

# DEMAND FOR IP ADVICE GROWING - ROCA JUNYENT

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## **As Barcelona's reputation as a centre for technology companies grows, an ever-increasing number of start-ups require advice on the protection of intellectual property**

Barcelona is in the process of developing a reputation as a centre for technology companies and consequently there is growing demand for advice on IP rights and management, according to Roca Junyent partner Anna Viladàs.

"Barcelona is increasingly becoming a 'smart city' and is shifting from its past tourism centred model and putting a greater focus on the technological industry," she says.

To illustrate this point, Viladàs highlights the recent opening of the Barcelona Advanced Industry Park (BAIP), which, according to the City Council is aimed at the "revitalisation of the city's industrial fabric and business growth". To this end, a new grant facility has been created that will make a total of €5m available to 500 companies that want to invest in new industrial projects.

Meanwhile, Viladàs also points to the success of the @22Barcelona project as evidence of Barcelona's gradual transformation to a technology industry hub. The project, which is situated on 200 hectares of industrial land in the Poblenou area and aims to form a concentration of "intensive knowledge-based" companies, has resulted in around 3,500 businesses moving to the area since

2000. The number of residents in the @22 district has increased 23 per cent since then, while the number of workers in the district is estimated at 90,000, which is 62.5 per cent more than when the project started.

"The City Council keeps attracting more new companies and is making Barcelona a more technological city," Viladàs says. "We are seeing many entrepreneurs establishing themselves here and, consequently, the number of contracts between the university and research centres keeps growing, for example."

Viladàs, who specialises in intellectual property law, says the nature of much of her work has changed in recent years, with a difference in the type of clients requiring advice. "We used to do a lot of work for cultural institutions, film production companies, advertising and media companies, but this slowed down with the crisis," she says. "Now our client base has transitioned to the world of new technologies and creative industries." Viladàs argues it is currently a boom time for such companies, which are creating products that are in high demand. "We are currently at a peak of intangible consumption [that is, the purchase of goods such as music, downloadable videos and e-books, for example]." She adds the staging of the 2015 Mobile World Congress in Barcelona is another sign of the city's status as a sought after location for technology companies.

### **Mistakes could be made**

Viladàs says one of the challenges start-up technology companies face is the protection of intellectual property. "It's key for them to get accurate legal advice right at the beginning of their activities" she says. Viladàs adds that if companies fail to do so, they may compromise their commercial potential. "One of the mistakes start-up companies could make is not being fully aware of the risks associated with the mismanagement of their IP – in some cases, they prioritise funding and end up signing contracts that may actually restrict their rights."

However, the outlook for start-ups in Barcelona is generally bright, Viladàs says. She adds that business schools are reporting that there are more companies getting started and more activity. "It looks like more small companies are managing to do better and banks and investors are increasingly participating in programmes to support these businesses and we expect this will continue."

While Viladàs believes Barcelona is making progress towards being a world centre for the technology industry, she argues there is still work to do. "I don't think Barcelona is fully there yet – there is still a lot to do and competition among cities is fierce."

The market for IP-related legal service is also becoming increasingly competitive, Viladàs says. "The biggest challenge for lawyers, in order to be able to render the best advice, is keeping up to date with new developments, not only in your country but on an international scale."