

## Acceleration Programs in the Ecosystem of Social Entrepreneurship Support\*



**Alevtina V.  
STARSHINOVA**

Ural Federal University named after the first President of Russia B.N. Yeltsin  
Yekaterinburg, Russian Federation  
e-mail: a.v.starshinova@urfu.ru  
ORCID: 0000-0001-8804-5681; ResearcherID: Q-1245-2015



**Evgeniya V.  
CHIKOVA**

Ural Federal University named after the first President of Russia B.N. Yeltsin  
Yekaterinburg, Russian Federation  
e-mail: putilova.evgenia@urfu.ru  
ORCID: 0000-0002-6021-7979

**Abstract.** The development of social entrepreneurship in Russia belongs to the topical areas of state policy and is aimed at creating conditions for the formation of the social services market, the participants of which, along with government agencies and non-profit organizations, become social enterprises. Social accelerators are a new tool for their development that requires systemic understanding. The article reveals the role of acceleration programs in the emerging ecosystem of social entrepreneurship support institutions initiated by the state, shows their common and specific features. The empirical basis of the study was formed by the data posted on the websites of Russian foundations supporting social entrepreneurship. We consider the general scheme of acceleration programs of the Social Projects

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Support Fund, Social Investment Fund, The Foundation of regional social programs “Our Future” and RAISE University Accelerator (RANEPa), including an analysis of the basic events organized for the participants of accelerators. This article presents systematized data on such interrelated elements of social acceleration as training, mentoring, partner and client networking, local community of social entrepreneurs, direct and indirect funding, and information support. The programs we analyzed followed the same pattern. They include a set of segments, each with a specific function for the development of promising social enterprises. We have identified the problems of exaggerated selection criteria for the acceleration cycle, the lack of direct financing as an element of Russian acceleration programs, which reduces the potential for participation of interested target groups, and weak information support for existing programs. Thus, the results of this study contribute to the study of the strategic advantages and limitations of social acceleration.

**Key words:** social entrepreneurship, social accelerators, social incubators, mentoring, Social Projects Support Fund, Social Investment Fund, The Foundation of regional social programs “Our Future”.

### Introduction

In the previous decade, the social services market has been transforming in Russia. The state, while retaining the role of the main regulator and manager of resources, delegates its powers to new market participants – socially oriented non-profit organizations and social entrepreneurs. The number of social enterprises, despite the tendency to increase, remains relatively small. According to the Unified Register of Small and Medium-Sized Businesses (EP SMEs), as of April 2020, 1,197 legal entities and individual entrepreneurs had the status of a social enterprise, and the July cross – section of the same year showed an increase in their number by 2.5 times – up to 2880 units<sup>1</sup>. Our analysis of regional registers of social service providers (n = 85) has proved that representatives of the commercial sector occupy from 5 to 12% of the total share of all suppliers represented in different federal districts, while state institutions, included in the register, make up at least 70%, and non-profit organizations

on average occupy at least 15%<sup>2</sup>. According to the Head of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, there are at least 50 thousand actually operating social enterprises in Russia<sup>3</sup>. The discrepancy in the figures indicates that the development level of social entrepreneurship is still only a rough estimate, as it is at the initial stage of formation.

Passing the law on social entrepreneurship in 2019 marked the integration of business with a social component into the general sectoral system of entrepreneurship in Russia. The initiators of

<sup>1</sup> Information about social enterprises has been entered in the Register of SMEs. Available at: [https://www.nalog.ru/m77/news/activities\\_fts/9732584/](https://www.nalog.ru/m77/news/activities_fts/9732584/) (accessed: March 01, 2021).

