

Recursive territories: A bibliometric diagnosis and a multilevel framework for women's entrepreneurship and territorial development

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Abstract:

Women's entrepreneurship is widely credited with strengthening the resilience of peripheral, resource-constrained territories, yet the literature remains split between an economic paradigm (financial inputs, growth outcomes) and an institutional paradigm (patriarchal norms, institutional voids). This paper tests that diagnosis empirically on a single-database Scopus corpus of 15,108 English-language articles and reviews (2007-2026, with 2026 only partially covered), combining bibliometric mapping with qualitative coding of its most influential documents (86% precision, $\kappa = 0.78$). Contrary to the assumed split, the two vocabularies already co-occur heavily within a single, polarised conceptual space (38.74% and 17.73% of inertia on its two dimensions): the true latent fracture instead separates a macro/meso structural pole from a micro, individual/cognitive pole. Building on this diagnosis and on structuration theory, we propose a recursive three-level framework (micro agency, meso intermediaries, macro institutions) in which territory is the relational context that makes these mechanisms mutually observable, not a fourth, additive level. The framework captures a recursive interplay neither prior paradigm addresses alone, with implications for regional development policy that should be read cautiously given the corpus's Global North centred authorship and collaboration, pending cross-regional replication.

Keywords: women's entrepreneurship; territorial development; bibliometric analysis; institutional voids; structuration theory; multilevel framework.

Classification JEL: L26, L31, F63, O1, Q01, R11.

Paper type: Theoretical Research.

Résumé :

L'entrepreneuriat féminin est largement présenté comme un facteur de résilience pour les territoires périphériques à ressources limitées, mais la littérature qui étudie cette relation demeure théoriquement fragmentée, partagée entre un paradigme économique (apports financiers, résultats de croissance) et un paradigme institutionnel (normes patriarcales, vides institutionnels). Cet article teste empiriquement ce diagnostic sur un corpus mono-source Scopus de 15 108 articles et revues de langue anglaise (2007-2026, l'année 2026 n'étant couverte que partiellement), en combinant cartographie bibliométrique et codage qualitatif de ses documents les plus influents (précision de validation de 86 %, $\kappa = 0,78$). Contrairement à la scission supposée, les deux vocabulaires co-occurrent déjà fortement dans un espace conceptuel unique et polarisé (38,74 % et 17,73 % d'inertie expliquée sur ses deux dimensions) : la véritable fracture latente sépare plutôt un pôle structurel macro/méso d'un pôle micro individuel et cognitif. Sur ce diagnostic et sur la théorie de la structuration, nous proposons un cadre intégrateur récursif à trois niveaux (agentivité micro, intermédiaires méso, institutions macro) dans lequel le territoire constitue le contexte relationnel qui rend ces mécanismes mutuellement observables, plutôt qu'un quatrième niveau additif. Ce cadre rend compte d'une interaction récursive qu'aucun des deux paradigmes ne saisit isolément, avec des implications pour les politiques de développement régional à lire avec prudence, le corpus étant fortement centré sur les pays du Nord, dans l'attente d'une réplique interrégionale.

Mots-clés : entrepreneuriat féminin ; développement territorial ; analyse bibliométrique ; vides institutionnels ; théorie de la structuration ; cadres multiniveaux.

JEL Classification : L26, L31, F63, O1, Q01, R11.

Type du papier : Recherche Théorique

1. Introduction

Women's entrepreneurship has evolved from a niche subfield of business research into a central pillar of regional and territorial development strategy. In peripheral and resource constrained regions especially, women led ventures are increasingly framed as engines of spatial resilience the capacity of local economies to absorb and adapt to structural shocks through the localisation of supply chains and the recirculation of capital within their communities (Welter, 2011; Korsgaard, Müller, & Tanvig, 2015). Understanding how female entrepreneurs operate within, and in turn reshape, their local contexts has therefore become a shared concern for spatial economists and development policymakers alike.

Despite this recognised importance, the academic conceptualisation of the relationship between women's entrepreneurship and territorial development remains fragmented across two largely non communicating theoretical streams. An economic stream adopts a growth centric paradigm: it evaluates female entrepreneurship through financial inputs chiefly microfinance access and measures success via firm survival, job creation, and regional economic growth (Karlan & Zinman, 2011; Bradley, McMullen, Artz, & Simiyu, 2012). An institutional stream, by contrast, adopts a sociological paradigm that treats the territory not as a market to be served but as a dense web of social norms and institutional voids, focusing on how female entrepreneurs negotiate patriarchal structures in pursuit of empowerment understood as a process of acquiring structural resources and agency (Kabeer, 1999; Al-Dajani & Marlow, 2013).

Each stream offers genuine insight, but their mutual isolation produces a theoretical blind spot: neither captures the recursive interplay between entrepreneurial agency and territorial structure, whereby entrepreneurs are shaped by the institutional environments in which they operate, and in turn reshape those same environments through their accumulated practice. We use *recursive* here in its structurationist sense (Giddens, 1984): a relation is recursive when the structural conditions of an action are simultaneously the medium of that action and its outcome, rather than related to it by a one-directional causal arrow. A fuller working definition, and its translation into the paper's three analytical levels, is given in Section 5; the short definition above is sufficient to follow the argument that follows. Drawing on this structurationist logic and on the concept of entrepreneurial embeddedness (Granovetter, 1985), we argue that economic approaches routinely bracket out how entrenched social norms condition the very possibility of enterprise survival, while institutional approaches tend to understate the hard economic mechanics (capital, markets, margins) on which that survival ultimately depends. What is missing is an account of women's entrepreneurship as neither purely economic performance nor purely social negotiation, but as a force that actively coproduces the territories in which it unfolds.

Diagnosing this blind spot, and building a unified model to address it, calls for an approach that neither existing tradition fully provides. Prior attempts to synthesise this literature tend to fall into one of two traps. Narrative reviews, such as Jennings and Brush's (2013) authoritative assessment of the field's relationship with mainstream entrepreneurship scholarship, risk selection bias and rarely cover the corpus systematically. Descriptive bibliometric exercises, such as Poggesi, Mari, and De Vita's (2016) mapping of the field's thematic dispersion or Cardella, Hernández-Sánchez, and Sánchez-García's (2020) systematic delineation of its principal clusters, visualise keyword structures and thematic boundaries without taking any specific theoretical partition, such as the economic/institutional divide argued for above, as an explicit hypothesis to be tested against the data. None of these three syntheses restricts its corpus to the intersection of women's entrepreneurship and territorial development specifically, and none uses its bibliometric output diagnostically, as evidence for or against a stated proposition about how the field is divided, rather than descriptively, to characterise the field's themes. This gap, detailed further in Section 2, is the space the present paper occupies.

The originality of this paper lies in bridging that divide, in a sense that is narrower and more verifiable than a general claim of novelty. Rather than treating bibliometric analysis as an end in itself, we use conceptual and thematic bibliometric mapping as an empirical diagnostic tool, one that renders the boundary between the economic and institutional streams visible and measurable, and tests it against a corpus defined specifically by the territorial intersection that prior syntheses have not isolated. Following a systematic and reproducible evaluation protocol (Zupic & Čater, 2015; Kraus et al., 2022), this mapping becomes the empirical foundation for a new theoretical framework, one that reconciles the two streams by modelling their relationship as recursive rather than static. Bridging this divide means capturing not only how women adapt to institutional constraints, but how they actively reconstruct the territorial environments in which they operate. This paper addresses two research questions:

- **RQ1:** How has the academic literature conceptualised the relationship between women's entrepreneurship and territorial development, and to what extent are its economic and institutional streams structurally fragmented?
- **RQ2:** How can these divergent streams be integrated into a theoretical framework that accounts for the recursive interplay between entrepreneurial agency and territorial context?

In answering RQ2, this paper makes three contributions. First, it empirically demonstrates, rather than assumes, that the field's true fragmentation is not between economic and institutional paradigms as vocabularies (which, as Section 4 shows, heavily co-occur) but between macro structural and micro cognitive concepts. Second, it operationalizes structuration theory to model the feedback loop between micro level entrepreneurial agency, meso level intermediaries, and macro level structural constraints, explicitly treating territory as the relational context binding them rather than as a fourth additive level. Third, it offers a methodological template that extends existing bibliometric protocols (Zupic & Čater, 2015; Kraus et al., 2022) in a specific direction: those protocols establish how to conduct and report a bibliometric review systematically and reproducibly, but they do not specify how to use the resulting clusters as a diagnostic test of a pre stated theoretical proposition. The template offered here does so by pre-specifying the proposition to be tested (the economic/institutional fracture), mapping the corpus, and using the empirical result, confirmed or disconfirmed, as the direct input into the theoretical framework that follows, a sequence that is reproducible for diagnosing other presumed fractures in other fields.

The remainder of this article proceeds as follows. Section 2 establishes the theoretical boundaries of the economic and institutional paradigms and situates the paper's claim to originality against existing bibliometric and narrative syntheses of the field. Section 3 details the systematic bibliometric methodology. Section 4 presents the empirical mapping results (RQ1). Drawing directly on these findings, Section 5 constructs the proposed recursive multilevel framework (RQ2) and, in a dedicated subsection, discusses these findings critically against the prior literature reviewed in Section 2. Section 6 concludes with policy implications, study limitations, and a future research agenda.

2. Theoretical context: the economic and institutional divide

To contextualise the bibliometric mapping that follows, we first establish the theoretical paradigms that have shaped the study of women's entrepreneurship and territorial development. The literature has developed along two historically distinct trajectories an economic paradigm centred on growth and capital, and an institutional paradigm centred on norms and empowerment each engaging the territorial dimension in different, and largely disconnected, ways. Rather than attempting an exhaustive narrative review, which the empirical analysis in Section 4 maps systematically instead, this section outlines the core assumptions, boundaries,

and territorial framing of each paradigm before identifying the conceptual disconnect that motivates the present study.

2.1. The economic paradigm: growth, microfinance, and capital

The first pillar of the literature is rooted in development economics and human capital theory (Becker, 1964), which conceptualises women's entrepreneurship primarily as a mechanism for market efficiency, poverty alleviation, and regional economic scaling. Within this tradition, entrepreneurship is a vehicle for converting individual endowments (education, skills, financial capital) into venture creation, and territories are understood chiefly as the aggregate markets within which these conversions occur.

Research in this stream focuses heavily on tangible financial and human capital inputs, investigating how access to capital, most notably through microfinance and microcredit institutions, acts as a catalyst for venture creation and survival. The tradition owes much of its empirical legitimacy to large scale randomised evaluations. Banerjee, Duflo, Glennerster and Kinnan's (2015) randomised evaluation of microfinance access remains a central reference point for assessing the causal effects of credit access on entrepreneurial and household outcomes. Their sample, like that of most microfinance access studies, is disproportionately composed of women borrowers, which has made it a de facto anchor for the gendered microfinance literature despite not being framed explicitly around gender.

