support in the phase of a crisis to recover quickly
- A better understanding of the internal processes between the people who work together

Most of the interviewees have not received any mentoring to date.

For instance, one of the reasons is that one had received "real mentoring" (Interviewee 8) through life and learned through one's mistakes.

Another founder explains the reason as follows: "No, I am not currently receiving mentoring, but I would look for it among colleagues operating in the same sector, however, actually similar to mine. It is also difficult to find some pretty good mentors at the moment and so not having one, let's say I can't say what I can appreciate at the moment" (Interviewee 6).

On the contrary, some of the female founders are mentors themselves, especially for a younger target group, in order to open up opportunities for them in certain sectors.

Access to Mentoring

However, three founders reported on their mentoring experiences, and they were quite varied. The first difference appeared in the type of mentoring they received:

"I received mentoring partially and in a non-continuous or professional way. A former professor of mine from King's College London offered himself" (Interviewee 1).

One more female entrepreneur did not receive any official mentoring but rather looked for mentors among colleagues and experienced people, even though it turned out to be very difficult for her to find a mentor in general.

Another female founder stated that, on the contrary, she found access to mentoring very unproblematic, as there were enough platforms and projects offering this service. She met her former formal mentor through an interview. However, she is trying to expand the activity of mentoring for herself.

Accordingly, there are, of course, certain things that these entrepreneurs value most in their mentors, such as authenticity and experience, or also: "I appreciate the honesty and understanding as well as the ability to bring back the focus about the important things, which I sometimes lose" (Interviewee 1). One other appreciates the mentor's ability: "[...] to push myself beyond the psychological barriers that I ask myself very often" (Interviewee 5).

Competencies of Mentors

In order to feel comfortable with the mentor and to maximize the added value, the founders were asked which competencies are most important to them in a potential mentor. Certain qualities stood out in particular, as most of the respondents mentioned them.

The most important factors were the ability to be empathetic, listen well, communicate, understand the mentee and to have enough experience.

Although one founder said that it is important to have experience in the same field in which one works, another founder, for example, did not need anyone from a specific field, but rather more generally:

"Surely a mentor must have an ability to read the external environment at 360 °, perhaps not focused only on the defined specialization, for which her support is required. I don't know how to explain this well, but I would rely on a person who somehow manages to give me advice of a general nature not only on the specific professional path" (Interviewee 9).

However, a few other attributes were also appreciated:

- Strong motivation and sense of belonging to the company project
- Visionary and genuine interest in people
- Leadership and charisma

ENTREPRENEURIAL SKILLS

General Perception and Skill Development

The female entrepreneurs were moreover interviewed about their general perception of entrepreneurial skills, i.e., what skills female entrepreneurs need to thrive in the arts and creative sector or also their reasons for the need for these skills. Further, the female entrepreneurs were asked whether they have points of contact with formal or informal entrepreneurial education.

Almost over half of those who commented on their skills development stated that they had not received any specific entrepreneurial education. The remaining ones said that they underwent some kind of entrepreneurial development, with one specifying it by stating: "I have attended some type of entrepreneurial training, and I mean it, that is, it is actually related to the method of content delivery. In my case, it took place through a training course that I obtained at the [...] University" (Interviewee 6).

In terms of the general perception of female founders, it rapidly became apparent that managerial and economic skills are important.

It was also particularly emphasized that one should have a general overview of what is happening in the business world in order to be able to keep up:

"I believe it is important to always be up to date on all the news, especially if you want to develop an innovative and competitive project, but I also believe that it is essential to know the basics of the legal/economic world in order to move more easily in the business world" (Interviewee 2).

However, the female founders also frequently mentioned the need for a proper combination of different skills, e.g., cognitive and social-emotional as well as digital and technical skills, which are equally important: "Yes, let's say it should have all these skills, that is, it should have all of them, be a bit of a mix, a nice mix of all these skills. Yes, yes, it would be fundamental [...]" (Interviewee 10).

Along the way, the founder shared the challenges she encountered in the creative sector, so her multiple skills helped to overcome them:

"Analytical mind and strong interpersonal skills. The creative sector, especially in Italy, has many obstacles arising from a culture of unprofessional creative entrepreneurship [and it] is important to navigate it in a very business-wise way. Very often, I am asked to offer or receive services on the freeway or at a discounted price. I always refuse. Work goes always paid. Also, not paying for a job implies being in debt, and debt is never good for any type of business." (Interviewee 1).

However, a large majority of the female entrepreneurs also emphasized socio-emotional skills, which can be considered as skills that enable individuals to perform certain tasks, such as recognizing and managing emotions and successfully dealing with conflicts. So here, the needed soft skills were highlighted such as empathy, teamwork, good relational and socio-emotional ability to motivate others, as well as communication skills.

INTRODUCTION - GERMANY

The interviewees from Germany work in various creative fields such as arts, diverse types of design, performing arts, filming, painting and illustration, and events and festivals. Some of the female entrepreneurs work in the industry already more than 10 years, while others started their businesses only a few years before or during the pandemic.

Here, it became apparent that most of the founders did not necessarily intend to go into self-employment. It seemed like a natural way for them to use their passion for certain things to turn their hobby or interest into a business:

"I didn't have any great expectations or goals during the founding process. I just let myself in on the adventure for the time being" (Interviewee 2).

Thus, some female entrepreneurs have decided to start up because of individual projects with friends that went well or because of their enthusiasm for specific areas. In this way, some of the founders acquired new skills and realized that they could be used profitably.

Two female entrepreneurs, however, approached the creation of their startup with a rather clearer purpose and longer plan.

