Smart Social Infrastructure as the Basis for the Long-Term Development of Social Entrepreneurship: Problems and Prospects in Russia

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Abstract

The article is devoted to studying the specifics of social entrepreneurship in modern conditions, as well as revealing the possibilities of smart social infrastructure in the processes of its development in Russia to achieve economic, social, and environmental goals. The authors proved that the level of digitalization achieved in the leading countries makes it possible to form a smart social infrastructure as a basis for implementing innovative activity of social entrepreneurs in solving socially significant problems. The authors proposed a conceptual scheme for using the potential of smart social infrastructure to expand the opportunities for social change on a large scale and ensure a new quality of implemented social projects. The authors found that the practice of social entrepreneurship based on the use of the potential of smart social infrastructure in Russian conditions is still fragmented: the smart social infrastructure in Russia is not fully formed; the failure to adopt a mental model based on scaling relationships using modern technologies determines the inability of social enterprises to lead in rapidly changing conditions. The authors formulated proposals to overcome the existing problems of developing smart social infrastructure that hinder the development of social entrepreneurship in Russia.

Keywords

Social entrepreneurship • Smart social infrastructure • Digitalization • Social problems • Russia

JEL Codes

L31 • O33 • O35

1 Introduction

The modern world is becoming more socially oriented. This is reflected in the fact that technological advances and economic results are redirected to meet human needs. Thus, scientific and technological progress becomes not only a source of technological innovations that optimize production and distribution processes, but also a tool that improves the standard and quality of living of the population.

For example, according to Openmind, a new trend has emerged—using the Nao robot to help people cope with stress. During a board game, the robot tracks an increase in a person's stress level and provides coaching designed to reduce stress (West, 2020). Some catering organizations use robots to reduce costs by controlling the ingredients used in the cooking process, while others are actively implementing tablets for placing orders directly from the kitchen without using the services of waiters (DePillis, 2015). The problem of finding economic resources to finance expenditures aimed at exploring the possibilities of using new technologies to solve complex social problems, such as reducing inequality, overcoming poverty, reducing the environmental burden, and creating a better future for society, is becoming

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increasingly urgent. As a rule, the state is responsible for solving the social problems of modern society. However, scientific and technological progress contributes to the mechanisms for transforming the role of the state in solving social problems. Now its function is to create a smart social infrastructure as an environment for the development of innovative activity of various forms of social entrepreneurship that can solve social problems at a qualitatively new level. For example, the concept of social change based on the creation of a platform for the development of social cooperation of non-profit organizations through the implementation of new business models is currently gaining popularity (Libert et al., 2017). Thus, the study of the possibilities of solving social problems through the use of smart social infrastructure as a resource base for social entrepreneurship is of current scientific interest.

2 Methodology

The purpose of the research is to study the specifics of social entrepreneurship in modern conditions, as well as to establish the capabilities of smart social infrastructure in the processes of its development in Russia to achieve economic, social, and environmental goals. Tasks:

- Revealing the content and specific features of social entrepreneurship at the present stage;
- Determining the role and place of smart social infrastructure in the development of social entrepreneurship: an analysis of the experience of developed countries;
- Identifying problems in the development of smart social infrastructure that hinder the formation of social entrepreneurship in Russia.

Research methods: method of theoretical analysis, deduction, and induction, system approach, method of systematization.

3 Theoretical Basis of the Research

Dees and Anderson (2003) social entrepreneurship refers to the innovative activities of commercial enterprises that they undertake to achieve economic, social, and environmental goals. The same opinion is held by Haugh (2005). Austin et al. (2006) reveal the specifics of corporate social entrepreneurship. At the same time, some authors point out that social entrepreneurship is a form of applying business skills and market experience in the non-profit sector, for example, when developing innovative approaches to generating income (Reis, 1999; Thompson, 2002). Zadek and Thake (1997) identify the main features that separate social entrepreneurship from other forms of business activity:

- Creating social value rather than personal and shareholder wealth;
- Creating an innovation base instead of repeating existing practices. Austin et al. (2006) note that the driving force of social entrepreneurship is the solved social problem, which determines the format of a social enterprise (non-profit, commercial, or state-owned enterprise) that effectively mobilizes the resources necessary to resolve this problem.