Success in this tradition is evaluated through quantifiable, market driven metrics: firm survival rates, revenue growth, local job creation, and, critically for a territorial framing, multiplier effects on regional output and employment. This is a link the economic paradigm draws far more explicitly than the institutional paradigm discussed below. Consequently, the economic lens tends to interpret barriers to female entrepreneurship as market failures, specifically asymmetric information in credit markets (Stiglitz & Weiss, 1981) or deficits in human capital that are presumed resolvable through targeted financial interventions. A related sub stream distinguishes necessity from opportunity entrepreneurship. This dichotomy originates in the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor programme (Reynolds, Bygrave, Autio, Cox, & Hay, 2002) and was subsequently translated into women specific enterprise development policy by international organisations (Kantor, 2001). It reflects a similar economic logic, in which women's business creation is read primarily as a response to structural income constraints rather than as a socially embedded process. The same logic informs cross country work linking the regulatory and business environment to gendered rates of firm creation (Klapper & Parker, 2011). This framing is shared with the regional growth accounting literature more broadly, but it is rarely extended into the qualitative, place specific mechanisms addressed by regional and endogenous development scholarship (Vázquez-Barquero, 2002; Camagni, 2002).

The paradigm's limitation, for present purposes, is architectural rather than empirical. Because territory enters the analysis as an aggregate market and institutions enter as a residual constraint on that market, the framework has no position from which entrepreneurial practice could alter the conditions under which it occurs. The causal arrow runs from capital endowment to venture outcome to regional aggregate, and no return path is specified.

2.2. The institutional paradigm: norms, gender regimes, and empowerment

The second pillar draws on neo institutional theory, feminist economics, and economic sociology. This stream argues that economic transactions do not occur in a vacuum: they are embedded within, and constrained by, socio cultural environments that are themselves unevenly distributed across space (Granovetter, 1985). This is a claim with a more explicit territorial dimension than is often acknowledged, since legal, familial and religious institutions vary systematically by region and locality even within a single country. Jack and Anderson (2002) demonstrated that embeddedness is not a static property of a context but a process through

which entrepreneurs become part of local structures and thereby gain access to resources that are unavailable to outsiders.

2.2.1. Formal and informal institutions as spatially differentiated rules

Rather than focusing on financial inputs, this paradigm examines the rules of the game (North, 1990): how formal institutions (property rights, legal frameworks, family policy) and informal institutions (patriarchal norms, religious custom, the gendered division of labour) shape entrepreneurial behaviour. Scott's (2014) tripartite decomposition of the institutional pillars into regulative, normative and cultural cognitive elements is useful here because it separates constraints that operate through sanction from those that operate through legitimacy and through taken for granted categories of thought. The distinction matters territorially: regulative institutions are typically national in scope, whereas normative and cultural cognitive institutions vary at sub national scale, which is precisely the scale at which territorial development policy operates. Estrin and Mickiewicz (2011) substantiated the general argument empirically, showing that institutional conditions shape female entrepreneurial entry, while Baughn, Chua and Neupert (2006) demonstrated across multiple countries that normative support for women's entrepreneurship predicts female participation rates independently of the general level of entrepreneurial activity. More recently, Hechavarria and Ingram (2019) showed, using a fourteen year panel of GEM data, that ecosystem conditions are associated with gendered entrepreneurial activity in ways that differ systematically from their association with aggregate activity, confirming that gender neutral institutional measures conceal substantively different mechanisms.

2.2.2. Institutional voids, gender regimes, and institutional work

Scholars in this stream frequently use the concept of institutional voids to explain how women navigate environments where formal market support structures are absent or exclusionary. Mair and Martí (2009) developed this concept through a case study of entrepreneurship in and around institutional voids in Bangladesh, showing that voids are not simply gaps to be filled but configurations that some actors actively exploit and others are excluded by. A parallel body of feminist scholarship has argued that the institutional problem is not only external constraint but the gendered construction of the entrepreneur as a category: Ahl (2006) showed that the discursive framing of entrepreneurship reproduces masculine norms and positions women's ventures as deviations from a male benchmark, and Marlow and McAdam (2013) extended this critique to the persistent framing of women's ventures as underperforming, arguing that the benchmark itself is the artefact requiring explanation. This line of work matters for the present framework because it identifies a mechanism through which entrepreneurs act upon institutions rather than merely within them. The institutional work literature (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006) provides the general vocabulary for this mechanism, describing the purposive activity through which actors create, maintain and disrupt institutions. Applied to the present domain, it implies that the accumulated practice of women entrepreneurs is itself a source of institutional change, which is the reverse direction of the recursive relation defined at the outset of this section.

2.2.3. Empowerment as the paradigm's success metric

The concept of context has been theorised further by Welter (2011), who argued that entrepreneurship is best understood within its historical, temporal, institutional, spatial, and social contexts, which simultaneously enable and constrain entrepreneurial action. Brush, de Bruin and Welter (2009) later extended this framework specifically to gender: their 5M model added motherhood and the meso and macro environment, capturing societal expectations, cultural norms, and intermediate institutional structures, to the classical 3M framework of market, money, and management. Within this literature, the ultimate metric of success is not financial scaling but socio cultural empowerment, most influentially defined by Kabeer (1999),

for whom empowerment is the process by which those denied the ability to make strategic life choices acquire that ability, a process she decomposed into resources, agency, and achievements. Entrepreneurship, in this reading, becomes a structural tool for renegotiating entrenched social norms.

The paradigm nonetheless engages territorial variation largely through case study specificity rather than through a systematic conceptualisation of territory as an analytical category in its own right. Where economic geography has developed explicit relational accounts of how proximity of different kinds conditions interaction and learning within a territory (Boschma, 2005), the institutional stream in women's entrepreneurship research has generally treated the territory as the site where a case happens to be located. This is a limitation it shares, in inverted form, with the economic paradigm's treatment of institutions.

2.3. The conceptual disconnect

The two paradigms differ not only in their theoretical assumptions but in their methodological orientations. The economic paradigm relies predominantly on quantitative, often econometric or experimental designs, as in Banerjee et al. (2015) and Estrin and Mickiewicz (2011), while the institutional paradigm relies predominantly on qualitative, case based approaches, as in Mair and Martí (2009) and Welter (2011). This methodological divide plausibly reinforces the theoretical one, since the two traditions rarely share data, samples, or units of analysis. It is also a fault line that bibliometric mapping is well positioned to detect empirically, for instance through distinct co-citation clusters or divergent bibliographic coupling patterns (Jones, Coviello, & Tang, 2011).

Read together, the two paradigms exhibit complementary blind spots that are symmetrical rather than merely different. The economic paradigm specifies mechanisms and outcomes but brackets the normative conditions under which those mechanisms operate. The institutional paradigm specifies those normative conditions but rarely traces them through to venture level economic outcomes. Neither treats territory as a fully independent analytical axis: the economic paradigm reduces it to an aggregate market, while the institutional paradigm reduces it to the setting of individual case studies. Critically for the argument of this paper, neither paradigm as currently specified can represent a recursive relation in the sense defined above, because each holds fixed precisely what the other treats as variable. The analysis that follows therefore assesses empirically whether these two theoretical families intersect explicitly within a single study, and whether, when territory is engaged, it is subordinated to whichever paradigm a given study adopts rather than theorised on its own terms.

3. Methodology

This section presents the research design, data collection protocol, and analytical procedures used to address RQ1 (the intellectual structure of the women's entrepreneurship and territorial development literature) and RQ2 (the multilevel integrative framework).

3.1. Research design

The study follows a two phase, mixed sequential design. Phase 1 is a quantitative bibliometric analysis (performance analysis and science mapping) of a systematically retrieved corpus, addressing RQ1. Phase 2 is a qualitative content analysis of a purposively selected subsample of influential documents identified in Phase 1, used to inductively and deductively derive the multilevel (micro/meso/macro) framework that answers RQ2. This sequencing quantitative mapping followed by qualitative synthesis on a theoretically sampled subset follows established bibliometric to theory building protocols in management research (Zupic & Čater, 2015; Kraus et al., 2022).

3.2. Data source and search strategy

3.2.1. Database selection

Scopus (Elsevier) was retained as the sole bibliographic database. This choice is justified by Scopus's broader coverage of business, management, and regional development journals relative to Web of Science, and by its more complete indexing of author keywords, which the cword and thematic evolution analyses reported in the Results require.

3.2.2. Search string and subject scope

The final query, applied to the Title, Abstract and Keywords field, was:

TITLE-ABS-KEY (("women entrepreneur" OR "female entrepreneur*" OR "women-owned business*" OR "female-owned business*" OR "women's entrepreneurship" OR "female entrepreneurship") AND ("development" OR "territorial development" OR "regional development" OR "local development" OR "economic development" OR "sustainable development")) AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE, "ar") OR LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE, "re")) AND (LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA, "BUSI") OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA, "ECON") OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA, "SOCI")) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE, "English"))*

The generic term “development” is deliberately retained as a broad OR branch rather than restricted with proximity operators, because early testing showed that tightly scoping it. excluded a non trivial number of manually verified relevant records in which the territorial dimension is established in the full text rather than in the abstract. A lower precision, higher recall strategy was therefore adopted, with precision validated empirically.

3.2.3. Temporal scope

The search was executed on 13 June 2026, with the time span filter set to 2007 as the lower bound. This bound is retained on empirical rather than arbitrary grounds: the annual production series for the unfiltered thematic domain shows sparse and intermittent output before 2007 and continuous, monotonic annual growth from 2007 onward; 2007 is therefore treated as the onset of the field's sustained publication activity.

3.3. Identification and automated bibliographic filtering

The filtering sequence is a logically ordered, strictly cumulative pipeline, following PRISMA reporting conventions for the identification and screening of records (Page et al., 2021): technical deduplication is applied immediately after export before any substantive filter, since duplicate records would otherwise be double counted at every later step followed by the three independent, no overlapping scope filters (document type, time span, subject area), and finally the language filter.

Table 1 : sequential identification and filtering protocol

Stage	Filter applied	N retained	N excluded at this phase
Identification	Boolean search string above; scopus; all document; types; years; subjects	33,933	-
Deduplication	Technical deduplication of duplicate records	33,918	15
Time span	Publication year 2007-2026	32,740	1,178
Subject area	SUBJAREA(BUSI) OR SUBJAREA(ECON) OR SUBJAREA(SOCI)	21,655	11,085
Document type	LIMIT-TO(DOCTYPE, "ar") OR LIMIT-TO(DOCTYPE, "re") journal articles and reviews	15,392	6,263
language	LIMIT-TO(LANGUAGE, "English")	15,108	284

Source: authors

The final corpus retained for analysis comprises 15,108 articles and reviews indexed in Scopus between 2007 and 2026, classified under Business, Management and Accounting; Economics, Econometrics and Finance; or Social Sciences.

