



Julie Wagner Keynote

9 February 17



*Thursday 9th February
Kindly hosted by Lendlease*

“Create smart places and use them to attract smart people” Julie Wagner told attendees at her keynote speech in the new Lendlease offices at Barangaroo. Julie, one of the world’s leading thinkers in urban affairs, Co-Director of the Initiative on Innovation and Placemaking at the Brookings Institution, and co-author of the seminal paper that changed the way people thought about innovation in the city, “The Rise of Innovation Districts”, gave a presentation that was both insightful and engaging. The phenomenon of Innovation Districts and how to create those conditions for innovations is a recurring topic for the Committee for Sydney, and we were delighted to welcome her to Sydney to present on innovation in its local context.

Julie discussed the future development of innovation districts in Sydney and how Government must work to create the right environment for innovation to flourish. Julie outlined that fast and reliable public transport is key to the creation of innovation districts, as knowledge workers value public and active transport connectivity over car accessibility. For this reason, she suggested that it is often more simple to develop an innovation district in an already established part of a city, often near the CBD, than to create an entire new precinct.

Julie also highlighted the importance of urban design to create a strong sense of place for innovation districts. As these areas rely on the sharing of information and the benefits of clustering many businesses in close proximity, social interactions are crucial to their success. Great places that are designed well and have a vibrant cultural life encourage social interactions, however, places that feel artificial are not as successful in fostering connections between workers needed for innovation districts to flourish. Julie emphasised that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to creating innovation districts, and that government officials should not assume that what has worked in one city will be successfully transported to another. Each city, and even different locations within a city, have a unique context that requires a nuanced approach.

Following Julie’s presentation, a lively discussion with Geoff Roberts, Economic Commissioner from the Greater Sydney Commission; Patricia Woods, Deputy Vice Chancellor (Resources) at the University of Technology, Sydney; Kate Meyrick, Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director at The Hornery Institute; and Julie pulled from the research what can be learned for Sydney and what strategies are required to realise innovation.

districts in our city.

The topic of innovation and smart cities is one of the Committee's priority focus areas, and we look forward to building on our strong start to the year by welcoming Julie's colleague, Bruce Katz, later in the year. We are also grateful to the Department for Premier & Cabinet and the Greater Sydney Commission for their support in bringing Julie Wagner to Sydney.