

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

WHY THIS MAPPING STUDY?

Innovation actors in International Geneva struggle with siloed operations, limiting collaboration despite common goals. This study maps key actors in innovation across Geneva to encourage engagement and sustained collaboration. It builds on insights from a roundtable held during the March 2023 Geneva Trialogue, emphasizing the importance of knowledge-sharing.

The aim is to identify commonalities, foster synergies, and create a foundation for a more cohesive ecosystem.

Ultimately, the goal is to strengthen innovation in International Geneva to promote sustainable development.

SCOPE AND APPROACH

The mapping provides a snapshot of Geneva's social innovation ecosystem, focusing on 16 organizations. Data was collected from interviews, workshops, and literature, highlighting shared goals and opportunities for collaboration.

The study asks: "Why should we work together more?" rather than focusing on barriers to collaboration. It offers a knowledge base for future collaboration, inviting ongoing expansion. The process is designed to grow as more actors join.

WHY FOCUS ON INTERNATIONAL GENEVA?

Some actors are deeply embedded in International Geneva, while others have distant or local networks. Despite these varied connections, innovation in Geneva benefits all actors due to its global reach. Geneva is a major international hub, with 40 multilateral organizations and hundreds of NGOs influencing international policy. Geneva's dense expertise and proximity to innovative industries make it ideal for collaboration. Bureaucratic hurdles, however, pose challenges, reinforcing the need to foster a culture of innovation.

HOW DO WE UNDERSTAND "INNOVATION"?

Innovation is purposeful change aimed at collective solutions rather than novelty. It can be helpful to distinguish between two strands of social innovation in the sector at hand:

- Hard innovation: Developing scalable solutions.
- Soft innovation: Creating environments that foster innovative mindsets.

The diversity of their service models notwithstanding, a shared emphasis on "soft innovation," or nourishing a culture of innovation, provide for future collaboration among the actors mapped.

For these actors, innovation is tied to collaboration, sustainability, and systemic change, aligning with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY "COMMONS"?

A commons includes a community, shared resources, and governance based on inclusivity and openness.

While not all actors label themselves as a "commons," many share resources and foster collective collaboration. The study suggests creating a "commons of commons" by pooling resources to strengthen collective innovation.

SHARED PERSPECTIVES FOR COLLABORATION

Many actors want to break silos but remain isolated themselves, facing institutional and resource challenges.

Physical spaces and community-building are key to fostering innovation, but high real estate costs and institutional barriers complicate access and a busy work culture impedes on serendipitous encounters.

Resource constraints affect innovation teams, with larger organizations providing some funding but imposing bureaucratic limitations. Independent actors face funding challenges despite greater autonomy.

Collaborative models could alleviate these constraints by sharing resources and expertise.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A commons-based approach could relieve resource pressure, promote collaboration, and create a sustainable innovation ecosystem.

Collaborations should align with actors' goals and build on existing structures. Informal events and shared spaces should serve as starting points for collaboration.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Immediate steps: Actors should reflect on the findings, seek to strengthen ties, and organize informal gatherings.

Medium term: Collaborative projects should be developed to prove the value of collective action, with stakeholders actively sharing resources and knowledge.

Long term: Solidify a community of practice, develop shared branding, and secure common funding for large-scale projects.

THERE IS AN URGENT NEED AND UNTAPPED POTENTIAL TO DEVELOP A FRESH "SPIRIT OF GENEVA" STEEPED IN A COLLABORATIVE COMMUNITY AND CULTURE OF INNOVATION.

WHY THIS MAPPING STUDY

Actors seeking to break silos in International Geneva often find themselves siloed. Despite common goals and facing similar challenges, collaboration between entities remains inconsistent, limiting the potential for knowledge-sharing and innovation.

This study was conducted to explore how cross-entity collaboration could support the culture of innovation in International Geneva.

This mapping focuses on actors operating various forms of what we might posit as "commons for innovation" in and around International Geneva.

These include spaces, networks, and knowledge resources dedicated to fostering a collaborative, purpose-driven culture of innovation. The study seeks to identify the key players and explore how they operate within their own organizations and the broader Geneva ecosystem.

In March 2023, a Geneva Trialogue roundtable brought together key actors with the goal of "Building Open Innovation Commons for International Geneva." Despite varying structures and approaches, all agreed that collective engagement and knowledge-sharing are essential to their collective long-term success.

This study builds on that momentum, aiming to map key players, identify synergies, and create a foundation for sustained collaboration.

THE STUDY'S OBJECTIVES INCLUDE:

- IDENTIFYING

 COMMONALITIES AMONG

 ACTORS TO ENCOURAGE

 COLLABORATION
- PROVIDING A KNOWLEDGE BASE FOR POTENTIAL PARTNERSHIPS
- SUPPORTING THE CREATION OF A "COMMONS OF COMMONS" IN INTERNATIONAL GENEVA

By illuminating the collaborative innovation ecosystem, it seeks to encourage sustainable development and renewal in global governance.

Ultimately, the study highlights that, while these actors vary in structure and approach, **shared values and visions** offer significant potential for creating a more cohesive ecosystem and collectively cultivate a stronger culture of innovation in International Geneva. This mapping is a step toward fostering stronger, sustained collaboration in International Geneva's growing open and social innovation space.

2 SCOPE AND APPROACH

This mapping study is not exhaustive, nor does it claim to be. It is rooted in ongoing engagements and collaborative efforts among a loose network of actors, whose diverse profiles are analyzed in the following sections and presented more exhaustively in the annex. The study offers a snapshot at a given moment, acknowledging that the landscape of innovation in International Geneva is continuously evolving.

SOURCES AND METHODS

The study includes a total of 16 organizations mapped through:

- 15 dedicated interviews, which were coded to identify common themes.
- Field notes from 18 months of bilateral and collective workshops, meetups, and exchanges.
- Open-source data collection from actors' online communications.
- A desk review of relevant existing literature, reports, as well as resources published by actors within the ecosystem.

It also draws on previous mapping studies and research on open and collaborative innovation, exploring the intersections of innovation in multilateralism, humanitarianism, and international development.

This study is **not a comprehensive ecosystem mapping exercise**, which would need to consider a broader range of external entities, power relationships, and other systemic factors.

Instead, it is a research exercise drawing from both systems thinking and design thinking approaches in order to provide further context and fodder for efforts in addressing the already well-defined challenge of collaboration between the actors mapped.

AIMS

Crucially, the study marks a perspective shift in thinking about collaboration. Instead of focusing on barriers preventing collaboration, a topic that drove the group's earliest exchanges, the study asks:



By mapping common ground and shared goals, the study seeks to **foster a sense of shared purpose** and lay the groundwork for more intentional and sustained collaboration across the ecosystem.

The goal is to move beyond questions of feasibility and obstacles, and instead highlight the opportunities for deeper collaboration. It addresses overlapping challenges faced by the actors and provides a framework for ongoing collective engagement.

