

Biomed in BCN: a semi-success

The Generalitat's support for the sector has put it on the map internationally, but the latest budget falls short, researchers say

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● The Catalan government's strategy to promote Barcelona as a hub of biomedical research in Europe has yielded dividends, but researchers emphasise that more funding is needed to consolidate those gains.

The main centres of biomedical research in Barcelona are the Institut de Recerca Biomèdica (IRB), founded in 2005, and located in the Zona Universitària's Parc Científic de Barcelona, the Centre de Regulació Genòmica (CRG), founded in 2000, and the Centre de Medicina Regenerativa de Barcelona (CMRB), founded in 2004, both of which are in Barceloneta's Parc de Recerca Biomèdica.

Along with increased funding in recent years and top-notch facilities, Barcelona's reputation for biomedical research received a boost from the achievements of Catalonia's Joan Massagué. Considered a Nobel Prize candidate for his work on cancer metastasis, or how cancer

spreads to other organs, Massagué holds posts as IRB's adjunct director and as chairman of Cancer Biology and Genetics at New York's Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center.

Future designs

"Scientific research has escalated in recent years in Barcelona perhaps more than any other European city," said skin cancer specialist Elaine Fuchs, from New York's Rockefeller University.

IRB is carrying out research into cancer, molecular medicine and genetics. "The Generalitat has understood that Barcelona can't survive on restaurants and tourism alone," said Eduard Batlle, head of the IRB's oncology programme.

CRG performs basic research in biomedicine and, particularly, in the genomic field, while CMRB carries out research with human embryonic stem cells.

These institutes survive on major funding from the Gener-

alitat, which gave €53 million for biomedical research in Catalonia in 2006 compared to a fraction of that amount less than 10 years ago. The 2008 budget for this sector is just over €57 million, a 2% rise from last year.

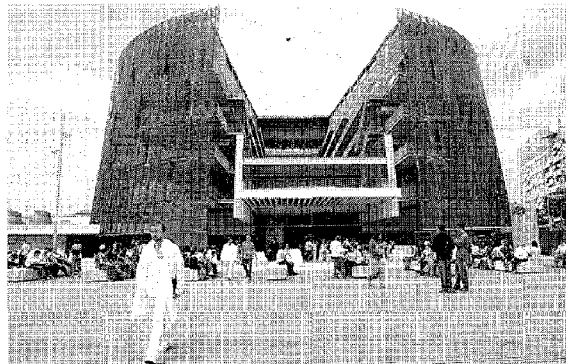
Restless researchers

The tiny increase has triggered much dissatisfaction inside these research institutes, which wanted a rise of between 10-30% for further growth. The CRG, for example, was expecting a 30% budget rise to cover additional staff.

"The situation is very difficult," CRG Director Miguel Beato told *El Periódico*. "If things don't improve I'll consider resigning," he said.

The funding crisis will affect the new institutions like CRG more as they try to recruit new scientists.

"For new centres still growing a small rise of 2% rise is suicide," an unnamed official told *El Periódico*.



The Parc de Recerca Biomèdica in Barceloneta/QUIM PUIG

The 22@ piece of the puzzle

● Barcelona's high-technology district in Poblenou, known as 22@, plans to develop a medical technology sector to compliment the biomed research that has taken root in other parts of the city. An example would be Gaes, the locally based hear-

ing-aid maker, says Sergi Guilhot Pichot, 22@'s corporate development director. The medical technology cluster is three to five years away, he says. In addition, 22@ plans to accommodate spillover from the Parc de Recerca Biomèdica./Braden Phillips