

# Challenging the context: mumpreneurship, copreneurship and sustainable thinking in the entrepreneurial process of women – a case study in Ecuador

## Desafiando el contexto: mumpreneurship, copreneurship y pensamiento sostenible en el proceso emprendedor de las mujeres - Estudio de casos en Ecuador

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### Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this article is to determine the factors in the context of entrepreneurship that are evident in Ecuador, a country that has the highest rate of female entrepreneurship worldwide with 34% according to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) (2019).

**Design/methodology/approach** – A qualitative study was carried out with 39 cases, applying in-depth personal interviews and focus groups to selected cases in the main cities of Ecuador.

### JEL Classification — L26, M21, N26, Q56, Z13

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**Findings** – The results suggest that “mumpreneurship”, copreneurship and sustainable thinking arise in response to the environment. Deepening then in the perspective of the 5M proposes by Brush *et al.* (2009) that give us a framework of the macroenvironment of women entrepreneurship and offers a holistic understanding of women’s entrepreneurship, adding a sixth “M” which is “Environmental Thinking” or the environmental thinking that is present in the current context.

**Originality/value** – This article is one of the first to analyse the context of female entrepreneurship in Ecuador and determine the context factors that influence the identification of opportunities and the exploitation of entrepreneurial opportunities. It also presents the expectations and challenges of the women who shape the authors’ case studies and give voice to Ecuadorian women. Consequently, this research will support the configuration of policies that supports each of the stages of women’s entrepreneurial processes.

**Keywords** Women entrepreneurship, Mumpreneurs, Mumpreneurship, Sustainable thinking, Entrepreneurial process

**Paper type** Case study

## Resumen

**Propósito** – Este artículo pretende determinar los factores del contexto del emprendimiento que se evidencian en el Ecuador, país que ostenta la tasa más alta de emprendimiento femenino a nivel mundial con un 34% de acuerdo al GEM (2019).

**Diseño/metodología/enfoque** – Se realizó un estudio cualitativo con 39 casos, aplicando entrevistas personales a profundidad y grupos focales a casos seleccionados en las principales ciudades del Ecuador.

**Resultados** – Los resultados sugieren que el “mumpreneurship”, el copreneurship y el pensamiento sostenible surgen como respuesta al entorno. Profundizando entonces en la perspectiva de las 5Ms propuesta por Brush *et al.* (2009) que ofrece una comprensión holística del emprendimiento de mujeres, añadiendo una sexta “M” que es el “Medioambiental Thinking” o el pensamiento ambiental que está presente en el contexto estudiado.

**Originalidad/valor** – Este artículo es uno de los primeros en analizar el contexto del emprendimiento femenino en Ecuador y determinar los factores del contexto que influyen en la identificación y en la explotación de oportunidades emprendedoras. Además presenta las expectativas y retos de las mujeres que configuran nuestros casos de estudio y dan voz a las mujeres ecuatorianas. En consecuencia nuestra investigación servirá de apoyo para la configuración de políticas que apoyen cada una de las etapas del proceso emprendedor de las mujeres.

**Palabras clave** Emprendimiento de mujeres, mumpreneurs, Mumpreneurship, copreneurship, Pensamiento sostenible, Proceso emprendedor

**Tipo de papel** Caso de estudio

## 1. Introduction

A widespread current discussion involves the value of entrepreneurship in the economic development of different countries. However, despite the fact that a number of studies have revealed the positive effects of entrepreneurship on increasing national productivity, the debate has not yet reached any significant level in developing economies (Álvarez and Grazzietto, 2018). In response to this, governments worldwide are gradually beginning to support entrepreneurship by promoting public policies, thereby progressively demonstrating a source of higher incomes, increased national and international trade flows, innovation and reduced unemployment. As a result, entrepreneurship has been gaining popularity, with more than half of the global population in 52 countries considering entrepreneurship as a good career option (GEM, 2018).

However, over the years we have shaped an image of the “entrepreneur” as being associated with masculinity and traits characteristic of men such as the strength and tenacity that “should” accompany an entrepreneur. Indeed, women have had to earn their place in the entrepreneurial environment through their contribution to job creation, innovation and well-being (Kelley *et al.*, 2015), and they are currently one of the fastest growing entrepreneurial populations in the world (De Vita *et al.*, 2013). Along with this increasing number of businesses started and managed by women, there has been a growing interest from academia. This has led to an increase in the number of research studies on women entrepreneurs, which focus on understanding the internal motivations of women entrepreneurs rather than the environment in which they develop (Arenius and Minniti, 2005; Jennings and Brush, 2013).

Hence, the importance of understanding the context, a multiple phenomenon that intervenes in entrepreneurship directly and indirectly as it offers a lens through which to consider how individuals interact with situations in their environment and how situations influence the individual (Welter, 2011), providing a broader and more varied perspective on the entrepreneurial phenomenon (Welter, 2011; Zahra *et al.*, 2014).

Gender affects the way in which an environment is perceived. For several authors, there are substantial differences in the situations to which men and women are exposed. These include institutional variables that affect the extent of female entrepreneurship in different countries (Welter *et al.*, 2003; Minniti and Arenius, 2003; Welter, 2011; Ruíz-Arroyo *et al.*, 2017), social variables such as work–family conflict studied by Shelton (2006) and contact networks (Welter and Trettin, 2006; De Carolis *et al.*, 2009), among others. Other studies focus on the particular context of different countries; for example, Álvarez *et al.* (2012) studied the context of female entrepreneurship in Spain, and, more recently, Aidis (2016) investigated the innovation environment for female entrepreneurship in Latin America.

Despite the progress of the studies mentioned above, the literature on context and female entrepreneurship in South America is still scarce and has focused only on specific dimensions, predominantly studies on the institutional context. We therefore developed our research to help fill this gap in the field of study while at the same time heeding the call of several authors (Minniti and Naude, 2010; De Vita, 2013; Kelley *et al.*, 2015; Welter *et al.*, 2014) who point out the importance of addressing the different contexts of women's entrepreneurship and its temporal dimension. The purpose of this study is therefore to identify the contextual factors that influence the entrepreneurial process through the two stages proposed by Shane and Venkataraman (2000), namely the identification and exploitation of entrepreneurial opportunities, which will be analysed from a woman entrepreneur's perspective. To this end, we conducted a qualitative research study using the case study methodology proposed by (Yin, 2017) in the context of Ecuador.

The paper is structured as follows. The first section sets out the theoretical framework and reviews the main results provided by the literature on female entrepreneurship in relation to the role of the context and its dimensions. Next, we present the research design and methodology followed by a description of the cases studied with their particular characteristics. We then present the results of the coding process, data analysis and comparison with the literature. Finally, we reflect on our findings, put forward propositions and discuss their implications in the academic, economic and social fields.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 Context

Context has been studied from different perspectives, including recent work in sociology (Simpson and Willer, 2008), psychology (Wagner and Rush, 2000) and organisational behaviour (Rousseau and Fried, 2001; Johns, 2006).

Business contexts present considerable novelty and are constantly changing due to the dynamism of the actors and processes involved (Zahra and Wright, 2011). They span a wide spectrum as there are differences in both perception and analysis (Baker and Welter, 2018). Steyaert and Katz (2004) previously defined context as a more complex social phenomenon and subdivided it into social context, institutional context and spatial context. Zahra and Wright (2011) identified four dimensions of context: spatial, time, practice and change, and later, Zahra *et al.* (2014) extended this to include business characteristics such as organisational, ownership and governance dimensions. Welter (2011), in her study focusing on women entrepreneurs, states that the different contexts respond to the questions: where, when and why do entrepreneurship occur; who or whom are involved in the entrepreneurial process and when does this process take place? The study examines the

historical and temporal dimensions transversally present in the two stages of the entrepreneurial process—identification and exploitation of the entrepreneurial opportunity—and how the entrepreneurial process is carried out (Shane and Venkataraman, 2000).

Table 1 provides a systematisation of the basis of our research, which is the context perspective proposed by Welter (2011).

Our research is based on Welter’s (2020) premise that contexts are interdependent and that temporal dimensions are transversal to each contextual factor. Thus, we address the temporal dimension as a cross-cutting factor in the stages of the entrepreneurial process, i.e. the identification and exploitation of the entrepreneurial opportunity (Shane and Venkataraman, 2000).

