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**KSENIJA VUKOVIĆ**

Faculty of Organization and Informatics, University of Zagreb, Croatia

## **HOW GEM REPORTS POSITION FEMALE ENTREPRENEURS: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS**

### **Abstract:**

The aim of this article is to explore the positioning of female entrepreneurs in GEM reports for the Republic of Croatia between 2002 and 2018. The research adopts a qualitative approach by using critical discourse analysis. The research began with content analysis looking for content related to the positioning of women and their entrepreneurship and the creation of a timeline of discussion topics. In the second stage, two-level coding system was deployed to find the dominant discourse as well as the implicit discourses. We have found the legacy of discourse subordinating female entrepreneurship to other goals. The dominant discourse is growth-supporting: the imperative of firm growth stands before gender equality.

### **Keywords:**

Female entrepreneurs, GEM, Croatia, critical discourse analysis

**JEL Classification:** L26

## **1 Introduction**

In her article *The discourse of entrepreneurial masculinities (and femininities)*, Eleanor Hamilton (2013) calls for a different approach to entrepreneurship research due to the lack of gender informed, reflexive practice in contemporary studies of entrepreneurship. Among other things, she points to the possibility of researching texts published annually by the global entrepreneurship monitor (GEM) to see how GEM reports “have promulgated a gendered view of entrepreneurship, through misleading reductionism, gendered essentialism and an implicit belief in the virtues of high growth, technology, innovation and ambition” (Hamilton, 2013: 96).

This article analyzes the texts of the GEM report for Croatia, which makes up a minority of the total texts of the GEM report at the global level (50 countries participate in GEM research according to GEM 2019/2020 Global Report, including Croatia since 2002). The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) survey for Croatia has been conducted in the Republic of Croatia since 2002. GEM is the world’s largest survey of entrepreneurial activity, launched in 1999 by the ten most developed countries, and led by a consortium of national teams led by the London Business School in London and Babson College in Boston.

GEM has its own research instrument that develops over time, but the basic indicators remain unchanged and provide a longitudinal overview of entrepreneurial activity for individual countries, as well as for the population of participants in GEM research. Quantitative indicators are accompanied by interpretations and guidelines that consist of a larger amount of text. In this way, it is possible to make an analysis of the discourses that dominate the texts and to investigate whether there are hidden discourses that can be read between the lines. The aim of the article is to identify discourses related to women's entrepreneurship in Croatia using the method of critical discourse analysis.

## **2 Representations of female entrepreneurs**

In her article *The discourse of entrepreneurial masculinities (and femininities)*, Eleanor Hamilton (2013) calls for a different approach to entrepreneurship research due to the lack of gender informed, reflexive practice in contemporary studies of entrepreneurship. Among other things, it points to the possibility of researching texts published annually by the global entrepreneurship monitor (GEM) to see how GEM reports “have promulgated a gendered view of entrepreneurship, through misleading reductionism, gendered essentialism and an implicit belief in the virtues of high growth, technology, innovation and ambition” (Hamilton, 2013: 96).

This article analyzes the texts of the GEM report for Croatia. GEM has its own research instrument that develops over time, but the basic indicators remain unchanged and provide a longitudinal overview of entrepreneurial activity for individual countries, as well as for the population of participants in GEM research. Quantitative indicators are accompanied by interpretations and guidelines that consist of a larger amount of text. In this way, it is possible to make an analysis of the discourses that dominate the texts and to investigate whether there are hidden discourses.

## **3 Methodology**

In the discourse analysis different methods of data analysis can be used but it often starts from a content analysis. What distinguishes discourse analysis from ordinary content analysis is the way the researcher approaches the material. Discourse analysis is not just about counting words, but questioning the content in a qualitative way to find out what is included in the content

and what is not, what the content explicitly says and what it implies. Such an analysis takes data as productive rather than representational (Ahl and Nelson, 2015).

### 3.1. Data selection

For the purposes of this research, secondary data were used - the texts of the GEM research reports for Croatia. GEM research in Croatia is conducted by the GEM team for Croatia, which consists of four members. The members are scientists - researchers, all of four researchers are women. GEM reports for Croatia are published on the CEPOR website (SMEs and Entrepreneurship Policy Center, the first think-tank in Croatia, which deals with SME sector problems). The research covers the period from the initial research year in Croatia in 2002 to the latest report for 2018. The results of the research were published through seven documents. The three documents provide a joint report for several years (2002-2005, 2002-2011, 2012-2015). Other documents refer to individual years (2006, 2016, 2017, 2018). The total text of all seven reports is 653 pages.

