

The Efficient Applicability Limits of Social Entrepreneurship

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Abstract: The efficiency of social entrepreneurship depends on the ability of social enterprises to be sustainable. So, this paper implies deriving the efficient applicability limits of social entrepreneurship in terms of their sustainability. The more sustainable a social enterprise is, the wider its efficient applicability limits are. So, it's a novel approach towards studying the efficiency of social enterprises and the limits of their efficient applicability. The case study approach is used to estimate these limits, and three social enterprises are taken for this analysis, namely, APOPO, Benetech and Conserve. The insights of this paper suggest that the burden on social enterprises should be dosed, because their viability depends, in most part, on implementing the respective social policy. Under the excessive burden on social enterprises they could be destroyed, whereas under the insufficient burden some of their capacities could be idle, and that would suggest that they are inefficient. Eight factors of increasing the efficient applicability limits of social entrepreneurship (namely the state support of social enterprises, the aid provided for social enterprises by the private sponsors, the support for social enterprises provided by the international organizations, the support for social enterprises provided by the external sources of loan and emission financing, creation of special economic zones in different innovation centres, in which social enterprises are formed, using social enterprises as sub-contractors of the private business in the process of social outsourcing, the position of public opinion towards social entrepreneurship, the strategy of designing and marketing the products of social enterprises) were derived. The measures of the state support, enlarging the efficient applicability limits of social enterprises are provided. Also, the creation of special economic zones in the innovation centres, in which social enterprises are formed, is proposed, as well as the mechanism of subsidizing social enterprises by the state and creating some special conditions for the microfinance and social stock markets as the main external sources of financing social enterprises are suggested.

Keywords: Efficient applicability, Social enterprise, Innovation

1. Introduction

In recent decades, there has been growing interest towards the topic of social entrepreneurship in the scientist community. It is connected primarily with the fact that it presents a new, innovative way of solving social problems under the environment of decreasing public expenditures by the state, and so it is rather an efficient tool of substitution of the state in different social sectors. For a long time the problem of efficient applicability of social entrepreneurship wasn't considered in economic studies, because within the ideological aspect the neoliberal approach towards studying social entrepreneurship predominated. And this neoliberal aspect doesn't allow to consider social entrepreneurship in its inseparable link with the public policy, but the neoliberal economists consider it separately from the state and social system, they consider it as mere ordinary private business maximizing its profit. For example, in such manner it is considered by A.A. Moskovskaya and her colleagues from the Higher School of Economics of Russia (Moskovskaya, 2011). Though in order to use this tool adequately one should determine the limits of efficient applicability of this phenomenon, since under the excessive burden on social enterprises, the risk of degradation of this phenomenon emerges, and in the case of insufficient burden its incomplete development takes place. In most part, the efficiency of social enterprises depends on their ability to be financially sustainable, so their limits of efficient applicability should be determined on the base of their data on their sustainability. The more sustainable a social enterprise is, the wider limits of efficient applicability it has.

In terms of the efficient applicability limits of social entrepreneurship, one can derive two aspects of this phenomenon: sectoral and territorial. The sectoral aspect implies using this phenomenon in respective sectors, which could be in line with the mission of social enterprises. The territorial aspect implies deriving the regions, in which social entrepreneurship is developed to the greatest extent, and that implies deriving the position of local authorities concerning social enterprises, their awareness about the large potential of social entrepreneurs and their readiness to stimulate the development of social enterprises.

2. The Sectoral Aspect of the Efficient Applicability Limits of Social Entrepreneurship

Within a context of sectoral attachment in Russia the most part of social enterprises works in the sectors of education, healthcare and social services. Such sectors as culture, sports, leisure and entertainment are at the third place, according to their popularity. Further processing industries, other services, trade and maintenance take place following the industries staying at the third place (see Table 1). Such industries as mining, household activities, public administration, military security and social care are the least popular industries within the area of social entrepreneurship (Soloviova, 2023). Meanwhile, one should mention that during the period of 2020-

