Amsterdam, the capital of the Netherlands, wanted to become more innovative. But like many cities, it faced a challenge: How to drive innovation when most city department heads were focused on day-to-day operations?

City administrators realized that an ecosystem model could bring together various stakeholders to build smart city solutions. To make this ecosystem model effective, the city's ideation and innovation processes were removed from operations and centralized within a new workshop environment. The focus was on developing ideas through co-creation with experts and a broad ecosystem of stakeholders including city agencies, businesses, academia, research organizations, and citizens.

Adopting this ecosystem innovation process required civil servants to work alongside technology experts, corporate entities, social entrepreneurs and start-ups. It also entailed embracing the rapid prototyping of ideas.

New and innovative solutions were applied to the city's most sticky problems. The city was able to develop seven ideas initially, which were then filtered down to two most critical areas: mobility and poverty reduction.

In line with their sustainable mobility goals, the city recently launched a pilot project called Vehicle2grid. The aim of the pilot is to help residents store their locally produced solar energy to their electric car batteries. The pilot involves several ecosystem partners like Cofely, Alliander, Mitsubishi Motors Corporation, Amsterdam Smart City, Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences and the borough of Nieuw-West. It is a good example of how diverse ecosystem players, in this case car manufacturers, city government, and academia, can come together to test an innovative solution.

Amsterdam's mobility efforts also include a focus on cycling. Cycling is a way of life in Amsterdam, and the city has built infrastructure, bike tracks and bike racks that could support and encourage bicycling. Amsterdam is arguably one of the most bicycle-friendly cities in the world.

In the sphere of poverty reduction, an innovative budgeting app has been developed that helps the poor plan and track their financials.
Another example of collaboration innovation through an ecosystem approach is the Amsterdam smart citizens’ lab. The lab provided a platform for citizens, scientists, engineers and designers to develop low-cost, easy-to-build and maintain sensor kits that can measure temperature, humidity, light, sound, carbon monoxide and nitrogen dioxide. Citizens were active participants in this effort and were taught both the science behind these measurements as well as their technological application, and also how to upload the data to the online platform. This initiative was developed in association with the Amsterdam Institute for Advanced Metropolitan Solutions (AMS). “It was one more step towards a greatly adaptive and user-centered urban environment”, noted Natasha De Sena, programme developer at AMS. She also believes that such innovations will transform cities into prosperous, dynamic and adaptive living environments.

How Deloitte helped

Deloitte worked closely with the city of Amsterdam’s leaders and Chief Technology Office to develop the city’s vision and define smart city goals and projects. Starting with an analysis of the city’s current situation, Deloitte determined that developing a successful innovation environment required working outside the city’s existing business model with external experts from public, private, and academic organizations who had strong technical expertise.

Once Deloitte and city leaders clarified the city’s vision, defined goals and projects, and identified staff roles, Deloitte established a structure for an accelerator ideation and rapid prototyping process that sits outside of the traditional city government structure and leverages cocreation with a broad range of ecosystem partners, including experts, city agencies, businesses, academia, research organizations, and citizens. As ideas are generated, they are prioritized by a board of directors, and proofs of concept are developed for those that are approved.

At the onset, city authorities used the ecosystem model to address two of their most critical areas: mobility and poverty reduction. Sample projects that emerged: cycling focus, budgeting app, and smart citizens’ lab. Deloitte continues to help the city apply the model to address other challenges the city faces and plans to establish the accelerator ecosystem as part of the city’s normal business model.

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Endnotes

1. Interview with Deloitte Netherlands project team, November 14, 2016
4. Interview with Deloitte Netherlands project team, November 14, 2016

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