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CEO

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"Interdisciplinarity is not a marginal feature but a structural precondition"

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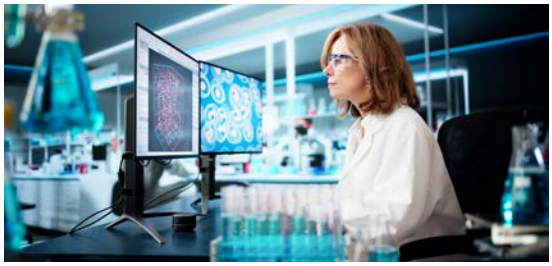

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Meetings INTERNATIONAL

LEGALLY RESPONSIBLE EDITOR IN CHIEF Atti Soenarso
atti.soenarso@meetingsinternational.com

PUBLISHER / GLOBAL SALES Roger Kellerman
roger.kellerman@meetingsinternational.com

TEXT Roger Kellerman, Atti Soenarso, Scott Steinberg

PHOTOS / IMAGES Sara Appelgren (including front cover), Magnus Malmberg, Mark Strozier

DESIGN KellermanDesign.com

EDITORIAL RAYS OF SUNSHINE Chloé Zhao & Lukasz Zal + Sarrita King + Robert Duvall + Jacob Collier + Bong Joon Hoo

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Geopolitics Reshapes the GLOBAL LIFE SCIENCES LANDSCAPE

GLOBAL TENSIONS, trade barriers, and shifting alliances are changing how life science companies operate, invest, and innovate. The sector – including pharmaceuticals, biotechnology, and medical technology – faces growing geopolitical risks. Trade disputes, national security priorities, and evolving supply chains now directly affect research funding and the availability of essential medicines. Life sciences, closely linked to science parks, have shifted from a global, cost-focused model to one where nations treat pharmaceutical production, data, and R&D as strategic security assets, positioning health as sovereign infrastructure.

At *World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2026* in Davos, geopolitics was identified as a primary force reshaping the global life sciences landscape, with geoeconomic confrontation named a top global risk. A clear message emerged across panels, dialogues, and roundtables: life sciences do not operate in isolation. The sector has become a competitive arena where nations seek advantage, technologies converge, and market dynamics rapidly shift. In this context, intersecting trends in trade and policy, innovation, operations, and competition shape the industry more than any single factor, underscoring why 2026 is pivotal for long-term strategy.

Geopolitics is shifting the global life sciences sector from hyperglobalisation to a more regional, fragmented system focused on resilience, national security, and partnershoring. The industry is reducing its dependence on volatile supply chains, especially those linked to China, and diversifying manufacturing to regions such as India and Brazil. Europe, for example, faces increasing pressure to stay competitive as global dynamics evolve, particularly due to US–China competition in biotech and pharmaceuticals. Companies must now carefully choose locations for trials, manufacturing, sourcing, and R&D investment.

Beyond geographic shifts, science parks and the life sciences industry face significant geopolitical challenges. Trade disputes, tariffs, and rising economic nationalism have exposed weaknesses in global supply chains, leading to delays, higher costs, and strategic adjustments across the sector. In response to restrictive US immigration policies under the Trump administration, the European Union launched "Choose Europe for Science" to attract international scientific talent with substantial funding.

Governments and multinational companies now consider life sciences essential to national security and economic growth. Reports from Novartis and the German consulting firm Vality One highlight a growing consensus that strengthening domestic life science ecosystems is critical for resilience.

Science parks and the life sciences industry are increasingly interconnected through cross-sector collaboration and are both being reshaped by geopolitics. As sustainable development and technological sovereignty become global priorities, these ecosystems will likely grow even more connected. The next phase will be defined by innovation and how nations balance openness with resilience.

Three key takeaways emerged from the Davos forum. First, life sciences are undergoing a critical shift driven by geopolitics, fragmentation, and sovereign health strategies. Second, success will depend on rapidly scaling innovation, integrating AI across operations, and building resilience. Finally, competition and cooperation are intensifying as Big Tech transforms data, access, and value flows throughout the industry.

PHOTO Magnus Malmberg

Swedish-Indonesian **ATTI SOENARSO** *has worked as a journalist for over 40 years. She has worked for Scandinavia's largest daily newspaper, was TV4's first travel editor, has written for many Swedish travel magazines and has had several international clients. She has travelled the length and breadth of the world and written about destinations, people and meetings.*

MIRANDA

TEXT
Atti Soenarso

PHOTOS
Sara Appelgren

While travelling to Spain for a board meeting, **Lena Miranda**, CEO of Linköping Science Park in Sweden, visited Aba Technologies in Morocco – a company developing connected healthcare pods for remote diagnostics, illustrating how local challenges can spark globally relevant innovation.

MOROCCO, with a population of about 38 million, is emerging as a regional hub for digital entrepreneurship, driven by improvements in education and international connectivity. The healthcare pods Lena Miranda encountered were first developed during the Covid-19 pandemic. As Morocco strengthens its technological and economic foundations, it is attracting increased interest from global investors and companies looking to engage with its rapidly evolving market.

"Their innovation allows patients to conduct medical tests and consult with doctors via secure video links, providing a practical solution to physician shortages. Initially launched in Morocco, the technology has since been adopted in several regions, including the Middle East, and demonstrates how local challenges can inspire global innovation," says Lena Miranda.

"I'm genuinely energised by the opportunities that come from exploring innovation ecosystems in emerging markets. It is refreshing to step outside familiar contexts and see how new models develop in places, guided by bold visions for the future. The national incubator Technopark Morocco, now 20 years old and hosting six sites in five cities, has become a North African role model for supporting startups and entrepreneurial talent, and the impact is significant."

Lena Miranda became CEO of Linköping Science Park in Sweden in 2014, after ten years of entrepreneurial experience in recruitment and staffing, during which she built up the company Skill. She served five

“Science parks serve as spaces to explore new norms, policies, and social contracts”

years as chair of Swedish Incubators and Science Parks (SISP) and was a member of Sweden’s National Innovation Council. Since 2019, she has been a board member of the International Association of Science Parks and Areas of Innovation (IASP), and last year completed her term as president. In 2022, Linköping University’s Faculty of Technology awarded her an honorary doctorate for her contributions to innovation and regional collaboration.

Her perspective, shaped at the intersection of entrepreneurship, regional development, and international policy, provides insight into how these environments can drive the next wave of breakthroughs in life sciences, deep tech, and system innovations. Lena Miranda’s career also illustrates the evolution of science parks from real estate projects to strategic hubs in global innovation ecosystems.

“I took office at a time marked by strong technological optimism. Globalisation, digitalisation, and urbanisation were at the forefront, and Agenda 2030 focused on how innovation can help address global societal challenges. However, the past decade has been characterised by the pandemic, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, increasing geopolitical polarisation, and shifting the focus toward resilience, preparedness, and regional positions of strength.”

Against this backdrop, Lena Miranda notes that while the core mission of science parks remains unchanged – to create long-term innovation arenas where people, ideas, and knowledge converge – the environment has become more complex. Science parks now operate at the intersection of business, academia, and the public sector. Their ability to unite stakeholders and drive change is essential as systemic stress, security concerns, and climate risks converge. In addition to advancing technology, science parks also serve as spaces to explore new norms, policies, and social contracts.

Many innovations within Linköping Science Park have emerged precisely from these collaborations. The park combines strong tech expertise in image analysis, artificial intelligence, connected systems, and life sciences. As a result, it has paved the

"The next decade may bring significant progress in treating serious diseases, with cancer being a prime example"

way for several notable companies. For example, Sectra, a Swedish high-tech firm founded in 1978, specialises in medical IT and cybersecurity. Similarly, Synthetic MR, founded in 2007 and also headquartered in Linköping, is a specialised software firm focusing on enhancing MRI scanning efficiency and diagnostic accuracy. Another medical technology company, Amra, was founded fifteen years ago and is also based in Linköping. This global health informatics and medical technology company has grown internationally, serving clients in the United States, Europe, and Asia.

"My experience is that the most interesting innovations arise at the intersections of different disciplines and industries. I believe that this type of technology and industry convergence is also the foundation for the next generation of innovations, particularly in precision health."

An event in Linköping last year brought together professionals from life sciences, technology, academia, healthcare, and investment, demonstrating how regional strengths can be highlighted and strengthened. The region hosts about 80 life sciences companies, employing over 2,000 people in pharmaceuticals, diagnostics, medical technology, biotech tools, materials development, and related services, with a turnover of €278 million. Lena Miranda describes the region as a "diamond in the rough," where focused gatherings generate new perspectives, encourage collaboration, and build partnerships.

She identifies three particularly critical factors for achieving breakthroughs in science park environments: talent, interdisciplinarity, and system innovation. The first factor is the competition for talent, especially international talent. Securing and retaining global expertise is vital for future competitiveness. The second factor is interdisciplinary collaboration, in which cutting-edge research, innovative companies, and end users, such as those in healthcare, integrate, fostering optimal conditions for innovation. The third factor, system innovation, demands moving beyond isolated pilot projects. Excellence in medicine or technology alone is insufficient; major breakthroughs require researchers, entrepreneurs, policymakers, and decision makers

to collaborate, ensuring large-scale implementation of solutions.

"Interdisciplinarity is not a marginal feature but a structural precondition. When cutting-edge research, innovative companies, and stakeholders like healthcare providers come together in the same environment, the best possible conditions arise for identifying relevant problems, developing solutions, and advancing them toward implementation.

"What risks slowing down the development is that increasing geopolitical polarisation and rising protectionism pose a major threat to innovation worldwide. Major breakthroughs almost always occur through collaboration between people, organisations, and countries. When borders close and collaboration is restricted, the flow of knowledge, mobility, and innovation risks slowing down."

"Major breakthroughs require researchers, entrepreneurs, policymakers, and decision-makers to collaborate"

At the European level, Lena Miranda identifies a need for a more integrated internal market and improved access to capital, so that more innovative companies can expand from Europe as their base.

From a Swedish perspective, she highlights the skills shortage and the challenges of attracting and retaining international talent, driven by bureaucracy and regulatory barriers. She also notes a structural weakness in the public sector's capacity to develop and implement new solutions. Many innovations struggle to gain traction within domestic market systems and incentives, a challenge that is especially acute in capital-intensive, regulated sectors such as life sciences.

"A long-term perspective, freedom, and room for risk-taking are necessary conditions for researchers, but many funding systems reward short-term results and measurable impact. I believe in models that combine strong, long-term research environments with shorter, more agile projects and pilots that can quickly take ideas forward once they have matured. Within IASP, I hope that we are contributing to making science parks around the world even stronger nodes in a global innovation system where cross-border collaboration drives technological breakthroughs and sustainable development."

Currently, the global network reports members in 81 countries, connecting over 350 members and more than 115,000 companies. According to Lena Miranda, science parks are shifting from their traditional research roles to become regional orchestrators of innovation ecosystems. Their mission now focuses less on providing premises and more on connecting research, businesses, capital and stakeholders, and linking these environments internationally. However, developments vary globally.

"In Asia and parts of the global south, science parks are often integrated directly into national innovation strategies, where new environments are built with integrated functions for research, entrepreneurship, test beds, and urban development. For example, these countries, in response to local and national challenges, use inexpensive, accessible digital technology to quickly create solutions that address domestic needs and can be scaled up nationally or exported."

In Europe, Lena Miranda notes the last decade has been characterised by cluster policy and regulation, but attention is now shifting toward competitiveness, capital supply, and scaling startups and scaleups as security and resilience move up on the agenda. Incubators, clusters, and science parks are key nodes for local mobilisation and for advancing both national and European goals.

"Examples of development on an international level are about connecting local areas of strength to a global innovation system, creating networking platforms for knowledge exchange, internationalisation, and policy development. But also the importance of educating decision-makers with, for example, in-depth white papers and, of course, participating in global conferences on deep tech and life science. Innovation does not occur in isolated ecosystems."

Lena Miranda emphasises the importance of the physical environment and cultural context in enabling groundbreaking discoveries. Concentrating talent, expertise, and curiosity in one geographic area increases the likelihood of unexpected encounters, knowledge exchange, and new ideas.

"Science parks serve as arenas for *in-between sections* – that is, where professionals actively ensure that the right people meet, where ideas are challenged, and where promising collaborations are taken further. An increasingly important task for sci-

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"The climate issue is no longer just about sustainability, but also about robust societies and resilient economies"

ence parks is to connect their environments globally so that researchers and investors can move between innovation hubs. Through networks like IASP, local areas of strength in fields such as deep tech and life sciences can become part of a global innovation system."

When discussing the urgent and complex topic innovation environments and the green transition, Lena Miranda says that today it must increasingly be viewed through the lens of security and resilience.

"For a long time, companies have been able to build their operations on relatively stable climate and environmental conditions. That stability is now changing rapidly. Extreme weather, supply chain disruptions, and increasing geopolitical uncertainty mean the climate issue is no longer just about sustainability, but also about robust societies and resilient economies. Energy systems, food supply, infrastructure, and industrial value chains need to function even in a more uncertain global environment.

"As the risk landscape becomes harder to grasp, the need grows for an innovative environment that can pool knowledge, test solutions, and help companies navigate the transition. Science parks can serve as neutral platforms where companies, research, and the public sector jointly develop new technologies, business models, and system solutions that both reduce climate impact and strengthen social and societal resilience."