Digital transformation will probably allow social entrepreneurs to build internal processes based on models similar to business, as well as provide an opportunity to digitize and show their social impact and bring social impact to a qualitatively new level (Rbk, 2020).

Experts note that the digital transformation of social entrepreneurship occurs through: direct use of digital technologies in the activities of social organizations; changes in the organizational culture of social organizations in the direction of building collaboration; experience of beneficiaries in interacting with social organizations using digital tools (website, mailing list, electronic document management, own multi-user platforms, etc.). Goyal and Sergi (2020) go further in their research and conclude that the sustainability and overall success of social business is determined by the state of smart social infrastructure. The authors define smart social infrastructure through the availability of a digital ecosystem, the availability of incubators for social startups, the introduction of circular business models, and a focus on collaboration, the availability of patient capital, as well as partnerships and networking with various stakeholders. Probably, the prospects for the development of social entrepreneurship are determined by new digital trends, including the formation of a smart social infrastructure.

Theoretical and applied questions on the problem studied in this article are disclosed in the works of Ponomarev (2016), Dees et al. (2004), Rebyazina and Vladimirov (2012), Stagnieva (2015), and Gorbunova (2014).

The authors also used materials from «Artem Shadrin on the roadmap for NGOs' access to the social services market» (ASI, 2016), «Social entrepreneurship: it's just beginning» (Businessofrussia, 2013), Eastern Economic Forum (2018), Federal tax service of the Russian Federation (2020), Nb-forum (2013), RAS (2015), TAdviser (2016), and from the web site HSE (2019).

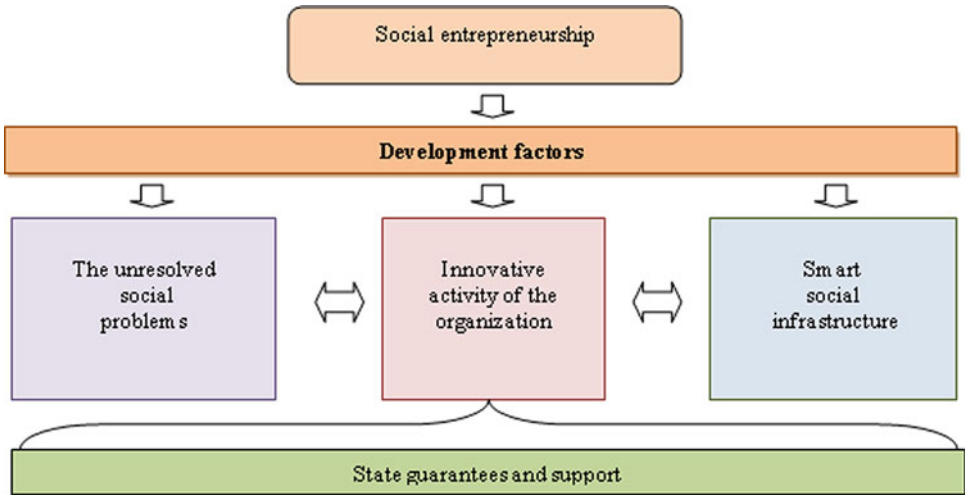

Fig. 1 Social entrepreneurship and factors determining its development in modern conditions. *Source* Compiled by the authors

4 Results

(1) Contents and specific features of social entrepreneurship in modern conditions.

