

SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

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Social Innovation as an Effective Response to Modern Challenges in Education



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Abstract. The system of education is an engine of progress in the modern world. On the one hand, it shapes human capital thus contributing to social development and improving the competitiveness of economies; on the other hand, it is a kind of mechanism that helps adapt to changes in the global labor market. At the same time, educational systems all over the world are continuously faced with certain challenges and problems associated with the development of globalization, informatization, integration, knowledge economy, etc. Social innovations are one of the effective tools to address these challenges. The article brings to the fore the issues associated with the development of social innovation in the system of education. The goal of the work is to highlight specific characteristics of social innovation in education, to analyze the current state of social innovation in Russia on the example of the system of education, to highlight drivers of and barriers to the development of social innovation in Russian education under the research project “Social Innovation: Driving Force of Social Change” (SI-DRIVE) of the Seventh Framework Programme of the European Union, one of the participants of which was Vologda Research Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences. The paper emphasizes the implementation and promotion of social innovation in the Russian education system. According to the results of case studies, major factors that hinder the development of social innovation in education include lack of financing, and various administrative and regulatory barriers. We provide examples of successful projects showing that the main drivers of social initiatives include charismatic leadership, governmental support, strong demand, and development of partnership networks. In conclusion, we give recommendations aimed to provide comprehensive assistance to the development of social innovation in the Russian education system.

Key words: social innovation, education system, social entrepreneurship, globalization, inequality, governance.

Introduction

Amid modern conditions rapidly changing under the influence of globalization processes in all spheres of human activity, certain transformations and re-focusing of goals and priorities take place. The education system as an institution is responsible for people’s proper preparation for professional, social, creative, and other types of activity is not an exception. Education systems of world’s countries are currently facing a number of challenges including inequalities in access to education, insufficient funding, issues of education quality and literacy, migrant socialization, compliance of the educational content with modern requirements, etc.[14, 15, 20, 22].

Europe 2020 strategy [17] defines common social challenges for the European states associated with education and lifelong learning one way or another, such as:

- ageing society;
- shortage of labor skills and global competition;
- high unemployment rate.

Since European labor markets are national, multidisciplinary and rapidly developing, the skills, competences and qualifications needed for social and economic participation need to be constantly adjusted. This includes, in addition to the skills related to professional activity, knowledge and competencies, as well as related skills:

the ability to learn and take the initiative, entrepreneurial skills promoting employment and business creation. In addition, it is important to better identify the necessary skills, competences and qualifications and manage them in order to prevent non-compliance of qualifications or professional skills with job requirements [24].

The concept of lifelong learning (covering all types of education including formal and informal) is considered as an adequate response to persistent and profound technological, social, economic, and demographic changes. Lifelong education is guided by strategic goals and optimization of goals and objectives identified by the European Commission, among which are: the accessibility of preschool education, reducing number of cases of school dropouts and increasing quantitative and qualitative indicators of engagement in lifelong learning [23].

A number of projects is aimed at the solution of global issues of education. For example, a non-profit global literacy project, aimed at increasing the literacy rate of various countries through creating clusters of high literacy where children and adults have direct access to books and programs promoting the culture of literacy [27].

Amid globalization and knowledge economy, Russia also has to search for solutions to the above mentioned issues, as well as a number of other specific problems. A special place among these challenges is occupied by the information technology challenge associated with the change in technology, the development

of the digital environment and, as a result, outdated knowledge and forecast of demand for certain competencies [4, p. 162; 5, p. 660]. In addition, there is an intellectual challenge – competition for highly qualified workforce amid the gap between vacancies and employment conditions and graduates' expectations, as well as graduates' competences and employer requirements [1; 6, p. 38]. Internationalization of education (unification of educational standards, double degree programs, academic mobility, etc.) raises the issue of preserving the unity of educational system in Russia. One of the most important objective is to overcome the administrative challenge which lies in bureaucratization of education, increased volume of paper work, insufficient funding [10, p. 115; 12, p. 10]. Moreover, there remain unresolved problems of personnel ageing, lack of access to quality education, non-inclusion of educational organizations in innovation processes [3, p. 38] etc.

