DOCUMENTS DE TREBALL
DE LA FACULTAT DE CIÈNCIES
ECONÒMIQUES I EMPRESARIALS

Col·lecció d'Economia

Gender and family firms: an interdisciplinary approach

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Acknowledgements: The paper has greatly benefitted from comments received at different stages from Lina Gálvez Muñoz, Mary B. Rose and anonymous referees in the U.K. and Spain. Paloma Fernández has received financial support from Spanish Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia research project SEJ2005-02788.

Abstract:

This study contributes to developing our understanding of gender and family business, a topic so crucial to recent policies about competitive growth. It does so by providing an interdisciplinary synthesis of some major theoretical debates. It also contributes to this understanding by illuminating the role of women and their participation in the practices of the family and the business. Finally, it explores gender relations and the notion that leadership in family business may take complex forms crafted within constantly changing relationships. Leadership is introduced as a concept that captures the reality of women and men in family firms in a better way than other concepts used by historians or economists like ownership and management.

Resum:

Aquest estudi és una contribució als estudis sobre empresa familiar i gènere, un tema rellevant en els debats actuals sobre les polítiques europees de creixement i competitivitat. En primer lloc perque proporciona una síntesi interdisciplinària dels més importants debats teòrics. En segon lloc perque proporciona reflexions significatives sobre el paper de les dones en les famílies i els negocis a Europa. I en tercer lloc perque proposa que el concepte de lideratge en el negoci familiar permet entendre i analitzar la contribució de la dona a l´empresa familiar millor que altres conceptes fets servir fins ara per historiadors o economistas –com ara els de propietat o direcció d´un negoci-.

Key words: Empresa familiar, gènere, lideratge,Family firm, gender, leadership
JEL: D10, J16, M20, N01, N80.

Introduction

This study contributes to developing our understanding of gender and family business. It does so by providing an interdisciplinary synthesis of some major theoretical debates regarding this topic, so crucial to recent policies about competitive growth. It also contributes to this understanding by illuminating the role of women and their participation in the practices of the family and the business. Finally, it explores gender relations and the notion that leadership in family business may take complex forms crafted within constantly changing relationships. Leadership is introduced as a concept that captures the reality of women and men in family firms in a better way than other concepts used by historians or economists like ownership and management – which historically, and until recently, had an institutional definition that blurred or ignored women's participation in entrepreneurship.

We also argue in this study that statistics in Europe, in contrast with U.S. statistics, are blurring the strong participation of women (old and young) in family firms, a participation which does not necessarily take place as owners or managers but very often as collaborative partners, unpaid workers, and unofficial leaders. A hypothesis of our study is that the role of women in family firms is a little-known side of European entrepreneurship that has been hidden through the historical and accumulated action of former European political institutions responsible of designing and collecting statistical data. The reasons that explain the visible and invisible sides of entrepreneurship are historical, and rooted in old cultural and political traditions.

This study starts by outlining the importance of family firms in the world today, and the role of gender in family firms. A second section discusses interdisciplinary theories about the relationship between entrepreneurship, women, and family firms. Finally, the third section analyzes the situation of women in family firms at the beginning of the 21st century, and stresses the fact that this is not a new development but the outcome of a historical specialization of women providing services. The conclusions synthesize the major theoretical contributions of this work.[1]

I. The importance of family firms today and the relevant role women are playing in them

The entrepreneurial literature paints a picture of family business on a very large-scale worldwide, contributing significantly to employment and wealth generation. Howorth, Rose and Hamilton (2006: 225) conclude that family firms represent between 75 and 95% of firms registered world wide and account for up to 65% of GDP.

A third of the largest US companies, listed in the Fortune 500, are family controlled; 12.2 million US family firms generate almost a third of GDP and employ 37% of the workforce (Colli and Rose, 2003: 339). In 2006 an estimated 17 million family firms were established in the European Union, giving employment to around 100 million people (Instituto de la Empresa Familiar, 2/12/2006). In the mid 1990's the majority of registered companies in the country members of the European Union were family owned, 70% in Portugal, 95% in Italy, 65% in Spain in 2006 (Colli and Rose, 2003:339; Colli, Fernández and Rose, 2003; Instituto de la Empresa Familiar, 2/12/2006). An estimated 75% of all businesses in the UK are family owned and operated firms (Fletcher, 2000:156). Westhead and Cowling (1998:31) claim that several studies conclude that family firms account for over two-thirds of all business in many western developed economies.