The mapping is **intended as a starting point**—a knowledge base and a conversation starter—that can expand to include more actors as they express interest or evolve over time.

While some actors were contacted but did not respond in time, and others were not approached due to time and resource constraints, the study encourages these actors to engage in future updates. Ongoing expansion and engagement would be key indicators of the study's success.

THE STUDY SEEKS TO

FOSTER A SENSE OF
SHARED PURPOSE AND LAY
THE GROUNDWORK FOR
MORE INTENTIONAL AND
SUSTAINED
COLLABORATION ACROSS
THE ECOSYSTEM.



THE ACTORS (1/4)

	What?	An open and safe space for collaboration and creativity at the Geneva Graduate Institute.
GENEVA GRADUATE INSTITUTE the fab	Why?	To promote different ways of thinking and doing and foster a culture of innovation within the Graduate Institute community and beyond.
	How?	Hosting informal, nontraditional events and artistic initiatives, and putting a spotlight on bold, innovative thinking within International Geneva.
	What?	A creative and modular space for teaching, events, and collaboration dedicated to sustainability and the SDGs.
SDG SOLUTION SPACE	Why?	To break with International Geneva's business as usual and connect creative thinkers of different stripes.
SIACE	How?	Cultivating a relaxed, frugal, and self-governned environment for active co-creation and serving as center of gravity for an ecoystem of innovators.
	What?	A hands-on innovation lab for visiting students and CERN researchers to design and create solutions for a sustainable future.
CERN	What? Why?	researchers to design and create solutions for a sustainable
IdeaSquare		researchers to design and create solutions for a sustainable future. To bring the CERN mindset of bold and unbounded innovation to
IdeaSquare	Why?	researchers to design and create solutions for a sustainable future. To bring the CERN mindset of bold and unbounded innovation to the rest of society. Welcoming daring dreamers and encouraging them to bring their ideas to life via hands-on workshops, tools for rapid
IdeaSquare Lust Innovate C4SI	Why? How?	researchers to design and create solutions for a sustainable future. To bring the CERN mindset of bold and unbounded innovation to the rest of society. Welcoming daring dreamers and encouraging them to bring their ideas to life via hands-on workshops, tools for rapid prototyping, and research on innovation. A nonprofit bringing graduate students together to think

THE ACTORS (2/4)

	What?	An informal network of professionals dedicated to innovation within the UN
UN INNOVATION NETWORK	Why?	To make the UN more innovative to deal with the major challenges we face.
	How?	Bringing people together to collaborate, share information and knowledge, and create a common culture.
	What?	A team and physical space promoting a culture of purposeful, evidence-based innovation at the ITC.
International Trade Centre	Why?	To unleash the creative capacity of ITC people through inclusive collaboration, continuous learning, and intentional experimentation.
(Innovation Lab)	How?	Creating space for exchanges among colleagues, for training in skills and approaches, and by incubating and promoting process innovations across ITC.
	What?	A lab for social innovation and long-term sustainability within UN Geneva.
beyond lab	Why?	To shift mindsets and inclusively co-create policies and programs that are truly sustainable and equitable for future generations.
	How?	By convening and connecting diverse stakeholders and by promoting fresh lenses such as systems- and future-thinking, intergenerational equity, and regenerative development.
	What?	A place for staff and diplomats at the UN to engage more deeply and collaboratively on key topics of importance to them.
Knowledge & Learning Commons Geneva	Why?	To make knowledge of the UN library and archives accessible and engaging to all, and encourage a culture shift towards more informality and collaboration at the UN.
	How?	By opening doors to a large and beautiful space to host non-traditional, informal, interactive, and collaborative exchanges at the Palais des Nations.

THE ACTORS (3/4)

	What?	A dedicated team and physical lab serving as focal point for technical support on innovation across the global WHO.
World Health Organization	Why?	To promote a organizational culture of innovation and support the scaling up of local evidence-based innovations in Health.
(Innovation Hub)	How?	Promoting a collective mindset shift toward continuous learning and providing space, tools, and facilitation to structure creation and experimentation across WHO's highly innovative teams.
	What?	A coworking space, event space, and innovation consultancy that provides resources and support for social entrepreneurs and creative changemakers.
HUB Geneva	Why?	To accelerate the transition to a sustainable, inclusive future through collaboration and innovative solutions for global challenges.
	How?	Offering tailored support, welcoming spaces, and access to local and global networks to enable collaboration on sustainable solutions.
	What?	An alternative, socially-engaged, and inclusive coworking space, event space, and cafe.
Foound	Why?	To promote and offer support for creative, socially-minded, and sustainable pursuits.
	How?	Providing engaged creators and entrepreneurs with affordable spaces and inspiring encounters, and drawing a community
		together around a robust code of ethics.
Geneva	What?	A platform, sustained by a committed team of volunteers, that assembles leading minds with the power to make an impact.
macro Labs	What? Why?	A platform, sustained by a committed team of volunteers, that

THE ACTORS (4/4)

	What?	An association that organizes hackathons and innovation festivals bringing together diverse, curious, and motivated individuals to co-create sustainable improvements for society.
open GENEVA	Why?	To promote a collaborative, inclusive culture of innovation that leverages perspectives from whole-of-society in response to grand challenges.
	How?	Sharing expertise in open innovation, partnering with public and private institutions, and curating open source digital tools and community spaces.
	What?	A third-place model that creates shared spaces such as houses and farms based on a contribution-based economy.
idea entrepreneuriat Citoyen	Why?	To empower local communities to democratically address social and environmental crises through radical, open innovation.
	How?	Strengthening community bonds and increasing knowledge and agency through intergenerational, interdisciplinary encounters and tailored workspaces, maker spaces, and studios.
Creative Think Tank since 1997	What?	An international creative think tank, consultancy, online platform, publisher, and maker space.
ADDICT LAB	Why?	To connect creative minds from various fields, empowering them to create impactful solutions for sustainable development.
		to create impactful solutions for sustainable development.
	How?	Facilitating collaborative ideation and experimentation by leveraging custom-designed creative tools, ideation processes, lab spaces, and a global network.
	How? What?	Facilitating collaborative ideation and experimentation by leveraging custom-designed creative tools, ideation processes,
GENEVA INNOVATION MOVEMENT		Facilitating collaborative ideation and experimentation by leveraging custom-designed creative tools, ideation processes, lab spaces, and a global network. A membership-based nonprofit for innovation professionals in

3 WHY FOCUS ON INTERNATIONAL GENEVA?

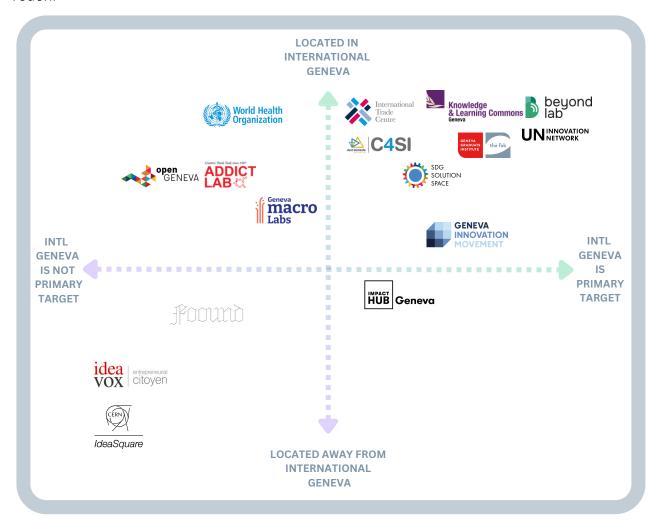
In the context of this study, "International Geneva" serves as **both an operational context**—a physical site and professional ecosystem—and a target of operations, as the community these actors aim to support and influence toward change.