3.4. Relevance validation of the retrieved corpus

Because the polysemy of "development" (product, career, skills, leadership, market, organisational development, and so on) creates a risk that a nontrivial share of the retrieved corpus discusses entrepreneurship without any territorial, regional, or spatial development dimension, a sample based precision check was conducted in place of full manual screening. A random sample of 200 records (approximately 1.3% of the final corpus) was drawn and independently coded by two trained coders against a single binary criterion: does the article substantively address both (a) women's, female entrepreneurship and (b) a territorial, regional, local, or sustainable development dimension, beyond incidental co-occurrence of the search terms?

Results of this validation: precision = **86%**, Cohen's κ = **0.78**, implying an estimated false positive rate of **14%**. The most frequent source of false positives was confirmed to be generic, non spatial uses of "development" co-occurring incidentally with women's entrepreneurship keywords.

3.5. Bibliometric analysis procedures

Performance analysis and science mapping were conducted in R (version 4.51) using the bibliometrix package (version 4.2.7.1; Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017) via its Biblioshiny web interface; network visualization was cross validated in VOSviewer (version 1.6.21; van Eck & Waltman, 2010).

- ✓ Keyword preprocessing. Author keywords (DE) and Scopus index keywords (ID) were merged into a single field (KW_Merged) after a manual synonym harmonization pass covering plural/singular forms, spelling, and common abbreviations (e.g., "SME"/"SMEs"/"small and medium sized enterprise(s)"; "women entrepreneur"/"women entrepreneurs"). The full synonym mapping table (table2).
- ✓ Co-word network and thematic map. The network was built on the 250 most frequent keywords with a minimum occurrence threshold of 75, using association strength normalization and Louvain clustering (resolution parameter: default = 1). Consistent with the bibliometrix default procedure, the centrality and density axes used to position each cluster in the strategic diagram represent the empirical median values of the observed distributions rather than fixed a priori cutoffs.
- ✓ Conceptual structure map. A multiple correspondence analysis (MCA) was run on keywords occurring at least 144 times, retaining two dimensions (38.74% and 17.73% of inertia). In practice, the retained solution reflects the absence of a clear multi cluster partition in the keyword space: rather than isolating several disconnected sub fields, the MCA returns a single, cohesive but internally polarized conceptual space. This is reported here as an analytical choice consistent with the observed structure of the data rather than as a criterion applied mechanically.
- ✓ Collaboration network. The country collaboration network used full counting of co-authorships at the country level, with edge weight equal to the number of jointly authored articles between each country pair. Author level and institutional affiliation collaboration networks were generated in VOSviewer for cross validation and are reported in.

Table 2 presents the full synonym mapping and harmonization rules applied to the author and index keywords during the data preprocessing phase described earlier, prior to generating the

co-word networks. This process ensured that semantic duplicates, plural/singular variants, and common acronyms did not artificially fragment the network clustering.

Table 2 : full keyword synonym harmonization rules.

Raw keyword variants (Scopus DE & ID)	Harmonized term	Thematic category
women entrepreneur; women entrepreneurs; woman entrepreneur; female entrepreneur; female entrepreneurs	women entrepreneurs	Target Population
female entrepreneurship; women's entrepreneurship; women entrepreneurship; female entrepreneurial activity	female entrepreneurship	Core Phenomenon
SME; SMEs; small and medium enterprise; small and medium sized enterprises; small business; small businesses	SMEs	Enterprise Type
entrepreneurial intention; entrepreneurial intentions; startup intention; intention to start	entrepreneurial intention	Micro / Cognitive
self efficacy; self efficacy; entrepreneurial self efficacy; perceived self efficacy	self efficacy	Micro / Cognitive
motivation; entrepreneurial motivation; motivations (psychology)	motivation	Micro / Cognitive
microfinance; micro finance; microcredit; microcredit; micro lending	microfinance	Meso / Financial
incubator; business incubator; incubators; accelerators	incubators	Meso / Ecosystem
family business; family businesses; family firm; family firms	family business	Meso / Social
economic development; economic growth; regional economic growth; local economic development	economic development	Macro / Territorial
sustainable development; sustainable development goals; SDGs; sustainability	sustainable development	Macro / Territorial
institutional voids; institutional void; formal institutions; informal institutions	institutional frameworks	Macro / Contextual
innovation; innovativeness; technological innovation; firm innovation	innovation	Outcomes
covid-19; covid 19; coronavirus; sars cov2; pandemic	covid-19	Contextual Shock

Source: authors

3.6. From bibliometric structure to the multilevel framework (RQ2)

The transition from the bibliometric clusters identified in Phase 1 to the multilevel (micro/meso/macro) integrative framework is not automated by the bibliometric software and required an explicit qualitative bridging procedure:

- ✓ Sampling: For each of the four thematic clusters identified in the strategic diagram, the ten most globally cited and the ten highest centrality documents were selected for full text review. This was supplemented by documents anchoring the poles of the MCA conceptual map, yielding a purposive subsample of 50 to 60 non duplicated documents. Because this selection strategy privileges the most-cited and most central documents, it structurally favors older, already consecrated publications over recent and emerging contributions, which by definition have not yet accumulated comparable citation counts. This citation based bias is an inherent limitation of any citation driven sampling strategy and is treated explicitly as a boundary condition on the framework
- ✓ Coding scheme: A deductive coding frame was derived a priori from the multilevel logic of the proposed framework, micro (individual attributes: motivation, self efficacy, human capital, entrepreneurial intention), meso (organizational/ecosystem level intermediaries: networks, family business, financing/microfinance institutions, incubators), and macro (territorial/institutional context: regional/national policy, culture, institutional voids, level of economic development) with an inductive allowance for emergent sub categories identified during coding.

- ✓ **Coder reliability:** Two coders independently coded the full subsample against the scheme; intercoder reliability was assessed with Cohen's κ (0.78, above the 0.70 threshold required before proceeding). The finalised coding manual (table 3).
- ✓ **Synthesis:** The coded output was cross tabulated against the thematic clusters and MCA poles, producing a level tagged synthesis matrix. This matrix identifies which themes operate predominantly at the micro, meso, or macro level, and serves as the direct empirical foundation for the framework.

Table 3: Comprehensive coding manual.

Theoretical level	Core deductive categories	Inductive/emergent sub categories	Illustrative coding rules & excerpts
1. Micro Level (Individual Agency & Cognition)	• Entrepreneurial intention • Self efficacy • Human capital • Motivation	• Experiential liminality • Adaptive capacity • Individual resilience	Rule: Code as Micro if the dependent or independent variables strictly measure properties of the individual founder. Example: “We measure the impact of prior education on the perceived self efficacy of female founders...”
2. Meso Level (Intermediaries & Organizations)	• Networks & social capital • Microfinance institutions • Incubators & support programs • Family business structures	• Sector specific dynamics (Tourism, High tech) • Business training initiatives	Rule: Code as Meso if the study focuses on the organizational structures that bridge the individual and the market. Example: “The study evaluates a high tech entrepreneurship program and its mentoring network...”
3. Macro Level (Institutions & Structural Norms)	• Regional/national policy • Patriarchal/cultural norms • Institutional voids • Economic development metrics	• Neoliberal contexts • Political reservations/quotas • Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)	Rule: Code as Macro if the paper analyzes broad legal, economic, or socio cultural boundary conditions. Example: “We analyze how political reservations for women in local Indian councils affect enterprise creation...”
4. Transversal (Territory & Heterogeneity)	• Subnational spatial variation • Intersectional identities • Migrant economy • Transnational trajectories	• Caste/Class dynamics	Rule: Code as Transversal if the document explicitly models within country territorial differences or demographic intersections beyond gender. Example: “Women in the migrant economy face overlapping positional vulnerabilities...”

Source: authors

4. Results

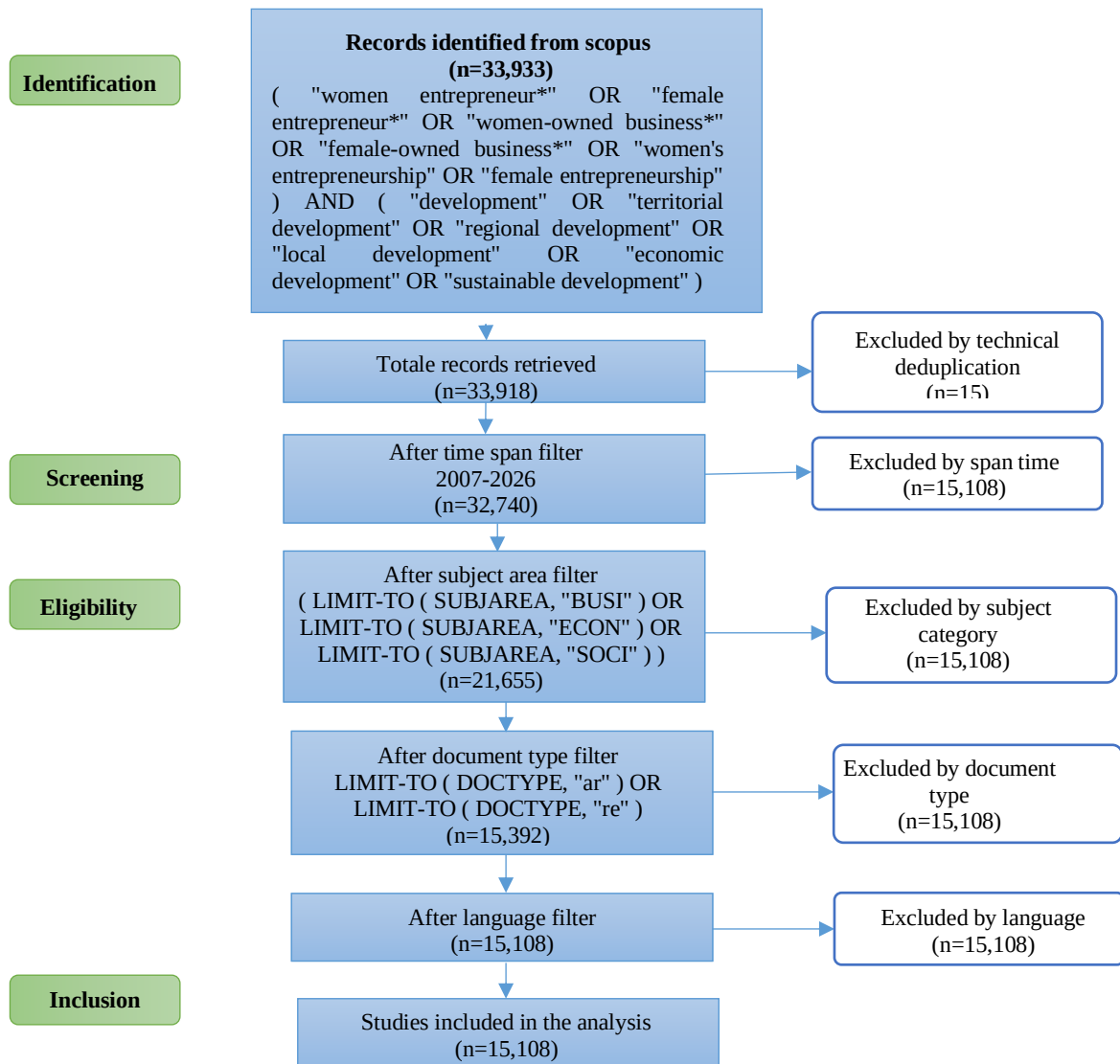
This section reports the empirical findings addressing RQ1, the intellectual structure of the women's entrepreneurship and territorial development literature. Findings are organized in three parts: (1) sample description and publication dynamics (performance analysis), (2) the geographic and source level architecture of the field, and (3) its conceptual and thematic structure, obtained through keyword co-occurrence, conceptual structure mapping, and thematic evolution analysis, as implemented in Biblioshiny.

