

## More technologies? More women entrepreneurs!

### DEBRIEF

#### EUROPEAN CONFERENCE: 'More technologies? More women entrepreneurs!'

Athens, 6 November 2012 / [www.gender-it.eu](http://www.gender-it.eu)

In a period economic crisis, in which solutions are being sought to break out of this vicious cycle, it is our duty and obligation to promote exceptional initiatives such as the European conference "More technologies? More women entrepreneurs!"

Approximately 500 participants attended the conference, out of which almost 300 participants attended the conference physically, -despite the severe difficulties caused by the wave of strikes in Athens, including the strike of all the mass means of transportation- and 195 participated through live web streaming.

What distinguished this conference and made it stand out was the fact that it spoke the language of today's and the future's female entrepreneur! In other words, it was organized in a manner that took into consideration the participants' gender-specific needs. It not only gave them the opportunity to leave the conference with new knowledge, but it provided, among other things, practical and useful workshops, focusing on mentoring, on office applications as well as the use and application of social media.

This conference was the result and high-point of a series of successful information endeavours and dissemination activities in the framework of the European project "ladybizIT", a "Leonardo da Vinci" initiative aimed at promoting and contributing to the European Commission's support of female entrepreneurship and in particular promoting the ways in which Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) can encourage and facilitate female entrepreneurship.

Additionally, 12 European projects were presented at the conference, projects that can help women of Europe -regardless of age or race/ethnic background- to discover what the EU Lifelong Learning Programme can do for them.

In highlighting and showing women -and men- the advantages and opportunities that ICTs can offer them for the development of their business initiatives and activities, the conference target was achieved, namely it succeeded in inspiring and encouraging *future* and *aspiring* women entrepreneurs.

More analytically, the **conference results** -prepared by the conference Moderator, Dr. Irene Kamberidou of ECWT Executive Group- are included below:

## FEMALE ENTREPRENEURSHIP: A CULTURE OF COLLABORATION

The promotion and support of female entrepreneurship and how Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) can facilitate, promote and support it were discussed at the European conference "More technologies? More women entrepreneurs!" held in Athens, November 6, 2012. The conference was organized by Militos Emerging Technologies and Services (coordinator of the project ladybizIT / [www.gender-it.eu](http://www.gender-it.eu)), and its partners i.e. ECWT-European Center for Women and Technology, the Hellenic Professionals Informatics Society (HePIS), ITEC Training & IT Services and OLN Learning.

There was a consensus on the issue of obstacles confronted by women entrepreneurs. One of the major obstacles for women to take the option of European entrepreneurship is the limited access and use of ICT tools.

**"We are in a new era, that of the technological revolution. The life cycle of such a revolution has 40-60 years duration, and we are only in the beginning!"** Eva Fabry, the Director of the European Centre for Women and Technology (ECWT) pointed out in her address to the conference participants.

**«We cannot have change unless we have men in the room»**, said Madi Sharma, an entrepreneur running the Madi Group, a group of private sector and not for profit companies with a philosophy to create innovative ideas tailored to local action which can achieve global impacts beneficial to society. **"We need a Business Ministry for Women!"** she also argued.

**"Entrepreneurship is all weather, meaning that it does not have a gender, an age, a race or an ethnic background"** as defined by Olga Stavropoulou, Managing Director of Militos Emerging Technologies & Services as well as a the Coordinator of the Greek part of the European Network of Mentors for Women Entrepreneurs. It is always current and contemporary, especially during periods of crisis where innovative and successful entrepreneurial activities surface and appear on the scene. **"We need to get rid of the stereotypes, because they are out of fashion"** she also argued.

The Head of the Representation of the European Commission in Greece, Dr. Panos Carvounis, said that gender equality is a fundamental right and a vital source for future economic development and competitiveness and that female entrepreneurship constitutes a dynamic and essential source for development. He also referred to the new EU programme *equality pays off*, that will soon be directed to 44 countries, stressing that this programme will also help countries achieve a gender balance. He added that a gender balance is also being promoted with regard to women's participation on the board of directors.

**«We do not have a *culture of collaboration* in Greece, consequently we do not have a culture of entrepreneurship"** said Dr. Theodore Skylakakis, Member of the European Parliament. He also argued that "there is a wastage of talent of a significant part of society, that of women [...] modern societies have 50% of their talent in women, but use only a small percentage of it." He also pointed out that although business success rates are higher when we have more women on board, there are still extreme inequalities observed throughout Europe.

