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How Europe is Competing with Silicon Valley by Sarah Jacob

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In 2008 Silicon Valley was named the most influential technology hotspot in the world by silicon.com. Itâ€™s no surprise given that Apple, the richest company in the world and the company that all technology fans are looking at, is based there and is making strides in both hardware and software development.

People in Europe will be pleased to know that it isnâ€™t all happening in California though - Europe has its own share of innovation within technology, which could of course lead to more IT jobs.

London ranked third in silicon.comâ€™s poll thanks to its status as a capital in media and world banking, and the smart use of technology in businesses that are based in the English capital. Cambridge was listed sixth on the panel. Itâ€™s considered a high tech hub in Britain thanks to close links between Cambridge University and some of the biggest names in technology.

Most noticeable about the list wasnâ€™t the countries that were included, but those that werenâ€™t. Italy, France and Germany were all omitted, but Germany seems set to change that.

Berlin is home to software maker Metaversum, which is situated right next door to the Game Academy. Game Academy is Europeâ€™s first ever school for aspiring programmers. Most refreshing is that Metaversum is home to dozens of young adults aged 25-35 â€“ a pinball machine in the hallway reaffirms its fresh outlook â€“ and the company develops Twinity, a 3D virtual world mirroring the real world, complete with real people and places. Twinizens, as the virtual people are called, rent flats, socialise with films and music, go shopping and run businesses. Berlin and Singapore versions are currently in beta testing, and other cities including London are planned also.

Metaversumâ€™s founder and CEO moved to Berlin from Brussels because he thinks the city is full of talent and other software makers, a fact represented by the 2,600 software companies in Berlin. In the 12 years since the millennium that number has more than doubled, and is so rapidly growing that software is the fastest-growing sector in the cityâ€™s economy.

Beyond Metaversum, Berlin has 38,000 people employed in IT, with the industry turning over seven billion euros a year. Not only that, but Berlin is also the centre for video games and mobile entertainment. Indeed, the German capital has become something of a home for start-up technology businesses, with new companies springing up seemingly all the time. The audio sharing site SoundCloud began in Berlin, and it isnâ€™t alone. Berlin has some unique features that are facilitating this growth: it has a thriving alternative scene and relatively cheap real estate, making it a place thatâ€™s easy for youngsters to get established.

A new project called The Factory has recently begun, which aims to put various companies under one roof, SoundCloud included. This move will allow people from different companies to share company of other people, providing a typical working office environment but with a twist â€“ co-workers will be from other organisations. This plan could have a tremendous positive impact on creativity and new ideas and organisations. Betahaus is an existing place where many technology workers already go to spend time in the company of likeminded people, so The Factory has in a sense been able to use that as its market research. Betahaus is a coffee shop that has become a hub for the tech crowd, and has somewhere they can exchange ideas, talk over plans and even loan office space. The boom in start-ups in Berlin has taken root to such an extent that people are moving there solely to get involved with their own company, meaning the boom is likely to continue indefinitely.

So while Silicon Valley may be number one right now, Europe isnâ€™t going to rest on its laurels. If Berlin continues in the vain it has for the past few years, Silicon Valley could be knocked from its perch soon.

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