The first female entrepreneur said that it was her ambition to be independent that drove her to start her own business right after graduation. Another said that with her move to Germany, she looked at the current gap in the market and demand for her service and started an attempt to offer a business.

BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

General Perception and Barriers

The female founders were initially asked what characteristics they associate with an entrepreneurial environment. In fact, the assessment seemed to be positive because the founders talk about opportunities in an innovative, autonomous, democratic, resourceful, and creative environment. An important factor is also networking and the constant possibility for learning and development.

"[...] I experienced it as a very fast-changing and you have to adapt to new situations like from it can change from day to day, but it's also very exciting, and fun, and the people that I met are very inspiring. [...] This is, like, the best time to make something of yourself because you have access to information, to people who support you, to networks, for example, on social media and LinkedIn. I think there's never been a better time" (Interviewee 3).

"I experience the arts and creative industry as very lively. Due to digitalization, the field is getting broader and broader, and the possibilities are getting more multifaceted. At the same time, the progress is so fast that it also becomes surprising and obscure. Through social media, enormous visibility is possible [...]" (Interviewee 2).

However, competition, lack of security, and challenges are also part of it, so internal motivation and thus the will to stay on is also necessary: "It is my life since I am 18 so it is very tiring, it is a continuous but very satisfying job. An adventure that begins every day, which at times is scary but is so demanding that it always makes me feel alive and with a specific purpose in life" (Interviewee 1).

Especially for the areas that did not need specific large resources, like painting, illustration, or design, the business environment does not pose any great challenges since most of what they needed for the production could be easily obtained.

However, entrepreneurs in different fields like the performing arts need more funding to be able to carry out their projects, so they are very dependent on it. Therefore, some founders identify the financial aspect as a key barrier in the entrepreneurial environment:

“So, I would like to see the period of funding extended, so at least five years. I think funding for the independency of arts is really bad” (Interviewee 6).

Further, another founder strengthens the statement: “Perhaps more financial aid from the state would be needed since many women are not only entrepreneurs but also mothers and wives and housewives because they are a resource for the art” (Interviewee 1).

Those female entrepreneurs who are not so dependent on funding use other types of support, such as help from organizations in the field they work in. Further, they also count on the network they have built up:

“So, what I love about being a female entrepreneur is that I have the feeling of the female entrepreneur network really helping each other and lifting each other up. And I have the feeling that women somehow, we give ourselves a support network. (Interviewee 10).

“[...] I have like a network with people that I can communicate, and they are also in entrepreneurial surroundings. So, I think I just need people that come from the same business, and they are interested in the same business so I can use that” (Interviewee 11).

One entrepreneur also spoke of other challenges: “There are so many incredible creatives with great innovative ideas who are not seen or who cannot survive from their work, because on the one hand they often lack the entrepreneurial know-how and on the other hand the work of the creatives is possibly not valued enough” (Interviewee 2).

Accordingly, it can be seen that most founders do not see any particular challenges for women per se in the industry, but for example, general things that were mentioned could be a challenge, such as the bureaucracy in Germany, which triggers a long process or health insurance and the combination of being independent and children care.

A few female founders emphasize that they see many opportunities for everyone, regardless of gender, especially in Germany. On the other hand, one female entrepreneur said that, unlike others, she has a slightly different position because she has a male partner:

“I can say that I am in a good position because I always had a partner, I was never alone as a female entrepreneur, I had always support and backup of my partners and husband. [...] So, I always had a backup. And that's that is why I can feel secure. But I can imagine if I did not have this help, I would not be in this position” (Interviewee 8).

Moreover, one founder adds that she sees some challenges for herself as she works in a male business: “[..] I think it's very important to be competent so that you know what you are doing and be on point, be prepared so then you will not have any problems, I think it's very important to know your skills and the business or the territory where you are working, so all the things that you can deliver as service has to be really professional because I think male entrepreneurs, they all focus on this female person able to give the same or maybe more products, or a better product than the male competitors” (Interviewee 11).

Other barriers arose for some female entrepreneurs because they did not have the necessary entrepreneurial knowledge or lacked access to training.

Drivers

Exactly because of these challenges, the founders see a need for action so that there is more support for women in the arts and creative industry in the future. The most important support mechanisms should be financial support, which helps with, e.g., retirement, health insurance and, so that the entrepreneurship and the family will not be in competition.

Although there is the Künstlersozialkasse, which supports one financially with health insurance, it is difficult to carry private insurance, especially at the beginning of the foundation. If you have a family later, the costs can be even more burdensome.

Accordingly, the founders would like to see an easier process for applying for funding and also more public attention for female entrepreneurs so that they become more visible.

Support should not only come from the government but also, for example, large businesses, private organizations, and smaller communities should be more open to newcomers.

In fact, the networking aspect is also emphasized here. There should be more opportunities for exchange between female entrepreneurs, as this helps, especially in times like the pandemic, to support each other and to stay confident. In this way, female entrepreneurs also have enough platforms to address their issues and have greater access to information that might help them.

Furthermore, they would like to see more offers in the area of entrepreneurial training and thus clearly more education opportunities. Mentoring also falls as a key point, as it can support people to get through crisis times but also provide so much input for their business.

One entrepreneur commented as follows: “There simply has to be opportunities for women to throw themselves into a career without having to fear that they will somehow fall into a social hole afterwards” (Interviewee 4).

Another female founder sees the right approach earlier than during the founding of the start-up. Various entrepreneurial training courses could be offered at a young age, e.g., at schools and universities. This would also provide early access to the right network of people who could support, motivate and mentor students on the path to independence.

COVID-19

The opinions of the founders on the impact of the pandemic on their business are divisive, depending on the field in which they operate. For the entrepreneurs who were mainly active in the field of performing arts or events and similar, the pandemic hit hard.

