

Introduction to the special issue women's enterprise international policy and practice: honoring the legacy of Julie Weeks

Julie R. Weeks was a leading advocate for women's enterprise, an internationally renowned expert in women's enterprise policy and a great friend to women's enterprise researchers across the globe. A double graduate of the University of Michigan, Julie used her skills in research, public policy, and communications to advocate for women's enterprise and to support researchers, policymakers and practitioners in the field. In a career spanning more than thirty years, Julie was personally responsible for much of the research-based information on the state of women business owners and their enterprises in the United States.

For nine years, Julie was the director of research and managing director of the Center for Women's Business Research, a non-profit organization conducting research among women business owners and their enterprises. She was appointed deputy chief counsel for statistics and research at the US Small Business Administration and vice president for research and public policy at two market research firms. She also served as the executive director of the National Women's Business Council – a federally funded bipartisan policy advisory body, created by the US Congress to serve as an independent voice of women's entrepreneurship – and as an advisor to the president, US Congress and the US Small Business Administration on women's entrepreneurship issues.

At the forefront of women's entrepreneurship policy development in the USA, Julie was also influential in the growth of women's enterprise in the UK and Europe. In 2004, she was invited to advise the UK Government's Small Business Service in the implementation of its women's entrepreneurship strategy and was a frequent keynote speaker and presenter at seminars and conferences throughout Europe. Additionally, she led, coordinated or consulted on research projects focused on women business owners and their enterprises in more than 30 countries, including Rwanda and Liberia – where Julie met President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the first woman to lead an African nation.

In 2006, Julie moved from Washington to Empire, Michigan, where she launched her successful business, Womenable, a for-profit social enterprise with the mission to improve the environment for women-owned businesses worldwide by improving the systems – laws, policies, programs and research-based knowledge – that support women's enterprise creation and growth. Julie was a passionate social activist and an accomplished communicator, able to translate data and complex information into clear, concise and actionable knowledge. As president and CEO of Womenable, Julie's national and international activism led her to board positions with the Association of Women's Business Centers, for which she served as the chair; *Enterprise Women Magazine*; the Global Banking Alliance for Women; the International Council for Small Business; the National Association of Women Business Owners; and WEConnect International. She also served as a strategic advisor to Quantum Leaps and to its FutureForward initiative.

Julie died on February 18, 2017, aged 59, loved and admired by many. Her personal life was enhanced by her 18-year marriage to Walter R. Hoegy, a scientist who worked for the NASA Goddard Space Flight Center, sharing Julie's love of music, theater and outdoor activities. A highly respected professional locally, regionally and globally, Julie researched and authored numerous articles and publications pertaining to women's entrepreneurship and empowerment. Julie was an editorial board member of the *International Journal of*



Gender and Entrepreneurship, and we honor her legacy with a special issue devoted to the subject to which she contributed so much. Fittingly, the editors of this special issue represent both the research and advocacy elements of Julie's work. Julie championed the role of research in informing policy and practice, and her unique blend of practical experience and policy-development expertise made her research accessible and resonant with a range of audience. She was a great communicator, using her unique analytical and "number-crunching" skills to bring research to life, making it as relevant to female business owners and government policymakers and academics. Julie will also be remembered for her mentoring support and encouragement of young researchers. She was generous with her time and advice, and students of women's entrepreneurship across the world will be familiar with her body of work – her last published paper features in this special issue.

In selecting the international policy and practice theme of this special issue, we are indebted to Julie's central role in advocating for women's enterprise and supporting the collection of national-level data on women's participation in entrepreneurship and business ownership across the globe. Her research focus was formed by the belief that important issues need to be researched and that the importance of women's enterprise could and should be demonstrated by robust and systematically gathered evidence. The international focus that Julie showed throughout her career is reflected in the papers included within this special issue. These papers show that studies of women's enterprise in diverse national contexts have moved beyond descriptive accounts to embrace more fundamental and theoretically informed questions.

In addition to the original research papers included in this special issue, we are delighted to be able to reprint Julie's last journal paper, co-authored with Barbara Orser and Allan Riding. Originally published in *Small Business Economics* in 2018, "The Efficacy of Gender-Based Federal Procurement Policies in the United States" is reprinted here by permission from Springer. From a 2012 Diana International Research Conference presentation to its eventual journal publication, this work was seven years in development. It is a testament to the importance of industry and academic partnerships and a reminder that research often takes longer than expected. Julie was a catalyst in building awareness about the importance of women's enterprise policies and programs, including procurement initiatives targeted at women-owned businesses. In Canada, for example, she co-authored with Barbara Orser the white paper that ushered in WEConnect International Canada. Today, WEConnect International champions supplier diversity and ensures that universal women's business enterprise certification standards are maintained by international affiliates and partner and government organizations.

