

## World Knowledge Forum 2013

### The Secrets of the Creative City

With the rise of rapid urbanization, one prominent issue on the minds of many world leaders is how to establish strong, creative urban centers. Edward Glaeser, Professor of Economics at Harvard University, proposed one possibility in Wednesday's World Knowledge Forum 2013 session on the Creative City. "What unleashes a maelstrom of creativity?" he asked. "Fundamentally, the government has to attract and train smart people, and then get out of their way."

Dr. Glaeser was joined by Kishore Mahbubani, Dean and Professor of Public Policy at the National University of Singapore, Danny Leipziger, Professor of International Business at George Washington University, John Bruton, former Prime Minister of Ireland, and Antonio Villaraigosa, former Mayor of Los Angeles, California.

Mr. Villaraigosa followed Dr. Glaeser's comments on the role of government with his own view of city leadership. "Great cities have to have great leaders, those who can close their eyes and see the future, because they have to plan," he said. "They have to know where the world is going and where the economy is going."

In order to strengthen the foundations of any city, Mr. Villaraigosa also emphasized the need for centers of education. "Great universities are an anchor for economic development," he said, "especially now that so much is predicated on intellectual capital."

Prime Minister Burton built on Mr. Villaraigosa's sentiments with a call not only for strong universities, but for universal education. "We need to have great schools, and we need to have schools that are good at looking at the interests of the bottom 50% of the academic distribution," he insisted, "because if the top twenty percent are to have a good life, the bottom has to be catered to also."

This learning should not be limited to citizens, however. It should extend across international boundaries. As Mr. Mahbubani asserted, "People don't know how much cities are learning from each other. There is a major learning journey that many people are not aware of." In regards to the rise of Asia and Asian cities in particular, he stressed, "In order to succeed, Asian societies must continue learning from the West."

One area especially pertinent to Asian countries, for which the panelists as a group also expressed interest, was the matter of public transportation. Mr. Mahbubani recommended that Asia, as well as

cities worldwide, get away from the "cult of car worship." Instead, he proposed, "A truly developed country is not where the poor try to achieve a car, it's where the rich take public transportation."

Another issue relevant to both Asian and other growing urban centers mentioned by the panelists was the problem of aging populations and decreasing birthrates. For this issue, Prime Minister Burton suggested, "It is important to maintain contact between the generations. If these problems are to be coped with, you need to be able to rely on families...you need a space where people can be physically close to each other."

Dr. Leipziger was concerned primarily with trends in Africa and South Asia, two regions where the standard of living continues to lag behind in spite of urbanization. He warned of possible issues when cities develop in poor areas. "When these places get to 50% urbanization," he said, "that means that a lot of the benefits are eluding many people because of the need to invest in infrastructure."

Returning to the theme of creativity, Dr. Leipziger also emphasized, "To be able to use the creativity and innovation of people in cities, they need an environment in which they can succeed. To step from creativity to creating income and doing something beyond their immediate space requires an environment conducive to that."

To create such an environment, the gentlemen of the panel agreed on the need to reform current political systems in many countries. As Dr. Glaeser explained, "The hardest job is how to transform a public bureaucracy that has always, in its DNA, a terrible fear of failure, the fear of looking like an idiot. Bureaucrats wouldn't become bureaucrats if they were fundamentally risk-taking, buccaneering entrepreneurs. So to transform this culture into something that is innovative, risk-taking government, that takes leadership."

Prime Minister Burton proposed, to combat the prevailing attitude, "The political culture needs to change. We need to say if you're in the public sector you have an obligation to be innovative, to experiment, to take risks, to encourage innovation, rather than simply regularity, and also to recognize that people will occasionally make mistakes and contradict themselves, and be more tolerant of that."