*2.1.1 Social context.* The individual is an eminently social being. This context can undoubtedly be one of the most important for women entrepreneurs whose family and social ties drive or limit them when setting up their own business (Manolova *et al.*, 2008). This has been studied by Minniti (2009), who highlights networks, role models and women’s role in the family as significant factors.

*2.1.1.1 Contact networks and role models.* Networks provide a mechanism for integration and serve as the social platform of the business (Anderson *et al.*, 2010). They strengthen the entrepreneur by providing meaning, identity and resources (Jack *et al.*, 2008). Networks have been previously studied by Davidsson and Honig (2003), Minniti (2009), Langowitz and Minniti (2007), Blenkinsopp and Owens (2010), Anderson *et al.* (2010), Ruiz-Arroyo *et al.* (2015), Naguib and Jamali (2015), among others. And they have been analysed from other areas of knowledge where they have been defined as a determining factor in women’s entrepreneurship given the importance of knowing other women entrepreneurs when deciding to undertake an entrepreneurial venture (Minniti, 2009).

Concerning contact networks, several studies also analyse the closeness and frequency of relationships with the network (Ruiz-Arroyo *et al.*, 2015), pointing out their levels of influence depending on these factors.

Studies by Minniti and Arenius (2003), on the other hand, highlight the differences in entrepreneurs’ networks according to gender. They point out that men generally pursue

Dimensions of the context	General	Examples
Social (Where?)	Networking, home and family	Network structure; density and frequency of relationships; household and family composition and roles
Institutional (Where?)	Culture and society, political and economic system	Social attitudes and norms; legal regulations; policies and support measures
Spatial (Where?)	Geographical environment: countries, communities and neighbourhoods, industrial districts and clusters	Characteristics of the physical location of the business; infrastructure; characteristics of local communities and regions
Business (Where?)	Industry, markets	Life cycle stage of industries and markets; number and nature of competitors
Historical and temporal dimensions (Where?)	Marked by a temporal space	

**Note(s):** \*Adapted from Welter (2011), Welter *et al.* (2014)

**Table 1.**  
Dimensions of the  
entrepreneurial context

hierarchical alliances oriented towards short-term interests, while women create affective ties and pursue long-term and more solid relationships. For a woman entrepreneur, networks offer support during the process of identifying and exploiting the opportunity and accompaniment throughout the life cycle of the new business (Johnson *et al.*, 2003).

In countries with less-developed economies, women entrepreneurs' networks tend to be smaller, less geographically mobile and less formal than those of their male peers (Minniti and Arenius, 2003). Moreover, regardless of whether the country's per capita income is high or low, there is a strong tendency towards a positive relationship between meeting other women entrepreneurs and starting a new business (Minniti, 2009). However, this is more evident in countries with low-income economies where there are a greater number of women entrepreneurs who say they know other entrepreneurs (Minniti *et al.*, 2005). Hence, the importance granted to "Networking" by the Global Entrepreneurship Index – GEI (Ács *et al.*, 2018) as one of its pillars for women's entrepreneurship.

2.1.1.2 Women's role in the family. A key contribution that research on women's entrepreneurship has made over the years is to recognise that the phenomenon of entrepreneurship is not gender-neutral. It is embedded in socially constructed belief systems associated with behaviours and roles that are considered appropriate for each sex (Jennings and Brush, 2013). Women's role in the family has historically been established by society, in turn, influenced by religion and culture, where the responsibilities of caring for the home have weighed heavily on women. If we analyse the Latin American context, it is clear that both motherhood and looking after the home play a decisive role and are considered to be the essential duty of women (Lamas, 2008). Indeed, in some cultures, love is not the only primary motivation for women to carry out what they consider to be their maternal duties; morals and social and religious values come into play as well. (Palomar Vereá, 2005). In themselves, these aspects are part of the subordinate role in which women were considered "natural" and men "cultural", by virtue of their natural biological role (Rosaldo *et al.*, 1974). Although this has been progressively diminishing with the increasing presence of women in the public sphere, there are still many differences in terms of the performance of motherhood in rural and urban environments. Indeed, by the age of 22, 20% of women in urban areas are already mothers, while this figure rises to between 60 and 80% in rural populations, often causing women to drop out of school (Lamas, 2008) and making their lives and those of their families more precarious, given the high levels of poverty in such areas. Many women have had to resort to making so-called "sacrifices" in order to reverse their subordinate roles and improve their personal and family standards of living, by choosing between being a full-time mother and achieving fulfilment in the workplace. This has not been easy either, as motherhood is still conceived with prejudices and stereotypes, including in terms of maternity leave (Heller, 2012), and where reaching a high hierarchical position is often a condition for childless women. Thus, according to the neoclassical theory of human capital, which explains gender segregation in the labour market, women tend to have fewer opportunities to reach high positions because of the belief of company managers that they will be employed while they are still childless; therefore, the company will waste time, money and effort in training female employees who will eventually leave. This paradigm is present even if the woman announces that she is not willing to leave her job. Finally, women are not hired for jobs that have been traditionally defined for men (Loprest, 1992).

As they experience a major conflict between work and family roles than men (Welter, 2004), the results of which are often negative (Jennings and Brush, 2013; Hammer *et al.*, 2004), explains why women have had to carefully consider the typical roles associated with their family and domestic responsibilities before making a decision about entrepreneurship (Welter *et al.*, 2003).

For Shelton (2006), work–family conflict is defined as a form of role conflict that arises because the pressures emanating from one role are incompatible with those of another.

Numerous studies then support the fact that women are motivated to start their own businesses in the hope of achieving a better work–family balance (Brush, 1992; Shelton, 2006; Jennings and Brush, 2013). Accordingly, Brush's (1992) “integrated perspective” points out that many women entrepreneurs see their businesses as part of their lives rather than as separate economic entities, tending to intertwine business activities with their family responsibilities, of which child-rearing is one.

*2.1.2 Spatial context.* Spatial context is part of the context perspective studied by Steyaert and Katz (2004), Welter (2011), Welter *et al.* (2014) and refers to the physical place where entrepreneurship takes place and how it influences the identification and exploitation of entrepreneurial opportunities. The spatial context has not been widely studied; however, feminist economic theory has identified the importance of place in understanding gender relations (Gibson-Graham, 1996). This has highlighted how differences between men and women are constituted through space (Harrison *et al.*, 2020). Thus, the geographical region is related to the culture and, in turn, the male and female behaviours accepted by different societies. At the same time, it is considered a key level at which an economy's capacity for development is determined, and, in the field of entrepreneurship, it analyses the phenomena of women entrepreneurs' natural environment and the influences, factors and forces that affect their behaviours and their business results (Harrison *et al.*, 2020).

*2.1.3 Institutional context.* The institutional context has been theorised and studied through informal and formal factors. The informal aspects comprise the constraints that come from information received over the years by society and which we call culture (North, 1997). Formal factors complement the effectiveness of informal constraints and are laws and public policies. Both formal and informal institutions can influence or constrain the identification and exploitation of entrepreneurial opportunities (Welter, 2011).

Previous studies indicate that formal institutions create areas of opportunity for entrepreneurship, while informal ones moderate the collective and individual perception of those opportunities (Welter and Smallbone, 2008). Moreover, they tend to interact, as, for example, in Latin America where there is a strong influence of informal institutions on formal ones (Hechavarría, 2016). Thus, culture can influence the evolution of government policies in different countries.

Culture refers to the set of values and norms that guide the behaviour of members of a society (Granato *et al.*, 1996). It is transmitted through teaching, imitation and values (Boyd and Richerson, 2009). The influence of culture on entrepreneurship can be observed in societies whose entrepreneurial motivations might be due to their culture rather than economic factors (Boettke and Coyne, 2009; Reynolds *et al.*, 1994; Jack and Anderson, 2002). For Varela (2001), values such as hard work, achievement, motivation or wealth generation are part of the behavioural pattern of individuals in different countries. Thus, culture shapes the thoughts, feelings and reactions of individuals (McGrath and Mc Millan, 1992). In terms of culture and gender roles, in most societies, the responsibility for taking care of the household and caring for children, the elderly or the sick falls on women, while men tend to be assigned the role of provider. Women are therefore allocated part-time, low-skilled jobs, which allow them to fulfil “their roles”. As a result, women opt for lower levels of specialisation as they do not require it to fit the jobs that they are “fit for”, even though they receive lower pay and compensation. Accordingly, women will find it more difficult to achieve similar human capital as men.