While its centrality varies across the actors, nurturing an innovation culture in International Geneva can be valuable to all due to its regional weight and global reach.

VARYING RELATIONSHIPS TO INTERNATIONAL GENEVA

The majority of actors mapped in this study are directly embedded within "International Geneva," either through geographical proximity or the nature of their services.

However, not all actors are equally focused on International Geneva.



Some are physically and/or operationally located elsewhere in the canton, perceiving themselves as distant from the core "Nations" quarter.

For some, International Geneva is merely a secondary network, and their primary ecosystem may be either local or transnational. A few are primarily rooted in Geneva's entrepreneurial fabric and only observe International Geneva from the sidelines.

Even for fully embedded actors, International Geneva may be just an operational base. Innovation labs within large IOs may focus primarily on serving staff, beneficiaries, and donors elsewhere in the world. For some Geneva-based IOs outside of this mapping study, innovation teams are decentralized altogether, operating outside the city's more conservative bureaucratic environment.

INTERNATIONAL GENEVA AS A TARGET FOR INNOVATION

Despite the varied relationships to International Geneva, nurturing a culture of innovation in International Geneva is of significant added value to all actors.

Geneva is home to over 40 multilateral IOs, 250 diplomatic missions, and hundreds of international NGOs, making it a center of global governance and international cooperation. It may not be a political decision-making hub, but it plays a crucial role in the execution of global programs and standard-setting on (among others) health, communications infrastructure, humanitarian emergencies, human rights, and planetary health.

International Geneva is a prime target for social innovation (see section IV) and successes here can have ripple effects throughout the multilateral and nonprofit systems, shaping international action and influencing norms.

Yet, for these very same reasons, International Geneva is also a microcosm of the bureaucratic hurdles faced by global institutions, where resistance to change is common despite widespread recognition of its necessity.

The "Spirit of Geneva" that helped shape the development of multilateralism was itself a grand innovation in service of the common good.

Yet today, many are worried about the terminal threat of sclerosis within these institutions, among them no shortage of true believers and even leaders of these institutions themselves. There is an urgent need and untapped potential to develop a fresh "Spirit of Geneva" steeped in a culture of innovation.

THE "SPIRIT OF GENEVA"
THAT HELPED SHAPE THE
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THE COMMON GOOD.

INTERNATIONAL GENEVA AS A SITE FOR INNOVATION





International Geneva is well adapted to be a hub for collaborative innovation:

- Dense geographic concentration of expertise in a wildly diverse range of subject areas.
- Proximity to other industries in the Leman region known for their innovative talent, creating opportunities for cross-sector collaboration.
- A central component of the local economy, representing over 10% of jobs in the region, making it easy to attract attention from other industries as well as the public sector.
- A relaxed, informal culture compared to politically charged environments like the UN's HQ in New York City.

WHILE INTERNATIONAL
GENEVA OFFERS MULTIPLE
OPPORTUNITIES FOR
INNOVATION, IT ALSO
COMES WITH SOME
CHALLENGES

But the International Geneva environment also presents several challenges that are hurdles to collaborative innovation:

- In spite of and/or due to its relatively small size, distances in Geneva often feel longer than they are, contributing to isolation among actors.
- A significant gap between International Geneva and local Geneva, partly due to the transience of international professionals.
- Security and access restrictions to key places of work (e.g. the Palais des Nations) limit organic interactions.
- Lack of social infrastructure in the Nations area that could facilitate spontaneous exchanges between professionals from different sectors.
- In spite of public transportation offerings, many also commute by car, further decreasing opportunities for serendipitous friction outside of working hours.
- Geneva's high cost of living and perception as a small, less exciting city compared to major urban hubs, which can deter innovative talent from relocating.

INTERNATIONAL GENEVA'S APPETITE FOR INNOVATION

The earliest initiatives around "innovation" in International Geneva date back about a decade, mirroring the rise in popularity of "design thinking" approaches within the humanitarian and development sectors.

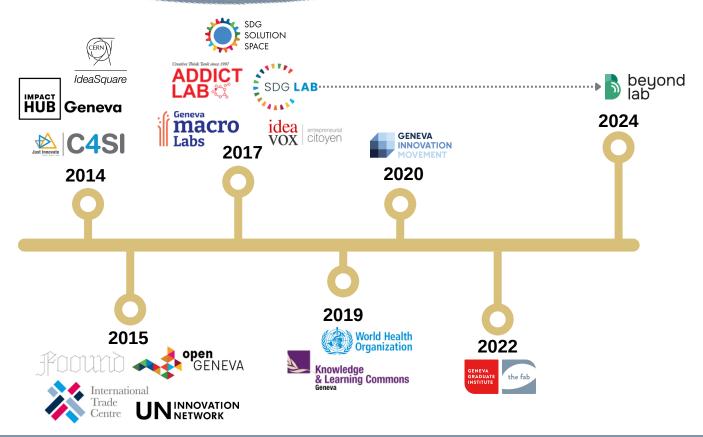
Several trends helped shape the arrival of this innovation mindset onto the International Geneva scene:

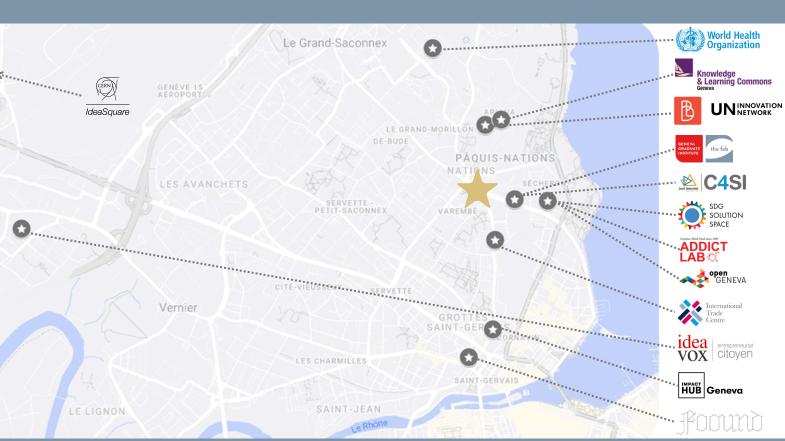
- The push towards business partnerships and private sector emulation to reform the humanitarian and development sectors.
- The perception of contemporary governance challenges as "wicked problems" that require creative, collaborative and adaptive efforts at problem solving.
- The popularity of the coworking and entrepreneurial movements, seen as catalysts for fresh ideas, in contrast to stale, traditional bureaucracies.
- The co-creative origins and collaborative imperatives embedded into the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in response to criticism of the earlier Millenium Development Goals.

