



## #405: What are the keys to a successful urban innovation district?

VOICEOVER

This is Up Close, the research talk show from the University of Melbourne, Australia.

ERIC VAN BEMMEL

Thanks for joining us. I'm Eric van Bommel.

Innovation. It's a buzzword and everyone wants a piece of it, because innovation is seen as the key to future economic prosperity in an increasingly digital and globalised world. Yet the key to successful innovation may lie, ironically, very much in the physical and the local, in face-to-face communities that foster a collaboration and the free exchange of knowledge and ideas. At least, that's the view of our guest, urban thinker Julie Wagner, non-resident senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, where she co-authored the ground-breaking paper, *The Rise of Innovation Districts: A New Geography of Innovation in America*, and more recently *Innovation Spaces: The New Geography of Work*.

Julie has written on innovation geographies for such leading publications as the *Harvard Business Review*, *Fortune* magazine, and *The Guardian*. A trained city planner, Julie Wagner is co-director of the Anne T. And Robert M. Bass Initiative on Innovation and Placemaking, which is a collaboration between Brookings and Project for Public Spaces. It aims to catalyse a cross-disciplinary approach to city building that integrates innovative urban economies with vibrant public spaces and inclusive growth. Julie, welcome to Up Close.

JULIE WAGNER

Thank you.

ERIC VAN BEMMEL

Julie, just what is an innovation district?

JULIE WAGNER

We define innovation districts as where anchor institutions and companies collaborate and connect with small firms, with accelerators, with incubators, with start-ups, with scale-ups, and that it happens not just anywhere but happens in a geography that is compact and walkable, that's amenity-laden, that has retail and

housing, that in its essence it is an innovation community. It is built on the foundation of density and proximity and accessibility.

ERIC VAN BEMMEL

You mentioned anchor institution. What do you mean by that?

JULIE WAGNER

Anchor institution often means a R&D-laden university. You can name those across any global region - KTH (KTH Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm), it could be MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), it could be University of Melbourne. In almost every city you have a university that can serve that function. It's serving as an anchor, the centrifugal force if you will, of a place.

ERIC VAN BEMMEL

Can you give us some examples of innovation districts that stand out to you?

JULIE WAGNER

You have, let's say in Stockholm in Sweden, two different innovation districts there. One is more of an urbanised science park model where they have strong economic strengths, and now they are evolving their physical story to be much more connected and more compact, more of a vibrant ecology. If you go 20 minutes down the road into the heart of the city, you have another type of innovation district that is actually led by life sciences while the other one is actually led around tech.

The life science one is an interesting story, because you have two parts of an innovation district, a hospital and a whole series of life science companies and then other research universities, but they're separated by a highway and now they're effectively decking over that highway to create an innovation community that essentially stitches together what were two divided halves. That's their story which I think is a really interesting case.

You have in Barcelona where they looked at reimagining outmoded industrial land and to create a cradle of innovation for that economy and to grow clusters creatively using land use zoning tools and figuring out what is an economic theory of change and creating like what's the constellation of economic actors we need that could create this magnetic force that all of a sudden all these other small companies come to. Their theory of change is let's have your university, let's have a top company, let's have an incubator, let's have housing and student populations, and if you get enough of those collectively within one economic cluster, you're going to create a magnet. I find that a very interesting story.

In the United States you have, let's say St Louis, where they essentially have been rethinking their physical landscape, 200 acres that were dividing a number of anchor institutions and creating that as the new hotbed for innovation and knowledge advancement and creatively concentrating their effort in very small, discrete nodes of activity to create a critical mass, this exciting overlapping of activity, firms, investments in a very small geographic radius.

You have - Philadelphia is on its way, Pittsburgh is an exciting case; both very different stories. Boston has another very different story. I think what we're finding overall is that every place we go to has a unique story, whether it's a strong economic story that they're going to clench and focus and build on. Others are saying, you know what, our story is cutting across a whole range of disciplines and we want to create that convergence.

ERIC VAN BEMMEL

I understand that this notion of an innovation district started in Europe.

JULIE WAGNER

The original origins I can't point to. What I can point to is that that's the first place that said to us oh, this is something interesting that's going on here. Let me actually speak to the point of what is going on here, from a macro perspective. What we're talking about is the changing geography of innovation.

