



RELISE

*THE SCIENTIFIC AND SOCIAL COSTS OF REDUCING
ENTREPRENEURSHIP TO THE WORLD OF STARTUPS¹*

**OS CUSTOS CIENTÍFICO E SOCIAL DA REDUÇÃO DO
EMPREENDEDORISMO AO MUNDO DAS STARTUPS**

Cândido Vieira Borges Júnior²

Who is an entrepreneur here? Two raise their hands. Who sells the products they produce? Everyone raises their hands. Among you, who has ever created a product? Twelve. Who here invests annually in their production even knowing that the expected productivity cannot be guaranteed? Twenty-seven respond positively.

The questions and answers presented seek to reproduce an experience lived by a consultant while she was conducting a management workshop for family farmers. During her dialogue with the group, she asked those present: *What does an entrepreneur do?* Participants responded that entrepreneurs have a business; that they produce and sell products, take some risks, and constantly seek improvement. Finally, when invited to compare what entrepreneurs do with the activities they perform as small rural producers, they were surprised to conclude that yes, they were also entrepreneurs - not only the two who had initially raised their hands.

After all, every year they plant agricultural products without knowing whether the weather will be suitable for good production and without knowing what the price of their products will be at harvest time. Many try to add value to their products - for example, by transforming fruit into jams or milk into cheese -

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² Universidade Federal de Goiás. candidoborges@ufg.br



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and all personally negotiate their production, selling directly to the final consumer, to municipal governments, through school meal programs, or to cooperatives.

The dissonance between the minority who perceive themselves as entrepreneurs and the larger number who actually are entrepreneurs occurs, in part, because of the predominance in the media and in entrepreneurship forums of a discourse that links entrepreneurship to innovation and new technologies, reducing it to innovative startups, high-growth firms, unicorns, and similar ventures.

This innovative-startup bias in the understanding of entrepreneurship does not affect only entrepreneurs themselves but also an important portion of researchers in the field (Aldrich & Ruef, 2018). By prioritizing only one of the attributes traditionally associated with entrepreneurship – innovation - other factors that characterize entrepreneurial activity are neglected. A startup founder is labeled an entrepreneur even though, in some cases, the startup in question may never produce an innovation or commercialize a single product. If it involves new technologies and the founder claims to aspire to become a unicorn, (s)he is immediately considered entrepreneurs.

On the other hand, common sense hesitates to classify the owner of the small neighborhood grocery store, or a seamstress who works independently, as an entrepreneur - even if they created a business responsible for generating the income that supports their family. In Brazil or in any country in the world, we will find far more entrepreneurs who operate independently or through small businesses than founders of innovative startups. The entrepreneurship research community therefore tends to focus on only the smallest portion of entrepreneurs, leaving the majority outside the scope of its investigations (Kuratko & Audretsch, 2022).

While some authors, such as Shane (2009), argue that the innovative startup model should be prioritized in entrepreneurship research and public policy



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because of its growth potential and consequent economic impact, other scholars who are references in the field take a different position. This is the case, for example, of Aldrich and Ruef (2018), Kuratko and Audretsch (2022), and Kuckertz, Scheu, and Davidsson (2023). These authors express concern about the bias that entrepreneurship research has developed by leaving aside most ventures and entrepreneurs while emphasizing startups and high-growth firms.

In this sense, it is timely that this issue of RELISE addresses the diversity of types of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial learning. Considering diversity means recognizing that entrepreneurship manifests itself in forms other than the creation of technology-based startups. In the next section, some expressions of this diversity are presented, followed by an exploration of the possible social and scientific costs of ignoring diversity in entrepreneurship.

THE DIVERSITY OF TYPES OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP

To counterbalance the dominant innovative startup model, Morris, Neumeyer, and Kuratko (2015) identify four main types of ventures that should be considered in entrepreneurship research: (1) high-growth ventures, (2) managed-growth ventures, (3) survival ventures, and (4) lifestyle ventures. The first two are ventures that grow and create more jobs than the others. High-growth ventures, also called gazelles, fit the profile of entrepreneurship advocated by Shane (2009). However, managed-growth ventures - those that grow more slowly, in an organic and incremental manner - constitute the majority of ventures that experience growth.

Survival ventures and lifestyle ventures rarely grow; in general, they tend to remain small with no or few employees, yet they are still socially and economically important (Morris, Neumeyer, & Kuratko, 2015). Lifestyle ventures refer to cases in which entrepreneurs start a business in order to pursue an occupation that allows them to work with something they believe in and enjoy



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while earning from the business the income necessary to maintain the standard of living they desire.