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Within that vast scale of firms there is enormous diversity in terms of scope, family firms vary from micro start-ups to well-established prominent firms such as Ford, Mars, Levi Strauss, and Estee Lauder in the US; Michelin, Bic, L'Oreal, Tetrapak, Ikea, Ficosa, CELSA, Corporación Puig and Lego in Europe; Tata and Birlas in India; and Kikkomann in Japan (Colli and Rose, 2003:339; Howorth,et al., 2006: 226: Fernández Pérez and Puig forthcoming).[1]

In the midst of the globalization process during the last decades the most influential and internationally-oriented family firms of the world have been creating associations and networks, like the *Family Firms Institute*, *Family Business Network* or the *Instituto de la Empresa Familiar*. These associations have helped them create an identity and have provided them with global strength defending their entrepreneurial interests, which often go beyond national frontiers.[2] Small and medium family firms have had more difficulties in combining their interests in powerful associations, though in recent times cross-national institutions linked to the European Union (EU) and the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) are promoting networks focused on them.

Many businesses are founded in the form of family firms and many more, including the giant dynasties, rely on family as an ongoing resource providing capital – including social, economic, cultural and human capital – throughout the lifetime of the founder, into the next generation, and beyond (Bourdieu, 1996; Aldrich and Cliffe, 2003).

Relationships between men and women within, and across, generations are embedded within a complex interaction between the family and the business. It has been argued that gender in family business is an under-researched aspect of the study of the family firm (Sharma, 2004; Hamilton, 2006a; Gálvez and Fernández Pérez, 2007). However, institutional, economic and social forces impacting on the family and business forge gendered roles and identities, both masculine and feminine. This is something that has been more visible and acknowledged in the U.S. and in Northern European countries. Also, in global institutions like the OECD, in which during the last twenty years there have been continuous efforts to integrate a gender perspective in the study of entrepreneurship and local development through the *"Local Economic and Employment Development Programme"* (LEED). The first OECD work on women and entrepreneurship took place in the first OECD conference "Women in SMEs" that took place in 1997. It is a sign of the new times and sensibilities in Europe the fact that the LEED Programme has judged that the national approach to promote entrepreneurship is not sufficient, and that regions and cities are in fact key to designing and implementing policies regarding gender and entrepreneurship. LEED has also been important in publicly acknowledging that until relatively recently statistics and policies regarding entrepreneurship have assumed a strong gender neutrality which has obscured historically-constructed gender differences in the conditions that favour – or not – the creation and expansion of a firm in developed countries (OECD, 2003).

Leadership in family business may take complex forms crafted within constantly changing relationships. Hamilton (2006a) in an empirical study revealed the powerful leadership role taken by women in family business and argued that leadership in the context of family business is not a quality to be found within solely the individual owner manager or chief executive but situated within and part of social practice, inherent in day-to-day lives of the families. This is not a new phenomenon. A study about comparative patterns of women and inheritance of family firms in the nineteenth and twentieth century in Britain, Spain and Italy and observed that women 'represented a hidden resource and their participation often went unrecorded' (Colli, Fernández Pérez, Rose, 2003: 42). Women were vital sources of finance and provided access to business and family networks of trust. Women often led and developed businesses either as widows, until a male relative could be found to take over, or while men were away from home travelling long distances, particularly in the mercantile companies. There are many well-known examples of intermarriages strengthening businesses, highlighting that marriage and business were at times inseparable (Colli, Fernández and Rose, 2003; James, 2006).

The leadership of the family business may be presented to the outside world as male whilst the family dynamics may be more complex, the external projection of leadership of the business being distinct from the actual practice in the family and the business. The way in which the leadership of the business is presented to the outside world is influenced by expectations of gender and identity. Gendered identities, male and female, emerge through participation and are constructed socially, culturally and in relation to others, shaped by their historical context (Scott, 1990; Anderson and Zinsser, 1988). In a family business these relationally defined selves are inextricable from the context of their negotiation (Hamilton, 2006a). Multiple, shifting forms of leadership constantly negotiated and re-negotiated are found in the context of family business.

A sociological study in the U.S. conducted by Cramton called for a greater understanding of how this difference both reflects and reinforces a gendered construction of entrepreneurship. In her study the oral history of the family elicited in her interviews and the written history revealed in documentary evidence told two different and contradictory stories of what was going on in the family business (Cramton 1993). The public accounts contained, for example, in newspaper articles, advertisements and employee handbooks emphasised the male entrepreneur in the family business having a desire for independence and control and a flair for economic opportunity. His wife was absent from these documentary accounts of the business other than being nurturing and supportive of her husband. In contrast, in interviews with members of the family and employees in the business it emerged that she came from a successful business family, she accessed finance for the business, and that she was the origin of business ideas – but her contribution was obscured in the public, written records.

