Emerald Journal of Entrepreneurship in Emerging Economies

Insights from the legitimation of accelerators in Turkey

Journal:	*Journal of Entrepreneurship in Emerging Economies*
Manuscript ID	JEEE-06-2022-0161.R2
Manuscript Type:	Research Paper
Keywords:	Accelerators, Legitimacy, Strategy, Turkey

How do technology-based accelerators build their legitimacy as new organizations in an emerging entrepreneurship

Abstract:

Purpose This paper aims to understand technology-based accelerators' legitimation efforts in an emerging entrepreneurship ecosystem.

Design/methodology/approach This research is based on qualitative inductive methodology using ten Turkish technology-based accelerators.

Findings Our analysis indicates that accelerators' legitimation efforts are shaped around (i) crafting a distinctive identity and mobilizing allies around this identity and (ii) establishing new collaborations to enable collective action. Further, we observe two types of technology-based accelerators, namely "deal flow makers" and "welfare stimulators" in Turkey. These variations among accelerators affect how they build their legitimacy. Different types of accelerators make alliances with different actors in the entrepreneurship ecosystem. Accelerators take collective action to build a collective identity and simultaneously imply how they are distinguished from other organizations in the same category and the ones in the old category.

Originality The study presents a framework to understand how accelerators employ strategies and actions to legitimize themselves as new organizations and advocate new norms, values, and routines in an emerging entrepreneurship ecosystem. The framework also highlights how different accelerators support legitimacy building by managing the judgments of diverse audiences and increasing the variety of resources these audiences provide to the ecosystem.

1. Introduction

Accelerators are essential actors in the entrepreneurship ecosystem that enable technology-based start-ups to access initial resources to initiate their entrepreneurial endeavors (Hallen et al., 2020; Cohen et al., 2019). An accelerator is "a fixed-term, cohort-based program for start-ups, including mentorship and/or educational components that culminates in a graduation event" (Cohen et al. 2019, p. 1782). Research indicates a significant variation among acceleration programs and that their impact on the creation and performance of start-ups is equivocal (Del Sarto et al., 2020; Hallen et al., 2020; Yu, 2019). The number of accelerators has been rapidly increasing globally (Cohen and Hochberg, 2014; Gonzalez-Uribe and Leatherbee, 2018).

Accelerators are new start-up support organizations that bridge start-ups to the broader entrepreneurship ecosystem, help the formation of new ties among various agents of the ecosystem, mobilize resources between resource holders and start-ups, and facilitate the flow of knowledge in an ecosystem (Armonios et al., 2017; Charoontham and Amornpetchkul, 2022; Goswami et al., 2018). Accelerators, as new organizations of entrepreneurship ecosystems, support the creation of new firms by influencing the entrepreneurship context at the macro and micro levels in different ways, such as by changing the practice and advocating, communicating, and transmitting new norms, values, and rules (Dutt et al., 2016; Eberhart and Eesley, 2018).

Like all nascent organizations, accelerators need to build their legitimacy to make themselves and their practices viable and taken-for-granted (Rao et al., 2000; Tracey et al., 2011). Accelerators in emerging entrepreneurship ecosystems need to work at macro and micro levels, mobilize scarce resources among various actors and play different roles due to the lack of or scarcity of other specialized supporting organizations (Goswami et al., 2018; Pustovrh et al., 2020). To effectively function and access available resources, accelerators need to legitimize themselves and their practices in such a context. Through legitimizing themselves and their practices, accelerators transform the norms, beliefs, values, or routines that do not function effectively in emerging entrepreneurship ecosystems. However, how to achieve this legitimation[1] is an enduring question in the literature (Jayanti and Raghunath, 2018; David et al., 2013; Klofsten et al., 2020). A literature review on accelerators (Crişan et al., 2021) points out the gap in understanding how accelerators become legitimate, while another study (Pauwels et al., 2016) calls for more research to observe the role of variations among accelerators' legitimation process. This paper is one of the early attempts to address this gap by increasing our understanding of how technology-based accelerators legitimate themselves as new organizational forms and how variations among accelerators influence the strategies they use to do so (Fisher, 2020). By doing so, we give a granular explanation of not only strategies and actions carried out by technology-based accelerators but also emphasize the importance of variations among accelerators in building their legitimacy.

The empirical investigation takes place in an emerging economy context, Turkey, where technology-based accelerators have recently gained attention and support from other agents of the ecosystem. But more importantly, Turkey is a developing country with "institutional voids" (Soluk et al., 2021) where various significant resources and infrastructures, such as financial service institutions, are lacking compared to advanced countries. Moreover, the first accelerators were established by universities has always been a characteristic that differentiates Turkish accelerators from others in similar institutional void environments such as Brazil, China, and India (e.g., Cao and Shi, 2021; Goswami et al., 2018; Snehal et al., 2020). Failures or low performance of other intermediaries in Turkey have triggered "novel institutional spaces that are leveraged by" accelerators (Jayanti and Raghunath, 2018). Hence, Turkey offers a futile context to investigate our research question.

This paper contributes to the literature that has considered accelerators to be new organizational forms (Del Sarto et al., 2020; Pauwels et al., 2016). By scrutinizing the

[1] Legitimating is based on the verb of legitimate, while legitimizing is based on the verb legitimize. Both nouns refer to making legitimate, justifying or making lawful. In this paper, we will use legitimizing and legitimization to point out making legitimate.

practices and strategies of accelerators to attain legitimacy, this paper aims to improve our knowledge of how accelerators interact with the current institutional arrangements and how they advocate new arrangements to become legitimate organizational forms.

In addition, our research contributes to the organizational legitimacy literature by emphasizing the importance of variations among actors and audiences in forming and legitimizing new organizational categories. Legitimation literature focuses on the emergence of the exemplar in a given category. Yet, it mostly ignores fundamental variations among new organizations and their actions to legitimize a given category (McKendrik and Caroll, 2012). Our study shows that variations among emerging organizations support the legitimation process by managing the judgments of diverse audiences and increasing the variety of resources these audiences provide. In addition, our study indicates that accelerators take collective action to build a collective identity to imply how they are distinguished from other organizations in the same category and the ones in the old category simultaneously. Therefore, some actions to build legitimacy are common across all accelerators, but some are not (Ganamotse et al., 2017). Our research indicates that various actors recognize the same opportunities and have similar resource constraints and overcome these constraints by interacting with each other and with other actors in the ecosystem (Lounsbury and Crumley, 2007; Wright and Zammuto, 2013). They take collective action to support each other in developing an ecosystem while taking different paths to mobilize resources. Our research also emphasizes the context-dependency of the process of legitimacy building for new organizations, as recent research indicates (Fisher, 2020).

Previous research on legitimizing new organizational forms has taken place in advanced economies (Jayanti and Raghunath, 2018; Soluk et al., 2021). Nonetheless, emerging economies have unique cultural, social, political, economic, and institutional contexts and suffer from institutional flaws (Dutt et al., 2016; Goswami et al., 2018; Mair et al., 2012; Snehal et al., 2020). The context influences the recognition of opportunities by institutional entrepreneurs and shapes their strategic actions (Mair and Marti, 2009; Yosun and Cetindamar, 2022). By focusing on the developing country context with an emerging entrepreneurship ecosystem, this paper highlights how the actions taken by accelerators are context-dependent.

This paper has five sections. Section 2 reviews and discusses the literature on accelerators and their legitimation as new organizational forms. Section 3, methodology, introduces research context, data collection, and data analysis, followed by section 4, which sets forth our results and extensively discusses the findings. The final section points out the theoretical implications of the study, outlines its limitations, and offers suggestions for future studies.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Accelerators

Accelerators are relatively new actors in entrepreneurship ecosystems. Y-Combinator, launched in 2005, is considered the first accelerator but the understanding of accelerators remains dissident in the literature (Crişan et al., 2021). The unexpected success of the earliest examples, such as Y Combinator encourages other stakeholders, such as corporations and universities, to start their acceleration programs or embrace some key features of these programs and adapt them to their incubation system (Shankar and Clausen, 2020). The engagement of various stakeholders and sponsors has increased the variety of acceleration programs and the phenomenon's complexity (Pauwels et al., 2016; Pandey et al., 2017; Prexl et al., 2018). Rapid dispersion of the phenomenon to various local entrepreneurship ecosystems in advanced economies and emerging markets also bolstered this process.