A decade on, "innovation" has become an operating principle and inescapable buzzword in International Geneva. It is often seen paired with concepts such as partnerships, knowledge exchange, and collaboration as well as digital technology. (See section V.)



THE ACTORS: TIMELINE & GEOGRAPHY





4 HOW DO WE UNDERSTAND "INNOVATION"?

Like many buzzwords, "innovation" has a fluid definition that allows it to circulate widely, but its frequent use has made it vague and a source of confusion, even among practitioners. In this study, innovation is understood as a purposeful practice of change focused on creating solutions for the collective good, rather than pursuing novelty for its own sake.

While several actors work to directly facilitate the development of tangible solutions, the collectively shared focus—and the greatest potential for collaboration—lies in fostering a culture of innovation

NAVIGATING PAST AMBIGUITY AND PRECONCEPTIONS

At its broadest, "innovation" refers to the practice of change, involving the introduction of new ideas applied toward creating products, services, structures, or processes.

For many, both practitioners and casual observers, innovation is often associated with scientific and technological advances, particularly digital solutions.

WE APPROACH
INNOVATION AS A
PURPOSEFUL PRACTICE OF
CHANGE FOCUSED ON
CREATING SOLUTIONS FOR
THE COLLECTIVE GOOD,

Notwithstanding the technology focus of some stakeholders, the consensus view from the mapping is that innovation should be tech-agnostic, steering clear of "techno-solutionism"—the belief that every problem has a technological fix (or, as Apple famously put it: "there's an app for that").

Being tech-agnostic does not imply being tech-antagonistic. Technology can be a highly effective tool for positive change, but it can lead to unintended consequences. Its power must be harnessed responsibly. The focus of innovation should be on using the right tools for the right purpose, not assuming that technology alone will resolve complex challenges.

Laying aside the role of technology, we might distinguish between two components of innovation:

"HARD INNOVATION":

Focused on structured processes aimed at designing and scaling tangible solutions to specific problems.

"SOFT INNOVATION":

Focused on creating spaces and fostering cultures that encourage the adoption of mindsets and practices conducive to innovation within communities or organizations.

These two components are interconnected, with soft innovation often acting as the foundation that enables hard innovation to take place.

While several actors mapped in this study have activities centered around hard innovation, it is in the promotion of soft innovation—cultivating a culture of innovation—where we find the common thread between the group of actors mapped, and can identify the greatest immediate added value for collaboration.



OPEN SOCIAL INNOVATION

Although most actors mapped in this study brand themselves as committed to some form of "innovation," several other key concepts like collaboration, collective intelligence, creativity, and entrepreneurship are just as important to their work. For a few, "innovation" is not even a primary term in their vocabulary.

Where actors do explicitly refer to innovation, they often qualify it with adjectives such as "evidence-based," "purpose-driven," "intentional," "collaborative," "inclusive," or "participatory."

These qualifiers signal a broader approach to innovation, where the process is guided by clear values and goals.

The two most notable forms of innovation recurring across actors were "social innovation" and "open innovation." Both are approaches that have been extensively theorized in academic and gray literature, yielding fairly consensual definitions:

SOCIAL INNOVATION:

Refers to efforts that aim for systemic, values-driven change for the common good, focusing on social and environmental impact.

OPEN INNOVATION:

Emphasizes participatory, inclusive innovation that leverages knowledge and resources from a diverse range of perspectives and expertise.

In contrast to its profit-oriented strands, the open innovation espoused by actors in this study might best be understood as a subset of social innovation, with a strong added emphasis on **open-source knowledge sharing and inclusivity** of a broad range of collaborators. Some actors may feel strongly about one label or another, but both concepts overlap significantly in terms of the values and aims.

For the stakeholders of this study, innovation is, ultimately, a useful shorthand to refer to a range of well-defined methodologies and mindsets—including design thinking, systems thinking, and hackathons—that are adopted with the intent to bring about positive change for the collective good of humanity and/or the planet.

For many of these actors, "innovation" goes hand in hand with "sustainability" and "sustainable development," often with explicit reference to the SDGs.

A VALUE-BASED PHILOSOPHY

In sum, the actors in this study seem to share in a common philosophy of innovation, according to which innovation is a practice that is guided by a certain mindset and conducted with the purpose of effecting positive change for the common good. A culture of innovation, steeped in a given set of values, is what helps forge this mindset and encourages innovation.

In fact, the study was able to identify significant overlap in the values espoused by the actors mapped, as illustrated by the following word cloud.

These shared values are a strong indicator of affinity and auspicious for potential future collaboration.



5 WHAT DO WE MEAN BY "COMMONS"?

Most actors mapped in this study do not explicitly identify as a "commons." Many may not even conceptualize themselves this way. Instead, they may brand as "labs," "hubs," "networks," or "spaces."

Yet the notion of the commons is central to this study. It serves as both a helpful framework for understanding the actors and a vision for the collective they might aspire to build. The idea of the commons helps capture the collaborative and open nature of these actors.

WHAT MAKES A COMMONS

The philosophy of the commons, articulated in 1990 by Elinor Ostrom, refutes the infamous "tragedy of the commons" theory. Rather than inevitable resource depletion, Ostrom showed how communities can sustainably manage shared resources through collective governance.

The internet's decentralized and open architecture has fueled the evolution and popularity of commons-based governance models. Open-source software, and platforms like Wikimedia and Creative Commons have demonstrated how digital commons can thrive through collective contribution and shared ownership.

A commons can be broken into three main elements:



A community

A group of people sharing a stake in common resources and making collective decisions to manage them sustainably.



Communal resources

These can be physical (e.g., space), digital (e.g., data), or intellectual, but they are managed collectively for the common good.



Rules of governance

Whether formal or implicit, which reflect shared values. Openness, inclusivity, and sustainability are typically feature prominently.

AN ECOSYSTEM OF COMMONS

All actors in this study exhibit characteristics of a commons and affinity with its guiding philosophy, even if they do not meet the strict definition or necessarily label themselves as such:

SHARED SPACES

Managing physical and digital spaces open for collective use by multiple stakeholders and facilitating knowledge-sharing and collective problem-solving.

SHARED RESOURCES

Documenting, curating, and enabling community access to data, knowledge, or tools.

PARTICIPATORY GATHERINGS

Organizing hands-on events or workshops, fostering collaboration and shared learning.