According to world practice, social innovation is an effective response to modern challenges to education systems¹. For example, the project “Rock Your Life! Mentoring” [28] (Germany) for people with a low level of education is aimed at developing their knowledge and talents so that they could find an appropriate job. The project cooperates

¹ The current research, social innovation is referred to as a new combination of or configuration of social practices in specific spheres of activity and social contexts, initiated by certain actors or groups of actors through target method in order to satisfy the needs and address the issues better than it is possible within the current practice; finally adopted and institutionalized as a new social practice [21, p. 9]).

with several companies willing to provide opportunities for young people to enter the labor market. The initiative “Abuelas cuentacuentos” [13] (Argentina) focuses on the problem of improving the quality of education, reading skills and comprehension in primary school through active participation of elderly people. The project also ensures cooperation between generations and enables the elderly to feel needed by the society. The program was replicated in Brazil, Colombia, Chile, and Mexico. Exploring the opportunities for social innovation to tackle social issues and territorial development is one of the important research areas. The importance of social innovation development is also realized by the authorities, particularly in Europe, where the EU social policies are reflected in the Europe 2020 strategy.

The purpose for the article is to highlight specific characteristics of social innovation in education, analyze their modern state in Russia, as well as identify drivers and barriers of their development based on case studies and areas for their comprehensive promotion in the Russian education system.

Social innovation in education has a number of features:

1. Unlike other types of projects, social innovation projects in education are focused on developing original solutions to educational problems, rather than creating a unique product (good, service). In this regard, social innovation in education has no real tangible economic results which social entrepreneurs could use immediately. These projects are

aimed at creating the framework for achieving long-term effects (qualified personnel reserve for enterprises and organizations, youth employment after school, college or university, socialization of vulnerable population groups).

2. Wider audience which requires separation into specific target groups.

3. Inter-disciplinary and multi-problem innovation. Social educational projects themselves, while addressing main problems of education, also touch upon critical issues of functioning of other spheres of science, health, social security, environment, entrepreneurship, and employment.

4. Extensive use of information platforms and technology platforms on the Internet.

5. Such projects are mostly initiated by non-state organizations. However, due to the need to navigate the rapidly changing educational environment, as the projects develop, they involved the most representative figures of science, education, and many other related fields.

6. The slow-rate deployment of social projects in education due to strict regulation of educational activity and bureaucratic constraints.

7. Focus of Russian entrepreneurs implementing social innovation projects in education on the strategy “First – rules and experience, then – deployment of activities”. This is primarily due to the fact that education in many countries is a sector formally regulated by the state. It is impossible to take into account all specific features of the industry

in the deployment of entrepreneurial activity as organization may not be registered by the state or get a license unless all the required documents are available, or unless the activity complies with the approved standards. Therefore, entrepreneurs working in this field typically have extensive experience and professional reputation.

As for the Russian reality, social innovation is a relatively new phenomenon [11, p. 70]. Unlike developed European countries where civil society plays the key role, in Russia special importance in spreading social initiatives is given to the authorities who, understanding the importance of their development, stimulate the processes of social activity in high-priority areas. This is explained by numerous barriers (administrative, legislative, financial, etc.), for this reason, for example, representatives of the business community are slow to implement social innovation projects. This is partly related to the scientific and technical area of the innovation policy in Russia – the focus on technological innovation whose development directly affects economic growth rate. However, the first major initiative to support social innovation, social entrepreneurship in particular, belongs to private business – LUKOIL oil company whose President is Vagit Alekperov who, in 2007, founded the Fund of regional social programs (FRSP) “Our Future”. Despite certain difficulties, the implementation process of social innovation was spread throughout Russia. According to FRSP “Our Future”, during 2007–2016 in the framework of the company’s activity 187 innovative projects were implemented in the country [2].

Materials and methods. SI-DRIVE methodology

It should be noted that a serious problem in terms of implementing such projects in education is a low level of public trust in the activities of social entrepreneurs as business representatives, lack of understanding of the nature of social innovation. Thus, according to Zircon Research group, a considerable share (48%) of Russians rely only on the state in the solution of social issues and only 4% – on non-state actors [9].

Table 1 presents some examples of social innovation projects implemented in the Russian education system.