If you look at it from a macro scale, there has been this phenomenon over the past several decades, 50 years, maybe a bit more, where you have a geography of innovation that had been increasingly found in more of the suburban, low-density areas adjacent to cities where you had easy access by car, no issue there. You'd move, go into your building and you would operate. There obviously would be some collaboration between different industries, different individuals, but in essence this is a separated and siloed physical pattern. So the physical landscape is basically defining how these industries are acting and interacting, at least to a certain extent.

What's happening and what we're observing is this reurbanisation phenomenon where you have advanced industry, creative industries that are now clustering and connecting. Where? In more dense, connected environments that are accessible by transit, that are amenity-laden, that have all these kinds of assets that keep people together, clustered, connected.

ERIC VAN BEMMEL

That's happening now but if you go back more than a century to 1890s, turn of the century at that time, you had the economist Alfred Marshall, who described what he called the agglomeration effect in cities, where basically you had this density of industry and individuals and sectors within urban confines, often very congested, and that had a dividend, I guess, the agglomeration effect. How is it different from that?

JULIE WAGNER

We actually view that as an evolution. We look at cities, they evolve and shift and change over time in terms of how dirt roads at one point turn into railroads turn into roads. So there is this wonderful evolution of how cities evolve for better or worse, and there's a lot of people, sociologists, ecologists, demographers, economists, that really like to explore that evolution and why, and explain why.

When we looked at industrial districts, which is what you're describing, in the 1890s

into the early 1900s, what you have is a phenomenon of industrial districts. This is your Manchesters and your Milans and a whole sprinkling of other places across the globe where you basically found industry in very dense, compact areas completing either identical or complementary work in small quarters. That allowed a scaling effect in terms of moving supplies that could be providing support for a range of different enterprises.

But what was happening in that phenomenon was knowledge exchange. They were learning and helping and teaching each other, given the close proximity. That's why this phenomenon that we're talking about is in some essence the reurbanisation because it's taking that story again, which is close quarters, sharing information and knowledge to grow and expand what is possible.

ERIC VAN BEMMEL

Many people might think of Silicon Valley as the quintessential innovation district but it's not quite the urban hub that you're talking about, is it?

JULIE WAGNER

The Silicon Valley is a regional cluster, a very successful one, a still very dominant innovation cluster, but it doesn't have what we're talking about. What we're talking about is an innovation economy at a hyper-local scale. When I say hyper-local, I mean it's a walkable scale, five-minute, 10-minute walk where you have, like your industrial district story, this intensity of proximity.

ERIC VAN BEMMEL

A neighbourhood size.

JULIE WAGNER

Exactly.

ERIC VAN BEMMEL

What are the prerequisites for an innovation district to take off?

JULIE WAGNER

We actually dissect it first in three dimensions, that we look at innovation districts with the economic assets that you need to have, the physical assets and the social networking assets. The economic assets can be things like these anchor institutions, so these can be your R&D-laden universities and hospitals. They can also be R&D-laden companies that have a strong arm around research and development and that are generating a whole series of activities and innovation. You have your small and medium enterprises, you have your start-ups and your growing scale-ups and your important intermediaries such as accelerators. Those are your economic assets.

What we generally find is that when we go into a place and we say oh, this looks like it's an emerging innovation district, we look at that but we also look at what are your economic strengths, so what are your cluster strengths? Is it in biomedical, is it in IT, is it in robotics, and what are the measures of that. So we look at a range of patterns

to joint publications, the list goes on and on. Let's try to understand what your strengths are, your niches, where you actually may have emerging clusters, where you may have some clusters that are decreasing but to understand the dynamic from an economic cluster perspective. That's our first entree into that story, but that is really only one dimension.

The next dimension is the physical, which is do you have the density? Do you have that proximity? For example, you are in the heart of a city where you have a walkable street grid, you have the accessibility to transit, you have a mix of open space and parks. Your buildings are actually designed to be close to the street so you can have a tight relationship between them with the pedestrians that are walking by and the experience within the buildings. These are some of the important bones, if you will.