The impact of Julie's tenacity, collaborative spirit and thought leadership is that today, governments, corporations and advocacy groups around the world are more informed about the opportunities and challenges of building policies and programs to support entrepreneurs. Indeed, one of the great successes of the women's enterprise research field has been to put women entrepreneurs "on the map." The importance of women's enterprise is now widely recognized by government and economic-development agencies and a range of new policies, programs and practices have been introduced in various contexts to help stimulate female entrepreneurship and support women-owned businesses. As business ownership has become a more mainstream practice among women throughout the world, the field of women's enterprise research has evolved to encompass a wider range of research questions that recognize the variety of contexts in which women's entrepreneurial activities take place and the breadth of issues that remain unexplored. Importantly, the research field has started to consider more systematic, evidence-based evaluations of policies and practices introduced in recent years with the intention of supporting women entrepreneurs.

Hence, the prospects for the women's enterprise research field are encouraging as the field evolves to incorporate more empirically diverse skill sets and greater theoretical sophistication. The strides made by the women's enterprise research domain, beyond the early descriptive accounts of individual experiences and toward more theoretically sophisticated questions and robust empirical techniques, are exemplified by the papers selected for this special issue.

Each of the papers selected for this special issue is drawn from a different international context, and each focuses on a distinct area of research. In the [Orser *et al.* \(2018\)](#) study, the focus is on evaluating a flagship policy designed to support women entrepreneurs. Women's enterprise advocacy groups have regularly recommended the introduction of gender-based procurement policies to ensure that women-owned firms can compete effectively within public and corporate markets, often citing US federal government policies as an example to be emulated elsewhere. But, as [Orser *et al.* \(2018\)](#) demonstrate, there is a need to critically evaluate procurement processes and practices to fully understand their impact and effectiveness, assess whether policy objectives are met, and ensure that policies designed to support women and other minority business owners are, as the authors describe, "more than political and public relations posturing." The breadth and depth of Julie Weeks' work in support of women entrepreneurs is exemplified in this paper. As an activist and advocate, she worked to introduce new policies and practices that would help women in business. As a researcher and social scientist, she sought to ensure that these policies were both evidence-based and effective.

While [Orser *et al.*'s \(2018\)](#) paper has been reprinted specially for this special issue, the remaining papers offer original research that collectively demonstrate the remarkable range and depth of the women's entrepreneurship research field. [Antwi Bosiakoh and Williams Tetteh \(2019\)](#) explore the experiences of Nigerian women entrepreneurs in Ghana, positioning their detailed qualitative analysis within the mixed embeddedness framework. While interest in migrant entrepreneurship has grown in recent years, research studies have often focused on the experiences and adaptations of migrant men from the global south moving to the developed economies of Europe and North America. [Antwi Bosiakoh and Williams Tetteh \(2019\)](#) subtly invert migration stereotypes while demonstrating that mixed embeddedness can be applied with great effect to migrant women moving from one part of the global south to another. Shifting the lens of global migration toward a gendered, global-south immigrant entrepreneurial reality, their in-depth accounts reveal both the vicissitudes endured and the daring entrepreneurial drive of female migrants "on the margin of the global economy." [Rugina \(2019\)](#) provides an entirely different perspective of women's entrepreneurial reality from the post-transition Baltic countries, questioning why there are still relatively few women entrepreneurs given the history of gender equality and the well-established ecosystem of business support visible across Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. Taking an institutional perspective and using published secondary data, Rugina's study illustrates how entrepreneurial outcomes are linked to their social context. [van Ewijk and Beghiti-Mahut \(2019\)](#) locate their study within the context of the UAE, exploring gender differences in entrepreneurial intention following tertiary education entrepreneurship programs. Finding that university-level entrepreneurship courses appear especially helpful in positively changing the entrepreneurial intentions of female students, this study contributes to our understanding of the gendered dimensions of business-enabling environments. As editors of this special issue, we thank all the authors and reviewers for their contribution.

Julie was both a researcher and an activist, fond of repeating Margaret Mead's maxim that we should "never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can

change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." The contributions included within this special issue help us better understand and so change the shape of the social and economic world for women entrepreneurs around the world.

We are pleased to announce that Julie's Womenable work will be carried forward by the Women's Economic Imperative (WEI).

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