

Persisting Gender Gap in the Field of Academic Entrepreneurship. The Case of Switzerland

Noemi Schneider, Richard Bläse, Pietro Morandi, Brigitte Liebig

Abstract: While women are increasingly frequent among the founders of innovative companies and advanced researchers in many university research institutes today, they are still an exception among initiators of research-based spin-offs. This also applies to countries such as Switzerland, which does have a leading position in international innovation rankings.

Starting from a gender sensitive neo-institutionalist perspective, this paper examines formal and non-formal institutional framework conditions for academic spin-offs at Swiss universities of applied sciences. This field, which stresses vocational education and practice-oriented research, seems to conserve the gender gap in the area of establishing research-based spin-offs spin-off rates strongly. The analysis starts from a survey conducted in 2017 and 2018 at all seven public universities of applied sciences in Switzerland as well as on an evaluation of expert interviews performed with heads of start-up centres, where also spin-offs from universities of applied sciences get support.

The results show the mechanisms, which contribute to gender gaps in academic entrepreneurship in higher education. University's female employees have hardly been discovered as target groups. Thus, only 10.5% of universities of applied sciences offer specific support measures for women in academia. And only 1 out of 7 universities of applied sciences offer mentoring programs for female entrepreneurs while in addition there are no financial resources available to support female founders in academia. Moreover, the awareness for the gender gap in academic entrepreneurship is low among founding commissioners.

A consistent transfer strategy might be key for bringing in line the formal and non-formal preconditions relevant for the formation of research-based spin-offs and for providing an effective incentive structure to promote women.

Keywords - Gender, science-based spin-off, universities of applied sciences, knowledge transfer strategy

F. A. Noemi Schneider BSc, Research Assistant, University of Applied Sciences and the Arts Northwestern Switzerland (FHNW), Olten, Switzerland (E-mail: noemi.schneider@fhnw.ch).

S. B. Richard Bläse MSc, Research Associate, University of Applied Sciences and the Arts Northwestern Switzerland (FHNW), Olten, Switzerland (E-mail: richard.blaese@fhnw.ch).

T. C. Prof. Dr. Pietro Morandi, Senior Researcher, University of Applied Sciences and the Arts Northwestern Switzerland (FHNW), Olten, Switzerland (E-mail: pietro.morandi@fhnw.ch).

F. D. Prof. Dr. Brigitte Liebig, Professor of Applied Psychology FHNW, Institute for Cooperation Research and Development, Olten, Switzerland (E-mail: brigitte.liebig@fhnw.ch).