COMMUNITY FACILITATION

Engaging a group of interested actors and providing structures conducive to mutual exchanges and support and the sharing and respectful confrontation of ideas.

VALUES

Promoting principles of collaboration, openness, and service to a collective good.

EVEN THOSE WHO DO NOT IDENTIFY AS A COMMONS BENEFIT, OR STAND TO BENEFIT, FROM THE RESOURCES AND COOPERATION OFFERED BY OTHER ACTORS IN THIS ECOSYSTEM.

TOGETHER, THEY HAVE **THE OPPORTUNITY TO BUILD A** "COMMONS OF COMMONS"—A FEDERATED STRUCTURE OF SHARED RESOURCES THAT STRENGTHENS COLLECTIVE INNOVATION AND SUPPORTS MUTUAL GROWTH.

ACTOR SERVICE MODELS

	Target audience	Secondary stakeholders	Flagship activities
GENEVA GRADUATE INSTITUTE the fab	 Academic community (professors, researchers, students, staff) Whole of International Geneva 	 Innovators within Intl Geneva External observers of multilateralism 	Event and meeting spaceInteractive eventsArt exhibitsResearch
SDG SOLUTION SPACE	 Students of innovation for sustainable development Innovators within Intl Geneva 	 Whole of International Geneva External observers of UN innovation 	 Educational programs Event and coworking space Hackathons and workshops Community building
IdeaSquare	 Master-level students from all disciplines CERN staff 	Innovators within Intl Geneva	 Fab labs for rapid prototyping Educational programs Academic publications
Just Innovate C4SI	Graduate students in Geneva	Whole of International Geneva	Educational program Partnerships with IOs, NGOs Hands-on innovation workshops
UN INNOVATION NETWORK	UN staff (personnel, consultants, interns)	External observers of UN innovation	Online community spacesFellowships and trainings
International Trade Centre	 ITC Staff (personnel, consultants, interns) ITC beneficiaries (entrepreneurs, governments) 	ITC Funding States External innovators and entrepreneurs	 Innovation challenges Methodologies and toolkits Hands-on workshops Trainings and facilitation
beyond lab	 International Geneva professionals seeking impactful change Youth passionate about sustainable futures 	Whole of International Geneva	 Interactive event series Innovation residencies Methodologies and toolkits Online community spaces
Knowledge & Learning Commons Geneva	 UN Staff (personnel, consultants, interns) Diplomats to the UN 	 Students and researchers of multilateralism Whole of International Geneva 	Event spaceNontraditional eventsPodcast seriesBlog posts

ACTOR SERVICE MODELS

	Target audience	Secondary stakeholders	Flagship activities
World Health Organization	WHO StaffWHO Member States	External actors and observers of innovation in health	 Hands-on workshops Hybrid lab space Methodologies and toolkits Trainings and facilitation
HUB Geneva	 Social entrepreneurs Social innovators within International Geneva 	International Geneva actors seeking meeting and event spaces	 Coworking and event spaces Incubation and mentorship Events and workshops Community building
Foound	 Socially- and environmentally- minded creatives and entrepreneurs Anyone excited about their work 	Social innovators within International Geneva	 Coworking and event spaces Vegan cafe-restarant Community building Events and workshops Art expos and performances
macro Labs	 Policymakers Technology experts Civil society actors committed to sustainable impact through new tech 	 Foundations and other potential sponsors Media 	 Afterwork social events Yearlong innovation cycles Trainings and facilitation Conferences Solutions papers
open GENEVA	Anyone wanting to effect change but unable to do so through own organization	Local public and private institutions	HackathonsInnovation FestivalScientific researchPartnerships
idea entrepreneuriat VOX citoyen	Youth with entrepreneurial aspirations Motivated individuals of diverse backgrounds committed to social change	Local public and private institutions	 Replicable third-space model Tailored and maker spaces Collaborative workshops Community social events Catering
Creative Think Tank since 1997 ADDICT LAB	 Innovators in International Geneva Youth interested in innovation Curious and creative individuals of all stripes 		 Methodologies and toolkits Maker space and mobile labs Creative workshop facilitation Online learning platform SDG Zine
GENEVA INNOVATION MOVEMENT	Innovation staff within major IOs and NGOs in Geneva	Likeminded innovation actors outside Geneva-based UN	 Fellowships and trainings Interactive event series Translating academic expertise for professional audiences

6 SHARED PERSPECTIVES FOR COLLABORATION

All actors mapped in this study advocate for collaboration and breaking down silos within their own institutions and communities. Yet, ironically, most acknowledge that the innovation ecosystem itself suffers from "siloitis," where actors are disincentivized from collaborating among themselves. The numerous examples of existing or past partnerships paint a picture of haphazard collaboration that struggles to be sustained over time.

Nevertheless, the study revealed a collective interest in boosting and sustaining collaborative efforts, ranging from cautious curiosity for some to a fierce appetite for others. It also highlighted a number of outlooks and challenges shared by virtually all actors who participated, offering numerous reasons and opportunities to work together.

THE INNOVATION ECOSYSTEM ITSELF SUFFERS FROM "SILO-ITIS"



SPACE AND COMMUNITY AS INGREDIENTS FOR A CULTURE OF INNOVATION

Physical space is crucial for fostering innovation. It can help provide opportunities and structure conducive to serendipitous encounters and the sharing of ideas.

Many innovative initiatives in International Geneva in fact began as a result of interactions in informal spaces, especially kitchens, which became incubators for new ideas.

Space is also important for innovation in the immaterial sense of **time**, **freedom**, **and resources** to create and innovate.

However, the barriers to making more and better space are many, not least institutional and financial constraints (see below), paired with exorbitant real estate and a frenetic work culture.

Space is equally important as a catalyst for **community building**. Several actors emphasized how a strong sense of community—not simply a transactional network—is vital for innovation.

However, actors also emphasized that space and community are not enough: what matters is their quality.

The spirit and culture of a space, the strength and reliance of a community, and the dynamism and depth of its engagement are the true ingredients of a healthy innovation culture. Cultivating and maintaining these over time requires significant effort.

Most actors actively engage in community-building within their own networks but spend significant energy— and sometimes face challenges—in sustaining, growing, and diversifying their community.

Competing for attention and time, and finding ways to ensure added value are ongoing challenges in fostering long-term, active engagement and collaboration.

A COMMUNITY EASES THE CONFRONTATION OF IDEAS AND PROVIDES ENCOURAGEMENT, SUPPORT, AND CHALLENGE FOR PROBLEM-SOLVING.



RESOURCE CONSTRAINTS & INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

Virtually all actors experience some form of resource limitations, with a number of similar experiences being reported, although the specifics vary depending on their institutional structure.

For those operating within larger parent organizations, the framework offers some advantages: core funding; outsourced administrative tasks; institutional prestige and name recognition; a built-in network of expertise and a defined audience.

