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Entrepreneurship as career choice of Russian students: the role of university education, cultural traditions, and gender stereotypes

Olga Tabachnikova¹ · Natalia Vinokurova²

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Abstract

In this paper, based on our own recent sociological survey of more than 800 students of 15 Russian universities, we explore the views of Russian students regarding entrepreneurship as their possible choice of a future career. We are interested above all in the role of university education in shaping these views. However, in order to scrutinize this role to full extent, we place our study in the broader framework of national cultural traditions which constitute an integral contributing factor and underlying influence not only in educational, but also in the general existential realm. In this context, we argue that a substantial impact on the students' future career choice is made by existing gender differences based on the stereotypes of the 'typically male' and 'female' employment fields. Our study demonstrates, in particular, that Russian students display—notably, just as the older generation of educated Russians too—a noticeable conservatism in their career choices (including entrepreneurial aspirations), by adhering to the traditional cultural values and gender perceptions. We also provide a nuanced analysis of the motivations and expectations associated with choosing an entrepreneurial career by our respondents. Our method of collecting information is chosen to be questionnaire-based—as most effective for descriptive research—which is then complemented by further qualitative analytics intended to reveal hidden causal connections. Our approach is interdisciplinary, as it combines sociological research methods with socio-economic and culturological analysis.

Keywords Russian students · Entrepreneurship · Universities · The role of traditional values · Sociological research

Extended author information available on the last page of the article

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Introduction

Laurence Harrison and Samuel Huntington in their work ‘Culture Matters: How Values Shape Human Progress’ (2001) reiterate assertions made by Richard Lewis in his book ‘When Cultures Collide’ (1996), as well as Edward and Mildred Hall (1983), Geert Hofstede (1980), and others, namely—that culture counts most in economic development (and not the other way round). This is echoed by the claim of the prominent Russian writer Fazil Iskander (2004) that economics as such is not a foundation of our life, it is secondary, while what is primary comprises our moral compass and outlook, our spiritual values. Iskander deems it to be the main mistake of Marxist theory—its belief that economics is the basis, while everything else including culture is the superstructure. He compares Marx with Dostoevsky in favour of the latter as being closer to the authentic human nature. Indeed, Marx believed that man is programmed by his economic and social status, while Dostoevsky claimed that man with atheistic conscience is a creature striving to fulfil his own unrestrained will, regardless of his material status. These considerations lead us to the conclusion that, when dealing with economic issues, cultural values and civilizational differences are of vital importance.

At the same time, as Sergei Averintsev (2005) notes, ‘the archetypal in itself is not a meaningful characteristic of phenomena, but only their abstract formal structuring’. Moreover, ‘an overestimation of the value of cultural constants [...] is an epistemological error’. And yet, having made certain reservations, Averintsev proceeds directly to discussing Russian cultural constants!

Similar claims of the importance and validity of concepts such as national character and cultural identity, civilizational differences as such, can be found in Western scholarly tradition as well—in the earlier studies by Margaret Mead (1951), Geoffrey Gorer and John Rickman (1949), Henry Dicks (1952) and other social scientists, to name but a few, who link culture with psychology and nation-building. The emergence of terms such as ‘cultural identity’, ‘modal personality’, ‘collective unconscious’ and ‘ethnic mentality’, in addition to the notorious ‘national character’, basically results from the attempts to bind together in a meaningful way the subjective and objective (Etkind, 2018 [1996]).

In the light of this, in many of our previous studies, we argued for the prevalence of conservative values and certain cultural continuity in the Russian context, and its crucial impact on the economic life of contemporary Russia (see, for instance, Tabachnikova and Vinokurova, 2018, 2020, 2021, 2023). At the same time, certain breaks and gradual cultural shifts, as a response to globalization, were also observed (Ibidem).

Research methodology and study sample

It will now be demonstrated how our own sociological study of Russian university students in terms of their intention to go into entrepreneurship and to open their own business correlates with the Russian ideological-cultural framework, and what role university education plays in this process.

Our sociological survey was conducted in the academic year 2018–19 among the students of five Russian cities: Moscow, Voronezh, Astrakhan, Tver, and Tyumen. The sample included 15 state universities. The total sample size is 816 respondents.

When selecting cities, we took into account the population size and the presence of federal state educational institutions of higher education in the city. First of all, the main state universities in regional centres were selected as partner universities.