Regarding potential global breakthroughs we might see in life science before 2030, Lena Miranda identifies a clear trend: converging technologies that combine AI with biotechnology, medicine, and materials research. When data-driven medicine, genomics, and advanced biotechnology are integrated with powerful AI tools, the potential for developing more accurate diagnoses, treatment strategies, and individualised therapies increases dramatically.

"The next decade may bring significant progress in treating serious diseases, with cancer being a prime example. And in ten years, we could see headlines such as: 'AI-designed cancer treatment cures previously incurable tumours', 'Personalised medications are prescribed based on your digital health profile' or this one: 'Biological drugs are manufactured in space – first factory in orbit inaugurated.'"

We already have great research within AI, we host academic supercomputers, and Mimer, an AI factory, and groundbreaking research in electronics and biotelectronics in the region."

Lena Miranda identifies *Together* as the guiding principle for the future of science parks and life sciences. The role of knowledge exchange practitioners is now more critical than ever:

"We must act as dealmakers by facilitating collaboration across sectors, bridging gaps, interpreting needs, and connecting people. We listen, understand, and recognise the value of each exchange while keeping sight of the broader context and the mutual dependencies that connect every part.

"We need to be holistic dealmakers at local, regional and national levels, while also fostering global connections with dealmakers from different parts of the world. As countries close their borders, our work in bridging research and innovation becomes increasingly vital. The greater system perspective, and the expertise we have developed by working in the *in-between sections*, is a profession itself and should be recognised as such."

Life Sciences and Science Parks
TWIN FORCES SHAPING GLOBAL INNOVATION

THE HISTORY of business events, congresses, and conferences in the life sciences is closely linked to the development of science parks and the broader shift toward collaborative innovation. Based on the triple helix model, in which academia, industry, and government intersect, these interactions have significantly influenced the flow of knowledge and the emergence of commercial opportunities in the global science ecosystem.

The concept of the science park emerged in the United States in the mid-20th century, as universities and government agencies sought to make better use of post-war research capacity. Stanford Research Park, established in 1951 in Palo Alto, became the prototype – a carefully planned community linking university research to emerging industries. Its success paved the way for Silicon Valley's transformation into one of the most dynamic innovation regions in the world.

19th century: The rise of scientific societies Early scientific associations established the foundation for today's international gatherings. Organisations such as the Society of German Natural Scientists and Physicians, and the British Association for the Advancement of Science began hosting meetings in the early 1800s. These events created the first official forums for researchers to share discoveries, build professional networks, and gain scientific recognition beyond national borders.

Mid-20th century: Integration of academia and enterprise By the 1950s, the landscape had shifted. The creation of science parks marked a significant step toward embedding research within industrial and commercial environments. Stanford Research Park pioneered the integration of academia and enterprise, demonstrating how proximity accelerates innovation. Similar models emerged in Cambridge (UK), Tokyo (JP), and Gothenburg (SE), shifting the focus from academic meeting halls to dynamic centres of applied science and technology.

Late 20th century: Networking and partnering The 1980s introduced a new phase of professionalisation and focus. Events in dedicated technology parks increasingly emphasised networking, partnering, and commercialisation. By the 1990s and 2000s, science parks had matured beyond physical infrastructure. They began offering specialised services such as startup incubation, venture capital access, and legal guidance on intellectual property. Increasingly, they served as brokers among universities, research institutions, and the private sector – building the ecosystem that allows ideas to move swiftly from concept to market. Many science parks also began to specialise in high-growth fields such as biotechnology, information technology, and clean energy.

Founded in 1983, Ideon Science Park in Lund, Sweden, exemplified this trend by hosting sessions that transformed university research into market-ready biotechnology products. As venture capital interest grew, these gatherings evolved from traditional conferences into strategic deal-making forums.

Science parks: The engine rooms of collaboration Science parks have evolved into highly specialised ecosystems for knowledge exchange and strategic development. Stanford in the United States (1951), and Cambridge Science Park in the United Kingdom (1970) set early benchmarks, while European and Asian models adopted the concept locally. Today, sites such as Swed-

IMAGE Form4 Architecture Stanford Research Park.

ish Sahlgrenska Science Park in Gothenburg and Ideon Science Park in Lund serve as networking hubs through regular events like linking early-stage companies with investors and multinational pharmaceutical firms. Their infrastructure – including conference centres, flexible lab spaces, and innovation offices – provides a neutral arena for interdisciplinary collaboration. For example, *Park Annual*, organised by Sahlgrenska Science Park, is a leading life science innovation conference held annually in Gothenburg.

- Globalisation has intensified competition and increased the need for faster innovation cycles.
- Entrepreneurship and spinoffs now serve as essential sources of industrial renewal, prompting widespread adoption of incubation programs.
- Private sector property development has introduced a focus on modern design, flexible spaces and service-driven environments.

"Modern science parks feature mixed-use design, coworking zones, and green infrastructure, that encourage constant interaction"

The modern scientific event landscape In the past decade, the science park model has entered a new phase, defined by sustainability, density and digital integration. Modern science parks, such as Digital Media City in Seoul, feature mixed-use design, coworking zones, and green infrastructure, that encourage constant interaction. They have become instrumental in shaping local innovation policies, attracting international investors, and accelerating regional economic development.

Several key drivers explain the continued transformation of science parks:

- University collaboration remains central, leveraging academic research for commercialisation.

Today, business events in the life sciences generally fall into three main categories. The first category includes partnering and investment-focused events, such as *LSX World Congress Europe* (Lisbon, Portugal), and *Nordic Life Science Days* (Stockholm, Sweden). These events prioritise one-to-one meetings to foster business development and attract venture capital.

The second category consists of scientific symposia and congresses. Examples include the *ASCO Annual Meeting* (Chicago, USA) and the *BIO International Convention* (San Diego, USA). These gatherings bring together large groups of experts to share research advances and foster collective scientific understanding.

The third category covers regional and specialised events tailored to specific local industries or technology needs. Examples include the *Swiss Biotech Day* (Basel, Switzerland) and the *Genesis Conference* (London, UK), which focus on targeted networking and innovation relevant to their respective regions or sectors.

Post-2020: Deep tech, sustainability, and hybridisation In the 2020s, life science congresses have embraced technical depth and environmental consciousness. For example, AI-driven drug discovery, CRISPR applications, and mRNA platforms now dominate agendas, while partner platforms enable global meetings across time zones. Events such as *Nordic Life Science Days* in Stockholm illustrate how this model supports targeted, high-value engagement between investors and innovation leaders.

Today's science parks adapt to regional priorities while maintaining international connections. The United Kingdom hosts more than 150 parks supporting a knowledge-based economy, while China's network of national high-tech zones has expanded significantly between 2008 and 2023, reflecting the country's strategic commitment to technology-led growth.

From Palo Alto to Cambridge and Shenzen, science parks have become critical platforms for innovation-led economies – proof that the collaboration between research, entrepreneurship, and place continues to shape the future of global development.

IMAGE Lunds kommun/Benjamin Wallfridzon

Ideon Science Park.

MOST INNOVATIVE SQUARE MILE ON THE PLANET
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Boston Research Cuts: ECONOMIC SABOTAGE

AS OF EARLY 2026, Boston, USA, remains a global hub for life sciences, but the sector is enduring a prolonged downturn, evolving from a funding crisis into a restructuring of real estate, talent, and regulatory compliance. Boston's "biotech crown" is challenged by global centres like Shenzhen, China, which is advancing in licensing and development, threatening the US dominance.

For fifty years, Greater Boston has been the living proof of what American science policy can achieve. Federal agencies have fuelled bold research at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Harvard University, Boston University, Northeastern University, and local teaching hospitals, turning the city into a discovery laboratory and a well-known destination for business events.

Universities convert public investment into talent, discoveries, and patents. Cambridge, the Seaport district, and Route 128 science parks turn ideas into companies, attracting capital and global talent. This progress comes from sustained public investment. Continued funding cuts put Boston at risk of weaker research, lost talent, fewer startups, and diminished leadership in innovation. The coming years will test Boston's resilience. Policymakers and stakeholders should act now to protect and expand research investment.

Tougher odds for grants The immediate pressures are evident on campuses and in labs. Cuts to federal research budgets and tighter overhead caps force universities to shrink research ambitions. Core facilities must cover more costs through user fees. Multi-year projects, once secure, now depend on annual political battles. Early-career scientists, facing tougher odds for grants, increasingly look outside academia or abroad.

Boston's confidence in market solutions remains strong. The innovation hub Kendall Square, major companies, and the influence of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and Harvard University attract investors. Philanthropists are also expected to fund new institutes. For now, this optimism is justified, as the city's science parks remain active. However, looking five or ten years ahead, a subtle but concerning trend is emerging that leaders should not ignore.

Consider universities first Research institutions have limited flexibility. When federal funding drops, they can't easily raise tuition or repurpose facilities. Instead, they reduce doctoral admissions, don't replace retiring faculty in less central fields, consolidate smaller centres, and drop high-risk, long-term projects. In Boston, this could mean losing a neurodegeneration program, fewer synthetic biology initiatives, or eliminating uncertain climate research.

Three main risks These decisions have significant regional impacts. For example, a decline in PhD students and postdocs today leads to fewer deep-tech founders and skilled employees in the future. In addition, when labs close, opportunities for spin-outs are lost. Moreover, if

PHOTO iStock.com/APCortizasJr
Kendall Square, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

departments focus solely on short-term, industry-funded projects, innovation tends to move elsewhere. The main risks are:

- A shrinking innovation pipeline, which reduces the creation of new technologies and startups.
- Slower economic growth due to fewer high-tech jobs and companies.
- A long-term decline in Boston's global technology competitiveness as research and innovation shift to other regions.

Science parks and innovation districts stand at a crossroads. The innovation hub Kendall Square, Longwood Medical and Academic Area, the Seaport district, and areas like Somerville and Allston thrive on frontier research, specialised talent, and patient capital. Federal disinvestment threatens all of them.

If these trends persist, science park operators and planners will face tough choices. Research lab buildings may house more service tenants. Incubators may host fewer innovative firms, instead focusing on incremental applications, reducing innovation. Corporate partners, seeing thinner academic pipelines and more policy volatility, may seek their next collaboration in Toronto, Berlin, or Singapore.

"The life sciences are the core of Boston's innovation narrative"

Now, the life sciences are the core of Boston's innovation narrative. The region became synonymous with biotech because federal funds, especially those from the National Institutes of Health (NIH), created an unmatched concentration of biomedical research. That density attracted pharma giants, contract research, manufacturers, and global investors. The city's skyline shows the result: towers for lab space, not just offices.

If federal life-science funding tightens, Boston will face early, significant challenges. Medical centres may delay or scale back trials funded by grants. Some translational projects may stall at the application stage. Large collaborations that require cohorts, shared infrastructure, and a high tolerance for scientific risk may become harder to maintain. The market funds incremental drug candidates with high profit potential, but rarely the basic science laying groundwork for real breakthroughs.

Policymakers must act Boston's innovation districts won't become ghost towns. The risk is that they shift from magnets for frontier work to reflections of whatever is currently profitable. That would mean fewer breakthroughs, lost research leadership, and less ability to attract top talent. The brand may outlast the substance, but founders and researchers notice where the frontier is. Once belief in Boston fades, it's hard to win it back.

For policymakers, the lesson is clear. Savings from research cuts mean lower growth, fewer jobs, and a weaker tax base in five to ten years. For Boston – an area built around knowledge, health care, and technology – cutting research is economic sabotage, not fiscal prudence. Policymakers must act to protect funding and ensure future economic vitality. They should prioritise sustained investment, advocate stability, and seek local partnerships to protect Boston's economy.

For innovation leaders such as heads of science parks, innovation districts, and corporate R&D, the message is urgent. National research policy affects them too. When grants are cut, they must spell out what's at stake: which programs close, which facilities lose viability, which startups never launch. Leaders should partner with universities and governments to support early-career talent, co-fund infrastructure, and align districts with national missions.

The good news is that Boston is well-placed to lead. Its universities, hospitals, companies, and civic institutions can prove that research equals infrastructure as vital as roads, ports, or power grids. They can make the case that every research dollar cut today costs far more in lost growth and competitiveness tomorrow.

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Global Competition CHALLENGES BRITAIN'S LIFE SCIENCES CROWN

BRITAIN HAS incorporated health into its industrial strategy. In the fast-changing life sciences sector, a clear long-term plan, proactive analysis, and adaptability are essential for competitiveness. The government's major investment in health data underpins this strategy.

To enhance strategic focus, the British government launched a ten-year Life Sciences Sector Plan last year. The plan leverages national research strengths to drive coordinated growth and health strategy, directly linking the National Health Service's (NHS) future to the performance of its laboratories and manufacturing facilities.

The life sciences sector contributes approximately €115 billion annually to the UK economy and employs around 300,000 people, primarily outside London and in the South East. The sector prioritises exports. In 2024, medicines and medical technologies became the United Kingdom's third-largest goods export by value. Private investment has grown in response. In 2023, the United Kingdom ranked third globally in life sciences equity financing, behind the United States and China.

To achieve these goals, the plan assigns greater responsibility to the sector, which must deliver two objectives from the broader Plan for Change: faster and more sustainable economic growth, and a stronger and prevention-focused NHS. In a country where long-term illness limits labour-market participation, improved health is both a social benefit and an economic necessity.