Since their business models are focused on offline activities and they did not want to create the same superficially online, they had difficulties during the pandemic as all their planned events were down for an unpredictable time. For some, there were additional problems with the funding (already received) and whether this could be used properly, and how to continue to pay out salary. Additionally, there were problems for those who had already sold tickets.

Although there was often a lot of support from the local communities, there were also enough people who wanted to get their money back right away. At that time, there was simply no willingness and no budget among the people to bear these costs.

In addition, there was less exchange, which meant that the creative process and mutual inspiration could not be realized.

Therefore, these entrepreneurs had to adjust to the situation, with some arguing that, for example, zoom simplified the situation but could not offer the same direct interaction in teams and also with customers since, for them, personal contact was important and not replaceable. Further difficulties were also caused by the challenging combination of steady work and childcare.

However, the businesswomen also emphasized that they have grown from these challenges, as they have become more flexible and used the time to rethink structures.

For one founder, it was also positive because she finally left her previous job, which she wanted to give up anyway, and focused on something new. She stated that it is not clear if she would have made the cut without the pandemic and then saw the chance to develop as an entrepreneur.

For some founders, it was only positive because despite initial cancellations, they gained new customers and had a more successful business year. Thus, they could work more determined and continue to focus on their creativity.

ENTREPRENEURIAL FAILURE AND RECOVERY

Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, some of the founders maintained a very determined and forward-looking attitude toward their businesses. Some of the founders had already faced many challenges before COVID-19 and therefore had a greater affinity for risk.

For instance, one founder, and her partner had a high-risk association before the pandemic and were well prepared for the risks: “The risk is always there and during the pandemic, it has become bigger, but I am convinced that in every crisis, there is a possibility of being even more successful. Everything becomes clearer, don't be afraid” (Interviewee 1).

Two more female entrepreneurs emphasized that they had drawn the following conclusions from the situation: “For me it was tough, but also I knew that in the future I would have more opportunities, because my field is really competitive, and the pandemic made a lot of my competitors leave the Berlin industry” (Interviewee 5).

Thus, it appears that the emergent risks were perceived as predominantly positive, namely as a source or catalyst for future opportunities.

These female founders also saw the time as an opportunity to continue working on the structures of their businesses, for instance, one of them also had clients who had the same energy to keep going and change things:

“So, I think I was lucky to find those three clients who really have the same energy to keep going to start changing. [...] this doesn't mean that there is nothing to do because if there is no event, you can use the time to rethink structures, to improve texts, to improve your presentation online, and even to prepare for the next events because everybody knew that this is not going to last forever” (Interviewee 3).

“[...] I know that there are always difficult phases in life and that the good ones follow. The pandemic has turned the world upside down and gives one reason to rethink many things, to adjust procedures, routines, etc. [...]. A functioning system must be fundamentally revised” (Interviewee 2).

Most female entrepreneurs anticipated from the beginning that their business would involve a lot of risks, either because of general challenges or because of the establishment of the business during the pandemic.

Therefore, they realized for themselves that it is important to adapt to the overall situation despite the uncertainty, be resilient and remain flexible in what they do and spread the risk.

“[...] I also realized I need to pivot a bit from what I was doing and look for a different direction and develop my business a little bit in a different direction and to succeed here” (Interviewee 10).

Therefore, it is important for many female entrepreneurs to stick with it and, above all, to keep their positive mindset, which will help them to move forward.

MENTORING

The interview partners gave a good inside into the opinion of female entrepreneurs within the arts and creative industry and what role mentoring might play in helping female entrepreneurs, especially after the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the industry.

According to the research, expertise in entrepreneurship emerged as a key quality that, other than creativity and passion, is not inherent to many creators but rather emerges through own experiences and initiative. To acquire knowledge on their own, many of the interviewees resorted to networks and online resources, which were considered very helpful resources. However, since the focus in the arts and creative sector encompasses many individual needs, and businesses in that area cannot be generalized, the exchange with a mentor specialized in this field is of great importance here.

Additionally, the various differences in (educational) background, experiences, and needs for support that are depicted by the interviewees support the conclusion that a networking or mentoring system would need to leave room for diverse needs. Since there were, for example, interviewees who already had great knowledge about the industry from working within it prior to founding their business or becoming self-employed, they would need to receive another mentoring than those who already have an economic education.

Although the research additionally showed that there are still large gender differences in entrepreneurship, most women interviewed did not really distinguish between female and male leadership.

Therefore, a mentoring program needs to take the gender aspect into account by not necessarily being exclusively female.

However, if interviewees were mothers, they clearly emphasized the associated sense of responsibility and the increased demand for flexibility as well as a strong sense of obligation. These gender-related aspects need to be considered when mentoring female entrepreneurs. Furthermore, these aspects posed major challenges for women during the pandemic, making it difficult for many to continue balancing family and career. From these examples, it is evident how severely the pandemic has affected the creative sector.

As the Covid pandemic additionally had great influences on the arts and creative industry itself, it can be concluded that these impacts might need to be balanced out with greater support systems from the outside that encourage females to follow entrepreneurial activities, as the interviewees showed how the pandemic helped them develop new skills that might be beneficial for future female entrepreneurs.

Since many interviewees mentioned using resources such as online tutorials, it is important to highlight the benefits of mentoring (networks) to help female entrepreneurs or those who want to become entrepreneurs in which ways they can gain expertise and knowledge from such programs. The fact that many of the interviewees had not experienced mentoring before shows that there might be barriers as to why mentoring is not used.