Comparative analysis of Russian experience in social innovation projects in education identifies their main features:

- focus on developing original solutions to certain issues in education;
- time lag in manifestation of tangible real economic effect;
- coverage of a wide range of people;
- interdisciplinary projects;
- greater role of information technology;
- predominance of private initiatives in developing projects;
- slow pace of project implementation due to bureaucratic restrictions and strict regulation of educational activities.

It should be noted that the study of the experience of social entrepreneurship in education is hampered by underdeveloped status and performance criteria in social entrepreneurship. For this reason, the issue of classifying certain projects to social innovation currently requires involvement of experts.

Table 1. Projects of social innovation in education

Social need	Learning stage	Work areas	Projects
1. Equal opportunities in education	Pre-school education	Implementation of invariant (as a rule non-state) forms of pre-school education	Project "Association of private kindergartens" (Tyumen Oblast)
			Project "Development of individual enterprise in pre-school education "Pre-schooler" (Khabarovsk Krai)
			"Centre of development of innovations in pre-school education, family kindergartens" (Krasnoyarsk Krai)
			Project "Building-garten" (Samara Oblast)
	Elementary and secondary education Continuing professional education	Joining efforts of the state and private organizations in social adaptation and professional training of disabled people, foster children, older persons, as well as development of social activity and responsibility of young people	Interregional agricultural complex "Farmers' school" (Perm Krai)
			Project "Inclusive education of individuals with disabilities" (Republic of Tatarstan)
2. Expansion of educational opportunities	Pre-school education Elementary and secondary education Professional education	Effective joining efforts of state and non-state organizations, focused on the development of intellectual abilities and creative potential of children and youth	Project "Development of research and entrepreneurial potential of Russian universities ("EURECA")" (Saint-Petersburg, Nizhny Novgorod Oblast)
			Project "Pupil of the year" (Vologda Oblast)
			Project "Development of effective system for revealing children's potential and realization of children's abilities in pre-school educational facilities and schools" (Chuvash Republic)
			Project "Regional model of young talents revealing and developing in the conditions of supplementary education" (Stavropol Krai)
			Project "Green schools of Russia" (Krasnodar Krai)
			Project "Community of gifted children" (Omsk Oblast)
			Project "Lift to the future" (Moscow)
			Project "Centers of youth innovative creative work" (Republic of Tatarstan, Moscow)
			Innovative family center of education and leisure activities "Home for the whole family" (Russia, Moscow)

End of Table 1

Social need	Learning stage	Work areas	Projects
3. Lack of professional skill, competences	Elementary and secondary education Tertiary education Professional education Continuing professional education Vocational training	Formation of professional competences needed for innovative economy, based on up-to-date (among others, remote-acting) technology	Project "Centre of instructional design in education" (Russia, Moscow)
			Project "Early training of innovative human resources for the city's economy" (Russia, Novosibirsk Oblast)
			Project "E-GENERATION. Leaders of the new industrialization in Russia" (Russia, Murmansk Oblast, Leningrad Oblast, Tula Oblast, Volgograd Oblast, Perm Krai, Stavropol Krai, Krasnodar Krai)
			Project "The Enterprise for All" (Russia, Rostov Oblast)
			Project "All-Russian pharmaceutical personnel reserve" (Russia, Moscow)
			Projects "Energy saving center" (Russia, Moscow, Moscow Oblast)
			Projects "School of environmental entrepreneurship" (Russia, Irkutsk Oblast)
			Projects "Academy of pharmaceutical and bio-industry" (Russia, Yaroslavl Oblast)
			Project "Universarium" (Moscow)
			Project "StudRezerv" (Novosibirsk Oblast)
4. Promotion of adults' participation in education and professional training	Elementary and secondary education Tertiary education	Formation of professional orientation and vocation of the youth	Project "City of professions 360+" (Tyumen Oblast)
			"Flights in vertical direction" (Russia, Lipetsk Oblast)
4. Promotion of adults' participation in education and professional training	Continuing professional education	Formation of new strategies for lifelong learning	Project "Improving of computer competence of older people" (Vologda Oblast)
			Project "Teaching computer skills to older people" (Republic of Buryatia)
			Project "Young volunteers of information society" (Omsk Oblast)
			Oleg Andreev School of speed reading (Moscow, Saint Petersburg)
Source: compiled by the authors.			

