The challenge of including civil society in the Quadruple Helix Collaboration as an actor on equal terms

Policy Brief 3

Reconfiguring Research and Innovation Constellations

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The challenge of including civil society in the Quadruple Helix Collaboration as an actor on equal terms

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Introduction

The RiConfigure[1] project includes in its design a social laboratory outside Europe. This laboratory, located in Colombia, investigates the way in which the Quadruple Helix Collaborations[2] manifest themselves in three cases of various kinds and in different areas of the country, providing knowledge about the particularities of the national and regional context.

Layout: Søren B. Jepsen, Teknologirådet, Danish Board of Technology

Context

During the last 30 years, initiatives have been born in Latin America that promote collaboration between different actors, most of them in the form of triple helix collaborations, where public sector, academia and industry collaborate. In general, these types of collaborations focus on innovation aimed at creating improvements in the exploitation of natural resources, efficient production processes and strategic financial investments. The incorporation of the social component in collaborations through the inclusion of civil society is new and its potential benefits are are still far from being fully exploited. There is evidence of discussions and initiatives around this innovation model in Chile[3], Colombia[4], El Salvador[5], Peru[6] and Mexico[7].

In Colombia there are several formal programs that, directly or indirectly, intend to include civil society in collaboration processes: National Policy for the appropriation of science, technology and innovation -ST & I (2005-present)[8], Conpes of Sustainable developement (2017)[9], Peace Agreement (2016)[10] and the Green Book 2030 - National ST&I Policy[11]. However, cases where members of civil society have a prominent role or work under the same conditions as other partners of the collaboration, not simply being a beneficiary of innovation practices, are still rare.

Depending on the form of inclusion of civil society, and especially that of members of native and underprivileged communities, the QHC could become a tool to overcome the remnants of colonialism and historical violence in rural areas of Colombia. To the extent that the members of civil society are empowered in these types of collaboration, and that this empowerment is promoted, collaboration among equals could become an instrument of decolonization. In the case of indigenous communities, their contribution as partners under the same conditions as others and ancestral knowledge could add social cohesion to an initiative of innovative collaboration.

Recommendations

1. When designing a collaborative initiative, it is recommended to establish permanent and diverse sources of financing such as crowdfunding.

2. Simplify bureaucratic processes as much as possible when designing a governance framework in order to foster civil society participation in the collaboration process.

3. Level the inequalities for participation in order to empower civil society as a relevant actor when making innovative decisions. This includes capacity building and guaranteeing internet access to all members of the QHC.

4. Establish a common communication protocol for all the helices independent of the technical jargon of the domain of each one.

Findings

> *"Civil Society involvement in governance and collaborative innovation must be boosted"*
>
> Social lab participant

Picture 1. Mentoring session held in Bogotá. Source: Avanciencia.

The results of the research showed that, despite the existence of a quadruple helix collaboration model, key elements need to be strengthened to democratize the participation of civil society actors and that the scope of their projects can be perpetuated in the long term.

In this sense, it is important to remember that the civil society actors in these cases came from economically deprived areas of Colombia historically affected by the armed conflict. Lack of access to basic services, mobility and financial resources often made it difficult for people from these groups to intervene in encounters between members of collaborative initiatives.

Picture 2. Case members in rural side of Colombia. Source: Minciencias.

This situation might have generated a perception, within each collaboration initiative, that the role of civil society was to be a beneficiary in their projects, not necessarily participating as an actor with the same possibilities to intervene in the design and management of the collaboration.

Specific main challenges of QHC in social lab cases were:

- **Language**

One of the problems that manifested itself most clearly in all cases was a lack of clear and transparent communication between the members of the helices.

Participants were concerned when it came to taking responsibility and setting goals for their projects. This is due to the confusion that is generated by the lack of a common language that allows the expectations and objectives of each of the propellers in the collaboration to be clearly conveyed. Technical, academic, legal and even ancestral concepts sometimes become obstacles when it comes to establishing the common objectives of the collaboration.

Technical language, legal terms, governance specific terms often made collaboration difficult. Not all participants of the QHC had the same level of knowledge when addressing specific technical

issues. This is also true in a similar sense when, for example, inhabitants of La Mojana had to transmit their ancestral knowledge about flood management in their territory to the rest of their case members.

- **Diversity**

Not all Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) have the same structure, capacity and robustness. Sometimes they are groups of a semi-nomadic people whose primary goal is to recover lost basic rights because of the war. Sometimes, they are farmers' organizations looking for suitable markets to develop their sustainable bamboo crops, and sometimes CSOs are well established institutions like NGOs with a structure more similar to an industrial company but with a social mission. Therefore it is not viable to use a single collaboration model supposed to fit them all.

- **Time**

Often the possibility of establishing a common language and setting a clear goal for the collaboration is limited by the constraints on time for the implementation of the projects and / or the lack of adequate financing. CSO members have a limited amount of time as they typically divide it between work and productive activities. Bureaucracy also affects the participation of civil society actors negatively, not only because it hinders the dynamic participation of these actors and limit their available time for the projects but also because it generates mistrust to public authorities.

- **Financing**

Social lab participants expressed the need to secure financial resources in order to perpetuate long-term collaborative projects. Limited budget hindered the collaboration process and turned civil society partners into mere beneficiary of these collaborative processes. Consequently, they did not necessarily participate as a partner with the same possibilities of intervening in the design and management of these projects.

Cases description

Between 2018 and 2021, a social laboratory was carried out in Colombia by **AvanCiencia**[12] (former ACAC) as part of the **RiConfigure** project, in which three main cases were invited to be part of its experiments.

Case 1:
Ideas for change is a **MinCiencias** (Ministry of Science) initiative that fosters science, technology and innovation appropriation among communities, with a social inclusion perspective and environmental sustainability. Under this programme the "Challenge Community and Energy in Motion Energy that ignites progress!" project goal was to implement a science based technological solution to provide energy to a cassava processing plant and increase the Kanalitojo indigenous community (organized civil society) wellbeing.

Case 2:
local bamboo farmers union (civil society) alongside with the mayor's office were exploring ways to make environmentally responsible use of their crops while making this economic activity viable in the Rionegro region thus avoiding migration from countryside to the cities.

Case 3:
The "Rehabilitation of the amphibian socio-ecosystem of the La Mojana region" project aim was to restore the wetlands ecosystems in order to protect its bio-diversity and sustainability. By achieving this goal local communities are benefitting from the restored landscape by increasing their quality of life and adopting global climate change awareness.

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