Then we look at the 21st century bones where we say okay, that's transit, that's high-speed fibre that's going to be connecting and igniting these places at a hyper-rate. So that's physical.

ERIC VAN BEMMEL

A proper communications network.

JULIE WAGNER

Right. Then there's the networking piece, which is around how people are interacting with each other. How are they meeting each other, how are they learning from each other, how are they growing together as a collective community? There's two different ways that we look at this. It is a sociological lens without question and we have pulled from some sociologists in this space, which is looking at strong ties and weak ties.

The strong tie piece is those individuals that come from a common background. It could be experience, education, something that binds them naturally, and that those strong ties are often very helpful in checking in - is this a good idea? You could be sharing information that's secretive and you know that you can trust them, but it allows these check-ins and/or elevating an idea because you have the similar kind of background. Those kinds of relationships are important, without question, in this type of ecosystem.

So you have your strong ties, which I just explained, and then you have your weak ties, which are very different, people with very different backgrounds, very different disciplines, very different experiences. It could be someone that is working in music and someone that is in biomedical engineering, and that they would naturally not come together but they have very different pieces of information, different insights, different experiences, different observations and intel, and that those can push each other in ways that people with the same background and understanding or network just don't have.

ERIC VAN BEMMEL

Those arise as a consequence of the way the place is set up or the way it's evolved.

JULIE WAGNER

Yes.

ERIC VAN BEMMEL

They're not being monitored and encouraged necessarily, or are they? Are there people coming in and encouraging human networking and how do they do that?

JULIE WAGNER

They are. It's the strong tie and weak tie that you want in these settings. You have innovation districts now that are creatively trying to encourage and facilitate the growth of both of these types of networks. In some places, they literally have people fulltime thinking about this.

ERIC VAN BEMMEL

Can you tell us more about how they actually encourage people to form these strong and weak ties with others? How do you form ties with people who you normally would not encounter that you would benefit from encountering in this context?

JULIE WAGNER

Let me give an example of how a strong tie network is strengthened, and it's not just at the district scale. This is actually phenomena that's happening across regions. Silicon Valley for sure is doing this. Eindhoven in the Netherlands is doing this where they have, for example, tech meet-ups where you have a structured conversation for people in the field of tech to talk about a common problem, to collectively problem-solve it without exposing any IP issues. What does that do? It allows people to meet each other that they haven't had any connection to prior so we're trying to now deepen the pool of your network.

ERIC VAN BEMMEL

Because these were extracurricular activities to their normal company work?

JULIE WAGNER

Exactly. This could be right after work, it could be at lunch. The other benefit is actually you are solving a problem that might be slowing or stymying a collective group, even though they're in their own individual world of industry or university or research institute but there is something common that they're sort of stuck on. The fact that they have that kind of conversation and you start building that kind of relationship ultimately gets to building trust. This is an important underpinning.

Now, in Eindhoven in the Netherlands, if they were to give a presentation, one of their slides would just have the words trust on it as being an important fabric that allows their ecosystem to flourish. Again, Eindhoven is at a regional scale, but this is a principle that can be applied at this very small neighbourhood scale of an innovation district. So often what we're finding is there's real interesting innovations around social sciences, around how people can collaborate or how the physical realm can support innovation and we can apply it across different scales. That's really part of the fascination with this piece of work.

ERIC VAN BEMMEL

Now, Julie, you talk about three proven models of these innovation districts. You mentioned a moment ago anchor institutions, but there's also this notion of repurposing inner-city industrial sites and there's also the science parks and campuses that are already pre-existing. Can you tell us more about that?

JULIE WAGNER

When we originally wrote our paper in 2014, we outlined three types. One is the anchor-plus model which we just have been talking about. Another type is the remake of commonly outmoded industrial land, often along waterfronts, that are now all of a sudden reignited with possibilities if they're connected by transit. That is an interesting model, that's a Barcelona story. There's a story of that in Melbourne, in Australia.

There's a whole series of places that have that story where the strength of that is attracting the right kinds of anchors and industry and small firms to create that ecosystem, but it's starting with a land phenomenon where you have to say how are we going to transform this space to become an innovation ecosystem. That's a great deal of thinking, a great deal of intentionality to come with that story.