Based on their empirical studies both Cramton (1993) and Hamilton (2006a, 2006b) argue that the current theoretical frameworks in the traditional entrepreneurship literature emphasise economic rationality and individualism and thus provide no framework to understand collaborative practice. Following this approach, this paper proposes that leadership in family firms may be more usefully understood as fundamentally collaborative and embedded in sets of relationships and practices of the family and the business.

II A theoretical approach to the 'invisibility' of women in family firms and in business studies more generally

II. 1. The dominant individualistic and masculine concept of entrepreneurship

Business historians, sociologists and others have used the term 'invisible' or 'hidden' to describe the relatively under investigated role of women in family business (Mulholland, 1996a, 1996b; Marshack, 1994; Baines and Wheelock, 1999; Dhaliwal, 1998; Poza and Messer, 2001; Colli, Fernández Pérez and Rose 2003; Hamilton, 2006a). Women do exert great influence and play powerful roles founding and developing family businesses (Vera and Dean, 2005; Colli, Fernández Pérez and

Rose, 2003; Mulholland, 1996a, 1996b; Hamilton, 2006a; Gálvez and Fernández Pérez, 2007; Sola Parera, 2001). Understanding family firms requires the analysis of the complex interaction of family and firm including the role of women. The 'invisibility' of women participating in family firms serves to reinforce and perpetuate gendered, stereotypical assumptions about those roles. This, in turn, limits our understanding of the intricate dynamics of family business**.**

Gendered identities and power relations in family business relate to the wider entrepreneurial discourse. Founders of a family business would be classified as entrepreneurs within any perspective that defines entrepreneurship as synonymous with new venture creation (Gartner, 1985; Gartner, 1988; Bygrave and Hofer, 1991; Shaver and Scott, 1991). The entrepreneurship literature, however, commonly assumes that an individual entrepreneur undertakes the processes of founding and leading a business. That individual, usually identified as male, is commonly the focus of research and female kin rarely figure. Ogbor (2000) argues that this individualistic and gendered discourse in entrepreneurship acts as a technique of sustaining the domination of a 'monolithic' knowledge (p.629). It prevents any understanding of entrepreneurial diversity by remaining uncritical of the social, cultural, and institutional forces shaping the pattern and development of entrepreneurship in contemporary society.

II. 2. The first important efforts to study women and family firms, and to use gender to study business history and business generally

The relative silence and invisibility of women in family business research is a product of interconnected social, economic and historical factors (Gálvez Muñoz and Fernández Pérez 2007). As Mary A. Yaeger has graphically indicated, it could surprise nobody in the US that Fortune magazine said in 1935 that ‘women Carnegies were lacking’, and that in 1990 it said again something very similar regarding the absence of women in top positions of the business world. Very few economic historians in the U.S. or Europe acknowledged before the II World War that an individualistic approach to entrepreneurship is an obstacle to study female entrepreneurship until recent decades, due to legal and social barriers imposed since the industrial revolution which often restricted such entrepreneurship to household management.

U.S. business historian Miriam Beard was perhaps the first scholar who as early as 1938 started studying in a comparative way American and European differences in the way women participated in family enterprises. For Beard, French, Dutch and other Continental European businessmen’s wives had a more tenuous and ambiguous relationship to business than did U.S. businessmen’s wives.[3] Beard’s was above all a historical and cultural approach to business history, and her focus was the businessman, as it was commonly done in the case studies published in these years in Harvard. It was some decades afterwards, around 1962, when Alfred Chandler started shifting the focus from individual businessmen and firms to decision-making processes within modern integrated corporations. With this shift Chandler may have unwittingly assisted studies of women in business (Yeager, 1999:13). This possibility was not rapidly developed by feminist studies or women’s history until the 1970s. Until the 1970s feminist scholars were more concerned with politics and power, and in the rejection of authority and established institutions, than in studying well-to-do middle and upper-class women. Industrialization in the 20th century increased the differences between the so-called ‘business girls’ of the corporations dominated by men, and women who were independent proprietors in small service-oriented enterprises like retail, commerce, education, and health. The rise of the big corporations meant in many developed countries the decline of small and medium family firms, and the massive entrance of former owners of small businesses – either men or women – as salaried employees of public and private corporations. Women in leadership roles in business were harder to see and almost impossible to count (Yeager, 1999: 20).

