

Speech by the Governing Mayor of Berlin, Klaus Wowereit, for the “Good Local Governance” Plenary Session on “The Creative City: Re-Imaging the City for a Livable Future” at the first ASEM Meeting of Mayors and Governors on 28 October 2010 in Jakarta

Distinguished colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I'd like to start by expressing my sincere thanks for the hospitality we have enjoyed here. Thank you to the governor of the fascinating city of Jakarta! Berlin, Jakarta's partner city, sends its very best regards to all of you. A year ago, Governor Fauzi Bowo visited the German capital city, and I am delighted to be here in Indonesia's capital today.

Creativity is the subject of this panel, and it is probably the best asset of today's major cities at the beginning of the “urban age.” All around the world, large cities are facing similar challenges, and with no blueprint to follow:

- Cities are growing and reaching unparalleled sizes
- They are undergoing dramatic changes – economically, demographically, and culturally
- And: growth and structural change are making new demands on their infrastructure – both in terms of transportation and the water supply, as well as education and health care

These fundamental changes require maximum creativity. Each city must find its own way, since every city is unique. At the same time, despite their differences, all of the world's cities face one big task: they must find a way to unite a dynamic economy, social cohesion, and ecological sustainability. We have to combine economic success with quality of life and effective climate protection in our cities. And we have to ensure that everyone is able to participate in society. That is the key challenge to today's large cities and to the intelligent management of these in the 21st century. Exchanging experience and learning from each other will help us all to meet this challenge.

What was unique about Berlin's situation? Well, not only did it have to deal with the rapid expansion of globalization and digitization – something the whole world experienced – but it also faced the end of 28 years of division at the very same time. The end of division was

the happiest moment of our recent history, but it brought with it the new challenge of uniting two halves of a city that had become independent cities in their own right. And all this had to be done at a time of severely reduced finances, since reunification was followed by the collapse of Berlin's industrial sector. The sector was not competitive without state support. As a result, the new era that dawned with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 was followed by initial disappointment.

But reduced finances can sometimes be a good thing, since they force people and institutions to be more creative. They brought about a change of mentality. We had to ask ourselves: What should be preserved for the future? What are the existing strengths we should be building on? What is our city's guiding principle?

We identified three key strengths:

Berlin is an international, outward-looking, and tolerant city, in which people of very different origins, languages, religions, and lifestyles live together in peace and in freedom.

Berlin has enormous capacity and potential as a center of research, and it is very well-positioned in many different high-technology sectors – from medical and biotechnology to transportation technology and information and communications technology.

And, last but not least, with its outstanding universities and research institutions, Berlin attracts bright minds and talented people from all over the world.

Richard Florida determined quite a while ago that the future of large cities and the attractiveness of metropolitan areas belongs to the three "T"s: talent, technology, and tolerance. He recently wrote that Berlin is the German city that most consistently satisfies the requirement of talent, technology, and tolerance. As he put it, the city is free, open, and fast-paced, and is constantly reinventing itself. In other words, Berlin is the "place to be."

Our new policy for the city is built on these strengths and consists of two elements. On the one hand, we are pursuing strict fiscal consolidation, modernizing the administration, streamlining bureaucracy, and merging boroughs. On the other, we have identified clear priorities: science, culture, and education.

With a drastically reduced manufacturing sector, we had to lay the foundations for new companies, technology transfer, and new industries. We tackled major infrastructure projects:

- Berlin has Europe's most extensive fiber-optic network and a high-speed broadband cable network, making us trailblazers for modern telecommunications infrastructure.
- We have reorganized the Berlin railway hub with our new main train station.
- We closed the Tempelhof inner-city airport and turned this gigantic property in the heart of the city into a public park and a venue for creative uses. This development benefits Berlin enormously.
- With the opening of the new capital city airport in 2012, we will consolidate our air traffic at one airport. This airport will give us direct connections to cities all over the world, including Asia, which is becoming more and more important to Berlin and Germany.

Above all, apart from these infrastructure measures, we have invested in bright minds. One of our key investments was in moving university natural sciences departments to a business and technology park. In just a few years, that decision transformed an empty and forgotten property into one of Europe's largest and fastest-growing technology parks. A little earlier, I mentioned the challenge of climate protection. The Adlershof Technology Park is a center of cutting-edge energy technology. Effective climate protection creates the jobs of today and tomorrow.

