

# THE BUSINESS DISTRICTS: AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE CITY OR AN AUTONOMOUS ENTITY?

## HOW TO CHARACTERISE A BUSINESS DISTRICT?

Business districts, often considered as a city's economic hub, vary in age, size, location and management mode.

- **Age**

La Défense is indisputably the oldest. It was founded fifty years ago, at a time when nobody in Europe was thinking about creating a new business district. Its example gave birth to a trend that twenty years later led to the launch of Canary Wharf, and then to Beijing fifteen years ago.

- **Size**

When it was created, Canary Wharf was the largest urban redevelopment project in Europe. In contrast, La Défense only extends over 160 hectares and Beijing covers just over 4 km<sup>2</sup>.

- **Management mode**

There is no single model for success. At Canary Wharf, for example, a private consortium under the aegis of Morgan Stanley manages all operations from urban planning, funding and construction, right up to building rental and maintenance. Accordingly, this management mode follows the investor-developer model.

On the other hand, in Beijing, Montreal and Curitiba, business districts are fully integrated in the city and actually managed by the local city council.

For its part, the La Défense business district is located 6 kilometres from the centre of Paris and has been developed by EPAD, a public enterprise.

## COMMON CHALLENGES AND ISSUES

Despite the variety of their locations, business districts are faced with comparable challenges and similar issues.

- **Transportation**

Whether you travel in Beijing, London, Paris or Montreal, road traffic poses a problem. Some developers have sought a solution by locating their business district outside the city centre, as is the case of Canary Wharf and La Défense. Others, such as Beijing, Curitiba or Montreal are situated in the very heart of the city.

Consequently, varied and low-polluting means of access have to be deployed. In this area, France is an interesting case in point as it has turned to bicycles as a means of public transport. Montreal, where 80% of journeys are already via public transportation systems, would now like to copy this French example.

When all is said and done, public transportation remains one of business districts' key factors for success. On top of the fact that it contributes to reducing traffic jams and pollution, by way of suitable pricing policies, it can play a role in social redistribution.

- ***Building, infrastructure and environmental quality***

In order to attract investors, on the one hand, it is important to offer a good level of infrastructure and, on the other hand, to offer a healthy environment.

Accordingly, when Morgan Stanley embarked on construction work for Canary Wharf, it based its plans on the observation that 95% of London's building stock is obsolete. Mindful of the need to respect the environment and improve energy efficiency, Morgan Stanley opted for high-rise buildings. In fact, it has been proved that the latter consume less energy per occupant than other types of buildings. In addition, all the buildings have BREEAM Excellence and LEED Platinum certification and are subject to twice-yearly assessment.

Population density also appears to be one of the prerequisites for sustainable development in urban areas, provided that it is adapted to cultural specificities. This is the reason for building high-rise blocks at La Défense, not in an attempt to compete in terms of the highest building, but in order to raise the level of everyone's wellbeing and fulfilment and to control energy costs.

Protecting our heritage, managing resources and cutting pollution and waste are also vital objectives. Obviously, it would be preferable to take account of these factors before and during the construction phase, as is the case for developing Beijing business district. However, older business districts are also focusing efforts to achieve these objectives, as witnessed in the city of Montreal over the past 25 years, with its considerable improvements in business centre infrastructure.

- ***Governance***

Business district sustainability also relies on the involvement of all its stakeholders. Accordingly, at Canary Wharf, Morgan Stanley is developing projects aimed at the surrounding communities by opening school and sports centres and creating jobs. Currently, 25% of employees are from these communities. Moreover, they involve investors, builders and tenants in building energy control programmes.

In the same vein, in Montreal, high-rise building owners participate in implementing recycling programmes and inhabitants play an active role in the associations in charge of resources and waste management.

- ***Desegregation***

Desegregation constitutes a vital criterion of success for a business district.

At Canary Wharf, cultural, retail and leisure activities cohabit alongside companies and financial services. At Curitiba, La Défense and Montreal, social desegregation and usage desegregation are also considered indispensable. They enable the business district to remain alive in the evenings and at weekends, and attract and retain a varied population.

By way of example, Canary Wharf is the workplace for 90 000 employees and welcomes 500 000 visitors every week. La Défense has 150 000 employees and 20 000 inhabitants. 400 000 people live in the business centre of Montreal (not counting visitors and students enrolled in the 3 universities located in the area) and 1.8 million people live in the Curitiba business district.

In this way, desegregation guarantees that the human being remains at the heart of the Economy and that, rather than being divorced from the city, the business district remains truly integrated.

**Otherwise, a business district created *ex nihilo*, and as a stand-alone entity that turns into a no man's land outside office hours, will appear less attractive to investors. Forging and consolidating links with the city will sow the seeds for the emergence of a genuine neighbourhood spirit, improve living and working conditions, boost the number and variety of activities and raise the level of personal and property security.**