There are several prerequisites for the social entrepreneurship development in modern conditions (Fig. 1):

- The presence of a social problem that has not been solved by the state and requires the mobilization of efforts on the part of the business sector (Austin et al., 2004). Such problems are the problem of poverty and social inequality, environmental problems, differentiation of access to education, and so on.
- If commercial enterprises are not able to meet the social need for public goods or in violation of the contract, then there are conditions in which the social entrepreneur begins to perform this function (Nelson & Krashinsky, 1973; Weisbrod, 1977).
- Commercial entrepreneurship has a strong social impact, as it provides private benefits from the creation of new goods and services, as well as jobs. Social entrepreneurship is aimed at creating social value for the public good, which is the application of existing business skills, innovation activity, as well as the implementation of entrepreneurial motivation and experience (Austin et al., 2004).
- Commercial entrepreneurship is focused on new needs and achieving an advance that ensures the growing size of the market, while social entrepreneurship is aimed at meeting basic long-standing needs through innovative approaches (Dees & Anderson, 2003).
- The capabilities of social entrepreneurs are determined by social needs, which often outstrip the amount of available resources needed to meet them (primarily due to the fact that consumers are not able to cover the cost of goods or services, so donor subsidies are required), in contrast to commercial entrepreneurs, who are financially self-sufficient (Bradach, 2003).
- Technological progress opens up new business opportunities that have a positive impact on society. The benefits of the digital environment and investment can help rebuild the work architecture, increase productivity, and boost people's efforts to solve their social problems.
- The current level of digital development makes it possible to create a smart social infrastructure as a basis for implementing innovative activity of social entrepreneurs in solving socially significant problems (Goyal & Sergi, 2020).

The practice of social entrepreneurship is quite developed, but international statistics have not yet been formed. However, we can assess the level of social entrepreneurship development in different countries, for example, using the CAF World Giving Index (it allows you to see in which countries people are most likely to engage in pro-social activities and advocate for the growth of global returns) (CAF, 2019); CSR Hab Ranking (2019) (corporate social responsibility performance rating); the Index for social entrepreneurs (ISC, 2020) (Table 1).

In countries with mature economies, social entrepreneurship is developing much more actively and in a more diverse way, since there are formed entrepreneurial models, values, culture, economic education of the necessary profile is available, as well as there is a financial infrastructure and advisory assistance from foundations (Skvortsova, 2019). So, in terms of many ratings, the leaders are the United States and the United Kingdom. In the United States, 35% of social enterprises are non-profit organizations, and 31% are regular category "C" corporations or LLCs (for-profit organizations). Activity 20% of US social

Table 1 Leading countries in terms of social entrepreneurship development

Country	CAF World Giving Index	CSR Hab ranking	Index for social entrepreneurs
USA	58	47	73,238
New Zealand	57	45	84,173
Australia	56	46	64,166
Ireland	56	51	57,565
United Kingdom	54	52	70,496

Source CAF (2019), CSR Hab Ranking (2019), ISC (2020)

enterprises aimed at economic development of the country, 16% are focused on workforce development; 12% work in the field of energy and environment, 11% in education (Center for Social Entrepreneurship & Social Innovation, 2019). The United Kingdom is considered a global center for social entrepreneurship development, with the most reputable investment networks and favorable political conditions. In 2017, more than 470,000 social enterprises were registered in the United Kingdom, with more than 1.44 million employees (or 4.4% of the employed population). However, some underdeveloped countries also occupy high positions in the ratings on the level of development of social entrepreneurship, proving the high level of social orientation of the implemented policies and the existence of a culture of charity. For example, Myanmar is ranked second in the world by the CAF World Giving Index (58), Sri Lanka-9th (51), Indonesia-10th (50), Kenya-11th (47), and so on (CAF, 2019).

(2) The role and place of smart social infrastructure in the social entrepreneurship development.

If we use the definition of smart social infrastructure introduced by Goyal and Sergi (2020), then its structural elements are:

- A digital ecosystem;
- An incubation ecosystem to support social startups;
- Circular business models;
- Patient capital; and networking.

