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Case study in Argentina

This chapter analyses the University 21 of Cordoba's efforts to support entrepreneurship education, and other knowledge transfer activities. It also studies the connections that the university has generated with external stakeholders in regional and national ecosystems through these activities.

Siglo 21 Business University (Siglo 21)

Established in 1995, this private university is the largest in Argentina. Founded by an entrepreneurial family, the university's institutional mission is to train entrepreneurial leaders. Entrepreneurial training is embedded across all career tracks, including those in social sciences and law. Recognising its role in building links with industry and in creating the leaders of the future, the university focuses on building and sustaining the national and local ecosystem through a variety of activities. It has developed a partnership with governments, companies and investors to support entrepreneurship and contribute to social and sustainable growth.

Entrepreneurship education

The university has a comprehensive entrepreneurship education offer, which includes elective and mandatory entrepreneurship courses for undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate students covering subjects such as entrepreneurship development, creativity and entrepreneurship and digital tools for entrepreneurship. In order to embed entrepreneurship education, all faculties deliver entrepreneurship courses including in applied sciences, social sciences, law and administration.

Since 2017, undergraduate students have had the option to supplement their studies with a Certificate in Entrepreneurial Competencies. This certification is open to students in any career track who want to focus their degree on entrepreneurship; indeed, there are law students at the university undertaking this specialisation. The certificate consists of two core subjects, two specialisation subjects, one Professional Practice module with a focus on the application of internal innovation in organisations, and one final degree project with an entrepreneurial theme. This certification is registered as a supplement to the degree title in the student's transcript. This programme has been successful and has attracted over 300 students.

A bachelor's degree in entrepreneurship was launched by the university in August 2021, followed by the opening of the programme in both face-to-face and virtual mode in March 2022.

Siglo 21 also has an entrepreneurship-focused extracurricular offer for students with activities including two annual Entrepreneurship and Innovation Challenges centred on issues affecting local organisations and the community. The challenges bring together students, graduates and professors in a space that encourages them to think and act on solutions in conjunction with the business sector and organisations.

Other extracurricular endeavours include Fair 21, an annual event with a community outreach focus, which promotes the development of innovative ideas community and learning about the dynamics of professional life whilst generating links with the business world. It is now in its fifth edition.¹ Impulso 21 is an online pre-incubation programme for students, graduates, professors and researchers of Siglo 21, which provides selected candidates with scholarships to go through ideation, modelling and validation of ventures. The best projects from the programme also receive a stimulus fund for their development. In conjunction with Santander, the university also delivers the Impulso X national programme for women entrepreneurs,² which aims to strengthen the leadership role of women entrepreneurs within national ecosystems. The most recent Impulso X offered online incubation, acceleration support and funds of up to ARS 1 080 000 for successful projects.

Finally, the university also puts on hackathons, which offer ideation spaces where companies set students a challenge and ask them to develop a possible solution together with teachers and company staff.

Connection with the ecosystem generated by entrepreneurship education activities

The university fosters a number of connections with actors within the ecosystem including the Economic Development Agency of the City of Córdoba (ADEC): the university partners with ADEC to feed into the development board of the municipal government of Córdoba.

The university also works closely with social incubators such as Mayma and Fundación Avina and is working with an NGO Pro Mujer to create an entrepreneurship centre. Furthermore, Siglo 21 has collaborated with the incubator Incutex's Company Builders programme³, which selects, promotes and finances technology-based ventures that aim to develop solutions for the education system.

The university also brings together over 100 active mentors who engage in the university's entrepreneurial activities every year. These mentors come from incubators and are often professors, executives, advanced entrepreneurs and other key players.

There are a number of partners funding entrepreneurship education activities at the university: these include Santander Bank, which has provided incentive funds for entrepreneurs to fund their projects over a number of years. The Córdoba Innovation and the Entrepreneurship Agency within the framework of the Córdoba Incuba and Vincular Córdoba programmes also supports entrepreneurship education activities in Córdoba.

