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34th IASP Annual World Conference
Istanbul, Turkey

A New Approach to Business Incubation: Sera

Parallel Session 4
"Innovation support services: thoughts in action"

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A New Approach to Business Incubation: Sera

It is so important to have knowledge based economy to be a country which has passed middle income trap. Countries can develop economies by developing and selling international competitive products and this is possible by technology based companies. Technoparks and technology incubators have been developed because of that, it is so hard for an entrepreneur to establish and grow a technology based company by him or herself. Sera established to help entrepreneurs to establish their technology based companies.

Sera is a unique technology based business incubation program which is implementing by Erciyes Technopark in Turkey. Sera program constituted with four phases: Pre - Sera (Pre Incubation), Sera, (Incubation), After - Sera (Post Incubation), Pro - Sera (Acceleration). Entrepreneurs or entrepreneur candidates can start from different phases of Sera according to their business idea's development level. For an instance, if an entrepreneur who has no business idea but has entrepreneurship potential wants to attend to Sera Program, he or she needs to start from Pre – Sera level, but if another entrepreneur who has business idea with a prototype wants to attend to Sera Program, he or she needs to start from After - Sera level. At this paper, we aim to introduce Sera incubation program which has unique features.

Sera program firstly started lately 2013, at the beginning of the program (in 2013) it is asked to the entrepreneurs to bring their business ideas throughout a business idea call which has a strict calendar. This timely based approach was not give opportunity to reach expected potential, so the program is altered to always open call model. Today, any entrepreneur can apply program and can be part of Sera in any time. Time limited approach has potential to prevent to reach all entrepreneurs, because business ideas can be raised independent from program calendar. Calendar based or time limited call approach is useful when it is aimed to trigger mass application.

It is important to support the entrepreneurs not only technical services but infrastructure all of the entrepreneurs of Sera program can benefit from 1.000 m^2 modern working space (fully furnished and equipped), 50 Mbit wireless fiber internet connection, fast prototyping atelier (3D Printer, desktop CNC, small tools, etc.), Sera – Start Up Cafe, resting and gaming rooms, mutual secretariat (Printer / Scanner / Telephone services), brain storming and inspiration rooms, meeting rooms, business idea wall. Sera entrepreneurs can also benefit from legal advisory service, financial advisory service, commercial and technical mentoring / coaching, technology advisory service, export and marketing advisory service, project and access to funding advisory service, Microsoft BizSpark network partnership, access to Europe Enterprise Network, access to Business Angel Networks and Angel Investors.

Program Requirements:	
1	To have entrepreneurship abilities
2	Aiming to work on technology based business idea
3	To have a potentially commercial business idea
4	Physically involvement to the program
5	Allocation enough personal time for the program
6	To have enough technical background about the subject of the business idea
7	To have no restriction to establish a legal company according to Turkish Trade Law

Table 1. Program Requirements

1. Pre – Sera Phase: Pre – Sera is the first phase of the program. Entrepreneurs who have business ideas in earlier phase or have no idea can apply to Pre – Sera phase. At this phase program management applies a survey to the candidates, the name of the survey is "I am an entrepreneur". According to survey results, program management selects up to 30 candidates to start a new inspiration program. There are three sub-program inside Pre – Sera phase: inspiration, idea and validation. Inspiration program is a training program and it takes 3 days to complete the program. Beyond the program, entrepreneur candidates get trained by management team, in the program trainers show to the attendees Turkey's 2023 vision, regional development plan, national development plan, national grant calls for project proposals, then it is asked them to bring a new business idea with this new vision and approach. Inside inspiration program, attendees bring their ideas and after that program management asks to the entrepreneur to verify the idea. Sera mentor pool is ready to help the entrepreneur candidate for verifying process. The process is illustrated in Figure 1, as seen in the figure after the "pre sera" phase there has to be a verified business idea. Entrepreneurs can apply If an entrepreneur candidate can be successful to create a new verified business idea, program management take him or her to next phase: Sera.

2. Sera Phase: Sera is the second phase of the program. Entrepreneurs who have verified business idea can apply to Sera phase. Program management asks to entrepreneurs to verify their ideas again by Sera methodology. Entrepreneurs who pass this verification progress can be part of Sera program. Beyond the Sera program, entrepreneurs have their self-working space, computer, furniture, internet connection etc. Sera program normally takes 6 months to be completed, but it is possible to extend the program according to needs of the entrepreneurs. To be able to successfully complete the Sera program, entrepreneurs needs to produce their prototypes. In Sera phase, it is aimed to produce commercial products at TRL(Technology Readiness Level) 7. To be able to attract the investors and get investment it is so important to reach at least TRL7. It is not easy to reach TRL7, so Sera program also offers to the entrepreneurs "fast prototyping atelier" for free. In the atelier, entrepreneurs can benefit from 3D printers, mini CNC, handy tools, etc.

3. After - Sera Phase: After – Sera is the third phase of the program. Entrepreneurs who have their prototypes or customers who pay for the products or services can apply to After – Sera phase. To be able to be accepted to the program, program management ask to the candidates to show proven prototype or to show legal documents about company income from technology based business idea. At this phase, entrepreneurs have their separated working space (cubic). If entrepreneurs want to establish their companies, it is possible at this phase. To be able to successfully complete the After - Sera program, entrepreneurs need to establish their companies and sell products or services to the customers. If they

already have company and customers, it is expected to reach certain income level which defines at the beginning of the program. Beyond the phase, every entrepreneur or team gets mentoring services, fast prototyping services, trainings etc. It is aimed to develop the products and services also new income models. Before this phase, it is not allowed to establish legal companies by entrepreneurs.