Chang and West (2006; Chang et al., 2006) argue that digital ecosystems are an open, self-organizing, demand-driven, agent-based cluster environment designed to expand communication between small- and medium-sized enterprises within the global business ecosystem through the use of digital technologies. The incubation ecosystem for supporting social startups is a set of institutional entities (in the field of education, science, legislative, and legal regulation) that create conditions for generating new ideas and products that provide solutions to social problems (Karpunina et al., 2020). The economic and social benefits of implementing circular business models include reducing the consumption of raw materials and energy resources, reducing demand for them and price volatility in resource markets, and increasing the number of jobs (Beuren, 2013; Sukhanova et al., 2021). Patient capital is a source of financing for social entrepreneurship projects, but it is more often owned by donor organizations than by socially unprotected segments of the population for which social startups are implemented due to their low financial security (Bradach, 2003). Network interaction of participants is mediated by the development of supply chains, provision of consulting, technical services, placement services, and brokerage IT services. However, the elements of smart social infrastructure, according to the authors, should be supported by the principle of ideological unity in relation to creating social value, as well as meeting the needs of all segments of the population. Using access to smart social infrastructure expands the opportunities for social change at scale, as well as provides a new quality of implemented social projects (Fig. 2).

Since there are no statistics reflecting the scale of use of smart social infrastructure in the activities of social enterprises, we will give some examples of real practices for implementing such social projects. For example, the social enterprise Koe Koe Tech, established in Myanmar, is essentially a technology company whose activities are aimed at improving health indicators and expanding access to information to implement positive social changes for the people. Android, web, and back-end developers create mobile and web applications and SaaS that, for example, provide information to pregnant women and help people organize consultations and delivery of medicines to remote rural areas (Gardian, 2017). In India, a social high-tech innovation has been the use of a wristband for measuring the temperature of newborns among parents, which monitors the temperature of the child and gives an audible signal if it changes. This implemented social startup contributes to solving an important social problem of infant (Gardian, 2016). A social enterprise Zoox—an American robotics company focused on autonomous mobility implements projects to support urban mobility for people and the environment of the future.

