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Entrepreneurship, Gender, Innovation, Technology

Overview

Women are underrepresented in successful entrepreneurial ecosystems and a persistent gender bias continues to exist in entrepreneurship discourse and practice. GENRE aims to address this, by providing a nuanced understanding of how gender is a decisive factor, i.e., how women and men are influenced by and, in turn, influence entrepreneurial ecosystems differently. In other words, our objective is to investigate the extent to which entrepreneurship ecosystems support or hinder women's technology entrepreneurship. In order to achieve this, GENRE focused on a specific facet of gender in entrepreneurship: namely women's technology entrepreneurship and how this relates to accepted femininity and masculinity norms in different contexts.

Progress outcomes

The research carried out in GENRE project has resulted in de-novo knowledge that is of relevance to a variety of end-users across several stakeholder groups (policy community, business and in particular, entrepreneurial, community, the academic community, and society at large).

Team members

	Woman	Man	Other
Gender balance in the whole consortium	8 (73%)	3 (27%)	0 (0%)
Presence of women as lead researchers/PIs	6 (85%)	1 (15%)	0 (0%)
Gender Experts in the team	6 (75%)	2 (25%)	0 (0%)
Subsequent team members trained (Gender equality and/or IGAR)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

Contribution to the achievement of UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Underlying most regional entrepreneurship and innovation ecosystem frameworks is the assumption that all entrepreneurs have equal access to resources, participation, and support, as well as an equal chance of a successful outcome (i.e., venture start-up). However, women are underrepresented in successful entrepreneurial ecosystems and a persistent gender bias continues to exist in entrepreneurship discourse and practice. As an example, the UN STG on Gender states that women suffer from "disadvantages in education [which] translate into lack of access to skills and limited opportunities in the labour market".

Our findings address this, by providing a nuanced understanding of how gender is a decisive factor, i.e., how women and men are influenced by and, in turn, influence entrepreneurial ecosystems differently. In order to achieve this, we focused on a specific facet of gender in entrepreneurship: namely women's technology entrepreneurship and how this relates to accepted femininity and masculinity norms in different cultural contexts.

Our cross-cultural comparison between Ireland, Sweden, Norway, and Israel thus helps to explain variations and similarities with regard to gender in entrepreneurship and innovation ecosystem frameworks. The findings generated will inform policy development aimed at inclusivity and sustainability, thus benefiting both women and men. In so doing, we align with SDG 5 and SDG 9.

Differences/inequalities between women and men highlighted by the project

Gender inequality and incubation: gender inequality may be implicit, or even unintentional, a “grey zone”, an experience that is difficult to locate and identify. This implicit discrimination is reflected in male dominance, boys club and women feeling obliged to do the caring work in incubators.

Processes and practices within the incubator: in the Scandinavian countries the formal selection process generally takes precedence. Israel’s ecosystem appears to have the most formal entry requirement procedures selection process. Irish incubator selection processes are a mixture of formal and informal. The Irish data specifically suggested that the physical structure of the incubator, such as its “openness” and “friendliness” may influence gender distribution within the incubator.

Challenging the male norm: a reinforcing set of assumptions genders the image of the typical technology entrepreneur – he is male. Some female founders experienced inappropriate comments about their physical appearance and femaleness and referred to not being taken seriously, experiencing issues with mansplaining and more generally being treated in a patronising manner.

Women founders negotiating risk: women founders partake in individualized risk assessment to determine the impact of entrepreneurial decisions on their family responsibilities. There were also some preliminary insights to denote that women may deliberate about this issue differently depending on their age and life stage. Some of female founders suggested that entrepreneurship can also generate a lack of security.

Positive impact of the project on gender equality/scientific evidence on gender in the field

GENRE has advanced knowledge on the ways in which actors’ micro-practices and institutional mechanisms within entrepreneurship and innovation ecosystems are gendered.

It has provided new knowledge on how business incubation is gendered, including the emotional labour by incubator staff and how founders relate and respond to the services and programs they take part in;

It has also highlighted how gendered aspects of funding and decision-making are problematized, including relations between funders and founders.

Finally, it has underscored new and emerging personas and discourses around technology entrepreneurship (e.g., intersectional, social focus) from a gender perspective.

In short, the GENRE project has advanced knowledge on the drivers for institutional change and factors that impact on policy implementation.

Socio-economic impact; involvement of policy makers/civil society

Given that a key element of the GENRE project is close collaboration with policymakers so that the knowledge generated will lead to improved policy development and focused measures, strong relationships with policymakers have been nurtured in the four partner countries from the outset which have facilitated the transfer new knowledge and evidence to policymakers. For example, the report from WP1 was disseminated to the four Enterprise agencies in the participating countries and a webinar took place (Dec, 2020) to further disseminate the results of this report and to ignite further conversations. DCU (the lead PI’s University) launched a press release to coincide with the launch of this report, thus stimulating wider societal engagement with the results of the GENRE project. Furthermore, representatives from the four Enterprise agencies in the participating countries attended the series of WP4 workshops and the Diana Impact Day (22nd of June 2022). Furthermore, Prof McAdam met with Minister Troy – the then Minister of State at the Irish Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and his team to discuss the GENRE project on the 9th of August 2022.