



City Leaders Forum

Innovation Districts - Spotlight

In recent years, city leaders have been attracting talent through the transformation and sustainable development of public buildings, institutions, streets, and even whole districts that were getting old, outdated, and little used.

This has been done on various scales of size. From single buildings, such as empty historical buildings, through schools that ceased operation because of changing demographics, to abandoned industrial sites up to a large-scale renovation of a whole district. In this review, we will take a look at some case studies of various scales of size.

Innovation districts are residential and commercial areas that offer favorable environments and amenities that attract research institutions, high-growth firms, and tech and creative start-ups. Innovation districts facilitate the creation and commercialization of new ideas and support metropolitan economies by growing jobs in ways that leverage their distinct economic attributes.

"These districts build on and revalue the intrinsic qualities of cities: proximity, density, authenticity, and vibrant places. Given the proximity of many districts to low-income neighborhoods and the large number of sub-baccalaureate jobs many provide, their intentional development can be a tool to help connect disadvantaged populations to employment and educational opportunities."

Barcelona

In Barcelona, the 22@Barcelona Innovation District has started as a governmental initiative to transform an old industrial district into an innovation zone. By developing a synergy of an attractive living environment with an advanced work environment, the 22@Barcelona district has become a center for SME companies surrounded by museums, galleries, bars and restaurants. The district has an area of 4,000,000 sqm of offices, commerce and research, 220,000 sqm of green spaces, residential and social housing buildings.

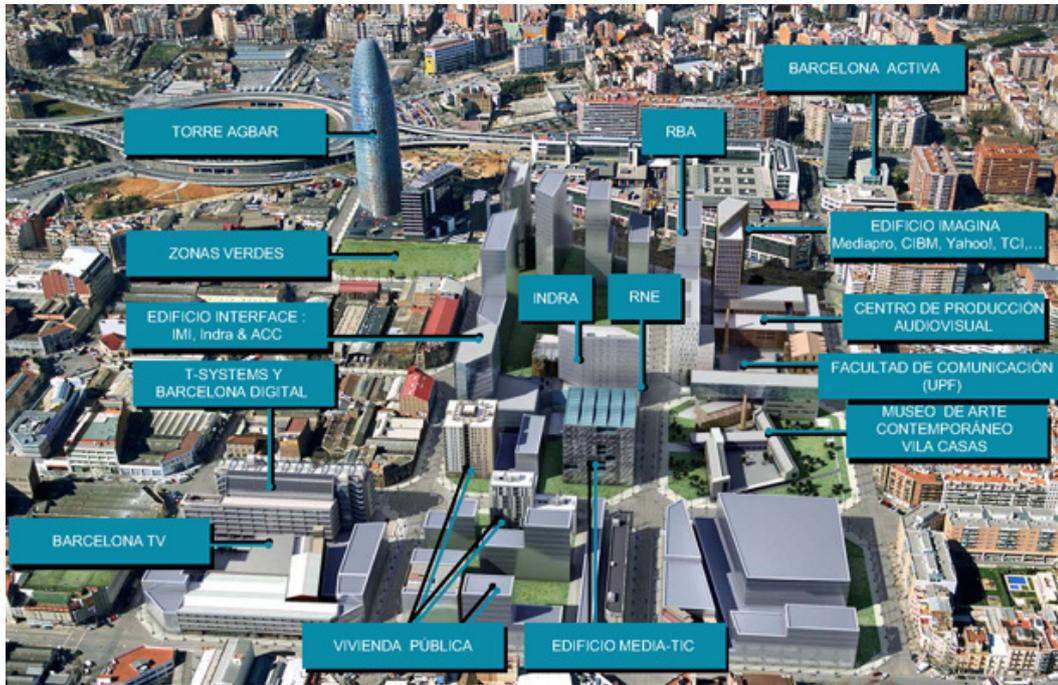
Do you aspire to draw businesses and creative talents into your city? To boost the local economy, increase municipal income, gain status and appreciation to your city?

The 22@Barcelona district drives technological and economic innovation by bringing together innovative companies, universities, learning centers and research centers. It attracts local and international talent. By 2020, the district had more than 93,000 people in 9,000 companies and 25,000 students at the local universities. 16% of the residents are from other countries around the globe.