"New technologies are providing new opportunities for women entrepreneurs" argued George Flessas, President and CEO of CIVITAS S.A., the largest strategy, communications and public affairs Company in Greece today. Mr. Flessas pointed out that "social media has been developing with rapid speed, the world has changed, the way we shop has changed and the way we communicate has changed. **There is a new culture that is leading to a new consumer-citizen, who is thirsty for something new and tires of it quickly.**"

(See video of all speakers' presentations in [www.gender-it.eu](http://www.gender-it.eu))

Indeed the social media, the digital culture, for many a new and stimulating environment have become a significant part of our daily activities. Yet we have hardly begun to understand to what extent the new media has changed our daily lives, practices, habits and culture.

Many speakers, and especially women entrepreneurs, demystified the world of new technologies through the lens of their own experiences, focusing on how technologies and specifically social media supported the development and success of their business. **Aspiring women entrepreneurs have been relying on this flexibility to achieve the so valued career-family balance.**

It is worth pointing out that entrepreneurship provides flexible working conditions for both women and men and as published in the frames of the conference (*Reflections on women entrepreneurship /a reader*), a number of recent studies show that many men today are using technology, digital tools to work independently, market their brands or ideas, monitor results instead of hours and in particular to balance their personal/career lives. Numerous studies show that women enjoy a slight edge over their male counterparts when it comes to social media and group communication skills. Women seem to possess stronger communication skills and social intelligence than men and are also better listeners. They not only excel in communication skills, but studies find that the collective intelligence of a group rises when the group includes more women (Kamberidu & Fabry 2012, Cowley 2011, SheSpeaks 2011, Woolley & Malone 2011, Karacostas 2012, Akalp 2012) Woolley & Malone 2011).

In today's digital economy which requires such skills, these so-called "feminine" skills and leadership qualities that promote and reproduce *a culture of collaboration*—whether the result of biology or social conditioning— are more significant now than ever!

#### Some TIPS from the conference speakers:

- Stop being scared of technologies and get to know them better!
- Invest on a good internet connection.
- Be practical and set realistic goals.
- Seek synergies and work on common ideas.
- Take advantage of the available European projects with ready to use online educational and training material, at no cost.
- Find online groups, fora and social networking sites that are created by women, for women since these usually offer support, connections, information, marketing opportunities, and more.
- Present successful women entrepreneurs as role models and learn from their experience (storytelling).
- Connect with a diverse range of people from all around the world, people you may never have even discovered or had the chance to contact without the social media.

- Learn to use the analytical tools that help you determine the impact your social media networking is having on your business.
- Social media compliments marketing efforts, for example Twitter is great for 'trial and error' in the social media world. Whatever you put up there only lasts about 15 minutes, so you can test things out and not to worry about it hanging out in cyberspace to haunt you.
- Stay Specific: Target customers and focus on information that builds customer trust. This means that your social media is interested in your customer and not just on making a sales pitch.
- Practice makes perfect: navigate, explore, tweet new ideas, products, etc.
- Whatever you post on social media should add value to the reader's experience and encourage them to come back to you for more. Once you or your business has been 'recognized' in the social media, they will be more apt to respond to traditional outreaches through e-mail.
- Refrain from over posting; avoid being one of those who exhaust social media friends with multiple postings.
- Create a circular flow of communication through your use of social media that ultimately and always brings your clients back to your website.
- Decide on your 'framework' or 'brand' in the social media outlets: some social media are more relevant to certain aspects of your business development than others.
- Use social media as an integrated part of your business marketing approach.

### **Integrating a gender perspective**

Indeed as Madi Sharma argued during her presentation "we cannot have change unless we have men in the room." The main goal of integrating a gender perspective is that of gender equity/social equality for both women and men. Gender integration refers to the process of assessing and reassessing the implications for both women and men of any program and action plan at all levels: social, economic and political. This requires gender-specific interventions, policies and practices that may target exclusively women or interventions that target men exclusively, or even men and women together. For example, male migrant groups or ethnic minority entrepreneurs, another important pool of entrepreneurs in Europe, also confront exclusionary practices and obstacles: discrimination, language barriers, and limited access to funding, support services, as well as inadequate business, management and marketing skills.

In fact, the goal of mainstreaming gender equality is to transform exclusionary or unequal social and institutional structures into equal and just structures for both women and men. It entails ensuring a gender balance, increasing the talent pool and enabling everyone to realize their full potential. We already have all the necessary research and analyses. Gaining a thorough understanding of the wastage of talent, including the talent shortages—trends, rates and differences—is essential in order to set realistic targets and integrate the gender dimension into the equation.