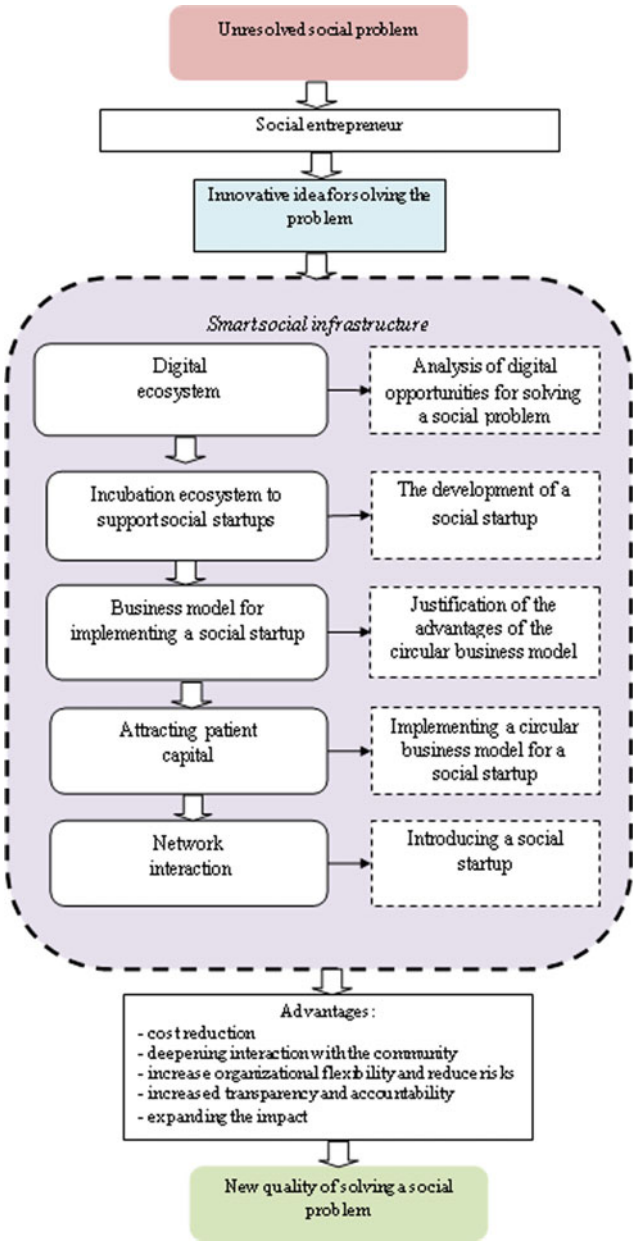

Fig. 2 Conceptual scheme for using the potential of smart social infrastructure in the implementation of social entrepreneurship projects. *Source* Compiled by the authors

(3) Problems and prospects of social entrepreneurship development based on smart social infrastructure in Russia.

The practice of social entrepreneurship in Russia cannot be called sustainable, especially in comparison with developed countries. Despite the fact that even in historical retrospect, individual projects were implemented in Russia. For example, in the nineteenth century in Russia, houses of diligence were created as a form of assistance to vulnerable segments of the population and their socialization by providing paid work, food, and sometimes housing (Zhukov, 2015). During the soviet period the social entrepreneurship practice under state control was implemented in the form of employment of disabled people in the production of bags in order to obtain additional sources of funding for disabled homes (Haugh, 2005). Social entrepreneurship acquired a relatively institutionalized form in 2003, when the Center for social entrepreneurship and the Youth business incubator were established in Novosibirsk, which support the implementation of innovative social ideas of students, as well as provide them with training (Safarov, 2014).

Only in 2019, the law on social entrepreneurship was adopted in Russia, and the state register of social entrepreneurs was created (Nb-fund, 2020). One thousand one hundred and ninety-seven small- and medium-sized businesses have received the status of social entrepreneur, 60% of them are individual entrepreneurs, 40% are legal entities, and 90% are micro-enterprises (Federal tax service of the Russian Federation, 2020). Additional education (16%), day care for children (13%), physical education, sports and recreation (10%), and healthcare (7%) are the most popular areas for implementing social entrepreneurship projects in Russia (Nb-fund, 2020).

What is Russia's place in the world rankings of social entrepreneurship? The value of the CAF World Giving Index of Russia is 21 (which is almost 3 times lower than that of the United States and New Zealand), the country has 50 points on the CSR Hab (CSR Hab Ranking, 2019) ranking, thus ahead of the United States (47) and approaching the United Kingdom (52). The value of the Russian ISC social entrepreneurship index is 61, while New Zealand has 84 and the United States has 73. Such contradictory data do not allow us to draw a clear conclusion about the role and place of Russia in the world for the development of social entrepreneurship. The practice of social entrepreneurship based on the use of the potential of smart social infrastructure in Russian conditions is still fragmented. First, the smart social infrastructure itself in Russia remains in its infancy (Table 2).

Second, social enterprises primarily operate in internal and external bunkers, without crossing industry lines that are becoming increasingly blurred. Their long-term mental models and business models of value creation, as well as their failure to adopt a mental model based on digital scaling of relationships; do not allow them to lead in a rapidly changing environment (Libert et al., 2017). However, according to experts, over the last ten years have seen the rapid growth of web-building among non-profit social organizations: in 2009 only 22% of organizations surveyed had websites, whereas in 2019 30% more. Social enterprises have become more active in using websites, mailing lists, social networks, and innovative forms of fundraising to

Table 2 Assessment of the state of smart social infrastructure elements in Russia

