



# East Innovation Conference

## MAGNET CITIES

WEDNESDAY  
November 25, 2020

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online

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The lineup of speakers at this year's East Innovation Conference brought together a unique mix of business representatives, public officials and experts from the academia and NGOs. It illustrates the depth of the ambition to transform Eastern Slovakia not only to a region of thriving business but also to a vibrant place to live which attracts talent.

This level of change requires "flipping the magnetic switch" of Eastern Slovakia which would turn it into a magnetic region. The conference focused on inspiration from other regions and cities which successfully managed a transformation of similar magnitude and scope as well as on the opportunities resulting from the disruptive processes launched by the Covid-19 pandemic.

In her opening keynote speech, H.E. Bridget A. Brink, Ambassador of the United States of America to Slovakia, stressed that Košice has already achieved a lot and is well-positioned to further improve its prospects. She praised the quality of local universities and the fact that more and more local graduates are able to find suitable jobs in the city. While the IT sector employed 1000 people in 2007, the current figure exceeds 15 000.

In the opening interview that followed, Gabriel Galgóci, President of AmCham Slovakia talked to Marek Antal, State Secretary of the Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization about how to jump-start the regions. Mr. Antal shared the

governmental priorities in this area, highlighting education in all its forms and for all age groups.

**The Slovak economy cannot be called a success if it is a success only in Bratislava.**

H.E. BRIDGET A. BRINK, Ambassador of the United States of America to Slovakia

Michal Hladký, Director of Creative Industry Košice, started his keynote speech by mentioning the characteristics that magnet cities have in common. He went on to demonstrate these on specific examples of cities like Malmo, Tel Aviv or Bilbao. And his recipe for flipping the switch? Connecting the creative and digital industries, strengthening the concept of a green city and making the river more prominent. This approach should be backed

by creating new partnerships and connections and, of course, leadership and a clear vision.

Creative Industry Košice is also fully involved in designing the right strategy for the city. Marcel Gibóda, Deputy Mayor, City of Košice, confirmed this in his speech, which outlined the municipality's approach that aims to get closer to the city's inhabitants, obtain direct feedback and provide meaningful services.

The program continued with a panel discussion on reinventing the Košice innovation ecosystem. As the panelists agreed, Košice already meets the requirements of a magnet city - as it attracts talent and innovation - but only at the local level. Peter Kolesár, Partner, Civitta Slovakia, described the stories of two challenger cities - Brno in the Czech Republic and Tartu in Estonia, which both underwent an amazing transformation that could inspire Košice. Both were ready to embrace new ideas, create meaningful and wide collaborations and adopt an innovative approach.

Raimond Tamm, the Deputy Mayor of Tartu was also among

the panelists and contributed with first-hand experience. He described Estonia's bold adoption of digital after the fall of communism and how Tartu was able to use this potential to the fullest through its focus on startups.

Peter Kolesár summarized the potential of the city as follows: *"Košice has a strong identity, a legacy of more traditional industries, the legacy of the European Capital of Culture, an emerging new sector which is the creative industry. We have strong public institutions and a leading organization basically unmatched in Slovakia in terms of impact (Creative Industry Kosice), and really strong universities - these are the assets that we should build on."*

**I foresee a return to a more rustic life where people will be working for global companies from the comfort of their cottages.**

TOMÁŠ SEDLÁČEK, Economist, philosopher and former economic advisor to Václav Havel

Steel industry has defined Košice for decades and Juraj Sabol, General Manager for Strategy,



PANEL 1. MAGNET CITY: REINVENTING THE KOŠICE INNOVATION ECOSYSTEM. From left: **Raimond Tamm** (EE), Deputy Mayor, Tartu; **Peter Kolesár**, Partner - Strategy, Innovation, Funding, Civitta Slovakia; **Michal Hladký**, Creative Industry Košice; and **Martin Mudrák**, AmCham Slovakia (Moderator)



