

TRANSFORMATION OF AREAS WITH DISUSED OR DEGRADED LAND IN URBAN CENTRES FOR THE CREATION OF INNOVATION POLES

Posted on 23/01/2024 by Naider

In 2000, Barcelona City Council launched the 22@ project to transform 200 hectares of declining industrial land in the Poble Nou district. Since its launch, 22@ has attracted more than 4,500 companies, employing almost 60,000 people, most of them highly qualified. Since the project's inception, it has sought to preserve most of the existing industrial structures, as well as to build affordable housing to attract young professionals. It was a visionary approach at the time and illustrative of the transformative potential of disused or run-down urban spaces.

Geographical proximity between technology companies, and between technology companies and knowledge creation centres such as universities, research centres and technology institutes, favours knowledge transfer and boosts productivity in the sector.

In particular, the digital sector can benefit enormously from this knowledge transfer. It should be remembered that in Spain the contribution of this sector to GDP reached 22% in 2020 and is expected to reach 40% by the end of 2025.

Opportunity:

Many cities have disused land that contributes little or no value to the local economy. A clear example is urban industrial areas that have been losing activity in recent decades, often becoming run-down areas.

Certain areas with disused or degraded land have potential as innovation poles, which can attract technology companies and knowledge creation centres.

These areas offer the following advantages:

- Price per square metre of office space is lower than in established commercial areas.
- As these areas are within or close to population centres, there is the possibility to travel to work on foot, by bicycle or by public transport.
- The availability of land and the low prices favour not only the establishment of the technology companies and knowledge creation centres themselves, but also other complementary services such as nurseries, catering businesses, sports centres, training academies, art centres and galleries, etc.
- Many former industrial areas include buildings with a high heritage value, which, when refurbished, add aesthetic value to the area. In addition, as these are often areas with large undeveloped spaces, it is possible to have green and recreational areas close to the workplace.

In addition to disused or degraded land, the areas to be considered should include the following characteristics:

- Being relatively centrally located in urban centres.

- Being located in medium to large urban centres with dynamic local or regional innovation systems, especially in the digital domain.
- Having disused buildings that can be converted to house businesses or knowledge creation centres.
- Belong to a city or region whose government prioritises innovation as a key driver of growth and transformation of the local economy.

Other areas with potential for transformation:

Examples of areas with disused or degraded land in urban centres with the potential to be transformed into innovation poles:

- **Bilbao:** Zorrotzaurre, Punta Zorrotza and Burtzena/Lutxana (as a joint zone)
- **Valencia:** La Creu Coberta and Vara de Quart
- **Málaga:** Polígono Industrial Ronda Exterior
- **Lisboa:** riverside, Beato and Marvila neighbourhoods

