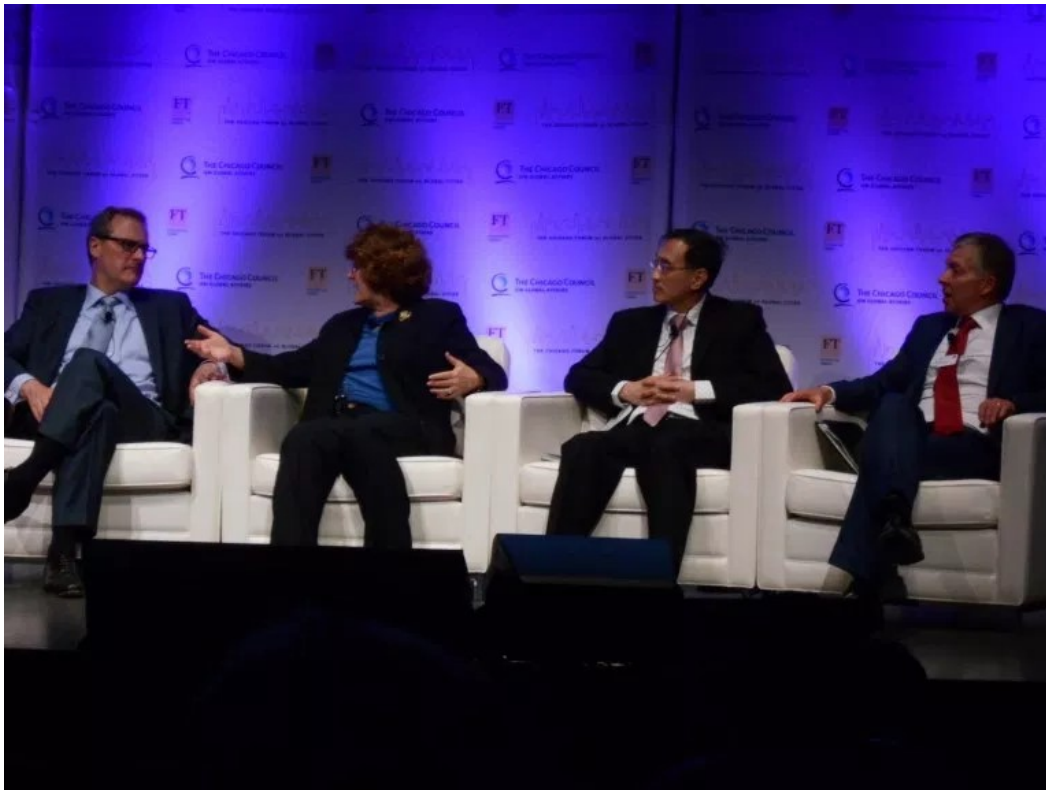


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## On the World Stage Chicago's Place in the Global City Hierarchy

JULY 29, 2016 AT 9:00 AM BY [ALAN MAMMOSER](#)



*Ginger Evans, Commissioner, Chicago Department of Aviation, makes a point during the Global Transportation Hubs panel. To her right is Thomas Wright, President of the Regional Plan Association of New York.*

By Alan Mammoser

Chicago is one of the world's greatest cities. For all its Midwestern modesty, it is home to several major universities, world-class hospitals and iconic architecture and attractions. We've got a nascent bike culture and bike-share system, a developing riverwalk and a world-renowned food scene.

Yet our future isn't certain. For all of the city's developments, our infrastructure is crumbling. For every new

innovation and accomplishment, medical emergency services are unfairly meted out.

Segregation is growing. Violence is rampant. Wages are down.

What's a city to do?

The second annual Chicago Forum on Global Cities, cosponsored by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs and the Financial Times (FT), tackled some of these issues and asked even more questions of the world's top urban centers during a three-day conference this past June. It's not enough to have great art and theater and architecture. Great cities have to continue to rebuild. And rebuilding requires tearing down.

"The old industrial city with its machine politics worked for many people because it had a kind of social contract that's gone now," says journalist Richard Longworth, who's been writing about Chicago's place in a changing world for four decades. "Now we have this global economy that's bringing enormous wealth into the city, but we've got to figure out how to spread the riches to the people who were shut out thirty or forty years ago when the industrial economy changed."



