

# Social Representations of Entrepreneurial Success Factors Among Successful and Unsuccessful Entrepreneurs in Cotonou, Benin: Between Actors and Agents

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**Abstract:- Social representations shape practices. However, very little work mobilizes social representations and entrepreneurship. This research aims to identify and analyze the social representations of entrepreneurial success factors among successful and unsuccessful entrepreneurs. To this end, quantitative research was conducted with 246 randomly selected entrepreneurs. A multi-method approach based on prototypical analysis, resampling, and confidence intervals was used. The results show that successful entrepreneurs represent entrepreneurial success factors in terms of faith and organization, while unsuccessful entrepreneurs represent them in terms of resources and the market. These two social representations reveal two opposing actors regarding actors and agents.**

**Keywords:-** Social Representations, Entrepreneurs, Success, Failure, Benin.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Social groups share beliefs, knowledge, and opinions about objects. This constitutes social representations. They are “un ensemble organisé d’informations, d’opinions, d’attitudes et de croyances à propos d’un objet donné” [an organized set of information, opinions, attitudes and beliefs about a given object] (Abric, 2005). They structure action to such an extent that social representations and practices are not unconnected. Better still, they are interrelated, with one conditioning the other in an interdependent fashion. “C’est pourquoi la quasi-totalité des chercheurs sont d’accord sur le principe suivant : les représentations et les pratiques s’engendrent mutuellement” [This is why almost all researchers agree on the following principle: representations and practices mutually engender each other] (Abric, 1999).

If social representations and practices are interdependent, they hardly spare the entrepreneurial field. Regarding social representations, Filion and Bourion (2008) emphasize that “ces approches sont fondamentales pour

permettre aux acteurs entrepreneuriaux de mieux structurer leur pensée, en vue de définir plus adéquatement leur système d’activités et d’améliorer leurs pratiques” [these approaches are fundamental to enabling entrepreneurial actors to better structure their thinking, to define their system of activities more adequately and improve their practices]. However, very little work mobilizes social representations and entrepreneurship (Bornard & Thévenard-Puthod, 2009; Loué & Sarrouy-Watkins, 2020). Pioneering works include Bornard's (2007) thesis on the links between representations and the conduct of the business creation process, Filion and Bourion's (2008) work laying the foundations for the study of social representations linked to entrepreneurship, Créplet and Mehmanpazir's (2008) work on representations of the entrepreneurial vision, and Bernard and Thévenard-Puthod's (2009) contribution to understanding the difficulties of an external takeover using the social representations approach. The 2010s are marked by the research of Lefebvre and O'Shea (2013) on the social representation of intuition in the French press, Lanoux Claverie (2013) on the representation of the entrepreneur in cinema, Monteiro, Silveiro, and Daniel (2015) on the social representations of male and female entrepreneurship, Renon (2019) on the influence of the owner-managers life trajectory on the representation of his or her relationship to the company and success. More recently, in the 2020s, the contributions of Loué and Sarrouy-Watkins (2020) on the impact of social representations of a sector of activity on entrepreneurial behavior appear.

These rich contributions provide a reading of social representations concerning entrepreneurship. They do not, however, enable us to understand how entrepreneurs represent success factors. Better still, they do not offer the opportunity to grasp these representations through the entrepreneur's situation.

Indeed, the entrepreneurial field is not uniform. It is characterized by the coexistence of plural actors, including opposing groups of successful and unsuccessful

entrepreneurs. Success refers to companies that continue to exist and operate, while failure refers to companies that are no longer functional (Tohon & Fakeye, 2022). From this perspective, it seems necessary to identify the social representations of success factors insofar as action is deployed according to the social representations of the object. In this context, what are the social representations of entrepreneurial success factors among successful and unsuccessful entrepreneurs?

This positioning will enable us to decipher the extent to which social representations of entrepreneurial success factors shape the behaviors of entrepreneurs, putting them in either an actor or agent position to create entrepreneurial success or failure. Indeed, Crozier and Friedberg (1977) show that actors play an essential role in influencing systemic logic, which can have consequences for the system and the overall conduct of organizations. Conversely, in line with the sociological currents of determinism (Durkheim, 1895; Bourdieu, 1994), the agent finds himself in a passive position vis-à-vis the system or his environment.

We argue that social representations of entrepreneurial success factors lead entrepreneurs to act as actors or agents. As actors, they devise strategies that lead to success. As agents, on the other hand, they are subject to the system's constraints, exposing them to entrepreneurial failure. Therefore, the research aims to identify and analyze the social representations of entrepreneurial success factors among successful and unsuccessful entrepreneurs. So, the

methodological bases must be defined, and the results must also be presented and discussed.