2022 the amount of social enterprises increased in almost all the sectors of economic activities. The processing industries and storage and transportation, excluding the insurance, financial activities and electricity supply due to the low base effect, demonstrate the most significant rates of increase (about three-fold increase). Social entrepreneurship is less active in its development in agriculture and forestry (111%), as well as in the activities of hotels and public catering (149%) and the real estate operations (182%) (Soloviova, 2023). These facts can be explained by the approval that social enterprises have a certain social mission that is focused on executing a special social impact, and this impact can be realized best of all in such sectors as education, healthcare and culture. All the rest sectors are less important in terms of producing the social impact. As a whole, the sectoral structure of social entrepreneurship within the Unified register of the subjects of small and medium-sized entrepreneurship corresponds with that of social entrepreneurship, according to the statistical data of competition “Social entrepreneur”, which is held by the Our Future Foundation (OFF, 2020). The sectoral structure of social entrepreneurship is such surprising that one should ask questions: “Why should one use social entrepreneurship, in most part, in education, healthcare and public services? And why shouldn’t it be used in mining and oil and gas industry?” The answer to these questions underlies the assumption that using social entrepreneurship in oil and gas industry wouldn’t be worthwhile, since its main task is not the profit maximization and rent-seeking, but solving certain social problems on the base of innovative approach. It is the maximum presence of social entrepreneurship in these sectors that determines the limits of its efficient applicability.

Table 1: Distribution of social enterprises of the Russian Federation by types of economic activity, 2020-2022

The section of economic activity classification	2020	2021	2022
Education	662	1864	2013
The activity in the field of healthcare and social services	873	1824	1908
The activity in the field of culture, sports, organization of leisure and entertainment	442	1168	1280
Manufacturing industries	237	577	606
Providing other types of services	158	446	474
Wholesaling and retailing; maintenance of vehicles and motorbikes	152	380	412
The administrative activity and associated supplementary services	80	158	173
The activity of hotels and catering units	61	147	164
The professional, scientific and technical activities	65	138	150
The activity in the field of information and communication	47	114	124
The activity in the field of the real estate operations	37	57	55
Transportation and storage	33	53	54
Construction	27	39	49
Agriculture, forestry, hunting, fishing and fish farming	18	34	42
Water supply, sewerage, organization of waste management and recycling	9	11	0
Financial and insurance activities	1	3	4
Provision of electrical energy, gas and steam; air conditioning	1	5	4
The activity of households as employers; undifferentiated activity of private households on producing goods and services for their own consumption	1	2	2
Public administration and provision of military security; social security	0	2	2
Mining	0	1	1
Total	2904	7023	7517

Source: Data of the Federal Tax Service of Russia (2020-2022)

3. The Territorial Aspect of the Efficient Applicability Limits of Social Entrepreneurship

The territorial aspect implies deriving the regions, in which social entrepreneurship is developed to the greatest extent, and that implies deriving the position of local authorities concerning social enterprises, their awareness about the large potential of social entrepreneurs and their readiness to stimulate the development of social

enterprises. So, for instance, in Russia in such subjects as Moscow, the Moscow region, the Khanty-Mansiysk Autonomous Area, the Republic of Bashkortostan, the Nizhny Novgorod Region and the Primorye Territory the positions of local authorities towards social enterprises is active in the sense that they rather actively support social entrepreneurship initiatives at the local level, providing subsidies for them and other kinds of the state support, without which the development of social entrepreneurship wouldn't attain such great results (see Table 1). So, for instance in the Republic of Bashkortostan in 2021 within the national project "Small and medium-sized entrepreneurship and the support of individual entrepreneurial initiative" 147 social entrepreneurs of the Republic got the measures of state support, which amounted to 70 million rubles, the amount of grants was from 100 to 500 thousand rubles (RBC Ufa, 2022). Later this programme was prolonged as it was in high demand. Speaking about other measures, one can't help but mention that the municipalities provide the financial support for the entrepreneurs to reimburse the costs incurred by them. It is the competition procedure, and social entrepreneurs have the priority in it. The Bashkir microloan company provides loans at preferential rates, and the category of social entrepreneurs is allocated into the special category, and the annual interest rate of this company is about 3.5% for social enterprises. The Republic of Bashkortostan and the Regional Leasing Company, that hasn't allocated the category of social entrepreneurs into the special category before, agreed that social entrepreneurs would have preferential rates. In terms of the size in Russia the microenterprises predominate over other enterprises (Soloviova, 2023), and first of all it is connected with the fact that it is easier for the organizations that have small sizes to meet such criteria as the necessary share of employees belonging to the category of socially vulnerable people and the necessary share of expenditures connected with their wages. The significant decrease of amount of social enterprises (so, for instance, in the Tambov region in 2022 it was 0, as compared with 2021 when it was 7 in the region (see Table 2)) can be explained by the fact that these enterprises decided not to confirm their status because they didn't benefit from inclusion into the register before.

