

QUALITATIVE STUDY

## Catalysts of Growth

*A Qualitative Analysis of Innovation Hub Governance and Ecosystem Development in Kigali (2000–2026)*

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### ABSTRACT

The rapid development of innovation hubs in Kigali is widely acknowledged as a driver of the national knowledge economy. However, there is a critical gap in understanding the specific governance models and relational dynamics that underpin these ecosystems and influence their developmental trajectory. This study aims to analyse the governance structures and stakeholder interactions within Kigali's innovation hubs, identifying the mechanisms that catalyse or constrain ecosystem growth and sustainability. A qualitative, multi-case study design was employed, using purposive sampling to select five prominent hubs. Data were collected via in-depth, semi-structured interviews with founders, managers, and resident entrepreneurs, supplemented by documentary analysis and non-participant observation. Thematic analysis was conducted using NVivo software. A dominant theme was the central, directive role of the state as a 'strategic architect', which fostered rapid infrastructure development but also created dependency. Approximately 70% of interviewees expressed concern that this model could inadvertently stifle bottom-up, organic community formation and limit critical peer-to-peer learning essential for long-term resilience. The ecosystem's growth is propelled by a distinct, state-coordinated governance model that effectively mobilises resources but presents a tension between top-down strategic direction and the need for autonomous, community-led innovation practices. Hub managers should institute formalised peer-mentoring programmes to strengthen horizontal networks. Policymakers are advised to develop funding instruments that support grassroots community-building activities independent of centralised strategic priorities. innovation ecosystem, governance models, entrepreneurial hubs, qualitative case study, Rwanda This paper provides a novel conceptualisation of the 'strategic architect' governance model, offering a critical analysis of its implications for ecosystem maturation beyond initial infrastructure deployment.

**Keywords:** *Innovation ecosystems, Entrepreneurial governance, Qualitative case study, Sub-Saharan Africa, Knowledge economy, Stakeholder collaboration*

#### Article Highlights

- Analysis reveals a tension between top-down strategic direction and autonomous, community-led innovation.

#### Core Tension Identified

The study conceptualises a 'strategic architect' model, where

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 70% of interviewees expressed concern over dependency limiting critical peer-to-peer learning.</li><li>• Growth is propelled by a distinct, state-coordinated governance model that effectively mobilises resources.</li><li>• Recommendations include formalised peer-mentoring and funding for grassroots community-building.</li></ul>	<p>centralised state direction fosters rapid development but may constrain the bottom-up, organic practices needed for ecosystem maturation.</p> <p><i>This analysis is based on a multi-case study of five prominent innovation hubs in Kigali.</i></p>
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