So, as a result, the following cities were selected:

1. Moscow is a metropolis where five universities are involved in the survey: Moscow State University named after M.V. Lomonosov, Russian Economic University named after G.V. Plekhanov, Russian State Agrarian University—Moscow Agricultural Academy named after K.A. Timiryazev, Diplomatic Academy of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and State Academic University for the Humanities.
2. Voronezh is a city with over a million inhabitants. Voronezh State University and Voronezh State Technical University took part in the survey.
3. Tyumen is a city that is among the cities with a population of 500 thousand to 1 million inhabitants. Tyumen State University was examined.
4. Astrakhan is also one of the cities with a population of 500 thousand to 1 million people. Five universities were surveyed: Astrakhan State University, Astrakhan branch of the Russian Academy of National Economy and Public Administration, Astrakhan branch of the International Law Institute (Moscow), Astrakhan State Technical University, Astrakhan State University of Architecture and Civil Engineering.
5. Tver represents a city with a population of 100 to 500 thousand people. Tver State Technical University and Tver State University took part in the survey.

In each university included in the study, a multi-stage quota sample was used, taking into account the age and gender of students, the course of study, and the nature of their specialties. When constructing the questionnaire, the method of control questions was used, when different questions addressed the same topic, but from different angles. This technique makes it easier to interpret the survey results.

The specialties included a broad variety: mathematics, engineering, computer science, physics, economics (including business studies), biology, philosophy, psychology, history, philology and Law.

The questionnaire consists of 32 questions. One part of the questionnaire includes questions regarding students' career plans, their assessments of the attractiveness of various types of activities, and motivations for choosing a place of work.

Table 1 Students' preferences regarding the most attractive type of work for them (% of respondents who chose the appropriate type of work),
Source: the results of our own research

Type of work	Female respondents	Male respondents
Organizational	18.0	15.1
Analytical	7.5	9.9
Managerial	16.4	20.4
Academic	21.1	5.0
Related to communication (with clients, partners, etc.)	18.0	14.0
Related to technology, industry	2.6	15.4
Art related	10.8	8.5
Information technology related	5.0	10.7
Other	0.6	1.0

Most of the questions are devoted to the attitude of students to entrepreneurship in general, their ideas about the work of entrepreneurs, about the personal qualities necessary to achieve success in entrepreneurial activity, about what seems most attractive in the work of an entrepreneur for respondents personally, in what industry they would like to work as an entrepreneur, whom they would like to have as business partners, as well as their intentions and capabilities to engage in entrepreneurship. (The current paper is based primarily on this part of the questionnaire.)

A large section of the questionnaire consists of the socio-demographic characteristics of the students themselves. In addition to the usual questions regarding gender, age, specialty (the set of specialties coincides with the classification used in the GUESSS project), academic success, educational programme, financial situation of the family, and parents' occupations, this section also includes questions that are not standard for this type of research. For example, about ways of spending your free time or about your favourite books.

In addition, the developers of the questionnaire conducted about 20 interviews with students who expressed a desire to talk about the topics of the questionnaire, about their own or family experience of entrepreneurship, and explain their answers to the questions of the questionnaire. This greatly assisted the authors in interpreting the results.

The research methodology is described in more detail in (Vinokurova, 2023) and (Gavrilets, 2023).

Results of our sociological study of Russian students

Gender aspect of the study

The purpose of the study was to identify the interests and preferences of students (both male and female) in relation to their future work. The first question concerned the preferred type of work (see Table 1).

As can be seen, female students, to a much greater extent than male students, deem academic activity as the most attractive, but, at the same time, technology and industry related jobs are much more attractive for male students rather than female students. By the same token, female students also recognize work related to art as the most appealing (and view it as an interesting and creative career). At the same time, the female respondents do not strive to become leaders, but they do like organizational and academic work. Notably, such choices largely correspond to the existing gender stereotypes.

In terms of motivations, when choosing a job after graduation, female students deem most important to be able to develop as a person. Moreover, female students more than male students are interested in helping people.

Female students also prefer to spend their free time on cultural activities: going to cinema, theatre, and exhibitions. This choice was made by 17.6% of female students and only 13.8% of male students. 9% of female students and only 7.4% of male students are ready to spend their free time reading. This squares up with the female students' tendency to go into the field of culture.

