

Women's entrepreneurship in transition economies such as the Czech Republic

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Abstract

The main aim of this study is to provide an overview of the approaches, forces and attitudes toward women's entrepreneurship in transition economies, in particular in the Czech Republic, using comparative analysis and descriptive statistics.

Entrepreneurial activity is believed to be a fundamental force in the transformation of societies and economies of former communist countries towards free markets and democracy. The democratization of Central and Eastern Europe brought with it a new economic force, the female entrepreneur, which has seen more and more women starting, owning, and managing significant numbers of small businesses. However, little attention is actually paid to gender differences between entrepreneurs. Moreover, the social context inherited from the former socialist period appears to affect both the attitudes and behaviour of entrepreneurs, of men and women alike, and the attitudes of society at large towards entrepreneurship. This paper summarizes the scientific approaches to research in the field of women's entrepreneurship in transition economies and represents the initial phase of a project aimed at developing successful businesswomen in the Czech Republic.

Keywords: women, entrepreneurship, business, transition, economy

Introduction

Researchers have identified many reasons for why entrepreneurs start businesses. The primary theories that have been developed in this field categorize the motivation for starting a business as having pull and push factors (Hakim 1989; Schjoedt and Shaver 2007). Push factors are elements of necessity. These include insufficient family income, dissatisfaction with a salaried job, difficulty in finding work and the need for a flexible work schedule because of family responsibilities. Pull factors relate to independence, self-fulfilment, entrepreneurial drive, a desire for wealth and social status. Women are

seen as experiencing more complexity in making career choices because of their need to balance employment, childcare, and housing. Fulfilling multiple roles requires women to consider time and space constraints when making economic and social decisions (Gilbert 1997). This highlights the influence of the socio-cultural context and suggests that differences in motivation may be due to social factors. Gender role socialization experiences teach young girls what roles are appropriate, or not. These experiences are seen as constricting career choices, compromising career potential (Gottfredson 1981) and influencing women's beliefs, attitudes and self-conceptions. These factors ultimately affect their work interests and choices.

Vodochodský further reflects on the main changes for women caused by the egalitarian socialist policy. The rapid increase in the number of economically active women implied that women became independent of men – economically, socially, and psychologically. They became almost self-sufficient in supporting themselves and their families. Their level of education improved and many became qualified. Havelková points out that women in the 1950's were taking jobs and, to a greater extent, becoming teachers while completing and improving their education and skills (Havelková 1993). Female authors emphasise that women in the socialist era became more independent, self-sufficient, and self-assured. Due to the new system, they also very quickly gained control over their own bodies by being relieved of their "*reproductive duties*" due to the availability of contraception and abortion. Women could also easily disengage from marriage and attempts were made to free them from everyday chores by offering relevant services (e.g. cleaner's, laundries, and crèches), even though these were not everywhere, and not always of sufficient quality (see below).

However, most authors agree that under socialist emancipation, the metamorphosis of the traditional household was not achieved and that women still took on the majority of tasks and duties. More independence and self-confidence notwithstanding, women were still under continual psychol and physical strain, fatigue, and stress resulting from the "*double load*" of a paid job plus domestic chores. Jiřina Šiklová characterizes the situation as follows: "In the socialist era, at least two generations of women experienced the impossibility of mastering the dual roles – keeping the household running and being employed – suffering feelings of guilt and permanent frustration from not being able to cope with either of these tasks to their satisfaction. Although crèches and kindergartens were available, other household services as well as public transport for commuters were of poor quality and women trying to fulfil both roles were not doing as well in their jobs as men." (Šiklová 1997a).

Pay differences between men and women also persisted. Gender inequalities also barred women from advancing into leading positions and the overall structure of professions remained the same. This also applied to government, politics and the "management" of socialist enterprises. Women were present, but in fewer numbers and often occupying lower positions. Éva Fodor (2002) states that, in the socialist era, women were assigned professions and offices not only different from but also inferior to those of men (Vodochodský 2007). "Even though gender free on the surface, the ideal communist

subject was equipped with pronounced masculine qualities and women could never have come up to this standard. In particular, due to their reproductive duties, which the creators of the socialist social policy had not cast any doubt on, women could never be considered equally reliable and committed to the communist cause as men. For this reason, their enforced presence in the world of labour and politics could only be segregated and second-rate." (Fodor 2002).