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The 22@Barcelona district
Source: More than Green

Beer Sheva

Beer Sheva, the largest city in the south of Israel, on the doorstep of the Negev desert, and the 2nd largest city in Israel in terms of the municipal area, is making major efforts to develop hi-tech industries despite its relative distance from central Israel. The district between Ben Gurion University, the large Soroka medical center, a new hi-tech business compound, the municipality building, and a train station have had great potential for development. Developing gradually, the number of Hi-Tech companies in the district has doubled between the years 2014 until 2018. A collaborative plan, led by the municipality and engaging these key establishments, Beer Sheva has won a national grant for a large-scale development initiative to be led by the municipal-government- university-medical center-industrial park consortium.

The district was designed with Cyber technology, Robotics, Medical Tech, and Arid environments technology and agriculture clusters and a central boulevard, meeting, leisure, and other facilities at their midst. These major clusters will be centered around the existing establishment, leveraging their years-long experience to sparkle renewed growth. The collaborative initiatives will add further opportunities. As an example, Ben-Gurion University and the Soroka Health Center have established together the Negev Health and Environmental Research Institute (NEHRI) to study the effects of climate change on human health.



The Beer Sheva Innovation District. Marked are core specialty areas: Cyber Technology, Digital Healthcare, Arid climate / Desert Technologies and the boulevard at the heart of the district.

Source: The Beer Sheva Innovation District outline for inclusive innovation and growth, Jan. 2020.



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The design of the district was also based on local stakeholders engagement. The design team has conducted over 150 interviews with local stakeholders and more than 50 meetings with residents in the area. Beyond business development, the project was designed to create a vibrant innovative community, nurturing leisure and social activities and drawing in talents, similar to the 22@Barcelona district.

Amsterdam's Knowledge Mile

The Knowledge Mile in Amsterdam is a remarkable example of a collaborative local area project, a business and innovation district that runs through 2 streets in central Amsterdam (Wibautstraat and Weesperstraat).

This area in the heart of the city was facing challenges such as heavy traffic, air pollution, and flooding. Since its inception in late 2017, a diverse community is working to solve these issues by sharing knowledge, driving innovation, establishing connections, and creating partnerships. It has a community of 30.000 residents, 60.000 students, 735 organizations, municipal institutions and 3 universities located in the vicinity - the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences, the University of Amsterdam, and Amsterdam University of Arts.

The business, social, and knowledge institutions located at the Knowledge Mile have united in a business investment zone (BIZ) that is becoming increasingly intertwined with the development of the area between Amstelplein and City Hall, working to sustain a green, safe and networked business, and innovation district. This is a great example of experiencing and developing the full urban ecosystem through a collaboration of the local government, SMEs, academic institutions, NGOs, schools, students, and the local resident community.

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In 2019, the municipality of Amsterdam started the Knowledge Mile Park project to work together with the community and other partners on greening public space and building facades. Solar panels and water storage facilities were also installed to better manage abundant renewable natural resources.



Multiple projects at the Amsterdam Knowledge Mile (<https://knowledgemile.amsterdam/s/projects>)



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Greening Amsterdam's Roofs - A mission to install 10,000 SqM of blue-green roofs
source: De Amsterdamse dakenrevolutie

A large number of participants in the Knowledge Mile business investment zone have joined forces in a collective waste contract, for clean collection and sustainable processing of waste and raw materials. This reduces the amount of polluting transport movements, resulting in lower CO2 emissions and better traffic flow. The Knowledge Mile is therefore close to Zero Waste status.

Insights and takeaways

Innovation districts can completely transform urban areas, bringing remarkable business, learning, social and environmental benefits for the city and drawing in both local and international talent, as well as major organisations and enterprises.

They may be based on a renovation and rejuvenation effort of a declining district which has lost its appeal, or on ambitious construction projects in already thriving areas and they can also be based on existing infrastructure and buildings. There are opportunities in many locations waiting to be rediscovered, either with a major redesign or a subtle rejuvenation of existing assets.

Their secret of success is in community building and in creating new opportunities and collaborations, engaging multiple and diverse stakeholders - local residents, students, entrepreneurs and artists, business, culture, science, learning, social and health establishments and organizations

They also need to create convenient, pleasant and green places for meetings and a healthy, comfortable environment that will attract both local and international talent to commit to long-term sustainable engagement.

- All the examples are about creating areas in the city, a city service for SMEs and organizations like universities and schools that will provide opportunities for the SMEs in smart cities.

see you at our next spotlight!

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