Table 2: Region leaders and region outsiders according to the amount of social enterprises in the regions of Russia in 2020-2022

2020	2021	2022
5 region leaders		
The Moscow region (292)	The Moscow region (711)	The Moscow region (774)
The Khanty-Mansiysk Autonomous Area (291)	The Republic of Bashkortostan (347)	The Republic of Bashkortostan (391)
The Republic of Bashkortostan (194)	The Nizhny Novgorod Region (343)	The Nizhny Novgorod Region (343)
Moscow (192)	The Khanty-Mansiysk Autonomous Area (296)	The Khanty-Mansiysk Autonomous Area (296)
The Nizhny Novgorod Region (165)	The Primorye Territory (290)	The Primorye Territory (290)
5 region outsiders		
The Kaluga region (0)	The Republic of Tuva (9)	The Republic of Tuva (9)
The Kostroma region (0)	The Republic of Dagestan (8)	The Republic of Dagestan (8)
The Republics of the North Caucasus (except Chechnya) (0)	The Tambov region (7)	The Republic of Ingushetia (7)
The Republics of Kalmykia, Mordovia and Tuva (0)	The Republic of Ingushetia (7)	The Kostroma region (5)
The Ulyanovsk, Kurgan regions, the Jewish Autonomous region (0)	The Kostroma region (3)	The Tambov region (0)

Source: Soloviova (2023).

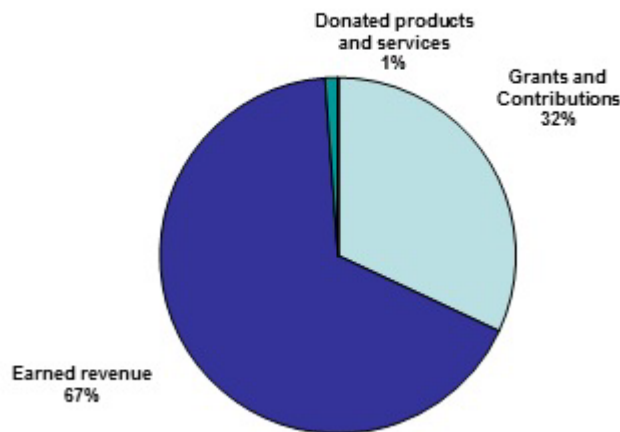
As a whole, the territorial aspect shows that the efficient applicability limits of social enterprises are wider in the regions, where the local authorities actively support social entrepreneurs, and they are narrower in the regions, where social entrepreneurs don't find any benefits from inclusion into the respective register. It is the support of local authorities at different levels that is the main factor of increasing the limits of efficient applicability of social entrepreneurship in the respective regions within the territorial aspect of this problem.

4. Three Cases of Determining the Efficient Applicability Limits of Social Enterprises

In order to determine the efficient applicability limits of social enterprises, it is sufficient to present just three examples characterizing the level of their financial sustainability, and, hence, characterizing the level of their

efficient applicability. Here three cases of social enterprises in terms of their efficient applicability limits are presented, allowing for the fact that in each of them a special factor of increasing the efficient applicability limits of social enterprises is presented. So, for instance, in the first of them the significant impact of the aid provided by the external private sponsors is emphasized, in the second one the significant influence provided by the governmental sources of financing is noted and in the third one a special role of creating the structure division on the development of design and marketing strategy of social enterprise is highlighted.

The first example is connected with the social enterprise “Benetech”, which can be named as the most progressive social enterprise in the USA. This enterprise was initially named “Arkenstone” and it was engaged in manufacturing a special reading machine for the blind people. Later the company sold this business to a commercial distributor and focused on producing the software such as, for instance, Bookshare, Human Rights, Route 66 and Benetech labs. Its total amount of financial sources consisted of 33% of its external sources and of 67% of its own income in 2008 (see Figure 1). Later, in 2017 its total income from software sales was 10.078.925 dollars (see Table 3), which is approximately 13-fold greater than the total sum of the donations, that were made to it. So, the limits of efficient applicability of this social enterprise are rather wide reflecting the high level of its financial sustainability. But at the same time this enterprise had a large share of the financial support provided by private sponsors, namely grants and contributions from the private sources of financing. It was at the level of 32% of the total amount of financial sources of Benetech’s projects in 2008 (see Figure 1).