One of the most extensive studies of social innovation is an international project of the EU 7th Framework program “Social Innovation: Driving Force of Social Change” (SI-DRIVE) [25] focused on dissemination of knowledge about social innovation in three main areas:

integration of theory and research methodology for better understanding of social innovation leading to a new global innovation paradigm.

European and global mapping of social innovation in eight major world regions according to different social, economic, cultural, historical, and religious contexts;

ensuring the importance of social innovation for policy-makers and practitioners with the use of in-depth analysis and case studies in seven practice areas, including European and global comparison, foresight and round tables on policy issues.

SI-DRIVE project involves 14 partners from 11 EU member-states and 11 partners from all continents, accompanied by 13 advisory board members, all in all covering 30 countries all over the world. Russia is represented by the Institute of Socio-Economic Development of Territories of the Russian Academy of Sciences. The study focuses on seven main practice fields: education, employment, environment and climate change, energy, transport and mobility, health and social care, poverty reduction and sustainable development [25].

In the first stage, the study defined the initial concept, objectives, and the methodology including the working definition of social innovation and basic scientific provisions, which is reflected in critical literature review [19] devoted to the theoretical aspects of the study. On this basis, methods and instruments

for the first empirical stage (global mapping of social innovation including more than 1.000 cases; *Fig. 1*) have been developed helping get an idea about social innovation in selected regions and policy areas (at the national, European, and global levels).

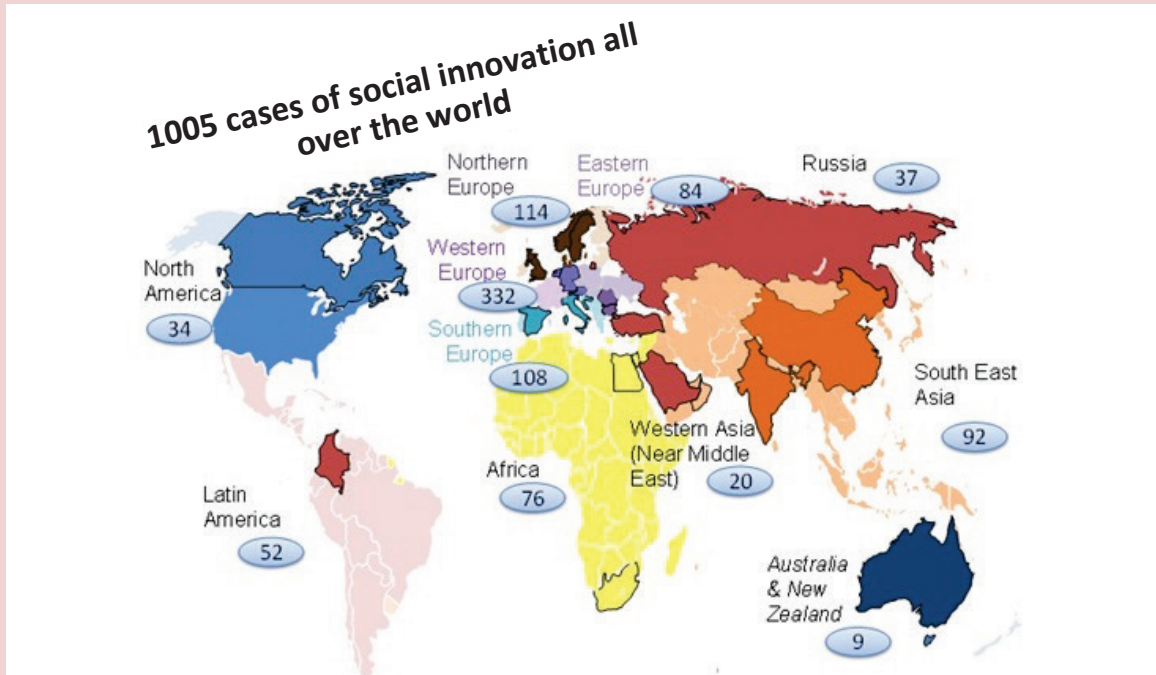
The generated database became the starting point for determining the typical projects in the relevant policy areas and world regions. On this basis, 82 projects for in-depth investigation (the second experiential stage) were selected. The results of the empirical phase helped conduct comparative analysis in each of the policy area, complete the theoretical-methodological concept, and formulate policy and forecast recommendations.

