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ORIGINAL SCIENTIFIC PAPER

# When Is Entrepreneurship a Career Option for Highly Educated Students? Evidence from Czechia

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**A B S T R A C T**

*This article focuses on youths' opinions on becoming entrepreneurs. The primary objective of the research was to identify the motives, trigger events, and conditions that younger people consider when deciding to become entrepreneurs, in order to understand the decision-making process for entrepreneurship among young university students. We conducted 22 focus group discussions with 133 participants, comprising 15 initial focus groups with 94 participants (approximately half of whom were women) and seven follow-up focus groups with 39 participants. We found the Kaleidoscope career model (authenticity, balance, and challenge) highly relevant in explaining youths' decision-making. For youth, it was mainly a matter of their free choice, which depends on many factors relevant to their personal experiences. The cultural factors, including perceived family obligations, mainly constrain women.*

**KEYWORDS:** *nascent entrepreneurship, kaleidoscope career model, university students, decision-making, women entrepreneurship*

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## Introduction

This article focuses on youths' opinions on becoming entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurship is a vital opportunity for both men and women to develop their careers, gain self-fulfilment, and escape economic hardship. Some studies found increased interest in entrepreneurship and minimal differences in entrepreneurial intentions among younger men and women (Santana Vega et al., 2016; OECD/EU, 2019); however, several studies noted a gender gap in entrepreneurship among younger entrepreneurs – young men are about twice as likely to start a business (Holienka et al., 2016; OECD/EU, 2019). Women's entrepreneurial ventures may be different and motivated by different factors (OECD/EU 2019); for example, for women more than men, the choice to start a business is linked to necessity or to time and location flexibility, which is indicative of a level of independence that can accommodate family needs and child rearing (Minnity & Nardone, 2007).

We focused on choosing one's life course during university studies. University students are well-suited for exploring entrepreneurship intentions. Younger people frequently engage in decision-making about their lives and are often unsure about their future career paths. Due to their commitment to their studies, their level of engagement in entrepreneurship activities is often lower (Holienka et al., 2016). The primary aim of the research was to identify topics and categories related to the decision about entrepreneurship. We wanted to identify the experiences, motives, trigger events, and conditions that younger people consider when making decisions about entrepreneurship. We also examined arguments against aspects that do not support entrepreneurship and its potential role in the respondents' life course. We discussed the relevant life-course conditions and pathways and addressed how students debated the perceived gender differences.

The article's contribution lies in providing insight into the perceptions, opinions, and claims of youth who choose to become entrepreneurs, as opposed to those who do not. Starting a business was largely a matter of choice for younger people. We identified differences between how young men and women are perceived as entrepreneurs. Aspects of the Kaleidoscope model were relevant to the decision-making processes of young people. The empirical part of the article is divided into four sections: general impulses and personal reasons for entrepreneurship; the life-course perspective; and perceived gender differences in entrepreneurship.

## Literature Review

We defined entrepreneurship as a process with specific phases (Shane et al., 2003; Srivastava & Misra, 2017). Younger people may perceive entrepreneurship as a career choice (Krueger et al., 2000). Our career perspective is rooted in the stage passages approach (Burton et al., 2016). We understand careers as non-linear and multifaceted journeys (Christophe et al., 2024), interacting with past, present, and future events, as well as life stages and transitions (Bowen & Hisrich, 1986; Burton et al., 2016). Transitions are parts of the life cycle trajectory. A career is a sequence of decisions and events that creates a pattern of employment and self-employment history. A boundaryless career extends beyond structural constraints and organisational arrangements (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006), encompassing both physical mobility and accompanying psychological flexibility. The protean career model emphasises the individuals' ability to guide and manage their career in alignment with personal goals and values (Greer et al., 2024). Kaleidoscope career model – KCM (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005; Mainiero & Gibson, 2018; Christophe et al., 2024) addresses how people reflect on authenticity (following personal values), balance (family life), and challenge (development) in various life stages based on their career considerations, shifting priorities, and changing life situations. Gender is brought to the forefront of this model. Women look for a mosaic that best suits their life circumstances, wants, and needs. In the Kaleidoscope model, family and context are defined as sets of connections representing individuals who deserve consideration in a weigh-in decision (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005).