The university is also organising multiple events collaborating with institutions to stimulate entrepreneurship:

- In 2020, Feria 21 and the local event Vincular Córdoba merged into a two-day event involving the main actors of the entrepreneurial ecosystem (40 institutions).
- The National Scientific and Technical Research Council (CONICET) and the Ministry of Science and Technology of the province of Córdoba as partners of the university organised the Entrepreneurship with Science Challenge for 2022. The latest edition of *Desafío Emprendé con Impacto*, a contest in that more than 65 entrepreneurial teams participated including teams of students from the university Siglo 21. The contest was co-organised with the Ministry of Science and Technology of Córdoba, Banco Santander Argentina, Grido, Incutex, Renault and Stellantis Tarjeta Naranja.

Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on entrepreneurship education

In terms of entrepreneurship activities, although co-curricular activities were already a blend of face-to-face and virtual, the virtual model was enhanced even further. In terms of curricular content, the greatest impact was seen in those subjects involving interdisciplinary work where it was necessary to apply new pedagogical strategies and tools (including Mural, a collaborative virtual tool that facilitates remote teamwork) to encourage online collaborative work. The pandemic was also an opportunity to raise the profile of some co-curricular programme events such as Feria 21 and Impulso 21, which significantly increased their level of participation. For example, Feria 21 had 8800 participants, whereas the 2019 edition, which was held in person, had 1 500 attendees and a limited number of potential participants.

Remaining challenges related to entrepreneurship education

The university has identified a number of entrepreneurship education activities, which have the potential to be developed such as the new bachelor's degree in entrepreneurship; further expanding the university's entrepreneurship pre-incubation programme, Impulso 21, into Latin America, the Caribbean and Asia; and initiating the development of more specific entrepreneurship programmes.

Knowledge transfer strategy

The university is mainly dedicated to teaching, with a small percentage of the university's budget allocated to knowledge transfer and research. Three percent of the institution's total budget is allocated to research and university transfer activities and 97% percent to teaching and general administration activities.

Nevertheless, the university has been making efforts to expand its research and knowledge transfer activities. In the latest strategic plan (2021-27), the university states its intention “to expand the impact of its outreach and community service programmes for organisations and companies through research, promotion of culture and open innovation”. In addition, the university has adopted specific structures dedicated to knowledge transfer, with full- and part-time staff, demonstrating its commitment to driving forward the knowledge transfer agenda. Specific activities include:

- Extension Secretariat: Centre for Entrepreneurship and Innovation, Centre for Social Sustainability, Centre for Internationalization, Centre for Alumni and Employability.
- Vice-rectorate for Institutional Management: Vida 21 Area (sports, arts and culture).
- Vice-Rector Office for Graduate Studies, Innovation and Research: Global Corporate Liaison Centre, Training and Development Department.
- Research Secretariat: Directorate for Scientific Communication and Transfer, Innovation Coordination (IDEA21), Observatory of the Future.

The institution also regularly collects indicators to assess the quality of its research and knowledge transfer activities.

Connection with the ecosystem driven by knowledge transfer activities

The university carries out collaborative work with multiple actors in the community, at the local, national and regional levels. The university has strong links with companies of different sizes as well as international universities, sports and cultural institutions, and governmental and non-governmental organisations. In the case of companies, most collaborative work is related to the development of professional practices and student internships, the strengthening of internal and external capacities of the companies (in the form of in-house programmes, specific internal competencies and community support) and the understanding of common problems and needs in the corporate world through research.

As for the public sector, the university has developed co-operation activities on issues related to community development. For example, the university organises the annual ICT Week, a networking event which looks to promote technology issues relevant to the local area, in collaboration with the province of Córdoba's Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Mining, the Ministry of Science and Technology, the Ministry of Education, chamber of commerce and the Córdoba Technology Cluster.

The university also collaborates with ADEC (under the municipality of Cordoba), engages in research and provides technical assistance in the development of local strategic proposals, and contributes to the development of technical reports.

Remaining challenges related to knowledge transfer activities

University stakeholders noted that there are a number of remaining obstacles in the implementation of knowledge transfer activities. When it comes to financing these activities, and particularly in relation to calls for funds for transfer activities, requirements can be highly restrictive. Furthermore, there is still an overreliance on state funding due to limits in the private investment coming forward.