**Marek Antal**, State Secretary of the Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization



**Marcel Gibóda**, Deputy Mayor of the City of Košice



**Juraj Sabol**, General Manager for Strategy, U.S. Steel Košice



**Marcela Havrilová**, Education Industry Lead, Microsoft Czech Republic and Slovakia



**Andreas Truls**, Managing Director Deutsche Telekom IT Solutions Slovakia



**Tomáš Sedláček (CZ)**, Economist, philosopher and former economic advisor to Václav Havel

U.S. Steel Košice, talked about its future. He introduced steel as an essential and 100% recyclable material for the economy of tomorrow, also in modern sectors such as the production of electric vehicles or renewable energy sources and described the path of USS to become a "technology company that just happens to make steel."

**Steel has the potential to be the fabric of innovation in Košice, Eastern Slovakia and beyond.**

**JURAJ SABOL**, General Manager for Strategy, U. S. Steel Košice

In her informative presentation, Marcela Havrilová, Education Industry Lead, Microsoft Czech Republic and Slovakia, talked about the necessity of upskilling. The current situation on the labor market no longer enables employers to simply choose from an open pool of talent when the need arises. As she explained, upskilling your people is the best investment on the path of digital transformation.

Andreas Truls, Managing Director Deutsche Telekom IT Solutions Slovakia, took a closer look at the pandemic and its aftermath with the goal of identifying potential opportunities. As he admitted, it

is easier to do so for the IT sector, which is much better suited to adapt quickly, and other sectors might find it much more difficult. He also pointed out that this kind of disruption opens up possibilities which were previously considered unimaginable.

Instead of talking about a "new normal", Mr. Truls prefers the term "we work new" to describe the future mode of operations designed around talking and listening to the feedback of customers, managers and analyzing and consulting the relevant data. In practical terms this translates into identifying opportunities, experimenting and accepting failure as a part of the process.

**The companies which will be able to motivate their employees to think proactively and work on improving themselves will be the successful ones.**

**JURAJ GIRMAN**, Vice President Telekom IT, Deutsche Telekom IT Solutions Slovakia

The next speaker, Tomáš Sedláček, Economist, philosopher and former economic advisor



PANEL 2. INNOVATION DURING HARD TIMES. From left: **Juraj Girman**, Vice President Telekom IT, Deutsche Telekom IT Solutions Slovakia; **Tomáš Sedláček (CZ)**, Economist, philosopher and former economic advisor to Václav Havel; **Petr Chládek (CZ)**, CEO of the South-Moravian Innovation Centre (JIC) Brno; and **Jozef Bujnovský**, Moderator

to Václav Havel, shifted the discussion to a more general level of changes happening at the level of society and of how we will live our lives in the years to come. He offered a vision of cities as modern agoras, with more and more people living in rural areas adopting the digital nomad lifestyle.

Mr. Sedláček also took part in the last panel discussion, focused on innovation in hard times, along with Petr Chládek (CZ), CEO of the South-Moravian Innovation Centre (JIC) Brno and Juraj Girman, Vice President Telekom IT, Deutsche Telekom IT Solutions Slovakia. They talked about how the center of our lives has been shifting towards the virtual world and how the pandemic has strengthened this trend. The ongoing digitalization is likely to result in a change of culture and values, and a change of leadership and of the way we work. As Petr Chládek warned, one of the biggest challenges is to help SMEs on the path of the digital transformation; otherwise they may be irrelevant in five years.

**For us the future lies in connecting creativity and IT and digital solutions.**

**MICHAL HLADKÝ**, Director, Creative Industry Košice

The panelists also agreed that proactive personal upskilling will be a must in the future and that individuals will need to adopt an entrepreneurial mindset to realize their potential on the market.

The last speaker of the program was Michael Cresswell, Headmaster of the Košice International School, who introduced the concept of the recently opened first international school in Košice, as well as its vision of education for the future.