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Building a Research and Innovation Ecosystem

Dr Kamal H Kharecha
Associate Professor, Department of Commerce & Accountancy, Tolani Commerce College Adipur , Kachchh , Gujarat

Abstract

Decisions on government support and funding for research should consider how institutions, agents, and phenomena interact. Weaknesses in the research and development ecosystem inflate costs and devalue infrastructures. A Research and Innovation Ecosystem comprises nodes and agents that generate and share knowledge; flows of financial resources; incentives shaped by rules; products made available to the private sector; grantees receiving funds; and changes in knowledge affecting agents and product types. Collaboration and Networking Mechanisms are crucial for research success and can include matchmaking services, competence platforms, community outreach, and innovation initiatives. Connections by topic, such as multidisciplinary research, are less emphasized. Studies highlight early connection steps, direct partnerships in main phases, and consolidation afterwards. The effectiveness of knowledge transfer during formal cooperation can mitigate shortcomings in collaborative foundations. Science parks and incubators do not provide a significant advantage at the proposal stage

Keywords: *Ecosystem, Collaboration and Networking.*

1. Introduction

The term 'ecosystem' has originated in ecology, referring to a physical environment that sustains a biocenosis, or interplay of life forms, such as flora, fauna and microorganisms. Translation of the concept to culturally constructed environments has evolved, commencing with the microbiome, through chemical sampling of human-system interactions, to landscapes, and now extending to PhD input-output (Gao et al., 2021). Understood thus, an 'ecosystem' constitutes a permeable area bounded by local cultural attributes, intertypically different from another, sharing properties—'shared growth' described as 'open innovation'. Analytically, an 'ecology' relates to indistinguishability of

double-, triple-, (and higher) helix interaction nucleus, each factor engaged in two or more simultaneous interactions, advancing complexity (Carvalho et al., 2019).

The emergence of potentially disruptive elements is central to governance reform on R&I, focusing on culture understanding, problem awareness, and a phased, feasible policy research framework. This framework, which includes digital platforms, allows countries to engage in R&I activities independent of Chinese influences. Different economic characteristics are critical to the discourse. Human capital, particularly PhD elements, may be context-sensitive. The innovation ecosystem is viewed as a shared-growth condition, with digital policies promoting distinctive mobility and addressing double-circumstances. Ecosystem interpretation clarifies spatial dimensions in commodity and service analyses, guiding researchers in understanding discipline-specific attributes. The broader area influences PhD circulation, breaking traditional regimes. Human capital development at the micro-level fosters interaction among various disciplines, emphasizing technology access and compliance. Fundamental analysis, inter-disciplinary PhD examples, platform-function roadmaps, and policy landscapes have been outlined.

2. Foundations of a Research and Innovation Ecosystem

A research and innovation ecosystem fosters high-impact knowledge generation and transformative change within nations and societies. The term ecosystem often conjures images of dynamism, creativity, novelty, and unexpected synergies. Such characteristics are indeed common and aspirational for any ecosystem, but their presence and forms of articulation vary tremendously across (a) types or classes of ecosystems, (b) temporal phases in their development, and (c) national or regional systemic conditions, including culture, demographics, or material resources. To move from ideas to implementation, these (1) foundations, (2) governance, (3) collaboration, (4) asset and resource flows, (5) risk management, (6) evaluation, (7) and specific policy recommendations illustrate complexities, interdependencies, and contours of variability essential for analysis and action (Carvalho et al., 2019).