Source: Fruchterman (2008)

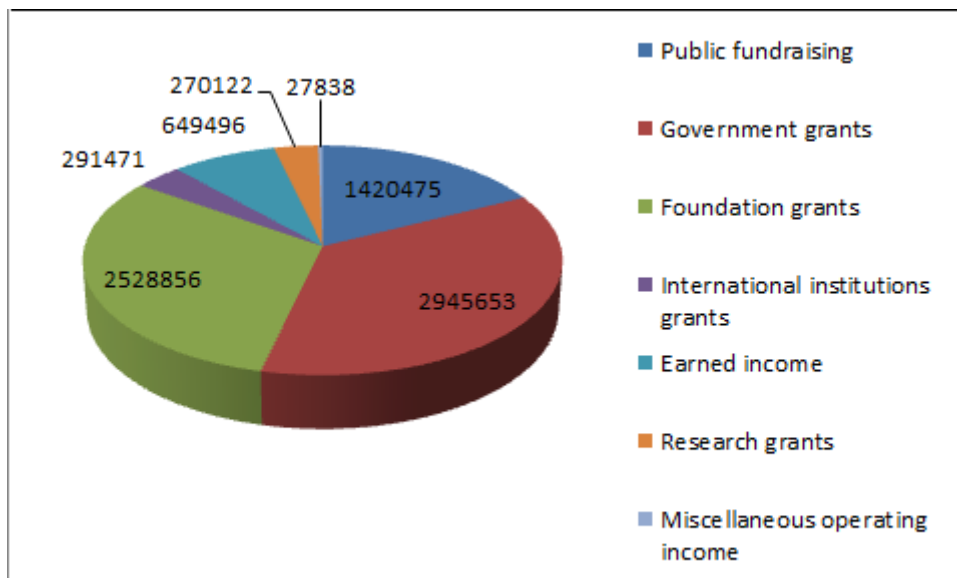
Figure 1: Financial sources of Benetech in 2008

Table 3: Financial support and income of Benetech in 2017

Financial support or income	Value (US dollars)
Donations	793.147
Services/products provided	412.078
Payment for engineering and consulting services	5
Income from software sales:	
Bookshare	9.439.665
Human rights	569.102
Route 66	99
Benetech labs	70.059
Interest income	6.413
Rental income	22.392
Total financial support and income	11.312.960

Source: Benetech (2018)

The second example is connected with the social enterprise “APOPO” from Mozambique. This enterprise is engaged in landmine and tuberculosis detection, and is a very successive social enterprise, but it always needs some financial support from the external sources. During the period of twenty-one years since its foundation APOPO has developed into a mature organization. 2018 was marked by great progress – not only expanding its existing landmine detection program in Cambodia and securing independent registration in Angola but also enabling it to reach even more tuberculosis patients in Africa with the incredible expansion from 73 partner hospitals in two countries at the beginning of the year to 142 hospitals in three countries at the end of the year. The structure of financial sources of this company is rather diverse. In 2022 more than 90% in this structure consisted of external sources, and the share of the government grants was the largest and comprised 2945653 US dollars, and only 0.5% were of its own income (APOPO, 2022) (see Figure 2). As the definition of this phenomenon says, “a social enterprise is an organization that applies commercial strategies to maximize improvements in financial, social and environmental well-being” (Wikipedia, 2013). It can be structured as a charity or non-governmental organization and can require some external sources of financing during the periods of its formation. According to the authors of the website Social Change Central (2024), there are four stages of a social enterprise, namely the incubation stage, the birth stage, the nurturing stage and the maturity stage. At the nurturing stage the social entrepreneur is searching for grant opportunities and reaching out within different networks to get barriers moved. At this stage a social enterprise is not self-sustainable. So, the limits of efficient applicability of this enterprise at this stage can be high, but only due to the massive government support, by means of the government grants. This enterprise can reach some degree of sustainability only at the maturity stage. As the authors of the aforementioned website say, addressing to the social entrepreneur running this enterprise at the fourth stage: “Your impact is where you wanted it to be, your finances are stable, and you have a solid and well-functioning team” (Social Change Central, 2024).