The third category that we had talked about was the urbanised science parks model.

ERIC VAN BEMMEL

Now, science parks have been around for a while, right?

JULIE WAGNER

Yes.

ERIC VAN BEMMEL

We've seen them usually often on the outskirts of universities or industrial areas.

JULIE WAGNER

Often the outskirts of cities, easily accessible by car.

ERIC VAN BEMMEL

Yes. And only by car, in many cases.

JULIE WAGNER

And that's changing, in some cases. Let's take Research Triangle Park, which is in the United States.

ERIC VAN BEMMEL

That's in the state of North Carolina, is that correct?

JULIE WAGNER

That is correct. You have a science park that has said to themselves through internal process, what does our next generation of work look like to remain competitive in this

increasingly competitive landscape. They interestingly have put together a framework plan that was very articulate in the fact that they recognise there are changing preferences on the part of workers and also on the part of firms of wanting to be in more quality-laden places that are walkable, that are amenity-laden, that have these kinds of choices for their workers, and that if they want to move to the next generation of their space that maybe they want to rethink their physical landscape and the clustering of their economic actors in new ways.

So what they are doing, and I think they're really doing a fascinating piece of work, it's a combination of planning and design and true implementation and then reassessing and seeing how over time they're growing and evolving and shaping themselves around, for example, specific nodes that are, rather than redesigning the entire park, which is tremendously large, let's concentrate our efforts in discrete hubs or nodes and put a lot of our energy and focus there in creating spaces for start-ups, in creating spaces for medium-sized enterprises and having some of our larger industry there and having retail.

So they are importantly focusing on how we have the transit connection, how are we having that kind of proximity, how are we having that kind of spill-over experience where you have people colliding into each other. These types of things they're thinking about in such a deliberate and thoughtful way, and I see this as a nice model for those science parks that ask themselves reflectively, what is our next move?

ERIC VAN BEMMEL

This is Up Close, and I'm Eric van Bommel in conversation with urban planner and thinker Julie Wagner from the Brookings Institution. She's also co-director of the Anne T. and Robert M. Bass Initiative on Innovation and Placemaking. We're talking about innovation districts.

So Julie, the feeling I'm getting is that there seems to be an organic growth element to innovation districts, because earlier you talked about when we notice an innovation district starting to emerge, which suggests that there is - noticing something happening on its own, if you like. But there's also the need to get these various organisations, various actors together. Lots of guidance, lots of, if you like, central planning on some level. The spectrum of coming out of the pond versus the boardroom, where is it coming from?

JULIE WAGNER

This is an excellent question, and it's a question that is often asked. My answer is that it really is a combination of both, that if you're overly intentional you will be missing what is really an organic process ultimately where that if you're going to achieve an innovation ecosystem things start to flourish on their own, connections are made on their own, ideas are facilitated on their own. That's the magic and the ultimate ambition of this. In some cases, there has to be - in fact, in many cases there needs to be a level of intentionality to get this going and to facilitate the continuance of this. So there often is some sort of governance mechanism.



But there is a lot of organic work that's already been laid and that has to be recognised and valued in this, which is the natural agglomeration of these firms, of these talent pools. This is a story about building on strengths and so many of these cities have, over the last 20 to 30 years, laid the transit infrastructure that created the spark, or that they have a series of R&D labs that are part of a university that have already been cultivating industry-university relationship. These are the things that have already been manifesting.

ERIC VAN BEMMEL

Yeah. The pump has been primed. It's about building up what's there.

JULIE WAGNER

Exactly.

ERIC VAN BEMMEL

There's a critical mass that's been reached.

JULIE WAGNER

Yeah. I think the concept around innovation districts is that there's an end-state and really what it is is just an evolution. It's an acknowledgement that we have something here. It's something that's been laid and has been growing for some time; now the question is how do we want to get to the next level. So we find that a lot of these innovation districts are in very different places and often we give them insights, the Brookings Institution and Project for Public Spaces, who's our partner, we give them insights as to things they may want to be thinking about.