2.1. Institutional Architecture

Universities play crucial roles in building inclusive innovation ecosystems, with their specific functions varying by national context. The mechanisms for transferring knowledge from universities to the economy are still not well understood, despite changes in the Triple Helix model across OECD countries. Interaction levels between universities and the economy are higher in the USA compared to Europe. Their economic impact can be seen as modulating factors that enhance firm innovation capabilities. Consequently,

policy measures to strengthen these linkages differ based on the type of knowledge and the transmitting actor. Focus on institutional frameworks positions universities as knowledge providers, suggesting attention to human capital through education and graduate supply. Financial incentives like tax credits for external research bolster university-firm collaborations, particularly where high-quality knowledge is scarce. Universities significantly influence countries with notable knowledge supply disparities between academia and industry, highlighting the need for more doctoral graduates and post-doctoral researchers. (N. Sampat & C. Mowery, 2004)(Gregersen & Johnson, 2009)

2.2. Financial and Incentive Structures

The transition of research outputs to the market requires a suitable mix of financial incentives in the RDI chain, particularly during the development phase. This includes access to pre-commercialisation technology and pilot demonstrations, while remaining neutral regarding R&D modes and benefits. Mapping RDI funding shows an investment preference for early and late stages, neglecting the development stage and lacking in human capital, even in initial building efforts. While public funding exists, private investment is weak. State-owned enterprises should take more risks, as they cannot declare bankruptcy. However, the risk-averse nature of private entities limits overall RDI investment, with a lack of early-stage financing instruments restricting funding access when needs peak, hindering the attraction of private venture capital. (George & Tarr, 2021)(Kapetaniou et al., 2018)

2.3. Human Capital and Talent Development

A key factor in developing a research and innovation ecosystem is the quality of human capital and skill investment. Individuals generate and utilize knowledge, making their efficiency and quantity vital for innovation. Investment in education and training is essential to cultivate the skills society needs. Empirical evidence shows a consistent positive correlation between human capital investment and innovation levels. As the economy becomes increasingly knowledge-based, this investment is needed at a higher rate. Thus, enhancing human talent through education, training, and attracting experience is critical for ecosystem development. (Souleh, 2018)

2.4. Physical and Digital Infrastructure

High-quality physical and digital infrastructure is essential for facilitating the movement of ideas, people, knowledge, technology, and innovation across borders. It improves data quantity, quality, openness, and accessibility, crucial for research, development, technology transfer, and the adoption of new innovations tailored to specific contexts. Investments in infrastructure empower researchers, inventors, and entrepreneurs.

Excellence in STEM and the arts requires well-equipped facilities, and national investment alongside corporate commitment is key to achieving quality infrastructure. In less-developed countries, investments in data collection and GIS technology by national agencies, with support from international partners, are critical. However, a talent shortage in data science poses significant challenges in these regions.

3. Governance and Policy Frameworks

In establishing Research and Innovation Ecosystems, strategic planning and stakeholder engagement are crucial for direction and workflow design. Countries and regions seeking to enhance their ecosystems should collaboratively inspire a vision to engage capable institutions and individuals. This collective effort aims to pool resources and frame references to generate impacts that address challenges and opportunities in a collaborative networked manner. To create an Initial Vision-and-Awareness-Shaping Event suitable for specific contexts, consult the guide "Improving Canada's Research and Innovation System," which outlines applicable process-design principles. Although some regions have initiated Ecosystem-building without extensive groundwork, others embark on this journey without pre-existing collaborations. Therefore, designing an Initial Vision-and-Awareness-Shaping Event for such regions requires a focus on engaging leading institutions and experts to foster collaboration at multiple systemic levels. (M. Yawson, 2009)

3.1. Strategic Planning and Stakeholder Engagement

Strategic planning and stakeholder engagement are critical for enabling and sustaining Research and Innovation Ecosystems (Fellnhofer, 2017) ; (Teo, 2023). Engaging stakeholders and articulating strategic intentions help to identify shared outcomes, align interests, and prioritise problems and opportunities. Governance and policy frameworks that endorse broad, open, and participatory approaches are therefore preferable.

Governance systems must facilitate and reinforce strategic planning and stakeholder engagement. Specific mechanisms will vary by context but should, as a minimum, address innovation stakeholders at all levels, focus on both national and ecosystem priorities, and ensure sufficient reach and coverage to engage a broad cross-section of each community during planning and implementation.