Regarding the opinion about mentoring itself, for the majority of female entrepreneurs interviewed, the most crucial factor in gaining a foothold in the art and creative industry does not seem to be mentoring but networking and the exchange of ideas with like-minded people.

The reputation of mentoring varies greatly, and often, it is considered a luxury commodity since many creatives do not have the financial means to afford it. Albeit those who jumped at the opportunity of working with a mentor would not want to miss this valuable experience and highly recommend it. Furthermore, as many candidates expressed having had indirect mentors in the form of people from their environment, it can be concluded that networking and mentoring show huge parallels and can be easily combined.

ENTREPRENEURIAL SKILLS

Each of the founders has a concrete idea of what makes a successful female entrepreneur in the arts and creative sector. When they were asked about the characteristics that distinguish a successful entrepreneur, socio-emotional skills were often emphasized.

Social capabilities, i.e., the ability to communicate, network, communicate with different people, and work well in a team, were particularly important.

In addition, the presence of professional skills that help one drive the business was also mentioned. For some, these included managerial abilities as well as technical affinity, but also creativity, multi-tasking, efficiency, and entrepreneurial skills were mentioned.

Above all, however, it became evident that for most women, it is often necessary to manage their business consistently and with a lot of willpower and self-confidence. The following skills were mentioned:

- Determination, tenacity, resistance, and persistence
- Assertiveness, stamina, and power
- Visionary, proactive, and risk-taking
- Inquisitive and with courage

The largest majority of participants stated that they had not received any formal entrepreneurial education. Since they come from creative fields such as design, art, education or music, they, therefore, focused on the skills needed in that industries.

Thus, for these entrepreneurs, starting and running the company seems to be based on their own experience and thus self-taught, also emphasized by one of the founders: “[...] I'm only a designer. I give my ideas to productions. I have my experience because my age is 67. My life experience is my entrepreneurial education. There is no university where you can study the design of children and families” (Interviewee 7).

Some of those who did not have entrepreneurial education sought (entrepreneurial) help for the start-up process, i.e., someone to assist them with finances, business model, tax, and other economic, strategic, and organizational matters. A small proportion of respondents had no specific entrepreneurial education but studied business or had courses at universities and thus acquired the necessary skills.

INTRODUCTION - PORTUGAL

The film and audiovisual (AV) sector in Portugal was chosen as a case study for the Arts and Creative Industries in Portugal.

We interviewed 10 women, with an average age of 44 years old, the youngest 28, and the oldest 49. The interviewees were highly qualified, with nine interviewees having completed at least one undergraduate degree. They had different educational backgrounds, both in the field of arts and arts-related fields (e.g., sound and image, cinema, architecture, and design) and in non-artistic fields, within the social sciences and humanities.

Considering the interviewees' professional roles and the different areas in this sector (from production to postproduction, from sales to distribution), most of the interviewees worked in production and also in education/training. The choice of working as educators, is often a way of dealing with job insecurity and all the difficulties encountered by women in the cultural and creative sectors. Most interviewees were currently freelancers by the time of the interview or have been in the past. Four interviewees have established their own businesses, ranging from an average of one year to two years to over 10 years of existence. Those interviewees expressed different motivations for starting their businesses: as an alternative to the difficulties in finding work and/or work in positive work environments, as a way of balancing work-family life, as a way to keep side-projects in parallel with a more financially stable career, or to access informal networks of contacts.

The interviews lasted an average of 1h30, the shortest one being 1h, and the longest one 5h. As such, the information that we share in this report is a very short summary and does not reflect all the richness and complexity of the life stories that were generously shared with us.

BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

General Perception and Barriers

The interviewees, overall, described that the cultural and creative industries are facing chronic difficulties such as intense levels of precariousness, lack of institutional support (both governmental and private), and low salaries. Interviewees felt that the working opportunities in the film industry are decreasing, mostly due to the pandemic. As a consequence, the job market has become more competitive than ever and, also, more precarious.

Interviewees point out that on the one hand, the market is oversaturated, and on the other hand, organisations are toxic. Strict hierarchies in production companies are mentioned as creating hostile working environments.

The government is not investing nor changing the market or the working conditions in the sector. Not only has public funding decreased, specifically the one provided by the main public funding body for the cinema and audiovisual sector in Portugal, The Institute of Cinema and Audiovisual (ICA), but also the selection criteria for funding are perceived as unequal (favouring men over women) and often unfair.

Another key factor that hinders entrepreneurship is bureaucracies when starting a venture to produce films, either through the creation of a company or a not-for-profit association. This shows how the business environment is not supportive to those who want to (re)start a business. Despite these barriers, the interviewees claim that the diverse and multiple challenges and tasks in the cinema and AV sector provided them with a certain degree of freedom and opportunities to experience different work processes, which has helped them improve specific skill sets.

Barriers Facing Female Entrepreneurs

The generalized lack of financial support for the sector is a barrier that also affects women who want to start or restart a business in the cinema and AV. The other most common barriers mentioned were a lack of knowledge in the financial and entrepreneurial side of business, more specifically, financial illiteracy and lack of entrepreneurial skills. It was also mentioned a lack of knowledge on labour rights.

Adding to the general barriers affecting negatively the flourishing of Cultural and Creative Industries and all its workers, women are facing additional hardships. Female entrepreneurs in the arts and creative industries have to overcome specific barriers in order to start or restart their businesses. Interviewees complained that leadership positions in the cinema and AV sector are white male-dominated, and they perceive the work environment as sexist and paternalist. They have experienced gender pay gap (being paid less than men in the same job role, and with the same working experience).

