



Government as Business Partner_Sustainable City and Human Life_Art Hall

Speakers:

John Hynes, CEO of Gale Intl.

Peter Tennet, Mayor of New Plymouth, New Zealand

Panelists:

Pier Carlo Padoan, Deputy Secretary General of OECD

Lars Vargo, Ambassador of Sweden to Korea

Moderator:

Ferne Edwards, Sustainable Cities Research Officer, University of Melbourne

“A shared vision is critical!”

According to Peter Tennet, Mayor of New Plymouth, New Zealand, this is the most important factor if businesses and communities want to prosper and be sustainable in the future.

At the Ninth Annual World of Knowledge Forum hosted by Maeil Business Newspaper, Ferne Edwards, the Sustainable Cities Research Officer at the University of Melbourne, agreed with her colleague. “No one person has all the answers nor can one person single-handedly achieve the changes that need to occur,” Edwards stated.

For the first time ever, the majority of people live in cities. Since “the majority of energy and other resources are consumed in cities, they are an excellent place to locate and apply solutions to address environmental issues,” said Edwards.

This has led to the development of Sustainable Cities Round Tables (SCRTs), which are a series of events held every six weeks in Melbourne, Australia. The SCRTs are a collaborative model that bring different people together in order to exchange ideas, kick start innovation, and encourage collaborative action.

Tennet, who emphasized that “a community with a shared vision is unbeatable,” has gone a step further with New Plymouth, New Zealand.

In 2000, New Plymouth had the highest unemployment rates in New Zealand, and the highest rate of capital decline. Today, it has record lows for unemployment, and is now the leader in New Zealand for capital growth.

“Perception is Reality,” Tennet said. He refused to take credit for the remarkable turnaround. Recent hydrocarbon exploration and the boom in the demand for dairy products were partly responsible for the change. But, as Tennet explained, environmental safeguards are in the long-term interest of a business and its investors. “It makes no sense for businesses to destroy the very environment that attracts and holds its staff. A shared vision is critical!” And as soon as he was able to convince the businesses and people of New Plymouth that this was true, they began taking pride in their city and began changing it as a community.

Another example of how to plan for the future is what John Hynes, CEO of Gale International, has been doing in Seoul for the last eight years. Multi-national corporations and the Korean government have

collaborated and invested over ten billion dollars to build Songdo, a new city being built near Incheon on 100 million square feet of reclaimed land.

“The entire city is focused on beautiful landscaping and wide, open green space.” The goal is to make Songdo one of the most beautiful coastline cities in the world. They also hope to attract foreign investment and to have multinational corporations use Songdo as their Asian corporate headquarters.

“Songdo is designed to be one of the greenest cities on the planet, and it will be a model for the future.” Hynes also claimed that once completed, Songdo would produce 300,000 local jobs, and housing for more than 75,000 people.

At first, Hynes said, we must rely on the government to develop the infrastructure. In 2001, with the Korean government already investing billions of dollars in the Incheon airport, Hynes’s company knew that they could trust the government to do what needed to be done.

After that, it’s up to the developer to create the quality of life. First, he must design the buildings and choose where each will be located. In today’s world, they also need to focus on having a completely eco-friendly environment. One of the surprising benefits they found while constructing Songdo was that there was a 5-10% reduction in building costs when compared with typical construction.

Lars Vargo, the Ambassador of Sweden to Korea, agreed. Sweden recently built a symbio-city in Stockholm, where they took a holistic approach to city planning and made it as eco-friendly as possible. This surprisingly resulted in “more efficient land use, lower maintenance costs, it increased the property values, lowered carbon dioxide emissions, and reduced direct environmental impact.”

Vargo’s statement was met with praise from Pier Carlo Padoan, Deputy Secretary General of OECD. According to Padoan, cities consume 60-80% of the world’s energy, and produce 60-80% of its carbon emissions. He agrees that “we should try to design cities that focus on climate management, and that offer incentives to their dwellers” to become more eco-friendly.

When asked how would it be possible for Seoul to change and become more eco-friendly and sustainable, Tennent replied, “The same way you eat an elephant. One bite at a time.”

Vargo concurred and said that there were many little things which Seoul could do to start changing. He suggested offering rebates for cars driven on biofuel, and pointed out that the Korean waste management system needs a lot of help.

As Tennent said, “For that to happen, a community must have faith in its leaders, and at all levels, we should be singing from the same song sheet. Everyone must have the opportunity to be involved in setting the vision for that vision to enjoy universal ownership.”

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