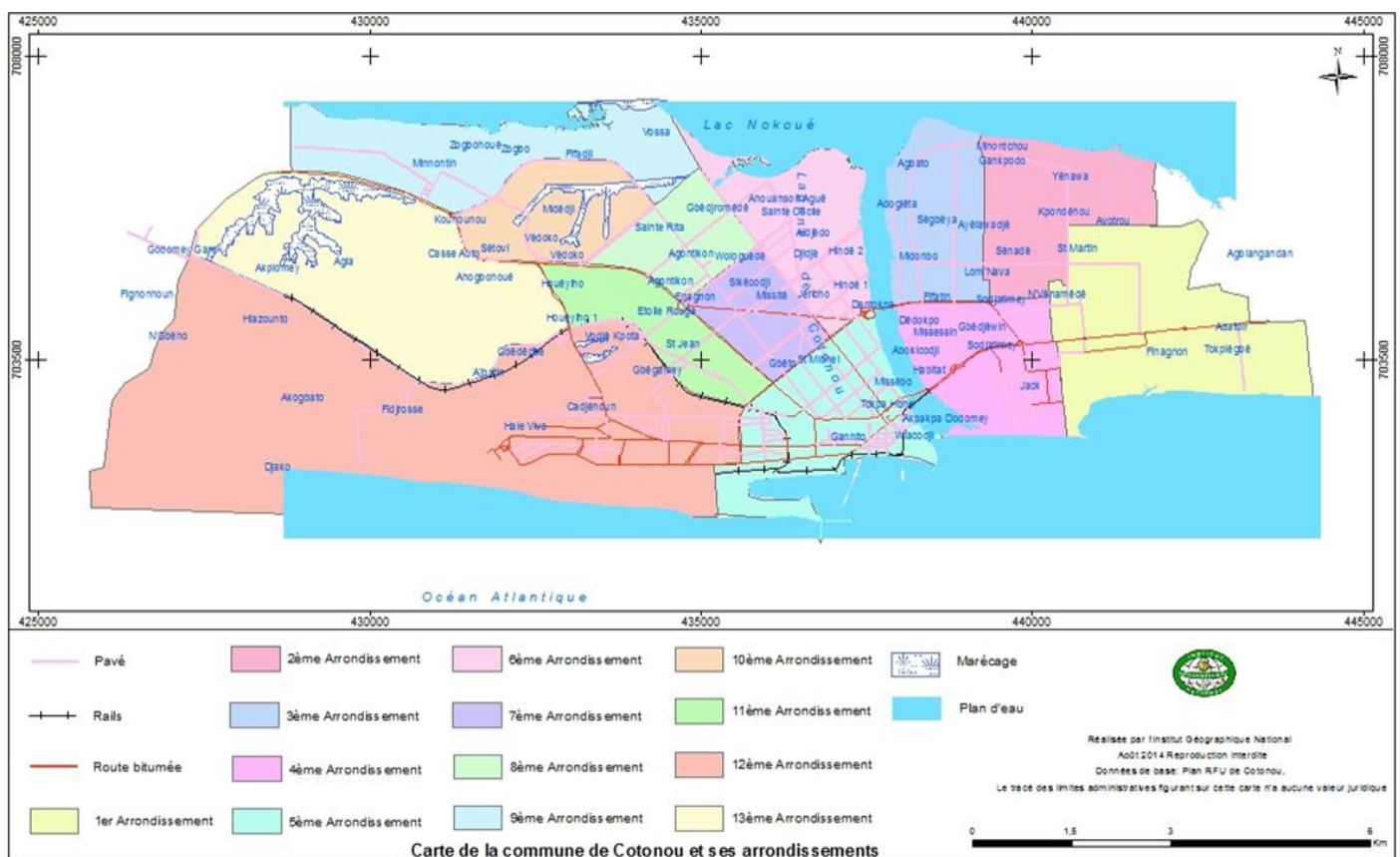
## II. METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF THE RESEARCH

The research's methodological aspects concern the research area, target population, sampling, and data analysis method.

### ➤ Research Area

The research is quantitative. It occurred from May 04 to November 07, 2020, in Cotonou in the Republic of Benin. This research area is justified because it is Benin's economic capital, with many businesses.

The city of Cotonou was founded in 1830 on the initiative of King Guézo (illustrious king of Abomey from 1818 to 1858). Called initially "Kutonou" ("the lagoon of death" in the Fon language of Abomey), Cotonou has become an ethnic melting pot of Benin's booming urbanization. The city of Cotonou lies on the coastline between Lake Nokoué and the Atlantic Ocean. It is bordered to the north by the commune of Sô-Ava and Lake Nokoué, to the south by the Atlantic Ocean, to the east by the commune of Sèmè-Kpodji and the west by the commune of Abomey-Calavi. It covers an area of 79 km<sup>2</sup>, 70% of which lies west of the channel. To the west of Cotonou are the Port Autonome and the International Airport, making the city Benin's most important entry and exit point, while to the east is a vast industrial zone.



Map 1 Commune of Cotonou and its Arrondissements

Source: National Geographic Institute, 2017

➤ *Target Population*

The research focuses on entrepreneurs regularly registered with the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Benin in 2015. It concerns establishments and Limited Liability Companies (LLC). These two categories of the company are chosen because entrepreneurship seems to be more the work of small groups of entrepreneurs: creation ex nihilo corresponds to the creation by an individual or a small group (employees, unemployed, Etc.) of an independent company carrying out a new activity (Bruyat, 1994).