4.1. Sample identification and screening

Following a PRISMA adapted protocol for bibliometric reviews (Figure 1; Page et al., 2021), a Scopus query combining terms related to women's/female entrepreneurship with terms related to development (territorial, regional, local, sustainable) initially retrieved 33,918 records after technical deduplication (15 duplicate records removed from the raw export). Data were extracted from Scopus on 13 June 2026; coverage for 2026 is therefore partial, and the corpus contains no records beyond that date. After restricting the time span (2007-2026) and document type (articles and reviews only), removing duplicates, restricting the subject area to Business,

Management and Accounting (BUSI), Economics, Econometrics and Finance (ECON), and Social Sciences (SOCI), and limiting to English language records, the final corpus comprises 15,108 articles. This corpus constitutes the empirical basis for all analyses reported below.

Figure 1: PRISMA flow diagram of the article selection process. → **non lisible à refaire. Image mauvaise qualité**

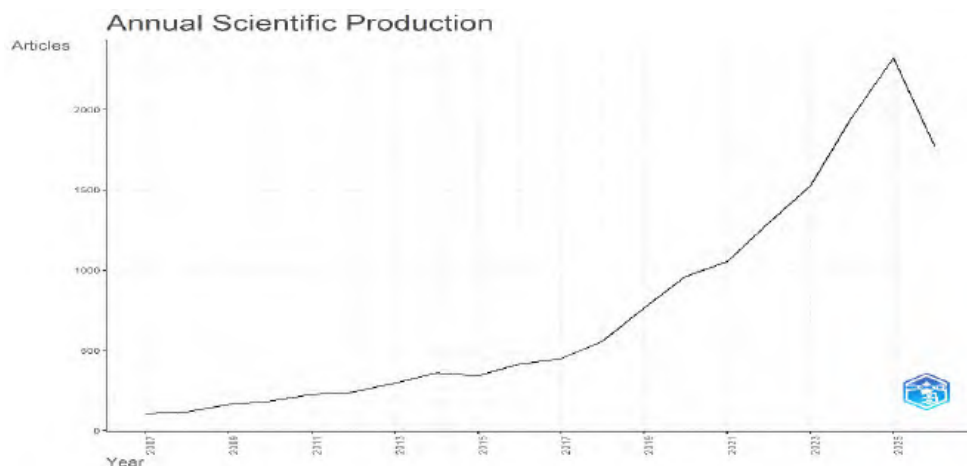


Source: authors

4.2. Publication Dynamics and Field Maturity

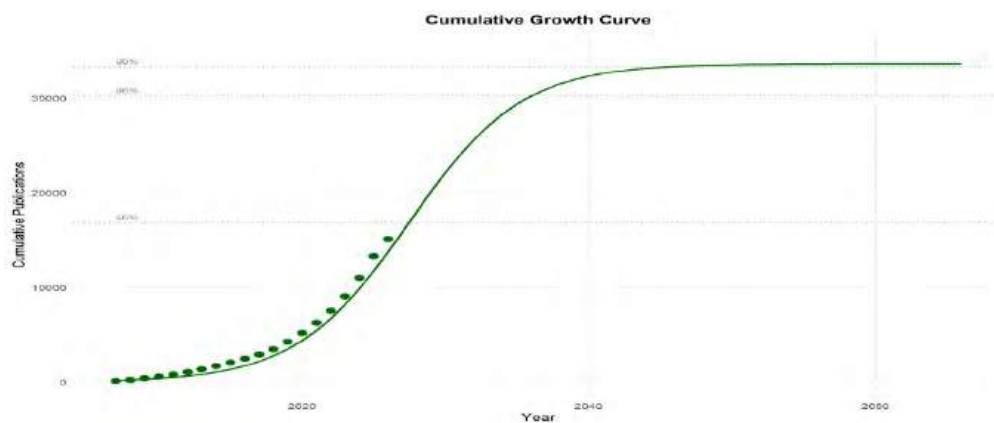
Annual scientific production shows a steady, near exponential increase, from about 104 articles in 2007 to a peak of 2,325 articles in 2025, followed by a partial year count of roughly 1,780 articles for 2026 as of the extraction date; the 2026 figure is not directly comparable to complete year counts without annualisation (Figure 2). The corresponding cumulative growth curve, fitted to the observed 2007-2026 series by nonlinear least squares (R's nls() function, via bibliometrix's growth analysis routines), is well approximated by a logistic (S-shaped) model, with observed values tracking closely under the fitted curve indicating that the field has not yet reached the inflection associated with the 90% saturation threshold (Figure 3).

Figure 2: Annual scientific production, 2007-2026



Source: authors

Figure 3: Cumulative growth curve with fitted logistic model



Source: authors

A complementary life cycle (bell curve) model fitted to the observed annual series ($R^2 = 0.960$) projects a production peak at approximately year 2027 (Figure 4). Because this estimate falls outside the observed data window, it should be read as a forward projection rather than an empirical finding, warranting confirmation once complete data for 2027 become available. Read jointly with the logistic curve, it is nonetheless consistent with a field transitioning from a rapid growth stage toward maturity rather than early emergence.

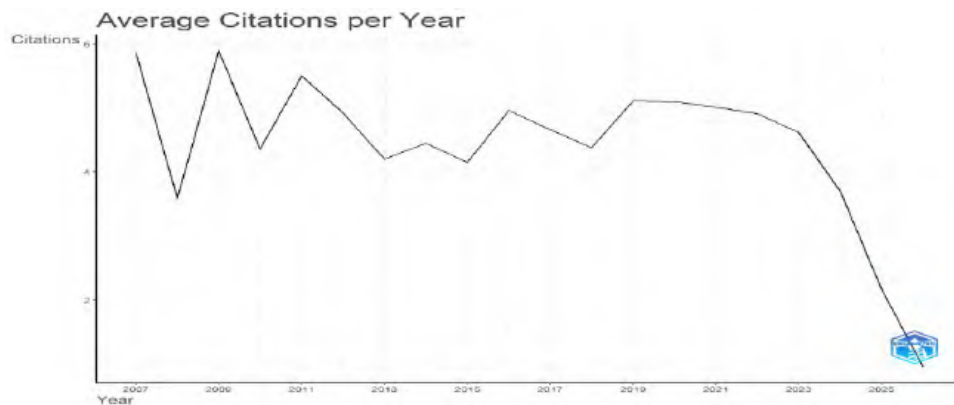
Figure 4: Life-cycle model of annual publications (Gaussian fit)



Source: authors

Average citations received per year per document remained comparatively stable, oscillating between about 4.2 and 5.9 from 2007 to 2023, before declining thereafter (Figure 5). This pattern is consistent with the normal citation accumulation lag expected for recent publications; however, this interpretation was not tested against a normalized citation window (e.g., citations accrued within a fixed period post-publication, which would control for publication age), and an alternative explanation, such as a genuine shift in citation practices or a routine 2026 extraction-truncation effect, cannot be ruled out on the present evidence. This is acknowledged as a limitation of the citation trend analysis.

Figure 5: Average citations per year, by publication year

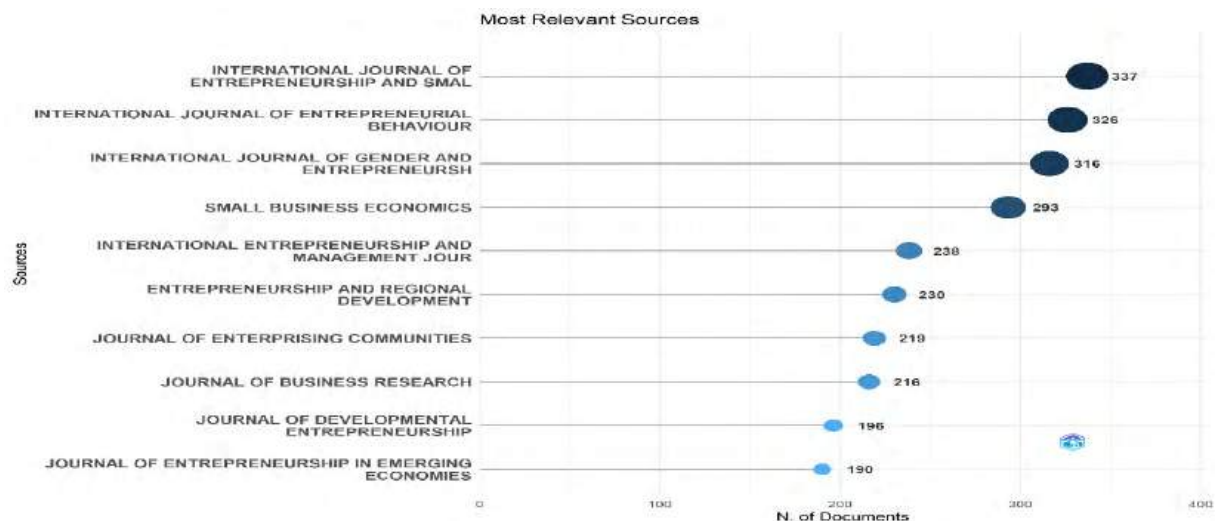


Source: authors

4.3. Most Influential Sources and Foundational Documents

The corpus is concentrated in a small set of specialised outlets. The three leading sources ,the *International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Small Business*, the *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour & Research*, and the *International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship*. Together account for 979 articles, followed by *Small Business Economics* and the *International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal* (Table 4; Figure 6).