When asked what our respondents would like to do if they chose an entrepreneurial career, the answers were also instructive—see Table 2 below.

The presence of gender differences in the views of male students and female students was one of the hypotheses, the confirmation of which was supposed to be obtained from the results of the study. It turned out that the majority of students oriented towards entrepreneurship in the future are young men (56.0%). Among female students, 39.9% are hoping to be future entrepreneurs. This practically corresponds to the existing state of affairs. According to the Federal Tax Service, women in 2021 made up 40.3% of the number of entrepreneurs in small- and medium-sized

Table 2 Students' preferences in choosing a field of activity if they intend to become entrepreneurs (% of respondents who chose the appropriate type of work) *Source:* the results of our own research

Possible answers	Female students	Male students
Trade	22.5	20.8
Repair, Building construction	4.7	9.0
Domestic services	3.2	3.0
Real estate activity	4.7	2.7
Information Technology	7.9	10.5
Education	13.2	4.5
Healthcare	3.4	2.7
Oil industry	5.3	8.2
Car maintenance	2.5	9.6
Entertainment, leisure	24.8	15.8
Industrial production	3.5	8.5
Scientific developments	4.3	4.7

businesses.¹ It is not surprising that when answering the question ‘What will you be guided by when choosing a job after graduation?’ such a motive as ‘creating your own business’ was rated much lower by female students than by male students. At the same time, when choosing a job, young men also rated the opportunity to ‘work with advanced technologies’ or ‘develop the idea of a new product’ higher. Female students are thus less inclined to innovation activities in general. The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) 2023 report says that this situation needs to be overcome: ‘More attention needs to be paid to women who start and develop high-growth, innovative and large-market businesses’.² A large gender difference is also observed in the choice of the desired types of entrepreneurship in the event if students decide to take it up. As we can see, young men prefer entrepreneurship in ‘male industries’: car maintenance, oil industry, industrial production, repair and construction. Information technology also featured as a ‘male’ occupation. On the other hand, 13.2% of female students and only 4.5% of male students would like to do business in such a ‘female sphere’ as education. A large gender difference is also observed among those wishing to engage in entrepreneurial activities in the field of entertainment and leisure (24.8% of female students and 15.8% of male students).

Since cultural and leisure organizations can be both non-profit and fully commercial, those female students who are inclined towards entrepreneurial leisure and entertainment activities can found centres for the aesthetic education of children, organize tourist trips, craft clubs, and so on.

For female students, education came second (it was chosen by 13.2% of female respondents and by 4.5% of male ones). Female students in general showed a penchant for the humanities. Thus, when asked about preferences in working with new technologies, 22.9% of female students versus only 9.2% of male students chose socio-humanitarian technologies. But information technology, as was mentioned, turned out to be more preferable for young men. In our later study of students in the city of Dubna, it was revealed that more male students chose such specialties as ‘Information and Communication Technologies’ and ‘Artificial Intelligence’, whereas more female students went for such specialties as ‘Design’ and ‘Economics’. That is, the same correlation between gender of the students and their subject choice was discovered. It is also interesting that, despite a substantial gap between young men’s and women’s desire to do research in academia (as follows from Table 1), when talking about entrepreneurship, there was practically an equal proportion of male and female youngsters who would be keen to start their own business based on scientific research (see Table 2). Also, both female students and male students show substantial and almost equal interest to the field of trade (22.5% of female students and 20.8% of male students). Apparently, trade is chosen as being, in their opinion, the most familiar business observed on a daily basis.

¹ The Federal Tax Service assessed the number of women in small businesses—RBC <https://www.rbc.ru/rbcfreenews/6041f52b9a79478445dfd914?ysclid=lvse3neu8595633942> (accessed 01.05.2024).

² GEM Global Entrepreneurship Monitor <https://www.gemconsortium.org/reports/womens-entrepreneurship> (accessed 01.05.2024).

Thus, it turned out that young people show noticeable conservatism in their choice of activities, following traditional ideas about masculine and feminine. This is confirmed in the works of NAFI (2020), Tabachnikova and Vinokurova (2021), and others. At the same time, we found that women agree to lower wages than men in order to work in their preferred ‘female’ field.