The focus of qualitative research is the dynamic relations between social innovation, practice areas² and various mechanisms of social change. All these mechanisms are reflected in the five key SI-DRIVE dimensions (*Fig. 2*), according to which the main purpose of case studies is to promote better understanding of:

- processes of social innovation and its performance amid social change (institutionalization, diffusion, and simulation of social practices);
- functions and roles of actors and networks for the development, dissemination, simulation, and institutionalization of social innovation;
- identification of factors of critical success (and failure) leading to social changes [21].

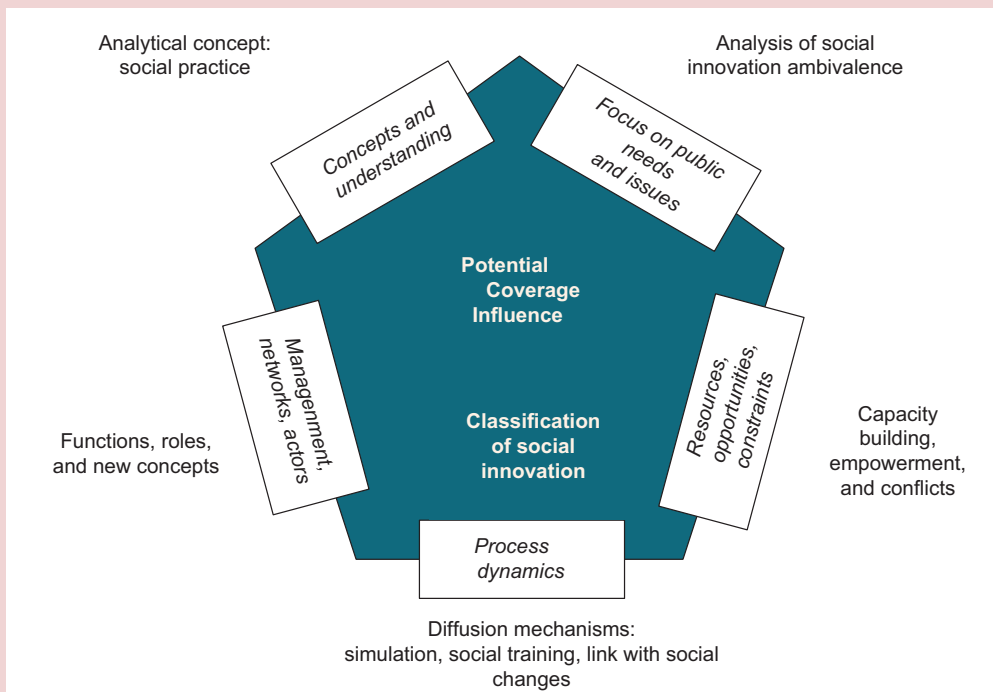
² Practice areas represent similar initiatives in the generalized group of social innovation, for example, various local types of micro-financing in the framework of general practice area – micro-financing.

Figure 1. Number of SI-DRIVE projects



Source: Howaldt J., Kaletka C., Schröder A. *Mapping the world of social innovation. Key results of a comparative analysis of 1005 Social innovation initiatives at a glance.* TUDO: Dortmund, 2016. P. 6.

Figure 2. Five key SI-DRIVE dimensions



Source: Howaldt J., Schröder A., Kaletka C., Rehfeld D., Terstriep J.: *Mapping the World of Social Innovation: A Global Comparative Analysis across Sectors and World Regions.* Dortmund: TU, 2016. P. 5.

