

Business, government, and academic leaders analyze the post-pandemic future of cities and create roadmap for change

Study will examine how innovative technologies will drive urban sustainability, resilience, and citizen well-being

November 5, 2020 (Philadelphia, PA) – ESI ThoughtLab, a leading research firm, has joined forces with a coalition of business, government, and academic leaders to analyze how COVID-19 and associated disruptions will permanently change how people work, shop, travel, learn, and live in cities. This comprehensive research program, titled ***Smart City Solutions for a Riskier World: How innovation will drive urban resilience, sustainability, and citizen well-being***, will examine what 150 cities across six continents are doing to promote a safe, sustainable, and inclusive future for their citizens.

The pandemic is already reshaping urban environments in fundamental ways—increasing reliance on remote working, medicine, and education; changing the role of distance and mobility; and speeding up adoption of IoT, AI, RPA, 5G, biometrics, and other smart technologies. At the same time, COVID-19 has served as a stress test for cities, revealing weaknesses in their digital infrastructure, data security, and operating procedures. But it has also been a wake-up call for government and business to do more to build the social good—including prioritizing the UN’s 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) around citizen safety, green living, social equality, and economic development.

Creating an evidence-based roadmap for cities

To help cities advance their future social and economic agendas, the research coalition will work together to provide urban leaders with an evidence-based roadmap that includes best practice insights, benchmarking data, and ROI analysis of digital, policy, funding, and partnership solutions that will work best to help them achieve the SDGs. The research program will include:

- An exchange of perspectives and insights from business, government, and academic leaders in the coalition.
- A rigorous benchmarking survey of 150 cities across population, income, and economic levels.
- Ongoing sentiment analysis of citizen concerns and views across locations and demographics.
- Economic modeling of the social, environmental, and performance benefits of smart solutions for achieving the UN’s SDGs.
- In-depth case studies of cities that excel at driving positive social, environmental, and economic outcomes.

“From electric cars to smart streetlights and intelligent water networks, technology has the potential to dramatically improve urban living and conserve finite resources,” said Lou Celi, CEO of ESI ThoughtLab and the project director. “But succeeding in a post-pandemic world will also require cities to draw on innovative funding and partnership approaches, while taking a fresh look at public policies and governance procedures. Our economic analysis will help cities find the best path.”

The research coalition consists of:

- **Corporate leaders**, including Cisco, Hatch, Deloitte, NTT, Oracle, Honeywell, Microsoft, Bentley, Axis Communications, GM, Intel, and RH Strategic.
- **Multilateral organizations**, including the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, and UNECE.
- **Academic institutions**, including Carnegie Mellon University, Penn IUR, IESE Business School, Sogang University, Nankai University, Zigurat Global Institute of Technology, and University of Southern California.
- **City leaders** from Singapore, Tel Aviv, Orlando, Philadelphia, Dublin, Moscow, Trondheim, Helsinki, Pearland, and Stockholm, among others.

As part of the initiative, ESI ThoughtLab has teamed up with CityAge, a media and event company, to create a dedicated website (www.citysolutions.riskierworld.com) that will provide regular updates on the program, along with the latest analysis, useful data resources, and shared content. An eBook, benchmarking platform, and other decision support tools developed from the research will be released in early 2021, together with calls to action for city leaders and the broader urban ecosystem related to the urban imperatives and solutions uncovered by the study.

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About ESI ThoughtLab: ESI ThoughtLab is the thought leadership arm of Econsult Solutions Inc., a leading economic consultancy. The innovative think tank offers fresh ideas and evidence-based analysis to help business and government leaders understand and respond to economic, industry, and technological shifts around the world. Its team of top economists and thought leaders excels at creating valuable decision support that combines visionary thinking, analytical excellence, and multi-format content.

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