The duration of programmes was also found to affect the effectiveness of knowledge transfer activities. There is a large number of rapid transfer events, in which the academic sector can meet the socio-productive sector. However, engagement opportunities, which are sustained over the long term, are limited. Stakeholders reported that a shift towards longer-term alliances has the potential to generate more sustainable alliances and programmes with greater community impact.

The difficulty in determining agreed indicators that can measure the effectiveness of activities was also cited as a challenge. There are limitations in understanding the effectiveness, efficiency, return on investment and real impact of transfer actions. Furthermore, there is no national framework for the co-ordination of activities; these are carried out on an ad hoc basis.

It was also noted that there was a lack of awareness of the opportunities available for the academic sector to engage with the productive sector. This means that it takes time for approaches and relations to mature to the point that parties have a clear understanding of the language in use have received the necessary training and are able to implement joint transfer actions.

Informality, related to the point above, was also identified as a potential barrier to effective knowledge transfer activities. Given that small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) or third-sector institutions are dominant in the country, a culture has been forged which is strongly concentrated on rudimentary processes or with limited access to information technologies that favour linkages. This produces a lack of knowledge about university-based possibilities, thus generating gaps in access to transfer.

Ecosystem analysis of Buenos Aires and the role of Siglo 21

While the Córdoba ecosystem has not been studied with the methodology used in the report, Siglo 21 is also an actor in the ecosystem of Buenos Aires. As evidenced by the analysis carried out by Global Ecosystem Dynamics, in collaboration with MIT D-Lab and supported by Santander Universidades, as part of its Participatory Innovation Ecosystem Mapping of the innovation-driven entrepreneurial economic ecosystems of Buenos Aires, the University of Siglo 21 plays a role within it.

Figure 8.1. Ecosystem analysis of Buenos Aires and the role of Siglo 21



Note: This figure provides a visualisation of the collaborations between actors of the economic ecosystem of the city of Buenos Aires with a node size dependent on the number of mentions by other participants and the strength of said mentions (weighted in degree), highlighted in blue the universities categorised as Enablers, those focusing primarily on education and capacity building, and in green the universities categorised as Knowledge Generators, those focusing primarily on research and the development of new technologies. These visualisations, along with the interpretation of each node's centrality metrics, allow for the analysis of the positioning of universities mentioned within their innovation-driven entrepreneurial economic ecosystem.

There could be a dissonance between what the university sees as its presence in the ecosystem and what this independent mapping exercise finds. Data collection for each ecosystem was conducted by first identifying as many actors as possible through desk research, which were in turn invited to attend a workshop on strengthening innovation-driven entrepreneurial economic ecosystems and fill an online survey regarding their social dynamics with other actors.

Source: Tedesco, M. (2022^[1]), "How and why to study collaboration at the level of economic ecosystems", *D-Lab Working Papers: NDIR*, MIT D-Lab.

In the city, the second-largest number of involved universities among the Latin American economic ecosystems was observed (Tedesco, 2022^[1]), with 27 universities, 11 of which are enablers and 16 knowledge generators.

However, Austral University alone was recognised as a gravitational centre, with 12 collaboration mentions in the study, highlighting that this university was not part of the data collection.

On the other hand, Siglo 21, which did not take part in the data collection, also appears to have marginal participation in the ecosystem structure according to the metrics shown by the Complex Network Analysis modelling.

References

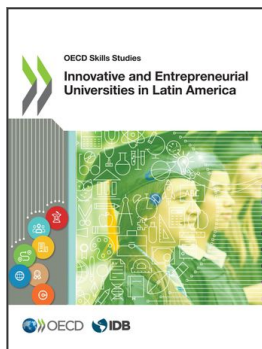
- Tedesco, M. (2022), “How and why to study collaboration at the level of economic ecosystems”, [1]
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Notes

¹ For more information, see <https://21.edu.ar/noticias/mas-de-8000-personas-vivieron-feria-21-vincular-cordoba>.

² For more information, see <https://21.edu.ar/noticias/impulso-x-proyctosemprendedores-liderados-por-mujeres>.

³ For more information, see <https://www.incutex.com.ar/>.



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