

# Joining forces to create a functional innovation ecosystem

**As the discussions at TownHall Košice clearly demonstrated, various stakeholders are currently joining forces to make an impactful change in the region of Eastern Slovakia in terms of establishing a functioning innovation ecosystem. Such an ecosystem should offer a long-term vision for the region and make it a more attractive place to live as well as to invest in.**

We've approached two more experts to identify the key element(s), which could turn these bold plans into reality.

**What is the key element in creating a functional innovation ecosystem in the region of Eastern Slovakia?**



**LAURA DITTEL**  
Director, Carpathian Foundation (Košice)

Development of a functional innovation ecosystem in the region needs involvement of different stakeholders and the more diverse the group will be the better result should be expected.

However, the key players are always elected decision makers holding real instruments and controlling resources. Their role is to create an enabling environment and platforms for innovations where others can find their niche and contribute to the bigger result. This includes vision, strategy, good legislation, open and free space for creativity, fair financing and willingness to accept new ideas. And here players from different sectors, levels, areas and environments come to offer their knowledge. Natural ecosystems are doing fine without our intervention and this should be the goal here as well – the creation of a space where innovations can arise, develop, prosper and contribute to the development of Eastern Slovakia.



**PETER KOLESÁR**  
Partner, Civitta Slovakia, a.s.  
AmCham Board Member

The key elements for any functioning innovation ecosystem are collaboration and trust. These can be boosted by the following initiatives:

### 1. Building on legacy and strengths

Košice has a strong creative industry cluster and Creative Industry Košice (CIKE) can play a pivotal role for Košice's future and add value in more traditional sectors of Košice's economy such as IT.

### 2. Support for new skills in universities

Universities should not be seen as (only) vocational institutions - training future employees of local IT firms. Universities should focus on talent and skills of the 21st century that prepare workforce for the labor market of the future. More systematic training and institutional support in entrepreneurship should be provided to academics and researchers and more emphasis should be put on humanities and liberal arts.

### 3. Corporates connected with startups

It should be in the interest of large companies to have a vibrant local tech scene – attracting talent from abroad, empowering universities, but also benefiting from solutions developed by local startups. The maturity of a startup

ecosystem tends to correlate with the quality of corporate jobs large companies provide locally.

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### 4. One “go-to-event”

Strong events such as Art & Tech Days can be a game-changer for the local scene, putting the city on the map of European tech events and attracting innovators and creative professions from around the globe. For this to happen, all key stakeholders need to work together towards this goal.

### 5. Support from local and regional government

Mayors help define the narrative of their cities – the more they associate their city with innovation and “the new economy”, the more talent and entrepreneurial activity they are able to attract. The city can serve as a lab - providing data to researchers and entrepreneurs to support pilots of new solutions that improve citizens' lives - and can provide practical support measures to entrepreneurs and ecosystem players.



**JURAJ SABOL**  
General Manager  
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If I were to use one word, it would be “cooperation”. Eastern Slovakia is already a unique region as it has a combination of established industry, a growing IT sector and good universities. Through cooperation between individual players as well as with public authorities, Eastern Slovakia could establish a virtuous cycle of innovation leveraging synergies between existing entities.

For example, a university spin-off can pilot, or even co-develop, its solution at a local industrial company and then scale up. Moreover, the region is facing a significant decarbonization challenge and solving that will require a great deal of innovation which will have to involve collaboration between industry, universities, and authorities.

Cooperation should start with creating a joint vision for the region endorsed by all key players and frequent communication at forums such as Townhall East or Townhall Košice.