Source: APOPO (2022)

Figure 2: The structure of financial sources of APOPO in 2022 (in US dollars)

The third example is connected with Conserve India. It was established in 1998 as an NGO, and it emerged as a social entrepreneurship company in 2004. Conserve has developed a proprietary handmade process for transforming everyday plastics like bags, chips packets, and biscuit wrappers into "Handmade Recycled Plastic," a novel fabric that may be used as a form of vegan leather, for fashion accessories, home furnishings, and even to make low-cost housing tiles. It also works to create valuable apparel from plastic waste. “We started collecting plastic waste that has no resale value and so nobody else was collecting it, from the Yamuna River and other diversified waste streams which otherwise would have ended up in the ocean or landfills. Landfills are disease's breeding grounds, and they are wreaking havoc on the unorganized sector of the ragpicker population who live right next to landfills” says Ms Kanika Ahuja, Director of Conserve India (AIM2Flourish, 2022). Kanika Ahuja's parents started Conserve India as a non-profit organization, and Kanika has worked for Conserve since she was a child. She was involved in several of Conserve India's initiatives to clean up plastic garbage from slums, land fields, and water bodies, which posed a severe threat to the environment and society. Kanika quit her lucrative

corporate job and joined Conserve India full-time in 2016. She launched a for-profit brand LIFAFFA for marketing and selling Conserve products made of upcycled plastic with a global reach. LIFAFFA, the marketing arm of Conserve India is responsible for designing and marketing the products. LIFAFFA sells its products through online platforms. The quality and aesthetics of the products helped the company to attain a fiscal year revenue of 100,000 USD in 2021 amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. The company was profitable and had faster growth, with a Compound Annual Growth Rate of 30% before the pandemic. So, the limits of efficient applicability of this social enterprise are rather wide due to the strategy of designing and marketing the products.

5. The Main Financial Sources of Social Enterprises

So, we can derive five main kinds of financial sources of social enterprises: conventional financing, social investment, government contracts, crowdfunding and internal resources. Consider the estimates of their real availability for social enterprises on the example of the USA (presented below in Table 4).

Table 4: Comparison of different financial options for social enterprises

Financial Options	Timeliness	Amount	Stability	Mission	Distance
Conventional Financing	OK	Good	OK	Poor	Good
Social Investment	Poor	OK	Good	Good	OK-Varies
Government Contracts	Poor	OK	Poor	Good	OK
Crowdfunding	Good	Poor	OK	Good	n/a
Internal Resources	Good	OK	Good	n/a	Good

SCALE: Poor = smaller / worse, OK = medium, Good = higher / best

Source: Tulchin, Yi-Han Lin (2012)

Factors defined:

Timeliness: level of effort needed to obtain the cash

Amount: Funding levels likely from that source

Stability: Availability of capital over time

Mission: How motivated the option is by an enterprise's purpose

Distance: How far the option is to the U.S.

So, we can conclude that in terms of the level of effort needed to obtain the cash, that is of the ability of receiving it in time, the conventional financing is the most available way, and social investment and government contracts are less available in that case. But in terms of funding levels social investment and government contracts are rather available, though that is not the case for crowdfunding.

Social enterprises are rather vulnerable in terms of their presence at the market, because they experience a large deficit of financial sources. At the same time it is hard to overestimate the benefit that they provide for the society as a whole, because in terms of social usefulness and social value that they provide they can cover the amounts that are invested in them by the external sponsors. In this sense they are really very effective enterprises, so the financial aid which is provided for them by the external sources is justified.

6. The Main Factors of Increasing the Efficient Applicability Limits of Social Entrepreneurship

After doing this analysis we can derive 8 main factors of increasing the efficient applicability limits of social entrepreneurship:

1. *The state support of social enterprises:* Beside the example of successful social entrepreneurship state support in Bashkortostan, one should also highlight the special programme of supporting social entrepreneurs in the USA during B. Obama presidency named "Pay for success", according to

which, a certain sum was returned to the investor in the case if the target of the project he invested in was fulfilled, the sum he invested in was returned to him and he would get a certain premium, if the target of the project was overfulfilled, but he wouldn't get anything, if the target of the project wasn't fulfilled (Vanroekel and Greenblatt, 2013). In the process of financing this project the finances of taxpayers were involved, and that meant that this project was financed at the expense of the state budget.