Three pillars, one goal The plan is structured around three pillars: world-class research, a highly competitive business environment, and an innovation-driven National Health Service.

The first pillar, Enabling World-Class R&D, builds on Britain's established strengths in discovery science, from genomics to advanced therapeutics. To support this, the plan allocates over €2.3 billion in

PHOTO iStock.com/AndreyPopov

government funding during the current Spending Review period, supplemented by funding from UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) and the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR).

The second pillar, Making the UK an Outstanding Place to Start, Scale and Invest, focuses on grants, regulatory reform, and attracting international investment. The third pillar, Driving Health Innovation and NHS Reform, positions the National Health Service as a platform for innovation rather than solely a cost centre. The NHS will open data, boost clinical research, and adopt new technologies, despite ongoing challenges.

"The government is making substantial investments in health data"

Money and machinery The government is making substantial investments in health data a central element of the plan. Up to €692 million will fund the new Health Data Research Service, supported by the Wellcome Trust and public sources. The service aims to enable secure and efficient use of NHS data for research and innovation while maintaining public trust. If successful, it could provide Britain with a significant advantage, as few countries have a single-payer health system with longitudinal records of this scale.

In addition to its focus on health data, the government prioritises domestic manufacturing growth. The Life Sciences Innovative Manufacturing Fund (LSIMF) will provide up to €600 million in capital grants to support the production of medicines, diagnostics, and medical technologies in Britain. The goal is to retain high-value manufacturing, strengthen supply chains, and create skilled jobs. Grants will target projects at risk of delay, downsizing, or relocation overseas.

To further support these initiatives, the government will reform regulations to address longstanding industry concerns. The Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) will receive additional investment to accelerate product approvals. They will also improve coordination with the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) on market access for medical technology. The government has also committed to reducing regulatory costs by 25 per cent.

Six flagship promises:

1. The first flagship promise supports the data and research pillar. The Health Data Research Service aims to "unlock NHS data to find new cures" by developing an AI-ready platform for researchers and companies.
2. For clinical trials, the government will reduce administrative barriers by streamlining approvals and integrating research into NHS care, allowing patients to join trials sooner.
3. The Life Sciences Innovative Manufacturing Fund will support British manufacturing by providing grants for new and expanded biologics and diagnostics production facilities.
4. The fourth promise addresses the regulatory environment. Additional resources for the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency will accelerate patient access to new treatments by streamlining and clarifying regulatory processes, supporting both innovation and business competitiveness.
5. The fifth promise advances National Health Service innovation. The proposed NHS passport will accelerate adoption of proven tools across the NHS by providing streamlined access to AI-enabled cancer imaging and wearables.
6. The government will support leading UK firms by establishing at least one major industry partnership each year, directly linking these partnerships to efforts to retain promising companies in the United Kingdom.

While these flagship promises have the potential to set a new direction, several build on existing initiatives. Investments have already begun, including up to €710 million for the data service, about €770 million for Genomics England, and up to €420 million for Our Future Health, a large population health cohort. "Innovator passports" to accelerate the adoption of new technologies in the National Health Service are already being implemented.

Officials emphasise that the plan was developed collaboratively, not in departmental isolation. Over 250 organisations, including clinicians, scientists, NHS executives, and industry groups, contributed. The plan aligns with the ten-year Health Plan for England and the broader

Industrial Strategy. The aim is to avoid the common pitfalls of Whitehall fragmentation. Building on this collaborative approach, the plan's structure further enhances accountability and clarity.

Each action includes designated leads and clear goals, making progress easier to monitor and ensuring accountability. The emphasis is on delivery rather than aspiration, marking a notable shift in a country known for many polished but unfulfilled innovation strategies.

AI: Promise and pressure The plan makes significant investments in artificial intelligence, which is transforming research, diagnostics, treatment, and manufacturing. Britain aims to capitalise on this trend. McKinsey's Global Institute estimates potential annual AI gains in the pharmaceutical and medical products sector at €52–96 billion. With established strengths in machine learning and biomedical data science, the United Kingdom seeks to capture a substantial share of these gains. However, this opportunity also brings challenges that require careful management, especially in healthcare implementation.

Beyond these opportunities and challenges, AI in healthcare raises important questions. AI models require extensive, high-quality datasets, which the NHS holds. National use of patient data requires strong governance, genuine consent, and robust safeguards. Previous data-sharing initiatives failed due to public scepticism. The Health Data Research Service will succeed only if it earns political trust and demonstrates technical expertise.

A crown jewel under pressure Life sciences are a cornerstone of the British economy, driving innovation and accounting for 17 per cent of UK business R&D spending, the largest share of any sector. The sector supports the government's aims to create quality jobs and lead in science. However, intensified global competition is pressuring this sector as major regions launch investment initiatives. The United Kingdom is responding by positioning itself to remain a top destination for life sciences capital and talent.

"Life sciences are a cornerstone of the British economy"

This pressure is growing as global competition intensifies. America is enacting the Inflation Reduction Act and the CHIPS (Creating Helpful Incentives to Produce Semiconductors) and Science Act. Europe is working to strengthen health system resilience. Asia is expanding its manufacturing. All are seeking investment that once may have gone to Britain. The United Kingdom is attempting to stay in the top tier of destinations for life sciences capital and talent.

Risks of over-promising Many industrial strategies fail to bridge the gap between ambition and delivery. Reducing regulatory costs is easy to promise, but upholding standards is more challenging. Streamlining clinical trials sounds compelling, yet trials depend on an already stretched NHS workforce. Transforming the health service into a research engine is not achievable through policy changes alone. Decisive changes to incentives, infrastructure, and culture are essential.

Anchoring manufacturing domestically will increase costs compared to global supply chains, especially if support schemes lack precision. The Life Sciences Innovative Manufacturing Fund is designed to safeguard projects genuinely at risk of relocation. However, distinguishing real threats from lobbying remains challenging.

Health as an industrial strategy The government aims to unify health and industry to grow the economy by improving public health and expanding the life sciences sector. If successful, Britain will export more drugs, devices, and its unique model of integrating scientific strength, a national health system, and industrial drive. However, this integration also carries risks. The strategy is based on the belief that science can drive national renewal. Its success will depend more on political commitment and effective administration over the next decade than on vision alone.

Dubai Science Park
FROM LOGISTICS HUB TO HEALTH INNOVATION SYSTEM

DUBAI IS positioning itself as an emerging hub for life science innovation. Its science parks and innovation districts serve as experiments in building a modern health ecosystem rather than traditional industrial estates. For researchers and R&D leaders, the city demonstrates how urban planning, regulation, and infrastructure can accelerate the journey from discovery to distribution across underserved regions.

Sheikh **Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum** founded Dubai Science Park (DSP) in 2005, establishing the region's first free zone dedicated to the science sector. In this special business area, companies benefit from special tax and customs incentives. Today, over 500 companies, ranging from multinational corporations to small and medium enterprises (SMEs), call the park home. Major organisations include Pfizer, Astra Zeneca, Bayer, Jotun, and Himalaya Wellness.

There are over 6,500 scientists, researchers, and professionals working within the Al Barsha South community. The hub features over 90 laboratories. It also includes LEED-certified offices and storage facilities, meeting standards for environmental sustainability, focusing on energy savings, water efficiency, and reduced carbon emissions.

Over the past two decades, Dubai has shifted from a focus on logistics and real estate to a knowledge-driven economy. Life sciences, health technology, and advanced manufacturing are now strategic priorities. National visions emphasise science, technology, and innovation as central to future competitiveness, with health and biotechnology identified as key drivers of diversification and resilience.

Instead of the traditional approach of incrementally expanding existing universities or hospitals, policymakers have prioritised greenfield science parks and themed innovation districts to build capacity. This approach has fostered an ecosystem in which public-sector goals, private-sector incentives, and spatial planning align from the outset to support life science R&D and commercialisation.

The chosen path sets Dubai apart from older life science clusters that developed around legacy institutions. Scientists and translational teams question whether top-down ecosystem design can foster the same level of collaboration, debate, and competition found in places like Boston and Cambridge. However, early results from Dubai's flagship districts indicate the city is closing the gap more quickly than expected, largely due to a design focused on future needs rather than historical limitations.

Dubai Science Park serves as a living laboratory. Initially launched as a biotech-focused free zone, it now encompasses life sciences, energy, and environmental technologies. DSP unites multinational pharmaceutical companies, regional manufacturers, contract research organisations, diagnostics firms, and startups within a single regulatory and physical framework, offering clustering benefits and streamlined administrative processes.

The park's infrastructure offers office space, specialised laboratories, pilot-scale production units, and controlled-temperature logistics facilities. This keeps companies on a single campus as projects move from research to market, reducing friction and delays caused by fragmented locations. For R&D organisations that shuttle between university labs, hospital partners, and industrial plants in different countries, such integration is significant.

Dubai Science Park. IMAGE GDMO

“National visions emphasise science, technology, and innovation as central to future competitiveness”

Dubai Science Park’s Nucleotide Lab Complex attracts top-tier researchers seeking advanced wet-lab space for genomics, molecular diagnostics, and other biotech R&D. The availability of advanced, ready-to-use wet-lab facilities shortens the typical lead times compared to hospital- or university-based build-outs. It changes the calculus for both early-stage companies and established firms looking to run regionally relevant studies. For those facing infrastructure bottlenecks in less-resourced settings, a plug-and-play lab near a major transport hub is convenient, and it helps risk-ambitious science in emerging markets.

Building on these design foundations, sustainability in Dubai’s science parks goes beyond a compliance box from a research viewpoint, and becomes an experimental variable. As a result, scientists and engineers in Dubai are piloting low-energy vaccine cold chains and testing new materials to reduce hazardous waste. They are exploring circular approaches to lab plastics within a controlled, well-instrumented setting. Furthermore, the Gulf’s extreme temperatures and the need for air conditioning heighten the relevance of energy-efficiency experiments.

This research is still in its early stages and raises important questions for further study. For example, what are the trade-offs between energy savings and reliability in critical medical logistics? How do new refrigerants or packaging materials perform over multiple years in extreme heat? Can procurement strategies in a science park significantly reduce emissions from hospitals and manufacturers? Dubai’s engineering capacity, regulatory flexibility, and strong incentives to reduce resource intensity, position it well to address these questions.

A bridge to understudied populations One of the most compelling aspects of Dubai’s growth is its role as a bridge between established R&D institutions and large, understudied populations in the Global South. The city’s connectivity makes it an ideal base for multi-country clinical trials, real-world evidence studies, and genomic surveillance initiatives across the Middle East, North Africa, East Africa, and South Asia.

This region remains underrepresented in global datasets for human genetics, infectious disease dynamics, and non-communicable disease patterns. A Dubai-based research network could address these gaps by enabling studies that are logistically feasible, ethically governed, and adequately powered. The involvement of regional regulators, health insurers, and health system leaders in the same ecosystem increases the likelihood that findings will influence policy and practice.

This opportunity brings responsibilities. For investigators considering collaboration, key questions include governance and access: How will data ownership, benefit-sharing, and priority-setting be managed? Will Dubai-based platforms adopt proprietary models, or can they support open, equitable scientific partnerships that respect the interests of participating countries and communities? The answers will determine whether the city is seen as a trusted steward of regional health data, or as a gatekeeper.

Dubai’s science parks and innovation districts offer a model for building new life science hubs in the twenty-first century: deliberately designed, highly networked, digitally integrated, and focused on large, underserved markets.

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China: Strong Government Support UNDER THE 15TH FIVE-YEAR PLAN

CHINA'S LIFE science sector is evolving from a generic manufacturing hub into a global innovation powerhouse. Driven by significant R&D investment, top-tier talent, and strong government support under the 15th Five-year Plan, China has become the world's second-largest pharmaceutical market and a leader in biologics, as well as cell and gene therapies.

The 15th Five-year Plan (2026–2030), adopted in March 2026, prioritises "new quality productive forces," technological self-reliance, and national security to upgrade China's industrial base. Life sciences, specifically biomedicine, genetic research, and AI-driven healthcare, are designated as strategic emerging industries to drive economic growth, with the goal of raising average life expectancy to 80 by 2030.

Imagine a map of global science powerhouses – do you immediately picture Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen, Suzhou, or Guangzhou? Since the early 2000s, these cities have become dense life science clusters, leading in the manufacture of pharmaceutical ingredients and low-cost generic drugs for major pharmaceutical companies. Today, China's life science sector is globally recognised and remains a strategically important market for multinational suppliers.

The big three innovation regions

China's national strategy now focuses on three major science and technology innovation hubs: the Beijing–Tianjin–Hebei region, the Yangtze River Delta anchored by Shanghai, and the Greater Bay Area led by Shenzhen and Guangzhou. These hubs are expanding from single cities into regional clusters. Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangdong (home to Shenzhen and Guangzhou) report the country's highest R&D intensities, underscoring their roles as primary drivers of life science and deep-tech growth.

In Beijing's northwest suburbs, Changping's Life Valley and the Zhongguancun Life Science Park form one of China's leading life science innovation districts. The park hosts more than 600 companies, including major biotechs, and is closely linked to the Beijing Free Trade Zone and Future Science City. It is supported by substantial government "mother funds" that invest billions of yuan in health projects and synthetic biology ventures.