Nonetheless, the scholarly research on the impact and role of accelerators in emerging entrepreneurship ecosystems stays far behind its speed of expansion. There is still minimal research on the role of accelerators in developing entrepreneurship ecosystems (Goswami et al., 2018). However, a few studies show how accelerators effectively build and enhance functioning local entrepreneurship ecosystems in developing countries. Gonzalez-Uribe and Leatherbee (2018) focus on ecosystem accelerators that aim to stimulate entrepreneurial activities in a focal region in Chile and find that a combination of training and basic services of cash and co-working space provided by accelerators leads to higher fundraising and a quicker scale-up. Goswami et al. (2018) suggest that accelerators in Bangalore, India, not only assist start-ups in enhancing their performance and success but also create ecosystem additionality by enhancing the cooperation among stakeholders and spreading knowledge. A study of Slovenian accelerators (Pustovhr et al., 2020) emphasizes that the lack of resources is not the only problem for accelerators in emerging entrepreneurship ecosystems. Still, due to a lack of specialized organizations, they must expand their operations into pre-acceleration and later scale-up stages.

Recent research accepts accelerators as distinctive organizational forms specified by new support mechanisms, values, institutional logic, and routines (Roundy, 2017; Stayton and Mangematin, 2019). These studies emphasize the features that differentiate accelerators from other entrepreneurship ecosystem intermediaries, specifically incubators. These features vary from the duration of the programs, accepting start-ups in cohorts, demo days organized at the end of each cohort, intensive mentoring and networking services, seed funds to selected start-ups, to equity stake taken by accelerators in return (Cohen and Hochberg, 2014).

Beyond these differences, recent research on the mechanisms of start-up nurturing has been deepening our understanding of accelerators (Crişan et al., 2021; Shankar and Clausen, 2020). These studies indicate that accelerators have transformed the known and frequently used mechanisms of nurturing start-ups, such as start-up selection (Beyhan et al., 2021; Mohammadi and Shafiee, 2021). New mechanisms that make accelerators unique in the entrepreneurship ecosystems, such as validation of the product-market fit, which is a matter of survival for start-ups, access to investors, and other resources to achieve rapid scaling are also introduced (Crişan et al. 2020; Shankar and Clausen, 2020). The principles behind all these mechanisms are connected to the experiential release of new product ideas at a small scale. These mechanisms test product-market fit as quickly as possible by collecting feedback during small-scale experiments and using resources efficiently for those start-ups whose new product ideas fit the market (Ries, 2011). These new mechanisms also require start-ups to be more flexible, effectual, and open to new possibilities (Sarasvathy, 2000). Stayton and Mangematin (2019) argue that by "reducing the time lag between entrepreneurial idea and value capture," accelerators build up "the minimum viable start-up" that can mimic the core features of a legitimate organization.

2.2. Legitimizing accelerators

There is limited research on how nascent organizations legitimize themselves (Eberhart and Eesley, 2018; Jayanti and Raghunath, 2018; Lee et al., 2017). Previous literature exhibits the role of actions taken to mobilize resources and allies (David et al., 2013; Greenwood and Suddaby, 2006), build up a distinctive organizational identity (Clegg et al., 2007), bridge diverse stakeholders (Fisher, 2020), theorize institutional change, construct rhetoric to justify the change and convince the stakeholders (Battilana et al., 2009), align with highly legitimate actors (Tracey et al., 2011), and establish new inter-actor relations, coalitions and collaborations to enable collective action (David et al. 2013; Hardy and Maguire, 2017) in the legitimation process.

New organizations need to establish a distinctive identity that reveals how they are similar to or different from other organizations (Clegg et al., 2007). A unique organizational identity answers the questions of "who we are" and "what we do" (Navis and Glynn, 2010), or, in other words, this process is about building and communicating consistent stories about a new organization (Clegg et al., 2007). However, achieving optimal distinctiveness is critical for organizations in nascent-markets (McDonald and Eisenhardt, 2020; Navis and Glynn, 2010). New players begin with cooperation and ensuring similarity with peers and then differentiate themselves to better compete with their peers (Navis and Glynn, 2010). A level of similarity brings legitimacy to new organizations, but as emphasized by McDonald and Eisenhardt (2020), beyond legitimacy, similarity or borrowing from peers and established substitutes ensures faster learning and decreases the cost of learning and building a new business model.

In nascent markets, the balance between organizational learning and building legitimacy needs to be considered; as suggested by Zuzul and Edmondson (2017), emphasizing too much on building legitimacy can hamper the internal learning process of nascent organizations. Although crafting a distinctive identity is a crucial step for nascent organizations to mobilize allies and external support (Jayant and Raghunart, 2018), whether this distinctiveness is as optimal as not to harm the learning process needs to be considered for the sustainability of these organizations. To achieve change in institutions, new organizations need to affiliate or collaborate with existing, legitimate organizations (David et al., 2013). Bridging diverse stakeholders that will be benefited from the change in institutional logic provides new organizations with sets of different resources (Battilana et al., 2009). As the number of supporters and their resources increase, the new organizations achieve more, do better than existing organizations, and attain more pragmatic legitimacy (Suchman, 1995).

Developing and implementing new practices based on a discrete institutional logic is difficult to achieve in isolation. Lounsbury and Clumsey (2007) scrutinize how multiple actors interactively create an active money management practice in the US mutual fund industry. Kishna et al. (2017) suggest that alliances and their collective effort increase the legitimacy of new sustainable technologies.

Our research question asks how different types of accelerators take different actions to legitimize themselves as new organizational forms in an emerging entrepreneurship ecosystem. Despite these variations in actions, legitimation has been achieved. We focus on the strategic actions of accelerators to understand how they build their organizational identity, mobilize allies around this identity, and organize collaborative efforts to advocate the new practices and legitimize themselves as new organizational forms of start-up nurturing.

By doing so, we contribute to the literature on the legitimation of new organizational forms by focusing on accelerators in a developing country context. The research on institutional change in developing countries suggests that when government-related organizations fail to act on problems in the system, new actors emerge to accelerate the development of institutions (Dutt et al., 2016; Mair and Marti, 2009). This research suggests that accelerators vary in many aspects as new organizational forms address different failures and flaws, especially in emerging entrepreneurship ecosystems. These variations may lead them to take additional actions to legitimize themselves and some common actions to address institutional shortcomings and legitimate new practices. Accelerators apply various combinations of existing resources to new opportunities in a resource-constraint environment, legitimizing their practices as new intermediaries.

3. Methodology

Considering the limited understanding of the legitimation processes of technology-based accelerators, our research design is based on qualitative inductive methodology using multiple cases (Eisenhardt, 1989; Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007). We explore multiple accelerators (Yin 2003) within Turkey's technology-based entrepreneurship support provided by intermediary organizations (Eisenhardt, 1989). Multiple case studies increase the robustness of findings and lead to more generalizable and meaningful theoretical conclusions (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007).

3.1. Research context

The Turkish government uses intermediaries to support entrepreneurial activities (Armonios et al., 2017; Dutt et al., 2016; Mair et al., 2012). Such activities can be analyzed in four phases. The first phase of technology-based entrepreneurship support in Turkey dates back to the 1990s when the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Organization (KOSGEB) started establishing technology business incubators under Technology Development Centers (TEKMERs) to strengthen university-industry collaborations. These incubators diffused quickly to most of the leading universities in Turkey. Eventually, the incubation model was exhausted due to inefficiencies in selecting entrepreneurs and providing support. In 2018 only 30% of the capacity of all TEKMERs was in use, and no new tenants have been accepted since (Akçomak and Koçak, 2021). KOSGEB re-modeled the incubation program in 2019, outsourcing the management of all activities to universities. However, this re-modeling has not been fully utilized yet.

The second phase started in 2000 by enacting the Technology Development Zones law that allows universities to establish technology parks. Since then, many technology parks have been established to enhance university-industry collaboration. Today about 73 technology parks shelter about 7,000 technology firms, which employ about 60,000 R&D personnel.

The third phase of creating intermediary organizations started in 2010 when the government established Technology Transfer Offices (TTOs) via grants provided by TUBITAK (Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey) and Regional Development Agencies. By 2019 there were about 140 TTOs, half established and supported by TUBITAK (Investment Office, 2020). TUBITAK also provides grants to entrepreneurs directly, but such support/grants are increasingly being distributed through the accelerators.

In 2014, technology parks started establishing incubation-like programs, which led to the establishment of technology-based accelerators (the fourth phase). Since then, accelerators have been gaining much attention. The number of accelerators that support technology-based entrepreneurs increased to about 60 in 2020 from six in 2010 (Investment Office, 2020). Very few of these programs are private or supported by corporations or municipalities; most are sponsored and run by universities' TTOs or technology parks.