Interviewees explained that women are taken less seriously than men in the cinema and AV sector, and often remain invisible. The interviewees made clear that there is a general lack of female representation and recognition in the areas of cinema and audiovisual, across all career stages and sub-sectors.

Pregnancy and motherhood are extremely difficult to balance with the demanding work of production companies, which requires long hours of work. There is also the perception that female-related issues, such as menstruation, are difficult to approach in the workplace.

Drivers

Funding is one of the most important drivers, in the interviewees' opinion. Salary tables and quotas are presented as measures already being taken, that have the potential to make a positive change in the cinema and audiovisual labour market, and become drivers for new ventures. However, its implementation has been slow and has not met the expected changes yet. The implementation of more systematic inspections in the workplace could be an action to promote better working conditions and support female entrepreneurs, as suggested by one interviewee.

Also, belonging to professional associations in the sector can be a way to have access to legal and financial support, but also as a way of expanding the network. Furthermore, training and mentoring can also be a way of supporting female entrepreneurs.

COVID-19

It is important to emphasise that the Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated the problems already existing in the cultural and creative industries (CCI), long before the pandemic hit the sector.

Several interviewees claimed that either all of their projects were halted during this period, or it became virtually impossible to find new work opportunities. Six interviewees either closed their activities or lost all work as freelancers during this period. Only two interviewees claimed that they were not negatively financially affected by the pandemic and kept working in the business. However, they emphasised that they are exceptions and that their situation is specific and not symptomatic of the overall state of the industry.

Another interviewee began a personal research journey and reflection on the transformations that the field of cinema was going through during the period when she had a more unstable financial situation.

One interviewee told how she went without any work for four months but discovered through this an opportunity to reflect and eventually found a way to fund her own production company.

While a context of socioeconomic crisis as catastrophic as the one resulting from Covid-19 pandemic does not always have to be an insurmountable obstacle for entrepreneurs, this type of success is a rare experience.

It also shows that there is not a "one size fits all" solution when it comes to struggling female entrepreneurs in the field of cinema and audiovisual.

ENTREPRENEURIAL FAILURE AND RECOVERY

Reasons and Impact

In this topic, the answers were varied due to the heterogeneity of professional activities. Specifically, in the professional environment for women entrepreneurs, there are still several gaps and weaknesses associated with a lack of funding and career stability. In this sense, the pandemic was a magnifying lens into the business challenges associated with the cinema and AV sector.

The sector suspended activities (film productions suspended, movie theatres closing down), resulting in the decrease of job offers.

This situation combined with the lack of funding to face the COVID-19 pandemic pushbacks in the sector, was a common reason for entrepreneurial failure, resulting in the drastic slow down in activity for most interviewees.

The pandemic impacted the quantity of the entrepreneurial activity, and it affected its nature. The interviewees demonstrated increased proactivity in seeking new opportunities and restructuring their activities.

From this restructuring, the film and audiovisual production processes were also changed, with a direct impact on the type of content produced. There was a turn to the production of commercial content, to obtain a more stable financial situation. In this regard, two interviewees underlined the importance of flexibility and interdisciplinarity when developing film and audiovisual projects.

Interviewee 1 detailed her efforts in finding new opportunities in the field, ending up restructuring her career, by working both outside of the field and by turning to freelancing as a way of keep working in the cinema and AV sector. Unlike other interviewees, this interviewee feels that she never fully succeeded in entering the field and that the pandemic situation further decreased her chances of ever becoming a professional in cinema with a fixed income.

Interviewee 5 decided to become self-employed when the pandemic hit, and by turning to self-employment she was able to succeed in not slowing down or closing down the activity during the pandemic period. The stress levels and the toxic work environment in the production company where she worked pre-pandemic, were determining factors for starting her activity as a self-employed worker.

Throughout difficult times, interviewees struggled to remain in the film and audiovisual sector, creating strategies to navigate the financial and labour instability.

The key factors for entrepreneurial recovery were:

- Resilience and proactivity and in seeking new opportunities
- Restructuring work practices to be aligned with market needs
- Finding alternatives to the film production company business model (e.g., associations)
- Establishing and/or relying on networks of people from different creative fields with whom to build synergies

Sensemaking and Learning

During the COVID-19 pandemic period, most of the interviewees reflected on the need to always have a resilient attitude and be flexible to the challenges that professional life in the cinema industry can bring.

Despite the work instability felt by some of the interviewees during this period, it is necessary to underline how these professionals gained a new sense of confidence and resilience in the face of the adversities experienced.

This new sense of confidence also originated in a reorientation of ideas and modes of production in the face of rejection. Hence, flexibility and networking with people from other creative fields plays a major role in the creation of innovative business strategies.

The creation of alternatives to the more traditional film production company, such as not for profit associations, is also a way out of entrepreneurial failure.

Other interviewees underlined the financial risks of being an independent professional (or freelancer) and how those risks are reflected in the personal lives of these professionals. Without a family support network and efficient expense management, paying for basic daily expenses can become difficult and even emotionally draining. One of the interviewees felt that the pandemic period was important for learning to regulate and manage anxiety related to their professional life.

In terms of sensemaking and learning lessons, the following aspects were common to several interviewees:

- Self-confidence
- Resilience
- Flexibility
- Support
- Innovation

Outcome

Most interviewees who were negatively impacted have not yet fully overcome or recovered from the losses associated with the pandemic. As a matter of fact, at the time of the interviews, some of them did not yet perceive this unfavourable phase as something that had fully ended.

As a result, most of them do not mention a significant new attitude towards taking risks and are still re-adjusting themselves, and trying to make sense of what their entrepreneurial or professional future will look like.