Notably, these gender-biased views of Russian students regarding entrepreneurship (as well as other career choices), square up quite neatly with the advice of the prominent Russian academics concerning possible future professions for the young generation. This follows from our other survey conducted amongst leading Russian academics, who displayed the same gender-bias as the younger generation, with men advising traditionally ‘male’ professions, while women went for the ‘female’ ones.³ If we bear in mind that these respondents being leading Russian academics essentially set the agenda of university education in Russia, we can see why the conservative views in gender sphere perpetuate down the generations, and prove stronger than globalizational tendencies.

Culturological and socio-economic aspects of the study

However, if we turn from the gender aspect to the culturological and socio-economic one, we can see a less conservative attitude on the part of our student respondents regarding their plans to open their own business upon graduation from the university. In other words, a certain shift in perspective could be observed in comparison with the views on personal wealth and economic prosperity in general, traditional for the pre-revolutionary and then Soviet periods of Russian history, where romantic attitudes prevailed in one form or another.

Thus, traditionally, Russian economists of the late 19th—early twentieth centuries were characterized by universalism in their approach to the analysis of economic phenomena, by social orientation, by transcending the strictly economic field of research to the field of philosophy, and by attempts to subordinate political economy to the ethical principles of Christianity. Most extreme of them, like, for instance, Russian thinker Vasily Rozanov (2008), in his indignation at the ideas of material gains, went so far as to deny economic progress in general, declaring a ‘normal’ life to be a life ‘with poverty and labour’, ‘with prayer, heroism and without even thinking of becoming rich’! The Soviet era continued to cultivate a selfless attitude to individualistic wealth, and produced films like ‘Nine Days in One Year’ (1962), professing scientific daring, and mankind’s dreams of exploring the limits of human capabilities to be far superior to any personal material gains.

Moreover, earlier studies revealed that numerous Russian economists still adhered to the old traditional lines which have divided Russian nation for centuries into two large camps—of Slavophiles and Westernisers, where the former continued

³ The results of the corresponding study, based on a questionnaire survey of leading scientists, are presented in the article: Varshavsky A.E., Vinokurova N.A., Kochetkova E.V. (2020). ‘Scientists’ ideas about which professions are most suitable for their children and grandchildren’. *Population*, vol. 23, No. 1, pp. 119–134.

to believe in selfless endeavour for the common good (continuing the ideas of *sobornost'*), while the latter showed more rational inclinations, focussing more on the individual than the collective (see, for example, (Chernavsky, 2012), as well as various other interviews referred to in (Tabachnikova & Vinokurova, 2023)).

Indeed, quite Slavophile ideas are present among the conservative-minded part of Russian economists, who believe that Western economic models are incompatible with the Russian context, primarily due to the discrepancy between the key life values of the two systems. At the same time, the liberal wing of the Russian economy, which carried out the reforms of the 1990s according to Western models, ideologically corresponds precisely to the Westernizing trend. But there are also so-called centrists who advocate a reasonable (rational) unification of both Westernizing and Slavophile ideas. At the same time, a paradoxical fact emerged: some of our respondents repeated almost verbatim the ideas of either the Westernizing or Slavophile camp of the first half of the nineteenth century, without, as it turned out, being specialists in the history of these two movements.

That is, the adherents of these ideas (in economics) on both sides of the barricades, unfamiliar with the teachings of the founders of Westernism and Slavophilism in Russia, nevertheless seem to unconsciously follow these historically given lines. So, the continuity of value choice apparently determines the corresponding worldview and ideology. For behind their economic choice, there is essentially a discussion of fundamental life values.

Professing these values is proven in practice as well. Thus, for example, demonstrating what he defends as Russian values, the famous econophysicist D.S. Chernavsky⁴ refused a real million euros (see Chernavsky, 2012). Chernavsky, who spoke most radically in the conservative vein of the above-mentioned debate between Westerners and Slavophiles on economics, saw the reason for the socio-economic crisis in Russia in the fact that 'in 1991 there was an attempt to impose Western civilization on Russia' (Chernavsky, 2016), which, in his opinion, does not correspond at all to the Russian mentality. In an interview for the 'Oral History' project, he talked about how he won a million euros by participating in a TV programme about science. 200 leading Russian scientists from different fields of knowledge took part in it. The best one was promised this million. Moreover, since it was something like a show, it was supposed to demonstrate 'how scientists will fight over a million'. Our respondent, having received a million, divided it equally among all programme participants. He is confident that he acted, although irrationally, but appropriately/correctly: 'That million that I divided—I think I did the right thing, yes. This raised the spirit of scientists by showing that scientists are scientists. Not all of them are hucksters and businessmen... In the community called 'scientists' the friendship parameter was increased. Yes, the solidarity parameter has been increased. And this is important, I think, for the scientific community' (Chernavsky, 2012). Independently