Moreover, in societies where male values dominate the culture, women's participation in entrepreneurship decreases as they feel very distant from social norms (Quevedo *et al.*, 2010). Rubio and Esteban (2016) present the Hofstede scale (1983) in which he analysed the countries considered culturally more masculine or feminine. The author divides countries into four categories: feminine countries (Sweden, Norway, Finland, etc.), moderately feminine countries (Chile, Portugal, Panama, Peru, Brazil, Spain), moderately masculine countries (Argentina,

India, Ecuador, Colombia, Mexico, Italy, etc.) and masculine countries (Hungary, Japan, Slovakia). Female countries are those where the gender gaps are the smallest and vice versa (Rubio and Esteban, 2016). Behaviours that have been incorporated into the masculine (instrumental) domain are strength, assertiveness, achievement orientation, etc. and those related to femininity (expressiveness) are nurturance, modesty, concern for quality of life, etc. (Hofstede and McCrae, 2004). This may have an impact on the performance of companies established in different countries with greater or lesser masculinity traits (Martín-Ugedo *et al.*, 2019). In this sense, the socio-cultural expectations for each member of a country will depend to some extent on their gender (García-Campos, 2008). These cultural differences influence gender discrimination in the workplace, and there are several related theories, including the theory of statistical discrimination, which becomes evident when two individuals with the same qualifications are treated differently solely on the basis of their gender (Lago, 2002).

On the other hand, authors such as Scott (1995) and Kostova (1997) studied the institutional environment from three dimensions: regulatory, cognitive and normative. Business laws and policies enacted by a country's government are part of the regulatory dimension. The normative dimension is framed by the rules for entrepreneurial activities in a given region (Kostova, 1997). In the context of female entrepreneurship, the regulatory dimension includes the gender-specific laws in the General Constitution that guarantee equal opportunities for women and men. The normative dimension includes labour market regulations that grant equal access to jobs and family policies such as specific tax regulations and in some countries childcare and property rights for women (Manolova, 2008; Welter and Smallbone, 2008).

The influence of these dimensions on the identification and exploitation of opportunities is evidenced by the availability of capital, access to credit granted by the state, the strength of support institutions and fiscal support measures. In itself, a positive institutional context reduces the levels of uncertainty that escalate throughout the entrepreneurial process (Li *et al.*, 2015).

*2.1.4 Business context.* The business context refers to the influence of market, industry and competition on the identification and exploitation of entrepreneurial opportunities (Welter, 2011). The market is part of the 5Ms that influence female entrepreneurship, along with money, management, motherhood and the meso/macro environment (Brush *et al.*, 2009). The market is the basic element for creating a new business (Shane, 2003) as the identification of entrepreneurial opportunities is closely related to the market environment in which the business is developed (Brush *et al.*, 2009).

The entrepreneur's ability to perceive the business environment and, in turn, interpret it has been studied by Herron and Robinson (1993), Ardichvili and Cardozo (2000). The latter indicated that the ability to successfully recognise a business opportunity is influenced by entrepreneurial awareness among other factors. Thus, the exploitation of the opportunity and subsequent actions or behaviours will depend on this process (Man and Lau, 2005).

Another factor to consider in the business context is innovation by introducing novel products, without which a business would not be competitive. In this regard, the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) in its special edition "Women" (2018) points out that women who start their businesses say that their products or services are innovative. This is confirmed by the 74 economies studied by the GEM, where women entrepreneurs are 5% more likely to innovate than men (Kelley *et al.*, 2017).

*2.1.5 Interacting contexts.* Noting the relevance of interacting contexts in better understanding entrepreneurship, Welter (2011) stresses the importance of the multi-layered approach by emphasising the proximal social interactions and distal political and cultural systems previously referred to by Mowday and Sutton (1993).

In this sense, while motherhood and family roles pertain to the social context, they could also be considered part of the informal factors of the institutional context through culture

influenced by the historical and temporal dimension, thus demonstrating the interaction of contexts. This shows the importance of cultural legacy in the definition of family roles where being a mother influences many actions, especially in the entrepreneurial process (Brush *et al.*, 2009; Miniti 2009). Thus, for women who have become mothers, the identification of entrepreneurial opportunities could be linked to the satisfaction of their need for self-fulfilment, which, according to Down and Warren (2008), could be linked to the “*career narrative*”.

2.1.5.1 Mumpreneurship. In their quest to maintain a career while balancing work and family, women who are mothers have given rise to the term “mumpreneurs”, which Ekinsmyth (2011, p. 105) defines as “*an individual who discovers and exploits new business opportunities in a social and geographical context that seeks to integrate the demands of motherhood and business ownership*”.

The terms “mumpreneur” for entrepreneurial mothers or “mumpreneurship” for the act of entrepreneurship that accompanies motherhood have attracted media attention since their inception, with campaigns seeking to encourage women to embrace entrepreneurship as an alternative way to achieve a work–life balance (Eikhof *et al.*, 2013). This concept was first pioneered in the United Kingdom in 2011 when, according to Ekinsmyth (2011), a Google search on the word “mumpreneur” returned more than 700,000 results, whereas a year earlier it was barely more than 120,000.

For Welter *et al.* (2014), while the study of mumpreneurs has emerged from forums, blogs and other community discussion spaces, it is only in the last 14 years or so that have seen the emergence of academic studies distinguishing mothers who run their own businesses and engage in childcare from women entrepreneurs, implying a limitation even as far as the concept itself. The concept has been shaped within the “new feminism” field, where women are called upon to embrace motherhood and shape the demands of business in the best possible way (Welter *et al.*, 2014). Meanwhile, a study by Duberley and Carrigan (2012) demonstrated the importance that mumpreneurs gave to being considered “good mothers” by limiting the growth of their businesses as a way to efficiently fulfil both roles, even if it represents many hours of work. This last aspect represents a common factor in studies of women’s entrepreneurship (Baines and Wheelock, 1998; Gurstein, 1996).

Likewise, the formal factors of the institutional context such as laws and public policies interact with the social context where the option of entrepreneurship is socially accepted and legally validated in some countries if it is undertaken together with a partner. To this, we must add the growing discrimination that affects aspects such as the wage gap, the employment gap, the high rates of unemployment, underemployment and women’s reduced access to management and decision-making positions.

2.1.5.2 Copreneurship. Given the discriminating factors and determinants at social and cultural level, women would opt for starting entrepreneurship with their partner and become “copreneurs”, a term that, according to Blenkinsopp and Owens (2010), was coined by Barnett and Barnett (1988) to define those couples where both are involved in the business and share responsibilities for its operation and management.

Copreneurship is thus defined as entrepreneurship created by romantic business partners (Jurik *et al.*, 2019). Recent studies point to the positive effects of copreneurship, such as being based on a relationship of support and cooperation not only financially but also in terms of time and effort, which could contribute to business development (Machek and Hnilica, 2015), as could the input of both visions. Among the negative aspects would be the division of roles and decision-making as currently the husband still tends to be the boss (Machek and Hnilica, 2015).

The interaction of social contexts with networks and role models, the institutional context with the cultural heritage associated with multiple customs and traditions and the

geographical location as part of the spatial context and the innovation culture of today's business context provide the basis for sustainable thinking and, based on this, the development of sustainable entrepreneurship.

2.1.5.3 Sustainable entrepreneurship as a result of sustainable thinking. For [Johns \(2017\)](#), sustainable thinking is a line that is framed within the study of entrepreneurship contexts and draws the attention of scholars, as the sustainable development paradigm accepts that there is a certain compatibility between environmental concerns and economic development. Thus, the geographical location of a firm may make it more or less likely for it to achieve sustainability goals ([Gallo et al., 2018](#)).

Authors such as [Jambor and Lindner \(2018\)](#) include social and ecological responsibility within the business model of new companies, highlighting female entrepreneurship because according to [Hechavarría et al. \(2012\)](#) and [Jennings and Brush \(2013\)](#), companies led by women are more sensitive and inclined to adopt social causes than those led by men. Thus, female entrepreneurship should be understood from its holistic nature where the identification of the entrepreneurial opportunity would lie in the determination of social or environmental problems while its exploitation would be based on the desire to provide solutions to these problems and at the same time obtain economic benefits.