The turbulent political and social events that took place in Europe in the early 1990's brought with it new job opportunities for all. Young Czechs travelled abroad and people were given the chance to build a career regardless of their political affiliation. Unfortunately, it is clear from more recent research conducted by Czech authors that the gender role division within families, even to this day, remains mostly traditional (Rašticová 2014).

It should be noted that women themselves are also showing reluctance to give up their traditional role as mother and homemaker. For many of them, having their own business and a flexible work-life balance, is becoming a big challenge.

Materials and Methods

The main aim of this study is to provide an overview of the approaches, forces and attitudes toward women's entrepreneurship in transition economies like the Czech Republic.

This paper represents the initial phase of a project aimed at researching the development of successful businesswomen in the Czech Republic. For this purpose it is necessary to research the conditions and factors which have influenced female entrepreneurship in the past and today. Various methods were used, mostly intercultural and historical comparative analysis and descriptive statistics to fulfil the aim of the presented paper.

Results

A. Historical roots of women's position

A review of literature reveals that all entrepreneurs have their own perceptions of what success means to them. They can regard themselves as successful, although, looking from the outside and using traditional financial measures, their businesses may have attained different levels of success (Simpson, Tuck and Bellamy 2004). A difference exists between male and female entrepreneurs in the perception of what indicates success (Halkias et al. 2011). Men are assumed to measure success using quantitative criteria (Buttner and Moore 1997; Still and Timms 2000) such as job creation, sales turnover and profitability. In contrast, studies suggest that women perform less well on quantitative measures. The reason that is often put forward for this is that women do not enter business for financial gain but for pursuing intrinsic goals. These intrinsic goals include the need for independence and a fulfilling life outside of the domestic

sphere. As a result, women mostly strive to achieve self-fulfilment and accomplishment through self-employment (Cliff 1998; Fasci and Valdez 1998).

Small and medium-sized enterprises have played and continue to play a significant role in the former planned-economies of Central Europe (Arendarski et al. 1994; Ivy 1996). They are considered critical engines of economic growth and stability for these transforming economies. The economies concerned include the member countries of the "Visegrad" group, namely Slovakia, Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic. There can be no doubt that the changes that have affected the economies of these nations over the past ten or more years have been sweeping and fundamental. The period has been characterized by the rise of an entrepreneurial class the likes of which have not been experienced in these countries before. "The creation of entrepreneurs is fundamental to the entire process of transition," according to Forst (1996).

While entrepreneurship is viewed as a key element in economic development and fundamental to the successful transition of these economies, the cultural context and history of free enterprise in these nations may affect the nature and extent of entrepreneurial motivation in both men and women (Fogel and Zapalska 2001). The Velvet Revolution (November 1989) marked the beginning of a transition in the Czech Republic to a free-market economy and privatizations. Many small and medium-sized enterprises have been established since then and women own or are partners in a significant number of them.

As women entrepreneurs tend to use a relational approach to management and leadership, one might argue that their business concerns and goals are mainly intrinsic and not financial. Brush (1997), Cuba et al. (1983), and Rosa et al. (1994), all found that women tended to pursue intrinsic goals rather than financial goals. Women ranked self-fulfilment as a top reason for becoming self-employed (Moore and Buttner 1997). They are also concerned with customer satisfaction and social responsibility (Chaganti and Parasuraman 1996).

B. Structural conditions of women's work and the creation of women's entrepreneurship under socialism

Women and men alike viewed the Germans and the Soviets as enemies during the long years of domination. Consequently, the struggle for human rights and national independence took precedence over that of women's rights (Havelková 1993). True, women bore more than their share of hardships under those regimes. The National Socialists were dedicated to the traditional German view of a woman's place being "Kuche, Kirche und Kinder." During the Soviet years, women bore the double burden of working fulltime and looking after their families, when the shortage of consumer goods and household appliances made this particularly onerous. The unfulfilled promises of "socializing housework," while women were used as the cheapest available labour force, made them increasingly cynical and reinforced their aversion to politics, both national and international (Vrabková 1997).

