

Officially launched more than 13 years ago, **Barcelona's 22@** – or Districte de la Innovació – is one of the most ambitious urban renewal projects in the world. It began as a government initiative to transition the historic but rundown industrial Poble Nou neighborhood into a technology and knowledge-driven economic powerhouse.

Today the **22@ District** plays host to universities, research and training centers, startups and cutting-edge technology companies alike. Since 2000, more than 3,500 businesses have moved to the innovation district and, with the almost 100,000 employees working there, Poble Nou has witnessed a nearly 25% increase in residents.



The growth has not been at random. The urban renewal project has created this surge in economic activity by fostering 5 specific “knowledge clusters”: Information and Computer Technology (ICT), Bio-Medical, Design, Energy, and Media. The idea is to connect both the international and local communities by creating physical and social networks to facilitate collaboration, capture talent and develop a sustainable business ecosystem. Well, it’s working. Barcelona’s model of rejuvenating a dilapidated area with sustainable economic and social development is being applied to other global cities such as Boston, Istanbul, Cape Town and Rio de Janeiro.

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The cluster approach works because the close proximity of the businesses allows them to work together to spur creativity and innovation through formal and informal channels. The 22@Network is the official group of companies that lead the way for advancement through innovation with monthly events and initiatives. The annual ~~Urban Cluster Day~~ is a symposium featuring over 700 representatives of the **22@** companies to gather ideas and make plans for the future. However, sometimes it’s the informal connections that produce the most potent ideas. With such amazing local and international talent occupying the same space, a 2km from the city center, original and innovative ideas can take shape over morning coffee or at a favorite restaurant.



This second idea, the informal knowledge exchange is why **22@ Districte de la Innovació** won't stay just an "urban renewal" project for much longer. The creators behind the **22@** gave a 3-pronged approach to the renewal process: Urban, Economic, and Social Renewal. The plan calls for more than 220,000 sq m<sup>2</sup> dedicated to new public parks and residential housing. The project has also encompassed massive urban builds such as the Parc Diagonal Mar and the controversial Torre Agbar by the French architect Jean Nouvel. Lastly, the brand new, state-of-the-art [Media TIC](#) building is now open in the heart of Poble Nou that will serve as a hub of research, training and technological advancement for all Barcelona citizens.