3.2. Intellectual Property and Technology Transfer

Technology Transfer Offices (TTOs) are essential for transferring new technologies from academia to industry while prioritizing public interest. They incentivize technology transfer in research-intensive universities reliant on public funding. The Bayh-Dole Act (1980) validated TTOs by allowing universities to claim rights over federally funded

inventions. Despite competition from emerging economies, research universities play a vital role in technology transfer and protect dissemination of non-patentable knowledge through public activities. The technology transfer process includes various responsibilities among inventors, TTOs, and support staff, and faces numerous challenges related to knowledge dissemination, partnerships, and collaborations. As complexities grow, the technology transfer process continuously evolves. Universities seeking to enhance their TTO functions should learn from other institutions. Many institutions rely on TTOs for revenue, facing financial challenges and weak incentives post-initial experimentation. To improve TTO effectiveness amid resource limitations, institutions should explore sustainable technology transfer methods. (Contreras & R. McManis, 2011)(Fauzan & Gooneratne, 2019)(Marr & Phan, 2020)

3.3. Regulatory Environment and Compliance

Building a robust, evidence-based approach for designing, evaluating, and implementing a sustainable Research and Innovation Ecosystem is essential. Establishing a Regulatory Environment Framework and ensuring compliance among ecosystem stakeholders with government policies is crucial. Investments aimed at fostering strategic collaboration should be protected from malpractices that could harm government initiatives. The ecosystem must justify infrastructure development costs for public return on investment. As early-stage technology ideas and businesses increase, a thorough understanding of venture creation is necessary. Support for emerging entrepreneurs and small businesses is vital, along with awareness of available resources. Creating a favorable environment for rapid commercialization through government and private funding is crucial. The government must play a key role in developing tools to catalyze innovation in the private sector, targeting areas with significant commercial potential. Mentoring for entrepreneurs should extend beyond financial aid to include qualitative support. The establishment of venture-capital firms and management contact offices reflects the surge of innovative ideas and business models entrepreneurs bring to the economy.

4. Collaboration and Networking Mechanisms

Strong Research and Innovation Ecosystems depend on collaboration and networking to foster partnerships and knowledge-sharing. These mechanisms work across sectoral and intersectoral levels, engaging actors from various domains, including industries, universities, public research organizations, innovation centers, and government and non-governmental entities. Sectoral networking connects actors within specific fields that drive regional innovation, while intersectoral networking develops partnerships with diverse profiles at regional or macro-regional levels. Such initiatives include technology

support, regional incentive programs, shared platforms, technology transfer, and joint research projects. The transformation of sectors often results from the convergence of technological innovations from different fields, known as cross-fertilization. In agriculture, for example, advancements in genomics, biotechnology, and communication technologies enhance networking and information sharing across the agricultural value chain. Open research ecosystems facilitate collaboration among a wide range of stakeholders, leading to co-designed, co-developed, and co-evaluated solutions for societal challenges. These ecosystems are essential for implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Inducement prizes mobilize talent and creativity by presenting problems to a wide audience, funding development of solutions. Additionally, complementary prizes recognize efforts related to endurance, efficiency, and implementability. A platform for scientific challenges addresses societal problems at the EU level, utilizing challenge-based prizes with varying scopes and complexities on the competitive innovation marketplace. (Battisti et al., 2018)(Toillier et al., 2018)(Giugliani et al., 2017)

5. Ecosystem Assets and Resource Flows

Governments worldwide emphasize research and innovation as vital for economic growth and social progress. Recent international efforts have highlighted research and innovation ecosystems, essential for sustainable development. Such ecosystems involve interconnected actors whose interactions shape broader institutional frameworks. Knowledge is the core resource, followed by innovation assets like researchers and infrastructure. Sustainable development drives diverse research agendas, with common themes of health, well-being, and environmental responsibility emerging globally. This diversity shows that different research and innovation ecosystems can work towards shared global objectives. The dynamics within these ecosystems facilitate the exchange of knowledge, talent, funding, and innovation assets. Thus, these resources are critical to monitor. (Carvalho et al., 2019)(Giugliani et al., 2017)

