

Chapter 84

An Innovation Ecosystem beyond the Triple Helix Model: The Trentino's Case

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ABSTRACT

In the current global scenario, the relevance and the importance of social innovation becomes critical in order to face this situation of crisis. For its close link with the local area in which it takes place, social innovation is deeply rooted in the overall system, and thus involves the action of many different actors. The aim of this chapter is to highlight the presence of a new managerial model that is more suitable to promote social innovation within an ecosystem. This analysis has been developed focusing on a new and innovative framework, the Social Innovation Pyramid, and on the Trentino's ecosystem based in North-East of Italy.

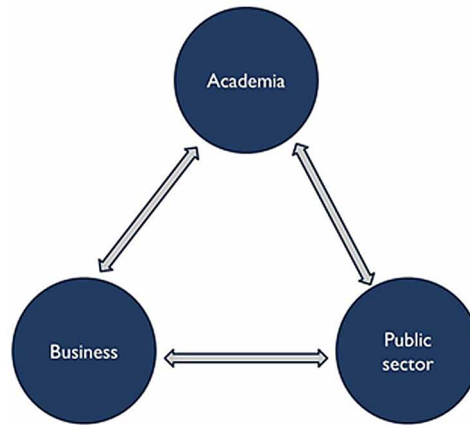
INTRODUCTION

In the nowadays contest characterized by an unexpected social crisis, one of the striking feature of our society is the increasing urge of enhancing innovation. Enhancing innovation means developing a network of public and private institutions, within which production, diffusion and application of new knowledge and technology takes place (Erikson et al., 2002). In this context the concept of social innovation is becoming more and more prominent. In particular, it is a form of innovation that explicitly

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Figure 1. Triple Helix model

Source: adapted from Etzkowitz (2010)



aims for the social and public good (Harris & Albury, 2009). OECD (2010) defines social innovation as the phenomenon that seeks new answers to social problems, through new services, new labor market integration processes, new competencies, new jobs, new forms of participation. Several models were developed to enhance innovation. At first, the Triple Helix Model has been proposed (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 1995), as a joint effort of firms, Universities and the public actor to the development of innovation. Afterwards, this model has been improved by Carayannis and Campbell (2009; 2010) that propose a fourth and also a fifth dimension from an inter-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary perspective of analysis that relates knowledge, innovation and the environment to each other. In their contributions, the authors moved towards a Quadruple Helix Model (adding the media-based and cultural-based public) and then a Quintuple Helix Model (adding the natural environment).

Another interesting framework has been developed by Giunchiglia (2013): the Social Innovation Pyramid (see Figure 1). This model proposes an innovative way to understand the interrelations between the actors and identifies a new and important actor that is fundamental to enhance the innovation ecosystem: the innovation catalyst. In this context, the need for intermediaries that can create the necessary link between the involved actors is crucial in order to foster social innovation. As affirmed by NESTA (2007) there is a notable absence of intermediaries able to connect demand and supply and to find the right organizational forms to put the innovation into practice. The innovation catalyst meets this need. It plays the unique role of facilitating the interaction and collaboration between all the actors, combining their objectives, protecting as the same time the whole ecosystem.

In the Italian contest, an excellent example is Trento Rise. It is based in the Trentino Region, an area that in the last years becomes one of the best examples of virtuous and innovative ecosystem, a centre of excellence in Italy and Europe in particular in ICT technologies. TrentoRise is a core partner of the European Institute of Technology (EIT) ICT Labs (the equivalent of MIT in US) and its mission is to act as an innovation catalyst between Research, Education and Business actively fostering social innovation through ICT. It is a fully operational institution merging the ICT branch of the largest research institution in Trento - Fondazione Bruno Kessler (with about 380 researchers) - with the Department of Information Engineering and Computer Science (DISI) of the University of Trento, in a wide spectrum of scientific areas and human sciences.

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