Beijing leverages its dense ecosystem for business events through high-level scientific conferences and congresses that highlight China's regulatory reforms and AI-driven drug discovery, investor-startup partnering forums connected to the city's healthcare investment funds, and government-branded "international showcases" that position Life Valley alongside global benchmarks such as Kendall Square (Cambridge, USA) and Biopolis (Singapore). Events typically combine closed-door policy roundtables with curated site visits to science park labs and incubators, providing international delegates with context and proof of concept.

Shanghai and the Yangtze River Delta

The city has emerged as a global science and technology hub, ranking highly among international scientific cities and serving as the anchor of the Yangtze River Delta innovation region. Its life science and biopharma strengths are reinforced by nearby hubs in Jiangsu and Zhejiang as the national strategy extends Shanghai's innovation remit across the entire delta. For example, Zhangjiang Science City in Shanghai hosts over 1,700 biomedical businesses, including major companies such as Astra Zeneca, Pfizer, Boehringer Ingelheim, Roche, Novartis, Johnson & Johnson, and GSK.

Shanghai's meetings strategy integrates its convention infrastructure with its biotech branding. *Biotech China*, a flagship biopharma exhibition held at the Shanghai New International Expo Centre, focuses on advanced biotechnology, R&D,

Zhangjiang Science City. SOURCE Ennead

“China has become the world’s second-largest pharmaceutical market and a leader in biologics, cell, and gene therapies”

and production services, using the trade show floor to connect Chinese biotech, major pharmaceutical companies, and global service providers. Conference programming addresses regulation, technology, and patent landscapes, while the format emphasises large-scale exhibitions, matchmaking zones, and co-located specialist forums to maximise partnering opportunities within a short timeframe.

Shenzhen, Guangzhou and the Greater Bay In southern China, Shenzhen has established itself as a world-class innovation city. Guangming Science Park in Guangming District is designed as a flagship science city that integrates scientific research with sustainable and cultural functions. The park covers more than 200 hectares and follows a “One Core, Two Wings” layout, featuring a central scientific hub with adjacent green and recreational zones, to attract researchers, residents, and visitors.

Greater Bay Area (GBA) life science meetings are typically outward-facing and investment-driven. Shenzhen’s science parks host international innovation summits that connect digital health, med-tech, and biopharma, while Guangzhou and other GBA cities contribute medical universities and hospital networks as clinical research partners. Event strategies often emphasise “innovation plus lifestyle,” embedding conferences within new science city campuses and incorporating social programs that introduce delegates to the green corridors and waterfront urbanism central to the Greater Bay Area’s global brand.

Rising secondary hubs: Chengdu and Suzhou Beyond the coastal centres, inland cities are leveraging life science clusters and conference strategies to gain global recognition. In Chengdu, the Tianfu International Bio-Town has impressed visiting Nobel Prize laureates and senior scientists, who have described the city’s biotechnology research environment as “astonishing,” highlighting its ambition to become a leading biotech hub in western China. Local authorities organise curated tours, laboratory visits, and high-level symposia with international scientific panels to position Chengdu as an investment destination and credible research partner.

Suzhou, located between Shanghai and Nanjing, has become a biopharma manufacturing and R&D hub and is increasingly hosting large-scale sector events. For example, *BioChina 2026* in Suzhou is expected to attract more than 30,000 professionals, 500+ international delegates, and hundreds of speakers across 250 specialist forums covering early-stage R&D, clinical development, manufacturing technologies, regulatory submissions, and market access. The event’s design demonstrates how Chinese cities now approach meetings strategically, focusing on large scale for visibility, in-depth content for deal-making, and clear objectives for cross-border collaboration and capital strategies to integrate local clusters into global value chains.

Driven by national policies and rising market demand, China’s biotech sector is expanding rapidly. However, industry overcrowding, and funding constraints threaten continued progress. In 2026, the life science sector will face significant challenges, including price pressures, geopolitical tensions affecting cross-border transactions, and the need to scale AI applications beyond research and development.

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From *Simple Abundance* by **SARAH BAN BREATHNACH**

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IASP World Congress 2026
TECH FOR HUMANITY

WIDELY recognised as Europe's premier science and technology park, Sophia Antipolis Science & Technology Park was founded in 1969 near Nice on the French Riviera. It serves as a major R&D hub, hosting over 2,500 companies, more than 40,000 employees, and thousands of researchers and students across a 2,400-hectare landscaped environment. The park specialises in artificial intelligence, information technology, environmental sciences, health, energy, cybersecurity, biotechnology, and autonomous vehicles. Today, the workforce represents over 80 nationalities.

In October, the venue will host the *43rd IASP World Conference on Science Parks and Areas of Innovation*. Known as Europe's first science and technology park, Sophia Antipolis serves as a living laboratory of collaboration, making it an optimal site for the International Association of Science Parks and Areas of Innovation (IASP) annual gathering.

The congress is scheduled for 27–30 October, and is expected to attract more than 1,800 participants from over 70 countries, including innovation district directors, policymakers, researchers, entrepreneurs, and investors. The event is projected to generate 8,500 hotel nights across Antibes, Nice and the wider Côte d'Azur region, resulting in a significant economic and reputational impact.

IASP's decision to return to France, where the association was founded in 1984, carries strong symbolic weight. For local organisers, it signifies both acknowledgement of Sophia Antipolis's sustained dedication to innovation ecosystems and a prime chance to demonstrate the region's advancing role in the digital and green economy.

Hosting Europe's oldest science park The venue was established over 50 years ago by French senator **Pierre Laffitte**. He envisioned a place where universities, businesses, and public institutions could collaborate in a natural setting that fosters creativity. Its international reputation made it a logical choice to host the 2026 congress.

"Sophia Antipolis embodies what our association stands for: interconnected ecosystems, where research

Sophia Antipolis Oxygen. PHOTO Flex-0

and enterprise collaborate across borders," says Doctor **Ebba Lund**, CEO of IASP. According to her, the French bid emphasised not only the science park's legacy but also its ongoing transformation toward a digitally smart, sustainable innovation district model.

The Communauté d'Agglomération Sophia Antipolis (CASA) will coordinate the event, collaborating with Team Côte d'Azur, Business France, and local academic institutions, including Université Côte d'Azur and Inria, the French national research institute for digital science and technology. The Région Sud Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur and the French Ministry of Higher Education and Research will also support the congress, underscoring its national significance.

A four-day focus on transformation and connectivity The 2026 theme, Transformation Through Connection: Building Resilient Innovation Ecosystems, highlights the evolving role of science and technology parks in addressing global challenges. The congress program includes three plenary sessions, 24 breakout sessions, eight workshops, and a poster exhibition for young researchers and startups.

Over 130 international speakers will contribute to the sessions. Confirmed keynote speakers include Professor **Mariana Mazzucato** of University College London, known for her work on mission-oriented innovation, Doctor **Luc Julia**, co-creator of Apple's Siri and chief scientific officer at Renault Group, and **Silvia Candiani**, Microsoft's Vice President for Western Europe.

Alongside the plenary sessions, parallel tracks will address the following themes:

- Sustainable innovation districts and net-zero strategies.
- Artificial intelligence and data sovereignty in science parks.
- University–industry partnerships for regional development.
- Funding models for deep-tech incubation.
- Talent attraction and diversity strategies.

> **"We want to highlight how Sophia** Antipolis serves as a bridge between science, industry, and everyday life"

Participants will take part in site visits highlighting Sophia Antipolis's ecosystem. Among these are tours of Eurecom's 5G campus, the CEA Tech research facilities, the Inphyni Photonics Laboratory, and a cluster of startups working with quantum technologies and biomedical diagnostics. CEA Tech is the technological research branch of the French Alternative Energies and Atomic Energy Commission, focusing on bridging the gap between fundamental research and industrial application.

"IASP congresses are not only about presentations. They offer a platform for peers to exchange operating models, discuss policy, and build new collaborations. This year, we want to highlight how Sophia Antipolis serves as a bridge between science, industry, and everyday life," says **Marie-Hélène Parmentier**, Director of International Affairs for CASA.

The congress will take place at several venues in the region, with the Sophia Antipolis Conference Centre as the main location. Technical meetings and workshops will be held in Antibes, Juan-les-Pins, and electric shuttles will connect hotels and event spaces. Regional authorities expect high occupancy at over 60 partner hotels, including both international chains and local business hotels.

To ensure a lasting legacy, local organisers and IASP are developing a post-congress programme to extend partnerships beyond the event. One proposed initiative is the Sophia Innovation Residency, a six-month exchange program for startups and researchers from the association's member parks, planned for launch in 2027.

"The congress gives us visibility that translates into long-term cooperation. Beyond the immediate economic impact, we see this event as an accelerator for joint projects within Europe and with our partners in Asia, Africa and Latin America," says **Jean Leonetti**, President of The Communauté d'Agglomération Sophia Antipolis and Mayor of Antibes.

Sustainability and digitalisation IASP and the host committee have committed to ISO 20121 for sustainable event management. They will use renewable energy at the main venue, reduce waste through digital materials, and encourage public transport and electric shuttles for mobility.

An estimated 85 per cent of delegates are expected to use low-emission transport options during the event. Regional transport operator

“The French bid emphasised not only the science park’s legacy but also its ongoing transformation toward a digitally smart, sustainable innovation district model”

Lignes d’Azur will provide a dedicated congress pass integrated with hotel bookings. Additionally, the event app, developed by a local startup in the Sophia Tech cluster, will enable paper-free registration, participant matchmaking, and real-time updates. Further environmental goals include offsetting residual emissions through reforestation initiatives in nearby Valmasque Park, making the congress one of IASP’s most sustainable editions to date.

The role of universities and research

Universities and research institutions have long played a central role in the association’s gatherings. For 2026, Université Côte d’Azur (UCA) will serve as both scientific co-organiser and content contributor. UCA will also host the *Young Researchers Forum*, a one-day event held before the main congress, during which 120 doctoral students and early-career researchers will present work on AI ethics, climate modelling, and biomedical engineering.

“This forum exposes young scientists to global perspectives. It establishes the university’s role in the local innovation ecosystem and strengthens our partnerships with industry to turn research into real applications,” says Professor **Jean-Marc Gambaudo**, President of UCA.

The congress will include a session on international collaboration models among universities, with case studies from KAUST (Saudi Arabia), Tecnológico de Monterrey (Mexico), and Aalto University (Finland). These discussions support the association’s ongoing goal to foster global networks that enhance regional innovation.

Industry participation and exhibition

Alongside the conference programme, the IASP Innovation Marketplace will feature over 60 exhibitors from 25 countries. Exhibiting organisations range from large technology parks and incubators to innovation agencies and corporate research centres. The marketplace is designed to facilitate one-on-one meetings between investors, park managers, and technology developers.

The 2026 edition will host the *IASP Global Innovation Awards*, honouring excellence in Science Park Management, Startup Support, International Partnerships, Social Impact, and Digitalisation of Services. According to IASP’s Secretariat, nearly 200 applications were submitted for the awards, reflecting the growing competitiveness in the global innovation ecosystem. The awards ceremony will take place at the Palais des Congrès Antibes Juan-les-Pins, followed by a networking gala showcasing local Mediterranean cuisine.

Looking toward the future

Beyond the numbers and sessions, the international congress underscores the growing importance of science and technology parks in addressing global challenges, from climate resilience to digital transformation. It also reaffirms the IASP network’s goal to connect ecosystems that drive shared innovation.

As Doctor Ebba Lund summarised in a preparatory briefing: “The world today requires interconnected innovation spaces. Sophia Antipolis, with its history and forward-looking initiatives, symbolises precisely that spirit.”

CREO
つくば カピオ
Tsukuba Science city

Japan's MEGACLUSTER AWAKENS

THE JAPANESE government seeks to address environmental and social challenges, such as an ageing population, and the goal of carbon neutrality, through technological innovation. Japan's long-term life science strategy, guided by the Bioeconomy Strategy 2030, strives to establish the world's most advanced bioeconomy. The strategy focuses on utilising biotechnology to achieve sustainable economic growth.

Business events play a crucial role in the life science ecosystem by building trust, sharing knowledge, supporting international collaborations, and fostering innovation through in-person networking – especially in major hubs such as Tokyo and Yokohama. Notable events like *Bio Japan 2026*, recognised as a leading biotechnology event in Asia, and the *Link-J Conference 2026* are key platforms that connect startups with industry leaders, investors, and academic institutions worldwide.

Japan's life sciences sector is experiencing substantial growth, influenced by demographic trends, government-backed innovation, and the adoption of advanced technologies. The sector aims to achieve global leadership in the bioeconomy by 2030, focusing on medical biotechnology, gene editing, regenerative medicine, and AI-driven medical devices. Enhanced regulations, dynamic R&D hubs like Kashiwa-no-ha, and robust public-private partnerships further support this trajectory.

This growth is reflected in Tokyo–Yokohama, which is becoming one of the world's most complex and mature life science regions. City campuses, coastal research groups, and the planned Tsukuba Science City create a broad innovation network linking universities, national laboratories, and corporate research sites. These centres increasingly prioritise research that aligns laboratory work with industry needs.

A multi-nodal life science powerhouse At the heart of the Tokyo–Yokohama life science landscape, several globally recognised universities, including the University of Tokyo, Tokyo Institute of Technology (part of the Institute of Science Tokyo), Keio University, and Waseda University, anchor a series of inner-city innovation districts. These institutions show strong publication and patenting performance, and co-locate medical schools, teaching hospitals, and engineering faculties to accelerate cross-disciplinary work in biomedicine, digital health, and advanced materials.