*Richard Longworth*

Longworth has documented the destruction of old industrial Chicago and the Midwest. His series of articles for the Chicago Tribune in 1981, "Chicago, City on the Brink," alerted the public to the dangers of the city's downward spiral as its industrial base declined. Years later he authored the book "Caught In The Middle," which looked at the tough choices facing many Midwestern towns that have not fared well in the new global economy.

Now, as Distinguished Fellow at the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, he is helping Chicago to see how it can continue to transform and meet the challenges of the new era. He's working to make the Council's Global Cities program into a first-rate think tank. "The program is focused on the fifty or sixty cities worldwide that dominate, but we want to have an influence on Chicago," he says, "to help the city find its niche in the global economy."

The second annual forum was organized around a series of panel discussions skillfully moderated by FT columnists.

Although it had no specific mission, it highlighted key themes, the big problems and the great possibilities of Chicago and its global colleagues. Our town stood shoulder to shoulder with the giants and fared pretty well, at least for now. But the forum left a feeling that the city's future footing, global or otherwise, is on tenuous ground.

For Longworth, there's no other choice, there's no going back. Chicago will thrive as a global metropolis or it will begin to die. He argues that the city must continually recreate its economy and care for all of its people. And he warns that if Chicago fails to reinvest in itself, then it will lose its high place in the global economy, shrinking and emptying out like so many rusting hulks across the Midwest. "In the end, if the economic

## Going Global

“The world is flat,” wrote journalist Thomas Friedman in the title of his popular book eleven years ago. He coined the phrase after seeing the amazing growth of industries in China and India, made possible by electronic communications that link the world together as never before. We live in an era when place, space and time seem less and less relevant, when there’s no longer a remote far side of the earth.

Longworth, former foreign correspondent for the Chicago Tribune, doesn’t disagree, but he takes a more nuanced view. Not all places are equal in this new era; there is a hierarchy. While we all live in an interconnected world, a few places are the command centers of this world, where the most important decisions are made. These are the global cities, the leaders in business, finance, education and culture.

Longworth, now retired, is enjoying his role as Distinguished Fellow at the Council. “I never thought I would be ‘distinguished’ anything,” he says with a laugh. He was a Tribune correspondent in Europe for twenty years; he reported from the USSR and was in Berlin when the Wall fell in ’89. During his years abroad he remained concerned for his Midwestern home.

In 2001, twenty years after his “City on the Brink” series, Longworth authored a report called “Global Chicago” for the MacArthur Foundation. In this report he again sounded an alarm bell, asserting that Chicago has a lot of global assets, but these remain apart like separate islands of activity, not forming the archipelago of a global city. He urged Chicago’s corporate, civic, educational and cultural leaders to work together to promote the city’s interests and raise its profile on the world stage.

Some scholars and consultancies have assembled lists of the world’s top towns based on various sets of criteria. These usually list New York, London, Tokyo and sometimes Paris on top. Just below them is another tier of big cities characterized by their universality in every aspect of life, economic, cultural and educational. Chicago finds its place among these, together with the likes of Shanghai, Toronto, Singapore, Hong Kong, São Paulo and several others. They are cities of universal talent with many corporate services, major cultural institutions and universities. They are somewhat more all-encompassing than more specialized cities such as Los Angeles (cinema), San Francisco (tech), Houston (oil), and so forth.

The world comes together in these global cities, and they reflect the whole world in themselves. They are like human magnets drawing in a universe of peoples from all continents, where you find people of almost every talent and skill, in business, in the arts, in education. This makes for a marvelous richness of cuisine, of music and dance, literature and religion, indeed all forms of human expression coming together in a metropolis.

Longworth believes that the Chicago region is in the top ten of major global players. It is famous for its corporate headquarters. It holds a strong position in the financial sector as well, being the home of top derivatives markets. Add to this a plethora of universities including Northwestern and University of Chicago, its research labs Fermi and Argonne, cultural institutions such as the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and the Art Institute, and a major airport—O’Hare—that grants direct access to almost anywhere.

Since his 2001 report, Longworth has been pleased with what’s happened. “Chicagoans saw their city as a regional center, as a Midwestern metropolis; there was a conceptual block to overcome,” he says. “But we got

Now, with the annual forum, Longworth and his colleagues at the council have created a big discussion about the technologies, the politics, the design and the dangers of being a world class town. Essentially it's a platform to ask, now that we've acknowledged globalization and our place in it, how do we get it right? A big challenge is inequality because not everyone enjoys equal access to the benefits of the new era.