⁴ Dmitry Sergeevich Chernavsky (1926–2016) was a chief researcher at the Physical Institute named after P. N. Lebedeva of the RAS, Higher Doctor of Physical and Mathematical Sciences, Professor, one of the founders of the field of 'econophysics.' Winner of the competition 'For the best explanation of key issues of the structure of the world' (2004), a television programme with a prize fund of 1 million euros.

Table 3 Distribution of answers to the question: ‘What aspects of having your own business may be the most important for you personally?’ (Check no more than three answers) (as a percentage of the number of answers). *Source:* the results of our own research

Possible answers	Astrakhan	Voronezh	Moscow	Tver	Tyumen
Stable income	28.1	23.7	26.2	28.2	24.8
Securing the future of your children, the opportunity to pass on your business to them	19.7	23.7	17.8	21.9	16.0
Working for yourself, not for someone else	17.6	17.5	19.9	16.9	19.2
Opportunity for continuous self-development	17.7	23.7	20.9	16.9	18.4
Opportunity to earn money quickly	8.6	5.3	4.8	8.2	9.6
Recognition and respect from others	5.9	2.6	8.3	6.3	6.4
Other (what exactly?)	0.2	1.7	0.7	1.2	2.4
Not sure	2.3	1.7	1.4	0.4	3.2

of Chernavsky, other academics came up with similar ideas, condemning monetary stimulants in scientific research, and, like Grigory Perelman, refusing prestigious cash prizes.

Attitude of Russian students to entrepreneurship

However, as many studies have shown (see, for instance, Belmi (2016), Vinokurova (2021 and 2022), Shirokova (2019), Kokh (2019), Ovsianikov (2015), Zernov (2015)), and our research also confirms, the grip of globalization on Russian society and the shifts of socio-economic attitudes in the post-Soviet years towards the West and what can be called the ‘Western material values’ have been substantial. As mentioned above, this revealed itself in our study of Russian students in relation to their intentions to open their own business.

The results for this section are presented in the tables below in the context of all five cities included in the sample. Their goal is to demonstrate the attitude of modern Russian students to entrepreneurship, their ideas about entrepreneurship, motivation, and readiness to start entrepreneurial activities in the near or distant future (Tables 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8).

As we can see from Table 3, the main reason for doing business is to generate income. This motivation comes first in all the studied cities. Astrakhan and Tver are poorer cities, and the desire to get a stable income for students there is more important than in Moscow. Also, students from cities with a population of over a million are more interested in self-development, with Muscovites wanting recognition and respect more than others. But generally, comparing results across the cities and exploring the reasons for these differences is still in progress, and constitutes in itself a separate large study.

The fact that the most important result of entrepreneurial activity for students in all cities is the opportunity to receive a stable income indicates that their understanding about the nature of entrepreneurship is still poor, as they do not

Table 4 Distribution of answers to the question: 'If you ever wanted to start your own business, what would you be prepared to do for this?' (Check no more than 3 options) (as a percentage of the number of answers) *Source:* the results of our own research

Possible answers	Astrakhan	Voronezh	Moscow	Tver	Tyumen
Master the university programme well	8.7	3.8	4.3	6.7	4.6
Master the subjects which an entrepreneur needs (finance, management, etc.)	29.8	30.2	30.0	27.1	29.9
Work hard and intently/intensely/for long hours	23.8	26.4	26.3	23.2	28.6
Risk your money (including the money of your family and friends, if they help you)	5.6	5.0	11.9	10.4	7.1
Give up entertainment, etc., for the period of business formation	14.5	15.1	12.3	14.6	11.7
Avoid large purchases, etc., for the period of business formation	15.8	18.9	14.6	17.1	15.6
Other	1.8	0.6	0.6	0.9	2.6

Table 5 Distribution of answers to the question: ‘By what criteria, in your opinion, should entrepreneurs choose a field of activity?’ (Check no more than 3 options) (in percentages) *Source:* the results of our own research