In addition to these academic hubs, Yokohama has developed a strong biocluster in its port and waterfront areas. Here, Life Innovation Platform Yokohama (LIP) and Riken's Yokohama Campus bring together expertise in gene research, systems biology, and environmental life sciences. University hospitals, research centres, and company labs work closely together, enabling rapid progression from discovery to proof-of-concept in regenerative medicine and immune disorders.

Tsukuba Science City: Planned innovation at scale Tsukuba Science City was intentionally developed within the Tokyo–Yokohama region as Japan's national science and technology hub, beginning in the 1960s. Designed to reduce Tokyo's congestion and centralise research, Tsukuba

Tsukuba Science City. IMAGE Tsukuba Science City Network

“Tsukuba Science City is home to over 60 public research organisations and more than 200 private R&D facilities, and employs around 20,000 PhD-level researchers”

consolidated national research and testing institutes and introduced new infrastructure and residential areas for scientists and their families.

By the late twentieth century, Tsukuba hosted about 46 national research institutes and two universities, organised into clusters for higher education, construction, physical sciences, engineering, biological, and agricultural research, as well as shared facilities. Today, Tsukuba is home to over 60 public research organisations and more than 200 private R&D facilities, employs around 20,000 PhD-level researchers, and receives nearly half of Japan’s national research funding.

University of Tsukuba and big science anchors The university and other major scientific institutions are central to this ecosystem. As the city’s academic core, the university, formerly Tokyo University of Education, leads interdisciplinary research in life sciences and technology. It has established Tsukuba as a national centre for robotics, nanotechnology, and digital-bio research. The university also offers specialised programs, including the Tsukuba Life Science Innovation master’s and doctoral tracks, in partnership with the Tsukuba Life Science Promotion Association and regional collaborators.

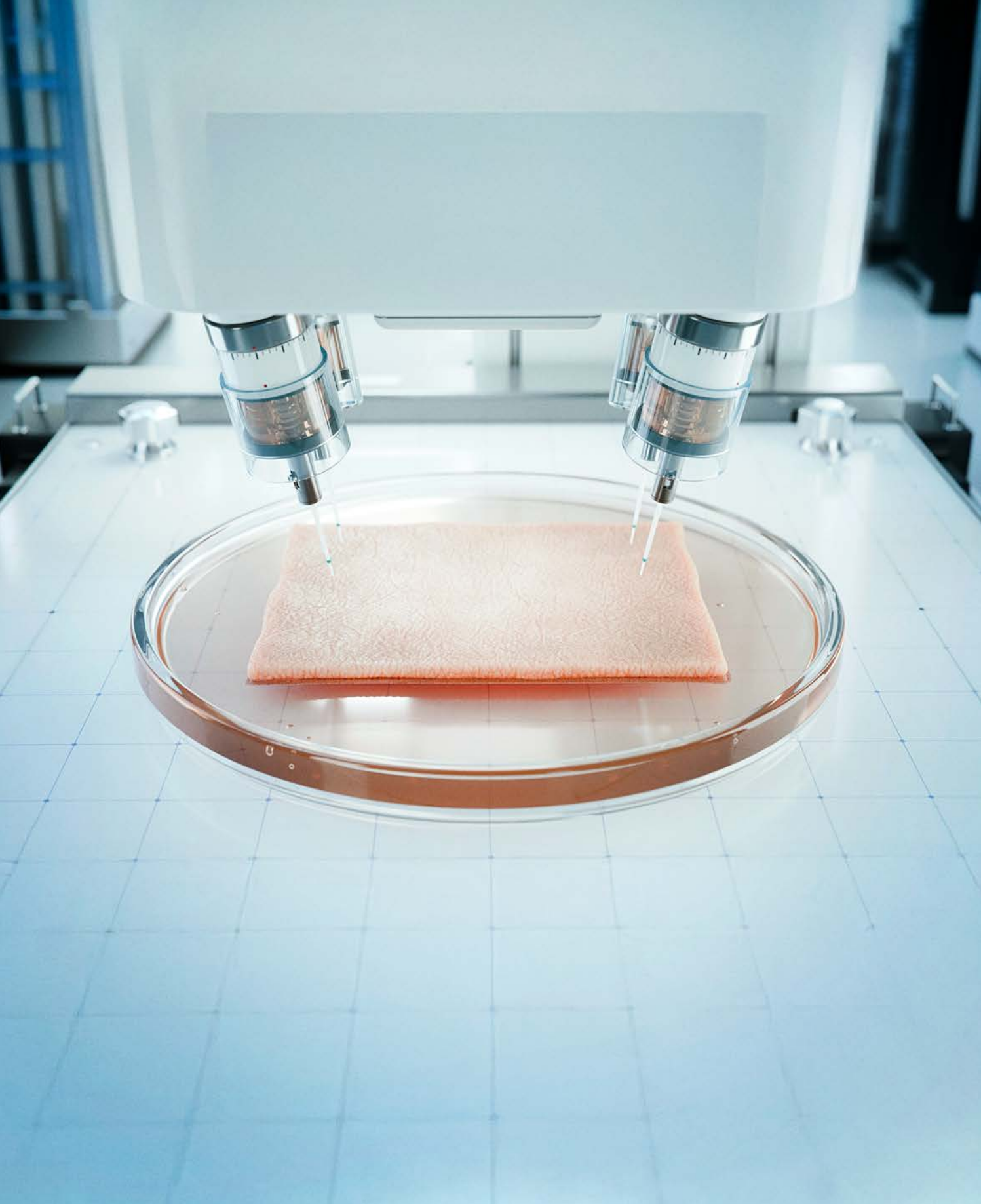
In addition to the university, several big science laboratories give Tsukuba a distinctive research profile. The High Energy Accelerator Research Organisation (KEK) is one of the world’s leading accelerator centres, providing advanced instruments and beamlines, attracting international users and supporting research in materials, structural biology, and medical imaging. Additional institutes in advanced industrial science, materials science, and metrology further strengthen the city in nanotechnology, biotechnology, and instrumentation, reinforcing its role as a national testbed for emerging technologies as a pilot for Japan’s Super City initiative.

Global significance and future trajectories All these elements combine to form the region’s global significance and outline its future trajectories. When viewed as a single region, the Tokyo–Yokohama cluster, including Tsukuba Science City, is comparable in scale and complexity to leading global life science hubs such as Greater Boston and the San Francisco Bay Area. However, it remains more polycentric and institution-driven. The region’s elite universities, national laboratories, specialised bioclusters, and planned science city infrastructure provide Japan with a strong platform for life science innovation and deep-tech development.

Looking ahead, these foundations support national initiatives to strengthen universities for international research excellence and enhance medical-engineering collaboration. These programs aim to transform the megacluster into a more integrated global innovation district. For international partners, the Tokyo–Yokohama–Tsukuba region offers outstanding scientific opportunities. It serves as a living laboratory for connecting established science parks and innovation districts at a metropolitan scale to address challenges in health, sustainability, and advanced manufacturing.

Kashiwa-no-ha Smart City. PHOTO U.S. Green Building Council, Inc.

Mitsui Garden Hotel



The New Geography OF PARISIAN BIOMEDICINE

FRANCE IS A nation built on scientific achievement, as reflected in the number of Nobel Prize laureates in this category: 36. As a whole, the country has a strong network of biotech hubs with Lyon, Strasbourg, Nantes, and Toulouse each specialising within its local ecosystem.

For example, Lyon focuses on vaccines and pharmaceuticals, Strasbourg on personalised medicine, Nantes on biotherapies and tissue regeneration, and Toulouse on oncology and bioprocessing. Universities and life science clusters regularly host congresses and conferences that advance science locally, regionally, nationally, and globally, benefiting society.

Paris has a long history as a global life science hub, evolving from 19th-century work in immunology and microbiology to a modern centre uniting biotech, artificial intelligence, and pharma. The Paris region, also known as Île-de-France, built its reputation through research institutes such as the Institut Pasteur (1887) and the Institut Curie (1909), solidifying its status in immunology and oncology.

The city is positioning itself as one of Europe's leading life science centres. The Paris region leverages state intervention, university reform, and new biological clusters to turn policy into therapies, startups, and manufacturing. Île-de-France acts as a catalyst, collaborating with other regions in the country. In doing so, the Paris region also contributes to a broader collective goal: to help establish France as a European leader in biotech and health.

A state that plans for molecules

After the Covid-19 crisis, France made life sciences a national priority to strengthen sovereignty. Over the past five years, the government launched initiatives such as France 2030, a €54 billion national investment plan, and the Health Innovation Plan 2030 to establish the country as a leader in European healthcare innovation and independence. These initiatives focus on digital health, biotherapies, and advanced treatments for cancer and chronic diseases, aiming to develop over 20 new biological drugs.

The government highlights three priority technology fields: biotherapies and biomanufacturing, digital health and medical devices, and emerging areas such as genomic medicine. The strategy aims to launch at least five new biomedicines within five years, double biomanufacturing jobs, and accelerate the growth of unicorns and high-potential small and medium-sized biotech enterprises. The Agency for Health Innovation was created to provide strategic leadership and help companies address regulatory, reimbursement and industrialisation challenges.

The Health Innovation Plan 2030 allocates approximately €7.5 billion to strengthen France's leadership in health innovation. Government support for research, startups, and manufacturing aligns with Europe's goal of strategic autonomy in medicines. France 2030 expands on this by integrating health innovation with a broader reindustrialisation strategy, including large-scale project calls, long-term financing, and targeted investments in bio-clusters. Public agencies are involved in land-use planning, infrastructure development, and co-investment in new life science campuses near Paris.

Universities as Engines of Bio-Clusters. The Paris Region's life sciences sector relies on its universities, which now act as co-architects of innovation districts rather than solely as talent providers. Université Paris–Saclay, formed through the merger of 19 higher education and research institutions, brings together leading

Bioprinting artificial skin. IMAGE iStock.com/SweetBunFactory

engineering schools, science laboratories, and medical research units on a single, purpose-built campus south of Paris.

Paris–Saclay's graduate and doctoral programs in life sciences and health span basic biology to translational medicine, linking doctoral schools in biological signalling, cellular and molecular biology, and systems biology. Internal funding backs interdisciplinary projects, early-stage industry collaborations, and international partnerships, positioning the university as a steady source of deep-tech innovation.

A similar model shapes Genopole in Évry–Courcouronnes, one of Europe's first dedicated bio-clusters. Centred around the University of Évry–Val d'Essonne, the cluster brings together 19 academic laboratories, 86 biotech companies, and a major hospital, all within a few kilometres from each other, sharing advanced platforms for imaging, cytometry, synthetic biology, and histology. The campus is expanding through the Genopole Next project, a new 21,000 square metre laboratory and office development created with local authorities and aligned with the France 2030 strategy.

In both Saclay and Évry, universities serve as governance partners and co-founders of infrastructure. They act as intellectual anchors, attracting global industry and talent. This approach, where higher education institutions shape urban development, defines the Paris life science landscape.

The changing map While central Paris is home to historic hospitals and research institutes, the most dynamic life science growth now occurs along an arc from Villejuif through Saclay to Évry, within curated innovation districts. At Villejuif, leaders designated the Paris–Saclay Cancer Cluster as the first national health bio-cluster under France 2030, bringing together the Institut Polytechnique de Paris, Inserm, Sanofi, and Université Paris–Saclay. This group aims to unite the entire oncology innovation chain – academic research, hospitals, startups, and large pharmaceutical companies – on one platform, accelerating progress from discovery to clinical impact.

Further to the southwest, the Plateau de Saclay is now a dense, interdisciplinary innovation hub, recognised among the top global science and technology clusters. Here, Paris–Saclay's health and pharma ecosystem brings together leading research institutions, major hospitals, global companies, and a rapidly growing number of healthtech and biotech startups. The area's advantage lies in its concentration of essential capabilities, from AI to materials science, needed to develop tomorrow's medicines.

Genopole in Évry focuses on stem cells, biotherapies, synthetic and systems biology, and genomic medicine, positioning itself at the forefront of new therapeutic modalities. The cluster co-funds shared technology platforms, giving researchers and companies access to advanced tools, from molecular analytics to bioinformatics, that are otherwise prohibitively expensive. Together, these sites create a polycentric ecosystem, connected by regional transport, coordinated planning, and national funding.

Five years of acceleration The last half-decade has been characterised less by isolated scientific breakthroughs than by systemic acceleration across the Parisian life science value chain. On the industrial side, the Health Innovation 2030 and France 2030 strategies have already financed more than 80 biotherapy and biomanufacturing projects nationwide. These involve over 250 partners, with a significant share linked to the Paris region and its clusters.

This progress has resulted in new facilities. Dedicated acceleration programs and new R&D sites for major pharmaceutical groups support biomanufacturing projects. Specialised incubators, such as Spartners and the Servier–Bio Labs facility at Paris–Saclay, also benefit. Biotech incubator Spartners provides fully equipped shared laboratories and office space for over 100 scientists, embedding early-stage biotech startups near Servier's research institute and the broader campus ecosystem.

On the academic and entrepreneurial side, Paris–Saclay's annual *Spring* event has become a flagship

"Success will be measured not only by patents and startup valuations, but also by improved healthcare"

"The Paris Region's life sciences sector relies on its universities, which now act as co-architects of innovation districts rather than solely as talent providers"

marketplace for deep-tech innovation, including life sciences. It regularly features startups, technology transfer projects, and collaborative platforms. Genopole companies have won national innovation prizes, including I–Lab awards, particularly in the biopharmaceuticals sector. Local stakeholders also contribute to national major challenges programs. Across the region, this combination of competitive calls, visibility platforms, and shared infrastructure has made it easier for new ventures to emerge, grow, and connect with industrial partners.