A career transition is the specific period during which individuals change their status. Greer et al. (2024) expect the transition to include the career preparation phase (learning) and identity formation phase. Young people are in the building competencies, early exploration and establishment stage of their lives (Baù et al., 2016; de Villiers Scheepers et al., 2017). The expectations and projections of young people regarding their future lives (Bussi et al., 2024) and the concrete boundaries they perceive (Braches & Elliott, 2017; De Klerk et al., 2024) are relevant to their decision-making.

Ajzen (1991) developed the theory of planned behaviour, which posits that intentions depend on belief-forming attitudes towards startups, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. Ajzen (1985) argued that people's beliefs represent information about their inner worlds, and it

follows that this information determines their behaviour. The interaction of several tipping points contributes to the success of a business startup (Stephan et al., 2015). Conditions may be attractive to some younger people, while others may find them discouraging (Christophe et al., 2024).

Schoof (2006) and Stephan et al. (2015) discussed necessity-based (NBE) and opportunity-based entrepreneurship (OBE). OBE is more prevalent than NBE in high-income countries, particularly among individuals with higher levels of education and younger populations. Stephan et al. (2015) argued that the NBE-OBE dichotomy captures only a small part of the relevant motivations. Acs et al. (2016) stated that work satisfaction is essential for entrepreneurship and may even overcome other motives. Dvouletý et al. (2018) listed demographic characteristics and socioeconomic factors, psychological factors, role models, and considerations for economic and institutional circumstances. Schoof (2006) and Stephan et al. (2015) named the following motives: achievements, challenges, learning and opportunities, independence and autonomy, income security, financial success, personal recognition and status, family, aspirations, dissatisfactions, and community (social) motivations. Henrekson (2007) found motives involved fraudulent and predatory behaviours. Underlying decision factors may include possessing the appropriate skills, knowing the right people, identifying a good opportunity, and securing financial means (Schoof, 2006). Decision-making includes doubts, concerns, and perceptions of barriers to starting a business (Stephan et al., 2015). Barriers to starting a business may include a lack of skills, work experience, finances, and networks, as well as market barriers and social attitudes (Halabinsky, 2012).

Stephan et al. (2015) highlighted that the motives for entrepreneurship differ across life phases, reflecting personal experiences and changing life circumstances. Young people, in particular, have fewer obligations related to family and economic security (Schoof, 2006; Stephan et al., 2015). Since individuals are risk-averse, the perceived possibility of failure is essential to an individual's decision to start a business (Minnity & Nardone, 2007). Brück et al. (2011) noted that extreme events may influence populations' willingness to start an entrepreneurial venture.

Family background and role models are crucial for entrepreneurship, as they help bridge the gap in entrepreneurial experience (Bosma et al., 2012). People in their social networks, media stars, and campaigns can influence young people. Bosma et al. (2012) defined the following functions of role

models: 1) inspiration and motivation, 2) increasing self-efficacy, 3) learning by example, and 4) learning by support. If people believe influential individuals and role models approve of their decision to become entrepreneurs, they are more likely to be attracted to entrepreneurship and feel more capable of pursuing it (Liñán & Chen, 2009). Social contacts can serve as tipping points for starting an opportunity-led business, particularly when collaborating with others (Stephan et al., 2015). Younger people were more likely to work in teams on their new startups than adults (OECD/EU, 2019). Cooperatives can be attractive because members can increase their financial and human capital and benefit from economies of scale (Halabinsky, 2012).

Some studies argue that the influence of gender on entrepreneurial intention is indirect (Prakash et al., 2023; Paunovic & Musial, 2024). Feminist theories (Fischer et al., 1993) suggest that gender differences in entrepreneurship can be influenced by structural conditions for men and women, as well as by their perceptions, which may lead men and women to behave differently due to varying preferences. The liberal feminist theory hypothesises that women may be deprived of essential opportunities and are subject to discrimination or misguidance. Social feminist theory emphasises the differences in social experiences. Among men and women, shared experiences are assumed to help define a group-based rationality or mode of knowing. Minniti and Nardone (2007) found that differences in personal perceptions most likely explain differences across genders in entrepreneurship behavior. Paunovic & Musial (2024) documented relevant gender differences in perceptions of financial risk and business responsibility (perceived risk was higher for women). Women may also more incorporate the “balance” aspect of the KCM model (Maineiro & Gibson, 2018).