What differentiates accelerators that support technology-based entrepreneurs in Turkey from the accelerators in similar institutional void environments (Cao and Shi, 2021; Goswami et al., 2018; Porras-Paez and Schmutzler, 2019) is their commitment and belonging to the production and reproduction of information, network, and intangible value for the greater good. Since 2010 when technology-based entrepreneurship became the focus of innovation policy in Turkey, universities have established many accelerators. Because universities mainly produce a public good, their first approach to the accelerator concept was similar: accelerate technology-based start-ups to contribute to the entrepreneurship ecosystem. Though this first approach was quickly aligned with the aim of acceleration (scale fast, fail fast, grow fast), producing value for the greater good remained an anchor of accelerators.

The emergence of accelerators in Turkey occurred when incubators and technology parks could not meet the expectations of technology-based start-ups. The private investment side is neither developed (Investment Office, 2020). In an environment where technology business incubators are on hold, private funding options are scarce, and government support options are shadowed by bureaucracy. Accelerators rise as new forms of intermediary organizations. In this context, accelerators have found the ground to legitimize themselves as new intermediaries that nurture start-ups.

3.2. Sample selection and data collection

In Turkey, the boundaries between technology-based acceleration and incubation programs are blurred. Therefore, based on Cohen et al. (2019) we consider three criteria to include a technology-based accelerator in our sample.

1) History of continued operations. Some accelerators are recently established, some cease to exist, and some face ceased operations within the lifespan. Our sample covers accelerators founded between 2010 and 2015 (see Table 1).
2) The existence of a cohort-based system to select entrepreneurs. Accepting technology-based start-ups in cohorts is the most identifying feature, decreasing the transaction costs of accelerators (Pauwels et al. 2016).
3) Duration of the program. A pre-defined at most six months of active support to differentiate from the incubators.

When the fieldwork started, there were 24 technology-based accelerators in Turkey (Investment Office 2020), most of which were operational in Istanbul and Ankara. Out of these, only 15 satisfied the above criteria, and only 10 of them accepted our interview request.

The study is based on the analysis of triangulated data collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews of the managers of accelerators and secondary sources, including archival data such as accelerators' websites, blogs, newspapers, and newsletters. Archival data were used to prepare for the interviews, elaborate on the interviewees' responses, and supplement interviews where necessary.

As common for most qualitative inductive research (Eisenhardt 1989), our primary data source is semi-structured interviews. We conducted face-to-face interviews at the offices of accelerators from March 2016 to January 2017. During these interviews, an a priori set of questions was structured under different sections (e.g., general information about the organizational structure and the definition of an ideal start-up). For the reliability of the data, we interviewed the manager responsible for all operational activities. The interviews took between 45 to 90 minutes. All interviews were recorded and transcribed as text documents.

Table 1: Summary information on accelerators interviewed

Accelerator	Location	Starting year of operation	Tied to a university	Scale (continuing - graduate)	Take equity stake?
Apus	İstanbul	2011	F	S - L	No
Dorado	Ankara	2008	P	S - S	No
Grus	İstanbul	2012	P	L - M	No
Hydrus	İstanbul	2015	F	S - M	Yes
Indus	İstanbul	2013	F	S - S	Yes
Musca	İstanbul	2013	No	S - S	No
Pavo	İstanbul	2015	No	S - M	Yes++
Phoenix	İstanbul	2008	No	S - S	Yes++
Tucana	Ankara	2007	P	M - L	No
Volans	Ankara	2010	No	S -S	No

Legend: P: Public University; F: Foundation University. S: Less than 20 entrepreneurs; M: 20 to 49 entrepreneurs; L: 50+ entrepreneurs. Yes++: Provides funding.
Source: Our interviews.

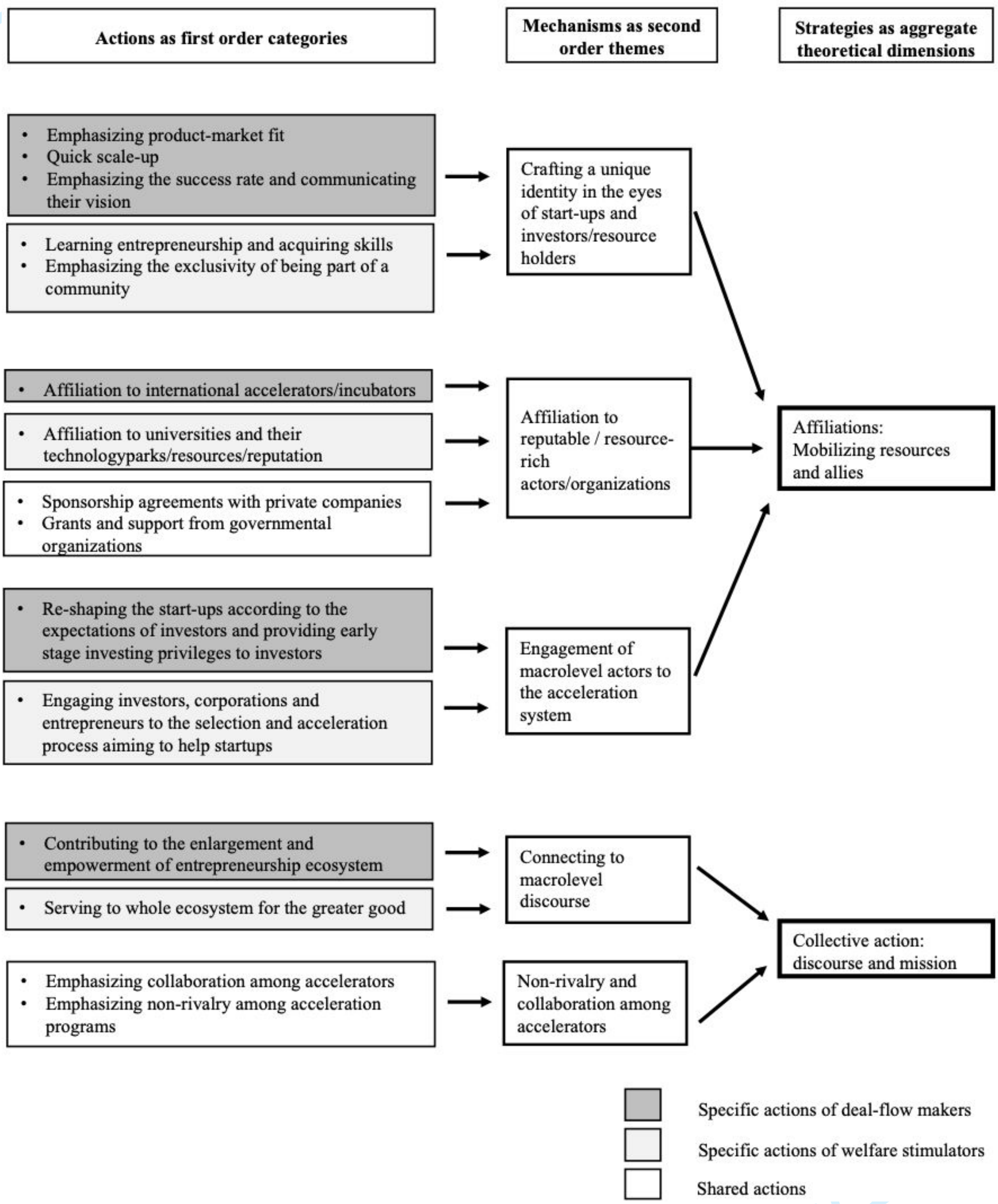
Table 1 provides summary information of the sample. Each accelerator is named after a southern star constellation. Private, for-profit organizations run three acceleration programs; one is corporate but not-for-profit, and the rest is university-based and not-for-profit. These ten programs provide fixed-term, cohort-based acceleration services to technology-based start-ups. They offer co-working spaces, mentorship, training, coaching, and consultancy services. Only two of these programs provide seed funds to their selected start-ups. However, half of them take equity stakes between 3-8% from the entrepreneurial teams if a legal company is established. These programs receive hundreds of applications during an application process and select 20 entrepreneurial teams/start-ups in two or three steps. To give an idea about representativeness, we benefit from a special dossier on 15 accelerators in the Turkish Economist (Ekonomist, 2018). It reports about 6,100 start-ups that have benefited from the acceleration services as of January 2018, 75% of which were officially registered in six accelerators in our sample (Dorado, Grus, Hydrus, Indus, Musca, and Indus). Table 1 shows that our accelerator sample is diverse in geography, formal ties to universities, scale, and funding.