<sup>2</sup> “On the basics of social services for citizens in the Russian Federation”: Article 25. Federal Law no. 442-FZ, dated December 28, 2013. Available at: [http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons\\_doc\\_LAW\\_156558/8aa93e4372acfa5dd8c704830619f2f65aa84528/](http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_156558/8aa93e4372acfa5dd8c704830619f2f65aa84528/) (accessed: March 01, 2021); The results of the rating of the entities of the Russian Federation based on the results of implementing mechanisms for supporting socially oriented non-profit organizations and social entrepreneurship, ensuring access of non-state (non-municipal) suppliers to the provision of services in the social sphere and the introduction of competitive ways of providing state (municipal) services in the social sphere, for 2019. Available at: [http://www.nko.economy.gov.ru/podpisannyj-rejting-skorrektirovannyj-i-napravlennyj-v-pravitelstvo-\(1\).pdf](http://www.nko.economy.gov.ru/podpisannyj-rejting-skorrektirovannyj-i-napravlennyj-v-pravitelstvo-(1).pdf) (accessed: August 09, 2021).

<sup>3</sup> There are about 50 thousand social enterprises operating in Russia. Available at: <https://tass.ru/ekonomika/9054185> (accessed: March 01, 2021).

passing the law focused on the fact that social enterprises, sharing the principle of combining social effect and economic benefit and being deprived of such a significant disadvantage of many NCOs as financial instability [1], satisfy the demand for innovations in the social sphere, and also organize the production of the necessary volume of goods and services demanded by certain consumer categories, whose demand was not provided by state institutions or traditional commercial enterprises [2]. Nevertheless, the chosen path of social entrepreneurship development has weaknesses. One of them is the presence of a large number of competitors. Social enterprises are trying to find their niche in the field of social services, where state institutions and NCOs traditionally prevail, and in the framework of market competition they face traditional commercial enterprises. Therefore, the use of all possible competitive advantages becomes an urgent need for a social enterprise which is why the community of social entrepreneurs quite clearly formulates its own requests for the development of the supporting infrastructure.

According to the report of the SEFORIS research consortium for 2016, representatives of the social and entrepreneurial community formulated five main “supporting” proposals to the country’s leadership: maintaining federal support programs, increasing the availability level of capital, introducing tax incentives, removing administrative barriers (especially in terms of reporting documentation) and expanding information and explanatory support for social enterprises<sup>4</sup>. The indicated formats of the requested assistance reveal not only the fact of “underfunding” of social enterprises, but also the problem of forming society’s loyalty to social entrepreneurship as a whole. Another sore point of the sector, according to

experts, is related to the fact that the state provides assistance mainly to social startups, while working businesses are given much less attention<sup>5</sup>.

Among the urgent problems, associated with the formation of Russian social entrepreneurship, the problem of ensuring human resources remains one of the key ones, as it is human capital that largely determines the success of the activity of a social enterprise [3; 4]. The report of the research group “Zircon” for 2018 shows that active social entrepreneurs are mainly people over the age of 30, who already have a higher education<sup>6</sup> and often have experience working in commercial structures or conducting social projects with elements of entrepreneurial activity. They become the target group for which the format of accelerators is designed as short-term practice-oriented integrated programs for the intensive development of social enterprises and social projects including elements of mentoring, expert, network, financial and information support in addition to the educational segment.

The purpose of the research is to analyze the features of the functioning of various types of acceleration programs for social entrepreneurs as a way to accelerate the development of promising social enterprises. The research objectives are aimed at identifying common and distinct structural elements of acceleration programs initiated by different founders; determining the conditions and algorithm for implementing programs; forming an idea of value propositions and the range of support resources provided to participants of acceleration programs; formulation of the benefits acquired by the founders of various types of programs.

<sup>5</sup> Social entrepreneurs called the necessary measures of state support. Available at: <https://tass.ru/msp/6902652> (accessed: March 01, 2021).

<sup>6</sup> Social Entrepreneur – 2018. Self-portrait. A brief analytical report on the research results. Available at: [http://www.zircon.ru/upload/iblock/4e7/socialnyj\\_predprinimatel\\_2018\\_avtoportret.pdf](http://www.zircon.ru/upload/iblock/4e7/socialnyj_predprinimatel_2018_avtoportret.pdf) (accessed: March 13, 2021).

<sup>4</sup> SEFORIS. Cross-Country report. Russia. 2016. Available at: [https://issuu.com/kwinbxi/docs/seforis\\_country\\_report\\_ru\\_04\\_april](https://issuu.com/kwinbxi/docs/seforis_country_report_ru_04_april) (accessed: March 01, 2021).