➤ *Sampling*

Entrepreneurs in these two categories were selected by simple random sampling. The selection was therefore made randomly using R software. The sample size was 246. It is calculated using the following formula  $n = t^2 \times p \times (1-p) / m^2$

- N: minimum sample size required to obtain significant results for a given event and risk level;
- T: confidence level (the standard value for the 95% confidence level is 1.96);
- P: estimated proportion of the population with the characteristic;

- M: margin of error (generally set at 5%).

The proportion p is 20% because, according to the Benin Chamber of Commerce and Industry, business mortality in Benin is 80%. A total of 246 entrepreneurs were surveyed. The response rate was 96.34%: of the 246 entrepreneurs surveyed, 237 responded. However, 235 entrepreneurs provided complete information on their career paths.

➤ *Data Collection and Analysis Methods*

Several methods of data analysis were used in the research. The first concerns the analysis of social representations.

- *Methods for Analyzing Social Representations*

A multi-methodological approach was used to identify social representations. Prototypical analysis was carried out using Evoc 2005 software, designed by Vergès. This analysis consists in cross-referencing the frequency and importance of words or expressions evoked by the actors.

Table 1 Interpretation Grid For Prototypical Analysis

		Importance	
		High	Low
Frequency	High	Box 1 Strong core zone	Box 2 1st periphery
	Low	Box 3 Contrasting elements	Box 4 2nd periphery

Source: Abric, 2005

The resampling and confidence interval method was applied to confirm the prototypical analysis trends. This allows us to visualize the confidence intervals built around the original word positions (Grenon, Larose & Carignan, 2013).

- *Trajectory Analysis Methods*

Data were collected by questionnaire and processed using R software. Based on the theoretical framework of the "life course" (Robette, 2011, Gherghel, 2013), "chaque trajectoire (...) est décrite par une séquence, autrement dit par une suite chronologiquement ordonnée de « moments » élémentaires, chaque moment correspondant à un « état » déterminé de la trajectoire" [each trajectory (...) is described by a sequence, in other words by a chronologically ordered sequence of elementary 'moments,' each moment corresponding to a determined 'state' of the trajectory"] (Robette, 2012). In this case, there are thirteen states, namely "Secondary study," "University study," "Unemployment," "Employee," "Executive," "Salesman," "Company manager," "Apprenticeship," "Internship," "Occasional employment," "Training," "Retirement," "Before study." The period before secondary education is designated by the "Before Study" status. The links between trajectories and variables were analyzed using sequence

dispersion analysis." Ce type d'analyse permet de mesurer la force du lien en fournissant un pseudo-R2, c'est-à-dire la part de la variation expliquée par une variable, ainsi que la significativité de l'association. On s'affranchit ainsi de l'hypothèse des modèles de trajectoire en calculant directement le lien, sans clustering préalable " [This type of analysis makes it possible to measure the strength of the link by providing a pseudo-R2, i.e., the proportion of variation explained by a variable, as well as the significance of the association. We thus free ourselves from the assumption of trajectory models by calculating the link directly, without prior clustering] (Studer, 2012). The significance level is 5%, a threshold accepted in the social sciences. This presentation of the methodological aspects enables us to discuss the following results.

- *Additional Tests*

Chi-square and Student's t-tests were performed. "Le khi-carré est d'abord et avant tout destiné à l'examen de la relation entre deux variables qualitatives, nominales ou ordinales" [The chi-square test is intended first and foremost for examining the relationship between two qualitative, nominal or ordinal variables] (Stafford & Bodson, 2006:115). The Student's t-test offers the opportunity to compare the means of two groups.

### III. RESULTS

The results underline the social representations of entrepreneurial success factors and their conditions of emergence.

➤ *Social Representations of Entrepreneurial Success Factors*

The structure of social representations of success factors is identified using a multi-methodological approach based on prototypical analysis.

• *Social Representations of Entrepreneurial Success Factors: Prototypical Analysis*

Social representations of entrepreneurial success factors differ for successful and unsuccessful entrepreneurs, as Tables 2 and 3 of the prototypical analyses highlight.

Table 2 Importance-Frequency Analysis of the Social Representation of Success Factors Among Successful Entrepreneurs

	IMPORTANCE <2,5			IMPORTANCE >2,5		
	Box 1: Core zone			1st Periphery		
		Frequency	Importance		Frequency	Importance
<b>FREQUENCY &gt;10</b>	Ambition	29	1.966	Courage	39	3.487
	Confidence	36	1.944	Market	61	3.016
	Creativity	29	2.483	Persévérance	41	2.512
	Determination	71	1.746	Risk-taking	10	2.900
	Commitment	39	2.462	Value for money	12	2.667
	Faith	16	2.125	Relationship	14	3.143
	Organization	26	2.192	Seriousness	66	2.788
	Quality	54	2.370			
	Resources	65	2.354			
	Will	14	1.286			
Motivation	20	1.600				
	Box 3: Contrasting elements			Box 4: 2nd Periphery		
<b>FREQUENCY &lt; 10</b>	Work	5	2.000	Attractive setting	5	3.400
	Vision	8	2.250	Communication	5	3.000
				Competence	6	3.167
				Courtesy	5	2.800
				Planning	8	3.250
			Smiling	7	2.857	
			Adaptation	5	3.200	