3.3. Analysis

The qualitative analysis includes an iterative process to analyze the information embodied in the transcribed interviews, archival data, and site visits. This iterative process involved drafting aggregate theoretical dimensions from emergent codes, phrases, experiences, and statements in the transcripts, grouping these under second-order themes, and re-reading the transcripts to hone the themes and interpret the findings (Bryman and Bell, 2007).

Face-to-face interviews, site visits, and reviews of the archival data were conducted by authors that helped to form crude themes in the first instance. The collected documents' first read was based on these crude themes and produced various codes (Figure 1, first-order categories). We view these codes as individual actions of accelerators. Then these codes were refined and matched to second-order themes (Gioia et al., 2012), which we take as mechanisms of technology-based start-up nurturing. At this stage, recognizing differentiated actions under the same mechanism, we grouped ten accelerators into deal-flow makers and welfare stimulators. The names of the groups are inspired by the study of Pauwels et al. (2016, p. 20). This differentiation between the two groups was made considering the design, program package, strategic focus, selection process, alumni relations, and funding structure, as discussed in section 4.1 in detail. First-order categories were reassessed to match different actions to these two groups.

Figure 1: Analysis of the interviews: strategic actions of accelerators as institutional entrepreneurs



Source: Our interviews.

In Figure 1 first column, the gray color represents the actions specific to deal-flow makers, the light gray color represents actions specific to welfare stimulators, and the white color describes shared actions. Then the mechanisms were matched to two theoretical dimensions, which we view as general strategies. Once a draft codes-themes-theoretical constructs structure was ready, a third read was conducted to test the robustness of the analysis. Figure 1 depicts the final analysis results, 15 codes under five second-order themes, and two theoretical dimensions.

4. Findings

The findings indicate that accelerators use affiliation and collective action strategies to build their legitimacy in the ecosystems. Furthermore, variations among accelerators influence the legitimation strategies they apply. In the following subsections, we discuss the variations among accelerators and present where the strategies and actions of different types of accelerators diverge and converge.

4.1. Variations among accelerators: deal-flow makers and welfare stimulators

The primary aim of accelerators is to resolve uncertainties. They introduce new practices to reduce uncertainties about the selected and nurtured start-ups. They do this for start-ups and other actors in the ecosystem, such as investors, sponsors, and funding agencies. As their practices work, they attain success, measured mainly by the number of start-ups funded by investors or the total amount of funding. Accelerators differentiate themselves from other intermediaries in the ecosystem, such as incubators, by articulating what is not working in the incubation system and how they resolve these issues. This differentiation indicates an optimal distinctiveness that explains the similarities of accelerators to existing supporting organizations but, at the same time, their superiority over them (McDonald and Eisenhardt, 2020). They learn from the failures of incubators and hence learn faster to build a new business model to resolve the problems that are not yet solved by the existing organizations (McDonald and Eisenhardt, 2020). Most accelerators we interviewed started with a business model close to incubation programs, but they have transformed their system to resolve the major problems they experienced. The first problem concerns the existing logic for the selection of start-ups. Accelerator managers find the selection system applied by incubators inefficient. According to the accelerators, they select start-ups based on the novelty they bring to the technological and scientific field, so the technical superiorities of the project are given priority. Selection committees are not capable of evaluating the market potential of start-ups. However, according to accelerators, entrepreneurial ideas need to be evaluated differently, prioritizing the potential market's existence and/or size and the fit between opportunity and team. To solve this problem, accelerators engage investors, sponsoring company professionals, and successful entrepreneurs in their start-up selection process as external evaluators and their start-up nurturing process as mentors.

The second problem is the time spent on technology/product development without testing product-market fit. Start-ups working with the accelerators test product-market fit at very early stages and can fail quickly (Shankar and Clausen, 2020; Yu, 2019); quick failures increase the system's efficiency. The interviewed managers of the acceleration programs voiced the argument that incubating start-ups for an extended period without ensuring that a problem and opportunity exists in the market brings inefficiencies for both the start-ups and the incubator. As a solution, the time to nurture start-ups has shortened, and new practices are introduced to train and support start-ups to test the product-market fit first.

These new practices introduced by accelerators also change the definition of an ideal start-up and the projects to be selected to nurture. As we derived from our interviews, accelerators' managers intensively exchange information with other stakeholders in the entrepreneurship ecosystem. They are experienced in venture building and confident about their ability to help start-ups build the right product and have the right business model. For the quick execution of entrepreneurial projects, accelerators need to control team-related uncertainties. Therefore, focusing on short-term results drives accelerators to select high-quality teams equipped with the required skills, competencies, passion, ambition, preparedness, and commitment (Beyhan et al., 2021).

The accelerators we interviewed are similar in terms of practices, such as enabling the engagement of investors, professionals, and entrepreneurs in the acceleration process, using a stage-based selection, providing intensive mentoring, and emphasizing product-market fit and quick scalability. Yet, some fundamental variations among them can also be observed. Pauwels et al. (2016) highlight the acceleration system variations and identify three distinct themes that characterize accelerators. During the analysis process, we observed some fundamental variances in the strategies and actions of accelerators to legitimize themselves and their practices, especially the ones they used to build their legitimately distinctive identities and build alliances to mobilize resources. Based on the model that Pauwels et al., 2016 propose, we categorize the accelerators we interviewed into two main groups: deal-flow makers and welfare stimulators. The literature focusing on how nascent organizations build legitimacy ignores fundamental variations among new organizations and their actions (McKendrik and Caroll, 2012). However, our data analysis indicates that a combination of similar and distinctive strategies and actions can legitimize accelerators as a new organizational category. Tables 2 and 3 outline the key features of these two types of accelerators driven by our interviews.

Table 2: Accelerators that act as welfare stimulators

	Welfare Stimulators: Apus, Dorado, Grus, Musca, and Tucano.	**Representative quotes**
Design theme	Supporting young entrepreneurs, guiding them in developing entrepreneurial skills, stimulating start-up activities	We want to train entrepreneurs and teach them how an entrepreneur thinks; We call it 'entrepreneurship muscle (APUS); We go to as many universities as possible and explain technology-based entrepreneurship (TUCANA);
Program package	Entrepreneurs, angel investors, company professionals, and academics provide intensive training and mentoring. Start-ups are not forced to benefit from these services. There is no seed investment and no equity engagement.	They are provided with an 8-week entrepreneurship training" (GRUS); Training never ends; They are held once a week for three months. Mentor sessions are also held once a week (TUCANO);

Strategic focus	Local and international focus. Most welfare simulators are generalists, but one has a sector focus.	Most projects are software; It is easier for us to support (APUS); We are looking for projects that would be successful in Turkey on a global scale (TUCANO).
Selection process	Open to both very early-stage ventures (even the ventures at the idea stage) and the ones at later stages.	Most entrepreneurs are inexperienced; Sometimes, we refuse well-developed, ready-to-market projects because their aim might be award hunting (GRUS); We receive applications from start-ups at the ideation stage or in later stages (DORADO).
Alumni relations	There is no established infrastructure for alumni relations; the continuation of relations is up to alumni; if they wish, they can still receive support from accelerators. Otherwise, there is no system to make alumni engage.	We send regular emails to alumni; When they need us, they can reach us for any inquiry; We try to help them (APUS); As long as they update their information, we can help alumni, especially in networking (MUSCA).
Funding structure	They were sponsored mainly by universities, corporations, and foundations. Public funding is also very important for these accelerators.	Five of these accelerators are sponsored by universities; all accelerators have temporary or permanent sponsorship agreements with corporations. Four run a public funding scheme (TUBİTAK BIGG), and almost all utilize various public funding schemes.