### Theoretical foundations of the research

Social entrepreneurship is an area of intensive innovation generation, an example of using new combinations of existing resources [5] and a source of ideas for traditional commercial enterprises that are under pressure from the economic crises that have erupted in the previous two decades, the risks of a competitive economy and the spreading paradigm of social responsibility [6]. We pay attention to issues related to the support and development of the social entrepreneurship ecosystem [7; 8] which is understood as a set of interrelated elements that contribute to the fullest disclosure of the potential of social entrepreneurship within a single territorial entity. In the interpretation of the well-known research network of social entrepreneurship in Europe EMES, this ecosystem includes the following support elements:

- the ability to self-organize (involving the community of citizens in solving social problems);
- political, legal, public and private recognition of social enterprises;
- access to resources (using “irrevocable” resources to start and debug the work of a social enterprise, tax benefits, etc.);
- organization of research, educational programs that allow developing skills for running a social business.

The social acceleration included in the last three segments according to this classification, although it acts as an integral element of the ecosystem, nevertheless remains poorly studied. The researchers focus on the difference between different types of social “catalyst”, accelerators and incubators from each other, as well as from accelerators and incubators focused on working with traditional enterprises [9]. We adhere to the approach according to which accelerators are focused on existing social enterprises and are focused on developing a strategy for their growth and leveling weaknesses, while incubators work with projects that need to be

launched or are at the idea stage [10]. In addition, as there are more similarities than differences in the basis of social and traditional business [11], the “catalysts” of social startups and enterprises differ only in the context of goal-setting, as the priority for the former remains the development and refinement of the social mission.

Initially, researcher considered acceleration programs as a new tool of social policy, functionally replacing traditional government and commercial structures which is demonstrated by the example of support programs deployed in the USA and Europe [12], Brazil [13; 14], further – as an element of the ecosystem of support for social entrepreneurship [15; 16] or a mechanism that allows integrating new actors into the development process of this ecosystem – non-profit organizations [17; 18], students<sup>7</sup> [19; 20], interest groups of potential entrepreneurs: women, representatives of ethnic minorities [21], rural residents [22], the elderly [23], etc.

Among the issues of greatest interest to researchers of social “catalysts”, such as increasing the sustainability of social enterprises through acceleration tools [24], a “basic” set of problems inherent in social startups that can be leveled by participating in an acceleration program [25], catalyzing strategic opportunities for social business by expanding its ties with small traditional companies [26], using social accelerators and incubators as a medium for promoting social innovations [27] attract attention, characteristic structural elements of acceleration programs [28].

Studying acceleration activities in the social sphere is mainly based on the consideration of materials from individual local cases that characterize acceleration programs in different

<sup>7</sup> Collections based on the results of implemented projects in 2016–2020. All-Russian accelerator of social initiatives RAISE: website. Available at: <https://raise.ranepa.ru/biblioteka/sborniki-po-rezultatam-realizovannyh-proektov/> (accessed: March 01, 2021).

countries, such as Italy [29], Singapore [30], Spain and the United States [31], countries that are members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [32], and a number of others [33].

The researchers focus on the problems of evaluating the effectiveness of the “catalyst” as a tool that increases the probability of success of social and entrepreneurial initiatives. It is calculated taking into account a combination of such indicators as an increase in the employment level in the region, financial return and social impact [34], the launch of technological startups and the creation of dyadic partner networks with stakeholders [35; 36].

Many authors insist on the need to introduce unified evaluation indicators [37] that would correlate with the legal forms of enterprises and the economic conditions of the region of their localization [38], take into account the idea underlying the competitive selection [39], and at the same time take into account the symbiosis of social, technological and economic variables demonstrated by enterprises [40; 41].

Due to the fact that Russia, like other countries, is building its own strategy to develop social entrepreneurship [42], it seems timely to raise the question of what functional niche acceleration programs occupy in the context of the environment for the development of social entrepreneurship and what requests of “target audiences” (the state, big business, social entrepreneurs) they satisfy.