Source: Field data, 2020

• *Table 2 is Subdivided into four Groups (Abric, 2005):*

- ✓ box 1, the core zone, contains the most important elements most frequently mentioned by social actors;
- ✓ box 2, the first periphery, contains the less important elements most cited by social actors;
- ✓ box 3, the contrasting elements, contains themes mentioned by few players (low frequency) but who consider them to be very important;
- ✓ Box 4, the second periphery, comprises elements that are not very present or important in the field of representation.

From Table 2, the potential elements that could form part of the core of the social representation of entrepreneurial success factors among successful entrepreneurs are confidence, creativity, determination, commitment, organization, quality, resources, ambition, motivation, will, and faith. As for the market, perseverance, seriousness, risk-taking, value for money, social relations, and courage are mentioned by many players, but they attach less importance to them. A minority of successful entrepreneurs value vision and hard work, but their numbers are relatively small. Attractive surroundings, communication, competence, courtesy, planning, smiling, and adaptability are hardly considered factors that condition entrepreneurial success among successful entrepreneurs. This structure of social representation of success factors is not necessarily the same for unsuccessful entrepreneurs.



Table 3 Importance-Frequency Analysis of the Social Representation of Success Factors in Failed Entrepreneurs

	IMPORTANCE <2,5				IMPORTANCE >2,5		
	Box 1: Core zone				Box 2: 1st Periphery		
FREQUENCY >5		Frequency	Importance			Frequency	Importance
	Market	16	2.375		Determination	15	2.733
	Resources	32	1.813		Perseverance	12	3.083
					Relationship	8	3
	Box 3: Contrasting elements				Box 4: 2nd Periphery		
FREQUENCY < 5	Confidence	3	2.333		Creativity	3	3
	Quality	4	2		Availability	3	3.333
					Commitment	4	2.5
				Organization	4	2.5	
				Sacrifice	3	3.333	
				Seriousness	3	3.333	

Source: Field data, 2020

Table 3 shows that the elements that may form part of the core social representation of entrepreneurial success factors among unsuccessful entrepreneurs relate to the market and resources. Many unsuccessful entrepreneurs cite determination, perseverance, and social relations, but the latter give them less importance. They form the first periphery. The contrasting elements in the social representation of failed entrepreneurs concern trust and quality. As for creativity, availability, commitment, organization, sacrifice, and seriousness rank in the second periphery of the social representation of success factors among failed entrepreneurs.

Tables 2 and 3 analysis shows that successful and unsuccessful entrepreneurs only sometimes share the potential core elements of the social representation of entrepreneurial success factors. However, this analysis needs to be confirmed by another method of identifying the structure of social representations.

• *Social Representations of Entrepreneurial Success Factors: Resampling and Confidence Intervals*

The resampling and confidence intervals method confirms the potential core elements of the social representation of success factors among failed entrepreneurs identified in the prototypical analysis. On the other hand, it restricts to two elements the core of social representation among successful entrepreneurs derived from the prototypical analysis, as shown by the Multiple Correspondence Analysis integrating the confidence intervals below.

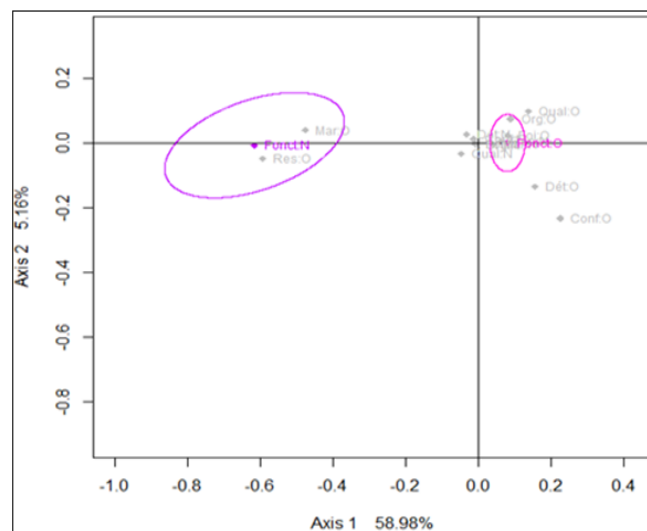


Fig 1 Multiple Correspondence Analysis of Social Representations of Success Factors, Including Confidence Intervals

Source: Field data, 2020

Legend

- Mar O: Market
- Qual O: Quality
- Fonct N : Failed entrepreneurs
- Fonct O : Successful entrepreneurs
- Res O: Resources
- Foi O: Faith
- Org O: Organization
- Dét O: Determination
- Conf O: Confidence

Each item with N indicates that the entrepreneur does not cite these items.