Schoof (2006) argued that sociocultural constraints may contribute to lower women's engagement in entrepreneurship. Men and women are perceived differently as entrepreneurs, and social attitudes may discourage some women from starting businesses (OECD/EU, 2019). The perceived legitimacy of entrepreneurship, encompassing its general reputation, acceptance, and credibility, can influence people's decision to start a business (Schoof, 2006; Acs et al., 2016). Srivastava and Misra (2017) argued that women's entrepreneurship legitimacy could explain some women's intention to start a business. In developing countries, specific

conditions, such as high levels of misconduct including corruption and favouritism, imperil the acceptance of entrepreneurship (Schoof, 2006).

## Materials and Methods

Focus group discussions, used for this research, are appropriate for studying and learning about concrete situations, sharing experiences, and fostering interactions and dialogue. Participants can qualify their responses or identify important contingencies associated with their answers (Steward & Shamdasani, 2015). Research was conducted in Brno, one of the largest cities in the Czech Republic. We used purposive sampling based on definitive selection criteria, including gender and full-time university attendance (resulting in an age range of 19-25 years for most students). Most of the students come from the faculties of one university (see Table 1 for the studied fields), although some students from other universities may also participate. We recruited students through the university's research participant recruitment system and via dashboard advertising. The focus groups consisted of semi-structured interviews, concentrating on six general, open-ended questions and questions that emerged from discussions. Follow-up focus groups concentrated on respondents' developments over the past year. We conducted 22 focus group discussions with 133 participants, including 15 initial focus groups with 94 participants and seven follow-up focus groups with 39 participants. They were conducted in the autumns of 2022 and 2023.

*Table 1: Characteristics of participants*

| | Category | N Participants |
|---|---|---|
| Gender | Men | 41 |
| | Women | 53 |
| Field of Study | Management | 20 |
| | Economics (inc. public economics) | 19 |
| | Finance | 14 |
| | Social Sciences (Psychology, Sociology) | 12 |
| | Natural Sciences (Biology, Informatics) | 11 |
| | Humanities (Languages, Library studies) | 8 |
| | Regional Development | 5 |
| | Medicine | 5 |
| Total | | 94 |

*Source: Authors' work*

We used inductive qualitative content analysis (Cho & Lee, 2014; Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019; Vears & Gillam, 2022). It is a method that systematically classifies data by their similarity in meaning, identifies patterns in the data, and provides descriptions and interpretations. The researcher defines the units of analysis, meaning units, code categories, content categories, and subcategories. Analysis is conducted using a coding scheme (Schamber, 2000). The researcher does reiterative data analysis through constant comparison, testing, revision, and refinement. Researchers seek patterns that link pieces of data by similarity and bring them together, both within and across documents. Priority categories that cover the data can be divided into subcategories.

*Table 2: Coding Scheme*

| **Original themes** | **Developed themes** |
|---|---|
| Thinking about entrepreneurship, the conditions of decisions | Opportunity recognition<br>Role models and forming events<br>Difficulty of entrepreneurship and fear<br>Responsibility<br>Risks and barriers (structural constraints)<br>Social contacts<br>Economic conditions and social policy |
| Being an entrepreneur is consistent with their preferred ways of living | Motives for entrepreneurship<br>Career<br>Hobbies and personal life<br>Job alternative<br>Economic security<br>Family plans<br>Timing of entrepreneurship in the life course |
| Balance between entrepreneurial responsibilities and family life | Family model<br>Entrepreneurship flexibility<br>Care<br>Role of the partner<br>Society pressure<br>Culture |
| Perceived gender differences in becoming entrepreneurs | Explaining differences:<br>- irrelevant (no differences)<br>- children and family life<br>- motivation and aspirations<br>- traits and skills<br>- society's (people's) stance toward women |

*Source: Authors' work*

## Results

We identified four groups of students with different stances toward entrepreneurship. Categories indicated whether students had personal experience with entrepreneurship or were interested in business, and how they perceived their statuses, life plans, goals, and chosen professions. From the KCM model perspective, we found that people who lacked both interest in entrepreneurship [authenticity] and motivation for high effort [challenge] were those who denied entrepreneurship and were probably not suitable candidates for entrepreneurship.