### **Methodology and materials**

Social entrepreneurship occupies a specific niche in the business sector, as the emphasis on solving the problems of local communities and socially vulnerable groups of the population inevitably limits its resource potential [43]. This feature makes social startups more receptive to the help of external parties compared to traditional businesses that rely on the stability of their internal resources.

Within the framework of the sponsorship theory [4], there are two main mechanisms that are used by the founding organizations of accelerators. The first of them is the mechanism of “buffering and building bridges”, implemented through such measures as direct support for entrepreneurs, organization of their network interaction with stakeholders and creation of a field for testing their activities. The second “supporting” mechanism includes the creation of a mentoring system, opportunities for additional fundraising and increasing the level of authority of the enterprise at an early stage of its existence through information support.

The analysis of foreign “catalysts” [25] shows that social accelerators mainly cooperate with newly formed social enterprises and enterprises that are at the launch stage, and both of these mechanisms are used within the framework of seven key areas of the programs: training, mentoring, creation of partner and client networks, formation of a community of like-minded partners, direct financing (provision of initial capital), indirect financing (organization of access to investors), raising the level of awareness about social entrepreneurship and trust in it.

The information base of our research is the materials from the websites of the Social Projects Support Fund<sup>8</sup>, the Social Investment Fund<sup>9</sup>, the fund for regional social programs “Our Future”<sup>10</sup>, the All-Russian accelerator of social Initiatives RAISE<sup>11</sup>. The choice is due to the fact that the analyzed acceleration programs, firstly, have been operating for a number of years, which makes it

<sup>8</sup> The Foundation of the Social Projects Support: website. Available at: <https://fundsp.ru/> (accessed: March 15, 2021).

<sup>9</sup> Social innovations. Acceleration programs: website. Available at: <https://www.soc-innov.ru/> (accessed: March 16, 2021).

<sup>10</sup> The Foundation of Regional Social Programs “Our Future”: website. Available at: <http://www.nb-fund.ru/> (accessed: March 18, 2021).

<sup>11</sup> All-Russian accelerator of social initiatives RAISE: website. Available at: <https://raise.rane.pa.ru/> (accessed: March 09, 2021).

possible to summarize the accumulated experience of implementing programs, and secondly, the existing experience demonstrates high effectiveness in quantitative and qualitative terms in relation to “graduates”. The sample was made by the type of the founder of the acceleration program: public, corporate, university, private.

We have analyzed all acceleration programs according to the following criteria: the goals declared by the founders, the selection criteria (entry points) for the acceleration program, the duration of the acceleration program and its territorial coverage, the algorithm of the acceleration program to check the presence of such elements as an educational segment, mentoring support, partner and client networking, creation of an informal community of social entrepreneurs, access to direct and indirect investments, information support of the accelerator.

#### **Results of the research**

Taking into account the main selection criterion (the type of founder of the acceleration program), the accelerator of the Foundation of Social Projects Support (FSPS) demonstrates its belonging to the state type, as the fund itself was created in accordance with the decision of the Supervisory Board of the Autonomous Non-Profit Organization “The Agency for Strategic Initiatives for the Promotion of New Projects” (ASI) in 2017. ASI was established by the Government of the Russian Federation in 2011; therefore, the FSPS is actually a subsidiary of the ASI and can be identified as a state structure.

Within the framework of the presented typology, the social investment fund belongs to a private type. Its creation was initiated by a private person (the head of the fund), it has the status of a limited liability company. However, the founder, S.V. Golubev, at the same time has the status of the commission chairman on social entrepreneurship of the public organization “Support of Russia”,

supervised by state structures, and is a member of the ASI expert council, a member of the expert group on social entrepreneurship of the Ministry of Economic Development of Russia and the Council for Social Innovations of the Russian Federation. The experts of the acceleration program of the Social Investment Fund include government experts, employees of the Ministry of Economic Development. Therefore, this Foundation cannot be fully typologically characterized as private, as it has strengthened ties with the authorities that form the state support system for social entrepreneurship.

