

»I consider the FemStart Conference a step in the efforts to solve the problem. It is necessary to continue actions in this direction, for example organising Master courses with entrepreneurship topics, meetings with successful business women, with students and teaching staff participation.« | A participant in Bucharest

A series of public debates at universities in

STUTTART, GERMANY

VALENCIA, SPAIN

»A very good subject for the discussion and future surveys. We need to recognise the phenomenon of entrepreneurship among female scientists.« | A participant in Wroclaw

WROCLAW, POLAND

»I think it is very positive to have initiatives like FemStart to encourage and inform women researchers about their entrepreneurial career possibilities.« | A participant in Valencia

RIGA, LATVIA

BUCHAREST, ROMANIA

TWENTE, NETHERLANDS



FemStart

Universities debate female start-ups



SIXTH FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME

supported by the European Commission DG Research FP6, Research and Innovation Priority



STEINBEIS-
EUROPA-
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Baden-Württemberg
MINISTRY OF ECONOMICS

Preface | The renewed Lisbon Agenda aims to turn Europe into a modern, dynamic and outward looking knowledge economy. Entrepreneurship and small businesses are a key source of jobs, business dynamism and innovation, and promoting entrepreneurship is a clear objective for achieving the Lisbon goals. However, Europe is not yet fully exploiting its entrepreneurial potential. In particular, women's intellectual potential and contribution to European competitiveness is not fully being realised. In Europe, it is estimated that the number of women that own a business in science and technology is between 5% and 15%¹.

Although entrepreneurship is included in a number of universities' curricula and start-up support systems are in place at a number of European universities, the question of how female students or graduates could be enthused for entrepreneurial activities is rarely raised. When asking university incubator managers how many female graduates are using their support systems to start a technology driven business, the question is usually answered with a question mark. These managers are often similarly surprised when they realise that 50% or more of their university graduates are female. These facts show how necessary it was to start the debate at universities to find out why their entrepreneurship programmes do not adequately attract female researchers and what can be learnt from those universities' programmes that do. Also, it was certainly a new step for the Women in Science programme of the European Commission to look at and finance a project on the issue of entrepreneurship. That project is FemStart. Looking at the results and the ongoing debates, it was certainly a good investment.

We invite you to increase your knowledge on this exciting topic of women starting a technology driven business by reading this short but comprehensive summary of our FemStart debates.



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FemStart – Universities debate female start-ups

The main goal of FemStart was to initiate a public debate on the issues connected with women from universities starting a high tech business. By organising a series of events at six universities in different European regions, FemStart started this debate. Experts from all relevant sectors, women scientists as well as representatives from university, development agencies, politics and the public and private sectors were invited to take part. One of the main aims of the FemStart events was to offer a platform for sharing experience. In addition participant feedback was monitored by means of a questionnaire and expert interviews.

In the course of the FemStart project, six European regions were visited. Each region has its own history and other individual requisites resulting in different entrepreneurship support modalities. Nevertheless analogies in thinking and acting were witnessed. FemStart offered participants the opportunity to learn more about female entrepreneurship in high tech sectors and to develop goals for sustainable support of female high tech start-ups. The following five elements were considered most important and efficient, according to the discussion during the events and the feedback received from participants:

- Raising awareness for women high tech start-ups among all relevant actors
- Improving information available as a basis to start action
- Creating interest for support programmes that respect women specific aspects
- Exchanging good practice in the promotion of women high tech start-ups among support agencies and universities
- Development of vision for a policy towards more women in high tech companies

FemStart Facts:

6 events in
6 European regions

522 participants

88 speakers
125 questionnaires
and interviews

G O O D P R A C T I C E

MEETS – Mid-career enterprise education in technology and science / Cambridge-MIT Institute, Cambridge, UK

The MEETS course was designed by a team at the Cambridge-MIT Institute, specialising in enterprise, innovation and leadership education for organisations, students and mid-career women. The programme combines presentations, practical workshops, small group sessions and individual project work, preparing delegates to take the next step in their career.
<http://www.cambridge-mit.org/project/home/default.aspx?objid=1421>

NEnA – Nano entrepreneurship academy / Martin-Luther-Universität, Halle, Germany

Within the nano-entrepreneurship-academy team, women scientists develop a concrete business idea and the necessary skills for a spin-off. Young women scientists from universities, research institutes and other institutes who operate in the field of nanotechnology can apply to participate with an outline of their entrepreneurship idea. A jury nominates the best team. The winners of each NEnA course additionally have the possibility of participating in a three-month exchange programme with the USA.
<http://www.nano4women.com>

ACTIVATE – Achieving the commercialisation of technology in ventures through applied training for entrepreneurs / University of Maryland, Baltimore County, USA

ACTIVATE is a year-long programme to train women with significant technical or business experience to be entrepreneurs and to create start-up companies from inventions from Maryland research institutions and federal agencies. Admission to the programme is competitive. Participants access technology innovations from universities and research institutions in the region, put together plans to commercialise suitable technologies, and start companies with support from instructors, entrepreneurs in residence and advisors from the local business community.
<http://www.umbc.edu/activate/>



RAISING AWARENESS FOR WOMEN HIGH TECH START-UPS AMONG ALL RELEVANT ACTORS

Whilst female entrepreneurship and women in science are well established themes in most partners' countries, the issue of women led start-ups in high tech sectors is not yet really on the radar. The discussion is mostly dominated by women and organisations often sent female speakers and delegates. As the academic world is largely male dominated, and decisions are mostly made by men, it is essential they are part of the discussion to get things started. The relevance of female entrepreneurship and innovation needs to be highlighted and all actors should make efforts to join forces. Raising awareness also means presenting positive role models to women scientists to stage entrepreneurship as a chance, not a makeshift if other opportunities fail. This can often be done within existing programmes by creating gender sensitive documents and promotion and by inviting male and female trainers.