In the last three decades there have been a few factors that have contributed to change this lack of interest or at least this lack of studies with a gendered approach to business history. These include the increased number of women managers, the improvement of women's educational and skill levels, the spread of policies promoting women's entrepreneurship, and the opportunity of women becoming a new source of competitive advantage in a services economy. As a direct result of these changing environmental factors regarding gender and business, a gender approach is emerging in business history, first in Universities of the U.S. and Canada, in England and Northern Europe, and later in Southern Europe (for instance, Goldin, 1990; Kwolek-Fowland, 1998).

Studies of gender in business history have taken place at least in three main areas of research: the labour market, self-employment and management of households. Regarding the labour market, research has focused on data about gender and business in factories and big corporations, particularly in sectors like the consumer industries and in the services sector (for the U.S., for example, Kwolek-Fowland, 1994; for Spain, for example, Borderías, 1993; Sarasúa y Gálvez 2003).

On self-employment, many publications have used official censuses – despite all the reliability problems – to reveal the existence of great numbers of women as independent proprietors in services activities like cleaning, washing, retail trade, food distribution, beauty and fashion services, health and education, etc. Some of the researchers have found the existence of many workshops and shops led by women where family, class, race, civil status and neighbourhood relations did play a very important role, and made business a collective endeavour where networks with clients and providers were very important, as in businesses run by men (Kwolek-Fowland, 1998 and 2007; Yeager, 1999; Baskerville, 1993 and 1999; Solà, 2001; Gálvez and Fernández, 2007 forthcoming). In this line of study some scholars are uncovering experiences of exceptional situations in which women have appeared as independent self-employers in businesses which were usually controlled by men like the printer business in Barcelona (Sola, forthcoming) and sometimes went beyond the regional or national borders as it happened with many women merchants of the 18th century colonial trade in the Rio de la Plata area (Aguirrezabala, 2006). This situation is more commonly found in examples of women independent entrepreneurs of the last three decades (Gálvez and Fernández Pérez, 2007). These studies show that self-employed women extensively use, as men do, personal networks with kin and people who shared birthplace as preferred ways to build trust and reduce uncertainty in their profit-making activities.

The third big field of interest in the study of gender and business has been the management of households, which is the traditional private sphere where industrialized societies enclosed women, particularly married women. Some scholars have initiated very interesting lines of research in this field: average individual households had small expenses, difficult then to be considered even a small business unit, but in an aggregate level all the households of a village or a city meant huge amounts of regional and national expenditure which were under women's control, therefore making their management styles a relevant research topic (Davidoff and Hall, 1987; Kwolek-Folland, 2006; Borderías and López, 2003)

Also, business history is benefiting from interdisciplinary approaches about gender and family firms. Social historians, business historians, anthropologists, sociologists, entrepreneurial scholars and women's studies scholars are converging in the family firm as an appropriate place where the most common and more abundant experiences of gender and entrepreneurship can be best captured and analysed. Until very recently most of the studies in this line of interest have drawn upon empirical evidence of women's participation in family businesses in order to highlight positive power relations and cases of success (as with the "Carnegie" woman that was scarce according to the *Fortune* magazine of 1935, cited earlier). This is natural, as the sources usually are richer in details about success rather than failure, and public interest and policies often means pressure to look for models that society may want to follow (ASEME, 2003). However, more recent approaches that use the archives of legal institutions, private documents, or interviews as main sources of information, do offer a complementary approach, showing besides success the existence of discrimination. Across borders and periods legal and cultural restrictions have limited women's acknowledgement of their role in family firms, which has sometimes provoked conflict and opposition, and even bankruptcy.