Under such conditions, family responsibilities provided women with an acceptable excuse not to join the Communist party. At the same time, the severe repression of all Czechs under these regimes reinforced the feeling of solidarity between women and men, much as is the case for African Americans who have struggled against racism in the United States. As Šiklová (1997b) says, “most of the men working by our side were not self-confident bosses but people similarly ‘downtrodden’ by the overprotective party and the government. Thus men were not rivals but humble partners.” Finally, unlike women in many other countries, Czech women have had relatively little need to resist pressures from religious groups to limit their reproductive rights. Again, the reason must be sought in history. Although the Catholic Church enjoyed something of a renaissance as a centre of resistance to Communism, its role remains less central than in neighbouring countries (including Slovakia). Even the church takes a rather relaxed attitude towards these issues in the Czech Republic. As Heitlinger (1993) noted “abortion was the most commonly used form of contraception in the Czech Republic; it is estimated that every third pregnancy is aborted.” When the government became concerned about this, it appointed a committee that included representatives of women’s and church groups, medical and legal organizations, relevant ministries and of parliament. The Czech Conference of Catholic Bishops consented with others that “in a situation when there are 189,000 abortions performed annually, it would be impossible to suddenly reduce the number to zero” (Heitlinger, 1993). Agreement was also reached that fees for abortions should be increased substantially, but contraception would be made available at no cost. The bitter conflict over these issues, which played a large role in the creation of women’s movements in other countries such as Germany, Poland, and Romania (Fuszara 1993; Harsanyi 1994; Tikow 1993), was therefore largely avoided in the Czech Republic.

One question that arises in those countries that previously had centrally planned economies, concerns the potential for entrepreneurial activities during the socialist period to “breed capitalism” (Kornai, 1992). Although in Central and Eastern European countries private entrepreneurship lost its major role within planned economies, there were different forms of private entrepreneurship that co-existed in parallel to state ownership, as well as entrepreneurship within state enterprises. In this regard, we can distinguish between the formal and the grey economies (consisting of the second and the illegal economy), the “boundaries” of which frequently changed following political trends that led to the liberalisation and restriction of private ownership and entrepreneurship (Welter 1996a).

The formal economy included state enterprises, co-operatives and legalised private businesses such as the craft enterprises in Poland or the so-called business work partnerships in Hungary. In the Czech Republic, from 1982, state employees could rent space from their employer to collectively produce their own products and services. Many of these private initiatives eventually became working brigades for state enterprises who performed overtime work (Laky 1985).

The term “second economy” refers to any form of unlicensed but tolerated private entrepreneurial activities. This includes unlicensed activities in the private sector that were not officially recorded, as well as the clandestine use of state property (e.g. raw materials, machines, labour, services) for private business activities (Dallago 1990). It can also be applied to the so-called “parallel circuits” of state firms and cooperatives that were motivated by the search of official enterprises for ways to meet planning targets. In the Soviet system, this resulted in the creation the “*tolkachi*”, employees of state enterprises who were responsible for trying to secure external resources (Kerblay 1977).

In other words, entrepreneurial behaviour within state owned enterprises during the communist period was a necessary response to the constant shortage of materials. The socialist period was also characterized by the illegal economy made up of the quasi-criminal activities within state enterprises (bribes, theft of resources) and also criminal private activities. However, in some countries (such as the former Czechoslovakia and the former Soviet republics) the illegal economy actually included any kind of private business activity. Even though the transformation process changed the rules for these entrepreneurs, some forms of entrepreneurship survived. These forms of entrepreneurship merged into the new private business sector during the transition period and provided a distinctive entrepreneurial experience. Both the state and private entrepreneurship that existed under socialism provided a “seedbed” for small business activity in both the formal and informal economies. Entrepreneurship within state organisations contributed to the development of the so-called *nomenclatura* businesses in some countries. Many directors and managers of state-owned enterprises, as well as former politicians (the *nomenclatura*), used their “parallel 250 David Smallbone and Friederike Welter circuits” to privatise “their” enterprises or to establish new businesses (Dallago 1997; Kusnezova 1999; Lageman 1995).

