

# THE BUSINESS DISTRICTS' NETWORK: A NEW SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT INTERNATIONAL STAKEHOLDER

## BUSINESS DISTRICTS: SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

Business districts vary in size, age and specialisation. For example, the Shinhan business district in Shanghai, has only just celebrated its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary, covers 1.7km<sup>2</sup> and specialises in luxury shops and offices, although restaurants, leisure activities and housing are also present. For its part, the city of Frankfurt is the workplace for 1 250 000 employees, but only half of them actually live in the centre. Frankfurt is home to several business districts specialised in various sectors of the economy, i.e. financial services, the automobile industry or higher education, not to mention being home to one of Europe 's largest airports.

Business districts often have a large foreign population: 40% in Frankfurt, including 58 different nationalities. Consequently, they are open to the other countries of the world with which they maintain close commercial ties. They are also in competition at the national level. In the case of Frankfurt, it vies with Munich, Stuttgart and Hamburg in the financial services sector and with Berlin and Munich for cultural activities. The rivalry is even more intense at the worldwide level. For example, Frankfurt and London compete to attract talent and the head offices of large corporations and financial services institutions.

Faced with this situation, business districts, such as Frankfurt or Shanghai, would really welcome the introduction of a special international standard that would place them on an equal footing with their rivals. In fact, some enterprises would view such an initiative very favourably.

Actually, despite their diversity, business districts are faced with similar sets of issues and therefore have everything to gain by co-operating and learning from each other. Moreover, certain challenges will only be overcome by working together on a global basis.

## BUSINESS DISTRICTS NETWORK: WHY AND HOW?

Without a doubt, everyone would derive benefits from pooling ideas and sharing experience via a network or even by adopting international standards, subject to taking due account of each country's specificities and national legislation. In fact, not everybody would start from the same standpoint and therefore it would be difficult to impose one rule for all. Among the questions to be decided, would be the matter of which body would have the power to ensure compliance.

Sustainable development is doubtless the determining criterion for success for modern business districts and can be divided into set of issues to be used as bases for deciding a future form of co-operation.

## BASES FOR CO-OPERATION

To ensure that business districts remain vibrant places outside office hours, we have to guarantee **desegregation**. With this in mind, the Shinhan district, in Shanghai, has developed by retaining a balance between its various functionalities: work, leisure, housing, hospitality and culture. Accordingly, business districts are transforming themselves into districts for living around business and enterprises are being called upon to provide clear

answers in terms of daily quality of life and to adopt a proactive approach towards sustainable development if they wish to avoid being shut out of the market.

- ***Mobility***

One of these approaches relates to mobility. In fact, the very large inflow of non-resident employees, e.g. 600 000 per day in Frankfurt, obviously poses traffic problems. In London, the introduction of a congestion charge on vehicles entering the business district convinced a vast number of people to switch to public transportation. Moreover, measures have been taken to encourage people to travel to work on foot or by bicycle. Along the same lines, the bicycle rental scheme launched by JCDecaux in Paris has improved intra-district mobility.

- ***The combat against climate change***

Another set of issues, and an important one at that, concerns the combat against climate change. This is the absolute priority of the Mayor of London, Ken Livingstone. As carbon emissions come mainly from existing buildings, their rehabilitation is the order of the day. As for new buildings, the focus has to be on making them less energy hungry with increased recourse to renewable energy solutions. In this domain, the United Kingdom is lagging behind its rivals and, in order to close the gap, regulations are being drafted to stimulate energy efficiency and development of green technologies. This is also the case in the area of waste treatment where public-private partnerships and co-operation with foreign cities will underpin these new markets.

- ***Form of cooperation***

The example of The Global Compact is illuminating in this area. This is a voluntary organisation that currently brings together 7 000 enterprises, including 400 French enterprises that form the largest national group, with other categories of members, such as associations or schools. On joining the organisation, each member commits to abiding by 10 basic principles that cover areas such as improving working conditions, sustainable mobility, combating climate change and sharing experience and best practices.

The Network could be subdivided into expertise platforms that group together business districts and enterprises around sets of issues forming the basis of their co-operation, with the aim of proposing strategies to improve living and working conditions in their territories. In this respect, JCDecaux has already created a study group committed to a similar approach.

Then, there remains the question of standards. An overarching international standard would avoid national regulations disrupting competition by imposing different burdens on enterprises. However, who will have the power to enforce compliance? Certainly not the United Nations, as it is only mandated to make recommendations.

Nevertheless, and even in the absence of international standards, we are moving forward in the right direction. In the real estate sector, for example, enterprises have already radically changed their behaviour and now view cutting energy consumption as a key priority. In fact, they have realised that this improves the marketability of their building developments, corresponds to employees' and users' requests, creates a positive image with the public and raises their ratings on the financial markets. In the same vein, the international awareness created by JCDecaux's bicycle-sharing scheme shows how the public welcomes new ideas when they correspond to expectations, independently of any regulatory changes or subsidies.

**Consequently, the creation of a business districts network and the organisation of international summits such as the World Business Districts Summit for Sustainable Development, meet the need to increase co-operation and develop knowledge-**

**sharing, not only between business districts, but also with enterprises, associations and other relevant stakeholders.**

**Its overriding objective will be to debate and propose concrete solutions to the set of issues currently faced by business districts throughout the world.**

**Its resources and actions will not only focus on promoting and encouraging adoption of international standards but also on consultation to respond, in a collective manner, to demands for better living and working conditions on the part of enterprises, employees and users and to support green technologies that contribute to fulfilling these demands.**