Conflicts are rare to appear except in cases of divorce (Fernández Pérez, 1997a), as women and families tend to solve their conflicts through private unrecorded ways, but when they do appear they reveal unwritten rules about rights and compensations that business historians usually have not recorded. These unwritten rules and conflicts have focused some interesting papers in two recent conferences on business and gender with a historical perspective. The first one was the gender and services session of the *European Business History Association Conference* (Barcelona, 2004), whose papers on Greece, Sweden England, the U.S. and Spain will soon be published (Kwolek-Folland and Walsh, eds., 2007 forthcoming). These papers agree with Nancy Fraser's observation that the family does not only have "an extrinsic and incidental relation to money and power", but an intrinsic and fundamental link to business and politics. The papers also were very important in insisting in the relevance that changes in the legal framework have in limiting or favouring social acknowledgment of women as entrepreneurs (as managers, employees, self-employers, or family firm owners)[4]. The other example is the session organized in the *XIV International Economic History Association Conference* (Helsinki 2006), by Beatrice Craig and Mary Louise Nagata under the title "Beyond Chandler; The Survival of the Family Firm in Europe, Asia, and North-America in the XIXth and XXth Centuries", whose major aim was to relate gender and family firms.[5] At this second conference Irene Bandhauer showed the importance of using an international framework to demonstrate not only the importance of the institutional legal framework in the definition of the possibilities and limitations of women's entrepreneurship in family firms but also in the protection of the rights and compensations that a female family firm member is accounted to as such member of a family enterprise. Bandhauer studied the effects of the Austrian Civil Code of 1812 in the legal foundation of women's cooperation in a family firm. While in France marriage laws during the 19th century did not stipulate the separation of property in marriage, and women's cooperation in a small business was not to her disadvantage in case of death or divorce, in Austria the separation of property during the marriage went closely linked to the obligation married women had to assist her husband in his enterprise without payment and without sharing the gains. This provoked conflicts and problems that were only resolved in the late 1970s when wives rights to compensation for their work in small- or medium-sized family firms were protected.[6] The discrimination of women in sharing responsibilities in family firms has also been highlighted in a recent conference on women self-employed that was organized by Angels Sola, in which Assumpta Muset indicated how in 18th century Catalan villages specialized in family networks of distribution in the Spanish market women were clearly separated from any kind of work in the family business.[7]

II.3- Recent methodological and theoretical contributions to the study of women and family firms

One influential explanation for the patterns of the dominant entrepreneurial discourse, the ‘silences’ and how they reflect in the individual experience of women entrepreneurs is Mulholland’s (1996a) sociological analysis of the creation of what she terms ‘entrepreneurial masculinities’. She argues that patriarchal strategies shape the role of women. Her analysis suggests women’s domestic labour and feminine ideologies play a fundamental part in the construction of particular masculinities, supporting entrepreneurial activity, which results in the accumulation of capital. It is Mulholland’s (1996a) view that although women might be playing an active role in the creation of wealth they often do not receive the recognition deserved and may be marginalized in the management and ownership of wealth (Mulholland, 1996a:78). She argues that women’s labour is exploited and their identity controlled by the forces of patriarchy, ultimately serving capitalism through the entrepreneurial activity of their husbands. Whilst patriarchy may offer a powerful interpretive framework within which to begin to understand leadership, gender relations, and identities, both feminine and masculine, Mulholland's work might be critiqued for relying on patriarchy as universal and therefore deterministic explanation.

For the UK, Baines and Wheelock (1997) demonstrated that 'family' is an important and under reported aspect of business behaviour and organisation. Their study suggested that family participation in small businesses is the norm rather than the exception, and they pointed to the importance of the role of the women as co-owners, employees or unpaid helpers in the business. They observed that it was the women who adapted their lives around the unpredictable workload of the business, shouldering domestic and business responsibilities and often undertaking 'tasks for which they have little taste'. Baines and Wheelock went on to say that 'sometimes, to an observer, it appears that women experience considerable exploitation', and they concluded that 'the intensity of self exploitation and the sacrifices made by some individuals, especially women participating in businesses with their husbands should not be glossed over in discussion of the 'business family'' (Baines and Wheelock, 1997: 2, 53).

Private and public accounts of what is happening in the family business may be contradictory. In her study of the founding of retail business in the US, Cramton (1993) drew on "family systems theory" to explore the relevance of family dynamics across three generations. In contrast to the individualistic perspective of the traditional entrepreneurship literature, family systems theory focuses on analysis at the group level and locates behaviour in systems of emotional relationships (Cramton, 1993: 236). An interpretation of events in which emotional relationships and relational goals were as important as business and economic goals in the founding of the family firm is presented in a close examination of the family group from which the venture emerged. Cramton argued that the private accounts of the business reveal that this venture was fundamentally collaborative but that the traditional entrepreneurship literature gives us no framework to understand that collaborative practice. Furthermore, the public accounts of the business revealed in media stories and advertising materials reflect that the values of the traditional literature emphasise ‘individualism and rational assessment over collaboration and emotional connection’ (Cramton, 1993: 244). It seems that families may present traditionally male models of leadership to the outside world but behind the scenes there is a different story to be told. The construct/discourse of the ‘heroic male’ owner manager and the ‘invisible women’ embedded in the patriarchal discourses and practices may be usefully invoked by the whole family to help the business.