Confidence intervals (the purple and pink areas around the functionality or non-functionality of companies) are essential in studying the position of words in the factorial design (Grenon, 2008). The purple area represents the confidence interval of failed entrepreneurs, while the pink area represents the confidence interval of successful entrepreneurs. The confidence interval of failed entrepreneurs includes two elements of social representation: market and resources, while that of successful entrepreneurs includes organization and faith as elements of social representation. Based on these data, the candidate elements for the core social representation of success factors are faith and organization in the case of successful entrepreneurs and market and resources in the case of unsuccessful entrepreneurs.

Concordance concerning the core obtained by at least two different tools is a first guarantee of the reality of the existence and nature of this core (Abric, 2005). It follows from the two methods of identifying social representations used in this analysis that the core of social representation among successful entrepreneurs is faith and organization and that of unsuccessful entrepreneurs, the market, and resources.

➤ *Conditions for the Emergence of Social Representations of Entrepreneurial Success*

The conditions for the emergence of social representations as factors in entrepreneurial success vary from one element of social representations to another for successful and unsuccessful entrepreneurs.

• *Successful Entrepreneurs*

The emergence of an organization as a social representation of entrepreneurial success factors depends on the professional trajectory followed by the entrepreneur (Pseudo-R2=0.92%, p=0.0442). The professional trajectory of all successful entrepreneurs whose social representation of entrepreneurial success is the organization remains marked by periods of stable employment, as highlighted in the figure below:

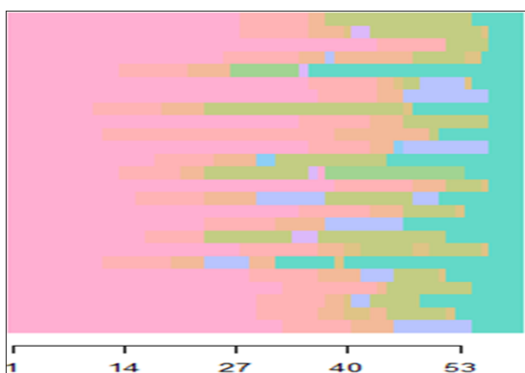


Fig 2 Tapestry of Trajectories of Successful Entrepreneurs whose Social Representation of the Factors of Entrepreneurial Success is the Organization  
Source: Field data, 2020

Legend

- Employee
- Company manager
- Occasional employment
- Executive
- Apprenticeship
- Training
- Salesman
- Internship
- Retirement

According to Figure 2, the organization is socially represented as a factor of entrepreneurial success by successful entrepreneurs with higher education. These entrepreneurs alternate periods of unstable employment with periods of stable employment before setting up their businesses.

As for faith as a social representation of entrepreneurial success, it is not linked to career trajectories (Pseudo-R2=0.32%, p=0.8506). On the other hand, this representation does derive from religious practice. Indeed, the use of endogenous religious practices in the entrepreneurial context contributed to the emergence of this representation, as shown in the graph below:

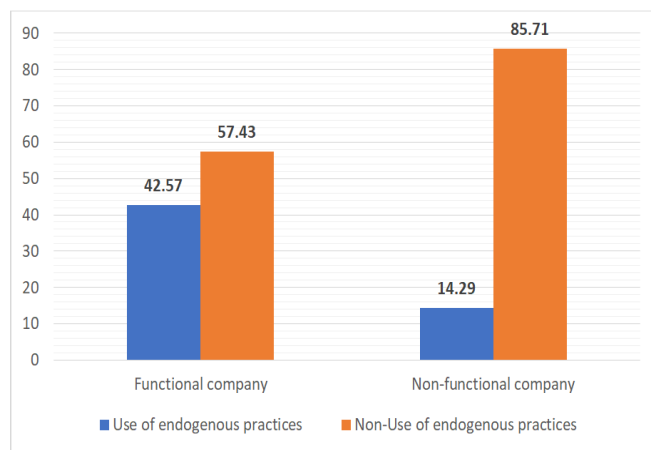


Fig 3 Use of Endogenous Practices by Company Functionality  
Source: Field data, 2020

According to Figure 3, 85.71% of companies that are not functioning do not use endogenous practices. Only 14.29% of failed companies used endogenous practices. In contrast, 57.43% of successful businesses did not use endogenous practices in the entrepreneurial process, while 42.57% did. This difference in using endogenous practices according to company functionality is statistically significant (Chi-square = 8.9319, p = .002802). It follows that the use of endogenous practices is related to business success. Thus, faith as a social representation of entrepreneurial success factors results from entrepreneurs' success using endogenous practices in the entrepreneurial process. Thus, professional trajectories and the use of endogenous practices in entrepreneurship have contributed to the emergence of social representations of entrepreneurial success factors among successful entrepreneurs. But what about unsuccessful entrepreneurs?