4. Pro – Sera Phase: Pro - Sera is the fourth phase of the program. Entrepreneurs who have their working legal companies can apply to Pro – Sera phase. To be able to be accepted to the program, program management ask to the candidates to show that they satisfy the program requirements (company must be maximum 3 years old, income of the company must be less than 221.000 TL, company must have less than 10 working staff). At Pro – Sera phase, entrepreneurs have their office spaces with %75 rent discount. Program lasts maximum 3 years, at the end of the 3rd year, no matter what the company's status, the company must leave the program. To be able to successfully complete the Pro - Sera program, entrepreneurs need to sell their products or services to the oversea countries. Pro – Sera phase can be named as accelerator phase of the Sera program.

Beyond this phase, companies get technical trainings, special market consultancy services, tailor made technical and academic consultancy, academic advisory services, national grant application guidance services, intellectual property consultancy etc. At the Pro – Sera phase, companies accelerate by extra services.
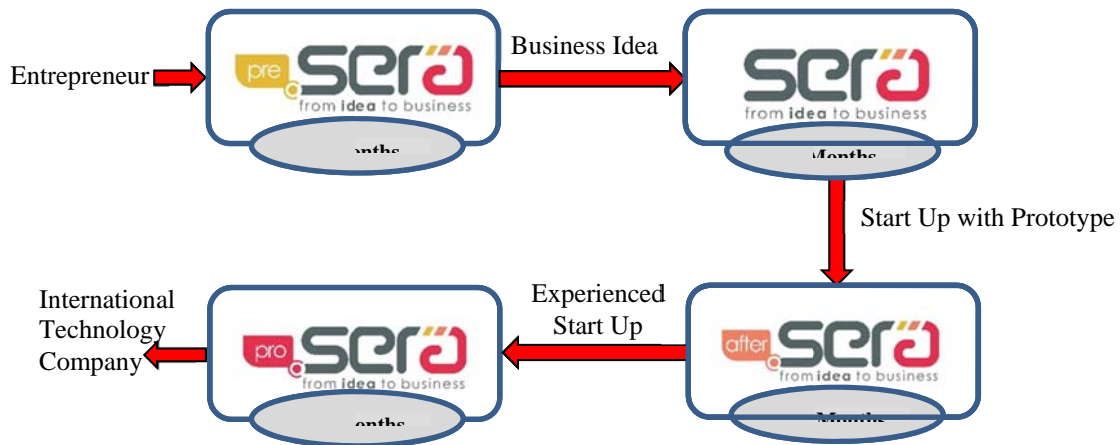

Figure 1. Sera Incubation Program Process Diagram
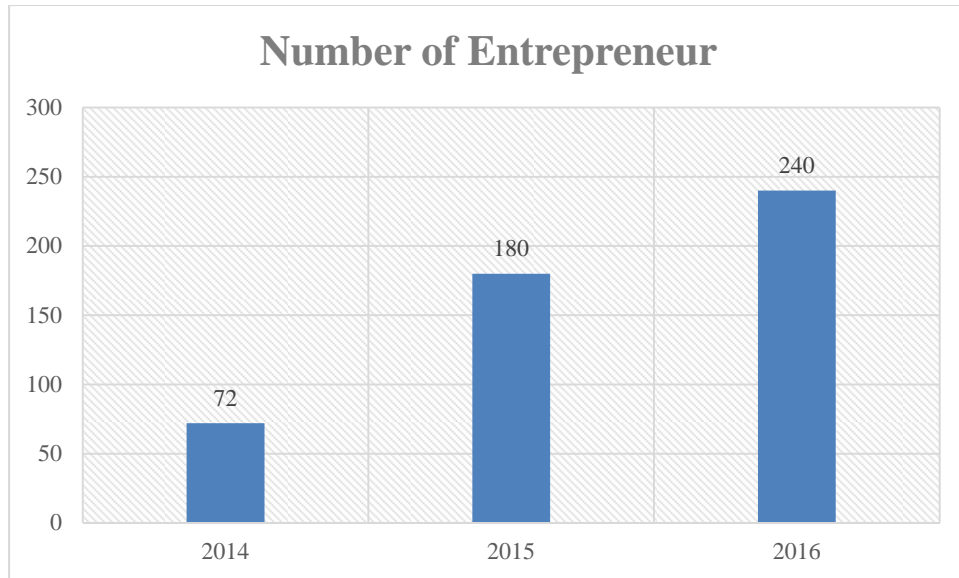
Number of Entrepreneur

Figure 2. Number of Entrepreneurs Benefit from Sera (Year by Year)

From 2013 to this date, 129 teams and 492 entrepreneurs have got service from Sera program. In figure 2, the performance of the program is illustrated. There are 15 companies those established by the support of Sera program. Sera is a technology based incubation program which has unique features, Sera is still changing and adapting according to needs of ecosystem. Nowadays, the Sera management team is working to extend the Sera program to other cities and countries by franchising method.