III. Situation of women in family firms at beginning of 21st century

III.1. Some figures

The increased interest in studying business with a gender perspective is not only the result of renewed analytical approaches. It is also the consequence of a changing reality.

Europe and Asia have less statistics on women’s participation in family businesses than America, and particularly the U.S. In the United States an earlier political awareness of women’s rights and a more equalitarian legislation have provided institutional power to have useful gender-oriented statistics. According to these available statistics, 1.2 million husband and wife teams ran companies in 2003, and the number of family businesses run by women has grown 37% between 1998 and 2003 with average annual revenue of $26.9 million in 2003. Also in the U.S. we know that in 2003 at least 52% of the family firms had hired at least one female family member full-time, while according to Arthur Andersen and Mass Mutual 10%

of these family firms employed two female family members (www.amserv.com/familystatistics.html). Many women who climbed corporate ladders in the past 20 years are returning to family firms with skills that made them more attractive CEO candidates (*USA Today* 2003). This process is less well statistically studied in Europe, where only very recently political administrations are promoting the creation of gender-oriented statistics. And when these statistics do exist they usually deal with women entrepreneurs as self-employed, and very rarely address the issue of women entrepreneurs within family firms – where ownership and management are, as we have seen, often very flexible and complex realities. As an example, the Commission of the European Communities published a report in which European female entrepreneurship was compared to the U.S., and said that:

> "The character of European entrepreneurship shows quite interesting features. First, female entrepreneurs are generally less represented in the entrepreneurial population than in the U.S. The exceptions are France, Austria and Finland, where the share of female entrepreneurs is comparable to that of the U.S. (an average of about 37% in the period 1990-1999) and Portugal, where it corresponds to around 41%. In addition, the share of female entrepreneurship has decreased in the decade 1990-1999 compared to the previous decade in Germany, France, Finland and Sweden. On average, therefore, the steady increase in female entrepreneurship recorded in the US is not found in the data for the EU Member States" (Commission of the European Communities, 2001:7).

In this report there were the following interesting figures regarding female entrepreneurs, as self-employed:

Table 1. Female entrepreneurs as percent of total entrepreneurs (self-employed) in the EU, 1980-1999

	15-20%	20-25%	25-35%	+than35%
EU countries	Ireland	Denmark,Italy,UK	Belg.,Germ.,Neth.,Aust.,Sp	Fr.,Portugal,Finland

Source: Own elaboration from Commission of the European Communities 2001, graphV.4, p.40.

According to EUROSTAT figures and Labour Force Survey figures, in Europe women are more likely to be employees than employers. In 2000 21 to 24 percent of entrepreneurs in the European Union were women, while 34 to 38% of employees were women. In Spain figures for female self-employment show that they have grown very slowly in the last five years, at a slower pace than women's occupation rates:

Table 2. Total employment and self-employment in Spain 2000-2005

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
A. Men and women registered in the Spanish Social Security (millions)	15.062,9	15.649,9	16.126,3	16.613,6	17.081,8	17.835,4
% women of A.	37,33	38,05	38,67	39,27	39,83	40,53
B. Men and women self-employed	2.568,8	2.614,9	2.656,2	2.732,9	2.840,4	2.840,4
% women of B.	30,32	30,36	30,59	31,04	31,38	31,59

Source: Anuario de Estadística Laboral. Ministerio de Trabajo y Asuntos Sociales, "Trabajadores afiliados a la Seguridad Social en alta laboral según régimen 2000-2005. Trabajadores autónomos".

As regards economic sectors, almost 30% of women self-employed with employees in the European Union worked in retail and wholesale distribution in 2000, as compared with some 23% of men. Community and personal services represented 12% and hotels and restaurants 13% of women self-employed with employees. These three sectors thus accounted for 55% of total women self-employment in the European Union. This is a clear representation of women's specialization in the services sector, which in some countries like Spain has been the outcome of a long historical process rather than a recent result of the explosion of the tertiary sector (Gálvez and Fernández Pérez, 2007). The Labour Force Survey data indicates that European older women of 40 years and over are more likely to be self-employed than younger women, and that in 2000 only 3% of women aged 25 to 39 were self-employed with employees. According to this Survey, they tend to work in smaller local units than men, despite the fact that the educational levels are similar for women and men (Franco and Winqvist, 2002). Does all this information mean that self-employment is a sign of strong entrepreneurship for European women or, rather, a market niche of low-tech services activities for workers expelled by the market because of their gender and their age? Why do young enterprising women in Europe seem to avoid entrepreneurship, defined as self-employment?

