Editorial

A Legacy Beyond the Triple Helix: Honoring Professor Loet Leydesdorff’s Academic Journey

The inception of this editorial is a poignant moment. Unlike the joyous celebrations typical of our other special issues, this one is imbued with solemnity. We grieve the loss of Professor Loet Leydesdorff, a pioneering co-creator of the Triple Helix model, who passed away in March 2023. This issue serves both as a tribute to his extraordinary contributions and as an exploration of his profound academic legacy. By revisiting his extensive body of work and the insightful videos he left behind, along with reflections from some of his closest collaborators, this special issue strives to distil and learn from his groundbreaking insights. It’s our way of paying homage to a remarkable mind in the field.

In 2023, numerous tributes were paid within the academic community. The Triple Helix Association (THA) hosted a solemn ceremony during the opening session of the XXI Triple Helix Conference in Barcelona in June 2023. THA formally acknowledged Leydesdorff’s significance by posthumously awarding him the Triple Helix Life Achievement Award and renaming the prize the Loet Leydesdorff Award.

In this context, the Triple Helix journal (THJ), long supported by Leydesdorff, embraced the responsibility to organize a special issue discussing his legacy. Triple Helix is not alone in this endeavor. A recent edition of the journal “Profesional de la Información” featured several papers about Leydesdorff, including what is likely his last collaboration with our colleagues Mariza Almeida and Igone Porto-Gómez (Almeida; Porto-Gómez; Leydesdorff, 2023). Further initiatives are underway and set for publication in 2024.

In addition to a paper by the editors of Triple Helix and leaders of THA, we invited several of Leydesdorff’s closest collaborators to contribute brief articles...
about him and their joint research. Professors Helen Lawton Smith from the Centre for Innovation Management Research (CIMR) at the University of London; Inga Ivanova from the National Research University Higher School of Economics (NRU HSE) in Moscow; and Han Woo Park from Yeungnam University graciously accepted our invitation.

Leydesdorff’s work will forever remain a beacon, guiding our search for answers and sparking new questions about our limited perspectives. He was years ahead of his time, leaving us with much to learn from his profound contributions. His journey with the Triple Helix model can be delineated into distinct phases. The initial phase, spanning from 1995 to 2003, saw Leydesdorff and Henry Etzkowitz laying the foundational concepts of the model through seminal papers. In the subsequent phase, beginning in 2003, they embarked on different yet complementary paths to explore, expand, and solidify these ideas. Leydesdorff, representing the neo-evolutional perspective of Triple Helix, delved into the complexity and dynamism of interactions among various sectors, rigorously studying and quantifying these relationships.

In 2012, Leydesdorff’s work on the n-tuple helix concept broadened the scope of discourse beyond the number of spheres necessary for the model (Leydesdorf, 2012), ushering in a research focus on the roles of actors in knowledge and innovation creation. A significant milestone was achieved in 2021 with Leydesdorff’s publication “The Evolutionary Dynamics of Discursive Knowledge Communication-Theoretical Perspectives on an Empirical Philosophy of Science”. This book, especially its three chapters dedicated to reviewing the Triple Helix model, marked the beginning of a revisionist period for the theory.

Leydesdorff and Etzkowitz have not only continually refined the Triple Helix model themselves, but they have also dedicated themselves to nurturing the next generation of Triple Helix scholars. As the current co-editors-in-chief, we are prime examples of their guidance and mentorship. Our close interactions and regular exchanges of ideas with them have resulted in some impactful publication (Cai, 2022; Cai & Amaral, 2021; Cai & Etzkowitz, 2020) in Triple Helix. The research on the Triple Helix model will undoubtedly persist, ensuring that Leydesdorff’s legacy lives on!

The Articles in This Special Issue

The inaugural article in this issue is “The Legacy of Loet Leydesdorff to the Triple Helix as a Theory of Innovation”, authored by the editors of this journal and current leaders of the Triple Helix Association. This comprehensive paper
is bifurcated into two sections: the first examines Leydesdorff’s seminal contributions to the development of the Triple Helix theory, while the second part delves into a bibliometric analysis of his extensive work in this domain.

The remaining three articles are written by some of Leydesdorff’s closest collaborators. The first is a heartfelt account from Helen Lawton Smith, titled “The Triple Helix Model and Working with Loet Leydesdorff”. This piece illuminates her long-standing academic partnership with Leydesdorff, a collaboration that led to some of Triple Helix’s most influential papers, including “Triple, quadruple, and higher-order helices: historical phenomena and (neo-) evolutionary models” and “Have quadruple and quintuple helices emerged? Metaphors, project titles, and empirical research”. The subsequent paper is by Professor Inga Ivanova, who delves into her journey with Leydesdorff in measuring the Triple Helix, offering profound insights into their collaborative research. Lastly, we feature Professor Han Woo Park’s tribute, based on a speech he delivered last year, which serves to immortalize his homage to Leydesdorff.

This edition, though concise, is immensely significant, reflecting not just Leydesdorff’s intellectual legacy but also his human qualities – his dedication, humility, and humanity. Our heartfelt thanks go to Helen, Inga, Han, Josep, Carina, Anne, and the Brill editors for joining us in this endeavor. We trust that the Triple Helix community and all those interested in innovation will find value and inspiration in this special issue.

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**References**


