



EXCHANGING IDEAS: Mal Vallance, left, with Stephen Taylor, the director – technology transfer of the AREA Science Park in Trieste, Italy.

Ballarat can learn from Trieste

By MAL VALLANCE

ON A recent holiday to Europe I took some time out from the tourist trail and visited the AREA Science Park in Trieste.

The city of Trieste is situated on the very edge of north-east Italy, towards the end of a narrow strip of land lying between the Adriatic Sea and Italy's border with Slovenia. The population of the city approximates 200,000.

In the mid 1970s, the Trieste region suffered a major earthquake that significantly damaged buildings and infrastructure within its region. The Italian government responded with a range of initiatives aimed at rebuilding the local economy. The AREA Science Park was established in 1978 with a mission to create quality jobs, undertake internationally recognised research and to generate strong economic outputs.

Over the past 30 years, AREA has grown to the point where it is one of the largest science and technology parks in Europe. The park operates across two campuses (Padriciano and Basovizza) and plays a fundamental role in the start-up and development of centres, companies and institutes operating in the fields of scientific research and technology transfer.

The Park hosts 90 organisations and enterprises (75 private enterprises and

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15 publicly funded research bodies), employing about 2400 people, and generates about \$200 million in outputs per annum. The Park provides 88,000 m² in office and laboratory space.

AREA and the leaders of the city of Trieste understand and appreciate that innovation (generated through quality research) has the potential to produce new and additional value, aimed at satisfying new and emerging markets within fields such as life sciences, physics, materials and nanotechnology, IT Electronics and Telecommunications; Energy and Environment.

The visit to AREA confirmed in my mind that the University of Ballarat is pursuing a sound strategic direction with the ongoing development of its Technology Park.

The Mt Helen precinct employs 1400 people, generates about \$300 million in outputs annually and produces about \$100 million in household income. While the business orientation of each park is very different, each is making a significant contribution to industry innovation and the creation of regional wealth.

The visit to Trieste emphasised a number of things, namely:

- The role of government cannot be overstated. AREA receives \$8 million each year from the Italian government to support innovative technology start-up enterprises and research entities.

AREA commits a percentage of its annual budget to investing in the equity of selected innovative start-up enterprises. Once the enterprise achieves business momentum across two or three years, AREA will then sell their equity back to the enterprise.

This type of approach is foreign to the Australian technology-park landscape. However, it should be acknowledged that the University of Ballarat has historically received solid support from all state governments for capital projects within its Technology Park.

Further, state governments have often provided a range of direct financial assistance to enterprises investing within a technology park context.

- The importance for a region to commit to a vision and work together for the common good.

AREA is clearly valued and supported by the city of Trieste. The park is highly regarded and respected by the Italian government as a leader in theoretical and applied research. Over the past three decades, Trieste has undertaken a process of reinvention – a shift away from the strong reliance on fishing, maritime and related industry sectors.

Trieste is now pursuing a future based on a knowledge economy (led by AREA and the University of Trieste), together with strong and robust commercial, transport and tourism sectors. There are some obvious parallels between Trieste and the journey and evolution of Ballarat and its region.

- It is critical that the proposed stage 2 University of Ballarat Technology Park expansion proceed.

The university is currently undertaking a land rezoning process of 22 hectares of land located between the Technology Park and the Mt Helen Campus. This development has the potential to create another 1400 quality jobs across the next 10 to 15 years. If we wish to ensure our young people live, work and invest within the region, then we need to create the environment and conditions for this to occur. Trieste is a clear demonstration of what can be achieved.

- Mal Vallance is the director of Technology Park, University of Ballarat