Self-employment may become too risky for women, or young entrepreneurial women may prefer to work as managers and employees in big corporations where promotion and economic rewards may be perceived as more accessible than in smaller businesses. However, there are other possible explanations. Firstly, that statistics in Europe are blurring the strong participation of women in family firms, a participation which does not necessarily take place as owners or managers but very often as collaborative partners, unpaid workers, and unofficial leaders. Secondly, that the role of women in family firms has been hidden through the historical and accumulated action of former European political institutions responsible of designing and collecting statistical data. Thirdly, that the explanations for these visible and invisible sides of entrepreneurship are historical, and rooted in old cultural and political traditions.

Despite the lack of quantitative data comparable to the US, qualitative evidences and business journals provide cases that point in a similar direction to events developed in the US, that is, to underline the strong participation of women entrepreneurs in small family-owned businesses, and the increased appointment of female family members as CEO in medium and big family firms (in Banesto, González&Byass, Campofrío, Calvo, Basi, and Codorniu in Spain, for instance). In many cases like in the Spanish fashion-oriented company Basi, internationally-trained women CEOs have returned to their family firm therefore improving the management skills of the company and contributing to its market expansion (Gálvez and Fernández Pérez, 2007). Family firm associations are well aware of this improvement of skills in their companies due to the contribution of female family members with top education and training. And, despite the fact that many female entrepreneurs do not want to engage in feminist debates or to be treated in a positive discriminatory way, many initiatives are being taken to highlight the increased participation of women in top management and creation of family companies, particularly by governments and entrepreneurial associations.

III. 2. Why women seem to be more ‘visible’ than in the past?

Women have always shared responsibilities in family businesses. This is very clear from what we know about the history and economics of the rural economy and the significance of women in family units of production now and in the past. In urban economies their participation has always been very important in the services sector (Kwolek-Fowland and Walsh, eds., 2007) though in the secondary sector there has been more debate about women's activities and variation in the social acknowledgement of such activities. In manufacturing, and generally speaking, women were very visible in family firms of pre-industrial times, and in family and personal businesses created during the third technological revolution since the end of the 20th century (Kwolek-Fowland and Walsh, eds., 2007).

There had been many women in Europe in pre-industrial times that led their family businesses, and in some Mediterranean countries and regions civil law protected women's management and ownership of their properties because in many ways this was a way through which families could safely transfer wealth between generations, against the potential mismanagement or abuse of husbands who did not belong to a woman's extended family network.[8] However, industrialization spread in Europe together with liberal ideas which legally enshrined the individual, understood as individual men, and solidly established in all Europe the legal rights of husbands to be household heads with all the power to own and control the household economy. Married women and single women with a living father saw their rights to manage family and personal property greatly reduced, and only widows and orphan single women could more easily appear in the official historical statistics as owners or managers of their family businesses (Fernández Pérez, 1997b).

With industrialization and liberalism new civil codes made possible that men massively appeared as the individuals who could represent the role of owners and managers of a business (Yeager, 1999). In this context, and in a coherent and logic way, if married women and single dependent women were not legally allowed to own and manage their own private property at home, society started massively accepting that women in general could not be owners or managers of private and public companies and corporations. This legal and social situation lasted in the U.S. and in

Europe until at least the Second World War, when economic expansion and the need to incorporate women in a massive way to the labour market led to legal reforms in many countries in America and Europe which generally allowed women to be free to own and manage their personal and family property regardless their civil status (Gálvez and Fernández, 2007; Kwolek-Fowland and Walsh, eds., 2007). Only in the last four decades we do have, therefore, a legal and social framework which allows greater visibility and registration of women as owners and/or managers of businesses regardless civil status. This is true particularly when women are self-employed or are the visible heads of a family firm, though it is not so clear when women share management and ownership in a family firm (Gálvez and Fernández Pérez, 2007). In these cases more than ownership and management it is leadership in its varied forms that provides a useful concept that captures women's role in family business (Hamilton, 2006a).

IV. Concluding remarks

The role played by women in family firms has been always important in all economies of the world. Either as self-employed owners and managers, or more often as collaborative partners with fathers, husbands and sons, their contribution has been very active in the first stages of a business, in providing a safe bridge between generations in case of the decease of a member of the family, and in useful networking. Their recorded story is more of collaboration than conflict, in comparison with the recorded documents on business conflicts which depict basically male members of the enterprising families.