Element	Development level	Examples of practice	Problems and limitations
Digital ecosystem	Low	– Creation of a Scientific and Technological Initiative (NTI) to bring together representatives of business and expert communities in order to develop promising technology markets and industries (RAS, 2015); – Implementation of projects Sbertech focused on the modernization of the banking system Sberbank-house developers (TAdviser, 2016)	(1) Russia is lagging far behind the world's leading countries in terms of digital development (2) Uneven broadband Internet access across the country (3) A high level of socio-economic differentiation that restricts the use of digital technologies by individuals and businesses (4) Problems of the digital development state policy
Incubation ecosystem to support social startups	Medium	– Regional centers for social innovation (CISS) to teach social entrepreneurship practices and support social entrepreneurship projects (Nb-forum, 2013); – Agency for strategic initiatives (ASI) to support innovative business projects, search for and attract talented young leaders, and promote and replicate socially significant initiatives (ASI, 2016)	(1) The problem of uneven location of innovation centers in the territorial context (2) Problems of bureaucratization and a weak educational base
Circular business models	Low	– Circular business models in Russia are implemented mainly in the field of household waste disposal (Eastern Economic Forum, 2018)	(1) Undeveloped institutional framework for the development of the circular economy (2) The lack of interest of enterprises in launching new business models, as well as the complexity of their implementation
Patient capital	Low	– Support of the private fund "Our future" on an ongoing basis (Ponomarev, 2016); – Creation of the center for social programs "RUSAL", which implemented 50 projects with an investment of 150 million rubles (Businessofrussia, 2013); – Development of the Fund for social and economic support of regions "SUEK-Regions" in 48 localities of Russia (Stagnieva, 2015)	Lack of ideology and culture of support for social projects by large- and medium-sized businesses
Network interaction	Low	– Practice of networking in the education system (HSE, 2019); – Network forms of interaction between Russian companies information and communication technology companies (Rebyazina and Vladimirov, 2012)	(1) Industry fragmentation of implementation of network interaction models (2) High cost and uncertainty of implemented models (3) Lack of understanding of the nature and prospects of networking in terms of results and effort

Source Compiled by the authors

create awareness, increase the number of donations, and launch new digital-first initiatives (Rbk, 2020).

Non-profit social organizations that carry out their activities using information technologies began to appear. For example, the educational project "Greenhouse of social technologies" is aimed at teaching new technologies to employees of non-profit organizations and representatives of initiative groups, as well as developing communications between civil society and IT specialists. Thanks to the "TeploDigital" program, non-profit organizations get access to Microsoft, Google, Symantec, Autodesk, AirBnB, Amazon, Zoom, and other software at a special price, which allows them to significantly save their budget. The "Arithmetic of good" foundation uses cloud technologies to organize educational activities in the form of online lessons for orphaned children. Thus, new educational technologies help to optimize expenses and transfer the accumulated experience (Rbk, 2020).

In our opinion, the stages of using the social entrepreneurship resource based on the development of smart social infrastructure in Russia should be as follows:

- The adoption of social change as the basis of being and the formation of communities that strive for social change, as well as the development of individual elements of smart social infrastructure;
- Assessment of the potential of the implemented business models and available resources as the basic conditions for

the transition of social organizations to the use of smart social infrastructure, identification of key performance indicators for new business models;

- Selection of digital platforms for communication, cooperation, and interaction of stakeholders (investors and consumers) for the exchange of values and implementation of exponential social changes, relations for scaling, programs and services, organization of interaction within the framework of implemented social projects based on smart social infrastructure (Libert et al., 2017).

5 Conclusions

The article systematizes the prerequisites for the development of social entrepreneurship at the present stage, and also defines its specific features. It is proved that in the conditions of digitalization, the formation of a smart social infrastructure will stimulate the innovative activity of social entrepreneurs in solving socially significant problems. The authors developed a conceptual scheme for using the potential of smart social infrastructure in the implementation of social entrepreneurship projects. An analysis of the practice of social entrepreneurship in Russia has shown that it is not sustainably developed, especially in comparison with developed countries, but it has significant growth dynamics. The use of smart social infrastructure as a tool for the development of social entrepreneurship in Russia is constrained by two factors: insufficient level of digitalization and lack of developed smart social infrastructure; failure to adopt a mental model based on scaling relationships using modern technologies, which creates the inability of social enterprises to lead in rapidly changing conditions. The authors have identified the stages of development of social infrastructure in Russia to unlock the potential of social entrepreneurship.

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