

KIWi Policy Talk

Innovation Ecosystems: Insights from California's Bay Area for German Universities

Tuesday, 23 September 2025

16:30 - 18:00 (UTC+2)

07:30 - 09:00 (UTC-7)

Event language

English

Background

Through their top-level research, universities are main drivers of innovation and key players in innovation ecosystems. The ability to generate innovations is considered a crucial indicator of modern societies' performance. Economic development, prosperity, social progress, and improved living conditions depend on this ability. Innovation is also necessary to address global challenges, such as fighting poverty, improving medical care and education, and solving environmental problems. Both, the USA and Germany are seen as innovative societies, but their approaches differ greatly. The U.S. is known for disruptive innovation with significant venture capital investment, whereas Germany is known for incremental innovation that reduces financial risk. As part of an innovation ecosystem, universities face challenges regarding the transfer of research successes into startups, economic progress and social impact.

This Policy Talk aims to explore framework conditions needed for enhancing transfer and for creating a successful innovation ecosystem. In collaboration with the German Center for Research and Innovation (DWIH) San Francisco, this event will put a spotlight on the U.S. Bay Area – a region globally recognized for its high level of innovation and the close collaboration between universities and economy. The discussion aims to uncover the key factors that have contributed to the success of this vibrant innovation ecosystem and explores how these insights can be applied to the German higher education landscape.

Questions to be discussed include:

- Which structures need to be in place to support universities to push research-based innovations?
- Which characteristics foster entrepreneurial culture in research systems? What is the special "mindset" at American universities that produces so many innovations and start-ups?
- What insights can be helpful and adapted by German universities? Which specific role do universities play in these ecosystems on an institutional level?
- How can individuals like professors, students, and members of the universities' transfer centers actively contribute to the transfer of research?

The panel convenes experienced speakers from the Bay Area and Germany: scientists who have been thoroughly engaged as entrepreneurs, as managers of incubator hubs and as policy advisers. They share their insights on what drives research findings into the market, which role startups play and how networks, mindsets and culture are influencing innovation outcomes.

Agenda

16:30 - 16:45 (UTC+2)	Opening Remarks
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Dr. Kai Sicks

Secretary General

German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD)

Panel discussion

Moderation:

Dr. Zahar Barth-Manzoori

Director, German Center for Research and Innovation (DWIH) San Francisco

German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD)

Panel:

Anne Cocquyt

Founder and CEO

The Guild

Darren Cooke

Interim Chief Innovation & Entrepreneurship Officer & Director, Life Sciences

Entrepreneurship Center

University of California, Berkeley

Prof. Dietmar Harhoff, Ph.D.

Director, Max Planck Institute for Innovation and Competition

Honorary Professor, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich (LMU)

Olaf J. Groth, Ph.D.

Founder and CEO, Cambrian Futures & Cambrian Labs

Professional Faculty, Haas School of Business, University of California, Berkeley

Prof. Dr. Stefanie Molthagen-Schnöring

Science Innovation Officer, UNITE

Vice President for Research, Transfer & Science Communication

Hochschule für Technik und Wirtschaft Berlin (HTW)