Ten-year horizons and Parisian dreams Looking ahead to the mid-2030s, Paris and its surrounding science parks will test a politically guided, university-anchored ecosystem. This model could reshape the economics and geography of biomedical innovation in Europe. The Health Innovation 2030 aims to make France a major global player in biomedicines and biomanufacturing. Most of the 21 actions in France 2030's health component are already underway, with new research, training, and industrial projects in development.

In practice, this means a decade of investment across three areas. First, scaling biotherapies from cell and gene therapies to complex biologics through integrated campuses where discovery labs are located next to GMP*-capable facilities and digital factory twins.

Second, embedding data and AI in care pathways by leveraging the proximity of mathematics, computer science, and clinical medicine at Saclay and Villejuif to develop next-generation diagnostics, decision support systems, and personalised therapy strategies. Third, redesigning hospitals and their surroundings as open innovation districts, with start-ups, community services, and public transport planned together from the outset.

Beyond policy and infrastructure, a more human vision shapes life science parks in Paris. Imagine a young researcher arriving from central Paris and, within ten minutes on foot, finding a laboratory, a mentor, an investor, and a potential collaborator. The goal is for discoveries at Villejuif, a synthetic biology platform at Évry, and an AI tool at Saclay to collectively shorten the path from hypothesis to treatment.

If achieved, this vision will make the Paris region a reference model for co-created innovation districts with societal missions. The region could move from being an important European hub to a leader. Success will be measured not only by patents and startup valuations, but also by improved healthcare, broader access to innovation, and whether this approach enhances patients' daily lives in France and beyond.

** GMP facilities are production facilities or clinical trial materials pilot plants for the manufacture of pharmaceutical products. They include the manufacturing space, the storage warehouse for raw and finished products, and support-lab areas.*

Seoul Positions Itself as a COHESIVE BIOHEALTH ECOSYSTEM

AS THE CAPITAL of South Korea, Seoul is fast becoming a leading Asian life science hub. Urban regeneration projects, the development of science parks, and the hosting of international conventions all support a unified innovation district strategy.

Seoul demonstrates how a dense metropolis can integrate basic research, startup development, and industrial scale-up into a cohesive biohealth ecosystem. Leading institutions such as Korea University, Yonsei University, and Seoul National University drive innovation through specialised colleges, major research facilities, and applications in agriculture and medicine.

This ecosystem has evolved rapidly over the past decade. Seoul's focus on life sciences has accelerated through targeted public investment and a clear goal to position South Korea as a global biohealth leader. Instead of concentrating activity on a single campus, the city now uses a multi-nodal cluster model across Hongneung, Magok, Gangnam, and new developments in the northeast. Central to this transformation is the repurposing of former infrastructure and logistics sites for high-value bio-industries.

Transit-oriented districts The Seoul Digital Bio City project in the Changdong Vehicle Depot area symbolises transformation. Here, the city converts 247,000 square metres into an advanced digital biological R&D cluster. The project aims to attract 10,000 researchers, generate €3.3 billion in production impact, and create 86,000 new jobs by 2030. Through repurposing depots and rail yards, Seoul creates high-density, transit-oriented science districts that connect to universities and hospitals across the city.

While Digital Bio City reflects Seoul's forward-looking vision, Hongneung serves as its living laboratory. In this northeastern neighbourhood, the Seoul Metropolitan Government and the Korea Health Industry Development Institute (KHIDI) have spent the past decade developing a biomedical innovation district centred on Seoul Bio Hub.

The Hub opened in 2017 as Korea's first dedicated biotech and pharmaceutical startup support centre, and now anchors the Hongneung Biomedical Cluster. By 2023, it hosted about 130 startups focused on drug discovery, digital health, and medical devices. Startups in AI-enabled digital dentistry, and cell and gene therapies, further strengthen its portfolio. The hub benefits from its location among nine universities, six medical centres, and nine research institutes, providing early-stage ventures with rapid access to clinical collaborators, talent, and shared infrastructure.

The model is intentionally cluster-driven. Seoul Bio Hub's leadership believes that the biomedical industry requires researchers, financiers, clinicians, patients, and regulators to co-locate to maximise efficiency. The hub serves as both an incubator and an orchestrator, collaborating with the city to create incentives for companies to remain in Hongneung and to attract major pharmaceutical and biotech associations. The goal is to establish Hongneung as a development-focused biotech cluster recognised across Asia, rather than just a national research enclave.

Seoul's science parks are interconnected. In the capital region, the Magok district in western Seoul and the nearby Songdo International Business District in Incheon form a corridor spanning R&D and large-scale biologics manufacturing.

Songdo already hosts global contract manufacturing facilities and

Seoul Digital Bio City (S-DBC). IMAGE Seoul City

“The hub benefits from its location among nine universities, six medical centres, and nine research institutes”

is adding a Bio Campus to serve as a training centre and collaborative R&D base for bio-institutions and companies worldwide, supported by initiatives such as Lotte Biologics’ Bio Venture Initiative. This structure enables a division of labour: Hongneung and emerging nodes like Changdong focus on early-stage research and digital biological convergence, Magok houses corporate R&D and headquarters, and Songdo specialises in industrial-scale production. For international partners, the combined Seoul–Incheon region offers a seamless continuum from discovery to commercial manufacturing within a highly connected metropolitan system.

Inside Seoul’s biotech room Scientific and technological breakthroughs from Seoul’s ecosystem reflect this layered structure. Startups at Seoul Bio Hub are active in advanced fields such as cell and gene therapies, AI-driven diagnostics, and digital healthcare platforms. National initiatives have also created enabling conditions through large-scale funding and data infrastructure.

In 2025, South Korea launched the Bio Health Mega Fund, mobilising over €224 million to support innovative companies through clinical trials and commercialisation. The fund is supported by a national integrated biological big-data project and AI-focused regulatory sandboxes. Together, these initiatives lower barriers for high-risk, high-impact ventures in regenerative medicine, immuno-oncology, and personalised therapeutics, and provides access to population-scale datasets under an evolving regulatory framework.

Regenerative medicine is especially prominent. *Korea Life Science Week*, the country’s specialist life science exhibition at the Coex Convention and Exhibition Centre in southern Seoul, highlights regenerative medicine innovation, analytical technologies, and advanced research equipment. This focus indicates that the city’s ecosystem is aligning with global frontier fields, rather than simply expanding generic biopharmaceutical capacity.

In Seoul, major conventions serve as core infrastructure for open innovation and cross-border collaboration, not just as showcase events. *Bio Korea*, launched in 2006, has become the country’s flagship international biohealth convention, and its twentieth edition in 2025 demonstrated the scale and ambition of this platform.

Last year, *Bio Korea 2025* was held at Coex, welcoming 753 companies from 61 countries and attracting about 30,000 participants. The programme included an exhibition, investment fair, business partnering, academic conference, and networking, with 14 sessions and over 100 experts from eleven countries discussed the latest trends and future outlook of the biohealth sector. For overseas delegates, the event provided structured deal-making through pre-arranged partnering meetings and direct exposure to South Korea’s technological capabilities and regulatory perspectives.

Korea Life Science Week 2026, held in September at the Coex Convention and Exhibition Centre, complements this programme by offering a specialised B2B platform focused on life science equipment and pharmaceuticals.

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TAXI

Singapore
A LIVING LABORATORY FOR PRECISION HEALTH

SINGAPORE'S strategic position as a bridge between Asian and global markets enables it to play an outsized role in driving biomedical advancements. It works both ways, as a gateway for global companies to access the growing opportunities in Asia, and as a springboard for regional companies to expand worldwide.

Building on this strategic role, Singapore is set for its next evolution. Over the next decade, the country aims to move from a regional life science hub into a living laboratory for precision health, healthy longevity and advanced biomanufacturing, with its science parks and innovation districts as the key operating system for this transition.

From industrial park to innovation district To understand this change, it is helpful to consider Singapore's transformation from Industrial Park to Innovation District. When Biopolis, a purpose-built biomedical research and development hub, opened in the early 2000s, it signalled Singapore's pivot from export-led manufacturing to knowledge-intensive biomedical science. Today, that bet has matured into an integrated innovation district at One-North. Here, Biopolis, Fusionopolis, and Launch Pad are within walking distance of leading universities, public research institutes, and more than 800 startups.

Unlike traditional science parks, One-North was designed as a work-live-play-learn environment, with cafés, residences, childcare and cultural venues deliberately woven into the research fabric to encourage serendipitous collaboration. This urban form has become Singapore's template for future innovation districts, informing newer clusters

Biopolis, One-North, Buona Vista, Singapore. IMAGE Crescendas Group

such as the Punggol Digital District and planned healthtech and medtech nodes around major hospitals.

RIE2030: Precision health and longevity as national projects The Research, Innovation and Enterprise 2030 (RIE2030) plan builds on these foundations for innovation districts. It sets the policy stage for the next phase: The RIE2030 plan, backed by €25 billion over five years, indicates where Singapore expects life sciences to move in the 2030s. Within this framework, health and biomedical sciences remain a national priority. There is now an explicit shift from treating disease to focusing on maximising healthy and successful longevity for a rapidly ageing, highly urban population.

One of the RIE Grand Challenges, Maximising Healthy and Successful Longevity, focuses on understanding the biology of ageing, preserving brain function and physical capacity, and intervening earlier across the life course. At the same time, A*Star's Genome Institute of Singapore and related centres are building an Asian precision medicine roadmap, combining genomics, epigenetics, single-cell systems and spatial biology to tailor interventions to Singapore's multi-ethnic population.

The next decade: Three transformations

1 Science parks as health platforms

By 2036, Singapore's life science parks will resemble open, health-enabled districts. Clinical trials, digital diagnostics, and population interventions will be embedded in daily life. This change will accelerate the adoption of new healthcare models and technologies. It will also directly influence how health services are delivered and accessed. One-North already pilots autonomous vehicles, AI systems, and digital twins of infrastructure. Upcoming phases will extend experimentation to community-based health monitoring and preventive care, leading to more proactive and personalised healthcare for residents.

Expect tighter integration among Biopolis, hospitals, primary care networks, and eldercare facilities. This will turn Singapore's western corridor into a contiguous testbed for healthy ageing solutions. The integration will speed up testing and implementation of new care models. Also, it enables more effective and coordinated interventions. For international companies, this creates a dense environment where discovery, regulatory science, reimbursement pilots, and scale-up manufacturing coexist within a single city-state, accelerating time from innovation to impact.

2 AI-native drug discovery and diagnostics

For over a decade, Singapore has invested more than €339 million in AI for life sciences through earlier RIE plans, including dedicated funds for AI in drug discovery and development. These efforts have attracted global pharma AI platforms and domestic startups focused on multi-omics integration, adaptive clinical trial design, and algorithmic pathology.

In the coming ten years, AI is likely to become the default layer across Singapore's life sciences ecosystem, from target identification to clinical decision support and post-market surveillance. This shift will streamline research, improve diagnostic accuracy, and speed up drug development, creating a more effective and responsive healthcare system.

3 Biomanufacturing as strategic infrastructure

Singapore's early investments in biologics and vaccine manufacturing have made it a regional leader in biomanufacturing. These efforts have attracted major multinational facilities and A*Star spinoffs. Under RIE2030, the focus is on advancing cell and gene therapies, RNA-based platforms, and continuous bioprocessing, positioning biomanufacturing as essential infrastructure.

