

Special Issue of the Triple Helix Journal

Call for Papers

Transformative Alliances: Higher Education Institutions and Multi-Stakeholders Collaboration for Regional Innovation

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In the face of accelerating technological change, climate challenges, and deepening socioeconomic disparities, regions must reimagine their development strategies. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have undergone a significant transformation, evolving from peripheral actors to central agents of regional innovation and change (OECD, 2022). This shift reflects an increasing imperative for HEIs to collaborate with industry, government, and civil society through multi-actor partnerships (Kopczynska & Ferreira, 2021). Such cooperation represents a paradigm shift in mobilizing collective intelligence for sustainable development (Carayannis & Campbell, 2021).

HEIs have moved beyond the traditional 'ivory tower' model to become entrepreneurial universities integrated within local and regional contexts (Etzkowitz et al., 2000; Benneworth et al., 2017). These institutions now play a crucial role in fostering innovation through research, entrepreneurial education, technology transfer offices, and living labs (Yao et al., 2018; Compagnucci & Spigarelli, 2020). Such initiatives enhance local innovation capacity, facilitate knowledge spillovers, and support the formation of new businesses (Mascaranhas et al., 2020; Audretsch et al., 2021). University-led innovation hubs and science parks further consolidate this relationship by anchoring regional innovation ecosystems, particularly when aligned with local strengths and competencies (Rodríguez-Pose & Wilkie, 2019; Natário & Oliveira, 2024). Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3) offer a compelling framework for aligning academic and innovation activities with regional priorities, helping to build robust, place-based knowledge ecosystems (McCann & Ortega-Argilés, 2016). In this vein, Triple Helix literature highlights S3 as a cornerstone for collaborative and adaptive regional innovation strategies (Pique et al., 2018).

The Quadruple Helix model, integrating academia, industry, government, and civil society, has gained traction as a dynamic approach to co-creating regional solutions. It underscores the importance of inclusive stakeholder engagement in driving innovation (Cavallini et al., 2016). Regional Innovation Councils and other multi-stakeholder platforms have proven effective in enabling shared visioning, policy co-design, and long-term dialogue (Uyarra et al., 2017), and the participation of diverse actors is crucial for addressing complex regional challenges, especially amid global uncertainty (Pugh, 2016; Cavallini et al., 2016). Inclusive governance has been shown to contribute to more resilient and adaptive regional innovation systems (Ranga & Etzkowitz, 2013). Nevertheless, institutional silos, power imbalances, and a lack of trust often obstruct true collaboration (Laranja et al., 2020).

Despite their potential, many HEIs still face difficulties embedding innovation and regional engagement into their core missions, particularly in underserved regions grappling with infrastructure gaps and brain drain (Pugh, 2016). Looking forward, regional development models must adopt place-based, mission-driven, and digitally enabled approaches. The twin transition, green and digital, highlights the critical role of HEIs as knowledge brokers, institutional anchors, and mediators within their regions (European Commission, 2023). According to recent analyses, these roles are becoming increasingly central to delivering inclusive and sustainable futures, regardless of a region's development level (Carayannis et al., 2022). Equally important is creating lifelong learning and skills ecosystems led by universities. These are essential to preparing regions for disruptions brought about by AI, demographic shifts, and the green economy (OECD, 2023). HEIs' role in developing such ecosystems is vital to strengthening regional resilience amid rapid change, as reflected in recent innovation policy studies (OECD, 2023).

This Special Issue will examine how higher education institutions (HEIs) drive innovation and create impact in the face of local and global challenges and technological change. It will investigate the broader societal role of universities within these dynamics. Accordingly, we invite papers covering, but not limited to, the following topics:

- University Innovation Hubs: Catalysts for Regional Economic Growth
- Universities as Living Labs: Fostering Regional Climate Resilience
- Smart Campus, Smart Region: Universities as Anchors of Digital Innovation
- Green Innovation and Regional Sustainability: Universities Leading the Way
- Building Innovation Capacity: Supporting Underserved and Peripheral Regions
- Lifelong Learning and Regional Transformation: Universities as Skills Hubs
- R&D Partnerships: Creating Value through University-Industry-Government Collaboration

- Regional Innovation Alliances: Facilitating Ongoing Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue
- Global Alliances for Regional Innovation
- Public Policy and Higher Education: Aligning Strategies for Regional Innovation
- Data-Driven Development: Higher Education's Role in Smart Governance

The guest editors invite robust qualitative and quantitative studies on individual HEIs within their regional or innovation contexts. Comparative or multi-context analyses, especially across countries, are also welcome. Papers that utilize innovative methods or focus on under-researched regions are encouraged, including case studies of engaged research or sector-specific innovation. Submissions must be original, clearly stating their research question, theoretical framework, and intended contribution.

- **October 15, 2025:** Expression of interest, abstract (optional) (around 500 words) submission by email to the guest editors for consideration in the special issues.
- **November 15, 2025:** Acceptances/Rejections, Guest editors provide recommendations for further paper development.
- **February 15, 2026:** Submission of the full article manuscript. The final submission will be managed through the standard submission systems for external review of the journal. The finally accepted paper will be first published online.
- **June/July 2026:** Provisional date for the publication of the special issue.

Submission instructions:

Before submitting the manuscript, please ensure you have carefully read the submission instructions for Triple Helix Journal. The full manuscript should be submitted through the journal submission system at <https://www.editorialmanager.com/thj/default.aspx>. Please indicate in your cover letter that you wish your manuscript to be considered as part of the SI "Transformative Alliances: HEI & Stakeholders". All submissions will undergo double-blind peer-review.

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