6. Risk Management and Resilience

Research and innovation ecosystems are vital for the economic growth of nations and cities. Their design must incorporate risk management and resilience, defined as the ability to prepare for, mitigate, and recover from disruptive events. Resilience can be strategic, developing capabilities for disruptions, or systemic, analyzing risks in a holistic way to understand cascading effects. Three key steps in a strategic approach to resilience management—adaptation, preparation, and recovery—can be enriched by a systemic risk-assessment step. Strategies to enhance ecosystem resilience must consider specific

risk profiles and the balance between capacity and systemic risk. (Pyrko et al., 2017)(Brito Fernandes & Liebenstein, 2011)(Carabine & Wilkinson, 2016)

7. Evaluation and Continuous Improvement

A research and innovation ecosystem embodies various interdependent components. To shape future research, innovation, and technology transfer policies, the various aspects of the ecosystem require systematic evaluation. Effective implementation hinges on an iterative, adaptive learning approach, examining data and feedback for ongoing improvement (Hagy et al., 2017).

A standardized, broadly applicable evaluation method remains elusive. Objectives framed and key performance indicators defined during the planning phase may enlist stakeholder–organisation participation. The ability to measure outputs and determine the extent to which objectives are reached at various levels profoundly affects the analysis of actual impact and sustainability.

8. Policy Recommendations and Implementation Roadmap

Research and innovation ecosystems are collaborative environments where various actors work together to create knowledge for innovative products, services, and processes, boosting their market introduction. Smart Specialisation Strategies focus on developing sustainable ecosystems capable of producing globally competitive research and innovation within a knowledge-based economy that increasingly relies on ICT services. R&D in these ecosystems is characterized by its demand-driven nature, business orientation, interaction with broader networks, and responsiveness to local needs. Recommendations for engaging actors in these ecosystems aim to enhance the roles of both supply and demand sides. Specific challenges arise within these ecosystems due to the interplay of research, innovation supply chains, and the overarching system, requiring tailored recommendations. A dual approach facilitates a systematic understanding of ecosystem policy, integrating common frameworks with specialized guidelines. Engaging economic, societal, and institutional actors calls for a clear articulation of priority recommendations, enhancing demand effectiveness and renewing user involvement. Establishing a robust research and innovation ecosystem improves policy relevance and demand articulation in funded initiatives, enabling better targeting of incentives through a comprehensive S3 framework. Without a demand-driven focus, research and innovation risks remaining supply-side oriented, undermining the articulation of incentives. These ecosystems address economic and societal challenges and foster opportunities for new activities and actors. Supporting their emergence and

development helps effectively integrate research and innovation into smart specialisation strategies. (Renda, 2012)(Schmid et al., 2016)

9. Conclusion

The creation of a Research and Innovation Ecosystem (RIE) through evidence-based collaborative exploration can transform institutional, regional, national, and international contexts. South Africa's knowledge-based economy struggles to respond to societal and scientific challenges without enhancing its research capabilities in science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and innovation. Developing a sustainable RIE is particularly challenging for transitional and low-to-middle income countries that cannot fully utilize technologies accessible through the Internet. This synthesis outlines the operationalisation of shared principles and indicators within the National RIE Blueprint's layers and describes their role in implementing the Innovation Framework, Policy, and Action Plan of South Africa's National Development Strategy. This strategy aims to amplify World Economic Forum drivers focused on social justice, inclusivity, economic participation, and investment, validated with the Academy of Science of South Africa, under the UN's Research and Development Gap Taskforce framework. Prioritising the establishment of complementarity between the Institutional Architecture, Financial Framework, Collaboration Framework, Collaborative Ecosystem Mapping, and Research Innovation Matching Framework is critical for the successful implementation of a National RIE. (Carvalho et al., 2019)

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