As for culture, many cities have slashed their cultural offerings to save money. We, on the other hand, have kept most of what we had, since culture is one of our biggest strengths. And when I say that, I'm thinking of the whole spectrum of cultural life: from our big opera houses, theaters, and museums to the enormously diverse creative scene that includes filmmakers, designers, and musicians and the city's 400 galleries and countless music clubs. Our clear commitment to culture has paid off. Berlin has become an international meeting place for creative professionals. It's also one of the world's most popular tourist destinations, in part because of its exciting range of cultural options. Our tourist industry numbers went up even in 2009, during the global economic crisis. Some people call culture a "soft" economic factor, but for Berlin it's definitely turned out to be a "hard" factor.

And as for education, places that lack raw materials need to rely on education as their primary resource. Education is what makes it possible to get ahead and to participate fully in society. As a result, we have invested a lot in early childhood education and in all-day schooling, because we don't want a single child to fall by the wayside. We need all of our children and young people if we are going to master the challenges of the future, and that is why we support their early education. That is also why we've raised the number of university slots in recent years.

I spoke earlier about modern, creative city management. That raises one key question: who is responsible for services of general interest – the free market or the state?

My impression is that the tide is turning. After years of deregulation and privatization, people are returning to traditional ideas of municipal responsibility and shaping metropolitan areas democratically.

In the last few years, we have taken metropolitan development in specific directions. I have already mentioned the fundamental changes in our infrastructure.

Let me give you a second example. We have decided to make education – from nursery school to university – free of charge. That way, a good education is not dependent on the ability to pay, and everyone has the chance to get ahead.

Third, we are using state-owned companies to provide key local services to all our citizens. These include the municipal hospitals that provide high-quality health care for all and our dense public transportation network, which ensures environmentally compatible mobility. It also includes an "environmental zone," which limits access to the city center to vehicles that meet certain emissions requirements.

Finally, we use our state-owned housing companies not only to have a positive impact on the housing market and to provide apartments for a large segment of the population, but also to work towards climate protection goals. Buildings that are big CO₂ emitters are being modernized to make them more energy efficient.

What is also important is that the housing companies support the idea of the “socially integrated city,” that they create meeting spaces for residents, and that they make it possible for people to have input into how their neighborhoods are evolving. The “neighborhood management” concept was developed in Berlin to meet these goals.

As different as our cities are, they are fascinating because of their abundant energy and culture. And because so many people live in them who bring their ideas, creativity, and skills to tackling the challenges we face – as long as they have the space and the freedom to do so. That is what Berlin has learned in the 20 years since the fall of the Wall – 20 years in which the city reinvented itself. Making this possible also in the future is our goal as a creative metropolis in the heart of Europe.

While it’s true that every city has to go its own way, there’s a lot we can learn from each other and a lot that unites us. That’s why this conference and the cooperation it’s launching between the cities of Europe and Asia within the ASEM framework is so important.

However, I would also like to mention that Berlin has been supporting cooperation with the Asian-Pacific region in a special way for years now. The Asia-Pacific Weeks have taken place in Berlin every other year since 1997, and in September 2011 their major scientific, economic, and cultural focus will be on an exchange of ideas regarding health, food, and water. I would like to take this opportunity today to invite our partners in Asia to be active contributors to the 2011 Asia-Pacific Weeks. In the end, our event in Berlin and today’s conference in Jakarta serve the same purpose: to create global networks. I would therefore like to thank our hosts again for organizing this conference. Global networks are the right answer.

Let’s work together to raise the profile of our cities as the dynamic engines of our economies.

Let’s work together to find ways to make people feel at home in and connected to their cities, despite all the changes. Let’s make sure they know that the rapid pace of change is not a threat, but an opportunity.

Let’s be inspired by the good examples of our partners.

And: let's take advantage of the creative capacity and potential of our cities. Let's tackle the challenges with determination.

It's up to us to show that the world's large cities have a bright future ahead of them in the 21st century.