Table 3: Accelerators that act as deal-flow makers

	Deal-flow makers: Hydrus, Indus, Pavo, Phoenix and Volans.	**Representative quotes**
Design theme	Identification of private funding opportunities for start-ups; nurturing them to find an investor as quick as possible	If you are in our investor's club, you have the privilege to meet our entrepreneurs earlier (PHOENIX); You need to tell us what you want. Then we will find those start-ups for you (HYDRUS).
Program package	Mentoring is provided by successful entrepreneurs and angel investors. A few start-ups are accepted, strictly followed, and tracked by managers. Only two of them provide seed funding, but equity engagement is common.	Since we work one-to-one with the selected start-ups, we cannot accept more than 6-8 (HYDRUS); Training is fundamental and common for every start-up, but we prepare a different road map for each start-up (INDUS).
Strategic focus	Local and international focus. Most of them are generalists.	Webinars or mentoring help them to enter the US or European markets (PHOENIX); For tech-based start-ups, the Turkish market is small (PAVO).
Selection process	Not open to the ventures at the idea stage; require at least a working prototype.	We don't enter at the idea stage; The prototype is a must (PAVO); Having a prototype brings the start-up a step forward" (INDUS).
Alumni relations	Since the number of start-ups accepted to programs is not high, alumni relations are strong due to equity engagement.	We participate in monthly investor meetings of start-up X (HYDRUS); We are tracking 23 alumni. We follow them during and after the program. We are partners (PAVO).
Funding structure	They are sponsored mainly by universities, corporations, and foundations.	Two accelerators are sponsored by universities, utilizing various public funding schemes, while another one is sponsored by a partnership that includes a university partner. Two of them are private programs.

4.2. Crafting a distinctive identity and mobilizing allies around it: Affiliation strategy

Accelerators need to craft a distinctive organizational identity in the eyes of their audience, which is start-ups at the micro-level and investors, mentors, and public organizations at the macro level. This identity helps them to form coalitions and attract support and resources to run their operations successfully and promote change. Quotations from the interviews in Table 4 demonstrate this affiliation strategy, and similarities and variations, in terms of strategies and actions between welfare stimulators and deal-flow makers. Our research indicates that deal-flow makers craft their distinctive identities in the eyes of start-up teams by emphasizing the benefits they provide to start-ups to lead them to a quick market entry. This type of accelerator accepts only a few start-ups to serve them one-to-one, craft a unique road map and action plan for each, strictly track them and assess their performance, introduce them to their networks, and make them more visible on the media by using their reputation, networks and public relations expertise, even make customer visits together. Two of them provide seed funding, but the ones that do not provide funding emphasize that they pay the cost of all external advisory services, which are not accessible otherwise for start-ups. Accelerators are confident about their ability to nurture start-ups and make them successful - as long as they are willing to collaborate, follow the advice, and accept the interventions of the program experts. Most interviewees emphasize that when start-up teams accept their guidance and follow the strategic actions proffered by the experts, they will eventually acquire the resources necessary for growth and success.

> "Last year we had a team; we gave them feedback. At first, they did not accept the feedback; they were conservative in changing their project. But then, somehow, they decided to apply what we had proposed to change, and they succeeded. They re-applied to the program. This is important because they acknowledged our contribution" (HYDRUS).

Accelerators also need to craft a distinctive identity among investors, corporations, and public organizations, to mobilize allies and resources. One of the narratives accelerators use in crafting a distinctive identity in the eyes of macro-level actors is the expression "a greater target." This expression indicates not just the accelerator's vision. Still, it also signals that macro-level actors collaborating with the accelerator can gain from achieving this target or any activity designed to reach it (Charoontham and Amornpetchkul, 2022).

> "Now we are taking small steps, but our ultimate plan for the next 5-10 years is to create two unicorns; one is a unicorn in the Turkish market, and the other is a global unicorn that will reach a billion-dollar valuation" (HYDRUS).

Accelerators that act as deal-flow makers craft a distinctive identity to show off their most successful, appropriate, or desirable start-ups. How many of the start-ups that they nurture had been funded before and after demo days was mentioned frequently by the interviewees and was admitted as one of the most important performance indicators. The start-ups are seen as "partners" that build and foster the reputation of accelerators. Compelling presentations of selected and nurtured start-ups demonstrate the functional superiority of new practices and help accelerators to attain pragmatic legitimacy (Suchman, 1995).

> "Start-ups must get traction. If the start-up did not get traction during the program, I would not put them to the demo day stage because the start-up's success is indeed my program's success" (PAVO).

On the other hand, in accelerators that act as welfare stimulators, entrepreneurs from various stages are accepted and provided with intensive training and mentoring. They train entrepreneurs about the basics of starting a start-up, improving their "entrepreneurship muscles." They connect them to customers and other stakeholders. Further, they give entrepreneurs some necessary resources to test the product-market fit. Therefore, they select as many entrepreneurial teams as possible, but they are not forced to complete specific tasks. They can do it if these teams are passionate and committed enough to utilize these resources, training, and mentoring. Otherwise, they are self-eliminated.

The community that welfare stimulators mobilize is the most valuable resource to start-ups: program graduates, mentors, sponsoring organizations, and even the location of the accelerator (i.e., in a technology park or university campus) are all important to create a sense of community. Based on our research, we suggest that welfare stimulators craft a distinctive identity by emphasizing the exclusivity of being part of their large community and the reputation and benefits that start-ups can harvest from having this exclusivity.

> "We are a program and a large family.… When our start-ups apply for public grants, if they mention that they are from our program, they always have a better chance to get the support" (TUCANA).

Table 4: Mobilizing resources and allies through affiliations

Crafting a unique identity in the eyes of start-ups and investors/resource holders	
Deal-flow makers	**Welfare stimulators**
Emphasizing the benefits that lead to "quick scale-up" of start-ups	*Emphasizing learning entrepreneurship and acquiring soft skills*
We provide education, workspace, and other services that have financial value (PAVO); Mentioning them in our social media accounts is public relations for them (PHOENIX); We introduce our start-ups to business angel networks and investors (INDUS).	They get the maximum benefit from our advisor sessions and education sessions (MUSCA); We direct them to the right government funding (APUS); Like kids learning to walk, they learn how to commercialize, develop a project and be successful in the market by doing one or more projects (GRUS).
Emphasizing the success rate and communicating the vision	*Emphasizing the exclusivity of being part of a community*
All of our five graduates this year obtained funding even before our demo day (HYDRUS); One in every four successful applicants to TUBITAK works with us (VOLANS); Our success criterion is our start-ups' being funded by angel investors (INDUS).	They work with people in the same physical environment who face similar difficulties (APUS); We are like a home (DORADO); Everybody wants others to succeed, and they share information (DORADO).
Affiliation to reputable/resource-rich actors/organizations	
Affiliation to international accelerators/incubators	*Affiliation to universities and their technology parks/resources/reputation*
We introduce them to mentors and executives of Y Combinator so that they can go beyond (PHOENIX); We match them with global mentors (PAVO); in Silicon Valley, Boston ... and London ... we make a video of entrepreneurs and advertise (INDUS).	When they graduate, they remain in the technology park. This is good for the ecosystem (DORADO); We greatly benefit from the ecosystem in Z university's technology park (TUCANA).
Sponsorship agreements with private companies	
Currently, we are running a special acceleration program for Company X by using its brand name (HYDRUS); We created a specific program on financial technologies with Bank X (APUS); Bank R's IT team collaborates with our entrepreneurs (MUSCA); Our program started with the sponsorship of Company X but turned into a system supported by 50 sponsors (TUCANO).	
Grants and support from governmental organizations	

We guide them regarding which public funds they should apply for (APUS); Without government, this ecosystem won't function, to increase its awareness, we invite government officials to all our events (PHOENIX); We have committee members from KOSGEB and TUBITAK (TUCANA); We enlarged our team with a fund from Development Agency; we are planning to apply again (HYDRUS).	
Engagement of macro-level actors in the acceleration system	
Engaging investors in the selection process by aiming to re-shape the start-ups according to the expectations of investors and providing early-stage investing privileges to investors	*Engaging investors, corporations, and entrepreneurs in the selection and acceleration process by aiming to help start-ups to improve their business and test product-market fit.*
If you are in our investor's club, you have the privilege to meet our entrepreneurs earlier (PHOENIX); Sponsors have the privilege to interact with our entrepreneurs from the start (INDUS); We try to make a joint investment; for us and others to deem a start-up "suitable" is important (PAVO).	Angel investors are invited to mentoring sessions for five weeks; one likes an entrepreneur and works with him 2-3 days a week (APUS); It is good that sponsors engage early. Some future contracts and agreements are already made (TUCANA).