Possible answers	Astrakhan	Voronezh	Moscow	Tver	Tyumen
Opportunity to earn money quickly	7.3	1.3	2.4	5.6	6.3
Stable income	15.4	7.9	9.2	16.9	12.0
Having work experience in the chosen field	14.3	15.8	12.8	14.5	14.6
Having ideas for business development in this area	20.6	22.4	23.3	20.1	20.9
Constant demand for products (services) of this type of activity	19.9	24.3	20.8	19.2	20.2
Being well-connected in this field	6.8	6.6	8.8	7.7	3.8
If your abilities and interests match this type of activity	12.2	17.1	20.0	12.1	14.6
Low requirements for having a starting capital	3.4	4.6	2.7	3.0	6.3
Other	0	0	0	0.9	1.3

Table 6 Distribution of answers to the question: ‘Do you personally have any ideas currently for entrepreneurial activity?’ (in percentages) *Source:* the results of our own research

Possible answers	Astrakhan	Voronezh	Moscow	Tver	Tyumen
Yes, I have	24.7	23.2	25.1	18.0	17.7
Yes, but they are still quite vague	35.4	39.3	42.2	50.8	33.9
No	38.1	37.5	30.6	28.7	45.2
I’m already an entrepreneur	1.8	0.0	2.1	2.5	3.2

Table 7 Distribution of answers to the question: ‘How likely is it that you personally will become an entrepreneur?’ (in percentages) *Source:* the results of our own research

Possible answers	Astrakhan	Voronezh	Moscow	Tver	Tyumen
After graduation: high	13.7	11.5	12.1	7.0	13.0
After graduation: medium	40.1	44.2	38.1	46.5	24.0
After graduation: low	46.2	44.2	49.8	46.5	63.0

appreciate how it is associated with risks, and how difficult it is to receive a stable income, especially for a beginning entrepreneur. Firstly, this can be explained by the fact that our respondents are still very young (93% are respondents aged 17 to 22 years, only 1.4% are over 25 years old). They have little life experience. Secondly, this means that students do not receive adequate knowledge about entrepreneurship at university.

Table 8 Distribution of answers to the question: ‘Does your university support youth entrepreneurship?’ (as a percentage of the number of answers). *Source:* the results of our own research

Possible answers	Astrakhan	Voronezh	Moscow	Tver	Tyumen
Yes, there is a special course in business	8.7	5.1	2.4	5.7	8.7
Yes, the university already has a student business company	2.3	5.1	1.2	1.6	2.9
Yes, competitions for the best student business projects are held	9.5	5.1	3.3	6.4	20.4
Yes, there are other forms of support	10.9	3.4	5.4	4.8	7.2
I don’t know anything about such possibilities	35.0	49.1	46.1	50.8	18.8
I am sure that the university does not have any forms of support for entrepreneurship	6.8	5.1	13.4	4.1	5.8
Not sure	26.8	27.1	28.2	26.6	36.2

Table 4 suggests that the students at least say that they are prepared to work hard, and they understand the need to master the relevant subjects necessary for entrepreneurship.

From Table 5, it is evident that our respondents choose their future business sensibly—not because of the immediate profit, but because of the opportunities for further development. Also, students place a fairly high value to matching their interests and abilities with their business topic.

As we can see from Table 6, students are thinking about entrepreneurship and already have some ideas, even if their ideas are not very realistic and more resemble dreams. Still, such sentiments towards entrepreneurship can be regarded as a positive phenomenon. If/When these students encounter congenial conditions, some of them might go into business.

Table 7 shows that students understand that currently business conditions are generally bad and do not hope to become entrepreneurs quickly. This was distinctly visible from the interviews. Still, they believe in the future of entrepreneurship. Moreover, Russian students value the career of an entrepreneur even higher than students from other countries.⁵ This once again confirms that young people are becoming increasingly closer to ‘Western’ ideas about economics.

Students’ attitudes towards the opportunity to work with foreigners.

A certain shift towards globalization was also manifested in the fact that many students in big cities would like to do business with foreign partners. Among Muscovites there are 23% of such cases, among Voronezh residents—22%. However, in Tver, the smallest city in our sample, only 12% want to work with foreigners. Among the Muscovites, the majority of those who want to work with foreign partners hope

⁵ See GUESS 2021_RU.pdf at <https://docs.yandex.ru/docs/view?tm=1714652833&tld=r> (accessed 01.05.2024).

to receive investment (38.8%). However, 33.5% expect to receive new technologies, and 18.5% would like to adopt Western management culture.