It is therefore in this interplay between sustainable thinking and the exploitation of opportunity that the concept of sustainable entrepreneurship was born ([Johnson and Schaltegger, 2020](#); [Muñoz and Cohen, 2018](#)). This new concept of sustainable entrepreneurship is

focused on the preservation of nature, life support, and community in the pursuit of perceived opportunities to bring into existence future products, processes, and services for gain, where gain is broadly construed to include economic and non-economic gains to individuals, the economy, and society ([Shepherd and Patzelt, 2011](#), p. 142).

Thus, sustainable entrepreneurship combines the achievement of social, environmental and economic goals in an integrated and comprehensive manner in pursuit of the future progress and the well-being of future generations ([Tilley and Young, 2009](#)).

2.1.6 *Research context: Ecuador.* Ecuador stands out for its high rates of female entrepreneurship with 51.67% OER, which exceeds male entrepreneurship that stands at 48.33%, according to the 2017 GEM Ecuador ([Lasio et al., 2018](#)). This phenomenon has already attracted the attention of authors such as [Brush et al. \(2018\)](#), [Arraíz \(2018\)](#), [Khan \(2019\)](#) who cite studies by the GEM (2018) in which Ecuador is noted as the country with the highest rate of female entrepreneurship worldwide.

Although the laws on entrepreneurship in Ecuador do not specifically address women's entrepreneurship, they do show concern for reducing the wage gap of 21.9% and the employment gap of 35.5% between men and women ([Senplades, 2017](#)). However, at cultural level, barely 17% of the population supports women's entrepreneurship ([Ács et al., 2018](#)). This may be due to the country's moderate level of masculinity ([Hofstede, 1983](#)) validated in the study conducted by [Rubino and Esteban \(2016\)](#) where Ecuador is ranked 63rd on the masculinity scale, with a gender gap of 0.17. Consequently, it ranks 82 out of 149 countries in economic participation and opportunities for women with a ratio of 0.283 in political representation and female empowerment ([World Economic Forum, 2018](#)).

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Research design

We chose the inductive multi-case design ([Yin, 2017](#)), as it broadens our understanding of the contextual factors that influence female entrepreneurship. The level of analysis is the Ecuadorian context that has been presented above, specifically in the cities of Quito, Guayaquil, Cuenca and Riobamba, which contain a high concentration of urban

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entrepreneurship. The unit of analysis is women entrepreneurs in micro and small enterprises (MSMEs) in urban environments. We have opted for the urban context, as we believe that recent studies have focused on enterprises in rural and community settings. However, research on women entrepreneurs in urban areas is scarce.

### 3.2 Case selection

Our research consists of a detailed field study involving the participation of women entrepreneurs. In the first instance, four cities in Ecuador were chosen, according to the concentration of MSMEs. We chose 39 cases, of which 14 were participants of the CONQUITO “Mujeres emprendiendo con éxito” programme and the rest were participants of the Academy for Women Entrepreneurs (AWE) DreamBuilder programme. For these cases, we applied the literal replication criterion (Yin, 2017) as they were cases of women entrepreneurs from Quito participating in training programmes, and we therefore expected similar results. Literal replication logic applied to context analysis can be used to examine the similarities or differences that would exist between the different contextual factors such as government policies, access to resources, networks, family roles, physical environment, business environment, gender gap, culture and society.

We then selected a further 11 cases of women entrepreneurs from the other three cities and treated these using a theoretical replication design (Yin, 2017). Our reason for doing so was that, despite being in the same country, some cities outside the capital would perceive the influence of the environment differently. One example is that women in these other cities may not have had the same concern or opportunities for training. We therefore split these cases based on the assumption that the two groups have different types of conditions and on the fact that we wanted to have subgroups covering each type of condition (Yin, 2017).

### 3.3 Data gathering

Data were collected through two instruments: in-depth, semi-structured, face-to-face interviews (25 participants – see Annex 1) and focus groups (14 participants - see Annex 2). The instruments were applied between August 2017 and August 2019, the interview guide was developed based on the questionnaire provided in the NES (National Experts Survey) form applied by GEM Mujer Chile 2017 (Mandakovic *et al.*, 2017). The questions focused on environmental conditions are as follows: Do you know about credit options and government subsidies for new and growing businesses? Do you think that support for new and growing businesses is a high priority for policies at the national or local government level? Do you know or have you participated in educational policies that offer attention to entrepreneurship and the creation of new businesses? Questions on their perceptions of entrepreneurship and the creation of new businesses were also included and inquired into whether they consider entrepreneurship as a socially accepted work option (by family and friends); whether women are encouraged to be entrepreneurs; whether they consider that men and women have the same opportunities for entrepreneurship and which of the two start businesses more out of necessity; and whether they have access to social services to continue working after becoming mothers.

Both in-depth interview and focus groups have been recommended (Bird and Brush, 2002; Duberley and Carrigan, 2012) to “explore the quieter, more feminine and personal end of entrepreneurship”. Accordingly, we used several informants as suggested by Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007) in order to limit bias and gather diverse perspectives on the phenomenon. We first gathered secondary information from media and websites on women’s entrepreneurship programmes in Ecuador.

In the first phase, we asked the heads of CONQUITO’s Women in Successful Entrepreneurship Programme and the AWE DreamBuilder Programme to provide us with

a list of women entrepreneurs who have excelled in their programme, respectively. We received a list of 30 winners or finalists in the competitions run by the CONQUITO programme and 31 participants in the latest AWE training. We then collected information about their businesses from websites and checked this information against the SRI (Internal Revenue Service) public database. The information obtained allowed us to determine the type of business activity, the year of creation and the active status of the enterprises. In accordance with our approach, we selected those cases in which the enterprises had survived at least their 1st year of life. Next, we looked for women entrepreneurs in the remaining three cities. This information was obtained from the SRI in a search based on the gender of the MSME owner. We selected these according to similar criteria and parameters to those applied in the first groups. The women entrepreneurs in the province (11) were first contacted by telephone to arrange a personal interview at their business. A summary of the cases studied (interviews and focus groups, respectively) can be found in [Tables A1](#) and [A2](#).

The in-depth interviews lasted between 1.5 and 2 h, encouraging participants to develop a personal narrative ([Larty and Hamilton, 2011](#)) through a theoretically validated interview guide. The focus group had a similar guide, but this was adapted according to previous results ([Silverman and Marvasti, 2008](#) internal validation). The meeting lasted 4 h. From the active position of the participants, we were able to corroborate [King's \(2004\)](#) finding that participants enjoy the experience and that it can help them to clear up doubts about particular issues.

In a final phase, we conducted participant observation ([Waddington, 2004](#)) because we were interested in the way people act, think or feel, and we wanted to share their experience. To do so, the researchers participated in a monthly "Café de Emprendedoras" organised by the Association of Women Entrepreneurs of Ecuador and the CONQUITO and AWE trainings, respectively. They interacted with the participants and learned first-hand about their concerns and expectations in their own environment ([Taylor and Bogdan, 1984](#)).

### 3.4 Data analysis

We conducted the data analysis using the constant comparative method ([Strauss and Corbin, 1990](#)), which begins by labelling raw data into basic units of analysis. It is designed to develop consistent descriptions of social phenomena that allow us to make discoveries and generate theories about them. Based on this method, we began to identify theoretical categories and make comparisons between categories prior even to the formal analysis of the data. By doing this, we were able to develop associated coding criteria. For the coding process, we paid special attention to avoid the "holistic bias", as the tendency of researchers to see patterns beyond the obvious ([Gibbert and Ruirok, 2010](#)). For this, we used triangulation of data obtained from primary sources such as interviews with our unit of analysis, research on websites of support programmes for women entrepreneurs and direct participatory observation.

We then considered the reports obtained for the preparation of the semi-structured script applied to the focus group. To do so, we adapted the script of the individual interviews according to the preliminary findings. We did this as an independent measure of construct validity. In some of the cases when we found counter-evidence or new constructs, we recoded the individual and group interview transcripts.