• *Among Failed Entrepreneurs*

Professional trajectories shape social representations of entrepreneurial success factors among failed entrepreneurs. The social representation of success factors as a market is

inseparable from professional trajectories (Pseudo-R<sup>2</sup>=0.05.82 % p=.0292). The professional trajectories of unsuccessful entrepreneurs representing entrepreneurial success through the market are marked by relative job stability before starting the business, as shown in Figure 4.

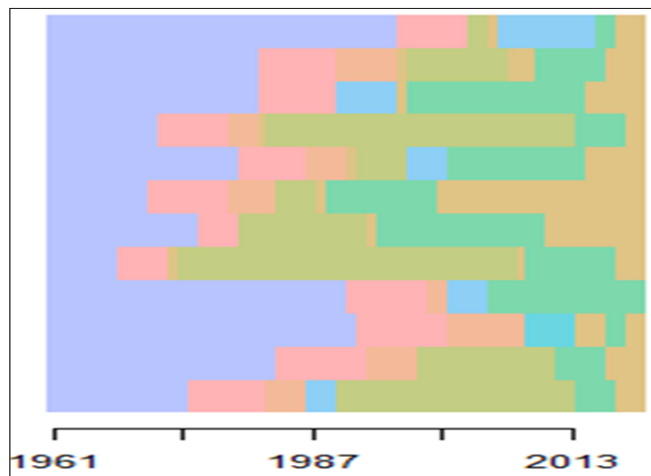


Fig 4 Tapestry of Unsuccessful Entrepreneurs' Trajectories and Representing the Factors of Entrepreneurial Success Through the Market  
Source: Field data, 2020

Legend

- Employee
- Executive
- Salesman
- Company manager
- Apprenticeship
- Internship
- Occasional employment
- Training
- Retirement

As shown in Figure 4, most unsuccessful entrepreneurs representing entrepreneurial success factors in the market gained stable employment after their studies. From this professional position, they set up their businesses, sometimes after a short period of unemployment. Professional trajectories do not always justify social representations of entrepreneurial success. This is the case for the social representation of entrepreneurial success factors by resources. This representation highlights the need for more human resources than financial ones.

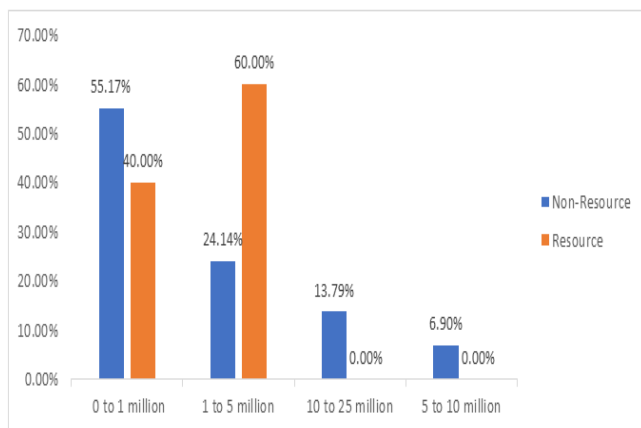


Fig 5 Distribution of Social Capital According to Social Representation of Entrepreneurial Success Factors as Resources  
Source: Field data, 2020

Unsuccessful entrepreneurs who represent the factors of entrepreneurial success in terms of resources are mainly found in companies with between one and five million in social capital. In contrast, entrepreneurs who represent the factors of entrepreneurial success as independent of resources have less than one million in social capital. However, this difference is not statistically significant (Chi-square= 3.236, p-value = .3567). On the other hand, the weakness of human resources remains inseparable from social representations.

The average number of employees working for unsuccessful entrepreneurs who represent entrepreneurial success through resources is 0.6, while the average number of unsuccessful entrepreneurs who do not represent entrepreneurial success through resources is 1.9. This difference is statistically significant (t = 2.2443, p-value = .04023). Consequently, the need for more human resources is associated with the emergence of this social representation.

IV. DISCUSSION

The core elements of social representations of success factors among successful entrepreneurs are faith and organization. For unsuccessful entrepreneurs, the core is the market and resources. These core elements are also identified in the literature as success factors.

Positions on faith in entrepreneurship are not unanimous. Janssen and Gundolf (2021) assert that religious affiliation can influence individual attitudes and behaviors that can motivate or discourage entrepreneurial activity. This position is taken by Cita (2020) through his empirical study when he argues, "cette matrice SWOT nous permet de nous rendre compte que les apports constatés des croyances religieuses dans certains cas sont importants. A contrario, les menaces dépendent réellement du degré d'implication de l'entrepreneur dans sa pratique religieuse" [this SWOT matrix allows us to realize that the empirical contributions of religious beliefs in certain cases are significant. On the contrary, the threats depend on the degree of involvement of the entrepreneur in his religious practice].

Faith impacts entrepreneurship, as Nakou and colleagues (2022) noted in Benin. They concluded that religious beliefs were essential to entrepreneurs' search for meaning in the informal business context. Their findings are consistent with Reid and colleagues (2015), who found that religious beliefs served as both an "outil d'adaptation" [adaptation tool] and a "mécanisme instrumental" [instrumental mechanism] for these entrepreneurs. So, the social representations of successful entrepreneurs, through faith as a success factor, do not deviate from scientific reality. What is more, these social representations derive from their practices.