Figure 6 : Most relevant sources by number of documents



Source: authors

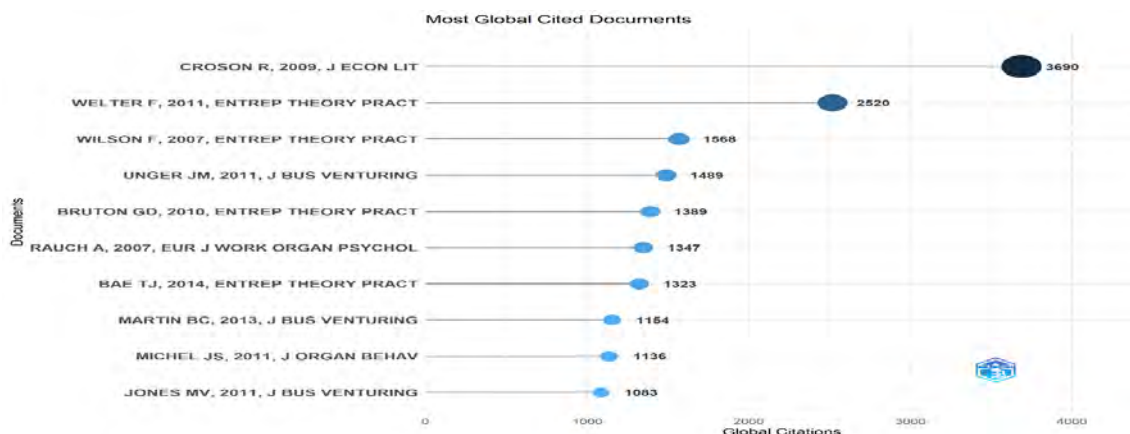
Table 4: top 10 most relevant sources

Source	N of documents
<i>International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Small Business</i>	337
<i>International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour & Research</i>	326
<i>International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship</i>	316
<i>Small Business Economics</i>	293
<i>International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal</i>	238
<i>Entrepreneurship & Regional Development</i>	230
<i>Journal of Enterprising Communities</i>	219
<i>Journal of Business Research</i>	216
<i>Journal of Developmental Entrepreneurship</i>	196
<i>Journal of Entrepreneurship in Emerging Economies</i>	190

Source: authors

In terms of intellectual impact, the ten most globally cited documents (Figure 7) are dominated by foundational, largely pre 2015 contributions from general entrepreneurship and organizational behaviour outlets rather than from the specialized journals above most notably Croson & Gneezy (2009, *Journal of Economic Literature*) and Welter (2011, *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*). This points to a field whose conceptual foundations were imported from adjacent, higher impact literatures before consolidating into its own dedicated journals.

Figure 7 : Most globally cited documents



Source: authors

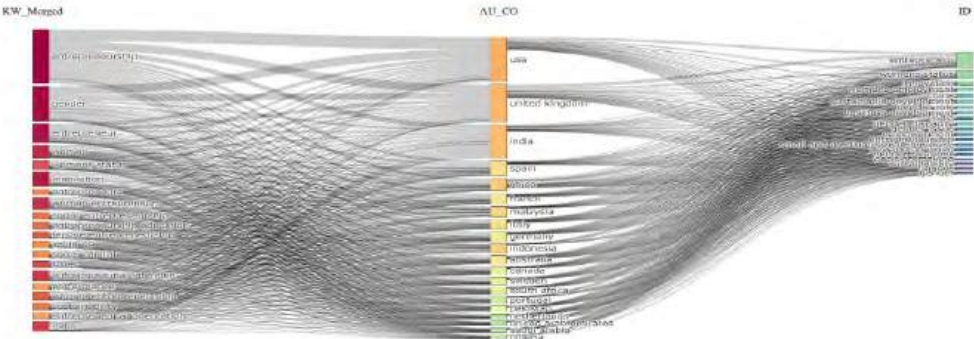
4.4. Geographic distribution and international collaboration

The three field (Sankey) plot linking keywords, author countries, and index terms (Figure 8) shows that the USA, the United Kingdom, and India are the leading contributing countries, and that their output is channelled overwhelmingly through the two dominant keywords "entrepreneurship" and "gender" toward a narrow set of index terms (women's status, women's employment, innovation, sustainable development).

The country collaboration network confirms a Global North centred, and secondarily Anglo Indian, structure (Figure 9). The United Kingdom (total collaboration frequency = 2,189) and the USA (2,014) anchor the network, followed at a distance by France (1,006), China (856), India (816), Australia (756), Canada (745), Italy (738), Malaysia (729), and Germany (727) (Table 5). The strongest individual bilateral ties are USA United Kingdom (200 coauthored articles), USA Canada (148), USA China (146), UK France (128), and UK Italy (116), indicating a dense core of Anglo American and Western European collaboration with comparatively thin bridges toward Sub Saharan Africa and Latin America. Because the study's substantive question concerns entrepreneurship's contribution to territorial development a phenomenon of particular relevance in developing and regional economies this Global North

concentration in authorship and collaboration is treated here as a substantive limitation of the evidence base, carried forward explicitly into the framework proposed in response to RQ2 rather than left as a purely descriptive observation.

Figure 8: Three-field plot: keywords, author countries, index terms.



Source: authors

Figure 9: Country collaboration world map.



Source: authors

Table 5: top 10 countries by total collaboration frequency

Country	Frequency
United Kingdom	2,189
USA	2,014
France	1,006
China	856
India	816
Australia	756
Canada	745
Italy	738
Malaysia	729
Germany	727

Source: authors

The institutional affiliation network (Figure 10) shows a comparatively sparse and fragmented structure, in which business schools and departments of management form small, largely disconnected clusters rather than a single dense core a pattern consistent with the country level finding that collaboration is concentrated among a limited set of Anglo American and Western European institutions, but with only a handful of bridging institutions connecting otherwise separate clusters.

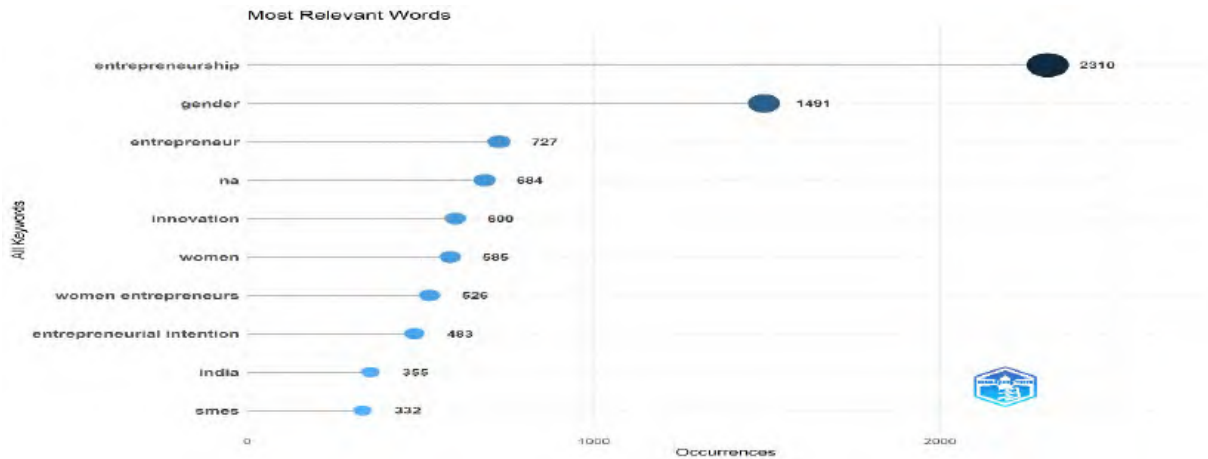
The author level coauthorship network (Figure 11) similarly resolves into several dense but largely separate clusters, each organized around one or two highly connected authors, with comparatively few ties bridging clusters a structure consistent with a field still consolidating around a small number of specialized research groups rather than a single integrated invisible college.

[illegible]

4.5 Keyword Structure of the Field

794

Figure 12: Most relevant words.



Source: authors

Figure 13: Keyword tree map



Source: authors

Figure 14: Keyword word cloud

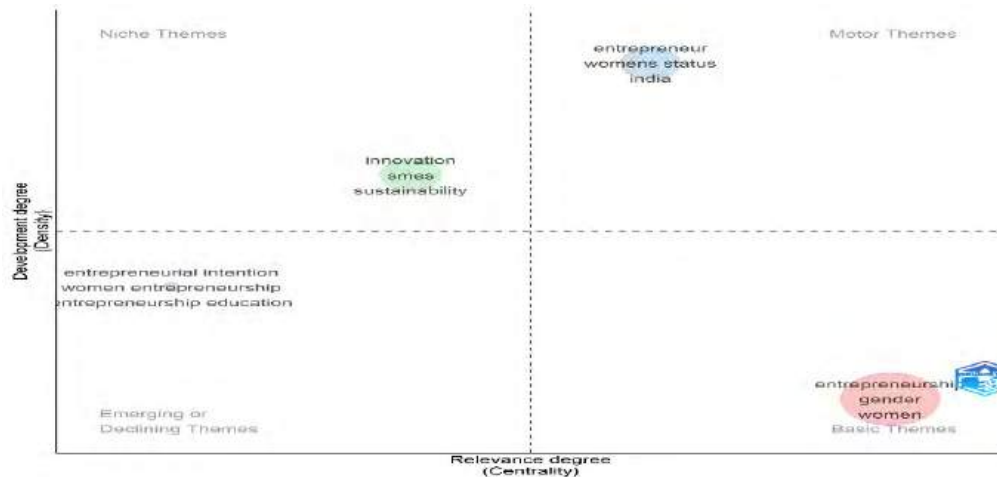


Source: authors

4.6 Thematic map: strategic diagram of the research themes

A Louvain clustering of the 250 most frequent keywords (minimum occurrence frequency = 75) identifies four thematic clusters, positioned in Figure 15 according to their centrality (relevance) and density (development) (Table 6). The frequency threshold was chosen to balance network parsimony against topical coverage.

Figure 15: Thematic map (strategic diagram), whole period (2007-2026).



