

Introduction to the Special Issue: Woman and Woman Entrepreneurship: Management Practices

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Introduction

The literature on women's status in society addresses issues that range from how the legal framework regulates citizens' activity to how different practices are defined and carried out. These practices include family responsibilities, socially acceptable behaviour (according to culture and traditions), women's access to education, their available knowledge and resources, and the incentives or difficulties faced by women with resources who decide to undertake an entrepreneurial venture.

The collection of articles presented in this special issue provides extensive analysis – using different approaches and methods – of women's status in all areas specified in the previous paragraph. Readers attentive to the different contributions can see that the reasons to strive for a fair society – where men and women enjoy equal rights and responsibilities and where the unique task of maternity has its reward – lie not only in the quest for equality. In addition to moral considerations, there are reasons linked to efficiency (greater productivity or better economic decisions), evidence of which can be found when women *grease the wheels* of the economy – making it more robust and agile – through their actions.

Social issues and women's family, social and professional lives are influenced – or nourished – by culture and traditions that regulate, stipulated by law, the specific levels of application and the way in which daily life takes place. These effects of culture and traditions are conveyed by most of the articles in this special issue. The first two articles examine women's status in Central Java (Indonesia) and in India, respectively. These articles highlight the importance of the cultural framework described above. The first study highlights social practices, adopting an approach that transcends any approach predetermined by a theory or general approach, and shows how progress is being made via practice, combinations of tradition and new forms of action, and careful consideration of the specific culture that fits within a “postcolonial thinking and deconstructivist standpoint”. The second article shows the legal advances that have been made in India to move towards equality between men and women. The article describes in detail how the established culture prevents new legal rulings from taking root and transforming women's status. In this context, women's learning, also hindered by the society's patriarchal structure, appears as a possible means of improvement.

Along the same lines as the two previous articles, albeit in very different contexts, articles 7 and 9 highlight different forms of discrimination against women in Europe. Based on data from the eighth European Community Household Panel, article 7 shows that the time spent by women caring for dependent persons outside of formal working hours keeps women away from or hinders their integration in the labour market. Article 9 analyses the administration and services staff at Spanish universities, showing the occupational discrimination or segregation suffered by women. As an incentive to correct this discrimination, the authors of article 9 argue that there exists a positive correlation between gender equality, competitiveness and GDP growth.

Articles 3, 4, 5, 6 and 8 all address women's relationship with business, with each one doing so differently, albeit yielding consistent findings. Following very different approaches, the studies show that the participation of women in business can boost business performance – efficiency (in addition to equality) is once again an issue – and that although the kind of management or participation may differ, many common traits are observed in men's decisions to start businesses and those of women.

Article 3 uses a sample of hotels and restaurants from Madrid to show that gender affects how businesses should plan and that a gender mix (i.e., if there are women in the decision-making team) means hotels and restaurants perform better. Article 4 shows that differences between the performance of women-led business and the performance of men-led businesses in Italy are non-significant. Although it deals with a very different case, article 5, referring to the music industry, does not encounter significant differences between men and women in terms of their artistic

capabilities, finding complete parity between male and female soloists and explaining the lower participation by women in musical groups as an effect of discrimination.

Article 6, with a method based on narratives of learning trajectories for becoming an entrepreneur uses data from 70 interviews to female small-business entrepreneurs to describe how women eventually engage in entrepreneurial action. Among the reasons for entrepreneurship are the desire to achieve greater independence, earn greater income through self-employment or encounter a more flexible balance between work and family. The authors of article 8 employ classic research methods using data from the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) to observe how men and women perceive society's evaluations of entrepreneurial activity and to investigate men's and women's evaluations of whether they have sufficient experience to start businesses or whether they fear failure. The study shows that the significantly higher fear of failure among women than among men is a consequence of gender differences in society's perceptions of women and men. Finally, article 10 explores the range of ways in which women act within and affect society, highlighting gender's moderating role in offers of low prices in online purchasing of tourism accommodation services.

This special issue thus contributes to the literature on women's status in society in terms of the cultural framework that conditions and limits women's status, and in terms of the family environment, women's role in the labour market and women's entrepreneurial action.