*Table 3: Categories of respondents concerning prior stances toward entrepreneurship*

| Title | Description |
|---|---|
| Entrepreneurs | People who had already confirmed some form of longer-lasting entrepreneurship and related interests. These individuals often drew on their experiences with entrepreneurship as a reference. |
| Aspirants | People who were not currently entrepreneurs but were interested in the conditions. They had declared a relatively firm interest in starting a business and, in some cases, had already taken concrete steps to prepare for entrepreneurship. |
| Hesitating | People who had generally positive feelings towards entrepreneurship. Their visions were more general and surface-level. They were deciding whether to pursue entrepreneurship, wait, or consider ideas with friends. Although they acknowledged entrepreneurship was one of the options in their decision-making process, they were not eager to pursue it soon. |
| Refusing and neglecting | People who were relatively uninterested in entrepreneurship or strongly opposed to it. This group included individuals who had never considered starting a business and viewed themselves as unsuitable candidates for entrepreneurship due to their traits (e.g., low self-esteem) or circumstances. |

*Source: Authors' work*

### The General Impulse for Entrepreneurship

Among perceptual variables, opportunity recognition represents the most distinctive and fundamental expression of entrepreneurial behaviours (Minnity & Nardone, 2007). Opportunities could emerge as business ideas,

at an event, or from external offers. For many youths, a suitable business idea was the principal and most difficult or disqualifying condition for entrepreneurship.

> *I cannot imagine starting a business again now. However, it can quickly change if I get a brilliant idea and know how to bring it to life. If I had something, I could start in one month (FG4, woman).*

The discourse on business ideas concerns the viability of businesses in enhancing economic security and doing something enjoyable, thereby allowing self-fulfilment [authenticity]. Decision-making at the idea stage was the primary concern for some younger individuals, rather than administrative barriers, entrepreneurial plans, or financial burdens. For some, starting a business was about seizing emerging opportunities as external events or offers arose, as they had the capacity to do so, starting immediately.

Relatives and friends were crucial sources of information, feedback, and economic and emotional support. Youth described people inspiring them to pursue entrepreneurship through their approach, success, leadership, orientation, self-confidence, and courage.

> *My parents inspired me because they gradually started their business. It took a long time and was very demanding, but they succeeded and can now reap the benefits of this. Many people told them it was worthless and that they would not prosper. However, they exemplify this option and fulfil their dreams (FG12, woman).*

Students also perceived the negative, such as discouragement, after seeing parents or family members go bankrupt. They valued negative experiences as a means of gaining knowledge about what to avoid in the future. A high level of effort and difficulty in the startup process or acquiring knowledge of concrete circumstances was also a deterrent.

Specifically, students discussed periods and events (e.g., COVID-19) and generalised experiences from these events in their decision-making. Some spoke about inspiring firms or famous business owners and argued for features they (dis)liked, especially marketing, branding, social responsibility, controversies, and ethics. Another relevant source of inspiration was people on social networks, including various influencers who continue to provide video advice about entrepreneurship. Others,

however, remained sceptical towards these idols due to the unreliability and specificity of their visions.

Some students thought that people in post-socialist countries were still not sufficiently used to entrepreneurship. The state is not interested in popularising entrepreneurship, and the public perceives it negatively. People often portray some entrepreneurs as villains, crooks, and thieves. Some family members were, due to refusal of entrepreneurship and fears about their children, sceptical and unsupportive of entrepreneurship:

> *In the Czech Republic, it was not long ago that the regime restricted people from becoming entrepreneurs. Many older people have instilled those habits in their children: employment is security. When I told my family that I would be an entrepreneur, they looked at me like I was insane. It can influence younger entrepreneurs when family members tell them their ideas are entirely foolish (FG2, man).*

Entrepreneurship was interesting for young people when those in their relationships encouraged "authenticity" and "challenge" aspects related to entrepreneurship (e.g., through examples and support).

**Personal Reasons for Starting or Not Starting Entrepreneurship**

Students considered entrepreneurship alongside other opportunities, interests, and preferred future lifestyles. No university student respondent mentioned the need to become an entrepreneur for financial reasons. Students argued that the motivations for going into business are:

- money and economic advantages, to be independent, have more personal control, and not work for others,
- a sense of enjoyment in building, of ownership, and creative purposes,
- to do something sensible and fulfilling – a noble cause, added value,
- time flexibility, living preferred life, fulfilling vision and goals,

These findings mainly correspond with the authenticity aspect of the KCM model, although challenge and balance are also present. Some respondents' positive stances towards entrepreneurship were sources of intrinsic motivation, while others argued that there are other ways to make their lives meaningful.