However, these benefits come with downsides. Parent organizations are often eager to launch innovation initiatives but may fall short of empowering them to fully realize their transformative potential. Institutional constraints and strategic priorities can also monopolize resources and force innovation teams to focus on short-term, tactical goals, rather than long-term, visionary projects.

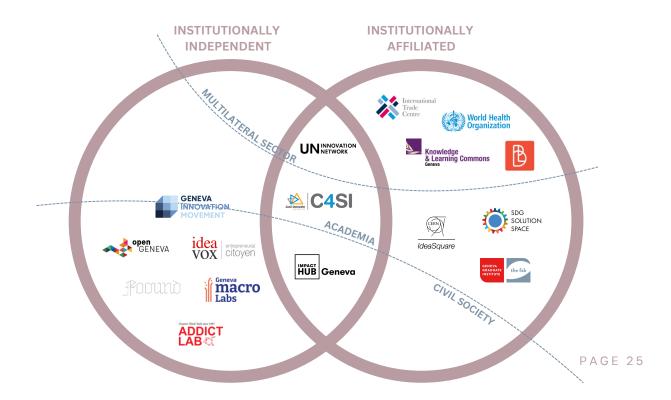
As a result, many innovation teams within larger organizations spend significant time and resources advocating internally,

navigating organizational politics, and working to align with institutional priorities that may run counter the innovation team's core mission, further constraining their ability to pursue bold, forward-thinking ideas.

Conversely, **independent organizations** enjoy greater freedom to pursue their mission without the same institutional constraints. However, they often face even greater resourcing challenges, relying on fragile external funding without the safety net of core institutional support.

A few actors within larger organizations have engaged in the idea of a hypothetical exit from their parent organization for more autonomy, but all concluded that the benefits of remaining within the current structure largely outweigh the disadvantages.

Instead, to address resourcing constraints, many are seeking to diversify their funding models to reduce dependence on core institutional funding, all while seeking ways to demonstrate the strategic and financial viability of their ideas to leadership.



KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

Institutional priorities and fundraising objectives often create pressure to document innovation efforts and prove their effectiveness through tangible results.

Several actors shared concern about duplicating existing resources and a crowded body of knowledge that is too abundant to consume. Likewise, some evoked a desire for stronger or more organized communal practices of knowledge sharing among actors in the ecosystem. The idea of a centralized knowledge commons was raised, albeit with apprehensions about community buy-in and sustainable management.

In spite of all the various resources and communications produced by actors in the ecosystem inside International Geneva and beyond, several actors emphasized a surprising gap in research and literature on innovation that is specific to global governance sectors.

Another major challenge is figuring out how to quantify the impact of promoting innovation culture within institutions and communities. This is often difficult when working on social and open innovation, and on the cultivation of a culture of innovation that fosters long-term change but may not show immediate results in data.

HOW TO QUANTIFY THE IMPACT OF PROMOTING INNOVATION CULTURE WITHIN INSTITUTIONS AND COMMUNITIES?





FRESH PERSPECTIVES AND REDIRECTION

Whether driven by sustained challenges or a natural point in their lifecycle, an interesting finding of this study is that many actors are currently, or have recently been, engaged in a process of strategic redefinition.

Even those not explicitly engaged in formal strategic rethinking are adopting **new approaches and methodologies**, reflecting the need to keep innovation efforts relevant and impactful.

This collective moment of reevaluation presents an opportunity for collaboration and co-learning as actors share lessons from their own journeys.

Many actors are experimenting with **new tools to evaluate the effectiveness** of soft innovation, aiming to better demonstrate its benefits to stakeholders. This is a shared strategic horizon for many.

True to the culture of innovation they promote, actors are frequently adopting new methodologies and approaches in their work.

Among these, a few patterns emerge, which could be opportunities for knowledge sharing and collaboration:

- Systemic and holistic approaches to change and innovation.
- Future and foresight methods to anticipate long-term challenges.
- Behavioral and affective sciences to understand the role of emotions and human behavior in innovation.
- Intergenerational and youth-led innovation, giving voice to younger generations and their unique perspectives.
- Decolonizing innovation by recentering marginalized knowledge and perspectives, over dominant Western business and Silicon Valley approaches.
- Artificial Intelligence (AI) as a tool for innovation, but also as a gateway to broader innovation dialogues.
 Some have found stakeholder interest in AI presents a unique opportunity to draw attention to, and stoke interest in, purpose-driven, ethical innovation.

7 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A Commons approach to resourcesharing could help alleviate pressures by pooling resources, encouraging collaboration, and creating a more sustainable innovation ecosystem.

APPETITE FOR GREATER COLLABORATION

There is clear interest in increasing collaboration among actors, though some hesitation remains.

The value added must be demonstrated for everyone involved. Collaboration should be harmonious and nondisruptive—it should align with, build upon, and elevate existing strategic goals of each actor. Initiatives must directly address the pain points, needs, and aspirations of the actors involved.

STAKEHOLDERS OF THIS STUDY
SHOULD REACH OUT TO OTHER
ACTORS IN ORDER TO EXPAND
THE MAPPING AND BRING IN
NEW PARTICIPANTS INTO THE
FOLD OF THIS COLLABORATIVE
PROJECT

Building a Commons requires organic collective buy-in but will also need active facilitation and institutional incentives to get started.

This effort should aim to maximize existing resources, avoiding duplication and reinvention. The goal is to consolidate what exists and then build on it, moving toward novel solutions only when necessary. Any new solutions should be integrative or compatible with current resources.



COMMUNITY BUILDING

Connections have already been strengthened through this mapping process, and new ones have been forged. These connections need to be nurtured further.

Partnerships and collaboration should be pursued in such a way that it becomes apparent what each actor can offer the other and second nature for actors to reach out to peers in the ecosystem for advice, assistance, and collaboration.

Actors should present themselves to their audiences and institutions as part of a larger ecosystem, adding value through collaboration. Time constraints might become less of a barrier if collaboration becomes a core part of each actor's work and aligns with their strategic goals.

Some actors focus on organizational process innovations, while others are more outwardly focused on programmatic innovations. However, institutional constraints remain a major pain point for many. A collective effort could focus on tackling bureaucratic and outdated processes, applying a culture of innovation directly to internal challenges across the sector.

Financial resources might be better addressed through collaborative efforts. Involving multiple actors can provide legitimacy for larger, bolder projects that **may be more attractive to donors**. This could mean less competition for scarce funds, and instead more collaboration to potentially tap into new pools of funding that were previously out of reach. If financially viable, collaboration might more easily be enshrined in institutional priorities.

KEY THEMES FOR COLLABORATION

There is fertile ground for **knowledge exchange and collaborative tool development** in areas such as:

- The importance of space and community for innovation.
- Intergenerational inclusivity and youth-driven innovation.
- The role of emotions and individualities in successful innovation and resistance to change.
- Decolonizing innovation and recentering marginalized knowledge.
- Centralizing knowledge and resources to avoid duplication and overwhelming audiences.
- Researching innovation journeys and practices in specific sectors (e.g. trade, health, etc.).
- Mapping and measuring impact of social and open innovation.
- Hacking the conversation on AI to steer it toward collaborative and purposeful innovation.