Table 2. Brief information on the projects

Criteria	“Timurovtsy of information society”	VoIRC RAS Research and Education Center (VoIRC RAS REC)
Старт проекта	2009	2001
Project supervisor	Russian Agency for Information Society Development (RARIO)	Federal State Budgetary Institution of Science “Vologda Research Center” (VoIRC RAS REC)
Project initiator	Aleksandr Anatol'evich Aigistov (RARIO Director General)	Vladimir Aleksandrovich Ilyin (VoIRC RAS Scientific Director)
Project purpose	Implementation of the “KiberLikbez” methodology aimed at elimination of computer illiteracy among socially vulnerable citizens	Establishment of multi-level system of training and re-training of highly qualified personnel for science, economy, and governing bodies in the region
Sources: Direction: Timurovtsy of information society. <i>Russian Agency for Information Society Development, RARIO</i> . Available at: http://rario.ru/projects/timurovci.php ; <i>VoIRC RAS Research and Education Center: 10 years. From the idea to its implementation: in 2 volumes. Vologda: ISERT RAN, 2013. Book 1: The subsystem of supplementary school education. 138 p.</i>		

The practice area “Education and lifelong learning” at the first stage was presented in 211 cases: 18 social innovation projects were selected for in-depth study in six global world regions such as Northern Europe (Finland, Sweden, Lithuania), Western Europe (Germany, Austria), Eastern Europe (Bulgaria, Croatia, Montenegro, Romania), Russia, Latin America (Bolivia, Chile, Argentina), and North Africa (Egypt). To achieve the research objectives in-depth interviews with different actors (participants) of social innovation projects³ were conducted.

The case study conducted by Vologda Research Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences (VoIRC RAS) analyzed positive experience in addressing the problems of the education system through two successful projects: “Timurovtsy of information society” (Moscow) and “VoIRC RAS Research and Education Center” (Vologda; *Table 2*) selected at the first stage of the SI-DRIVE project.

³ Further, data from in-depth interviews with A.A. Ganin (“Timurovtsy of information society”), G.V. Leonidova and E.S. Mironenko (VoIRC RAS REC).

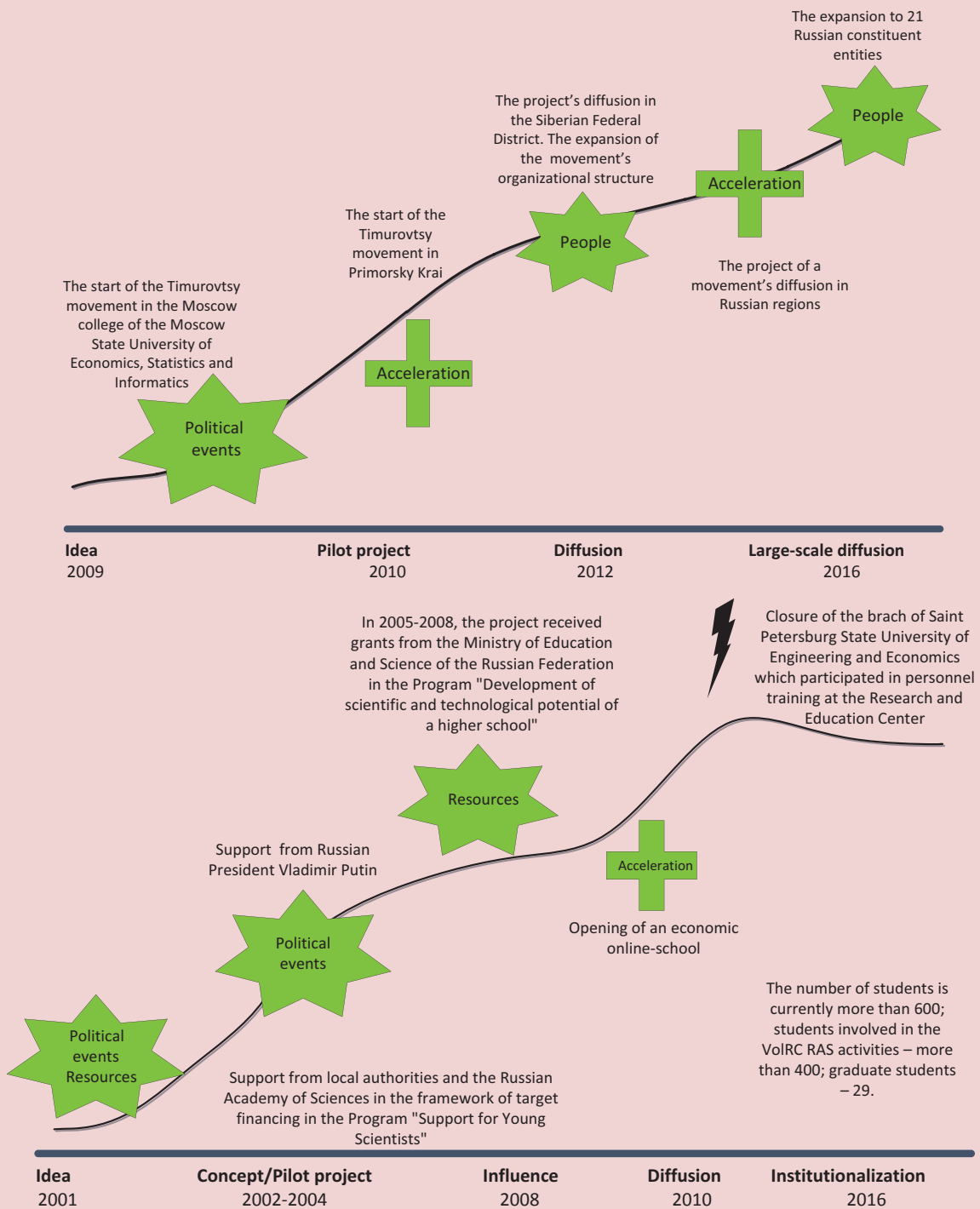
The projects have different purposes and conceptual framework, they operate in different geographical, economic, and organizational conditions. What unites them is that over a few years they made significant progress in their activities and have sufficient potential for further development.

