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Chapter 2 The dark side of the university’s participation in innovation ecosystems

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Ana Dias Daniel, Susana Oliveira and Joaquim Borges Gouveia

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Chapter 2

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2.1 Introduction

The concept of innovation ecosystem is inspired by the literature on ecological systems, where a set of living organisms promote collaborative behaviours to thrive in a specific community. In the case of an innovation ecosystem, it is the firm that has the pivotal role in the ecosystem, in order to succeed in an ever-increasing globalized world, where markets are becoming more and more competitive.

According to Jacobides, Cennamo and Gawer (2018), an innovation ecosystem is a group of organizations that make use of their unique or supermodular complementarities to foster customers' value creation. The interaction among ecosystem's actors catalyses creativity, trigger inventions, and accelerate innovation development across different scientific and technological disciplines (Carayannis & Campbell, 2009). Thus, this structure benefits both the firm and the end-customer. On the one hand, there is the firm that through the contact with external environment improves its dynamic capabilities (Teece, 2007), innovation processes (Rohrbeck, Hölzle & Gemünden, 2009), and knowledge stock (Carayannis et al., 2018). As mentioned by Distanont and Khongmalai (2018), innovation is the cornerstone of firms' competitive advantage and, more generally, of economic development (Etzkowitz, Webster, Gebhardt & Terra, 2000). Nevertheless, due to the increasing complexity of emerging market demands, firms do not possess all of the needed knowledge and resources to create innovations able to fulfil those demands (Foss, 1996; Grant, 1996). Therefore, the development of networks of collaboration among firms, and between firms and other public organizations, such as universities and other public actors, is of paramount importance for firms to fill in their knowledge and resources gaps. On the other hand, this collaborative network of organizations creates value for the customer through the development of new products and services, as well as new value propositions that no single actor in the system would be able to create alone (Adner, 2016).

Despite the existence of different types of innovation ecosystems (Nambisan & Baron, 2013; Zahra & Nambisan, 2012), it is possible to identify common features among them, such as being composed by a large group of organizations, that are inter-connected and interdependent, and that are organized in such a way that might experience a lifecycle that follows a co-evolution process (Gomes, Facin, Salerno & Ikenami, 2018; Zhang & Liang, 2011). Among an innovation ecosystem, there are several key actors, such as local firms, customers, suppliers, as well as public actors and academia (Ferasso Wunsch Takahashi & Prado Gimenez 2018)

