

## SynHERA Connect: Operationalising the quadruple helix for regional innovation through applied research

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In the face of complex societal challenges, Universities of Applied Sciences are called to act as pivotal players within innovation ecosystems. This contribution presents SynHERA Connect, a structuring initiative by the SynHERA network (the network of French speaking UAS in Belgium) designed as a co-innovation interface between applied research, SMEs, public authorities, and civil society.

We will demonstrate how this program operationalises the “quadruple helix” model by catalysing collaborative projects with tangible impact in areas such as the ecological transition, health, and sustainable agri-food. Central to its methodology is a demand-led approach, beginning with on-the-ground diagnostics and collective workshops to identify real-world industry and societal needs before mobilising relevant research expertise.

To operationalise this model, SynHERA executes targeted actions through a dedicated team:

- **Needs identification:** Running on-the-ground diagnostics and co-creation workshops with SMEs and local actors.
- **Specialised project facilitation:** Each initiative is led by a Business Manager in close partnership with a Valorisation Officer and several Scientific Advisors, ensuring alignment from industry need to research solution.
- **Expertise mobilisation:** Rapidly mapping and activating relevant scientific competences across the applied sciences network.
- **Integrated funding support:** The team, including advisors expert in federal, regional, and European programs (e.g., Interreg, Horizon Europe), provides end-to-end grant search and proposal development support.
- **Systematic student integration:** Embedding students via internships, thesis projects, and living labs connected to real innovation challenges.
- **Knowledge transfer:** Formalising project outcomes and methodologies to refresh curriculum content and disseminate best practices.

This integrated ecosystem, powered by a cross-functional team, is designed to simultaneously deliver innovation impact and educational advancement