The Foundation of regional social programs “Our Future” which oversees the accelerator “Formula for Growth” can be classified as a corporate type, although formally its founder is an individual V. Y. Alekperov, and in this sense, *de jure*, it belongs to a private type. Nevertheless, this Foundation, established in 2007, remains *de facto* one of the first non-governmental structures operating in the support system for social entrepreneurship, and its founder is a co-owner of PJSC Lukoil. Accordingly, this company actually directly finances the activities of the Foundations.

Finally, the All-Russian accelerator of social initiatives RAISE, launched in 2012, belongs to the university type of founders. Its creator is the Institute of Organizational Development and Strategic Initiatives of the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration.

The lists of acceleration programs within each of the declared organizations differ. At the moment, the FSPS has launched three acceleration programs: the main one has been operating since 2018, seven of its acceleration cycles have already been carried out, two more have been launched at the end of 2020 – a pre-accelerator for novice social entrepreneurs and a program for leadership projects in the social, educational and technological spheres.

The “Federal Accelerator” and the “Regional Accelerator” are opened on the platform of the Foundation of Social Investments. The first is an exact program implemented in Moscow at the foundation’s site and worked out for existing social enterprises in order to scale their activities and attract additional investments. The second one, in the format of a full-time program, works at the sites of the “My Business” centers and the Centers for Social Innovation (CISS) and is focused on the requests of these organizations which vary depending on the region.

The Foundation of Regional Social Programs “Our Future”, in addition to investment competitions, implements the only acceleration program “Formula for Growth”, positioned rather as an auxiliary direction within its activities. The RAISE Social Initiative Accelerator is also the only acceleration platform to realize social and entrepreneurial activities within the framework of the basic university. However, we should note

that RANEPa has a branch network and attracts representatives of other higher educational institutions to participate.

*Table 1* shows the goals of the declared acceleration programs, grouped into two categories: general goals, the achievement of which should ensure a sustainable launch and development of a social enterprise, and specific goals, separately formulated by the founders. It follows from its data that all acceleration programs, except for the “Formula for Growth”, are aimed at forming entrepreneurial competencies among participants, while the accelerator of the Our Future Foundation obviously works with already established social entrepreneurs and their projects. The growth of financial indicators (attracting investments, increasing key financial indicators, increasing revenue, optimizing costs) is a priority for everyone except the RAISE accelerator which can easily be explained by the student status of the contingent of participants who do not yet fully have the

Table 1. Goals of acceleration programs

Name of foundation/accelerator	Common				Specific
	Formation of competencies	Growth of financial indicators	Increase of social effect	Building partner and client networks, communities of entrepreneurs	
Foundation of Social Projects Support	+	+	-	-	Bringing a social project from the “prototype” stage to the “product” stage
Foundation of Social Investments	+	+	+	+	1. Search for new directions of development 2. Registration in the register of social enterprises
Foundation “Our Future”	-	+	+	+	1. Enterprise scaling 2. Transformation of products in accordance with new economic opportunities and the needs of customer groups during the pandemic
RAISE	+	-	-	+	1. Attracting active youth 2. Formation of career opportunities for students through access to employer companies

Source: websites of acceleration programs.

resources necessary to start their own business. The emphasis on the importance of building partner and client networks, communities of entrepreneurs is made by the Foundation of Social Investments, the Foundation “Our Future” and RAISE, while the main goal for the Foundation Social Projects Support is to launch a product and develop a sustainable business model. At the same time, the social mission is a priority, indicated in the statutory documents, only for two of the four acceleration programs under consideration.

As specific goals of acceleration programs, work on the received product of the project/enterprise is mentioned including its reformatting in accordance with the requests and capabilities of the target audience (“packaging” of the project, project development, successful product promotion, search for new directions

of development), securing the official status of the enterprise, the issue of scaling existing social enterprises is raised, the importance of forming a communication network between students interested in creating a social business is considered, companies-employers and beginning and established entrepreneurs in the social sphere.