Over the next decade, boundaries between labs and factories will likely blur in science parks. Modular facilities colocated with research institutes will support rapid iteration from preclinical proof-of-concept to first-in-human production. This will make manufacturing more flexible

> **"Unlike traditional science parks,** One-North was designed as a work-live-play-learn environment"

“One-North already pilots autonomous vehicles, AI systems, and digital twins of infrastructure”

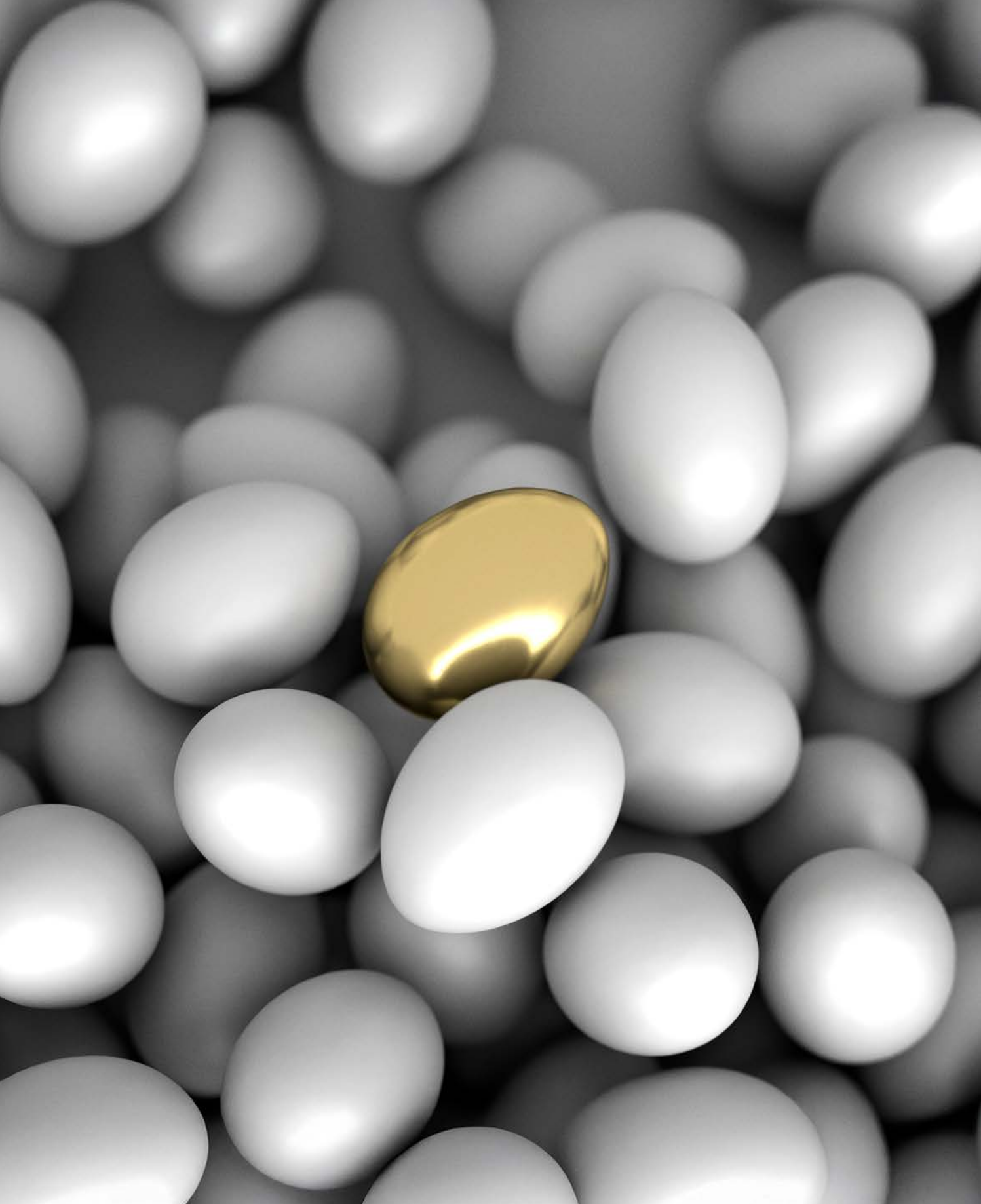
and responsive to scientific advances, enabling new therapies to reach patients faster. For Singapore, this is not just about GDP, it also strengthens supply chain resilience as health security and technological sovereignty are increasingly intertwined.

Global capital, local patients Together, these transformations are shaping Singapore’s international appeal. Three pillars now attract life science companies: predictable regulation, deep public funding, and an efficient interface between government, academia, and industry. Recent initiatives, such as JLABS Singapore from Johnson & Johnson and the Economic Development Board, further reinforce the city’s role as a favoured Asian base for early-stage biotech and medtech ventures.

There is growing emphasis on ensuring that global capital and technology flows bring tangible outcomes for local patients and workers. Outcomes include better access to cutting-edge trials, upskilling in bioprocessing and data science, or the design of age-friendly neighbourhoods. These shifts will directly improve healthcare access and create new jobs. They will also foster a more skilled workforce, showing the broader social and economic benefits of Singapore’s life sciences strategy. The success of Singapore’s next decade in life sciences will be measured by healthier, longer lives and meaningful jobs, not just patents, valuations or exports.

Small city, oversized ambitions In summary, these ambitions and transformations highlight Singapore’s special approach. The country, smaller than some Chinese districts or Indian suburbs, aligns land use, education, immigration, industrial policy, and health systems to support its life sciences ambitions. Science parks and innovation districts embody this strategy by concentrating talent, capital, and translational capacity in compact, hyper-connected environments.

Over the next ten-year period, Biopolis and its sister districts are set to become centres for developing, testing, and exporting new models of science-driven and age-ready urban living.



Engineered for Success

SETTING THE STAGE FOR GROWTH AND INNOVATION

TEXT
Scott Steinberg

IN TODAY'S topsy-turvy business world, the pace of technological progress and business disruption has accelerated dramatically. Coupled with ongoing economic uncertainty and geopolitical volatility, companies and governments alike are looking for ways to cultivate innovation ecosystems that foster creativity, collaboration and commercialisation of new ideas, and set the stage for community growth and advancement.

As noted in the new book *The Shape of the Future: How to Design for Disruption, Plan for Uncertainty and Adapt to Whatever Tomorrow Brings*, science parks and innovation districts have emerged as critical platforms for achieving these goals. By uniting startups, established corporations, research institutions, universities, and investors, these innovation hubs (increasingly common in major cities and throughout regions) not only promote continuing growth and advancement, but also provide an environment that's designed to accelerate the development of cutting-edge technologies, nurture entrepreneurship, and drive economic growth.

Science parks, traditionally anchored around research universities, focus on the commercialisation of scientific research. These storied settings provide office space, laboratories, prototyping facilities, and access to technical expertise that allow early-stage companies and spin-offs to transform research into market-ready products. Innovation districts, in contrast, are urban neighbourhoods intentionally designed to integrate workspaces, residential areas, amenities, and knowledge-based industries into one cohesive whole. The cutting-edge destinations encourage cross-sector collaboration, serendipitous interactions, and a vibrant community culture, creat-

IMAGE iStock.com/tostphoto

ing fertile ground for startups and established firms to co-create value. Both models aim to bridge the gap between ideas and impact, enabling rapid innovation from concept to commercialisation.

Driving business growth via community and collaboration One of the primary ways that science parks and innovation districts drive business innovation is by providing companies with access to talent. Any number of these hubs are strategically located near leading universities or research institutions, ensuring a steady flow of skilled graduates, researchers, and industry experts. For startups, this access to human capital is crucial. For larger corporations, it offers opportunities to identify emerging technologies and potential acquisition targets. Proximity to other companies also enables the exchange of best practices, collaboration on joint ventures, and access to shared services, reducing overhead and accelerating product development cycles.

In addition to providing access to talent, the innovation hotspots also frequently provide access to venture capital, incubators, and accelerators. For example, science parks in Silicon Valley, Boston's Kendall Square, and London's White City combine investment networks with mentorship programs to help startups scale efficiently. By embedding financial and advisory resources within the ecosystem, these destinations lower barriers to entry and accelerate the market introduction of promising technologies.

Fostering collaboration and knowledge exchange As often noted in keynote speeches and workshops, innovation rarely occurs in isolation. Science parks and innovation districts create environments that encourage interdisciplinary collaboration. By clustering companies from sectors such as biotech, AI, clean energy, and fintech, these hubs enable knowledge sharing, cross-pollination of ideas, and the formation of consortia to address complex challenges. For example, Sophia Antipolis Science & Technology Park in France and Research Triangle Park in North Carolina host hundreds of companies and research labs, fostering dense networks of expertise that support collaborative innovation.

> "**Innovation** rarely occurs in isolation"

These ecosystems also promote strong partnerships between academia and industry. Universities contribute cutting-edge research, while companies provide practical experience and market insight. This synergy enables translating theoretical discoveries into commercially viable products, including pharmaceuticals, advanced materials, renewable energy solutions, and digital platforms. Science parks and innovation districts serve as living laboratories where experimentation is encouraged, failure is part of the learning process, and continuous improvement is the norm.

Driving regional economic development and growth Beyond technological innovation, science parks and innovation districts also help promote regional economic development. By attracting high-tech companies, creating jobs, and fostering entrepreneurship, these destinations stimulate local economies. Innovation districts, in particular, help to revitalise urban areas by integrating residential, commercial, and recreational spaces, drawing young professionals and creative talent, and generating a dynamic, innovation-oriented culture.

Cities such as Singapore, Barcelona, and Toronto have invested in innovation districts to diversify their economies and reduce reliance on traditional industries. In Asia, Shenzhen's tech ecosystem has transformed the city into a global hub for electronics, AI, and biotech. Europe's Brainport Eindhoven region has used its high-tech manufacturing base to create a cluster of automotive, robotics, and materials companies that collaborate with universities. These examples show that innovation ecosystems can transform entire regions and create lasting economic impact.

Driving sustainability and global challenges A critical function of science parks and innovation districts is fostering solutions to global challenges. A growing number of hubs now prioritise research and development in areas such as clean energy, sustainable transportation, and healthcare innovation. For example, the Danish Ørestad Innovation District in Copenhagen, and the Masdar City Innovation Hub in Abu Dhabi focus heavily on sustainable technologies,

“By concentrating talent, capital, and resources in close proximity, the districts accelerate the development”

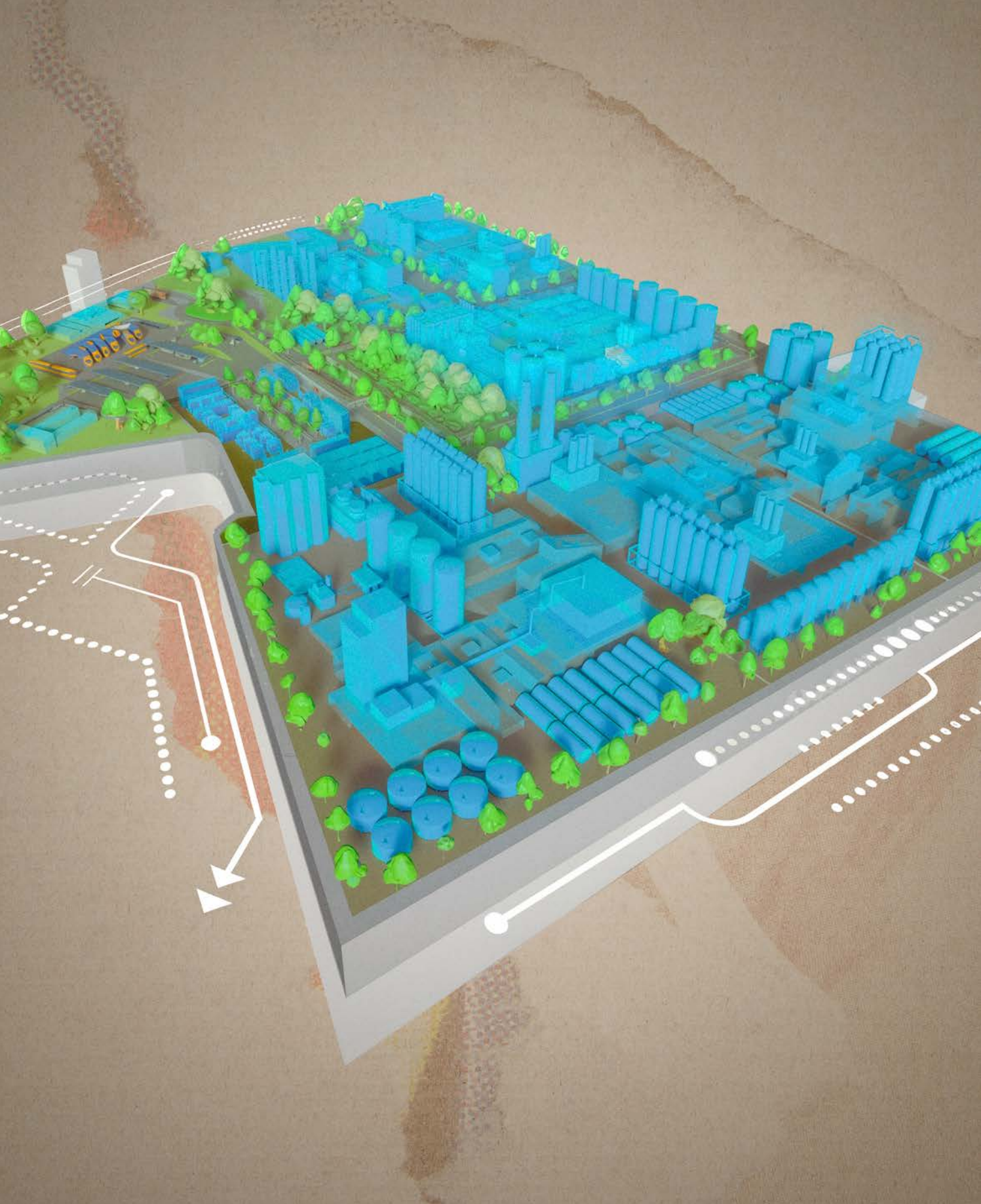
supporting startups and research centres developing renewable energy solutions, smart city infrastructure, and green building technologies. By concentrating talent, capital, and resources in proximity, the districts accelerate the development and adoption of technologies that address environmental and societal challenges.

Also, innovation districts foster a culture of experimentation, enabling rapid testing of solutions in real-world contexts. Urban districts often serve as testbeds for smart mobility, digital infrastructure, and energy-efficiency programs. These living laboratories provide feedback loops for developers, policymakers, and entrepreneurs, ensuring innovations are both technologically feasible, and socially and economically viable.

Setting the stage for growth and innovation Science parks and innovation districts promote growth, advancement and economic development on every front. By providing infrastructure, fostering collaboration, and connecting startups with established companies, research institutions, and investors, such tailored destinations help accelerate the translation of ideas into products and services. Beyond pure GDP growth, urban hotspots also help address societal challenges, foster the development of sustainable solutions, and create vibrant urban communities.