2. *The aid provided for social enterprises by the private sponsors:* At the initial stage of social enterprise formation the aid provided by the private sponsors, such as the Our Future Foundation for Regional Social Programs providing interest-free loans for social entrepreneurs, plays an important part in this process.
3. *The support for social enterprises provided by the international organizations:* At different stages of formation and development of social enterprises the international organizations, such as, for instance, UNESCO, Global Development Group and Hawk Rock Foundation, play a special role in these processes.
4. *The support for social enterprises provided by the external sources of loan and emission financing:* Such institutions as micro-financing organizations and social stock exchange play a crucial role in the development of social enterprises in those countries, where they emerge. So, they need to be derived in a separate section.
5. *Creation of special economic zones in different innovation centres, in which social enterprises are formed:* The special economic zones should be formed in such centres as "Skolkovo" (in Russia) with special preferential tax rates for individuals and organizations that invest in social enterprises.
6. *Using social enterprises as sub-contractors of the private business in the process of social outsourcing:* Social outsourcing is the process of transferring the enterprises of social infrastructure to the management of the private sector companies. This process was named "Race to the bottom" in the economic literature, because the private sector companies pursued, first of all, their own interests, not the interests of these enterprises, and saved on everything (In the Public Interest, 2014). As a result, these enterprises were moved to the regions, where the real estate was cheaper than that at the initial place, but where the crime rate was higher than there. This resulted in numerous facts of rapes of the children's home wards, and the staff was underpaid, so only low-skilled employees could be hired. Social enterprises couldn't compete on equal terms with a big business in this process, because they had limited financial resources at their disposal, and so they had to be content with the role of sub-contractors, being in service of the big business and performing those functions which were left by the big business for these enterprises (Williams and Richardson, 2012). But even being in this role, they were faithful to their responsibilities and didn't save on their costs if it threatened to turn into a real catastrophe. On the contrary, due to their main mission that was focused on solving social problems on the base of innovative approach, they solved these problems quite successfully and without any damage for those projects, which were provided for them under the sub-contractual management, which is the most important thing there. So, the role of sub-contractors in service of the big business is one of the variants of increasing the efficient applicability limits of social entrepreneurship until the level of qualitative management of the social infrastructure entities which were transferred to social enterprises on the base of sub-contracts.
7. *The position of public opinion towards social entrepreneurship:* One should take into consideration the position of public opinion towards this topic. To what extent does the public opinion perceive the feasibility of social entrepreneurship? The results of public opinion polls comply with the picture of social entrepreneurship development in different regions. Respectively, in those regions where the level of social entrepreneurship development is relatively low, less people can say that they are familiar with this concept. So, for instance, according to the study of the researcher group ZIRKON (2008), in the Central, the Northwestern, the Siberian and the Far East Federal Districts 7-10% of the respondents answered confidently that they knew what this concept meant. As compared with them, in the Southern, the Volga and the Urals Federal Districts the quantity of the people knowing something about this phenomenon constituted only 4-5% of the respondents.
8. *The strategy of designing and marketing the products of social enterprises:* As we can see from the experience of LIFAFFA, a good strategy for designing and marketing the products can help social enterprises to develop. So, the case of Conserve India can be a good example on this topic.

7. In Conclusion

So, we can summarize our conclusions concerning the definition of the main factors of increasing the efficient applicability limits of social entrepreneurship. First, a very important role of the state support of social enterprises in this process at different levels is noted. Second, a special role of private sponsors in this process is derived. Third, an important role of international organizations in the process of promotion and support of social entrepreneurship is emphasized. Fourth, a huge role provided by such intermediaries as microfinance institutions and social stock market in this process is noted. Fifth, the conclusion stating that in order to increase the efficient applicability limits of social entrepreneurship, one should create the special economic zones in the innovation centres is derived. Sixth, the efficient applicability limits can increase under involving these enterprises into the process of performing the roles of sub-contractors in service of the big business in the process of social outsourcing. Seventh, in order to emerge in new regions, social enterprises should be supported by the public opinion in these regions. And finally the last conclusion is the necessity to create within a social enterprise the special division on the development of designing and marketing strategy for this enterprise.

The actual efficient applicability limits of social entrepreneurship in terms of its sectoral and territorial specifics are outlined in this paper. In terms of the sectoral specifics, the most significant presence of social entrepreneurship in such sectors as education, healthcare and culture is noted and the least significant presence of it in such sector as mining is noticed, and that can be explained by the special mission of social entrepreneurship focused on maximization of the social value produced by it, and not on rent seeking and profit maximization. In terms of the territorial specifics the conclusion that the most significant part of social enterprises contained in the specified regions is due to the active governmental policy at these regions is substantiated. Also the main factors increasing the possible efficient applicability limits of social entrepreneurship in terms of the special policy on forming the respective institutions of supporting social entrepreneurship at different stages of its evolution are provided.

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