8 WHAT NEXT?

SHORT TERM



SOLIDIFYING THE NETWORK

- Internalizing and socializing the findings of this mapping study
- Organizing recurring gatherings for the community of stakeholders
- Pursuing discussions around collaborative project opportunities
- Assembling an email group or listserv
- Connecting with each other to meet
 1-on-1 outside of grouped events

MEDIUM TERM



EVOLVING FROM A NETWORK TO A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

- Increasingly and intentionally relying on each other's spaces and other resources
- Bringing to life the first collaborative projects, where success serves as proofs of concept for collaboration
- Promoting the belonging to a larger ecosystem and getting involved in community building
- Developing a central digital repository or platform(s)

LONG TERM



STRENGTHENING THE BACK-BONE OF THE COMMONS OF COMMONS

- Building a coherent community of practice and/or federation of commons for social innovation
- Developing of a common branding
- Establishing a central funding mechanism for impactful collaborative endeavors
- Renewing the needs assessment and collective advocacy and fundraising



SHORT TERM SOLIDIFYING THE NETWORK

CONCEPT



Internalizing and socializing the findings of this mapping study:

- Reflecting individually as actors, and connecting with other stakeholders to discuss in pairs or groups.
- Reaching out to the fab and the Canton to share reflections and feedback on the study.
- Following publication by the Canton, sharing the report horizontally and vertically with colleagues and institutional hierarchies. Promoting it to one's network.

Organizing recurring gatherings for the community of stakeholders:



- Seeking opportunities to get to know each other, discover each other's spaces and activities, share updates and announce opportunities, spark ideas and interest in collaboration, and generally socialize to strengthen ties.
- The fab serves as central facilitator, coordinating the organization of these events and providing guidance and support as needed for the rotating hosts.
- Suggested format: afterwork aperos or beforework breakfasts, 1 to 1.5 hour length, customizable format: 15 min welcome / 25 min facilitation by host / Remainder socializing, hosted by different actors in different spaces on a rotational basis.



Pursuing discussions around collaborative project opportunities scoped and ideated during the 2024 Geneva Trialogue workshop such as the Unconference on the societal impacts of AI (driven by GeMLabs)



Assembling an email group or listserv through which actors can announce events and updates to the entire group and/or reach out to each other individually.

SHORT TERM

CONCEPT (CONTINUED)



Connecting with each other to meet 1-on-1 outside of grouped events:

- Introductory / discovery chats and space visits for those who are less well acquainted
- Targeted discussions to identify potential bilateral collaborations, either based on predefined projects and needs, or based on joint ideation
- Coffee chats to catch up, share experiences, and socialize.

EXPECTED CHALLENGES



- Overload of information, invitations, and opportunities.
- Initial excitement deflates into disengagement if actors feel lack of reciprocation or engagement.
- Residual hesitancy about added value of collective engagement in light of busy schedules.
- Heterogeneity of the group slows the emergence of collective affinity.

REQUIREMENTS



- Every actor makes a good faith effort to reach out to at least one other actor and attend at least one social gathering.
- Although each actor's own events can serve as further opportunities for community building, to the extent that invitations are extended to others in the group, the collective focus should remain on regular, spaced-out, and informal community gatherings, as well as direct bilateral engagement, in order to not overload the community.
- The fab continues embracing a facilitator role by: touching base with each actor, gauging needs and interest, flagging existing resources in the community, and facilitating bilateral introductions.
- Trusting the process and celebrating small successes.
- Patience and awareness that efforts may only bear fruit over time, even through accumulation of low-stakes good faith efforts.

MEDIUM TERM

EVOLVING FROM A NETWORK TO A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

CONCEPT



Increasingly and intentionally relying on each other's spaces and other resources when organizing own events and developing own activities.

Bringing to life first collaborative projects through collective participation. Collective engagement in their success as proofs of concept for longer term and more institutionalized opportunities for collaboration.



Actors promote their belonging to a larger ecosystem and are involved in community building:

- Shining light on peer actors and collective efforts in interactions with colleagues and network.
- Showcasing each other's materials (brochures, posters, publications etc.) in each other's spaces and places of work.



Developing a central digital repository or platform(s) to help ease collective resource sharing. The initial strategic priority is for internal knowledge sharing. Several forms could be considered for this webspace:

- a linktree indexing actor's existing platforms and digital libraries;
- a curated google map index of actors with links to their profiles and resources;
- · a shared drive;
- a LinkedIn group;
- a dedicated participatory webspace built and customized using an open source platform (e.g. Open Social).

MEDIUM TERM

EXPECTED CHALLENGES

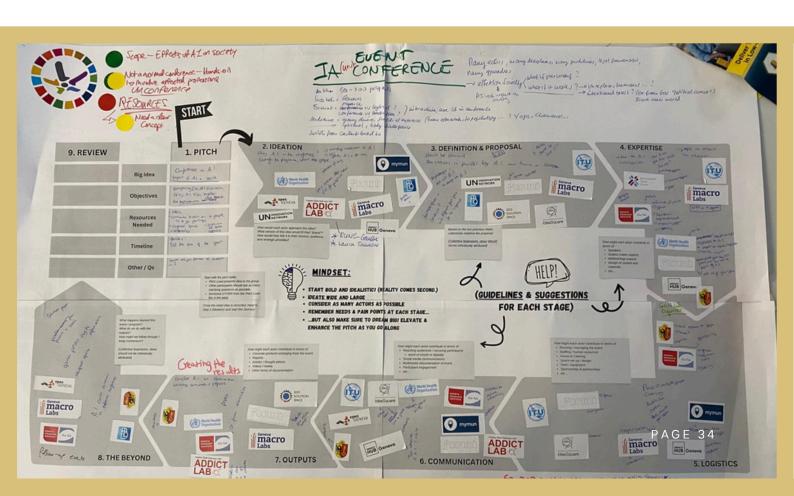


- Moving beyond simply transactional partnerships and networking into the building of a real community of practice.
- Early collaborative opportunities may be of greater interest to some actors than others.
- Sustaining momentum and slowly easing into collective ownership and communal self-governance.
- Basic funding for sustained coordination and facilitation of the collective.

REQUIREMENTS



- Overcoming silo mentality and institutional ego; seeing other actors as partners and support mechanism and not competition.
- Actors are invested in demonstrating the value of collective efforts to their own stakeholders.
- Centralized coordination and facilitation continues to usher the group along and shine a light on the added value and early fruits of collective efforts.



LONG TERM

STRENGTHENING THE BACK-BONE OF THE COMMONS OF COMMONS

CONCEPT

Efforts start giving way to a **coherent community of practice** and/or federation of commons for social innovation in International Geneva.