> *I see something happening due to me, some growth and success, and this is fulfilling for most people. Plus, I can set and adjust incomes based on my capacity and economic situation, which I find interesting. Everything is based on my success, leading me further (FG14, woman).*

Students noted that entrepreneurship conflicted with their other life goals, such as having a family, travelling, or securing housing. Others described themselves as unwilling to take risks or stressed. Students felt that lowered living standards were not worth the effort. The aspects of authenticity and challenge conflicted for some, while for others, they were congruent.

Students often compared entrepreneurship with employment, but these comparisons were often inconclusive due to the complexity of the comparisons, diverse preferences, and subjective perceptions. For some younger people, what you do is more important than whether they can achieve this through traditional employment or entrepreneurship. Students reflected on the more demanding character of entrepreneurship [challenge] compared to employment, where employers handle everything administratively. While starting a business can be relatively fast and easy, maintaining it for the long term can be much more challenging. Entrepreneurial demands include a significant time investment, a high work volume, sustained financial investment, and job insecurity. Four main aspects emerged:

- Necessary high time and effort investment (less time for their family).
- Individual responsibility, obligations, and securing all things.
- The complexity and unpredictability of entrepreneurship and the fear of mistakes and losses.
- Financial factors (highly financially demanding businesses, money for equipment, and the risk of incurring debts).

Investment in entrepreneurship was seen as a matter of choice. When there was no extrinsic pressure, being an employee was a more suitable alternative, allowing for an easier life and more time [high balance]. A female participant reflected on these motives:

> *Entrepreneurship is a 24/7 issue. Even when I come home, I must think about it or look for solutions to problems. It is hard to be outside of it. Additionally, you have many responsibilities,*

> *so you are always required to work. In contrast, some jobs allow employees to come home, switch off, and care about nothing. This model is an excellent basis for caring for the family (FG10, woman).*

Another essential issue is economic security (Greer et al., 2024), which students perceive as less than in employment. Lesser security was related to the prospective field of business and discomfort; students wanted fewer risks and a more stable income. They also discussed the importance of having extra money in case of unexpected problems. Broader economic security is relevant when considering loans. It was crucial whether entrepreneurship was the primary or additional source of income, whether it was the second income in the family, and whether it provided some protection due to the partner's or parents' incomes. The main goal for both men and women was to secure their futures.

> *When I consider balancing business demands with starting a family, I find them to be incompatible. When you want to start a family, you need stability and a stable income. Someone should care for the family, and when I take all the money and start a business with a potential for loss, this is not something the family can fully appreciate versus stability, security, and a peaceful night's rest (FG4, man).*

Respondents reflected on the low feasibility and high risk of securing the family's and the business's economic future, especially during the initial stages (effort, money, care). Many respondents thought it was better or more viable to consolidate the business before starting a family [a challenge before balance]. Some respondents noted there is a gender-based difference (see below).

Younger people thought of harmonising family life and entrepreneurship. Youth must prepare for entrepreneurship by creating a stable, solid life base with a financial 'cushion'. The opinion was divided between respondents who believed that established businesses were advantageous for family life due to the increased freedom and flexibility, versus those who warned against blurring work and family life, the high time and effort investments required, and the demanding nature of business.

**Reasoning Behind the Timing of Entrepreneurship in the Life Course**

Some respondents discussed entrepreneurship from the perspective of their life course. Simultaneously studying and starting an entrepreneurial venture may lead to stressful time pressure and an increased risk of school dropout. Some students did not want to start entrepreneurship immediately after completing their education. Many younger people believe that completing their studies and gaining work experience and skills as an employee are prerequisites for entrepreneurship or finding a career that best suits them.

> *I will secure a job in a field that aligns with my business aspirations. I would spend 5-10 years there, because the theory is excellent, but you need practical experience. I would bear such a risk [entrepreneurship] when I felt stable enough in my personal life and career (FG1, man).*

This widely adopted approach was viewed as more accessible, enabling individuals to gain experience and business contacts, achieve economic security, accumulate capital for future business ventures, and postpone critical life decisions (see also Kirkwood et al., 2014; Stephen et al., 2015). The social security system conditions were relevant for some women, and from this perspective, employment was seen as an advantage [for security].