Examples of this include the Soviet “*Komsomol* economy”, whereby a number of business organisations under socialism were established within the youth organisation (Gustafson 1999), and the “spontaneous privatisation” that occurred in Hungary in 1988/89 (Frydman et al. 1998), another source of *nomenclatura* entrepreneurs. Formerly legal private enterprises such as craft enterprises in Poland or private businesses in the form of cooperatives that emerged in the late eighties in the Soviet Union (Chepurenko 1998), continued to exist during the transition period. This is in spite of the fact that many of these entrepreneurs experienced difficulties in adjusting to the requirements of a market economy. The existence of the entrepreneurship that was tolerated during the former socialist period (which in the Czech and Slovak Republic also included illegal private entrepreneurship) manifested itself during the transition period. Once legislation abolished the legal and administrative barriers to private firms, large numbers of people registered new businesses. The legislation enabled them to operate on an equal basis with state owned companies (Grabowski 1993; Kuczi and Vajda 1992).

In countries such as Poland and Hungary, this occurred during the so-called initial phase of entrepreneurial development in the 1980s (Piasecki and Rogut 1993) starting with the law on cooperatives in 1988 (OECD/CCET, 1998). This happened later in the former Soviet republics. In those transition economies with a strong pre-war tradition of private entrepreneurship (such as Poland and Hungary) a number of entrepreneurs during the transition period originated from former entrepreneurial families. These entrepreneurs had either been self-employed in the second economy, or had occupied leading positions in state enterprises during the socialist period (Szelenyi 1988).

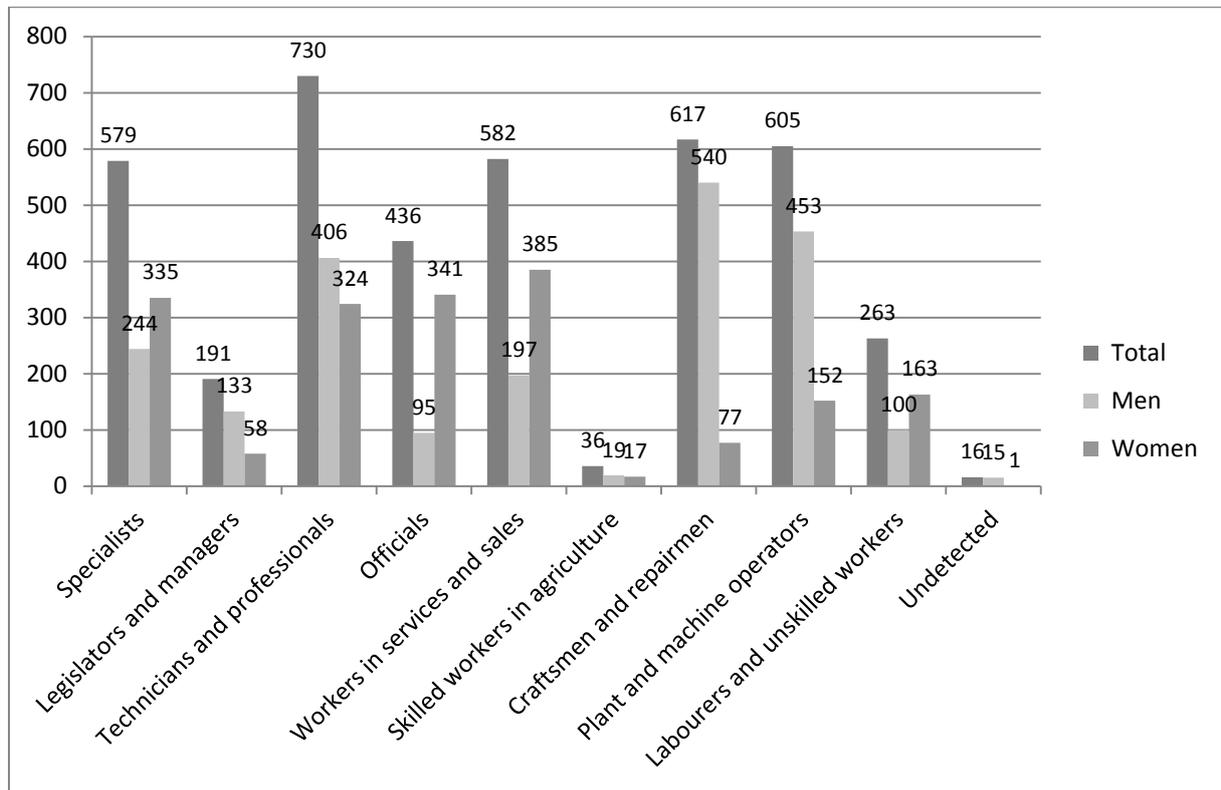
In this regard, it is important to stress the differences in the starting points from which private enterprise developed during the transition period in different countries, as well as the differences in the processes that operated during the transformation period. Entrepreneurship appears to have developed more quickly in countries where reforms proceeded smoothly and quickly (Mugler 2000) and where there was a strong presocialist industrial tradition for it. For example, in the former Czechoslovakia industrialisation and private entrepreneurship go back to the beginning of the 19th century (Benacek 1997) which favoured the quick development of entrepreneurship after socialism. In contrast, in Russia, which was an essentially agrarian society prior to the socialist period, the State played a stronger role in the development of entrepreneurship (Ageev et al. 1995; Paradis 1998). For example, at the beginning of the 20th century the Russian government tried to introduce entrepreneurship into the Russian economy by providing entrepreneurs with subsidies and donations, thereby creating "*bureaucratic entrepreneurship*" (Kusnezova 1999).