The first conclusions from the analysis of students' attitudes towards entrepreneurship:

1. Money is now the most important thing for students.
2. Students want to work for themselves.
3. They value such personal characteristics as self-development.
4. They are ready to work with foreign partners, study their experience and share good practice.

On the role of universities in shaping students' interest in entrepreneurship.

There is quite a discrepancy between the universities' claims (under the government's pressure/requirements) that universities support entrepreneurial education and activities, and students' being unaware of this support. See Table 8 above.

We can see from Table 8 that students' awareness of entrepreneurship support at universities is very weak. In fact, at Tyumen State University, 60.8% do not know about measures to support entrepreneurship within their university, while in Moscow, the percentage of those unaware is even higher: 87.7%. At the same time, a study aimed at finding out students' attitudes towards entrepreneurship revealed that young people would at least like to learn more about it. They would like contacts with successful entrepreneurs, would like to learn about the specific problems of entrepreneurs and how they solve their problems. Moreover, respect for entrepreneurship was also evident in the fact that students complained about the media creating a negative image of the Russian entrepreneur (Inozemtseva, 2016).

Judging by the National Report GUESSS 2019 data,⁶ the university environment in other countries is more conducive to teaching entrepreneurial skills, compared to Russia. There, universities offer special courses and programmes on entrepreneurship. In Russia, according to their data, 61% of students do not have such programmes at their universities. The results of our research demonstrated that even among economics students, more than 80% are not aware of any measures to support entrepreneurship at their universities, be it special courses, project competitions or other measures.

Students' attitudes towards university education in general.

Also, a disturbing finding was the attitude of the student respondents to university education as a contributing factor to their success in the future employment—see Table 9.

⁶ GUESSS 2019 https://gsom.spbu.ru/files/folder_11/GUESSS_report_2019_RUS.pdf (accessed 01.05.2024).

Table 9 Distribution of answers to the question: ‘What do you think is important in order to achieve success at work after graduation?’ (Check no more than 3 options) (as a percentage of the number of answers) *Source:* the results of our own research

Possible answers	Astrakhan	Voronezh	Moscow	Tver	Tyumen
In-depth mastery of the university programme	5.2	4.0	2.2	2.9	2.9
Willingness to work ‘24 hours a day’	5.0	6.8	5.4	6.3	6.7
Willingness to give up large incomes for a while	6.0	5.7	7.3	7.9	7.1
Communication skills	14.8	20.0	16.6	14.7	17.1
Self-confidence	17.6	15.9	17.5	17.1	15.2
Availability of personal connections	6.4	5.1	7.8	7.9	7.1
Constant willingness to learn	10.6	14.2	12.6	12.1	10.5
Mutual assistance, cooperation	6.9	4.5	4.5	6.0	8.6
Determination	20.8	20.4	21.9	19.7	22.4
Having a ‘big dream’	6.4	3.4	3.9	5.2	1.9
Other	0.3	0.0	0.3	0.3	0.5

The low value assigned by students to university education is striking. Moreover, it is especially low in Moscow, where leading universities and best teachers seem to be concentrated. In fact, students consider the education they receive to be useless for a successful career. At the same time, they are ready to constantly learn and consider this an important factor for success. Many works are devoted to the topic of higher education (VTsIOM, 2019), (Vinokurova, 2022), (Gelenkova, 2012), (Walter, 2013), (Falck, 2012) and others. For a significant portion of students, the motivation for entering a university is to acquire a diploma, not a profession. Higher education in Russia is losing its main function—preparing a person for professional activity. Young people are focused on the modern labour market, and there they can achieve success through personal rather than professional qualities.

The belief that university education is not necessary for achieving success in the future career is particularly evident in the sphere of entrepreneurship. Indeed, in Russia in 2019, only 28.8% of entrepreneurs in the field of small- and medium-sized businesses had higher education and the percentage of entrepreneurs with higher education is growing quite slowly. In 2021, it reached just 29.4%.⁷ In this connection, it should be noted that legislation in Russia does not require entrepreneurs to have a higher education.⁸ Moreover, according to the results of our study, among excellent students, only 33.3% would like to engage in entrepreneurial activity, whereas among students with C grades this figure is 60%. Good and bad students also have different attitudes towards the need to thoroughly master the university programme for the success of their career after graduation. This factor is considered

⁷ Small- and medium-sized businesses in Russia, 2022: Stat. Collection, Moscow 19 Rosstat, p. 93.