Some young people declared that the strategy is to start sooner, with limited time for business activity and capital, often combined with studying or working. This strategy was perceived as relatively more achievable, less demanding, and risk-free, providing an opportunity to assess whether it would be suitable for them or viable for securing some initial capital. Only some entrepreneurial attempts were meant to be lifetime businesses, but even these were quickly abandoned once they became unsuitable.

> *It is okay to start a business as young as possible when we have business ideas and all those things. Later, when we want to start a family and have children, the business can be an advantage rather than a burden for the family because it was established earlier (FG4, man).*

Other respondents liked having permanent entrepreneurship as a second activity. Respondents perceived this strategy as more manageable and less risky, offering greater economic security and greater life variability [authenticity]. Some people also mentioned that this strategy is viable for

women with children to return to work after maternity and parental leave [balance].

**Differences Among Students of Economics and Other Fields**

There were apparent differences among students regarding their educational backgrounds, including both high school education and university education. Most focus group participants were interested in entrepreneurship (which was probably why they decided to join the focus groups). Former Gymnasium (specific grammar school) students and university students in non-economic fields (social sciences, medicine) demonstrated much lower levels of basic economic literacy and entrepreneurial education than students in economic fields. Students who did not receive entrepreneurial education were less knowledgeable about the steps and requirements of entrepreneurship. Nevertheless, entrepreneurship education was perceived more as an advantage than as a necessity for starting an enterprise. The field of study was most relevant to students who studied to become entrepreneurs or considered entrepreneurship in their chosen professions, such as general practitioners or law consultants (compared to those whose entrepreneurship interest stemmed from hobbies or specific business ideas). Students who wanted to get practice in their fields preferred employment. Students considered whether their field of study is suitable for entrepreneurship (competition, financial, and legal requirements) – those who saw their field as unsuitable reported a need for specific knowledge, field orientation, and social capital.

**Perceived Differences Between Men and Women in Entrepreneurship**

Discussing the gender differences centred on family life, culture, and society. We noted both men and women who are more traditional family-oriented and those who are more equality-oriented. For respondents who held traditional views on family roles, this perspective shaped their perceptions and reasoning behind their attitudes; for example, men are perceived as having a greater capacity for entrepreneurship, as they are often the breadwinners, and children may be a barrier to their success [low balance].

> *Women typically stay on parental leave and prioritise family care. If a woman is considering starting a full-time entrepreneurial venture, she often thinks, 'When will I have*

*children?' I would not want to start a business soon after school because I would risk losing the money I would need to feed my family. The family influences men, but less so, since men always work and women stay home with the children. So, it is less complicated for men (FG14, woman 1).*

*I must disagree with this old family model, which I admit is still widespread. Entrepreneurship is a career path where the differences between men and women are not necessarily so apparent, as women can be entrepreneurs during maternal leave. Therefore, this should not be a barrier or negative influence on entrepreneurship. I see no difference in this; it is relatively equal (FG14, woman 2).*

Some respondents stated that gender differences are irrelevant, unacceptable, or nonexistent in certain areas. This line of argument was often also referenced in discussions about the number of men and women in entrepreneurship, or by using personal examples to overlook these differences. The argument is that the differences are primarily subjective, not gender-dependent or attributed, or that other factors are more important. Some respondents argued that perceived past changes in society had led to a diminishing of gender-based differences and discrimination. Respondents discussed the formal conditions that shape their life opinions in a way that allows for an unproblematic level of gender equality.

Some people's reasoning amounts to an implicit normative confrontation with a perceived level of traits or skills. Gupta et al. (2009) noted that traits required for entrepreneurship might be considered masculine. Respondents, for example, thought that women tend to be less proactive, more afraid, and more emotional. Men were thought to be competitive, courageous, and risk-taking.

*Women are more careful than men. They try to anticipate how things can evolve or go wrong and to prevent this from happening. Sometimes, they overthink, considering every alternative to avoid every risk. I always think of something, but then I tell myself that some aspects are foolish and the project will probably fail. I would need a more direct approach (FG10, woman).*

This issue may reflect the potential role of mindfulness and a simple orientation to results (see Van Gelderen et al., 2019). Some respondents

speculated that women are less interested or motivated to enter the business [low challenge]. The entrepreneurship environment is challenging and competitive, which may be more difficult and exhausting for women. Some respondents argued that women start businesses in different fields and for different reasons than men. Their preferences are more related to visions of a meaningful life.