Table 2 describes the conditions for participation in accelerators indicating that there is a sufficiently high selection bar. The Foundation of Social Projects Support, the Foundation of Social Investment and the Foundation “Our Future” demonstrate their readiness to work only with officially registered enterprises of various legal forms and pay attention to the availability of a product/service that can be offered to the client audience. At least three foundations consider the acceleration process as a team effort.

Table 2. Accelerator entry points

Name of foundation/accelerator	Common			Specific
	The status of an individual entrepreneur/legal entity	Ready-to-sell product/service	The presence of a team ready to implement the project	
Foundation of Social Projects Support	+	+	-	1. The project relates to the social sphere, solves the problems of unprotected segments of population and the disabled 2. ≥ 50% of the company is owned by residents of the Russian Federation
Foundation of Social Investments	+	+	+	Compliance of the company’s activities with the priority areas of the accelerator
Foundation “Our Future”	+	+	+	1. The participant is the owner/co-owner of a social business 2. The main activity of the enterprise is carried out in the region of the accelerator for 1–5 years (≥ 2 years in the KhMAO-Yugra) 3. Оборот предприятия не менее 10 млн рублей в год (≥ 1,5 млн рублей в ХМАО-Югра) The company’s turnover is not less than 10 mil. rub. per year (≥ 1.5 mil. rub. in the KhMAO-Yugra)
RAISE	-	-	+	1. Quantitative restrictions and restrictions on the age of participants (≥ 10 students aged ≤ 25 years) 2. The presence of a curator assigned to the team (teacher/university employee)/mentor (representative of government, business, NCOs)

Source: websites of acceleration programs.

Additional criteria for participation are the proven survival of an officially registered enterprise in the long term, the localization of the enterprise on the territory of the Russian Federation, the entrepreneur's personal interest in business development, provided by his status as an owner or co-owner. Obviously, social projects at the entrance to most acceleration programs already have a certain development history and are aimed at improving qualitative and quantitative indicators by working out weaknesses, creating a new product in demand or transforming an existing, acting algorithm for scaling.

With regard to the territorial coverage and duration of the program, we can conclude the following: the accelerators of the Social Projects Support Fund and RAISE have federal coverage, the Foundation of Social Investments also implements its goals at the federal level, but complements this activity with the presence of a regional program. The "Formula for Growth" accelerator is characterized by a clearly defined regional coverage, as it is implemented only on the territory of the Kaliningrad, Nizhny Novgorod and Astrakhan Oblasts, the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug. According to the duration of the acceleration programs, the longest of them is the university accelerator RAISE which has been operating since 2012, the Foundation of Social Investments launched its program in its current form in 2015, although before that, acceleration activities were carried out at the regional level in cooperation with big business and CISS in the format of the "School of Beginning Entrepreneurship" (2012–2014) and the "School of Social Entrepreneurship" in the Penza Oblast (2014–2015). Finally, the Foundation of Social Projects Support and the Foundation "Our Future" held their first acceleration session in 2018. All this indicates that acceleration in the social sphere can be considered as a new developing element of the ecosystem of support for social entrepreneurship.

The available information allows making the following assumption: regional programs are implemented to a large extent if there is a direct demand for their organization from local support structures, for example, the already mentioned CISS or the "My Business" entrepreneurship support centers. In other words, a social and entrepreneurial initiative within the local community should gain strength and coordinate the necessary amount of resources in order to signal its own importance to local authorities which, in turn, get the opportunity to deploy the potential for solving local social problems in the role of an intermediary providing a space for communication between the training structure (accelerator) and its target audience (social entrepreneurs).

*Table 3* shows the algorithm of the four accelerators.

The organizational structure of accelerators includes a training block and mentoring support, however there is a difference in the configuration of their use. Within the framework of the Foundation of Social Projects Support and the Foundation "Our Future", the module, related to training, precedes a meeting with mentors, while the Foundation of Social Investments and the RAISE accelerator mix these modules in the format of their events. In the first case, the organizers of the accelerator are aimed at filling the gaps in the basic knowledge of the participants and separating the process of working on projects from the theoretical part, in the second case, the learning process is intensified and involves more intensive work with the participants' cases.

