Multi-Helix

A COMPLEX SOLUTION FOR COMPLEX PROBLEMS

This is a summary aiming to highlight the benefits, and challenges, of a multi-Helix approach. It is important to be aware of potential pitfalls in order to facilitate co-creation, as obstacles can then be more easily overcome.

The main focus is on the fourth helix - civil society, and how to best involve them.

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Content

1. CONTEXT

The multi-Helix approach implies cooperation between the four main sectors of society – **business, academia, government**, and **civil society.** Notice that a more well-established term is quadruple-Helix Collaboration (QHC). In the following text, however, the term multi-Helix will be used since it is used within the project *Sustainability, Innovation and Resilience in Rural Areas* (SIRR)[1] as well as it emphasizes collaboration between the different sectors at different levels.

Constant societal transformations put pressure on effective governance. De-population and economic stagnation are examples of factors having a negative impact on local communities, creating the need for solutions to reduce these negative effects.

Many projects in the last decades have derived from a triple-Helix point of view, excluding civil society from the equation. Civil society could for example imply Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO's), local associations, entrepreneurs, enthusiasts and other interest groups.

Thereby risks triple-Helix to leave some people and groups behind in development processes. Including civil society in development projects and programs could therefore be considered necessary for sustainable development.

"No place nor person left behind" - SIRR

The understanding within the project SIRR is that co-creation through a multi-Helix approach is needed to create effective local communities.

2. OBSTACLES AND OPPORTUNITIES

For successful cooperation through the multi-Helix approach, it is important to note that multi-Helix in theory and practice are two different things.

Real-life entails barriers such as funding, role distribution, and power structures. The promised benefits of multi-Helix cooperation can only be achieved if the participating partners obtain a realistic picture of how multi-Helix collaboration functions in reality.

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[1] Sustainability, Innovation and Resilience in Rural areas (SIRR), 14

Multi-Helix cooperation is often involved when solving complex problems, but multi-Helix cooperation is often just as complex as the problem it aims to solve. The hardest challenge is usually to involve civil society. Successful cases tend to be those when a project aims for social innovation. Despite this tends civil society engagement to rely on other partners for funding, or on non-paid engagement.

The report *Riconfigure, Quadruple Helix Collaborations in Practice* [2] means that the initiating partners often hold decisional power about the inclusion of new stakeholders, both regarding who is included, and how. This can be argued to reflect already existing power structures, as well as reinforce them.

However, the report [3] also asserts that stakeholders are more flexible and adaptive than the four helices in the model suggest. Someone who exists in one helix can at the same time belong to, or have insight, into other helices, which speaks in favor of this kind of cooperation.

3. RESILIENCE

Resilience can be described as the capacity of businesses, individuals, communities, institutions, and systems to survive, adapt and grow no matter chronic stresses or acute shocks. [4] There is a program called *100 Resilient Cities* which intends to help cities all over the world to become more resilient to physical, social, and economic challenges.

Many cities in the program have either adopted a resilience strategy after a disaster created the need for reconstruction, or have millions of inhabitants. But, there are some examples of cities that have implemented a resilience strategy that is more relevant for rural areas and puts resilience in a new European context.

The city **Vejle** in Denmark was the first in Europe to adopt a resilience strategy, through the program *100 Resilient Cities*. For Vejle, **resilience is seen as the foundation on which the rest of society can rest**, and resilience is perceived to be needed to **reduce chronic stresses**, instead of just needed when managing acute shocks. This perception corresponds to **SIRR**, which also aims. to **work preventively.**

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[2] Alfonsi, A., Blok, V., et.al. *Riconfigure.* (Reconfiguring Research and Innovation Constellations), 20

[3] Alfonsi, A., Blok, V., et.al. Riconfigure. (Reconfiguring Research and Innovation Constellations), 8

[4] Resilient Vejle, 12

Vejle started its resilience strategy with workshops in which **civil society** and **stakeholders** such as housing associations, educational institutions, businesses, etc. participated. The workshops were followed by analyses, which identified five core challenges. These challenges conducted the starting point for the strategy.

4. CO-CREATION

Co-creation is, according to i.a. Vejle's resilience strategy a successful tool to build resilience. Within Vejle's strategy, co-creation is used when working with all other identified challenges.

Co-creation is described as "collaboration between public and private institutions, businesses and communities in the city to address challenges"[5]. It should be seen as an essential part of **any program or project that aims to involve everyone who has the desire for action.**

In projects like SIRR, one way to co-create may be to visit and **join already established networks** or groups, instead of only focusing on reaching out to invite civilians,

or organizations to workshops or meetings. Perhaps it helps to get a truer response and a broader reach.

The report[6] stresses that practitioners in co-creation projects are forced to reinvent the wheel every time they engage in a new project since there is no consensus on how to proceed. Thereby some theories or methods to fall back on may be useful.