> *Women look for stability and security. They would, instead, take a nine-to-five job that allows them to drop off their children at kindergarten and school, and then go to work. After work, they care for their children, husband, and the household. They do not have to consider paying employees' wages and similar things (FG2, man).*

According to some women, men have a higher degree of perceived authority, and women experience a lower level of general respect. For women, gaining respect from subordinates or securing good entrepreneurial positions in male-dominated fields is more challenging. One woman noted that women's position is also dependent on society's general stance on acceptable roles. Women can be less successful due to stereotypes and discrimination, which lead to low customer trust, or they must work harder to overcome these obstacles. Students discussed the concept of gender fit and gender-specific communication among women, which may offer advantages in certain fields. One of the respondents noted that there are fewer inspiring examples of businesswomen as role models.

> *Women are raised to be more empathetic and make more compromises. Moreover, they may step aside in the question of the family and prioritise it, even if they would like to work more or climb to the top of their career. However, it is still uncommon to see women in top positions in our society (FG12, woman).*

Such opinions may influence women's stances on the value of entrepreneurship. Braches and Elliot (2017) commented on potential gender bias in entrepreneurial discourse and the associated risks of subordination or of being perceived as subordinate (see ibid., p. 538).

Elley-Brown et al. (2018) argued that the context-dependent family model was highly relevant to a concrete family strategy. Family was something mostly hoped for, natural, preferred, or acceptable. Both men and women saw combining entrepreneurship and family as demanding and influenced by unpredictable changes. Entrepreneurship and pregnancy

(small children) do not go well together [challenge vs. balance]. Others, in contrast, provided positive examples of women who had managed it. Still, this was usually not a preferred strategy. The ability to harmonise work and family life depended on the partner's stance, common work-family strategy, and couples' negotiations of suitable common tactics vis-à-vis partner involvement. Male partners may feel more distressed when they see their entrepreneurial partners' success and the high level of effort they put into it.

Many respondents expected women to be more involved in decision-making regarding children and care. Some women spoke about the situations (especially early motherhood) when they felt they could not or did not want to work or switch roles with their partner [authenticity]. Women must consider family situations and household duties more, face more complex choices, temporarily prioritise children's needs over entrepreneurial responsibilities, and have shorter life spans for entrepreneurial opportunities [a challenge in balance].

Some women felt pressured by their close relatives or even by society [authenticity vs. subjective norm]. They described the society's stance as the discourse of the raven mother, the cuckoo mother, or the cat mother. Women perceived this as symbolic inequality, primarily because the exact behaviour of men and women is assessed differently.

> *Comments come not only from unfamiliar people but also from relatives: What a mother is, one who chases after her career and does not care for her children; she puts it away as soon as it is possible to be an entrepreneur. I wish society would see it differently. Mothers who raise children and those who lead businesses are not against each other or mutually exclusive; their children should not be pitied (FG10, woman).*

Some women respondents disagreed on the problematic relationship between entrepreneurship and motherhood. They perceived entrepreneurship as advantageous due to its flexibility in activities and time, and its ability to delegate business roles [balance]. This flexible approach was related to the aforementioned strategies of starting a business sooner or on a smaller scale, or entrepreneurship as a supplementary income. Some respondents stated that women can avoid discrimination in entrepreneurship.

Some younger people argued that the gender differences were based on the perceived division of gender roles. The position of women can be changed and made easier when society culturally accepts women more as

working or entrepreneurs. Other students claimed that women could be entrepreneurs with men's partial involvement in childcare and dividing family obligations, or that women and men could flexibly swap their roles.