Women's participation in family businesses has not always been universally the same throughout history and across borders. Their entrepreneurial contribution to family firms has changed in close connection with the effects of the three technological revolutions, and with the social transformations that occurred during the birth and consolidation of industrialized economies. Macroeconomic developments have affected microeconomic balances of power within families, which have been constantly redefining the unwritten rules that shape collaboration and emotional satisfaction among human beings. Besides, institutions and laws have provided changing frameworks which generally in the western world have blocked, until the second half of the 20th century, women's recognition and compensation for their work in firms owned by male members of the family.

It is also important to remember that women's participation in family firms varies enormously depending on the country, but also on the region and city, and on the size and market orientation of the firm. This is something that future research will have to study with much more detail. Contemporary oral evidence seems to reveal that medium and big firms internationally-oriented tend to give wider recognition and compensations to their female members (in Spain, for example the cases of Ana Patricia Botin in Banesto, the Basi sisters, the Tous family, and top women CEOs in Campofrio, González&Byass or Codorniu), in comparison with less well-known smaller and more locally-oriented family firms. The same evidence indicates that these differences may explain the different degrees of collaboration or conflict within families.

Scholars have approached the subject of gender and family firms only when the individualistic analysis of the business world focused on Schumpeterian owners have been modified to let groups and managers in. Alfred Chandler unconsciously contributed a lot in this change. Because he included managers as principal agents of success in the triumph of the U.S. corporations, and because women started to enter the new corporations after the II World War, and even found some of them, scholars were able to study documents about the role of women managers and women entrepreneurs. The subject also started to be interesting to a wide variety of scholars from different disciplines (sociology, marketing, history, management, economy), when the revolutionary ashes of the 1970s started to blow in the wind, and when after the 1980s feminist scholars reoriented their research from the lower end of the factory (women workers) to households and housewives. Business schools saw every year more women students registering, and in old declining industrial regions of Europe many of these students were members of small family firms, or wanted to create a firm of their own with friends or relatives, thus awakening the interest in providing these students with an academic account of the role of women in family entrepreneurship.

At the beginning of the 21rst century the writing of this academic account is still going on. The consolidation of a services economy, the final decline of many industrial regions in Europe, the relative abundance of public resources available for women entrepreneurs are contributing to the increased participation of women in business. However, we should not forget the importance of history: without the extremely important, and long, accumulation of human capital specialized in providing services among European women, we could not have today such an abundant and socially useful number of family firms.

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[1] Howarth, Rose and Hamilton in the Oxford Handbook of Entrepreneurship (2006) provide a comprehensive overview of family business research with international examples and perspectives.

[2] The Family Firm Institute was created in 1986. Today its members go up to 1,400 individuals and organizations from across the globe. An approximate 75% of them are family business advisors and

consultants, 22% educators and researchers, and 2% students. The FFI has held conferences in the U.S., Canada and UK. This information is in their official website.

[3] For Miriam Beard and her ideas see Yeager (1999), 9-12.

[4] Fraser (1985), 107.

[5] This session presented papers on women, gender, and business in a wide range of countries: Irene Bandhauer Schoeffmann dealt with Austrian business women and their status in family firms in the 19th and 20th century, Tomoko Hashino with the importance of women in family firms in Japan, Angel Kwolek-Fowland with women´s fiscal activity in the household economy of the US in the 19th century, and Peter Baskerville with the role of gender in urban family enterprises of Canada at the turn of the twentieth century.

[6] Bandhauer 2006 (unpublished)

[7] Assumpta Muset "Las Amazonas de Copons en el siglo XVIII" and Angels Solà Parera "Impresoras, libreras, estamperas y editoras. El caso catalán" in *La Historia de las Mujeres: Perspectivas Actuales*. XIII Coloquio Internacional AEIHM 19-21 oct 2006, Universitat de Barcelona.

[8] Fernández Pérez (1996) and Fernández Pérez (1997) for the case of Cádiz in the 18th century has shown how many middle-class women could litigate in civil courts and claim their properties back from common married property if they felt their husbands were mismanaging their inherited wealth, thus endangering their offspring´s inheritance rights. For another regions see Casey et alii (1985). A recent approach of this greater freedom of women to own and manage personal and family businesses has been a session organized by Angels Sola in *La Historia de las Mujeres: Perspectivas Actuales*. XIII Coloquio Internacional AEIHM 19-21 oct 2006, Universitat de Barcelona. For a different perspective in English territories, where among middle-class people husbands had a strong legal right to own and manage their wives´properties, see Stone (1977) and Davidoff and Hall (1987).