It's not us coming in as experts, it's us sharing the knowledge that others have imparted and shining a light on what could be and what is possible or things they really need to think about. In some cases, it's a frank conversation about what you don't have and how that's really going to undermine your efforts. In others it's here's a particular strength that you have that you need to be exploiting more and so shining a light on that. It's really an interesting discovery for how we can help a whole range of innovation districts emerge as a collective, continue to learn from each other and grow together.

ERIC VAN BEMMEL

There is an irony here though. I think that innovation districts suggest physical proximity, which gives a certain energy and a certain buzz. You're promoting a village-like atmosphere with these strong and weak links, but we live in an era of connectivity, right, that digital connectivity, that theoretically, distance means nothing anymore. So why is that we need to have the physical closeness? Why can't we just do this on industrial social media instead?

JULIE WAGNER

You ask a really great question. I think part of the answer is the fact that the market is already showing that these particular clusters are needing to be near each other naturally in themselves. They are naturally binding themselves in a very close

geographic radius because they realise they have complex information, tacit knowledge, a reason or a rationale as to why they need to be close together.

ERIC VAN BEMMEL

But you can be in Anchorage, Alaska and I can be in Adelaide, Australia and we can share that, but what is it about being human that requires us to be in physical proximity for certain kinds of creative sparks to fly?

JULIE WAGNER

I get that, and if you wanted to actually tease that apart, you could say a couple of things. One is that tacit information is very difficult to explain. Sometimes it's very experiential. That's what tacit knowledge is; it's experiential and often takes time and explanation where you need to use your hands, where you really need to understand what's happening in someone's eyes, where you need to have the more iterative conversations that often evolve and happen over time. Yesterday when we met, I saw that you were starting to make this illustration on your piece of paper; that actually made me realise that I'm not quite understanding what you're saying.

It's this kind of piece that we're talking about and in fact, this was a piece of research that I completed on the design of innovation spaces because I was trying to understand the notion of technology and the extent to which that is replacing this kind of exchange, and what I concluded in reading a lot of other literature and then research by other researchers that were trying to understand this, is that in the innovation economy or where you have economic clusters, where you have complex information, highly tacit knowledge, it really does demand a more intensity of communication.

And, when you have this phenomenon where you have different disciplines, which is an important phenomenon in this innovation district concept, you have different disciplines from biomedical to IT that are coming together in new ways as a means to innovate, they're using very different language. They have very different instruments of which to apply, they're using technologies that are vastly different and that they need to literally come together to help understand how they are speaking their own language, how that can be translated together.

ERIC VAN BEMMEL

There's almost no other way other than to meet physically?

JULIE WAGNER

It makes it far more complicated.

ERIC VAN BEMMEL

Julie, surely these innovation districts can be victims of their own success. For example, in Boston's case, I read recently that the real estate prices are going up, that there's gentrification. Some of the smaller players like the small start-ups are having problems finding a place in the innovation district. How do you counter that, counter the success of these places that attracts the larger players and the rising

prices, how do you monitor and keep that under control?

JULIE WAGNER

We actually have just put together a set of principles which we call the 12 principles of innovation districts, and one of those principles is get ahead of the affordability issue. Plan for it upfront. You have Barcelona and Boston that looked at that, particularly San Francisco is having to do that, especially in these hot markets. This is a big issue that needs to be focused on front and centre.

Some places have requirements now where they'd say okay, if you're going to be building a building that's this high with this kind of FAR and density, you need to allow 10 percent for start-up spaces that are affordable and starting to build that in. Increasingly, you have places that are trying to apply new tools to get at that affordability issue. Generally, what we're finding is in these hot markets it's often still not enough.

And so I think what we are finding ourselves in in this spate of innovation where there's a lot happening in a very short period of time, we're realising that our 20th century instruments and intermediaries and incentives are out of date and that we really need to think through what do we now do under these new rules with these new conditions. That is in part on us as researchers and as policy thinkers to be pushing that, and it's also about trying to then have conversations with government, to be thinking what does that need to look like. Or with the development community; we need new development models. How do we do that? We know that there's going to be new kinds of risk. How does that get factored in? These are the conversations that we need to have.

