

Innovation Districts in Bangkok: The concept and its implementation

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Abstract

Stemming from advanced economies, Innovation Districts (ID) are inner city areas that co-locate research institutions, business incubators, start-ups, housing, services, and urban amenities. This study investigates the planning of IDs in Bangkok, an emerging economy megacity. Launched in 2018 by Thailand's Ministry of Science and Technology, the ID development is largely a national *top-down* project led by the National Innovation Agency (NIA) as the importer of the ID concept, carried out with partner universities and land developers. Several IDs are planned in Bangkok, yet their realisation remains uncertain.

Based on interviews of 12 key informants including the NIA, local and foreign property developers and urban planning researchers, the study identifies four main problems of ID implementation. These are 1) the minor role of local government in city development, 2) NIA's lack of authority in urban planning, 3) the absence of civil society engagement, and 4) the lack of innovation drivers in the society. Thailand is seen to be stuck in the middle-income trap with a "talent gap" as an obstacle to economic upgrading. The root problems are the non-planned organic growth of the Bangkok megacity and the national education system that does not support innovations.

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