For example, after being forced to change the area of activity, interviewee 10 is now much more cautious with risks and new ventures. Interviewee 1 expresses a paradox regarding what attitude towards risk taking can mean for female entrepreneurs. She claims that the resilience gained during the pandemic period is likely to make her more willing to take risks. However, as she explains, this willingness has not yet come about, due to the new problems emerging in the post-Covid-19 world, such as the war in Eastern Europe, and the resulting historical inflation rates, and shock waves in the global economy. Hence, risk taking attitudes are low.

The interviewees also recurrently mentioned that there were no specific forms of institutional support for startups or self-employed people during the pandemic, which was clearly one of the harshest gaps.

Some recall receiving the general unemployment benefit from Social Security that is not specific to the creative sector, but most did not even qualify for this benefit, for bureaucratic reasons.

In terms of informal support, some interviewees were financially helped by relatives and partners.

Others had to start working in non-qualified jobs as waiters or in retail, so they could have enough money to get by and eventually try to get back on their feet.

MENTORING

General Perception

Most participants mentioned the importance of receiving guidance from someone with experience, and the importance of having someone professionally wise and available to provide support on several topics (eg: on how to overcome obstacles, how to approach the unknown).

Interviewee 2 draws parallels between a mentor and a teacher, and that how mentoring naturally takes place in an educational context.

Mentors' guidance should be conducted in specific ways. Interviewee 5 states the importance of openness to transmit the proper information to those who need it. Interviewee 4 emphasises happiness and hope in the process of mentoring others. The following characteristics are the ones mentioned as what mentoring should not be:

- o Not empathic
- o Uninspiring
- o Lacking in moral integrity
- o Authoritarian

The following reasons for seeking out a mentor were cited by the female entrepreneurs interviewed:

- Finding answers to their questions
- Getting advice on how to deal with clients
- Getting knowledge on how to give market value to projects
- Entrepreneurial skills
- Facilitating getting in networks/contacts
- Facilitating internationalisation
- Gaining multiple perspectives of the industry
- Finding other people willing to take risks /Finding associates

Access to Mentoring

Most of the interviewees are not receiving any mentoring to date, and very few have received mentoring either during their training, at Higher Education Institutes, or as workers, in the job market. Only interviewees 1 and 4 revealed having mentorship while in university and during their internships. Interviewee 5 shared having access to mentorship during her professional career.

Interviewees assumed that ways to find mentors would go from contacts in the academic world to the personal circle of friends, from artistic residences to training, and also advice from peers.

One obstacle in finding a mentor, could be the singularity of mentees' needs, implying that it would be hard to match with the knowledge offered by a mentor.

Competencies of Mentors

Interviewees mentioned the following qualities as the ones most appreciated on potential and current mentors:

Personal:

- Frankness and honesty
- Empathy (Willingness to listen; Ability to detect problems, tensions, things to solve and reciprocate)
- Openness
- Creative freedom
- Discipline
- Pragmatism
- Trustworthiness

Professional Skills:

- Availability
- Strong work experience and accumulated knowledge
- Inspiring, with a Vision
- Experience working with people in other areas and sectors (Interdisciplinarity)
- Promoting decent work, i.e., promoting fair, equal and inclusive working conditions
- Do not discriminate against gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation (being feminist, pro-LGBTQIA+, anti-racist)

Technical Skills:

- Knowledge of the film and audiovisual market
- Knowledge on how to get funding
- Communications skills to persuade clients and sponsors/funders (e.g., how to communicate and pitch ideas effectively)
- Management and organizational skills



ENTREPRENEURIAL SKILLS

General Perception and Skill Development

When asked about their access to any formal entrepreneurial training/education, only 4 out of the 10 female entrepreneurs have received it.

However, interviewees mentioned searching for entrepreneurial skills and knowledge through informal means, ranging from resources on the internet to getting advice from family and peers, and even therapy was mentioned.

From the participants' perspective, the skills that female entrepreneurs need to have in order to thrive in the arts and creative sector are hand in hand with the skills that mentors should have.

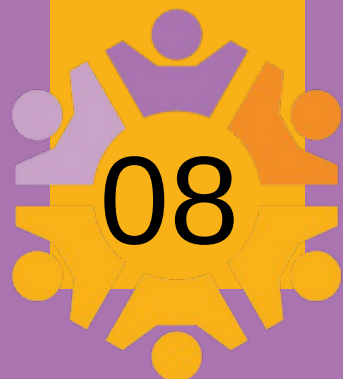
One of those skills previously mentioned was the ability to get funding. One interviewee claims that an attitudinal change towards funding is needed: "Finding the money is part of the job, but it's taboo, although it's part of it."

Adding to those skills, a few other attributes are also appreciated by interviewees:

- Leadership skills
- Persistence
- Resilience
- Teamwork
- Digital skills

Moreover, the interviewees also mentioned the need of a combination between digital and technical skills and its constant update and adaptation.

The entrepreneurs interviewed pointed out to the need to develop and strengthening socio-emotional skills. There is the belief that those skills can help women entrepreneurs facing the gender barriers previously mentioned, namely, the male-dominated film business environment, which makes harder for women to get access to the same job opportunities, and to thrive as full entrepreneurs.



Results from Survey.

MENTORS PERSPECTIVE



SURVEY OVERVIEW

A survey was conducted in four different countries including Portugal, Italy, Germany, and Netherlands to understand what impact the Covid-19 pandemic had on female entrepreneurs in the creative and arts industry and what role mentoring plays in (re-)starting the businesses of struggling female entrepreneurs. People of different ages took part in the survey, a large proportion evenly distributed between 25-54 years old. Most participants were female but also men and people from other gender minorities participated in the survey.