5. THEORIES AND METHODS FOR THE INCLUSION OF CIVILIANS

One way to include civil society is through **civic dialogue**. The method is **not task-solving** but instead aims to result in **recommendations for action**. Vejle, for example, used workshops when developing the strategy, which is one way of conducting civic dialogue. The method is often used **before establishing a project** to investigate what civil society needs. For SIRR, it can be useful to involve civil society before setting up further frameworks. This is also supported by the municipality of Ekerö's *Guide to collaboration with civil society*[7]

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[5]

Resilient Vejle, 20

[6]

 Riconfigure. (Reconfiguring Research and Innovation Constellations), 41

[7]

Ekero kommun, *Guide till samverkan med civilsamhället,* 12

which emphasizes that civil society requests follow-ups on their participation. There must therefore be a plan for how their involvement will be taken care of and managed. Civil society participation cannot be seen as a mere check-off, and they could thereby get involved at a stage when there is still room to shape and change the project in line with their opinions.

One way to involve civilians in projects is found within the **urban planning of Gothenburg**, where there is a website open for everyone to submit **comments** and **inputs at various stages of the planning.** For those who are interested in knowing more, do not have internet access, or just want to meet in person, there are also some **open physical meetings**.

Similar methods for involvement could be used within SIRR as **online engagement is time-efficient** and removes some barriers, but **real-life engagement** is necessary, especially since many areas of the project consist of an **ageing population that is not as digitalized.**

[8]
Sveriges kommuner och landsting, 12-14

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It is often valuable to learn from other procedures, like the example above, to avoid reinventing the wheel. Another way is to **start from what is already functioning**. Sometimes the solution is not something new, but just more of what already works.

An example is the project Les stations de mobilité led by *Communauté de Communes du Pays de Lumbres,* which aims for sustainable mobility.[9] Instead of having to come up with something totally new, they expanded the car-sharing stations already used and appreciated by citizens.

Analyzing what citizens require through i.e. consumer patterns is one way to indirectly engage with civil society, without creating specific places for dialogues and meetings. In city planning, for example, it may be more useful to map the areas where people spend time than to invite citizens to meetings or workshops.

6. MULTI-HELIX AND INCLUSION IN PRACTICE

One of the biggest challenges regarding multi-Helix in practice is, as mentioned before, the involvement of the fourth helix - civil society.

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[9]
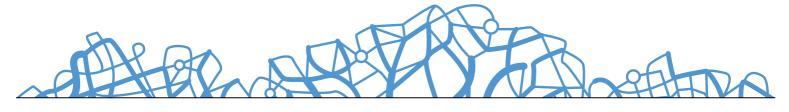Communauté de Communes du Pays de Lumbres, *Les stations de mobilité*

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To succeed, it may be useful to start the creation of new strategies with the citizens, to ensure they will correspond to their needs. Here, **Vejle's resilience strategy** can be used as inspiration, once again. As mentioned before (p.3) they began their resilience strategy with civilians, and other stakeholders, participating in workshops. Additionally, Vejle has succeeded in involving the citizens in concrete work toward the solutions.

For example, instead of the city council telling the citizens and businesses what to do, they get included in the work. The people and businesses located close to the problem often have the best solutions and know what is needed.

By starting with civil society, the risk of them only entering on conditions already established by other participants decreases. However, there is still a risk that only privileged civilians participate,

for example, those who already are part of a civic organization or meeting forums. Here, the **lessons from Lewisham** (p.5) may be useful to adapt. To reduce the risk that only the better-off participate in discussions, as not everyone can leave their job to participate in projects, it is useful to **schedule workshops and meetings outside of working hours.** This also correlates to the fourth suggestion being **offering different forms av dialogue at different times.**

To overcome the existing power structures between the different partners and participators, it is useful to **transfer the leadership structure away from initiators**. SIRR, for example, is structured with different Work-package leaders, which can be helpful. **Regular personal meetings, face-to-face events,** and **co-creation spaces** are also helpful tools to foster interaction and include the fourth helix. These tools are also required in order to shape transparent processes, to foster trust.

7. CONCLUSION

To summarize, a multi-Helix approach is in many cases a useful approach and could also be considered a necessity for true sustainable development.
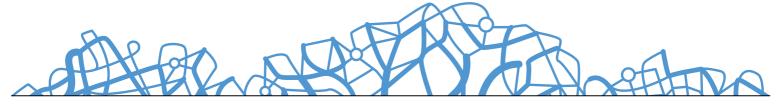
However, it is important to be aware of common pitfalls which may **hinder the multi-Helix approach from succeeding**, such as:

- Involving civil society at a late stage when there is no room for change in line with the feedback
- Involving civil society only under conditions already established by initiating partners
- Reinforcing existing power structures
- Offering only one, or a few, ways for civil society to participate.

Some things that **facilitate the work with** multi-Helix are:

- Starting with civil society if possible to make sure the work correlates to their needs
- Involving citizens in the work, not only in the creation of the project or program
- Tailor the communication materials to the different helices, and offer different ways of participation
- Join already established networks. Seek out civil society instead of them having to seek out the project

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