It seems interesting to select mentors for acceleration programs who are actually leaders of informal socio-entrepreneurial communities. Taking into account personal motivation and willingness to share the experience of running a social business, mentors undergo preliminary training.

All acceleration programs include such elements as the formation of a local community of social

Table 3. Operation algorithm of acceleration programs

Name of the program /foundation	Period	Program elements
Foundation of Social Projects Support	1,5–2 months	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Theoretical block: trainings on strategic and operational planning, working out of a marketing strategy, calculation of key product metrics, analysis of the social impact of projects, training in teamwork skills</li> <li>2. Practical block: work with participants' cases on market research, working out of a self-supporting and financially stable business model, marketing promotion and preparation of presentations</li> <li>3. Presentation block: meeting with potential partners and investors (demo day)</li> </ol>
Foundation of Social Investments	3 months	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Strategic sessions including lectures, individual work and brainstorming on the following topics: social impact model, target markets and value proposition, marketing strategy, business modeling and financial planning, long-term planning</li> <li>2. Investment session: feedback from experts and interaction with investors</li> </ol>
Foundation "Our Future"	9 months	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Module "Training": 10 interactive classes with social business practitioners on the following topics: strategic planning, marketing, internet marketing, sales management, personnel management, management and leadership, financial flow management, investment attraction, presentation to the investor</li> <li>2. Module "Mentoring": 18 personal meetings with a mentor</li> <li>3. Module "Exchange of experience": 4 business breakfasts with guest speakers, 7–9 meetings to discuss participants' cases</li> <li>4. Final reporting lesson: presentation of the results of changes in the organization of the activities of participating enterprises</li> </ol>
RAISE	9–9,5 months	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Round tables with potential project partners to clarify project ideas (representatives of NCOs, businesses, authorities)</li> <li>2. Road Show: teams' participation in educational installation events-workshops at universities</li> <li>3. Accelerator Tournament: correspondence competition of participating teams to perform special tasks</li> <li>4. Two three-day educational sessions: trainings, master classes, speeches and expert consultations</li> <li>5. Intermediate examination of projects (face-to-face / video conference format) for the admission of participants to the final events</li> <li>6. The final which consists of two stages and includes a presentation of the projects being implemented before the jury. Additionally, teams participate in nominations from partners</li> <li>7. Internship of winners of competitive events</li> </ol>
Source: websites of acceleration programs.		

entrepreneurs and network interactions “program participant – partner”, “program participant – client”. Creating informal ties in the conditions of the accelerator is ensured by organizing events of a team format of work (“brainstorming”) and the mentoring element, when several participants gather around one mentor with their projects.

Building partner and client networks are due to the presence of investment sessions that provide participants with indirect financing. There is no direct funding within the framework of the above examples of acceleration programs. It is often carried out from other sources – specialized grants

and subsidies. Sometimes an investor and/or an accelerator partner, provided that they are interested in the product of a participating enterprise, can become its customer in the post-acceleration period. Such offers are conditioned by the opportunity to reduce the competition level for the manufactured product.

It is worth noting that Russian acceleration programs provide information coverage of their activities at a low level. Materials about the held events, as a rule, are posted on the website and in the accompanying social networks of the accelerator itself, on the personal pages of participants of

acceleration programs, a few specialized sites, such as the “Social Information Agency”, on the pages and in groups of social networks of partners who focus rather on their own participation<sup>12</sup>. In other words, the “territory” of social acceleration and social entrepreneurship remains closed to the mass reader/viewer.

### Conclusions

The analysis demonstrates that all acceleration programs are characterized by a number of fundamental features. We cannot say that social accelerators pursue absolutely identical goals, but it is true that their target orientation is to form a strategy for the sustainable development of a social enterprise. This activity continues being fully implemented in the post-acceleration period, however, it may be accompanied by the risk of losing such priority as increasing the social effect of the activity. Additional tasks of acceleration programs include scaling of enterprises, official registration of their status, and more dense orientation of the manufactured product to the client audience.

