

Enterprising Women in Transition Economies

Edited by Friederike Welter, David Smallbone and Nina Isakova
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reviewed by Ksenija Denčić-Mihajlov*

“Enterprising Women in Transition Economies” is a collection of essays addressing female entrepreneurship in the framework of transition in seven countries - all different in their pace of political, economic and social reforms, cultural and religious background. The topic, one that nowadays attracts considerable attention from policy makers and scholars as well as fighters for women’s rights, is explored in the book on the basis of unique empirical data by sixteen competent authors - E. Aculai, R. Aidis, G.B. Özcan, M.Drnovšek, M. Glas, N. Isakova, O. Krasovka, L. Kavunenko, A. Lugovy, C. Makasudova, D. Mirzakhlikova, N. Rodionova, N. Shakirova, D. Smallbone, N. Vinogradova and F. Welter. The authors are university professors, lecturers and researchers whose research work mainly focuses on entrepreneurship and who have participated in numerous research projects on women entrepreneurs in transition economies.

The book consists of an introductory part, two main country-based parts and a final part offering conclusions and policy recommendations. Part II (four chapters) focuses on women’s entrepreneurship in four countries of the former Soviet Union, while part III (three chapters) offers studies concerning female entrepreneurship in the case of three Central European countries.

Having introduced the reader to the aims and rationales of the book, Chapter I gives an overview of the transition context and entrepreneurship as a multidimensional concept. In the editors’ view “when researching female entrepreneurs in transition economies it is important to recognize the differing cultural background between, and even within, countries as well as varying historical paths and the current role of women in society”. The next seven chapters examine women’s entrepreneurship from this perspective.

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Chapter 2 gives descriptive analysis and discussion of male-female similarities and differences identified among Ukrainian entrepreneurs. The analysis of the case study results by Nina Isakova, Olha Krasovksa, Lidia Kavunenko and Alexander Lugovy, is complemented by an overview of entrepreneurship development in the Ukraine in the post Soviet period and an assessment of the role of Ukrainian women in society. The case study evidence reveals that the main gender differences among entrepreneurs in the Ukraine can be found in business performances, financing resources, motives for cooperation and business aptitude evaluation.

The nature of female entrepreneurship under conditions of an “early stage” of transition in Uzbekistan is discussed in Chapter 3 by Frederike Welter, David Smallbone, Damira Mirzakhlikova, Natalja Schakirova and Charos Maksudova. Studying female entrepreneurship in a country where traditional values and norms play an important role, where the overall level of entrepreneurship is very low and the adopted laws typically change frequently, the authors emphasize the important contribution of women entrepreneurs to the overall level of economic activity in Uzbekistan.

The study of the differences between female entrepreneurs and proprietors in Moldova is given in Chapter 4 written by Elena Aculai, Nelly Rodionova and Natalja Vinogradova. Based on data collected in the international project Intas-00-043 and a survey conducted by the authors, the analysis provides evidence that: (1) in respect of motives for start a business, business aptitude, goals and performances and innovative behavior, a majority of Moldovan women cannot be classified as either entrepreneurs or proprietors; (2) women entrepreneurs diversify their activity more often, possess more resources to develop the business, have a higher education level and prior management experience, seek business contacts more actively and use assistance from consulting companies more often.

Chapter 5, contributed by Gül Berna Özcan, illustrates the development of female entrepreneurship in the bazaars across Kyrgyzstan. The analysis of 35 in-depth interviews shows rapid growth in the number of entrepreneurs in the bazaars, identified as “the biggest and most important sources of entrepreneurial talent and development for women as well as for men in Kyrgyzstan”. In an extremely competitive, ethnically divisive atmosphere, full of tension, women entrepreneurs play an important managerial role but also build strong business networks used to enhance the survival and growth of business.

After description of the status of Lithuanian woman and the characteristics of SME growth in Lithuania, special attention in Chapter 6 is drawn to female entrepreneurship, particularly to the characteristics of female licensed traders at one of the largest informal open air markets in this country. The author, Ruta Adis, analyses the potential impact of Lithuania’s EU membership on open air market development and highlights the importance of stimulating and supporting the growth of women’s entrepreneurship through governmental policy.

Having recognized the gap in studies on female entrepreneurship in Slovenia, Mateja Drnovšek and Miroslav Glas give in Chapter 7 answers to the following questions: (1) To what extent do women-managed companies contribute to gross output and employment growth in Slovenia? (2) Which are gender-specific characteristics of Slovenian entrepreneurs? (3) What kind of strategies do Slovenian female entrepreneurs undertake and what motives lie behind these strategies? The study also offers recommendations on how to design policy measures to foster female entrepreneurship in Slovenia.

The country-based examination of female entrepreneurship in this book ends with Friederike Welter's discussion of differences and similarities of women entrepreneurs in West and East Germany. Data and research results presented in Chapter 8 point to a higher growth rate and higher share of female entrepreneurs in East compared to West Germany, to a larger size of enterprise, share of full-time women entrepreneurs and higher interest in starting entrepreneurship in East Germany. These findings are explained by the differences in regulatory framework, societal values and norms of behavior in two settings with different paths of economic development in the 40-year-long period before re-unification.

The final chapter of the book offers conclusions with respect to the diversity and similarity of women's entrepreneurship across different transition economies and the economic and social contribution of female entrepreneurs to the transition process. These conclusions are complemented by the comparison of female entrepreneurs' profiles in mature market and transition economies. Finally, the chapter proposes and discusses policy measures to promote female entrepreneurship in transition countries.

This book explores in a unique way women's entrepreneurship in the transition context emphasizing both the heterogeneity of this phenomenon and the influence of the women's role in society on their entrepreneurial behavior. It provides the readers with new information and data from previously unpublished surveys and case studies done within several national and international research projects on women entrepreneurs in transition economies. The empirical investigations are linked with the existing body of theory explaining the embeddedness of entrepreneurship, and the references to such a theory are included too.

The book investigates the phenomenon of female entrepreneurship in seven different countries by presenting institutional, social and political settings for women's entrepreneurship and providing insights into current and potential involvement of women entrepreneurs in national economies. The overall picture of women entrepreneurs in transition economies would have been more complete however, had the book also contained the study of female entrepreneurship in one of the transition countries that has, in its transition path, experienced a civil war.

Studies of female entrepreneurship in the countries where there has been very

little empirical research on this topic (for example Kyrgyzstan or Uzbekistan), make a particular contribution to the book. It should also be underlined that analyzed case studies and interviews offer many opportunities for study and may be used as a starting point for similar studies on female entrepreneurship in other transition countries. The research in the book does not comprise only the analysis of characteristics of women entrepreneurs in a transition context. The authors identify policy priorities for fostering women's entrepreneurship in different national economies, which, consequently, raises numerous issues for discussion and practical action at the governmental level (and increases the value of this book).

In conclusion, this is an original, interesting and effective book that represents a valuable contribution to global research in the field of entrepreneurship. The authors have successfully achieved the purpose of their project - to draw attention, firstly, to the changing role of women in the transition period, and secondly, to the fact that the potential of female entrepreneurship in transition countries is not fully developed and realized. I would recommend the book to scholars and graduate students interested in the topic of entrepreneurship, institutions promoting female entrepreneurship, women's business organizations, policy makers, but also to women who are starting, or planning to start, their own business.