

# **ABSTRACT**

**EXCLUSIVELY FOR ETHIOPIA TRIPLE HELIX CONFERENCE**

## **A Mission Impossible? A Tri-Partite Co-Operation in an International Context: An Institutional Perspective**

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The Triple Helix concept has been advocated as a useful method for fostering entrepreneurship and growth. The concept identifies three actors where business communities, local universities, and local governments cooperate. Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff (2001:3) write: “A ‘triple helix’ of academia – industry – government relations is likely to be a key component of any national or multinational innovation strategy in the late twentieth century.”

The concept of Triple Helix and its way of working, has received great attention in the Western World, even if we still have little theoretical understanding. In the developmental countries in general – and as in our case here, in South Africa – the concept has received less attention and an espoused rhetoric about Triple Helix does not exist. Even so, a so called White Paper from 1995 outlines *A National Strategy for the Development and Promotion of Small Business in South Africa* where the Triple Helix concept is indirectly called for.

This paper deals with entrepreneurship and growth in the Western Cape region of South Africa through the perspective of Triple Helix. In this area at least two universities have business outreach programs – the University of the Western Cape and the University of Cape Town. The aim of this paper is twofold. First it aims to examine how academia, business firms and local authorities in the Western Cape region, through cooperation, are working for fostering entrepreneurship and growth. Second, it aims to identify impediments for working according to the model and discuss its possible outcome in the South African context.

Building on the triple helix model and on institutional theory we conclude that opposing principles exist. On the one hand, a tri-partite co-operation and collaboration trigger and foster possibilities for increased innovation whereas on the other hand institutional barriers obstruct interaction and cooperation. However, tentative attempts are made in this dual game of triggers and barriers in order to foster growth and sustainability. We also conclude that in a special complexity due to historical reasons the triple helix model needs to be elaborated upon and we add to the model the dimensions of donors and non-governmental organizations, and above all – a proactive entrepreneur.