The data on the “entry points” to acceleration programs allow concluding that potential participants face several barriers at once. With a few exceptions, accelerators are focused on working with established, officially registered and operating enterprises for a certain time. But at the same time, the FSPS launches a pre-accelerator for aspiring social entrepreneurs, and the RAISE accelerator retains the ability to launch and implement a project that is at the idea stage, as it is aimed at working with a student audience.

<sup>12</sup> Accelerators for social projects were discussed at the Blagosphere Center. Social Information Agency: website. 2018. Available at: <https://www.asi.org.ru/news/2018/09/28/akseleratory-sotsproektov/> (accessed: February 16, 2020); The Foundation of Social Investments presented acceleration programs for social entrepreneurs. Social Information Agency: website. 2018. Available at: <https://www.asi.org.ru/report/2018/07/27/moskva-akseleratsionnye-programmy/> (accessed: March 12, 2020); Social Initiative Accelerator RAISE. Official group VKontakte. Available at: <https://vk.com/raiser> (accessed: March 12, 2020).

Finally, acceleration programs are structurally built on the same model including educational, practical and reporting (investment) segments. The educational module is focused on getting participants basic ideas about doing business, the practical segment includes a mentoring support mechanism, supported by events that allow building informal ties between accelerator participants and communication with experts in the field, who can also be partners of the accelerator. The investment (reporting) segment provides an opportunity for selected enterprises to receive feedback from experts, to attract additional resources for business development.

However, within the framework of these acceleration programs, a direct financing mechanism is not implemented; participants do not receive financial funds from the organizers to implement the project following the completion of the accelerator. A common vulnerable element of acceleration programs is also weak information support of events: the created content is placed on resources that do not allow drawing attention of the general public to the topic of social entrepreneurship in general and acceleration programs in particular.

The significant difference between the programs is the duration of the acceleration cycle (from 1.5 to 9.5 months), which indicates different approaches to the process of their organization. Prolonged acceleration focuses more on ensuring that participants get basic ideas about doing business and can work out their own projects in the case of successful cases, the emphasis is on independent individual work of the participant using the acquired knowledge and skills. The reduced acceleration initially uses the projects of the participants as a visual aid for analyzing the strengths and weaknesses and development prospects. We assume that the latter already largely possess the necessary set of competencies for doing business in the social sphere.

Despite the fact that formally the founders of social acceleration programs are different types of founders, the main beneficiary, in addition to the social entrepreneurs themselves, is the state, primarily represented by regional and municipal authorities, as the development of another branch of the business sector creates conditions for the inflow of investment into the region and mitigates existing local social problems. In addition, by participating in the organization of accelerators, the state acquires an additional lever of influence on the business environment, and expands the range of players in the social services market.

It is obvious that a large socially responsible business is also interested in developing the infrastructure of social accelerators. Its representatives with a high frequency become partners and experts of acceleration programs. On the one hand, such a level of participation helps them to acquire certain

reputational dividends; on the other hand, they get access to an acceleration environment that catalyzes the design of innovative ideas that can be incorporated into the operational activities of large companies to solve internal (personnel) or external (reputational) tasks.

The founders of the private type of accelerators are also representatives of either large businesses or state structures, so it is extremely difficult to consider them in isolation from the acceleration programs of the corporate or state type. In turn, the university, on the basis of which the acceleration program is being developed, uses the capabilities of the business simulator to “train” the student audience: the most active part of it acquires a set of skills and knowledge relevant for future employment, builds a system of partnerships inside and outside the university environment.

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### **Information about the Authors**

Alevtina V. Starshinova – Doctor of Sciences (Sociology), Professor, Ural Federal University named after the first President of Russia B.N. Yeltsin (51, Lenin Street, Yekaterinburg, 620000, Russian Federation; e-mail: a.v.starshinova@urfu.ru)

Evgeniya V. Chikova – Senior Lecturer, Ural Federal University named after the first President of Russia B.N. Yeltsin (51, Lenin Street, Yekaterinburg, 620000, Russian Federation; e-mail: a.v.starshinova@urfu.ru)

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