Survey participants come from a variety of sectors, with most stating they work in the arts and creative sector (40%) or education (26%). Some other sectors covered were also for example business or entrepreneurship consulting.

The specific fields respondents work in also vary, with film and audiovisual including television and video games being the largest share. Further, the specific fields of education, performing arts, IT, software and computer services, and marketing and advertising account for a significant part. Moreover, there are non-specific fields that fall under 'others' such as educational platform coaching, entrepreneurship, social work, training and coaching, and mentoring.

OPINIONS ON MENTORING

The survey regarding mentoring shows that slightly more than half of the representatives have already acted as mentors. The other half had no previous experience with mentoring but would like to be either a mentor or a mentee.

The participants in the survey had thereby various reasons for their motivation to take part in mentoring. The most frequently chosen reasons are the 'development of professional competencies', and 'networking'.

There is a difference in this regard between (potential) mentors and mentees. For mentors, the second most meaningful reason for participating in the mentoring program is to contribute to the founding of companies by women or to the lives of others in general. For mentees, on the other hand, the most relevant reason is to receive guidance on own's startup.

Further reasons chosen by participants were:

- Increase the awareness of issues in the arts and creative industry
- Become an active bystander against gender inequality and
- Role modeling

MENTORING PROGRAMS

In general, women entrepreneurs' access to mentoring programs in the arts and creative industries is rated as rather average.

Participants were asked to assess which challenges considering the access to mentoring programs in the art and creative industries, they most agreed with. Here the answers of the respondents were similar.

Namely, 73% agree that the low visibility of mentoring programs can be seen as an enormous challenge. Further, 62% of the participants rated difficulties in pairing mentors and mentees as another important challenge. Finally, 58% also agreed that there are not enough mentors.

Apart from the challenges mentioned above, participants who already have experience with mentoring could choose which type of mentorship they use. The results showed that reciprocal and e-mentoring are the most popular types of mentoring, followed by team mentoring. Reciprocal means that two individuals work together through a mentoring process in which they both take on the roles of mentor and mentee, while e-mentoring includes virtual meetings or using an online platform.

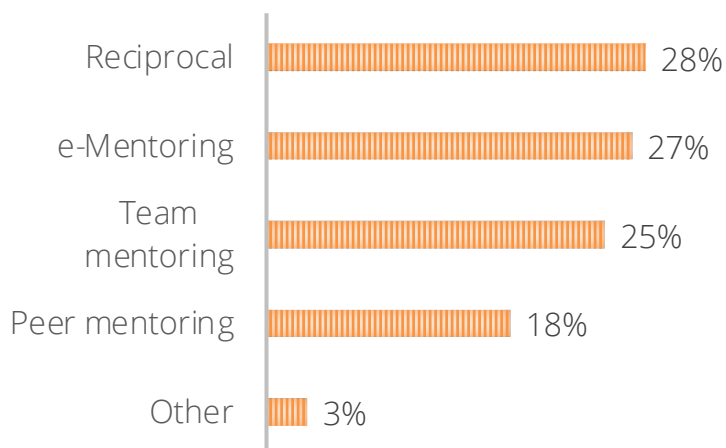
In fact, half of the participants who are mentors or might be potential mentors are willing to spend 1-3 hours and the other half would devote a minimum of three hours per month. In contrast, mentees expect it to be a minimum of three hours per month.

Respondents also predominantly agreed on how structured a mentor/mentee relationship should be, as for most, it should be moderately structured. This means that almost 60% of participants mostly preferred to talk at designated times in a month but with more scheduling flexibility.

In addition, there are different types of support that are offered or requested in mentoring. Most important for all the participants are the contacts from networking and interactions that can be drawn from the mentor/mentee relationship.

Subsequently, sharing and access to resources are also of great importance, and finally, presentation and pitching skills, leadership styles, and conflict management are also among the kinds of support on which great emphasis is placed.

TYPE OF MENTORSHIPS

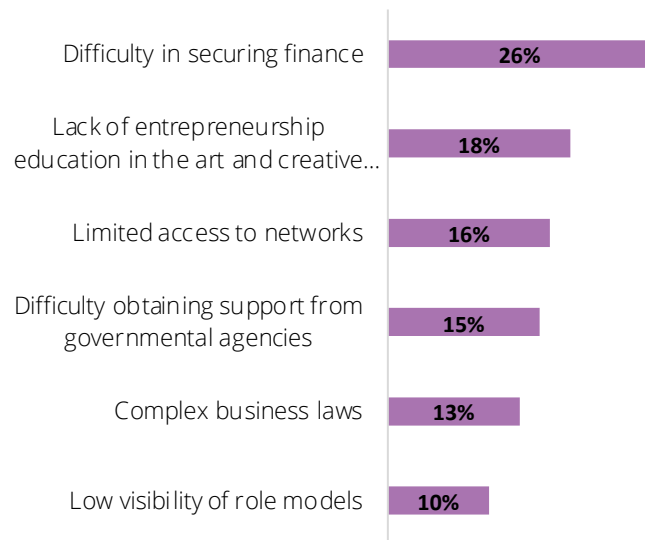


CHALLENGES FOR WOMEN IN THE ARTS AND CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

The views on what are the best types of support in a mentor/mentee relationship have been clearly mapped. Slightly more equally distributed are the opinions regarding the main challenges facing women entrepreneurs in the arts and creative industries.

Difficulty in securing finance proved to be the most chosen challenge. However, other issues were also seen as relevant, such as the lack of entrepreneurship education in the art and creative industry or limited access to networks.