Based on these final coding criteria, all data (interviews, observation, and focus groups) were included in Atlas.ti. software, which allowed on-screen coding and comparison between categories. Thus, we established networks and determined codes resulting from interactions and could graphically evidence co-occurrences in network graphs. Finally, the analysis allowed us to assess the degree to which some codes were the cause, were related to or were the result of empirically constructed propositions in terms of our central research question.

The first-order codes were established on the basis of theory as were the social, institutional, spatial and business contexts. As the research progressed, second-order codes were established, including mumpreneurship, copreneurship, sustainable thinking, access to credit, discrimination, innovation, sustainable entrepreneurship, opportunity identification, opportunity exploitation, role models, motivation, partners, proprietorship, institutional support, family support, obstacles to entrepreneurship, government policies, etc. The results of this research highlight the following: Mumpreneurship had 35 co-occurrences, copreneurship 27 co-occurrences, sustainable entrepreneurship 44 co-occurrences, when related to opportunity identification (41) and opportunity exploitation (28).

## 4. Results

Following the theoretical framework adopted, we analysed the contextual factors that affect women's entrepreneurial process. According to the time dimension identified by [Welter \(2011\)](#), we analysed our results based on the two stages of the entrepreneurial process: the identification of the opportunity and the exploitation of the opportunity, as an approximation of the transversal time dimension.

### 4.1 Opportunity identification

To identify a business opportunity is to consider that, at some point, the market supply is not satisfying a latent need and that by satisfying it, a profit could be made. Thus, for some of the cases studied, the social, spatial and business contexts present a framework for the identification of opportunities through previous experiences in the case of mumpreneurs and as the result of information and cognitive capacities in sustainable entrepreneurship.

*4.1.1 Social context and mumpreneurship.* One factor that stands out in our research is family roles. These roles are very well established in Ecuador and have led companies created by women-mothers to take over market spaces with businesses that often operate within their homes, providing the opportunity for what is known as mumpreneurship. In total, 64% of the women entrepreneurs in our study cited motherhood as their main motivation for starting a business. In [Table 2](#), we analyse 15 representative cases of this concept.

For these "mumpreneurs", the need for time, the search for work flexibility and childcare concerns are part of the motivations for setting up a business ([Figure 1](#)).

When asked whether they were satisfied with their decision to become entrepreneurs, 99% of them said yes. Many indicated that they would never work as employees again. They feel that they can balance their family and personal life. However, they stress that the work of an entrepreneur is not easy and that they have to dedicate a lot of time to the business. This may be one of the reasons why these businesses tend to grow as the children grow up and no longer need as much attention from their mother:

I thought I would have more free time but when you take on this responsibility there are so many more hours of work outside of working hours, unlike in any other job. . . I did not think we would grow as quickly as we did. . . in any case I'm satisfied and I know that I somehow manage to attend my daughters' school events. . . Ana (Child care centre).

Mumpreneurs have been able to identify opportunities through their experiences of motherhood:

It all started when I became a mother. Four months after I had my baby, I was already thinking about what else to do besides being a mother, because my life changed completely and from having a very busy day, non-stop, hardly ever being in the office, and then being at home 24–7, it was like I needed

Mumpreneur	Age	Number of children	Previous work	Entrepreneur in . . .	Reason for starting entrepreneurship
Neyla	33	2	Assistant	Catering service	Flexibility at work and time to take care of the children
Amada	36	2	Services	Sale of clothing	Improve household income and care for their children
Jessenia	30	2	Student	Building maintenance	No dependence on anyone, time for childcare
María Isabel	35	2	Hotel services	Sale of processed food	Need for time, to dedicate 100% of their time to their children
Cristina	33	2	N/A		Work and at the same time be able to devote herself to her children
Ana	42	2	Teacher	Textile manufacturing of uniforms	Need time for her daughters
Sandra	31	1	Teacher	Child care centre	Devote the time required for her daughter
Isabel	36	2	Teacher	Air Yoga workshop Manufacture of ecological nappies	Avoid being an employee and flexibility of time for her children
María Cecilia	33	1	Public relations		
Gabriela	29	1	Tourism guide	Online job placement platform for mothers	
Ximena	46	1	Police	Innovative heritage tourism routes	Helping other mothers and being able to dedicate time to her daughter
Carmen	43	3	Editor	Manufacture of natural cosmetics Manufacture of natural skin care products	Lack of work opportunities with flexible working hours and concern for her daughter
Doris	47	1	Web page design		
Senaida	36	3	Travel agency	Blog on motherhood and baby care	Taking care of her child
Erika	46	1	Civil servant	Manufacture of chocolate bars	Time to spend with her children

**Table 2.**Cases of mumpreneurs **Note(s):** Data obtained through qualitative research instruments between January 2018 and September 2019

to do something else, so I started to look for work options that would provide me with some flexibility so that I could also be at home and do what I like. I studied, I have a master's degree, but I did not find anything, no job gave me those options. María Cecilia (Flexible job placement agency for mothers).

. . . the ecological nappies business started when I found out from a friend that there was this option. When I was pregnant, I was looking for alternatives to raise my daughter well, but there was no such thing in Ecuador, only in the United States. . . Isabel (ecological nappies).

Thus, these opportunities would not have been identified without their condition of being mothers and their intention to solve problems in their own market segment.

*4.1.2 Spatial and business contexts, and sustainable entrepreneurship.* In Ecuador, the spatial context influences opportunity identification. Thus, women entrepreneurs in urban sectors are looking for business models based on sustainable thinking without losing their market orientation. With a view to achieving differentiation in supply, given the Ecuadorian

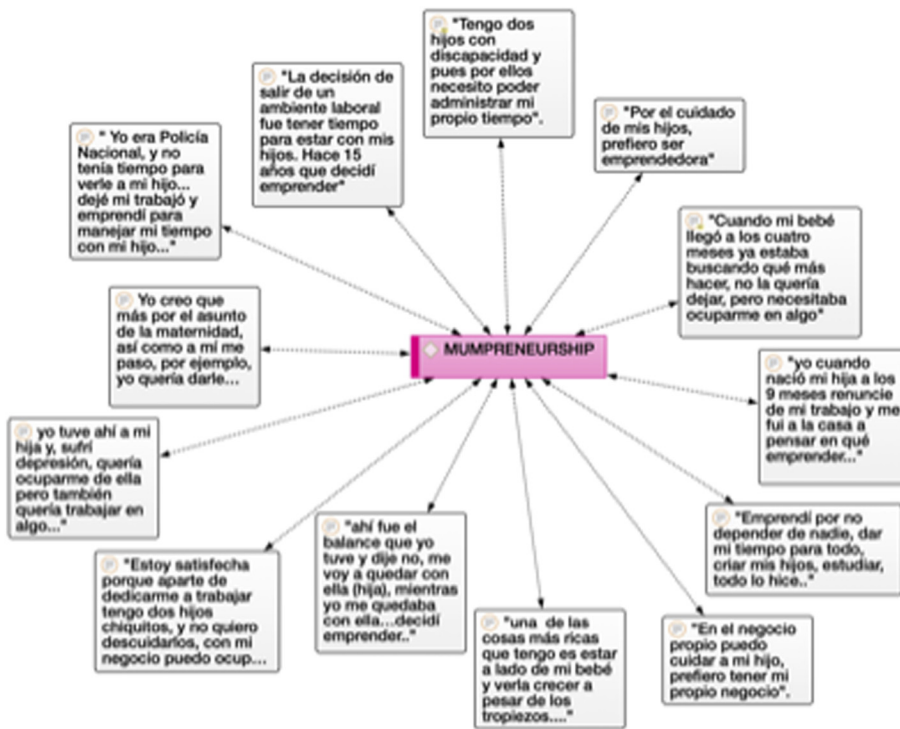


Figure 1. Mumpreneurs interviews

business context, they seek to innovate and provide alternatives that can be better accepted by their segment. Accordingly, we evaluated the cases in Table 3, based on the three pillars of sustainable development proposed by Ciegis *et al.* (2009), and included a fourth pillar, which is culture and the revaluation of ancestral knowledge.

Most of the cases comply with all the pillars of sustainable development or are aligned to the social aspect or environmental care. This shows that sustainable thinking has an impact on women developing sustainable entrepreneurship in Ecuador. It stands out that all the participants think that their business contributes, in one way or another, to the improvement of health, well-being and living conditions of the segment they are targeting.