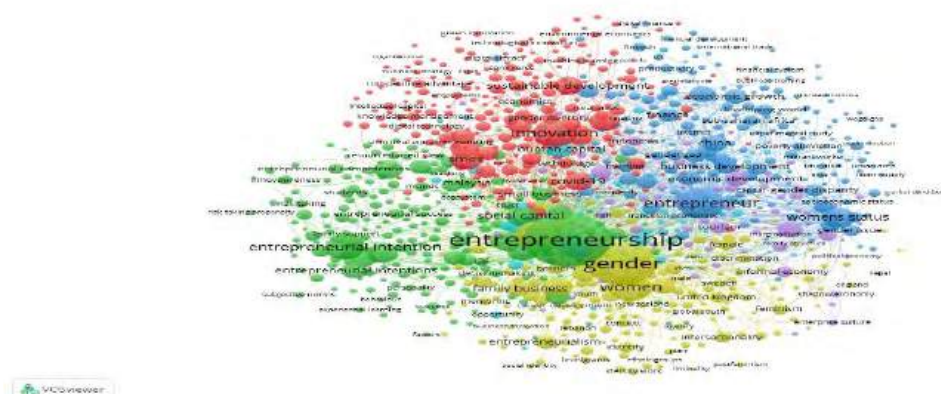
Source: authors

Table 6: Composition of the four thematic clusters (keyword co-occurrence network, Louvain algorithm).

Cluster	Representative keywords	Size
Basic themes (high centrality, low density) "entrepreneurship"	entrepreneurship, gender, women, women entrepreneurs, female entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurship, entrepreneurs, social capital	43
Motor themes (high centrality, high density) "entrepreneur / women's status / India"	entrepreneur, india, womens status, china, empowerment, economic development, economic growth, microfinance	34
Niche themes (low centrality, high density) "innovation / SMEs / sustainability"	innovation, smes, sustainability, covid-19, performance, entrepreneurial orientation, sustainable development, financial inclusion	34
Less central, less developed cluster "entrepreneurial intention"	entrepreneurial intention, women entrepreneurship, entrepreneurship education, entrepreneurial intentions, self efficacy, entrepreneurial self efficacy, higher education, saudi arabia	15

Source: authors

Figure 16: VOSviewer co-word network visualisation (cross validation of the Louvain clustering).

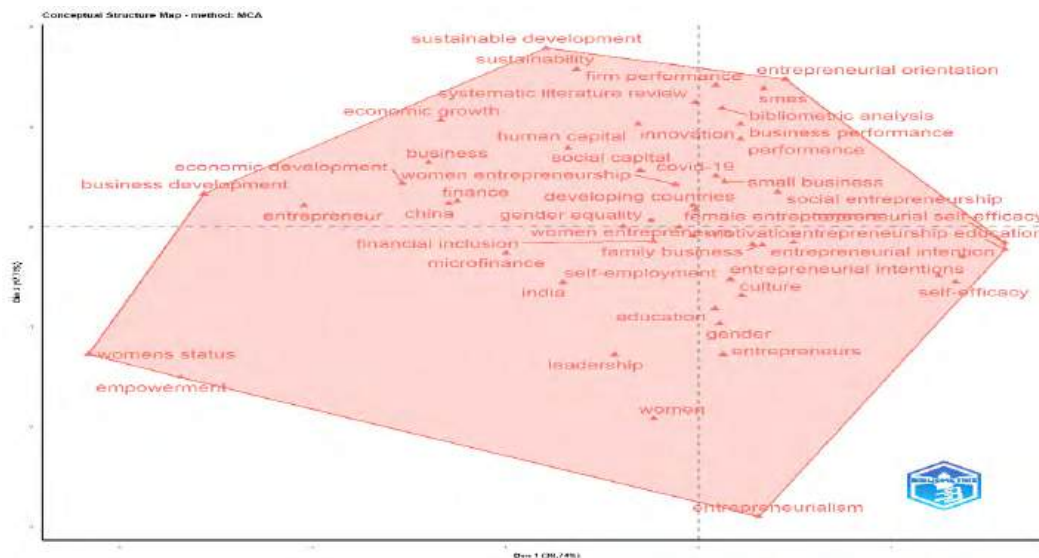


Source: authors

The most striking feature of this map is the split between a large, highly central but weakly developed "basic themes" cluster ,carrying the field's umbrella vocabulary (entrepreneurship, gender, women), and a well developed, equally central "motor themes" cluster oriented toward women's socio economic status and territorial context (entrepreneur, women's status, India, China, empowerment, economic development, microfinance). Sustainability and innovation related vocabulary occupies a specialised, less central niche. Individual level psychological

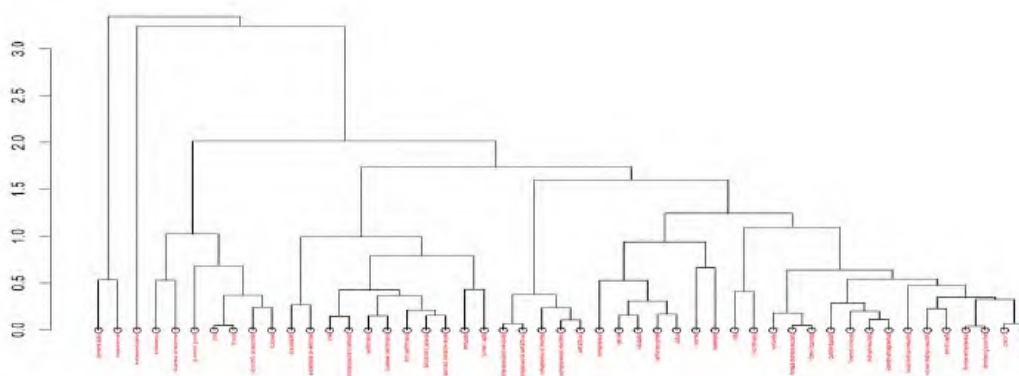
intention, gender, education, self employment, culture, women, leadership, microfinance, motivation, female entrepreneurship, family business, gender equality, financial inclusion, social entrepreneurship, social capital, developing countries, COVID-19), with “women's status” and “empowerment” forming a distinct outlying pair that joins the rest of the network only at the very last step, underlining their conceptual specificity within the field.

Figure 18: Conceptual structure map (MCA) of the keyword space.



Source: authors

Figure 19: Hierarchical clustering (dendrogram) of the keyword network



Source: authors

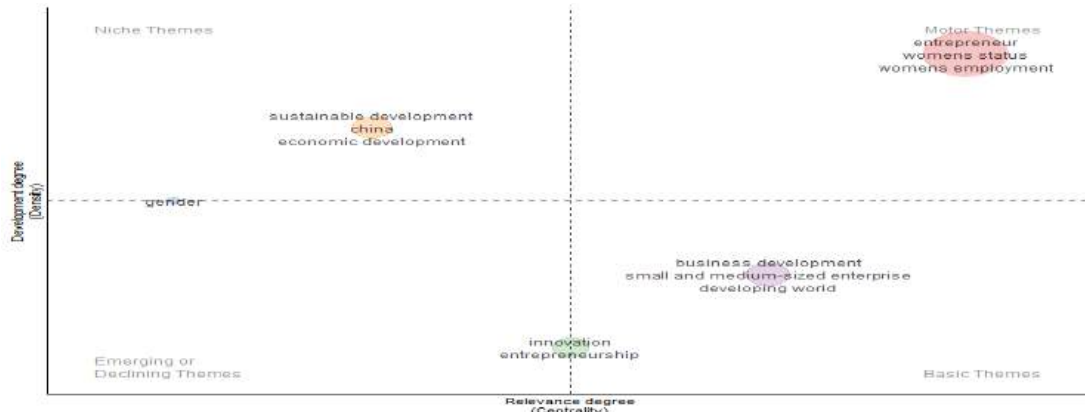
4.8 Thematic evolution across sub periods

Splitting the corpus into two sub periods and comparing their respective strategic diagrams reveals a reorientation of the field's core agenda (Figures 20-21). To keep the comparison within the observed data window, the split used here is 2007-2016 and 2017-2026 the nearest equal length split available given the corpus's actual coverage.

In the first sub period, the motor theme position was occupied by "entrepreneur, women's status, women's employment" while "innovation" and "entrepreneurship" sat close to the origin as a low density, borderline central cluster, and "sustainable development, China, economic development" remained a well developed but peripheral niche. In the second sub period, "women's status, women's employment, gender disparity" consolidates further into the motor theme quadrant, while "innovation, sustainable development, decision making" moves toward

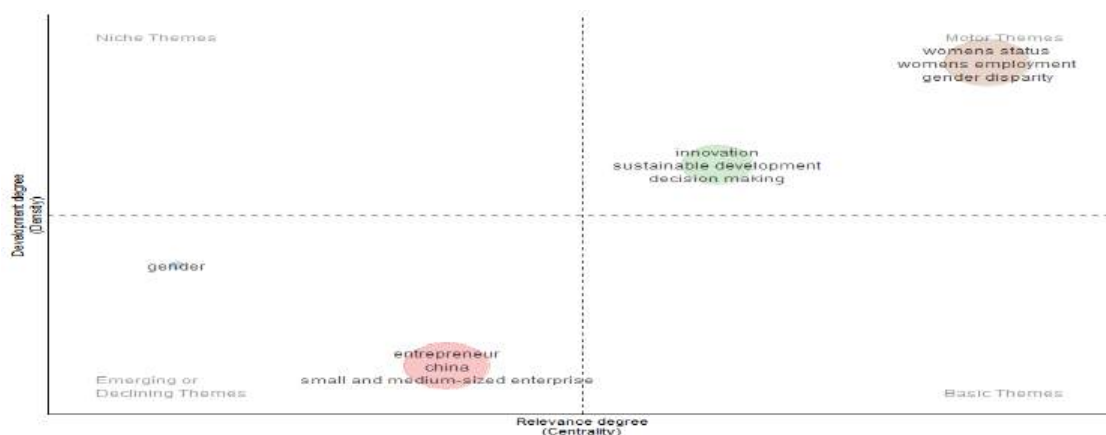
a high density, near central position immediately below it consistent with the rise of a sustainability, and decision making oriented agenda. Conversely, "entrepreneur, China, SMEs" recedes toward the less central, less developed quadrant, and "gender" persists as a broad, low density, low centrality umbrella term rather than a specific theme in its own right. Given the shorter and still incomplete second window, this reorientation should be treated as provisional until confirmed on complete year data.

Figure 20: Thematic map, period 1 (2007-2016)



Source: authors

Figure 21 : Thematic map, period 2 (2017-2026)



Source: authors

The keyword flow (Sankey) diagram between the two periods (Figure 22) makes the trajectory explicit: "business development" and "entrepreneur" converge into "entrepreneur"; "gender" persists as "gender"; "sustainable development" and "innovation" converge into "innovation"; and "women's status" emerges as a distinct destination node with no direct single keyword antecedent in the first period.

