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Innovation Districts and Their Dilemmas With Place.

The global rise of innovation districts continues. In the United States alone, roughly 20 districts have reached a level of critical mass to warrant the name, concentrating a mix of research institutions, mature companies, start-ups and scale-ups, co-working spaces, and supportive intermediaries in close geographic proximity.

Brookings first described this new model of innovation in cities and urbanizing areas five years ago, and since then researchers and practitioners around the globe have been exploring how to help them thrive. Driven by broader economic and demographic trends, most districts emerge organically as established firms and start-ups choose to co-locate around universities, medical institutions and/or other anchors. But over time, as the number of actors increases, innovation district leaders often become much more intentional about working together to leverage their district assets, applying a “collaborate to compete” approach.

Yet even with the best intentions, considerable resources, and unbridled ambition, many innovation district leaders are challenged in their efforts to create a balance between growing the innovation economy, enhancing social and professional networks, and creating a high quality physical environment that facilitates both.

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The Brookings Institute

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