Building sponsorship relations and affiliations with universities, large corporations, and governmental organizations are significant strategic actions that accelerators take to mobilize resources and support from the external environment. Deal-flow makers and welfare stimulators have built good connections with private corporations under sponsorship agreements and public agencies supporting entrepreneurial activities within the country. Most of the accelerators in this research either belong to welfare stimulators, or deal-flow makers are affiliated with universities (Table 1). These affiliations bring reputation and trust and assist the accelerators in reaching more public funds and support. The accelerators affiliated with universities frequently mention the role of the financial grants provided by Regional Development Agencies or TUBITAK in establishing their programs and later in their operations. Accessing public grants are also seen as the approval of the new practices of accelerators by governmental bodies.

> "We have the power of a full-functioning technology park behind us" (TUCANA).
>
> "In our proposal to TUBITAK, we stated that we would run this program in this way, this is our system. And they left everything to us" (APUS).

Accelerators are also sponsored by private or public corporations or frequently work with large corporations for industry-specific programs. These corporations support the vertical programs that are run by the accelerators. The selection of start-ups and their buildout is done under the responsibility of the accelerators but, of course, with the involvement of these sponsoring corporations. This process is another significant way for accelerators to mobilize alliances with reputable actors in the environment and thus mobilize resources for the programs and the start-ups nurtured in these programs. Market mechanisms to support start-ups are not developed in Turkey; the number of angel investors and VCs and the amount of funding from local private investors are still very limited. For accelerators, it is very challenging to build a sustainable system based on exits. Therefore, almost all accelerators rely on public grants and sponsorship from large corporations.

In the affiliation strategy, deal-flow makers and welfare stimulators emphasize international and local entrepreneurship ecosystems. Deal-flow makers generally turn their gaze more to global ecosystems and try to connect their start-ups to international markets. Using these affiliations legitimizes their programs, preparing their start-ups to compete in the local and global markets. On the other hand, welfare stimulators emphasize how they mobilize local resources; they are part of a more prominent and thriving but local ecosystem supporting start-ups at various stages.

Accelerators develop significant relations with investors, successful entrepreneurs, and corporate professionals by inviting them to participate in different acceleration processes. Most accelerators organize selection committees, including investors, successful entrepreneurs, and corporate managers. Moreover, these actors work as mentors to the selected start-ups in almost all acceleration programs. However, the discourse of welfare stimulators and deal-flow makers to explain their motivation to engage these actors in the acceleration system differs. For the deal-flow makers, engaging investors and successful entrepreneurs in the ecosystem with the acceleration process enables them to understand trends emerging at the macro level and to adapt themselves to such trends to increase the success rate of their start-ups and themselves. It also allows investors to learn and cooperate with start-ups early. The investors mentoring start-ups can re-shape the business of the start-ups as early as possible and invest in the start-ups they mentor.

> "We often invite investors to our selection committees to give investors a signal: We bring these selected start-ups before you very early as new ventures seeking investment. Now, you should tell us what you want. Then we will find those start-ups for you" (HYDRUS).

On the other hand, welfare stimulators engage investors, sponsor companies, and successful entrepreneurs in the selection and mentoring process as part of the training and making entrepreneurial teams acquire entrepreneurial skills and perspectives. They mobilize these resources to let entrepreneurial teams test their product-market fit, access market expertise, make them think about possible pivots, and obtain some pre-sale contracts. These engagements form new allies within the entrepreneurship ecosystem and mobilize resources between these actors.

4.3. Advocating the new institutional practices as well as legitimizing accelerators as an intermediary: Collaborative action strategy

The emerging literature on the role of collective action in institutional change suggests that institutional change can be achieved by mobilizing coalitions around new practices, norms, and standards (Drado, 2013; Kishna et al., 2017). The interactions of divergent stakeholders can legitimize the new practices, and new organizations seeking legitimacy need to drive their effort toward collective action. In some cases, collective action requires collaboration among organizations that are rivals; in other cases, collaboration occurs among divergent stakeholders who can benefit from a change in the institutional logic (Lounsbury and Clumsey, 2007). Our results indicate that accelerators do not see other accelerators or existing incubation programs operating on old institutional logic as rivals but as organizations serving the shared mission of empowering the Turkish entrepreneurship ecosystem. They believe that all field organizations have the same mission of enlarging and empowering the ecosystem. Table 5 includes quotations from the interviews regarding the collaborative action strategy.

Table 5: Collective action through discourse and mission

Connecting to the macro-level discourse	
Deal-flow makers	**Welfare stimulators**
Emphasizing the mission of contributing to the enlargement and empowerment of the entrepreneurship ecosystem	*Emphasizing the mission of serving the whole ecosystem for the greater good*
We do whatever we can to support the ecosystem (PAVO); I, you, we, not they or him/her (VOLANS); It is all about enlarging the Turkish ecosystem (INDUS); We talked with more than 200 entrepreneurs last year without any expectation, we do freemium (HYDRUS).	Either from us or another accelerator, this is not important if it helps employment and lowers the current account deficit (GRUS); We want to build entrepreneurship muscles (APUS).
Non-rivalry and collaboration among accelerators	
Emphasizing collaboration among accelerators and between accelerators and other organizations:	
I know many accelerator directors, we try to organize events together (APUS); We support the start-up program of X university (MUSCA); At Y university accelerator, X is my mentor, Q and P universities organize R together, and I am in the jury; Q university invites me to all of their activities (PAVO).	
Emphasizing a non-rivalry attitude among acceleration programs:	
We are at the beginning as an ecosystem. Why should we block each other (APUS); Our entrepreneurs can go to other accelerators, but we expect them to tell us (PHOENIX); Our entrepreneurs can go to accelerator X or Y (VOLANS); The ecosystem is small, everybody knows everybody, there is nothing to compete on (APUS).	

Almost all interviewees emphasized their mission to contribute to the Turkish entrepreneurship ecosystem. However, deal-flow makers and welfare stimulators differ in their roles and mission narratives in this ecosystem. Deal-flow makers try legitimizing themselves by using a narrative emphasizing the Turkish ecosystem's empowerment. Their narrative is shaped around the idea that the Turkish entrepreneurship ecosystem is not very large and is not functioning well. They aim to empower and enlarge it by generating and supporting a new class of entrepreneurs, mobilizing resources toward start-ups, connecting all the ecosystem actors, and connecting the Turkish entrepreneurship ecosystem to global ecosystems. However, welfare stimulators' narratives focus more on increasing the awareness of entrepreneurship, especially among young people, helping all who need any knowledge, information, or advice about entrepreneurship, starting a business, and even emphasizing the role of entrepreneurship in decreasing unemployment and trade deficit at the macro level.

> "It is not essential for us to find a project that will rapidly grow and be profitable. If we win, it would be nice. However, we want to train entrepreneurs and teach them how an entrepreneur thinks. We call it 'entrepreneurship muscle'" (APUS).

Our research findings indicate that accelerators collaborate and support their various activities differently. On that point, the efforts of the managers and professionals of acceleration programs are remarkable. It is frequently mentioned that they spend most of their time on networking activities and try to create a community directed to the common good. Their social capital and networking skills also play a critical role in building a coalition among accelerators and their supporters.

> "Accelerator GRUS is our friend; we always support each other. Accelerator HYDRUS is also a friend, X (naming the manager of the accelerator INDUS) is my mentor; I am a supporter of an enterprise competition at University X, and I am on the evaluation committee" (PAVO).

Furthermore, it is very common for start-ups in Turkey to participate in different acceleration or incubation programs, either simultaneously or sequentially. This strategy is not seen as strange by the accelerator managers because, as they emphasize, there is no rivalry among the programs, and start-ups participating in different programs can train themselves better and access more resources and capabilities. Another positive impact of collective action is the diffusion of new practices among other actors.

5. Conclusion

At the micro-level, acceleration programs provide initial support and resources to entrepreneurs, while at the macro level, accelerators address failures in the entrepreneurship ecosystem (Dutt et al., 2016; Goswami et al., 2018; Mair et al., 2012) and transform the institutional context and legitimate novel norms, values, beliefs, and routines. This paper focuses on how accelerators build their legitimacy and how their variations affect their legitimation efforts. By doing so, the research sheds light on how different accelerator types follow different actions and strategies to legitimate themselves as new organizational forms in the entrepreneurship ecosystem by elaborating on their practices at the micro and macro levels. In our framework, accelerators craft a distinctive identity, mobilize allies around this identity, and establish new collaborations to enable collective action to build legitimacy. Different types of accelerators follow different paths. For instance, deal-flow makers' identities and their allies differ from welfare stimulator accelerators' identities. Our results indicate that variations among accelerators support legitimacy building by managing the judgments of diverse audiences and increasing the variety of resources these audiences provide.