## Conclusion

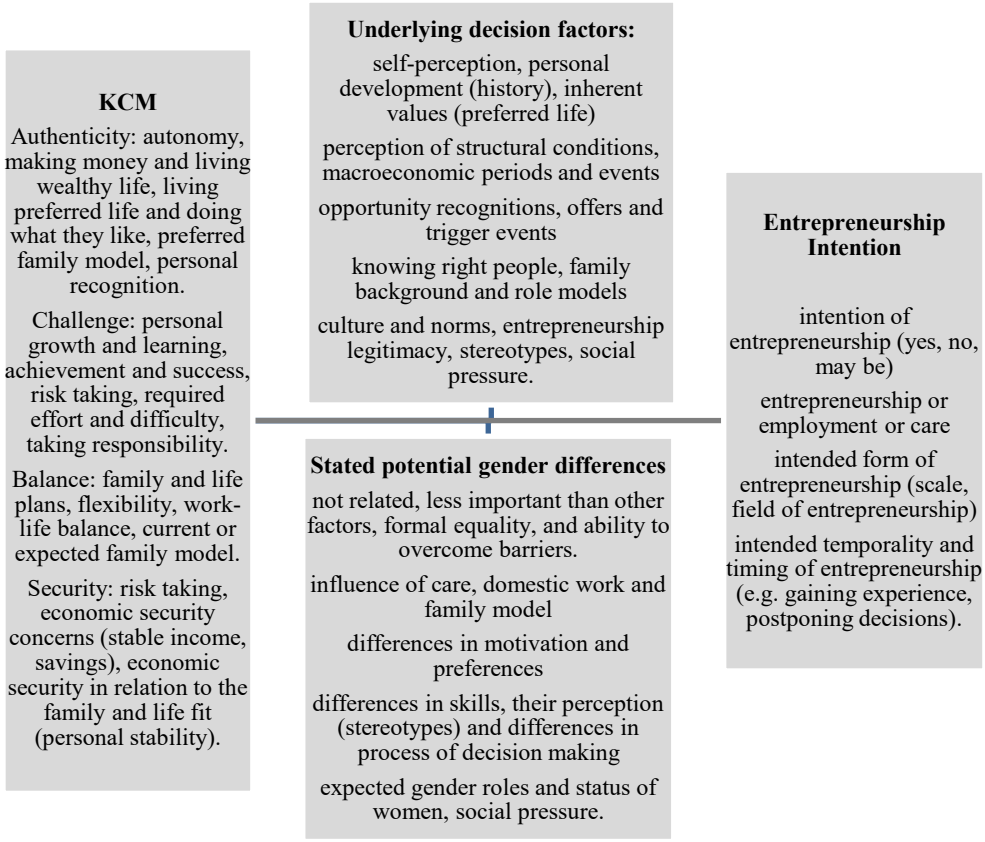
This article focuses on the factors that university students consider when contemplating entrepreneurship. The specific scientific contribution lies in linking entrepreneurship decisions to the Kaleidoscope model proposed by Mainiero and Sullivan (2005), as presented in Scheme 1. Authenticity, balance, challenge, and security are interrelated in decisions across the domains of employment, entrepreneurship, and personal and family life. KCM aspects were relevant at both the normative and day-to-day practice levels, as well as at contemporary and projective levels. In some cases, they were clearly in conflict, leading to dilemmas that necessitated, e.g., choosing an alternative approach or postponing entrepreneurship decisions.

Almost all discussed entrepreneurship was driven by opportunity and intrinsic positive forces (see also Dhar et al. 2022). Respondents were more willing to try entrepreneurship when they had a good business idea and a supportive environment, when entrepreneurship aligned with their interests or career plans, when they perceived it as not too demanding, and when they believed it was the right time to start. Youth also considered their career aspirations, the fields they chose to study, investment preferences, and economic factors. When directly asked about gender differences, students noted that formal conditions for entrepreneurship are the same. However, they saw the differences in personal motives and culturally determined expectations. Some women identified the responsibilities embedded in the web of relationships as a primary driver of their perceptions. The practical fit with their current or proposed life, including expected family and care situations, leads women to prefer entrepreneurship or employment. It may also explain the characteristics of planned business ventures.

The article explains, in the context of the Czech Republic, how perceptions of social norms regarding family can both encourage and discourage entrepreneurial intentions. We conclude that, for our respondents (specifically women), this factor was most pronounced in both their reflections on gender differences and their personal career plans, compared to other factors such as field of study, entrepreneurial training, and legal

conditions. The role of social norms can be context-dependent and may not function similarly across countries (Rahman et al., 2022). The findings of our study can be beneficial for entrepreneurship training. The potential for an invention lies in developing mindfulness skills, an entrepreneurial focus, and a simple goal orientation among students, which can support entrepreneurial intention (Van Gelderen et al., 2019; Prakash et al., 2023). Additionally, the discussion of entrepreneurship and work-life balance can enhance reflexivity and entrepreneurial intention among future entrepreneurs.

*Scheme 1: Key research categories derived from analysis.*




*Source: Authors' work*

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