We determined that the identification of a business opportunity arises from the search for information and from the cognitive capacities of the women entrepreneurs to recognise a business opportunity in the solution of a personal problem:

... I started to question myself a lot about everything we put on our bodies every day and what we put on our children, shampoos, creams, deodorants and cosmetics. Then I started to look for options that are not toxic to our health and the environment but I could not find any, so 9 years ago I started to make them at home, then I started to sell them to my relatives, they ordered more and more so then it became my business. ... Carmen (Nátu Natural Cosmetics).

... I could not use soaps with chemical components because of the damage they did to my skin, so I started to make my own natural soaps, and now I sell them. ... Ana (natural soaps).

... this was born out of a health problem, as I had to consume a large quantity of an imported product that was aloe vera powder, it was very expensive so I decided to make it myself. ... Estefanía (natural nutritional supplements).

**Table 3.**  
Cases of women  
sustainable  
entrepreneurs

Entrepreneur/ Entrepreneurship	Opportunity entrepreneur	Pillars of sustainable development Revaluation of ancestral knowledge (culture)	Excluded minorities (social)	Ecological awareness (environment)	Market oriented (economy)
Marcela / Happy Pollo	Restaurant uses organic inputs, collaborators: adult women	X	X	X	X
Mercedes/Easy Dry	Waterless car cleaner	X	X	X	X
María Solage/ Ethnisnacks	Vegetable snacks, they buy inputs from indigenous communities. Eco-friendly	X	X	X	X
Judith/ Mi primer huerto	Planting toy includes: soil, seeds and a care guide	X	X	X	X
Isabel/Eco bears	Designs and manufactures ecological cloth nappies	X	X	X	X
Isabel S/ Vida y Semilla	Organic seeds for agriculture	X	X	X	X
María Cecilia/ Lila	Online platform for flexible job placement for mothers	X	X	X	X
Working Moms	Natural cosmetics, its suppliers: Women's Associations in Africa and Ecuador	X	X	X	X
Ximena/ Fremeé	Eco-brick, reduces water consumption in construction by 98%	X	X	X	X
Pilar/ Eco ladrillo	Natural algae-based fertilisers	X	X	X	X
Cristina/Cianoplant	Family care products, with natural and ancestral ingredients	X	X	X	X
Carmen/ Nátu cosmética natural	Essential oils, with raw materials from Amazonian associations	X	X	X	X
Mónica/Ninfiás	Tourist routes to rescue the national heritage	X	X	X	X
Gabriela/ Ecuador Mystic	Restaurant, people with disabilities work there	X	X	X	X
Silvia	Aloe powder derivatives	X	X	X	X
Stephy	App for communication between new mothers	X	X	X	X
Doris	Association of women in Yasuni, for the production of organic chocolate bars	X	X	X	X
Senaida	Costume jewellery design, working with women in vulnerable conditions	X	X	X	X
Carla					

**Note(s):** Cases assessed according to the pillars of sustainable development

#### 4.2 Opportunity exploitation

Once the opportunity was identified, they exploited it and created their companies. This was influenced by several factors in the institutional environment, including access to resources and lack of institutional support, resulting in copreneurship.

*4.2.1 Institutional and social context and copreneurship.* The exploitation of entrepreneurial opportunities is related to the individual's perception of whether or not to take entrepreneurial risks, and this, in turn, is deeply rooted in the culture. In our study sample, 95% of the participants were practising Catholics, which influences their culture. For them, gender roles are clearly marked by societal acceptance, in which the mother is valued as the primary caregiver. As they themselves say, they married young and have an average of two children. They all affirm that the responsibility of caring for the household falls on women in both urban and rural settings. Under these conditions, it has been difficult for them to find suitable employment. In Ecuador, the unemployment rate in 2019 was 4.6% for women and 3.3% for men, who have an adequate employment rate of 44.8%, 10% points higher than that of women (INEC, 2019). Many women entrepreneurs also point to the wage gap—15% in the last year—as a problem they have had to face when they have been employed (INEC, 2019). This means that, given the institutional context, women entrepreneurs have had to balance their family role with part-time work due to the need for financial income in their families. Thus, for them entrepreneurship is an option that, for the most part, they have adopted out of necessity (GEM, 2018) and that has gradually become a socially accepted choice, especially when undertaken as a joint venture.

Based on our research, we can deduce that the women entrepreneurs studied do not start up alone (only 3% do), showing that teaming up with a partner gives them a better perception of their ability to take on the risks involved in setting up a business. This could be due to the influence of role models in the social context. These partners include friends or family members and in most cases, spouses or partners, leading to what is known as copreneurship. This is related to the informal institutional context whereby the culture in Ecuador has moderated women's reliance on support such as a partner, making the entrepreneur more optimistic in her perception of exploiting the opportunity.

Of the cases studied, more than 60% started a business together with their spouse or partner. Among the main reasons were financial support, ease in the division of roles, trust and teamwork (see Figure 2).

My husband supports me and is basically my right hand. With him, we had to work in the rain, on farms, anywhere, because we started from the bottom . . . Cristina (39 years old).

My husband is obviously my main investor; I said let's do it and he agreed and we first looked at how to cut the nappies more efficiently and more quickly. . . Isabel (ecological nappies).

Our women entrepreneurs in this category (23) are listed in Table 4.

On the other hand, despite the fact that most of the women entrepreneurs studied claim to be the decision-makers in the business, when it comes to establishing hierarchies in the organisation, the cultural pattern is once again marked by the fact that the man has to be the "boss," and so they tend to cede positions of power despite being the ones who identified and took the decision to exploit the business opportunity.

My husband would be the manager and I would be the assistant manager and marketing manager Neyla (catering service).

I am the administrator; Ricardo is the president. . . Isabel (seeds and agricultural inputs).

My husband is the president, (. . .) and I am the legal representative or general manager Gabriela (tourism services).

