

Ufficio Stampa della Provincia autonoma di Trento

Piazza Dante 15, 38122 Trento

Tel. 0461 494614 - Fax 0461 494615

uff.stampa@provincia.tn.it

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Massimo Gaggi journey through hi-tech districts supporting economic growth in the US

Hi-tech districts in the US are going beyond the “traditional” areas of West Coast and New York: new districts are emerging all over the country, from Portland - nicknamed “the city of engineers” – to Seattle, from the spin-offs of major universities in Austin to the design district in Miami. Massimo Gaggi, historical correspondent of the Corriere della Sera in New York, together with Patricia Thomas, American journalist from Associated Press Television News, brings us in a stimulating journey through the US, exploring main features of each hi-tech district and explaining how different technological specialisation can contribute to the economic growth of such a territories.

“Many times when we think about places where growth works – says Gaggi – our first attention goes to the Silicon Valley. Yes, it is the most famous hi-tech district worldwide but along the US new “brains hub” are growing too”. Starting from San Francisco, that is becoming more and more expensive above all in real estate, new hi-tech districts are blooming in bordering areas. First of all in northern direction, towards Seattle (Washington), where in 1979 Microsoft put its headquarter, followed in 1984 by Amazon, and towards Portland (Oregon) where is based the giant of processor Intel. Then in southern direction, towards the “Silicon Beach” a short strip on the Californian shore close to Santa Monica.

Concerning New York, many changes occurred in the las decades. “New York is famous worldwide for Wall Street – explains Gaggi - but is not the only “core business” of the metropolis. New activity are rising on the shore of Hudson river, new business are substituting obsolete sectors as textile and food industries”. Indeed in the last few years the meat-packing district in Brooklyn has been replaced by design & art galleries, the Bronx has lost its bad reputation and has given places to industrial engineers enterprises active in safety/security sector. Yet, also IT companies have taken places in New York giving life to the so-called “Silicon Alley” a small district in Manhattan that “jokes” with the name of the more famous Californian “brother”. In addition in New York have to be mentioned also the bio-tech, nano-tech and pharma industries.

“Anyway, one of the most creative “innovation cluster” – adds Gaggi – is located in Austin (Texas is one of the fastest growing State within the US and not only because of oil industry)”. The main features of Austin success consists in its multidisciplinary environment, where aside hi-tech industries are prospering cultural activities as art, design, music and interactive media. “An example of this cultural background that is nourishing hi-tech industries too – outlines Gaggi – and represents a must see convention along over the US is the South by Southwest Festival (SXSW), the highest revenue-producing event for the Austin economy, with an estimated economic impact of more than 200 million US\$”. Finally, in Gaggi journey it deserves a mention Miami too, renowned worldwide for tourism but last decades it is emerging for its fast growing design and architecture district.

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