C. The number of women entrepreneurs in the Czech Republic has doubled in the last 20 years

It is an eternal dilemma: Go into business or be an employee? Although the number of entrepreneurs is growing, the decision to register for a trade license may be the result of societal and economic conditions. In the Czech Republic, nearly 290,000 women now run a business, of which 41% are 45-59 years old. Noteworthy is the fact that more than 11.2% of businesswomen are 60 years old or over. The smallest category of women entrepreneurs is formed by the very young. Young women looking for entrepreneurial careers are often afraid to reconcile their working life and the education of their children and also have a greater fear of failure or a lack of experience. In addition, they may also lack the finances with which to start a business and have less access to credit. The latter may be in part due to the fact that women entrepreneurs make up less than 33% of the total number of entrepreneurs. However, since 1993, when there were only 123,600 women entrepreneurs, their numbers have more than doubled. There are now eight times more women entrepreneurs in the group 50-59 years old than 20 years ago. In the past, the number of young women between 15 -19 years of age was higher. In 1993, this category consisted of 1,800 women (1.5% of the total). After that, the number of very young businesswomen decreased. The reason for this trend is thought to be their

desire to pursue and complete higher education. The biggest business boom in the number of women entrepreneurs came in 2011 (Strasilova 2015). Figure 1 shows the classification of employees in 2013 according to gender on the basis of the International Standard Classification of Occupations of the Czech Republic (ISCO CZ). Figure 2 shows the classification of entrepreneurs in 2013 according to gender and on the basis of ISCO CZ.