ERIC VAN BEMMEL

Julie, we've heard about some of these quite successful innovation districts in different parts of the world. Surely there must be some that don't do quite as well, that flounder. What are some of the things that prevent these districts from succeeding?

JULIE WAGNER

Let me give, in general terms, some of the lessons that we've found in cases where they're either struggling to start or struggling in their continuation of success. You have ones that are struggling to start, often because you have strong institutions or industry in their own right but are unable to work together as a collective at the level that they need to. They need to have an integrated approach with a common vision and a set of priorities. That is a new way of thinking. This is really pushing organisations and institutions out of their old mould.

ERIC VAN BEMMEL

Yeah. You're asking a lot of them.

JULIE WAGNER

That's a lot. Some are just able to do that nimbly, and others are not. We've spent

time trying to help and understand what has to happen, what are the triggers that will enable those ones that are slow-moving to go into the fast track? I don't have an answer for that yet. Perhaps some of our listeners will have an answer to that. But another piece of that story about where there's some real struggle is when you have cases where you have government playing too heavy a role throughout the entire story.

Because government - let's take a city government where you have mayors every four years or every three years - you have them changing and the next mayor will have different priorities. One mayor will have a very strong focus and priority around an innovation district; the next one will have a shifting priority that may not align with that. Then, given that either policy will change or funding will change, and that if the right structures are not set up where you have a strong local leadership class that is not city-led, you will run the risk of just having a deluded and ultimately disintegrated innovation district.

#### ERIC VAN BEMMEL

The economist Enrico Moretti, in his book *The New Geography of Jobs* writes about this notion of the great divergence, which is a growing divide between those cities that have been able to surf the knowledge wave, if you like, and those stranded on the sandbanks of industrial history. This has led to a hollowing-out of the economy, the jobs economy, where high-skill, high-tech jobs, they pay really well but the other ones, low-skill, low-tech mean low pay and there's not much in between. Is there a way that these innovation districts can ensure that that hollowing-out doesn't happen? How do you build in inclusivity?

#### JULIE WAGNER

I would say that Enrico Moretti also looks at a ripple effect or a spill-over effect, if you will, from the innovation economy that for one, every one innovation job you produce five other jobs. That could be around service, and be around retail. Now, that offers some interesting insights but it also asks a lot of questions about who's filling those jobs, which is a very important question for cities, especially where there is a lot of economic disadvantage and polarisation. I think this is a really important question that cities, locally, should be looking at.

Another piece of information which we found particularly relevant for this research, also by the Brookings Institution, that found that 40 percent of STEM-oriented occupations do not require a college degree or a PhD degree. This is US data, but it sheds some light on the fact that you don't necessarily have to have this PhD to be part of the innovation economy, but what it does also then say well, who is filling those jobs, and again, these are the right questions that these cities and communities are asking and having these conversations about.

The part for us that is quite fascinating with the innovation district phenomenon, given that it's so hyper-local that it is a really manageable geography. We're not talking about these big, broad regions but we're trying to figure out how do we address some of these really fundamental questions. The smaller geography allows

it also be an experimental geography. And so these questions around inclusion often allow us to try to incubate and test new ideas about how to get greater numbers of people from disadvantaged communities into this economy, and this is actually a piece of work that will be ongoing because it's so fundamental to this.

Inclusion and innovation really should be locking hands here. In the United States, for example, you have a rather substantial number of these emerging innovation districts, largely around anchors but not necessarily, that are very close to or adjacent to disadvantage communities. That really presents an opportunity where before you could have this distance issue where you have the geography of innovation out in the suburban area and yet the people that are highly disadvantaged are in the city, and there's now an issue about how you connect them, where here you have an issue of proximity and that opens up a whole new door of possibility which we are really wanting to explore in the next wave of our work.

Some of these places already are really looking at that. Philadelphia is doing some real interesting work, a whole series of kinds of ways that they're thinking about strengthening the innovation and inclusion pipeline, if you will. St Louis, for sure, is doing that, and then of course a number of places in Europe. It's just an important topic that these places are saying to themselves, if this actually is going to be realised it has to be a top agenda item. This is not lip service, this is literally how do you work this into your work plan? How do you rethink this whole notion about innovation and what that means for the broader community.