Indeed, the positive link between the use of endogenous religious practices and successful entrepreneurs shows the practical meaning of faith. It is by experimenting with these endogenous practices, whether convinced or not,

that successful entrepreneurs forge social representations of faith as a success factor. Typically, in the research socio-cultural contexts, when an individual starts a business or finds himself in difficulty, he is soon advised to resort to endogenous religious practices. Based on the effectiveness of his experience, successful entrepreneurs gradually formed these social representations. Durkheim (1985) explained when he said that magical beliefs are, in a sense, confirmed by experience. This position confirms Weber's (1996) thesis, taken up by Sanchez (2007) who argue, " croyance religieuse a besoin de deux éléments ; un élément qui forme en quelque sorte la théorie ou l'armature intellectuelle d'un comportement – les représentations – et un élément qui appartient à l'image de techniques et de règles qui valident et vérifient le contenu ou les orientations du niveau idéologique" [religious belief needs two elements: one that forms the theory or intellectual framework of behavior - the representations - and one that belongs to the image of techniques and rules that validate and verify the content or orientations of the ideological level].

This research breaks with homo oeconomicus. "Plusieurs écrits laissent à penser que l'homo oeconomicus ne croit en rien, et qu'il s'agit d'un être fondamentalement opportuniste. Cette conception de l'homo oeconomicus en l'abstrayant de toutes croyances particulières, loin des normes et des conventions qui font la vie en société" [many writings suggest that homo oeconomicus believes in nothing, and is fundamentally opportunistic. This conception of homo oeconomicus abstracts him from all particular beliefs, far removed from the norms and conventions that make up life in society] (Orléan, 2002). The work is also out of step with Djidjoho (2015), for whom the God factor is often invoked to assuage anxieties and fears.

The literature confirms the organization as a success factor. Lasch, Le Roy, and Yami (2005) point out that the organizational characteristics of new businesses explain their success or failure. The organizational aspects identified for this purpose relate to the founding team (Nerlinger, 1998; Schutjens & Wever, 2000; Ruef, Aldrich & Carter, 2003; Teal & Hofer, 2003), the amount of capital invested, the customer structure, and the choice of location (Lasch, Le Roy & Yami, 2005).

The link between social representations and trajectories shows that these representations gradually form throughout one's life. If there is a link between professional trajectories and situations of business failure or success (Tohon & Fakeye, 2022), social representations are the missing link in understanding this. Indeed, professional trajectories enable the construction of social representations. The latter is part of the professional habitus, which is a system of "schèmes de perception, d'appréciation et d'action" [patterns of perception, appreciation and action] (Bourdieu, 1997), of "dispositions durables et transposables" [durable and transposable dispositions] (Bourdieu, 1980).

Regarding the social representations of success factors among failed entrepreneurs, resource erosion and competitive disadvantage explains the market and resources

identified. According to this approach, business success is analyzed regarding economic rent and competitive advantage. Successful companies can generate sufficient rent to create a sustainable competitive advantage (Arrègle, 2006). Conversely, failure is perceived as an erosion of resources and a competitive disadvantage (Smida & Khelil, 2010). These social representations derive, on the one hand, from professional trajectories and, on the other, from the conditions under which the activity is carried out. They lead to the understanding that social representations can vary for similar career paths. Indeed, the professional trajectories of entrepreneurs who represent the success factors through organization and those through the market seem similar, marked by a period of stable employment before the company creation. The focus factor can explain the divergence in social representations. "Il désigne la situation sociale dans laquelle s'élaborent les représentations sociales et se forment les jugements. L'histoire propre fait que leurs centres d'intérêt sont particulièrement variables. De ce fait, les groupes vont se situer de façon très diverse par rapport à un même objet. Celui-ci sera appréhendé de manière sélective, en fonction des perspectives qu'il présente et de ce qui est conforme avec les attentes et les orientations du groupe" [This refers to the social situation in which social representations and judgments are formed. As a result of their histories, their centers of interest are remarkably variable. As a result, groups will position themselves very differently about the same object. The latter will be apprehended selectively, according to the perspectives it presents and what is consistent with the group's expectations and orientations] (Guimelli, 1999).

The originality of this research lies in the fact that it reveals that the entrepreneurial success factors identified in the literature are represented differently than in successful entrepreneurs as in unsuccessful entrepreneurs. Beyond that, these results reflected an opposition between successful and unsuccessful entrepreneurs, with the successful entrepreneurs presenting as actors and failed entrepreneurs as agents.

