

## UNIVERSITY-BASED ACCELERATORS FOR START-UP AND THEIR IMPACT ON THE ECOSYSTEM

*Greco Fabio, Tregua Marco, Mele Cristina*

**Purpose** - Disruptive ideas leading to start-up are growing. As of 2018, 9,000 innovative start-ups in Italy increased the employment of 5% per semester, with over 40,000 shareholders. (Sole24Ore, 2018).

Scholars highlighted drivers of success, control systems, seed accelerators, and their supportive instruments (e.g., education/training activities) (Petretto, 2009; Davila, 2010; Blank, 2013; van Hove et al., 2018). Even European Union focused on accelerators (EU-Startups, 2019) and acceleration programs are increasingly spreading (Global Accelerator Report, 2016).

Further research has been called for (e.g., Colombo et al., 2018), due to the novelty of the topic and the open questions on the features of university-based accelerators, as their “viability” (Mele & Russo-Spena, 2018; van Hove et al., 2018) in the start-up ecosystems. Thus, this work overviews the start-ups scenario and the acceleration programs in Italy and observes university-based accelerators to analyse their role in start-ups development.

**Design/Methodology/approach** - A multiple comparative case study is performed through face-to-face interviews with the main Italian university-based accelerators and start-uppers. Interviews are performed in Italy due to the chance to complete them locally and because of the high number of accelerators.

**Findings** - Business incubators and accelerators played a fundamental role in supporting this growth. Indeed, accelerators with universities as partners established critical relationships in the surrounding context of a start-up catalysing the achievement of the objectives. Core competence, technical knowledge, and cross-sectorial knowledge brought by universities are key drivers of start-ups success. Moreover, a start-up ecosystem offers a fertile ground for start-ups development.

**Research limitations/implications** - Several discriminating factors contribute to the success of a start-up (Applegate, 2016) and it would be limiting to lead them back to acceleration programs, since they can represent one of the determinants for the success of start-ups.

**Practical implications** - The birth and the role of the most successful certified Italian company accelerators with local universities as front-line partners is emblematic. Moreover, on one hand, the mortality of start-ups significantly decreased, on the other hand, these emerging firms suffer from “dwarfism”, since they fail to scale up. Variety of knowledge and competence in a start-up ecosystem led by universities is a useful lever to support the success of start-ups; anyway, many problems remain unresolved. This study identified the key drivers of successful start-ups to set guidelines for university-based accelerators. Local and central agencies can understand how to support such accelerators, due to the advantages start-ups can bring locally (e.g., employment, spillover, and tied services).

**Key words** (max 5) - Start up, Accelerator, University, Ecosystem

**Paper type** – Research paper

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