ERIC VAN BEMMEL

So it's not just economic prerogative versus social equity, you're trying to bring the two together.

JULIE WAGNER

That's right.

ERIC VAN BEMMEL

I read about the Barcelona innovation district, 22@, that they were building in social housing from the start in their plans.

JULIE WAGNER

That is correct. One of the things that's interesting about their story is that they used zoning as a tool to create a new economy. They had an area of land which we call the reurbanised urban land model of an innovation district, and they up-zoned, so they increased the density but with conditions where they would have affordable housing or parks and open space because they didn't have enough. Or they would have facilities that would be incubating or teaching facilities for a range of people with a range of educational experiences or the ones that need a lot more. So they used land use to build in these other objectives, which continue to impress me to this day, and I often say well, let's look at your zoning as one of your ways to catalyse these other realities.

ERIC VAN BEMMEL

Now, that Barcelona innovation district, 22@, the planners of that district going back - starting in the '90s, they admitted this would be a multi-decade project. So how long do these things take to reach a kind of maturity and how will we know it?

JULIE WAGNER

Innovation districts is a story of evolution. There is no endpoint. There is no endgame. There is a process of growth, discovery, experimentation, evolution, adaptation. This is what this is and it should be building on your natural strengths and the investments that you have laid in the decades prior. It changes and evolves like cities change and evolve, and ultimately the ambition is how to get the best out of everything you have in that space, how to get the best out of your people, the best out of your organisations as a collective, how to get the most out of your physical landscape, how to get the best out of your networks. This is optimising.

ERIC VAN BEMMEL

Julie, can you share with us one of the insights that's come out of your research?

JULIE WAGNER

I would say one of our latest insights has to do with scale, that you have an innovation district that could be 10, 15, 20-minute walking distance, perhaps a bit more.

ERIC VAN BEMMEL

The 20-minute city.

JULIE WAGNER

Right. The 20-minute city, exactly. So you have this vast landscape. Granted it's smaller but it's still vast when you're thinking about social connectivity, and what we're finding, interestingly, is that a number of these innovation districts - not all, but a number of them are finding that the secret their success is to go small, to go within this broader district and to take a nodal approach, to go maybe within a block radius or along a particular corridor, and really concentrate their efforts there; have a critical mass of economic actors and start-ups and accelerators and corporate R&D facilities. Innovation centres really have that critical mass of activities on the economic side.

Then really focus on the physical, how do you strengthen those quality places that those actors want that will find magnetic. Make sure that there is the wireless, the kind of technology that they need, the high speed. How you create the kind of infrastructure, making sure that it's connected with the transit or making sure that it's a walkable grid and a wonderful experience on walking down the street. How you ignite the kinds of activities on the ground floor, looking at that ground floor as prime real estate, not just for corporates or sterile lobbies, which is often what happens, but to try to transform them working with the tenants or working with the building owners and having those also be community spaces. Whether it's spaces that are wireless where people can just sit and do some work for some time or maybe there's a café

that others can access, but to be thinking about those spaces.

And then there is the social networking piece on how to activate that very small geographic area, whether it's that node or corridor, but again concentrating your efforts on economic, concentrating on the physical, concentrating on the social, and then only spreading with success. This is one of the interesting insights that I think we've stumbled across in the last year.

ERIC VAN BEMMEL

Julie Wagner, it's been a pleasure talking to you. Thanks for joining us on Up Close.

JULIE WAGNER

Thank you.

ERIC VAN BEMMEL

Julie Wagner is a non-resident senior fellow at the Brookings Institution and co-director of the Anne T. and Robert M. Bass Initiative on Innovation and Placemaking. She's written extensively on innovation and cities, including as co-author of the ground-breaking research papers, *The Rise of Innovation Districts: A New Geography of Innovation in America* and *Innovation Spaces: The New Geography of Work*. If you'd like to know more about her work or read some of her reports or articles, you'll find them through links on the Up Close website.

Up Close is a production of the University of Melbourne, Australia. This episode was recorded on 21st September 2017. It was produced by Peter Mares and me, Eric van Bommel, with audio engineering by Gavin Nebauer. Thanks for listening and I hope you can join us again soon.

VOICEOVER

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