CHALLENGES FACING WOMEN

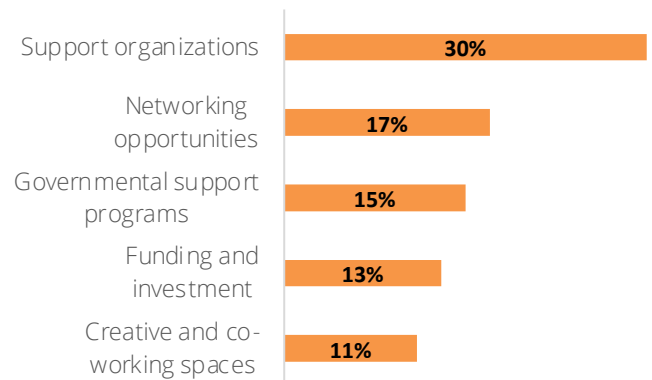


BEST START-UP SUPPORT

Accordingly, it is interesting to know which forms of start-up support are the best for women entrepreneurs in the art & creative industry, as there are obviously various challenges.

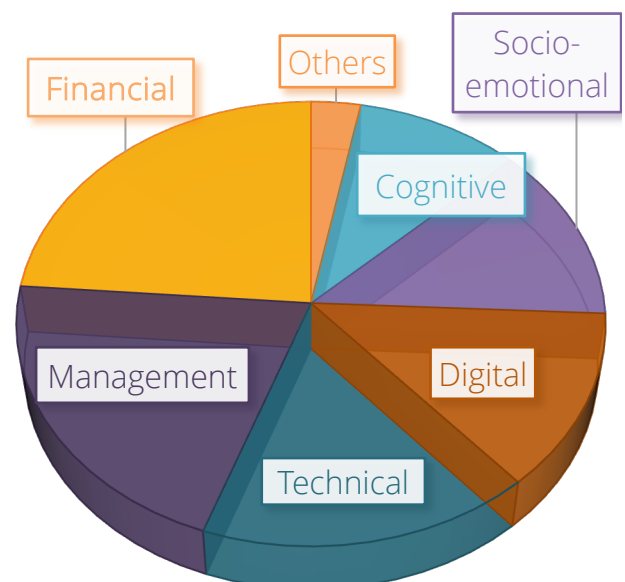
The three most frequently mentioned support options, according to respondents, would be support organizations, including incubators, accelerators, and start-up hubs, further networking opportunities, and governmental support programs. Slightly less relevant seemed to be funding and investment and creative and co-working spaces.

TOP 5 START-UP SUPPORT



Participants were then able to select which qualities are particularly relevant for becoming a mentor. It is clear that above all, management and financial skills are considered important, followed by technical skills. The socio-emotional, cognitive, and digital skills seemed to be somewhat less valued.

MENTOR'S SKILLS





Reflection and Outlook.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



Conclusions

Mentoring can play a significant role in supporting female entrepreneurs, and it can provide both mentors and mentees with multiple advantages. For the former, this is especially the increase of one's own awareness of issues in other businesses, and for the latter, it is the development of professional competencies and networking.

Additionally, it is important to highlight the benefits of mentoring to help female entrepreneurs or those who want to step on the entrepreneurial path, gain expertise and knowledge from such programs.

Moreover, as Covid-19 had substantial influences on the arts and creative industry itself, it can be concluded that these impacts might need to be balanced out with greater support systems from the outside that encourage women to follow entrepreneurial activities.

Given the insights from the survey as well as the interviews, we have seen that there is a lot of potential on how to support female entrepreneurs in the arts and creative industries through mentoring.

In the same vein, mentors are highly willing to share their expertise with the mentees. This further underlines the point of the openness of mentors to support their mentees. However, the fact that many of the interviewees had not experienced mentoring before shows that there might be barriers as to why mentoring is not used.

Regarding the opinion about mentoring itself, for the majority of female entrepreneurs interviewed, the most crucial factor in gaining a foothold in the arts and creative industries does not seem to be mentoring, but networking and the exchange of ideas with like-minded people. Therefore, there should be a collaboration between mentoring and networking.

Finally, there must be developed more strategies to increase awareness of the mentoring impact. This will show opportunities for mentoring for female entrepreneurs and also will help facilitate resource recycling by attracting female entrepreneurs with the knowledge and experience to become mentors. Thus, it will create a great value for female entrepreneurship in arts and creative industries.



Recommendations

Group approach

The group approach is reasonable in multiple ways. Peer mentoring is one of the favored types of mentoring as it can create social safety, a feeling of belonging and togetherness. This can in return strengthen the trust between members of the group, which was also mentioned as important.

Additionally, the peer approach is also more financially available than one-on-one mentoring, resulting in a greater target group for participation. Adding to that, the needs and struggles of entrepreneurs from the arts and creative industries are very individual: Groups would enable the participants to pick different pieces of know-how from various members according to their needs, while at the same time being able to extend their networking system with new contacts.

Gender diversity

A gender-diverse program is preferred over a women-only program. The main reason for this is that the “women mentoring women” approach unintentionally upholds a stereotype that is in fact not wanted. In order to achieve gender equality, all genders should be included in the program.

Yet while some women put high emphasis on gender equality, others insisted on having a female mentor because they believed males would not be able to understand them in a way women do. Even though, gender diverse program will open bigger networking opportunities.

Cross-sectoral networking

The network should be not just gender diverse, but also cross-sectoral. As many women are lacking expertise e.g., with taxes or other bureaucratic knowledge, this is more likely to be solved with participants from different sectors. According to the survey, one of the main motivations for people to be mentors is to contribute to other people's life. This implies that even the participants with huge entrepreneurial expertise will benefit from the network because they reach satisfaction by sharing their knowledge with others.





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