Discussion of results of case studies

The main stages of project implementation are demonstrated in *Figure 3*. In the framework of the study we sought to determine the factors and trends in economic and social life influencing the success of social innovation in education.

First of all, it should be noted that the success of the educational project to some extent depends on how the idea is embedded in the overall context of the public policy. Initiatives reflecting the objectives of the state’s development strategy and their logical continuation gain more support. For example, the initiator of the project “Timurovtsy of information society” A.A. Ganin suggests that the idea of “computer literacy” for adults and socially vulnerable population groups was

Figure 3. Biography of projects “Timurovtsy of information society” and “VoIRC RAS REC”



Source: Schröder A., Kuschnierz L., Asenova D., Damianova Z., Dimova A., Bernal M.E., Cecchini S., Morales B., El Zoheiry A.H., Wageih M., David A., Golovchin M., Kuzmin I., Popov A., Soloveva T., Terebova S., Andersson T., Hultman S., Stumbryte G., Tinfavičienė I., Kalac S., Karzen M., Turza B., Brunn L., Domanski D., Ariton D., Schöpf P., Holtgrewe U. *Social innovation in Education and Lifelong Learning: case study results*. TUDO: Technische Universität Dortmund, 2017. Pp. 64, 69.

originated during the debate in the society around the content of the state program of the Russian Federation “Information society (2011–2020)” and the degree of implementation of its requirements regarding the use of public services portal: “...*The resource (public services portal) was widely financed but the utilization rate was insignificant, which caused misunderstanding and sharp criticism in the society and the media*”.

At the same time, the reasons for such provisions were self-evident. People of the older generation (potential users of the portal services) due to their age characteristics face difficulties using the electronic tools and technologies and carrying out social interaction. Thus, the project offers opportunities for real saving of funds allocated by the state to implement the objectives of the program: “...*An important element of the project is the opportunities it provides for saving public budget funds. In 2014, the implementation of “Timurovtsy movement” saved more than 15 billion rubles for the state budget*” (A.A. Ganin).

However, being part of the state policy is not enough for the implementation of social innovation. A powerful driver for the implementation and further development of a project is its initiator’s charisma. The success of large-scale initiatives is possible only in case they are originated by the initiator possessing authority and respect in the society and state structures. “...*The primary role in the project initiation belongs to the position of RARIO (Russian Agency for Information Society Development) Director General Alexander*

Medvedev Aigistov, which lies in the fact that everyone should be free to use electronic public services regardless of their location and age” (A.A. Ganin). “*The experience of scientific and management work, the ability to find the right solutions by V. Ilyin is an integral factor in the project’s success*” (G.V. Leonidova).

In order to safely shift social innovation from the stage of concept inception to its implementation and development diffusion is required, ensured by reproduction of the project’s idea by the third-party actors.