In a rapidly changing world, organisations that leverage the power of science hubs and innovation ecosystems have the potential to gain a competitive advantage. Likewise, cities and regions that invest in them can position themselves as global leaders in technology, business, and economic development. From biotechnology to AI, renewable energy, and smart cities, science parks and innovation districts are not just engineered spaces. Rather, these thriving areas are engines of change, that are helping drive the future of innovation and business worldwide.

Hailed as the World’s Leading Business Strategist, award-winning strategic consultant and professional speaker Scott Steinberg is among today’s best-known trends experts and futurists. He’s the co-author of the book “The Shape of the Future: How to Design for Disruption, Plan for Uncertainty and Adapt to Whatever Tomorrow Brings.” The creator of “What’s the Future of …?”, a new series of training games for play at meetings and events, and the President and CEO of BIZDEV: The International Association for Business Development and Strategic Partnerships. www.FuturistsSpeakers.com.



Antwerp's Next Gen District: DELIBERATE CO-DESIGN OVERCOMES COMMON OBSTACLE

THE BELGIAN city of Antwerp has been a central trading hub for centuries and is home to Europe's second-largest port. It is also the capital of the diamond trade and the world's second-largest petrochemical cluster. As the largest city in the Flemish region, Antwerp has over 510,000 residents from 174 nationalities.

The 88-hectare Next Gen District brings together academic research, digital health technology, and industrial production in life sciences. This integration has enabled the city to develop a specialised ecosystem focused on smart health, AI-driven diagnostics, and sustainable chemistry.

The port's infrastructure supports translating research into practical applications, laying the groundwork for further sustainability and innovation initiatives. As a result, the project is central to the Port of Antwerp-Bruges' ambition to achieve carbon neutrality. Located in the former General Motors area, the district is dedicated to circular-economy startups and sustainable chemistry projects. It serves as a testing and scaling zone for converting waste streams into clean raw materials, strengthening Antwerp's role in the European energy transition.

Key components of Antwerp's importance to life sciences include specialised health tech and digital centres, clinical and biotech research, sustainable chemistry and industrial scaling, and logistics and infrastructure. For example, Dunden Innovation Campus focuses on fostering health tech companies, The Beacon specialises in digital innovation, and Antwerp Health Harbour (AHH) concentrates on digital health and care, each supporting innovation in their respective areas.

Dunden is a health tech hub focused on digital health startups, offering affordable office space, dedicated infrastructure, and a collaborative network. Similarly, the Beacon develops Internet of Things and artificial intelligence solutions for smart health and logistics. In addition, recently launched Antwerp Health Harbour (AHH) unites hospitals, academic institutions, the city government, and private companies to advance healthcare innovation through data, technology, and clinical research, delivering patient-centric, future-ready care.

Opened in 2022, Vaccinopolis is a 6,000 square metre research facility at the University of Antwerp designed to accelerate the development of vaccines and treatments for infectious diseases. It serves as a European centre for studying pandemic threats, enabling rapid testing to shorten vaccine development timelines. Vaccinopolis is funded by the University of Antwerp and the Belgian government.

The University of Antwerp Science Park, along with incubators and life sciences clusters, supports the health and environmental sectors by creating high-value jobs, attracting international investment, and commercialising research discoveries. Building on this, Antwerp's life sciences cluster benefits from a strong network of hospitals, research institutes, and innovation platforms. Key members include the University of Antwerp, Antwerp University Hospital (UZA), the Flemish Institute for Technological Research (VITO), and the University of Ghent's Flanders-wide network.

The University of Antwerp's Science Park currently hosts about 40 innovative companies. In the coming years, it plans to grow to 60 com-

panies and 600 employees, creating 250 new jobs and adding 20 R&D-focused firms.

In addition to direct employment, Antwerp leverages its position as Europe's largest integrated chemical cluster, with 500 chemical companies and 300 chemicals, to support life science manufacturing and speciality chemistry innovation. This industrial base provides clinical-grade materials, logistics, and large-scale production, enabling the health and life sciences cluster to move efficiently from pilot to commercial production.

Belgium's life science and chemical sectors employ over 97,000 people and generate more than €70 billion in turnover, but face shortages in specialised roles such as biotech, data science, and clinical development. To remain competitive, Antwerp must upskill its workforce, attract international talent, and align higher-education programs with industry needs, or risk falling behind the Netherlands, the United States, and Switzerland. Ongoing uncertainty about sustainable chemistry targets, circular-economy rules, and the alignment of clinical-trial and Advanced Therapy Medicinal Products (ATMP) regulations also slows long-term investment, complicating growth.

"Integration has enabled the city to develop a specialised ecosystem focused on smart health, AI-driven diagnostics, and sustainable chemistry"

Future challenges and growth barriers Despite recent progress, Antwerp faces four main challenges: limited land and infrastructure, talent shortages, fragmented sectors, and regulatory uncertainty. These issues slow or block progress in several areas.

Infrastructure constraints are a pressing issue. Rapid growth at the science park, incubators, and hospital-linked innovation hubs has filled available lab and office space, forcing life science and health tech companies to relocate or delay expansion until new lab-ready and mixed-use buildings become available. At the same time, demand from the chemical cluster strains land use and environmental permits, further delaying the construction of test and demonstration facilities for chemical and logistics companies.

Overcoming barriers through collaboration To address these challenges, local organisations and associations have made collaboration central to the innovation district. POM Antwerp, a provincial development agency, owns and develops the Science Park University of Antwerp and is expanding business space from 16,400 square metres of managed offices and labs to a higher-capacity innovation campus. By co-designing the park with the University of Antwerp and hospital partners, POM enables startups and spin-offs to focus on R&D and regulatory requirements rather than on infrastructure concerns.

Furthermore, targeted platforms and training initiatives are strengthening the ecosystem. Vi Talent, a specialised pharma and biotech training centre in the science park's Isala building, provides tailored upskilling for students, job seekers, and industry professionals, addressing skills gaps in manufacturing, quality assurance, and clinical operations. Open innovation hubs such as Blue App and Next Gen Demo connect chemical and life science firms with shared labs, pilot facilities, and circular economy projects, allowing smaller companies to scale up alongside multinational partners.

Cross-regional cluster alliances, such as the collaboration between Flemish Biovia and Walloon Bio Win, strengthen Belgium's position as a unified life science territory. These alliances jointly develop funding proposals, attract foreign investors, and coordinate pre-competitive projects, streamlining the path from incubation to industrial production and market entry. By aligning incentives across public agencies, universities, hospitals, and private investors, Antwerp secures a long-term competitive advantage as a compact, well-connected innovation district that can respond quickly to emerging health and environmental challenges.

In summary, Antwerp's life science and science park ecosystem demonstrates how deliberate co-design can overcome common obstacles. By expanding physical space, strengthening skills pipelines, and fostering cross-sector alliances, local organisations position Antwerp as a model for mid-sized European cities.

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Effective Governance Is Key FOR SUSTAINING INNOVATION

WE SHOULD no longer view life science, science parks, and innovation districts as real estate projects. Instead, they must be managed as long-term societal investments in knowledge, talent, and the capacity to address complex health challenges.

Success in life science environments should be measured by the ecosystem's ability to generate research, new companies, and improved healthcare, rather than by the volume of laboratories or office space. Leading regions prioritise expertise, clinical research capacity, digital infrastructure, and shared advanced equipment over occupancy rates. The *United Nations Conference on Trade and Development* (*UNCTAD*) emphasises investing equally in programmes, capacity-building, and Intellectual Property expertise alongside buildings and equipment. While science parks have evolved into innovation districts, governance often remains tied to outdated real-estate models.

Effective governance is critical. Without a clear, legitimate, and well-resourced central authority, collaboration fragments into silos, leading to project fatigue. The Global Institute on Innovation Districts (GIID) finds that successful districts have a central actor who sets a unified R&D agenda, drives partnerships, organises infrastructure sharing, and maintains a long-term talent strategy. Governance weakens when new stakeholders introduce differing goals and incentives. To build world-leading environments, it is essential to clarify who sets priorities when universities, regions, municipalities, and private property owners have competing interests.

A shortage of skilled labour remains a major global bottleneck, especially in cell and gene therapies, advanced manufacturing, and data-driven life sciences. Talent is often treated as a secondary HR issue rather than a strategic priority. Investments in facilities and programmes are ineffective without the right people. Leading regions invest in universities and support international recruitment, housing, schools, dual-career solutions, and transitions between academia, healthcare, and industry. Here in Sweden, the current key question is whether talent attraction will receive the same level of priority as investments in new buildings and initiatives under the updated national life science strategy.

Following the pandemic investment wave, the sector faces tighter capital markets, price pressure on pharmaceuticals, and stricter regulations, making short-term project approaches less effective. It must also address ageing populations, chronic diseases, mental illness, and rising healthcare costs. Countries are aligning life science strategies with broader innovation partnerships, that mobilise public and private actors around clear health challenges. Science parks and innovation districts can serve as neutral arenas, if they move beyond local project ownership and act as long-term coordinators of missions extending beyond the next fiscal year.

Life science environments must focus on a few clearly defined areas of excellence as capital, expertise, and trust become more limited. The most competitive regions build strength through targeted investment in talent and infrastructure, supported by governance that resolves conflicts efficiently. For science parks and innovation districts here in Sweden, three key questions remain: which two or three strengths should be recognised internationally, how can a legitimate central authority be organised around them, and will investments in people, programmes, and networks match those in real estate and branding?

Questions like these demand answers, as these environments contribute to global development in multiple tangible ways — not least the economic and reputational gains from generating a significant number of conferences, congresses, and events each year.

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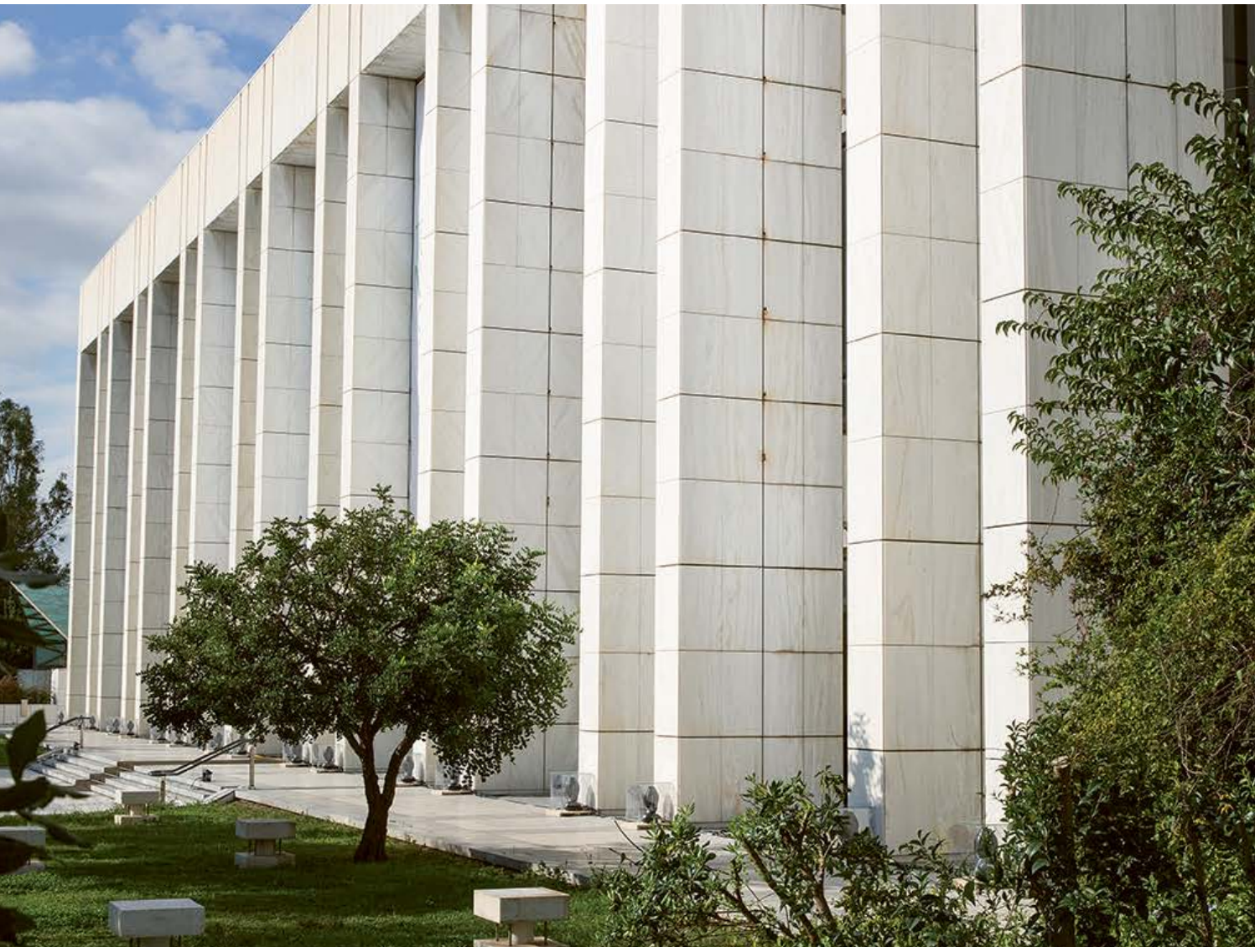

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