IMPROVING INFORMATION AVAILABLE AS A BASIS TO START ACTION

A lack of information and the relatively small number of existing women led companies in high tech sectors were two of the biggest challenges FemStart had to face. Hardly any robust data could be found describing the state of female entrepreneurship in high tech sectors in Europe and the Member States. Thus the latest European Commission, DG Enterprise & Industry study² and a recent German study³ are highly appreciated. A top priority for the partners is to conduct more gender specific analysis when thinking about a follow up strategy for the FemStart project. It is also essential to have more gender disaggregated data in the regular statistics; e.g. on patents awarded to women, the share of women benefiting from high tech support programmes or venture capital.

CREATING INTEREST FOR SUPPORT PROGRAMMES THAT RESPECT WOMEN SPECIFIC ASPECTS

During the FemStart project, a good number of representatives from academia, support organisations and also women entrepreneurs expressed the opinion that women in high tech start-ups do not need specific assistance as they have already proven to be able to make their way in a male dominated environment. However women specific activities like MEETS, NEnA and ACTiVATE were well accepted and have received very positive feedback from the participants. It is most likely that, had these activities been open to both sexes, they would not have attracted the same number of women as these women specific activities. Thus it is true to say a general positive climate for start-ups should go hand-in-hand with gender specific support offers for women in the high tech sector. These methods can range from indirect forms like awareness raising for female requirements to direct actions like training courses in business planning and the creation of networks for women in high tech entrepreneurship.

EXCHANGING GOOD PRACTICE IN THE PROMOTION OF WOMEN HIGH TECH START-UPS AMONG SUPPORTERS

One of the most important parts of the FemStart events was the presentation of good practice in the promotion of women high tech start-ups. The intercultural discussion enabled supporters to check and find out how the presented programmes can possibly be adapted and transferred to their own country, region or university. Another positive effect of FemStart was the possibility to support the cross-border co-operation as some initiatives are interested in international partnership. Good practice cases for the support of women in high tech start-ups can – so far – only be found in countries where support of university based and high tech start-ups has a longer tradition (Germany, UK, USA). A first step toward a more gender sensitive start-up support could be a gender analysis of the established programmes to make sure that they are appealing to women. Programmes currently being created can be gender sensitive from the very beginning.

DEVELOPMENT OF VISION FOR A POLICY TOWARDS MORE WOMEN IN HIGH TECH COMPANIES

To get more women to lead high tech companies and thus break the glass ceiling a clear vision for a policy is needed. It should point out that the whole of society can benefit from more female entrepreneurship and can formulate the goal of bringing more women into high tech start-ups. Gender awareness and gender mainstreaming in innovation policy and a gender action plan as a prerequisite for project financing can help to achieve these goals. Furthermore it is traceable, that women specific activities can be encouraged more successfully if economic sectors are addressed that are already in the focus of policy and economy. A programme like NEnA was comparatively easy to create as nanotechnology has been identified as a future technology in Germany⁴.

1, 2

Evaluation on policy: Promotion of women innovators and entrepreneurship, DG Enterprise and Industry, European Commission, <http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/dgs/eval.htm>

3

High-Tech-Gründungen in Deutschland – Trends, Strukturen, Potenziale, ZEW Zentrum für Europäische Wirtschaftsforschung GmbH, <ftp://ftp.zew.de/pub/zew-docs/gutachten/high-techgruendungen08.pdf>

4

Gründerinnen in Österreich – Vergleich internationaler Förderungsmodelle für forschungs- und technologieintensive Unternehmensgründungen, w-ffORTE – Wirtschaftsimpulse von Frauen in Forschung und Technologie, <http://www.w-fforte.at/de/knowledge-base/w-fforte-studien/internationaler-vergleich-foerederungsmodelle-von-gruenderinnen.html>

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www.ideas.upv.es

Wroclaw University of Technology (Poland)
www.pwr.wroc.pl

BA School of Business and Finance (Latvia)
www.ba.lv

University of Twente – Nikos (The Netherlands)
www.utwente.nl/nikos

University of Agronomics and Veterinary Medicine Bucharest (Romania)
www.usamv.ro

Find out more: www.femstart.eu

»I really enjoyed the diversity of people, because that means a diversity of ideas and experiences.«

A participant in Riga

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»Entrepreneurship is not really my issue. I was inspired to be here because it will stimulate thoughts about combining technology and entrepreneurship for children and girls in the 8 to 14 age-group.«

A participant in Twente

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»I propose to continue this initiative in view of encouraging women scientists to start their own business.«

A participant in Bucharest

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»Thank you for highlighting the challenges of entrepreneurship in Europe. I enjoyed networking with so many people.«

A participant in Stuttgart

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