As emphasized by the supervisor of the project “Timurovtsy of information society” A.A. Ganin, “*The methodology of our project is model and is easily replicated. The strategy of the developers is to create software and methodological framework for carrying out “computer illiteracy elimination”, which can be easily and cheaply “replicated” in regions, developing the educational structure of this basis...*” The expansion of activities of VolRC RAS REC is one of its priority areas. The services of Research Center currently cover 14 Russian constituent entities and several CIS countries. In the future, extension of the coverage area is planned.

Arising during diffusion, the correlation between actors often leads to new partnerships and expansion of the organization responsible for the project, new regional branches in its structure. An example of such expansion is the project “Timurovtsy of information society” which forms an extensive umbrella organization: General Secretariat (Federal headquarters) – regional commissioners – an Association of volunteer–“Timurovtsy”.

The project is currently expanding due to participants from Russian regions: teachers-promoters, volunteers, business. "There are a lot of cases of *our project ideas being borrowed. The imitator projects mostly adopt the name "Timurovtsy..."*. Federal headquarters of the movement do not forbid them to do it, but rather encourages them" (A.A. Ganin). Since the activities of VoIRC RAS REC are aimed at different categories of students, the process of active cooperation involves schools in Vologda and in districts of the Vologda Oblast and other Russian regions and CIS countries. The project interacts with schools, universities, institutes, public organizations, enterprises, etc. "Different relations with the media, professional communities, public and state organizations, educational and scientific institutions play a significant role in the promotion and development of the Centre" (G.V. Leonidova).

The desire to provide conditions for replication as a key to the expansion and development of the project determines an easy attitude of social innovators towards copyright protection. "We certainly thought about the development of a trademark, but it seems unnecessary to protect copyright for the idea of the project as it deters potential actors of its replication in regions" (A.A. Ganin). "All the achievements of the project are in public access" (E.S. Mironenko).

The success of social innovation is ensured by actors' abilities to overcome mental barriers, misunderstanding of program goals of project participants of educational relations becoming (even unwillingly) the counterparties of the initiative. According to the initiator of the

project "Timurovtsy of information society", "... the organizers faced the fact that headmasters and teachers in schools for "illiteracy elimination" were reluctant to participate in events fearing for the safety of school material assets, sanitary level in an educational organization after the visits of the "outsider" elderly people" (A. A. Ganin).

Technology improving the efficiency of innovation diffusion is also of great importance in the development and operation of the projects. "Within the Research and Education Center there is an Economic Online School which uses electronic diaries in the educational process, conducts interactive activities, teleconferences, Skype conferences, etc. It is the use of Internet technology and online learning that helped greatly expand the project's geography" (E.S. Mironenko). "Modern technology (computer and Internet) play a major role in the project. With their help the educational process is carried out. With rare exception, they are provided by actors on a pro bono or charitable basis" (A.A. Ganin).

Conclusion

Thus, having studied the experience of practical implementation of social innovation projects in education, we can conclude that the main driving force for social innovation is charismatic leadership and a development strategy, as well as compatibility with the educational system. A clear action plan for the implementation and expansion of projects, as well as competent management helps avoid many complexities. Besides, an important driver for the development of social innovation in education is support from public authorities, both formal and financial. The implementation of such projects is in great demand among the

population; the use of information technology accelerates the process of innovation diffusion. The interdisciplinary nature of innovation initiatives involves the interaction of various spheres of economy, science, politics and civil society, which makes it possible to concentrate common efforts on solving a particular social issue. The main factor hindering the process of development of social projects in education is insufficient funding, particularly at the pilot stage of project implementation, which greatly limits the pace of innovation diffusion. There are certain administrative and regulatory barriers which also represent a major problem of social innovation implementation. The leveling of these barriers will significantly simplify the process of implementation of social innovation initiatives in education.

Furthermore, the authorities must understand their important role in the development of social innovation not only through their funding and promotion, but also through coordination and integration into the existing educational system. An important factor is inter-sectoral collaboration and cooperation, active involvement of the civil society (including active users/beneficiaries), which leads to the creation of the social innovation eco-system [18, p. 12]. A modern approach to social innovation should be focused on empowering education and lifelong learning, provide opportunities for unlocking the potential of social innovation on the basis of favorable innovative environment for effective participation of the civil society and integration of all interested parties.

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