This reorientation is broadly consistent with the trend topics analysis over the full period (Figure 23), which traces the field's vocabulary from early, geographically descriptive terms (Eurasia, Far East, United States of America, North America; c. 2007-2011) through a middle phase centered on organizational and network level constructs (networking, informal economy, self employment, small business; c. 2016-2020), to a recent wave (2023-2026) combining a strong women's status, gender, entrepreneurship core with rising sustainability and governance related terms: sustainable development, sustainability, financial inclusion, digital transformation, resilience, entrepreneurial decision-making, and ESG. Using bibliometrix's trendTopics() output, ESG registers a frequency of 18 occurrences concentrated within an interquartile range of 2025-2026 (Q1 = 2025, median = 2026, Q3 = 2026), a markedly narrower and later window

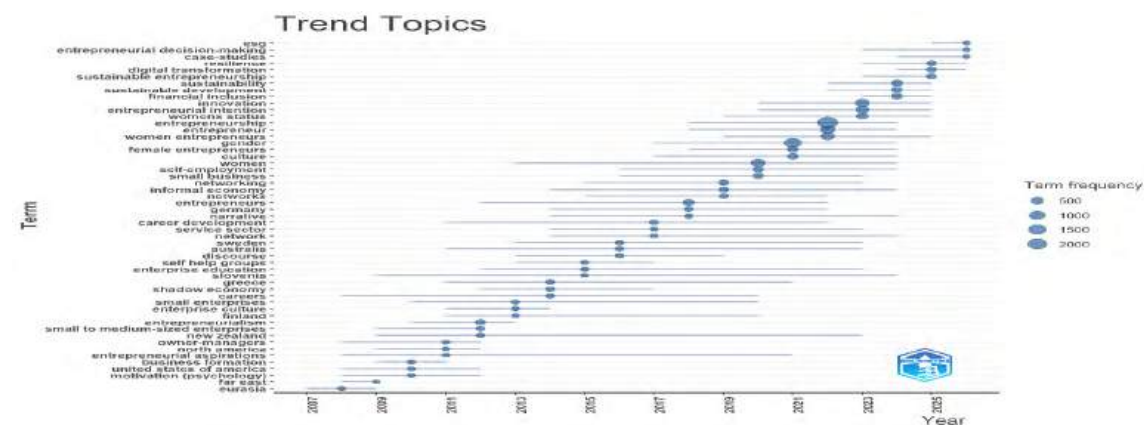
than other recent topics such as digital transformation (n = 100, Q1 = 2024, Q3 = 2026) or resilience (n = 129, Q1 = 2023, Q3 = 2026), confirming ESG's status as a genuinely late-emerging rather than an already-diffused theme.

Figure 22: Thematic evolution of keywords between the two sub periods



Source: authors

Figure 23: Trend topics, 2007-2026



Source: authors

Taken together, the performance and science mapping analyses portray a field that is:

- ✓ **still expanding rapidly**, with growth curve models fitted to the observed 2007-2026 series projecting an approach toward saturation in the near term a forward projection to be confirmed as further data accrue, not an observed endpoint;
- ✓ **intellectually anchored** in a handful of highly cited, largely pre 2015 contributions from general entrepreneurship and psychology journals, now relayed by a small set of specialized outlets;
- ✓ **geographically concentrated** around an Anglo American collaboration core, with India as a major but comparatively less internationally connected contributor and limited bridging toward the Global South a concentration treated here as a substantive limitation on the evidence base for claims about territorial development specifically, rather than a neutral descriptive detail; and
- ✓ **conceptually organized** consistently across the co-word network, the MCA conceptual map, and the hierarchical clustering, three complementary decompositions of the same underlying keyword co-occurrence data, around a persistent tension between a territorial/institutional development perspective (women's status, empowerment, economic development, financial inclusion) and an individual psychological entrepreneurship perspective (entrepreneurial intention,

self efficacy, motivation), with sustainability and decision making related themes rising in the most recent, still incomplete period.

This bipolar intellectual structure, read alongside the field's geographic concentration, directly motivates the multilevel (micro/meso/macro) theoretical framework developed in response to RQ2.

5. The recursive multilevel framework

This section develops the theoretical framework proposed in response to RQ2, building directly on the corrected diagnosis established in Section 4: the field's consequential fracture is not between economic and institutional vocabularies which co-occur heavily within its core themes but between a macro and meso structural pole and a micro individual cognitive pole, with the synthesis matrix supplying the empirical bridge from bibliometric structure to theory.

5.1. Rationale: why a recursive account is needed

A purely additive response to the bipolar structure identified in Section 4, simply appending a "structural" box and a "cognitive" box to the same diagram would reproduce the field's fragmentation rather than resolve it: it would still treat macro structural conditions and micro cognitive processes as separately measured variables rather than as mutually constituting one another over time. Structuration theory (Giddens, 1984) offers a different logic: social structures are simultaneously the medium and the outcome of the practices they organize. Applied here, institutional structures (regional policy, gender norms, the availability of microfinance) shape what a woman entrepreneur can plausibly attempt, while the accumulated pattern of women's entrepreneurial action which ventures succeed, which are normalized, which intermediaries emerge to support them progressively reshapes those same structures. This is a recursive relation, not a one directional causal arrow in either direction, and it is this recursivity, rather than any single level, that the bibliometric mapping shows the literature has not yet modelled.

5.2. Three levels, one recursive loop

The framework specifies three analytical levels, each populated directly from the coding scheme and synthesis matrix :

- ✓ **Micro (entrepreneurial agency):** captures the individual attributes identified in the coding scheme, such as foundational personality traits and motivations (Rauch & Frese, 2007), the formation and impact of human capital through entrepreneurship education (Unger et al., 2011; Martin, McNally, & Kay, 2013), and the well documented link between gender, entrepreneurial self efficacy, and career intentions (Wilson, Kickul, & Marlino, 2007), which the thematic map and the MCA locate at the individual, psychological pole of the field's conceptual space. In the framework, this level is the site of entrepreneurial agency: the capacity of individual women to interpret, comply with, negotiate, or reroute around the institutional conditions they face.
- ✓ **Meso (intermediating institutions):** captures the organizational and ecosystem level intermediaries identified in the coding scheme networks, family business structures (Chirico et al., 2011), microfinance and financing institutions, incubators which correspond to the field's "motor theme" cluster (entrepreneur, women's status, India). These intermediaries are the mechanism through which macro level structural conditions are translated into locally available (or unavailable) opportunities, and through which micro level agency is aggregated into recognizable collective patterns.
- ✓ **Macro (institutional structures).** captures the territorial and institutional context identified in the coding scheme regional and national policy, culture, institutional voids, level of economic development corresponding to the field's structural/institutional

development pole. This level sets the boundary conditions within which meso level intermediaries and micro level agency operate.

Territory is deliberately not specified as a fourth, additive level alongside these three. Instead, following Granovetter's (1985) embeddedness argument and Welter's (2011) treatment of context, territory is modelled as the relational space in which the micro, meso, and macro mechanisms become mutually observable to one another: it is the spatial unit within which a particular set of norms (macro), a particular set of intermediaries (meso), and a particular population of entrepreneurs (micro) are co present and can therefore interact recursively.

One could instead treat territory as a fourth, additive level, standing alongside micro, meso, and macro as a further independent input (Bruton, Ahlstrom, & Li, 2010). We reject this specification on two grounds. Theoretically, it would position territory as a substantive mechanism in its own right generating norms, intermediaries, or agency when its function here is relational rather than generative: territory does not produce these mechanisms but constitutes the plane on which they become cop resent and mutually observable. Empirically, an additive fourth level cannot represent the pattern the framework is built to explain: two territories subject to identical macro level policy can exhibit different entrepreneurial outcomes if their meso level intermediary landscapes differ. This is an interaction between macro level structure and local meso level configuration, not an independent effect of territory itself and only a relational specification, in which territory binds the other three levels together rather than standing beside them, can accommodate it.

5.3. The recursive loop

The loop operates in both directions. In the forward (structure to agency) direction, macro level institutional voids and norms condition which meso level intermediaries can viably form(whether a microfinance institution can operate without also addressing customary constraints on women's mobility or contract signing), which in turn conditions the range of ventures micro level agents can pursue. In the reverse (agency to structure) direction, the accumulated practice of micro level agents aggregated and made visible through meso level intermediaries can shift macro level norms and policy over time (a critical mass of women led ventures normalizing female business ownership within a territory, which in turn eases the institutional voids the next cohort of entrepreneurs faces). This second direction is precisely the recursive interplay that Section 2 argued neither the economic nor the institutional paradigm captures on its own: the economic paradigm registers only the downstream financial outcomes of the forward direction, while the institutional paradigm registers the forward direction's normative constraints but rarely traces the reverse, structure altering direction empirically.

Heterogeneity among women (race, migration status, class) is modelled as a cross cutting dimension that conditions the strength and speed of the loop at every level, rather than as a separate fourth level: the same macro institutional void, the same meso level intermediary, and the same micro level agentic capacity can produce different recursive dynamics depending on where a given woman is positioned along these cross cutting dimensions.

5.4. Propositions

The following propositions operationalize the framework for empirical testing. Each is derived from the coded synthesis matrix read against the recursive logic set out above, and each is stated as a comparative or conditional claim precisely so that it can be falsified by the multi territory and field experimental designs, and is now accompanied by at least one concrete empirical operationalization for its central constructs.

P1: Because macro level policy is applied uniformly across a territory while meso level intermediary landscapes vary within it, the effectiveness of a given macro level policy on women's entrepreneurial outcomes will vary systematically with the meso level intermediary

configuration of the specific territory in which it is implemented; meso level intermediary design should therefore be territorially differentiated rather than nationally uniform.

Operationalization : "meso level intermediary configuration" can be proxied by a territory-level density index (number of active microfinance institutions, incubators, and women's business networks per 10,000 working age women within a defined administrative unit); policy effectiveness can be measured as the pre/post change in new women owned business registrations, tested for interaction between this density index and a policy exposure dummy in a difference in differences design across territories.

P2: Where a single meso level intermediary type in isolation (microfinance access alone, or network support alone) addresses macro level institutional voids, the recursive loop will close more slowly producing smaller downstream shifts in macro level norms than where multiple intermediary types jointly address both the financial and normative dimensions of the void.

Operationalization : *speed of loop closure* can be proxied by the time lag, in years, between a measurable increase in meso level intermediary density (as above) and a measurable shift in a macro level norm indicator (a territory level survey item on perceived social acceptability of women's business ownership, or the share of local policy documents referencing women's entrepreneurship); intervention type (single vs. bundled) is coded from programme design documents.