⁸ ‘Is it possible to open your own business without education? Does an entrepreneur need education for business?’.

<https://xn----7sba5acai1akfpnah1l.xn--p1ai/news/mozhno-li-bez-obrazovaniya-otkryt-svoj-biznes/?ysclid=lvsk1v9rqs590037191> (accessed 01.05.2024).

important by 13.3% of students who study without C grades and only 7.3% of C grades students. That is, students who want to become entrepreneurs believe that higher education will not help them and, perhaps, that is why they study poorly.

The connection between university education and youth entrepreneurial intentions is well demonstrated in the GUESSS 2019 report. Our data, although based on a different set of survey questions, largely coincides with the GUESSS findings. Entrepreneurial intentions are closely related to specialization. Students of technical specialties are most inclined towards entrepreneurship, while students studying natural sciences are in second place, and humanities students are almost entirely devoid of any interest in entrepreneurship. But in the GUESSS study, there was no such career choice as freelancing. Mainly, the GUESSS project was concerned with the contrast between hired work and entrepreneurship. The introduction of freelancing as a choice for a student's future activity made it possible to reveal that humanities students (and these are mostly female students) would like to work as a freelancer. Thus, among humanities students, more than 20% would like to become freelancers, while among technical students this figure was only 2.4%. Moreover, our research found that freelancing aligns with the desire of humanities students for work-life balance and flexible work hours. At the same time, the modern labour market provides a large number of vacancies for humanities specialists corresponding to their professions, with the possibility to work remotely. Those wishing to work as a freelancer, together with those who directly stated their desire to become an entrepreneur, totalled more than half of the humanities students (51.3%). However, freelancer is a business concept; there is no such legal term. From a civil and tax point of view, it can be an individual entrepreneur, self-employed or an individual without a special tax status. This means that, in fact, a freelancer can often be classified as an entrepreneur.

Conclusions

1. The hypothesis about gender differences has been proven. That is to say, it was confirmed that traditional values and conservative attitudes prevail in this sphere, with typically 'male' and 'female' professions/fields of activities still strong in people's minds, including entrepreneurship as well. Our idea of cultural influence was confirmed, and, first of all, in the gender aspect.
2. It is shown that the views of the older generation (expert academics, that is, people who determine the university agenda) are quite conservative.
3. Against the backdrop of continuing traditionalism and conservative views in the gender sphere (despite the influence of globalization!), there is, by contrast, a gradual break with tradition in the socio-economic aspect, where the effect of globalization processes, with individualism prevailing over collectivism, appears much more prominent. Thus:
 - a. it has been demonstrated that individual desire for money, i.e. striving to ensure one's financial security, has become an important motive for contemporary Russian students. The ability to benefit people, which is the idea of a collectivist mindset, has not scored highly.

- b. among their most important reasons when choosing a job there is self-development, i.e. the desire to develop as a person, as well as the ability to combine work and personal life.
- c. the students displayed little desire to work as subordinates of others, and strove to build their own business instead.
- d. an international career has become important.
4. The role of universities and university education in general is rated low by students as a factor of success in their future profession, including business. The students are largely unaware of the support for entrepreneurial education and activities, (allegedly) provided by their universities.

Prospects for future research on youth entrepreneurship:
Our plans include the following:

- to conduct a comparative analysis of the situation with youth entrepreneurship in the five cities studied and identify the reasons for the differences;
- to conduct a comparative analysis of the situation with youth entrepreneurship in countries belonging to the same economic development group as Russia, and identify the reasons for the differences.
- to analyse the connection between the views and intentions of students and their socio-demographic characteristics, such as the level of family well-being and the type of occupation of their parents.

Declarations

Conflict of interest On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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Authors and Affiliations

Olga Tabachnikova¹  · Natalia Vinokurova²

✉ Olga Tabachnikova
otabachnikova@uclan.ac.uk

Natalia Vinokurova
vinokurova@yandex.ru

¹ School of Psychology and Humanities, University of Central Lancashire, Adelphi Building, Room 041, Preston PR1 2HE, England, UK

² Central Economics and Mathematics Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Nakhimovsky Pr., 47, Moscow, Russia 117418