### 3.2. Data analysis

Like all qualitative researchers, discussion analysts must delve into the material they are studying (Halmi, 2005). A good start for this is to simply read and re-read the text until you are fully acquainted with it. This process necessarily precedes coding. In the initial stages of coding, it should be carried out as thoroughly and comprehensively as possible, so that all cases are included in the analysis framework. Researchers use different coding strategies according to personal interests, but basically coding is a way of organizing a system of categories and looking for connections between them according to a certain paradigmatic model (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

In the analytical part of this research, all selected documents were read at the beginning to construct an overall timeline of discussion topics. After that, all parts of the text related to research questions were read again. In the second stage, the two-level coding system was deployed. The first level of coding was descriptive in nature to identify the thematic background of the text fragment. A review of all codes from the first coding level was then made to find patterns in the observed time. Finally, a table with identified dominant and persistent discourses was created.

## 4 Findings and discussion

The analysis of the text identified three discourses related to the role of women entrepreneurs in the Croatian economy (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Position of the female entrepreneur in GEM reports Croatia**

Discourse	Sample quotes
<b>Normative and cultural barriers to female entrepreneurship</b>	Equality of women's potential in recognizing business opportunities with men "melts" due to traditional values dominant in Croatian society, but also due to the lack of appropriate services for more efficient organization of family life, which would allow women to enter an entrepreneurial career

	The problem of women's inequality is a "hard nut to crack" and requires large and long-term investments in changing social, cultural and political norms.
<b>The need to involve all institutions and actors of society in order to remove barriers</b>	...the need for well-designed and related activities to change values and norms but also to create conditions for some value norms to be realized (eg a good network of services that facilitate family life) Changes in cultural and social norms are the most difficult to make and require the greatest amount of time, which emphasizes the necessity of cooperation between different policies, programs and institutions (from education to the media) even more.
<b>Imperative of growth</b>	Croatia still has few growing companies The ownership structure in fast-growing and non-growing companies by gender is the same: 25% owned by women, 75% owned by men. The long-term presence of this pattern of entrepreneurial activity (technological readiness without new products) also indicates the reason why Croatia fails to move up the competitiveness scale.

Source: Author according to GEM Reports Croatia

Two discourses are explicitly stated, the discourse on normative and cultural barriers and the discourse on the need to involve all institutions and actors in order to remove barriers. The third discourse refers to the imperative of growth through technologically advanced industries and innovation. The first two discourses are related to the normative institutions of Croatian society that represent barriers to women's entrepreneurship. Institutions determine behavior through processes that are related to three levels: regulatory, which affects behavior through repression and fear of sanction, normative, which affects behavior and activities through norms of acceptability, morality and ethics, and cognitive, which affects activities through the categories themselves and the frameworks by which actors know and interpret their world (Scott, 2001). According to North (1990), institutions can be: formal, such as political and economic rules and contracts (we can label them as regulatory) or informal, such as codes, conventions, attitudes, values and norms of behavior (normative and cultural-cognitive) .

Regulatory barriers have been removed but normative barriers remain in many societies. If we take the example of ancient Athens and modern Athens as an illustration, we can say that in ancient times there were regulatory barriers in Greece because women did not have the right to vote despite living in the cradle of democracy. Today, women in Greece have the right to vote, but are underrepresented in entrepreneurship compared to men. Regulatory barriers have been removed, but normative and cultural-cognitive ones have remained. The same is the case in Croatia.

Explicitly stated normative and cultural-cognitive barriers embodied in attitudes and beliefs about gender roles in Croatia implies that women are an unused potential to be developed in order to strengthen the entrepreneurial capacity of the Croatian economy. Women are less involved in entrepreneurship and are more inclined to necessity entrepreneurship than

recognizing entrepreneurial opportunity. This is the reason to call on all institutions to take joint action to remove barriers to women's entrepreneurship.

The discourse we have defined as the growth imperative points to the appeal of analysts to work on policies to encourage growth based on innovation. Reports show that the application of high technology is not sufficient for enterprise growth if there is no innovation but the fact is that the fastest growth rates are expected in high-tech industries where women are underrepresented. It can be implicitly read that gender equality is of secondary importance. The priority is economic growth at the national level. Support for the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises is moving towards areas where there is high growth potential. The discourse of economic growth acts as a master narrative. Since women own a smaller number of enterprises, there is a discourse on the potential contribution of women to economic growth in terms of the number and size of enterprises.

## 5 Conclusion

Comparing strategies and activities to improve the position of women in entrepreneurship with their outcomes, it can be seen that there is a gap between policy and outcomes. The reproduction of normative and cultural-cognitive patterns that favor men on the one hand, and the imperative of economic growth on the other, puts women in a doubly unfavorable social position, especially in the field of entrepreneurship. This conclusion is close to what Ahl and Nelson (2014) found during the analysis of the discourse of texts on the policy of support for women in entrepreneurship on the example of the USA and Sweden. Instead of improving the position of women in entrepreneurship, the circumstances are such that there is a tendency to reproduce the position of women in society, instead of improving them. It is surprising that, for example, the share of women in owning small service businesses is similar today and at the end of the 19th century when we talk about Croatia (Vuković, 2015). There is a need to review government policies to support the advancement of women in entrepreneurship.

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