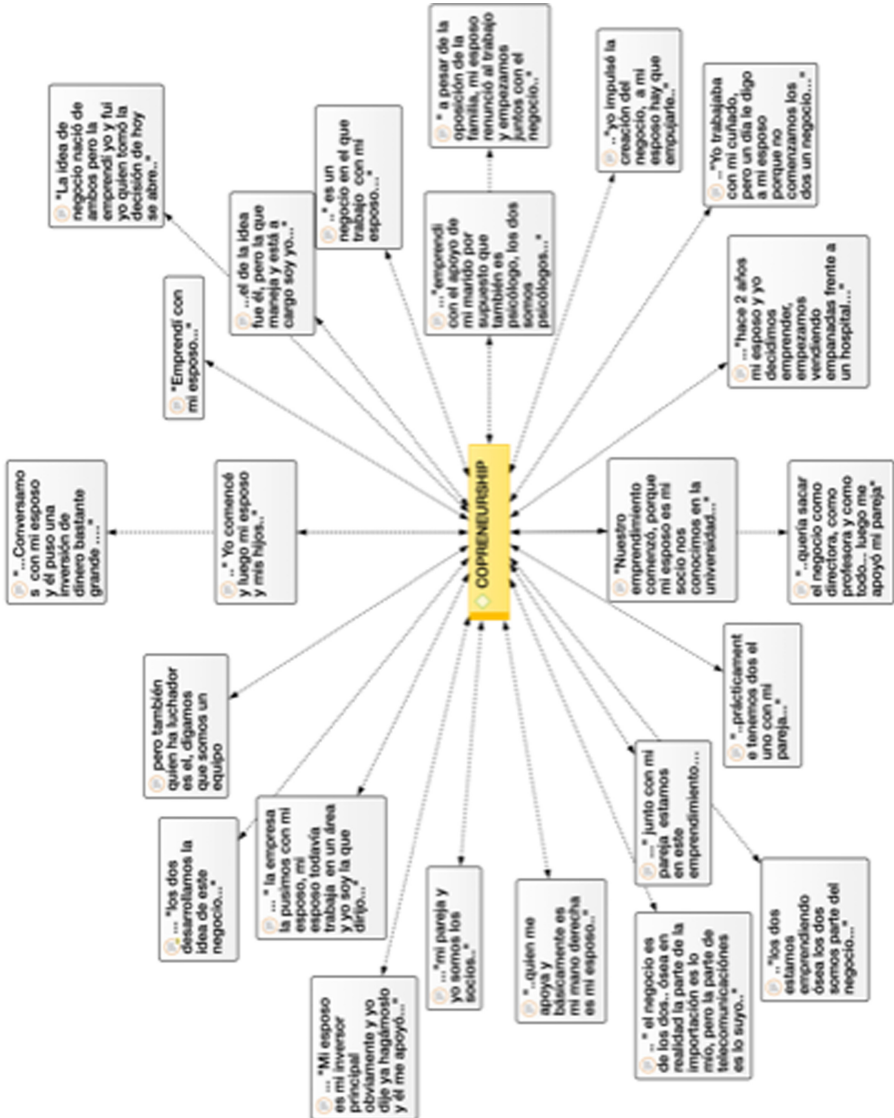


Figure 2.  
Copreneurs interviews

Copreneurs	Entrepreneur in . . .	Started her business with . . .
Neyla	Catering services	Started her business with her husband
Jessenia	Building maintenance	Started her business with her husband
María Isabel	Sale of processed food	Started her business with her husband
Ana Isabel	Child care centre	Started her business with her husband
	Production of ecological nappies	Started her business with her husband's support who is her capitalist partner
Gabriela		Started her business with her husband, who left his job
Mercedes	Innovative heritage tourism routes	Started her business with her boyfriend
Isabel	Car cleaning product	Started her business with her husband and her siblings
Pilar	Organic seeds for agriculture	Started her business with her husband and her children
Cristina	Ecological bricks	Started her business with her husband
Silvia	Fertilisers based on algae	Started her business with her husband
Stephy	Restaurant	Started her business with her husband
Aída	Aloe powder derivatives	Started her business with her husband
Marcela	Sale of traditional food	Started her business with her husband y her aunts
Cristina	Fast food restaurant	Started her business with her husband's financial support
Sandra	Textile manufacturing	Started her business with her boyfriend's support
Isabel	Centre for Yoga classes	Started her business with a woman partner and her husband's financial support
Mónica	Job placement agency for mothers	Started her business with her husband and Works with entrepreneurs in Amazonía
Erika	Produces essential oils	Started her business with her partner
Diana	Bocaditos (Argentinean alfajores)	Started her business with her husband and father
Ana Verónica	Commercialises technological products	Started her business with her husband's financial support
Jessica	Manufactures natural cosmetics	Started her business with her husband
Ángela	Canine care	Started her business with her husband and her parents

**Note(s):** \*Data obtained through qualitative research instruments between January 2018 and September 2019

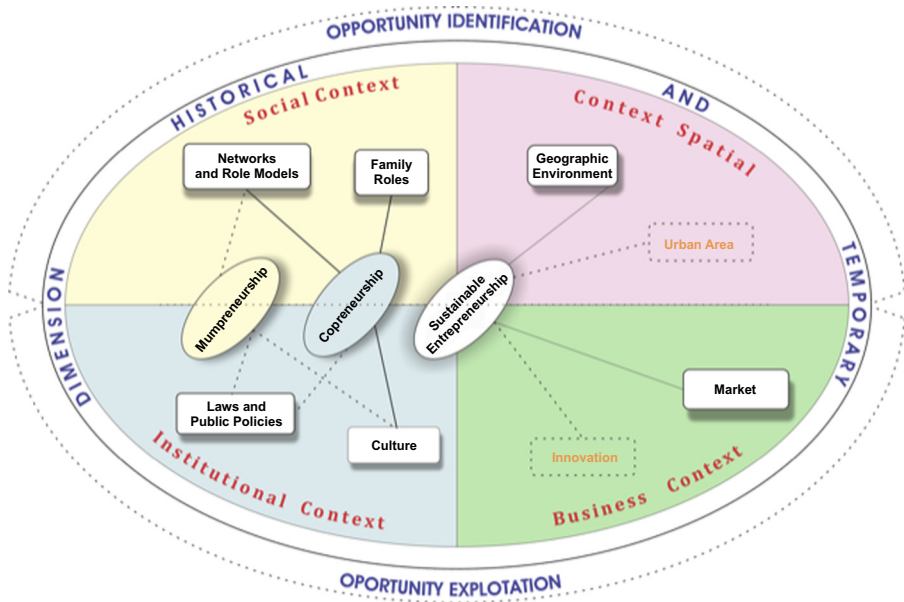
**Table 4.** Cases copreneurship

As a result, Ecuadorian women entrepreneurs find it difficult to assume the leading role that being in charge of the new business implies and tend to relegate themselves to more administrative positions, leaving their husbands or partners with the degree of legal authority in the constitution of the new business. This in turn avoids taking on the risk involved in the legal responsibility of the business.

## 5. Discussion

Contextual factors influence Ecuadorian women's entrepreneurial process, in some cases in the identification and in others in the exploitation of entrepreneurial opportunities to a greater or lesser extent. Figure 3 shows how the linkages between contexts provide new environmental factors that shape the entrepreneurial process.

Mumpreneurship is related to family roles (social context) and the formal and informal factors of the institutional context. This is explained by the fact that although motherhood orients women to fit into a specific role, it is influenced by a lack of government policies for the creation of jobs with flexible working hours, new forms of employment contracts, state programmes that guarantee childcare and longer maternity leave (currently eight weeks). Also consistent is the cultural premise that validates women as mothers dedicated to their homes (Brush, 2014). Accordingly, we develop the following proposition:



**Figure 3.**  
Factors arising from  
linking contexts

*Proposition 1.* The interplay of social and institutional contexts provides the basis for mumpreneurship that is strongly influenced by family roles in identifying opportunities, while culture and public laws and policies have a weak link in identifying opportunities and a strong link in exploiting them.

On the other hand, Ecuadorian women entrepreneurs are capable of identifying entrepreneurial opportunities. Their social environment favours them; however, their culture, which values male over female performance in the business sphere, has meant that they do not fully believe in their abilities and avoid taking risks. Thus, in order to move to the next stage of the entrepreneurial process, they require financial resources, time and support. Thus, one option used by women is to start a business as a couple. Thus, the study of copreneurship provides a shift in research on family businesses that has focused primarily on succession (Carter *et al.*, 2001). We developed proposition 2 in this respect:

*Proposition 2.* Women entrepreneurs are more likely to exploit a business opportunity if they are accompanied in the process, so that entrepreneurship includes a strong link with culture and society and a weak link with laws and public policies, providing copreneurship to overcome the risks of entrepreneurship and obtain support.

Furthermore, in Ecuador, the sustainable thinking of women entrepreneurs is a factor that cuts across historical and temporal dimensions and all contexts. In the social context, family roles raise women's awareness, enabling them to identify opportunities to solve their own problems. In the institutional context, there is evidence of the revaluation of ancestral knowledge and of cultural revival. In terms of the spatial context, women in urban sectors have a higher level of preparation and orient their actions towards production with less environmental impact. The business context directly influences the exploitation of the opportunity, serving a market segment sensitive to social and environmental impact that seeks innovative products and services, providing the basis for sustainable entrepreneurship. Based on this, we present the following proposition:

*Proposition 3.* In sustainable thinking, social and spatial context factors converge with a strong link in the identification of opportunity and a weak link in its exploitation, while institutional and business context factors have a strong link in the exploitation of opportunity and a weak link in its identification. This sustainable thinking leads to a stronger orientation towards sustainable entrepreneurship.

5.1 *Theoretical contributions*

Having outlined our propositions, we argue that in addition to markets, money, management, motherhood and meso- and macro-environment, Brush *et al.*'s (2009) 5M model of women's entrepreneurship, framed in institutional theory, should include "environmental thinking" as the 6th M. This complements the holistic nature of women's entrepreneurship, corroborated by the commitment they have shown in our case studies to sustainable entrepreneurship. Figure 4 presents the 6th M's cross-cutting level of interaction.

6. Conclusion

The need to better understand women's entrepreneurship and the effects of the influence of the social, spatial, institutional and market context has been strongly advocated. This research presents the singularities of women entrepreneurs in the Ecuadorian context; their search for a work-family balance and the vindication of their maternal role as they seek to achieve their professional development by creating businesses, even though their growth is limited by serving only local markets, having a small number of employees and little vision for growth and expansion. Many women entrepreneurs have identified business opportunities through their own experiences of motherhood and have exploited them with an optimistic perception of the market, launching their product to a segment to which they themselves belong, in line with the views of several authors (Shelton, 2006; Jennings and Brush, 2013; Thompson *et al.*, 2009; Brush, 1992; Down and Warren, 2008; Ekinsmyth, 2011).