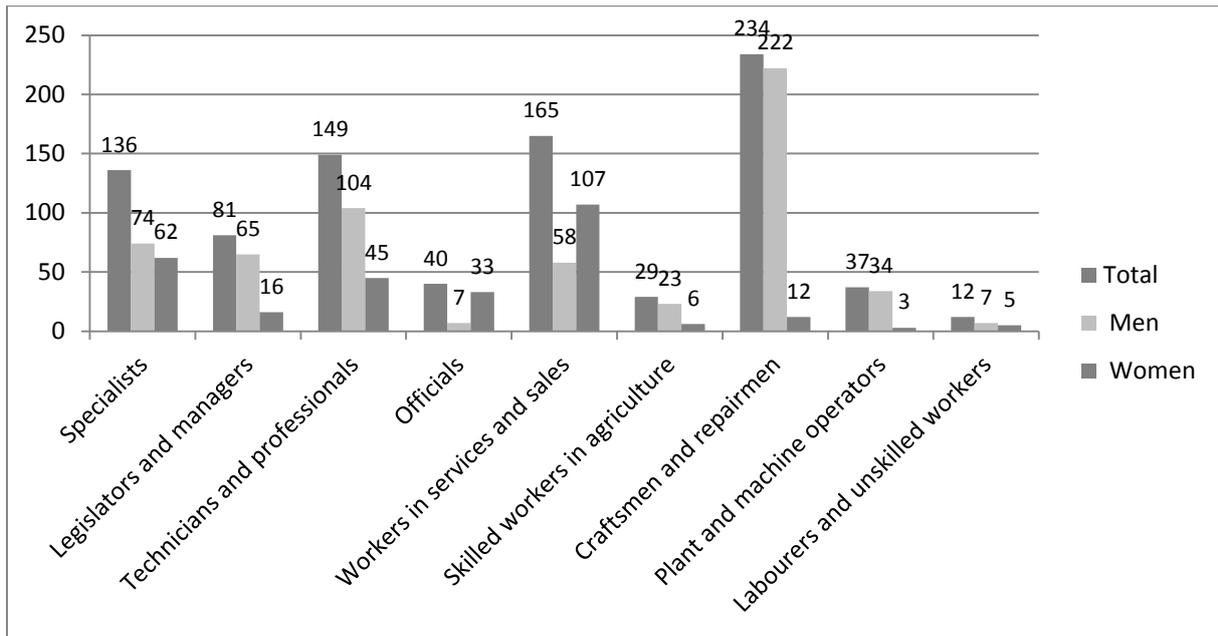
Figure 1: Employees by ISCO CZ (in thousands)



Source: modified by authors according to:

<http://www.statistikaamy.cz/2014/06/pocet-podnikatelek-se-za-20-let-zdvojnasil/>

Figure 2: Entrepreneurs by ISCO CZ (in thousands)



Source: modified by authors according to:

<http://www.statistikaamy.cz/2014/06/pocet-podnikatelek-se-za-20-let-zdvojnasil/>

Discussion and conclusion

Even though the number of women involved in business in the Czech Republic is significantly lower than for men, the upward tendency is apparent. There are many reasons why woman decide to start their own business and also many reasons why women succeed in business.

A few quotations from successful female entrepreneurs (www.entreprenista.com) describe the reasons, motivations and hopes of women in business.

"Entrepreneurship has given me freedom. At work I used to have assurances: work and money, but I have been living for freedom since my childhood. Entrepreneurship has allowed me to realize a number of ideas, dreams and things that I always wanted to do. It allows my ideas and dreams to come true. The thing I love about entrepreneurship is that I can manage my own time." Alice Kris, founder and creative director of the organization "Women for Women".

"Entrepreneurship has given me an opportunity to express myself: my passions, thoughts and beliefs. Every day I am thankful that I can do what I want, plus it's a service to people. I am also happy that it pays because if I had to earn money by doing something that is boring for me, it would probably prevent me from doing what I like and what I do. It is thanks to entrepreneurship that I can improve myself in terms of self-discipline, empowerment and the willingness to take risks." Lucie Kolaříková, psychologist, trainer and coach.

"Whatever you do, be different – that was the advice my mother gave me, and I can't think of better advice for an entrepreneur. If you're different, you will stand out." Anita Roddick, founder of The Body Shop.

“If you are committed to creating value and if you aren’t afraid of hard times; obstacles become utterly unimportant. A nuisance perhaps; but with no real power. The world respects creation; people will get out of your way.” Candice Carpenter, founder of iVillage.com.

“Aerodynamically the bumblebee shouldn’t be able to fly, but the bumblebee doesn’t know that so it goes on flying anyway.” Mary Kay Ash, founder of Mary Kay Cosmetics.

“If we had no winter, the spring would not be so pleasant; if we did not sometimes taste adversity, prosperity would not be so welcome.” Anne Bradstreet, America’s first published poet.

“Striving for excellence motivates you; striving for perfection is demoralizing.” Harriet Braiker, author and stress management expert.

“How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world.” Anne Frank, writer.

It is apparent that family and childcare are even today a priority for women of all generations. However, the role of being a wife with professional and business ambitions is not void of the dimensions of being a mother, educator and creator.

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