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CREATING INNOVATIVE CENTERS FOR SUSTAINABLE ENTREPRENEURSHIP: MODELS, TOOLS, CHALLENGES

Sustainable entrepreneurship is becoming a key factor in economic development amid global digital transformation. Innovation centers are a tool for supporting startups, developing social and environmental projects, and shaping the entrepreneurial ecosystem at the regional and national levels.

Identify effective models for creating innovation centers for sustainable entrepreneurship, analyze support tools, and outline the main challenges for their implementation in the modern economy.

The study found that the effective functioning of innovation centers for sustainable entrepreneurship is based on the use of different organizational models that are adapted to the specifics of the regional economy, the target audience, and available resources. In particular, academic innovation hubs at universities are focused on developing youth entrepreneurship and integrating educational programs with the practical activities of startups. Industrial and technical incubators provide access to professional equipment and technological platforms, which allows for the creation of competitive products. Social and environmental startup centers are aimed at supporting projects with social responsibility and sustainable development, while hybrid platforms combine online and offline formats to maximize coverage of the entrepreneurial community and attract international partners.

An analysis of practices has shown that the key tools for supporting innovation centers are business incubators and accelerators, which provide mentoring, project management consulting, and access to a network of potential investors (Table 1). The paper “Academic Business Incubators as Forms of Academic Entrepreneurship in Ukraine” describes the legal and organizational aspects of incubators at universities, providing an understanding of how such structures fit into the education and business support system.

Table 1

Examples of university business incubators and accelerators in Ukraine

Name / Institution	Short description
YEP! (Youth Entrepreneurial Partnership) – Uzhhorod National University	An academic business incubator that provides students with the opportunity to implement startup ideas, receive mentoring and advice, work on projects – in other words, combine education with practical entrepreneurship.
IdeasLab – startup platform at Ukrainian Catholic University (UCU)	An incubator/platform for launching student ideas and startups, with mentoring support. Teams from many universities in Ukraine are united through IdeasLab.
Academic business incubators at Kyiv National Economic University (KNEU)	The studies highlight the experience of universities, including KNEU, in creating academic incubators as elements of the entrepreneurial ecosystem development.
Business Incubator in Kharkiv Polytechnic Institute	Incubator for technological/innovative startups – provides mentoring support, business modeling consulting, assistance with market entry, preparation for Demo Day, and attracting investment.
Business incubator at the National University of Life and Environmental Sciences of Ukraine	Focused on projects in the field of biological resources, agriculture, and natural resource management; assists students and researchers with business plan development, marketing, and financial planning.
Business incubator at the Ivano-Frankivsk National Technical University of Oil and Gas	An educational/incubation platform for young entrepreneurs – offers business education programs, support in creating projects, training, and consulting.
Business incubator at Poltava Polytechnic National University	Youth incubator for students: supports the development and implementation of startups, assists with project design, entrepreneurial skills, and market entry.

An important component is the provision of financial resources through grant programs, venture funds, and government incentives, which creates opportunities for scaling promising projects. In addition, digital platforms, including business simulations and virtual exchanges, serve as an effective tool for teaching entrepreneurial skills, developing critical thinking, and modeling real-life business scenarios in a safe environment.

The Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine recently announced an initiative to create a national network of startup schools/incubators/accelerators at universities and research institutions. This demonstrates the state's systemic interest in the development of academic entrepreneurship.

At the same time, the study identified a number of systemic challenges that limit the effectiveness of innovation centers. These include insufficient financial and regulatory support, high competition in the global market, a shortage of qualified personnel and mentors, and the heterogeneity of regional infrastructure. Particular attention should be paid to the integration of digital technologies into traditional management and learning models, as this largely determines the speed at which entrepreneurial teams adapt to current market conditions and sustainable development requirements.

Thus, the results of the study confirm the need for a comprehensive approach to the formation of innovative centers for sustainable entrepreneurship, combining academic expertise, technological infrastructure, and digital tools for the development of entrepreneurial potential and critical thinking among young people and professionals.

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