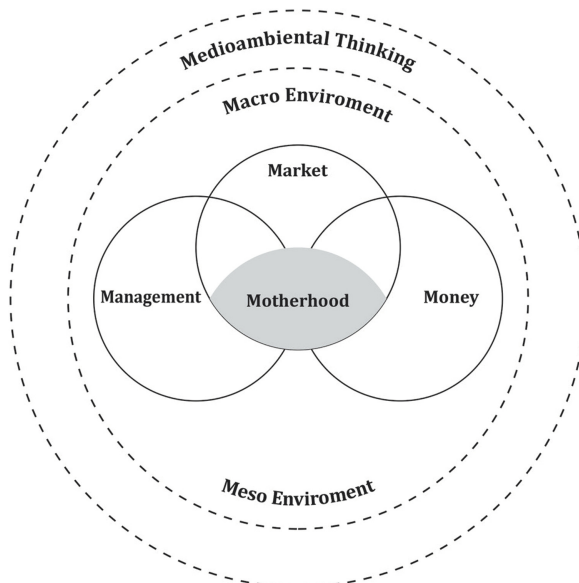


Figure 4.  
6M Women  
entrepreneurship  
framework

They are also sensitive to the realities of their environment, showing great social and environmental concern, without leaving aside product innovation as part of their proposal to the market. Culture, an informal factor of the institutional context modelled by the social context, has motivated them to undertake entrepreneurship jointly with their partner, which has brought them the benefits of economic contribution, the team vision inside and outside the home, having a partner who they trust and easy division of functions.

Overall, our research contributes with a description of the deepest considerations of women entrepreneurs who live the Ecuadorian reality, which is replicated across Latin America, and characterised by a scarcity of adequate public policies.

We want to emphasise the importance of such articles in shaping public initiatives that, as shown by [Foss et al. \(2019\)](#), are appropriately oriented towards either entrepreneurship development or small business policies. Similarly, in line with [Aldrich and Martinez \(2001\)](#), we recommend that governments lift their gaze from research on the individual entrepreneur to address how process and context interact to provide the outcomes of entrepreneurial efforts. We also concur with liberal feminist theory in proposing structural change whereby male and female entrepreneurs have equal access to resources and equal access to entrepreneurial education and training. We emphasise the need for legislation that prohibits banks from requiring a husband's co-signature for a loan ([Foss et al., 2019](#)), and we urge governments to create institutions that provide adequate care for children, especially in societies such as Latin America where family roles influence women's entrepreneurial choices.

In terms of research, this study opens up some avenues for future studies. First, given that the study is based on a sample of Ecuadorian women entrepreneurs, the model could be replicated in samples corresponding to other territories, especially in Latin America, where the context is similar for women. This would test the generalisability of the results. Second, quantitative scales could be developed and applied in future research, which would make it possible to contrast the results obtained in this sense in the present study. Finally, extending the contextual framework of the "5M" model with a "sixth M" complements the theory and opens up the option of studying new dimensions, such as green thinking, sustainable business and sustainable development.

We conclude by emphasising the broad conceptual and empirical potential offered by the topic of women's entrepreneurship, especially the study of the context that has been called for by authors such as [Minniti and Naude \(2010\)](#), [De Vita et al. \(2013\)](#), [Kelley et al. \(2015\)](#), [Welter et al. \(2014\)](#). These authors point out the limitations regarding the study of factors influencing the environment, in research on women's entrepreneurship, as we have demonstrated with this paper.

## 7. Limitations

The qualitative empirical study reveals a profound reality concerning the thinking of urban women entrepreneurs in the Ecuadorian context. Although we have tried to analyse the whole context through semi-structured interviews using questions from the GEM forms, this research could be extended by applying surveys to small representative samples, forming quantitative research that can be complemented with what has been studied. This would enable us to better understand the phenomenon of women's entrepreneurship, which, while widely analysed in African, Asian and Eastern European countries, has not been broadly examined in Latin America, where the struggle to vindicate the role of women and their contribution to the economy and the development of their communities is a topic of interest. This is especially true for areas where significant changes are being demanded in terms of women's inclusion.

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**Table A1.**  
Summary of the cases  
studied (interviews)

Interviewee	Financial sector	Time the business has been running (in years)	Age of the entrepreneur	Number of collaborators	Marital status	Number of children	City	Goes on training programmes
Entrepreneur 1	Agriculture	1	30-35	4	Married	0	Quito	Yes
Entrepreneur 2	Agriculture	10	35-40	12	Single	0	Quito	Yes
Entrepreneur 3	Food	30	50-55	4	Married	5	Riobamba	No
Entrepreneur 4	Food	6	35-40	5	Married	2	Riobamba	No
Entrepreneur 5	Food	16	35-40	17	Married	2	Riobamba	No
Entrepreneur 6	Food	2	35-40	1	Married	2	Quito	No
Entrepreneur 7	Food	8	35-40	4	Single	0	Quito	Yes
Entrepreneur 8	Commercial	1	30-35	1	Married	2	Cuenca	No
Entrepreneur 9	Commercial	1	25-30	0	Single	0	Cuenca	No
Entrepreneur 10	Commercial	4	35-40	0	Married	2	Cuenca	No
Entrepreneur 11	Commercial	10	30-35	27	Single	2	Quito	Yes
Entrepreneur 12	Commercial	3	35-40	4	Single	0	Quito	Yes
Entrepreneur 13	Commercial	5	35-40	5	Married	2	Quito	Yes
Entrepreneur 14	Services	10	30-35	4	Married	3	Cuenca	No
Entrepreneur 15	Services	8	30-35	8	Married	2	Riobamba	No
Entrepreneur 16	Services	1	30-35	1	Married	1	Quito	Yes
Entrepreneur 17	Services	9	40-45	1	Divorced	1	Guayaquil	No
Entrepreneur 18	Health and personal care	1	40-45	4	Married	1	Quito	Yes
Entrepreneur 19	Health and personal care	3	30-35	10	Divorced	3	Quito	Yes
Entrepreneur 20	Health and personal care	2	45-50	4	Married	1	Quito	Yes
Entrepreneur 21	ICTs	1	35-40	6	Married	1	Quito	Yes
Entrepreneur 22	ICTs	1	30-35	3	Single	0	Quito	Yes
Entrepreneur 23	Education	8	40-45	12	Married	2	Riobamba	Yes
Entrepreneur 24	Construction	30	60-65	4	Married	4	Quito	Yes
Entrepreneur 25	Tourism	2	25-30	2	Married	1	Quito	Yes

**Note(s):** Control variables

Interviewee	Financial sector	Time the business has been running (in years)	Age of the entrepreneur	Number of collaborators	Marital status	Number of children	City	Goes on training programmes
Entrepreneur 1	Handicrafts	5	35-40	2	Married	2	Quito	Yes
Entrepreneur 2	Food	10	35-40	1	Married	1	Quito	Yes
Entrepreneur 3	Food	5	35-40	0	Single	3	Quito	Yes
Entrepreneur 4	Food	16	45-50	6	Married	2	Quito	Yes
Entrepreneur 5	Commercial	3	30-35	1	Married	2	Quito	Yes
Entrepreneur 6	Commercial	6	40-45	1	Single	0	Quito	Yes
Entrepreneur 7	Services	1	35-40	4	Single	0	Quito	Yes
Entrepreneur 8	Services	12	35-40	3	Married	2	Quito	Yes
Entrepreneur 9	Tourism	3	30-35	5	Divorced	0	Quito	Yes
Entrepreneur 10	ICTs	1	45-50	1	Married	1	Quito	Yes
Entrepreneur 11	Health and personal care	5	35-40	4	Married	3	Quito	Yes
Entrepreneur 12	Health and personal care	20	45-50	2	Married	4	Quito	Yes
Entrepreneur 13	Health and personal care	2	45-50	0	Married	3	Quito	Yes
Entrepreneur 14	Health and personal care	1	35-40	0	Divorced	1	Quito	Yes

**Note(s):** Control variables

**Table A2.**  
Summary of the cases studied (Focus group)

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