5.1. Theoretical implications

By focusing on how different strategic actions are taken to build legitimacy, we contribute to the emerging literature on accelerators by offering a framework that might be instrumental in unlocking the legitimacy-building process by brokering between micro and macro-level actors. Research on accelerators shows no one type of accelerator; as the number of accelerators increases, the variations among organizations categorized as accelerators multiply. Despite these variations, accelerators build legitimacy as new organizations via new values, norms, and routines that they advocate. Accelerators as intermediaries need to attain legitimacy in the eyes of a distinct audience, including investors, business angel networks, or public organizations supporting entrepreneurial activities and among start-ups if they desire to attract the best teams and projects. The strategic actions taken by accelerators to attain legitimacy in both directions support and feed each other. They initiate institutional change by articulating problems and proposing viable solutions (David et al., 2013). To achieve the change, these practices should be seen as appropriate and acceptable in the eyes of the audience, including private investors and public organizations, sponsoring organizations, and start-ups.

Accelerators need to craft a legitimately distinct organizational identity to attract the attention and support of various audiences in the entrepreneurship ecosystem (Navis and Glynn, 2010). They need to exhibit how they are similar and different from other entrepreneurship support organizations such as incubators (McDonald and Eisenhardt, 2020). Crafting a legitimately distinct identity is also key to mobilizing allies and affiliations. The theory states that new organizations should ally with others to achieve institutional change and legitimacy (Battilana et al., 2009). David et al. (2013) propose that the legitimacy of a new organizational form increases when the change agents have ties to external authorities and stakeholders who are integral to the new problem-solution theorization. Affiliations enable the new organization to bridge the institutional distance and attain more legitimacy (David et al., 2013; Jayanti and Raghunart, 2018; Tracey et al., 2011).

Based on our findings, we propose that accelerators create a legitimately distinctive identity in the eyes of both start-ups and other stakeholders in the ecosystem. However, our study shows that there is no uniform legitimate new organizational form. In other words, the variation of accelerators, called deal-flow makers and welfare stimulators, result in different distinct organizational identities because the audience they address differs. For instance, deal-flow makers focus on creating a winning image and gaining legitimacy in the eyes of private investors; welfare stimulators address a larger audience and emphasize the quality of the teams they nurture and how various audiences perceive this quality. Around their distinctive identities, they mobilize allies with universities, technoparks, public organizations, sponsoring organizations, and international accelerators to legitimize their activities and themselves as new organizations. Equally importantly, both accelerators' efforts to build alliances with investors and engage them in the different phases of start-up acceleration play a critical role in legitimation. By engaging investors in the start-up selection process as evaluators or in the venture-building process as mentors, deal-flow makers ensure a continuing flow of information to the investors in their networks, providing the investors the privilege of being informed about attractive start-ups as early as possible and welfare stimulators help their start-ups to gain more accurate skills and talents to success as an entrepreneur. Using these allies, accelerators mobilize resources for their activities and their start-ups. Hence, as the number of resources mobilized increases, accelerators and their start-ups gain more success in the ecosystem, attaining pragmatic legitimacy (Suchman, 1995) by proving that their practices work better than the existing ones.

Finally, this research shows that collective action adopted by accelerators is another strategy employed to build legitimacy. Our research indicates that accelerators organize a collective action around the greater mission of empowering the whole entrepreneurship ecosystem. Around this mission, they organize a collective identity, which helps them derive support from each other and other actors in the ecosystem. Accelerators support each other in various activities to enlarge and empower the ecosystem. While the collective success of accelerators enables them to attain pragmatic legitimacy, organizing collective action around a common and legitimate mission of empowering the national entrepreneurship ecosystem brings them moral legitimacy.

The findings regarding the third strategy also show how the cultural, social, economic, and institutional contexts influence the discovery of opportunities and the strategy of new intermediary organizations to pursue these opportunities and be seen as acting appropriately and adequately. This result has been the motivation behind our study in addressing the legitimation of accelerators in an emerging country context, Turkey.

5.2. Practical and policy implications

Our study findings offer two critical strategic insights for accelerator managers. Because our study points out two distinct types of accelerators: deal-flow makers and welfare stimulators, managers need to decide what kind of accelerator they want to build. Based on the accelerator's goal, they need to follow different strategies. Second, the managers need to develop networks with other agents in the entrepreneurship ecosystem to help them build collective action in overcoming the institutional voids in the emerging country context.

Policymakers might benefit from our findings as well. First, there is no one size fits all solution for any intermediaries, which is also the case for technology-based accelerators. Since there are two distinct types of accelerators, their needs and expectations from the policymakers are different. Second, accelerators, especially welfare simulators, may be seedbeds of mechanisms that sustain an entrepreneurship ecosystem. The ecosystem may create outputs and value, but for sustainability, the government policy could be regenerative, integrating various intermediaries and actors and further developing skills, finance, ideas, and knowledge. In this way, the government may prevent a sustainability trap for the entrepreneurship ecosystem.

5.3. Limitations and future research

This research has some limitations that might become opportunities for further studies. First, this study exploits interviews with accelerator managers in Turkey. Thus, future research conducted in different contexts is required to compare findings across different contexts to enhance the generalizability of our findings. The analyses in this paper are based on the narratives of accelerator managers; their perspectives are used to understand the strategic actions of accelerators in legitimacy building. However, to fully grasp this process, other stakeholders that are part of the acceleration process should also be investigated. One of the avenues to further research might be the legitimation of start-ups in acceleration programs. New research might concentrate on how the stories told by the entrepreneurs in the selection process are deconstructed and reconstructed in the acceleration process, how entrepreneurs make radical changes in or revisions to their initial reports, or how they learn from the accelerator program experts to develop strategies to build legitimacy. Studying investors and other stakeholders regarding their engagement with accelerators might also enrich the story of how accelerators build legitimacy. Also, this research does not investigate how the backgrounds, experiences, competencies, and social skills of accelerator managers influence the strategic actions of accelerators. Studying accelerator managers might be another exciting research to understand how skill pools and individual efforts and interactions among individuals influence the collective actions of accelerators to attain legitimacy.

References:

Akçomak, I.S. and Koçak, K. (2021). Türkiye'de kuluçkalar: Eski yapılarla ve yeni yapılar birarada yaşayabilir mi?, in Akçomak, I.S., Beyhan, B., Çetindamar, D. and Tandoğan, V.S. (eds), *Türkiye'de Yenilik Tabanlı Girişimcilik*, Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, p. 233-254.

Armonios, D.E., Eesley, C. E., Li, J., and Eisenhardt, K.E. (2017). How entrepreneurs leverage institutional intermediaries in emerging economies to acquire public resources. *Strategic Management Journal*, 38, 1373–90.

Battilana, J., Leca, B., and Boxenbaum, E. (2009). How actors change institutions: towards a theory of institutional entrepreneurship. *Academy of Management Annals*, 3, 65-107.

Beyhan, B. Akcomak, S. and Cetindamar, D. (2021). The start-up selection process in accelerators: qualitative evidence from Turkey. *Entrepreneurship Research Journal*, https://doi.org/10.1515/erj-2021-0122

Bryman, A. and Bell, E. (2007). *Business Research Methods*. Oxford University Press.

Cao, Z. and Shi, X. (2021). A systematic literature review of entrepreneurial ecosystems in advanced and emerging economies, *Small Business Economics*, 57, 75-110.

Charoontham, K., and Amornpetchkul, T. (2022). Startup accelerator analysis: Strategic decision on effort exertion and information disclosure regime. *Journal of Entrepreneurship in Emerging Economies*, (ahead-of-print). https://doi.org/10.1108/JEEE-06-2020-0188

Clegg, S. R., Rhodes, C., and Kornberger, M. (2007). Desperately seeking legitimacy: organizational identity and emerging industries. *Organization Studies*, 28(4), 495-513.

Cohen, S., Fehder, D.C., Hochberg, Y.V., and Murray, F. (2019). The design of start-up accelerators. *Research Policy*, 48, 1781–97.

Cohen, S.G. and Hochberg, Y.V. (2014). Accelerating start-ups: the seed accelerator phenomenon. https://ssrn.com/abstract=2418000

Crişan, E. L., Salanta, I.I., Beleiu, I. N., Bordean, O. N., and Bunduchi, R. (2021). A systematic literature review on accelerators. *Journal of Technology Transfer*, 46, 62-89.

David, R.J., Sine, W.D., and Haveman, H.A. (2013). Seizing opportunity in emerging fields: how institutional entrepreneurs legitimated the professional form of management consulting. *Organization Science*, 24(2), 356-77.

