4. Determinants of Entrepreneurial Intentions

4.1 Introduction

Researchers in the field of entrepreneurship aim at developing a better understanding of individual deliberations regarding the attraction of an entrepreneurial career. The Theory of Planned Behavior has become a widely used theoretical framework to predict entrepreneurial activity and explore the reasons for entering such a career. However, Kolvereid (1996a) and subsequently Souitaris et al. (2007) call for more research to confirm whether their results about the attitudes-intentions link can be generalizable to other contexts. Therefore, to replicate and confirm early results about the linking of entrepreneurial attitudes with intentions I test the Theory of Planned Behavior based on my data in this chapter.

I draw upon the Theory of Planned Behavior and additional theoretical concepts discussed in chapter 2 to develop two groups of hypotheses. The first group is concerned with the attitudes-intentions link postulated by the Theory of Planned Behavior, the second group with the relationship between background variables (demographic, prior experiences, and personality dimensions) and intentions. To test the hypotheses I use the ex-ante data of the pooled control group.

All three hypotheses derived from the Theory of Planned Behavior receive strong support. With respect to demographic variables the results suggest that female students have lower and foreign students have higher entrepreneurial intentions, thus confirming earlier findings reported in paragraph 2.5.3.1. A broad prior exposure to entrepreneurship (role models and own entrepreneurial activity) is positively related to entrepreneurial intentions. On the other hand, with advancing completion of general university education, entrepreneurial intentions decline. Both results confirm the expected relationships and confirm the results of previously conducted studies (see paragraph 2.5.3.2). However,
having already attended entrepreneurship courses has no statistical significant influence on entrepreneurial intentions, but the size of the subsample of students who had attended a course already is very small. Zhao et al. (2010) examined the relationships between the Big5 personality dimensions and entrepreneurial intentions. They find that (ordered by strength of influence) openness to experience, conscientiousness, emotional stability, extraversion and agreeableness are all significantly related to entrepreneurial intentions, whereupon the first four have a positive, and agreeableness has a negative sign. I can confirm this order for the first three dimensions, and agreeableness also exerts the weakest influence. Extraversion is not significantly related to intentions. A somewhat surprising finding is the negative sign with the relation between conscientiousness and intentions. Perhaps, at this stage of their life, students leverage this characteristic in their studies rather than in preparing the step into an entrepreneurial career. Finally, the results suggest that the background variables are mediated by the entrepreneurial attitudes as predicted by the Theory of Planned Behavior. Thus they have an indirect effect on entrepreneurial intentions through perceptions of desirability, social norm, and behavioral control.

This chapter contributes both to the literature on entrepreneurial intentions and to the progress of my analyses. First, it adds to the emerging literature on predicting entrepreneurial activity using the Theory of Planned Behavior. It illustrates that the Theory of Planned Behavior is appropriate for research into entrepreneurial activity. Second, this chapter sheds light on the importance of background variables such as demographics, prior experience, and personality dimensions for the formation of entrepreneurial intentions. Third, on a more general level, the study also contributes to the literature on the Theory of Planned Behavior itself by confirming the attitude-intentions link and by testing the effects of exogenous influences on entrepreneurial intentions.

With respect to the following empirical analyses this chapter also contributes to this research project as a whole by getting more insights in the initial entrepreneurial attitudes and intentions of the treatment group. It sheds light on existing predispositions of several subsamples defined by background characteristics and thus adds to a more reliable interpretation of the results in the follow-