P3: Interventions that bundle financial access with local norm engagement at the meso level will outperform financial access only interventions on both venture level outcomes and territory level normative change, because bundled interventions engage both the forward (structure to agency) and reverse (agency to structure) directions of the loop simultaneously. Operationalization: venture level outcomes can be measured with standard indicators (business survival at 3 years, revenue growth); territory level normative change can be measured with a repeated cross-sectional attitude scale (adapted from Kabeer's, 1999, empowerment indicators) administered before and after the intervention in bundled vs. financial only treatment arms.

P4: The recursive loop's reverse direction (agency to structure) is conditional on the state permitting the visibility of women's economic activity; under active state suppression of that visibility, the loop may fail to close entirely regardless of meso level intermediary quality, meaning policy transfer between territories should be scoped to institutional context rather than assumed universal. Operationalization: state suppression of visibility can be proxied by an existing institutional voids or press/associational freedom index at the country or subnational level (components of the V-Dem or World Bank Women, Business and the Law indices); the proposition predicts a null or attenuated relationship between meso level intermediary density and macro level norm shift (as operationalized under P2) in territories scoring low on this index, relative to territories scoring high.

5.5 Discussion

This subsection provides the critical discussion of the study's findings against prior literature announced in the Introduction; it is distinct from the framework's construction above, which derives the model from the data, and from the Conclusion below, which summarizes contributions and limitations.

The central empirical finding of Section 4, that economic and institutional vocabularies co-occur heavily rather than forming two separate literatures, revises how prior reviews of this field have implicitly framed it. Narrative reviews such as Jennings and Brush (2013) and the more recent systematic review by Cardella, Hernández-Sánchez, and Sánchez-García (2020) both organise the literature descriptively around thematic clusters (motivation, finance, networks, policy) without testing whether these clusters correspond to genuinely separate scholarly communities or to a single continuum. The present bibliometric evidence, the degenerate two cluster partition reported in Section 4.7 in particular, suggests the latter: what

previous reviews have read as topical diversity is, at the level of keyword co-occurrence, a single, internally graded conceptual space. This reframes the field's core problem not as one of insufficient cross fertilization between separate economic and institutional literatures, but as one of insufficient theorization of the link between that continuum's two extremes, the individual cognitive pole and the structural/territorial pole, which is precisely the gap the recursive framework is built to close.

5.5.1. Positioning relative to existing frameworks

The framework's benefit is clearest against two established alternatives already engaged in Section 2, and a third drawn from economic geography. Relative to the 5M framework (Brush, de Bruin, & Welter, 2009), which extends the classical market, money, management triad with motherhood and the meso macro environment, the present framework shares the ambition to make gender and context analytically explicit but adds an explicit recursive mechanism the 5M framework specifies which factors matter at which level without formally modelling how micro level outcomes feedback to alter macro level conditions over time.

Relative to entrepreneurial ecosystem theory (Autio, Kenney, Mustar, Siegel, & Wright, 2014), which offers a synchronic inventory of the actors and resources present in a given ecosystem at a point in time, the present framework is explicitly diachronic: it is the loop, not the inventory, that does the theoretical work, which is why a recursive account captures dynamics such as the gradual normalization of women's entrepreneurship within a territory that a synchronic snapshot would miss.

Relative to proximity economics and relational economic geography (Boschma, 2005; Torre & Rallet, 2005), the present framework shares the foundational premise that territory is not a fixed container but a relational construct; it differs in specifying that construct through three structuration theoretic levels (micro, meso, macro) rather than through the multiple proximity dimensions (geographical, cognitive, organizational, social, institutional) that this literature typically uses to explain why co location does, or does not, generate interaction and innovation.

5.5.2 Territory as relational construct: dialogue with economic geography

The rejection of a fourth, additive territorial level (Section 5.2) is not specific to structuration theory: it converges with a longstanding argument in economic geography that territory is better understood as a relational construction than as a fixed hierarchical level. Boschma's (2005) proximity framework, for instance, decomposes what is often treated as a single *territorial* effect into five analytically distinct proximity dimensions, geographical, cognitive, organizational, social, and institutional, precisely because geographical co location alone neither guarantees nor is required for productive interaction between actors. Torre and Rallet (2005) draw a related distinction between geographical proximity and organized proximity, arguing that actors can be relationally close (organized proximity) while geographically distant, and vice versa. Read against the present framework, this literature offers independent, discipline external support for treating territory relationally rather than additively: what Boschma (2005) calls institutional and organizational proximity maps closely onto the present framework's meso level intermediary configurations, while geographical proximity maps onto the spatial co presence condition that, in Section 5.2, allows micro, meso, and macro mechanisms to become mutually observable. This convergence between a management and organization theoretic account (structuration theory) and an economic geography account (proximity economics) strengthens, rather than merely illustrates, the case against treating territory as a fourth additive level, and positions the present framework's contribution as complementary to, rather than competing with, territorial proximity approaches: where proximity economics specifies the dimensions along which actors can be close or distant, the present framework specifies the

recursive mechanism, structure to agency and back, that operates within whatever proximity configuration a given territory affords.

5.6. Scope conditions

The framework's claims to generalizability are scoped by the same evidence base that produced it. The underlying corpus is concentrated in Scopus and in a small set of highly networked, Global North anchored countries, so the propositions above should be read as most strongly supported for entrepreneurship research conducted in and about those contexts; whether the same three level recursive structure, rather than some other configuration, best describes dynamics in underrepresented Global South territories is treated here as an open empirical question rather than an assumption, and is carried forward into the future research.

6. Conclusion

This study set out to diagnose, rather than presuppose, the fragmentation between the economic and institutional paradigms that has structured the literature on women's entrepreneurship and territorial development (RQ1), and, on that empirical basis, to propose a unified theoretical framework capable of reconciling them (RQ2). Drawing on a bibliometric analysis of 15,108 Scopus-indexed documents spanning 2007–2026, our findings substantially revise the field's received self description: the economic and institutional vocabularies do not constitute the disjoint literatures the narrative reviews assume, but instead co-occur extensively within the corpus's core thematic structure. The fracture that proves empirically consequential lies elsewhere between macro/meso structural constructs and micro individual/cognitive constructs, a division corroborated convergently by the co-word network, the multiple correspondence analysis, and the hierarchical clustering reported in Section 4. To address this reconceptualised divide, we advance a recursive, three-level structuration framework, articulating micro level agency, meso level intermediaries, and macro level institutional structures. Within this model, territory is theorised neither as an inert backdrop against which entrepreneurial action unfolds, nor as an additive fourth analytical level, but as the relational context that binds these three mechanisms into a single, mutually constitutive system a formulation consonant with relational accounts of territory developed in economic geography (Section 5.5.2).

The principal theoretical contribution of this framework is to redirect analytical priority toward the micro level, which our bibliometric evidence identifies as the field's least integrated construct, occupying a persistently peripheral position within the co-word network (Section 4.6). This redirection is not merely descriptive: it entails treating individual entrepreneurial agency as a primary analytical driver in its own right, rather than as a residual epiphenomenon of structural or institutional forces. By embedding a recursive feedback loop in the Giddensian sense (Giddens, 1984), the framework demonstrates how female founders actively reconstitute, rather than passively navigate, the institutional voids that condition their activity. This constitutes a dynamic alternative to prevailing entrepreneurial ecosystem models (Autio, Kenney, Mustar, Siegel, & Wright, 2014), which tend to treat the macro environment as gender-neutral and unidirectional in its causal influence, while remaining complementary to proximity based accounts of territorial dynamics developed within economic geography (Boschma, 2005; Torre & Rallet, 2005).

From a practical standpoint, the framework calls into question the organisational siloing routine within development agencies of *financial inclusion* and *social norms* programming as though these constituted independent levers. It follows that meso level intermediary design should be calibrated to territorial specificity rather than applied uniformly at the national scale (P1). Furthermore, interventions that combine financial access with local normative engagement are theorised to structurally outperform standalone financial programmes, generating gains at both the venture level and the level of territorial normative change (P3). These implications,

however, are bounded by strict scope conditions that policymakers cannot responsibly disregard: policy transferability across contexts is not guaranteed. The recursive loop through which empowerment is generated and sustained may, for instance, fail to operate under conditions of active state suppression of women's economic visibility, irrespective of the quality of meso level intermediary design (P4). Development agencies should therefore audit the institutional context of a destination territory prior to programme transfer, verifying specifically that it permits the degree of public visibility on which the agency to structure feedback loop depends for its functioning.

Four limitations condition the scope of the claims advanced here. First, propositions P1–P4 are diagnostic hypotheses derived from aggregate bibliometric patterning; they are not findings substantiated by primary outcome data, and their empirical status remains to be established. Second, the corpus exhibits a pronounced geographic skew toward highly networked Global North economies, notably the United Kingdom, the United States, France, China, and India, which constrains the framework's validated relevance to these particular contexts and cautions against unreflective generalisation elsewhere. Third, reliance on a single database, Scopus, while defensible on grounds of its coverage of business and management scholarship, nonetheless restricts the robustness of the findings: because the study's central conclusion that the presumed economic/institutional divide is illusory, while the true fracture runs along the micro/macro axis rests entirely on this one source, cross-database triangulation, for instance against Web of Science, is a necessary next step before the claim can be regarded as established. Finally, although intersectional dimensions race, migration status, class, disability are present within the underlying literature, they are numerically overshadowed by the generic keyword “gender” in co-occurrence analysis, and are consequently rendered analytically invisible at the resolution this method affords. The framework accordingly treats intersectional heterogeneity as a placeholder for future theorisation rather than as a fully modelled component of the present account, a limitation we regard as consequential rather than incidental.

Addressing these limitations requires a transition from bibliometric diagnosis to primary empirical data collection, guided directly by the propositions articulated in Section 5.4. Testing P1 (territorial differentiation) calls for multi territory comparative designs difference in differences or interrupted time series analyses anchored to policy rollout dates stratified by an ex-ante index of intermediary density. Evaluating P2 and P3 (bundled versus single lever interventions) is best pursued through a field experiment in which entrepreneurs are randomly assigned to financial-only, bundled, or control conditions, with venture level outcomes and territory level normative shifts tracked via repeated cross sectional attitude scales adapted from Kabeer (1999). Testing P4 (the scope conditions imposed by state suppression) requires a moderated multi-country design pairing measures of intermediary density and normative shift with institutional context indices such as the World Bank's Women, Business and the Law index in order to establish whether the hypothesised relationships attenuate under more rigid institutional settings. Finally, subsequent research should validate these mechanisms in underrepresented Global South contexts, triangulate the present bibliometric findings against Web of Science, and draw on qualitative or mixed methods evidence to model, with appropriate rigour, how intersectional heterogeneity conditions the recursive loop at each of its three levels.

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