Del Sarto, N., Isabella, D., and Di Minin, A. (2020). The role of accelerators in firm survival: An fsQCA analysis of Italian start-ups. *Technovation*, 90-91, 102102.

Dutt, N., Hawn, O., Vidal, E., Chatterji, A., McGahan, A., and Mitchell, W. (2016). How open system intermediaries address institutional failures. *Academy of Management Journal*, 59(3), 818–40.

Eisenhardt, K. M. (1989). Building theories from case study research. *Academy of Management Review*, 14, 532–50.

Eisenhardt, K. M. and Graebner, M.E. (2007). Building theory from cases: opportunities and challenges. *Academy of Management Journal*, 50 (1), 25-37.

Eberhart, R. N. and Eesley, C.E. (2018). The dark side of institutional intermediaries: Junior stock exchanges and entrepreneurship. *Strategic Management Journal*, 39, 2643–65.

Ekonomist (2018). Bu yıl 'kuluçka'dan 1.105 start up çıkacak. Retrieved September 15, 2020 from https://www.ekonomist.com.tr/girisim-kobi/bu-yil-kuluckadan-1-105-start-up-cikacak.html

Fisher, G. (2020). The complexities of new venture legitimacy. *Organization Theory*, 1, 1–25. DOI: 10.1177/2631787720913881

Ganamotse, G.N., Samuelsson, M., Abankwah, R.M., Anthony, T., and Mphela, T. (2017). The emerging properties of business accelerators: The case of Botswana, Namibia and Uganda Global Business Labs. Journal of Entrepreneurship and Innovation in Emerging Economies, 3(1): 16-40.

Gioia, D. A., Corley, C. G., and Hamilton, A. M. (2012). Seeking qualitative rigor in inductive research. *Organizational Research Methods*, 16(1), 15–31.

Gonzalez-Uribe, J. and Leatherbee, M. (2018). The effects of business accelerators on venture performance: Evidence from start-up Chile. *The Review of Financial Studies*, 31(4): 1566-1603.

Goswami, K., Mitchell, J.R., and Bhagavatula, S. (2018). Accelerator expertise. *Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal*, 12, 117-150.

Greenwood, R. and Suddaby, R. (2006). Institutional entrepreneurship in mature fields: the big five accounting firms. *Academy of Management Journal*, 49(1), 27-48.

Hallen, B. L., Cohen, S.L., and Bingham, C.B. (2020). Do accelerators work? If so, how? *Organization Science*, 31(2), 378-414.

Hardy, C. and Maguire, S. (2017). Institutional entrepreneurship and change in fields. In R. Greenwood, C. Oliver, T.E. Lawrence, & R.E. Meyer (Eds), *The Sage Handbook of Organizational Institutionalism* (2nd ed., pp. 261-280). Sage.

Investment Office (2020). *The State of Turkish Start-up Ecosystem*. Retrieved August 15, 2020 from https://www.invest.gov.tr/tr/library/publications/lists/investpublications/turk-startup-ekosisteminin-gorunumu.pdf.

Jayanti, R. K. and Raghunath, S. (2018). Institutional entrepreneur strategies in emerging economies. *Journal of Business Research*, 89, 87-98.

Kishna, M., Niesten, E., Negro, S., and Hekkert, M.P. (2017). The role of alliances in creating legitimacy of sustainable technologies. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 155, 7-16.

Lee, B. H., Hiatt, S. R., and Lounsbury, M. (2017). Market mediators and the trade-offs of legitimacy seeking behaviors in a nascent category. *Organization Science*, 28(3), 447-470.

Lounsbury, M. and Crumley, E.T. (2007). New practice creation: an institutional perspective on innovation. *Organization Studies*, 28(07), 993–1012.

Mair, J. and Marti, I. (2009). Entrepreneurship in and around institutional voids: a case study from Bangladesh. *Journal of Business Venturing*. 24, 419-35.

Mair, J., Marti, I., and Vestresca, M.J. (2012). Building inclusive markets in rural Bangladesh: how intermediaries work institutional voids. *Academy of Management Journal*. 55(4), 819-50.

McDonald, R. M. and Eisenhardt, K. M. (2020). Parallel play: Start-ups, nascent markets, and effective business-model design. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 65(2), 483–523. https://doi.org/10.1177/0001839219852349

McKendrik, D.G. and Caroll, G.R. (2012). On the genesis of organizational forms: evidence from the market for disk arrays. *Organization Science*. 12: 661-82.

Mohammadi, N. and Shafiee, M. (2021). How design thinking help us to select start-ups for the acceleration period? *Journal of Entrepreneurship in Emerging Economies*. https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.uts.edu.au/10.1108/JEEE-07-2021-0274

Navis, C. and Glynn, M.A. (2011). Legitimate distinctiveness and the entrepreneurial identity. *Academy of Management Review*. 36(3): 479–99.

Porras-Paez, A. and Schmutzler, J. (2019). Orchestrating an Entrepreneurial Ecosystem in an emerging country. *Local Economy*. 34(8): 767-86.

Pandey, S, Lall, S., Pandey, S.K., and Ahlawat, S. (2017). The appeal of social accelerators: what do social entrepreneurs value? *Journal of Social Entrepreneurship*. 8: 88-109.

Pauwels, C., Clarysse, B., Wright, M., and van Hove, J. (2016). Understanding a new generation incubation model: the accelerator. *Technovation*. 50-51: 13-24.

Prexl, K.M., Hubert, M., Beck, S., Heiden, C. and Prugl, R. (2019). Identifying and analyzing the drivers of heterogeneity among ecosystem builder accelerators. *R&D Management*. 49 (4): 624-38.

Pustovrh, A., Rangus, K., and Drnovsek, M. (2020). The role of open innovation in developing an entrepreneurial support ecosystem. *Technological Forecasting & Social Chnage*, 152, 119892.

Rao, H., Morrill, C., and Zald, M.N. (2000). Power plays: how social movements and collective action create new organizational forms. In B. Staw and R.I. Sutton (Eds.), Research in Organizational Behavior, 22: 239-282. JAI Press, New York, NY.

Ries E. (2011). *The lean start-up: How today's entrepreneurs use continuous innovation to create radically successful businesses*. Crown Business: New York.

Roundy, P.T. (2017) Hybrid organizations and the logics of entrepreneurial ecosystems. *International Entrepreneurship Management Journal*. 13: 1221–37.

Sarasvathy, S.D. (2000). Causation and effectuation: toward a theoretical shift from economic inevitability to entrepreneurial contingency. *Academy of Management Review*. 26: 243-63

Shankar, R.K. and Clausen, T.H. (2020). Scale quickly or fail fast: An inductive study of acceleration. *Technovation*. 98: 102174.

Snehal, S., Sundaram, R., and Krishnashree, A. (2020). Assessing and comparing top accelerators in Brazil, India, and the USA: Through the lens of new ventures' performance. *Entrepreneurial Business and Economics Review*, 8(2): 153-177.

Soluk, J, Kammerlander, N., and Darwin, S. (2021). Digital entrepreneurship in developing countries: The role of institutional voids. *Technological Forecasting & Social Change*. 170, 120876.

Stayton, J. and Mangematin V. (2019). Seed accelerators and the speed of new venture creation. *Journal of Technology Transfer*. 44: 1163–87.

Suchman, M.C. (1995). Managing legitimacy: strategic and institutional approaches. The *Academy of Management Review*. 20(3): 571-610.

Tracey, P., Phillips, N., and Jarvis, O. (2011). Bridging institutional entrepreneurship and the creation of new organizational forms. *Organization Science*. 22(1): 60-80.

Wright, A.L. and Zammuto, R.F. (2013). Creating opportunities for institutional entrepreneurship. *Journal of Business Venturing*. 28: 51-68.

Yin, R.K. (2003). *Case study research: Design and Methods*. Sage.

Yosun, T. and Cetindamar, D. (2022). A typology of competitive strategies for social enterprises. *Journal of Social Entrepreneurship*. DOI:10.1080/19420676.2022.2148268

Yu, S. (2019). How do accelerators impact the performance of high-technology ventures? *Management Science*. 66(2): 530-52.

Zuzul, T. and Edmondson, A. C. (2017). The advocacy trap: When legitimacy building inhibits organizational learning. *Academy of Management Discoveries*, 3(3), 302–321. https://doi.org/10.5465/amd.2015.0086