Development of a **common branding or label** that each actor puts forward in their own work and communications. Branding is elevated through:



- Physical manifestations such as a low-tech tailordesigned "carrel" of postcards, each summarizing the profile of an actor in the ecosystem or a past collaborative endeavor.
- Online webspace is further adapted to serve as a central window onto the community of actors, a central landing page for external audiences interested in connecting with purpose-driven innovators in International Geneva.
- Establishment of a central funding mechanism through which actors can collectively seek sufficient funding to elaborate and pursue bold and impactful collaborative endeavors.
- Renewed need assessment and collective advocacy
 and fundraising for a new modular physical space to
 serve as a maison de l'innovation sociale in International
 Geneva, building on and leveraging past proposals and
 studies conducted by actors in the community.



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ANNEX

CATALOGUES OF RESOURCES, SERVICES, AND PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

A. RESOURCES AND SERVICES

The following list is not exhaustive. Some services may be subject to fees.

Available services

Publications tools and other

	Publications, tools, and other knowledge resources	Available services and partnership opportunities
GENEVA GRADUATE INSTITUTE the fab		 Co-hosting workshops and other events Support for project design and strategy Introductions to Graduate Institute experts Introductions to graduate student leaders
SDG SOLUTION SPACE	 Methodologies and toolkits for open innovation Academic articles on open innovation 	 Introductions to local innovators and thought leaders Introductions to graduate student innovators
IdeaSquare	Journal of experimental innovationInnovator blogsYoutube channel	 Introductions to CERN experts Introductions to young innovators outside of Geneva. Workshop facilitation
Just Innovate C4SI	Documentation of solutions from past challenge cycles	 Introduction to Geneva-based graduate students with interest in innovation. Introduction to workshop facilitators Partnering to test workshops
UN INNOVATION NETWORK	Online library of reports, guides, and toolkits related to innovation and digital transformation across the UN system	Introductions to innovators and thought leaders across the UN system
International Trade Centre		Introduction to innovators in the trade and entrepreneurship sectors
beyond lab	 Toolkits and guides Video documentation of event series Compendium of youth essays on "Beyond GDP" Documented journey of setting up a lab 	Partnerships for event series Introductions to innovators within International Geneva
Knowledge & Learning Commons Geneva	 Podcast series on present and future of multilateralism Video documentation of events Digital resources of the UN library and archives 	 Partnerships to host nontraditional events open to staff and/or diplomats at UNOG Briefings on the knowledge resources of the UN library and archives Introductions to thought leaders at UNOG

A. RESOURCES AND SERVICES

The following list is not exhaustive. Some services may be subject to fees.

	Publications, tools, and other knowledge resources	Available services and partnership opportunities
World Health Organization	 Reports on Health Innovation worldwide Case studies on WHO innovations Tools and resources on scaling innovation 	Introductions to health innovators worldwide
HUB Geneva	 Circular design toolkit Articles and blogs on sustainable innovation and entrepreneurship 	 Incubation consultancies Workshop facilitation Introductions to local and global network of social entrepreneurs
Foound		Catering services Personalized support for entrepreneurial ventures
macro Labs	 Solutions papers with policy recommendations Opinion pieces Podcast series 	 Workshop facilitation Co-creating and co-hosting events Spotlight during afterwork series Introductions to local thought leaders
open GENEVA	 Open source hackathon library, including methodologies and tools, as well as proposed solutions. Scientific research on science of hackathons. 	 Co-hosting tailored hackathons Briefing on hackathon science Introductions to local thought leaders.
idea entrepreneuriat vox citoyen	 Open source library of replicable frameworks and innovations. Podcast series produced by young community leaders and innovators 	 Introductions to young innovators and social entrepreneurs Introductions to local thought leaders
Contrive Think Tank since 1997 ADDICT LAB	 Open source library of replicable creative innovations and methodologies Custom tools and games for collaborative innovation workshops SDG Zine (many editions) 	 Briefing on custom innovation tools Training on maker space tools Introductions to local thought leaders Spotlight or publication in SDG Zine
GENEVA INNOVATION MOVEMENT	 Case studies and fact sheets on innovation in International Geneva Academic publications on innovation within the IO sector 	 Partnering to host member events Introductions to innovation leaders within International Geneva Workshops and certifications available to members

B. PHYSICAL SPACES

The following list is not exhaustive.

	Physical spaces	Pricing and stipulations
GENEVA GRADUATE INSTITUTE the fab	 Modular open lounge space (99pax) Access to 1 small (25p) and 1 large (49p) classrooms w/ videoconferencing 	 CHF500/half-day or CHF1000/day Free of charge for co-sponsored events Open space includes TV screen and lo-fi sound system Self-catered or paid in-house catering only
SDG SOLUTION SPACE	 330m2 modular space ground floor (including AddictLab's fab lab, 60m2) 160m2 upstairs coworking space, desks and meeting rooms 	 CHF150/hr or CHF1500/day Coworking membership = CHF550/mo.
Knowledge & Learning Commons Geneva	Large modular event space (300pax)	 Bookings free of charge. Strict discretionary selection criteria. Only nontraditional events aligned with mission. Full AV conferencing set-up w/ technician
HUB Geneva	 Main event space (90m2, up to 150pax) 1 large meeting room (40m2, 40pax) Entire floor + cafe (280m2, 200pax) Small meeting rooms Hot desks for coworking 	 Main event space: CHF950/4hrs Large meeting room: CHF550/4hrs Entire floor and cafe area price upon request Professional streaming and photo/video services, catering available Hot desk access and rental discounts for members
Foound	 5 modular event spaces from 50-80m2, ranging 25-90pax seated or 50-100 standing 1 small auditorium, 30m2 for 18pax Small meeting rooms Hot desks for coworking 	 Event spaces CHF80 to 240/hr or CHF480-960/8hrs Auditorium CHF70/hr or CHF246/8hrs AV setup and catering available Rental discounts for members Hourly or daily rentals for hot desks
idea vox entrepreneuriat	 Modular outdoor garden event spaces Lounge spaces Meeting rooms Maker spaces Podcast studios 	Business model not based on space rental. Access typically free of charge based on partnerships, service and resource exchange, and mission synergies. Determined on case by case basis. Priority to low-income youth.
ADDICT LAB	60m2 fab lab (with access to SDG Solution Space's modular event space)	Fab lab rental = CHF100/hr

B. PHYSICAL SPACES

The following list is not exhaustive.

	Physical spaces	Pricing and stipulations
IdeaSquare	Maker space with multiple workshops (eletrical, wood, 3D printing) and meeting rooms	Not typically open to external users except case-by-case collaborations.
International Trade Centre	Lab space for interactive ideation workshops	 Not open for outside users, except case- by-case collaborations. Access to ITC is badge-restricted, guests must be registered in advance.
World Health Organization	 'Eureka' lab, equipped for synchronous hybrid facilitation with double touch screens Dedicated space for showcasing innovations, equipped with AR 	Not currently open for external users, except on case-by-case basis for experimental partnerships.