Survival ventures are generally created by entrepreneurs who are unable to find employment or other means of subsistence. This is also referred to as necessity entrepreneurship. It is a type of entrepreneurship present in most countries, but proportionally more significant in regions at lower stages of economic development or during periods when local economies experience economic downturns or high unemployment rates. In Brazil, in 2024, 45% of entrepreneurs started a business out of necessity (GEM Brazil, 2025).

Diversity in entrepreneurship is not limited to the type of venture. Without intending to present all existing types, it can be said that diversity is also expressed through the multiplicity of individuals who engage in entrepreneurship, with diverse sociodemographic characteristics and equally varied contexts of activity.

When portraying diversity through the sociodemographic profile of entrepreneurs, we find research addressing, among other issues, gender, age, education, and income. Some examples include: women's entrepreneurship (Nassif et al., 2025), youth entrepreneurship (Borges, Filion, & Simard, 2008), senior entrepreneurship (Fañanás-Biescas et al., 2025), scientist entrepreneurship (Hayter, Fischer, & Rasmussen, 2022), and necessity entrepreneurship (Mueller & Pieperhoff, 2023).

Regarding context, Welter (2011) argues that entrepreneurship is contextualized, and that each context provides different resources, actors, and interactions, consequently generating different forms of entrepreneurship. The author presents four types of context that influence the type of entrepreneurship: (1) business context (industry sector, market), (2) social context (networks, family, embeddedness), (3) spatial context (countries, communities, geographical proximity), and (4) institutional context (culture, political and economic systems).



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Derived from this perspective, different types of entrepreneurship have emerged, such as social entrepreneurship, public entrepreneurship, technological entrepreneurship, religious entrepreneurship, entrepreneurship at the base of the pyramid, entrepreneurship in traditional communities, sustainable entrepreneurship, and ethnic entrepreneurship.

Even within a specific type of entrepreneurship, subgroups can be found, each with its own particular characteristics. For example, Carvalho and Borges (2025) propose a typology of self-employed workers with four different types that, due to their level of engagement with the new venture and the impacts they generate, differ significantly from one another. In another example, Pirnay, Surlémont, and Nlemvo (2003) present four types of academic spin-offs, which differ according to the type of entrepreneur (students or professors/researchers) and the characteristics of the technology involved, requiring specific public policies for each type of spin-off.

DIFFERENT ENTREPRENEURSHIPS, SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE AND POLICIES

Each type of entrepreneurship requires adaptations in the entrepreneurial process, public policies, and forms of learning. For example, in Brazil, women entrepreneurs face threats derived from a patriarchal culture that are specific to them (Nassif et al., 2025), and research indicates that entrepreneurship public policies directed at them are more effective when accompanied by gender policies (Teixeira, Borges, & Almeida, 2023).

Failing to consider the plurality of types of entrepreneurship and the diversity of entrepreneurial profiles and contexts in which they operate entails scientific and social costs. The precise definition of the target audience and knowledge about it are essential for the success of a public policy (Secchi, 2014). If governments and entrepreneurship support systems do not recognize the



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existence of different types of entrepreneurship within their sphere of influence, a social cost will arise. Certain groups of entrepreneurs may fail to receive attention from public policies and support initiatives. Alternatively, they may be considered by governments as already covered by policies designed for other groups and therefore potentially ineffective for a distinct target audience.

Even if governments recognize the diversity of types of entrepreneurship and propose to develop policies for the different types operating within their territory, they will face difficulties in doing so if the scientific community does not produce knowledge about these different groups. How can policies, support programs, or training courses be developed for a particular type of entrepreneurship without the necessary knowledge about it?

When entrepreneurship research studies only a portion of the existing types of entrepreneurship, knowledge about the entrepreneurial phenomenon becomes incomplete, generating a scientific cost. Investigations into other types of entrepreneurship will not progress, preventing the confrontation of existing knowledge and hindering the production of new discoveries and explanations.

Reducing entrepreneurship to the concept of the innovative startup with growth potential means ignoring the richness of the phenomenon and a large share of ventures and entrepreneurs. Recognizing the diversity of types of entrepreneurship is essential for the advancement of entrepreneurship and of the field of entrepreneurship research. Governments and the scientific community must recognize and investigate the plurality of types of entrepreneurship, the contexts in which it occurs, and the entrepreneurs themselves.

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