Representing faith and organization as a guarantee of success is tantamount to placing the entrepreneur at the heart of success since they are the entrepreneur's responsibility. They are factors over which he has control. They are factors he can use intelligently to his advantage. Consequently, in the face of constraints, he develops strategies using his faith through endogenous religious practices and the organization needed to succeed. In so doing, he mobilizes both spiritual and physical resources to achieve his goals. He becomes a true actor. The latter refers to an individual who is "autonome, capable de calcul et de manipulation et qui non seulement s'adapte mais invente en fonction des circonstances et des mouvements de ses partenaires" [autonomous, capable of calculation and manipulation, and who not only adapts but invents according to circumstances and the movements of his partners] (Crozier, Friedberg, 1977). The figure of the actor is "ni un être psychologique de besoins abstraits, ni un homo oeconomicus poursuivant un objectif d'optimisation mais un construit humain capable de se saisir d'opportunités c'est-à-dire de déployer des



stratégies” [neither a psychological being of abstract needs, nor a homo oeconomicus pursuing an optimization objective, but a human construct capable of seizing opportunities, that is, deploying strategies] (Crozier, Friedberg, 1977, 39).

In contrast, failed entrepreneurs represent success factors through constraints, factors beyond their control to explain entrepreneurial success. In their view, the market and resources are the significant assets that guarantee the entrepreneur's success. Unlike successful entrepreneurs, however, they cannot go beyond these factors to design, in the face of constraints, strategies for stimulating demand, and creating the conditions for developing resources and the market. The powerlessness of failed entrepreneurs in the face of the constraints differentiates them from successful entrepreneurs. As such, these failed entrepreneurs are trustworthy agents. The agent is “ l’individu qui agit moins qu’il n’est agi ou bien par les moments et situations ou bien par des logiques extérieures qu’il a intériorisées par la socialisation ou tout effet de domination” [the individual who acts less than he is acted upon, either by moments and situations, or by external logics that he has internalized through socialization or any effect of domination] (Paugam, 2010). Social representations in the light of results are, therefore, not to be excluded from Crozier and Friedberg's (1977) strategic analysis. In this case, it is a subjective representation of a strategist. The actor is the individual who subjectively represents himself as a strategist, while the agent represents external constraints that shape his actions. These positions have implications for entrepreneurship.

Very early on, the merits of the entrepreneurial experience, even in the face of failure, were extolled. Entrepreneurial failure is a good school (Bacq, Giacomin & Janssen, 2009). Similarly, the European Commission (2007) links business growth to past failure. However, the present results highlight the wall that failed entrepreneurs face. This wall, limited to the constraints of the environment, prevents them from going beyond their failure to grasp its true causes. So, it is appropriate to distinguish between good and bad experiences, to join the distinction between "successful failure" and "unsuccessful failure." “Dans le premier cas de figure, l’entrepreneur a tiré des enseignements positifs de son expérience pour retrouver la motivation d’entreprendre à nouveau et a réussi à rebondir en recréant une nouvelle entreprise performante (Bacq, Giacomin & Janssen, 2009 ; Sarrouy-Watkins, 2016). Dans le deuxième cas de figure, l’entrepreneur n’a rien appris de son échec, il se résigne” [In the first case, the entrepreneur has drawn positive lessons from his or her experience to regain the motivation to undertake again and has succeeded in bouncing back by recreating a new, successful business (Bacq, Giacomin & Janssen, 2009 ; Sarrouy-Watkins, 2016). In the second case, the entrepreneur has learned nothing from his failure and is resigned to it” (Khelil, Smida & Zouaoui, 2018). A " parcours d’apprentissage” [learning path] (Cardon, McGrath, 1999) is therefore necessary. The latter is a process of meaning construction that takes place progressively and dynamically (Cope, 2011). “Successful failure” only comes at the end of this process. These

analyses put the financing of unsuccessful entrepreneurs into perspective, and establish the prerequisite of a " learning path."

However, these results are limited to the Beninese context. Furthermore, the sampling frame remains relatively limited, as it only considers businesses registered with the Benin Chamber of Commerce and Industry in 2015; this explains the very high number of successful businesses. However, the random sampling technique increases the results' external validity.

## V. CONCLUSION

This research aimed to identify and analyze the social representations of success factors among successful and unsuccessful entrepreneurs. A multi-method approach based on prototypical analysis, resampling and confidence intervals was used to identify social representations. It emerged that faith and organization are the social representations of success factors among successful entrepreneurs, and market and resources are the social representations of success factors among unsuccessful entrepreneurs. These representations hardly depart from the literature, highlighting two opposing social identities. One is the actor, who subjectively represents success factors through objects that he can strategically manipulate to achieve his goal of entrepreneurial success. At the other end of the spectrum, we find the agent figure of failed entrepreneurs, who represent success factors in terms of environmental constraints they can no longer control. This leads to the need for a "learning path" to successful failure. As a corollary, this "learning path" is a prerequisite for financing failed entrepreneurs. However, the research does not allow us to pinpoint the moment of construction of social representations, particularly among failed entrepreneurs. The underlying question is whether unsuccessful entrepreneurs had these social representations at the very start of their business creation or whether these social representations stem from their failure. This question, which could be the subject of further research, would provide a better understanding of entrepreneurial failure.

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