SCIENCE PARKS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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Summary

Science parks originated in the USA in the 1950s where they were established in order to increase the possibilities and profitability of commercializing university research, and to meet the needs of entrepreneurially minded academics. They spread in Europe in the 1960s and 1970s and have now become a worldwide phenomenon. The original technology transfer motivation exists to a greater or lesser extent depending on the context. No two countries have the same pattern of development of science parks. This chapter defines science parks and traces the history of their development and compares their operation in different countries. The cases of Sweden and the UK are used to compare the roles played by science parks in economic development in different countries.

1. Introduction

The establishment of science parks has become a worldwide development. Since the early 1970s, universities, property developers, local authorities, regional and central governments in advanced and developing countries have developed prestigious sites.
High-tech images are used to project technological vitality and commercial credibility by their developers, their tenants and by public authorities. Although image is the common denominator, science parks have three broad, but not mutually exclusive functions: 1) ‘land use profitability’, 2) ‘commercialization of the science base’, and 3) as a component of local, or regional or national governments’ strategies, to foster the growth of indigenous firms and to attract inward investment. Even though the buildings might look similar, there are considerable variations between science parks with respect to the types of tenants, in networks within the site, and in links with local universities. It is also clear that no two countries have the same pattern of development of science parks. Moreover, since the definitions used in different studies are not always consistent there are difficulties in comparing the establishments.

The phenomenon of science parks has its roots in the USA. Dating back to the 1950s, science parks were originally set up in order to increase the possibilities and profitability of commercializing university research, and to meet the needs of entrepreneurially minded academics. The Stanford Research Park in California, established in 1951, is often regarded as the genesis of the science park movement. Before 1960, four other projects were founded in the USA, including the Research Triangle Park in North Carolina, which is the first “center type” project. In the following decades, there has been an emerging trend of entrepreneurial universities in the USA becoming more directly involved in supporting new business development activities. One mechanism used for this purpose is the establishment of business incubators. By 1992, the US National Business Incubation Association reported that more than fifty universities and colleges had participated in this effort. Using a broad definition of science parks, Kung (1995) found that in 1992 there were as many as 188 Centers, 57 Incubators and 103 Parks in the USA.

The establishment of science parks in USA drew considerable attention in Europe and other parts of the world. It did not take long before the first European science parks were established. For example, university professors from both Britain and Sweden travelled to the USA to find out more about these new developments. Returning to their own European universities, some of them found the support to set up similar European science parks. It was usual then, as it is now, for European science parks to be modelled on American parks.

In 1960, there were only six science park projects in the world (five in USA and one in the former Soviet Union). During the next decade, both Sweden and the UK established their first parks. By the 1970s, science parks had been established in Belgium, Japan, Korea, Taiwan and a number of other countries, amounting to some 50 projects in 13 countries. From the 1980s, the whole world witnessed an explosion in the establishment of science parks. By 1990, there were over 1000 parks around the world. It was found that the distribution of science parks among the top ten leading countries in 1992 was: the USA - 398 cases, Germany - 106, Japan - 104, China - 52, the UK - 50, France - 35, Australia - 33, Canada - 31, Sweden - 15, and Russia - 14. With two parks each in 1980, the UK and Sweden shared a world ranking as number five. Since then, the pattern of development in these two countries has diverged. This paper analyzes the phenomenon of science parks through case studies of these two countries.
One of the aims of this paper is to place the science park movement into its geographical and historical context. We begin by defining what is meant by a science park. In the second section, we present some earlier findings about the worldwide development of science parks and discuss what roles science parks are intended to fulfil. We then focus on the role of incubators. These are discussed in relation to the incubators link to its local university, to the science park on which it is located, to private firms and to industrial parks. The third section of the chapter examines the evidence on how the objectives of science parks are matched by experience. We discuss the highly important regional aspects of science park development. In the fourth section, we give an overview of the Swedish and British science park phenomena, followed by case studies from each country. The chapter ends with a summary and conclusions.

2. Universities, Science Parks and Regional Development

In this section, we begin by defining “science parks” and then discuss two of their three broad functions: commercialization of the science base, and regional development. In some parks that market themselves as science parks, the “land-use profitability” is the over-riding motive. Science parks established for land-use profitability often put less emphasis on the commercialization of the science base or on regional development, even if they are sometimes able to also fulfil these functions.

2.1. Definitions

At least five terms - business park, innovation center, research park, science park and technology park - appear quite frequently in existing classifications. In addition, some terms have a certain meaning in one country and another in a second country, for example, in Germany, the term Technology Center is used as an equivalent of a science park. Another term that is often used is the Business Incubator, which is closely linked with the term innovation center, it is also one of the six terms included in the classification of science parks and related developments of the European Community.

In this chapter we use the term ‘science park’ as the overriding concept for a whole group of related names and terms. As illustrated in Figure 1, a Science Park may include both a University Incubator and a Research Park for the transfer of technology. To be a science park it is, however, not necessary that these two functions are set up as separate legal units. Researchers have defined a science park very broadly as an organizational entity that sells or leases spatially contiguous land and/or buildings to tenants whose principal activities are basic or applied research or development of new products or processes. In addition, the UK Science Park Association in Britain requires that a Science Park:

- is a property based initiative;
- has formal and operational links with a University or other Higher Education Institute (HEI) or other major center of research;
- is designed to encourage the formation and growth of knowledge-based business and other organizations normally resident on site; and
- has a management function which is actively engaged in the transfer of technology and business skills to the organisations on site.
Using the Science Park as an overriding concept, including Incubators and Research Parks, we are excluding other concentrations of high-tech firms set up without formal links to universities. Following Kung, we classify Science Parks as:

- **University Science Park** - which has a locational proximity (campus-like) and important links to universities. Management and ancillary services are often important.
- **Incubator** - which can be synonymous with the “Innovation Center”, “enterprise center” and “business and technology center”. In general, an incubator is used for the start-up of firms engaging in R&D activities. A University Incubator puts special emphasis on the transfer of university research into the new start-up firms. Linkages with universities are important, so also is the help of on-site specialized management. An increasing trend is the formation of the sector specific incubators, particularly in the biotech sector.
- **Research Park** - where the transfer of technology and links with universities are very important. R&D is the preferred activity; prototype production is permitted, but mass production and commercial activities are not. One of the key features of the Research Park is the frequency of research collaboration and the transfer of technology between university and industry. There is no emphasis on the early development stages of new firms.

Figure 1. Science park as an overriding concept.

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Bibliography


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