### **Making People Smarter**

"Cities make people smarter," says Harvard economics professor Edward Glaeser, "so they attract the rich and the poor. They're great in inequality, but the poor come to find opportunities."

Sitting on a panel called "The Tale of Two Cities," Glaeser noted that long before Émile Zola and Theodore Dreiser, those insightful observers of the urban underclass, there was Plato, who wrote in his "Republic," "Any city... is in fact divided into two, one the city of the poor, the other of the rich; these are at war with one another."



*Economist Edward Glaeser makes a point during panel discussion on The Tale of Two Cities. To his right is Tessa Jowell member of House of Lords, Carlos Ivan Simonsen Leal, president of Fundacao Getulio Vargas in Rio de Janeiro, and moderator Edward Luce of the Financial Times.*

A thinker who seems to relish the ironies of economics, Glaeser says that policies to help the poor should recognize that a city is dynamic, that its economy is in flux. So what we want, he continues, is to have a city that allows the poor and the rich to connect. It's a mingling that naturally occurs in vital metropolises that constantly draw in new peoples. To support it there should be immigration, he affirms, saying, "Immigrants are good for cities, and cities are good for immigrants."

In terms of proactive public policy, Glaeser would put a strong emphasis on education and vocational training to prepare people to perform effectively in the global economy. And, he advised, in reference to the elite residents of the global city, "Make sure you're getting enough taxes out of these guys to pay for the schools."

### **A Cocktail of Evils**

A different set of challenges came up when FT columnist Gillian Tett moderated a panel called "Global Threats to the Global City." She introduced two specialists on terrorism, one on cyber threats and another on pandemics. "So we have a nasty cocktail of risks represented here," she half-joked.

The panelists bore down on the idea that the city itself is a target, as recent terror attacks such as those in Paris and Brussels showed. But looking beyond terror attacks to cyber-attacks and bio-pandemics, they agreed it's not a matter of if but when. The very aspects of contemporary life that make the global city possible—massive mobility and hyper-connectivity—also leave it highly vulnerable. Those who want to help and to harm the city are tapping into the same systems of connectivity.

A panelist from Singapore, an expert on epidemics, noted that the SARS epidemic of 2003 emanated from one infected person and eventually spread to thousands. As massive mobility means that no part of the world is remote any longer, the greater danger to the global city may be pandemics, and not terror, he said. Meanwhile, a cyber expert brought up the horrors of electronic terror, in a world where evildoers can link into the same online networks as their victims (as occurred in the Mumbai attacks in 2008).

There was much talk of technical solutions such as “containerization,” “air gapping” and “layerization” to put breaks into communications connectivity and lessen the harm of cyber-attacks. But more emphasis was laid on the importance of building up a strong civic culture and trust among city dwellers, as the basis of resiliency against any of the three threats.

### **New Cities Rising... Where?**

Much of what panelists said simply boggles the imagination. Attendees were told that more people are in movement today than ever before, that the slowest rate of change we'll ever experience in our lifetime is that of today. We were told that the world has 3.4 billion smartphones, 1.9 million drones, and that one third of all the world's data was created in the past year. We learned that by 2050, more than two-thirds of people will live in cities, with a huge shift to cities in Africa, Asia and Latin America. By 2050, two billion more people will live in the cities of this “global south,” and that eighty percent of the buildings needed for these people are not yet built. A developer from Hong Kong said that, in China, there have been more than 400 cities with one million or more people built in the past forty-five years.



*Alfonso Vegara, founder and honorary president of the Fundación Metrópoli in Madrid, discusses an emerging urban framework in Colombia.*

Alfonso Vegara, head of Fundación Metrópoli in Spain, gave a brief but fascinating presentation hinting at our urban future. Vegara spoke of how the scale of cities will change, as medium-size cities become more important. Lacking the scale of the global megacities, they will need to band together to become

how his organization is helping them to plan for the digital and physical infrastructure to connect them. High-speed trains will play an important role.

Dan Doctoroff, head of a New York-based company called Sidewalk Labs, stated that we're at the dawn of a "fourth urban age," an age of ubiquitous connectivity, and that something like Uber is just scratching the surface of what's to come. Cities will generate huge amounts of data collected on a very granular level, to make services such as autonomous cars far more targeted to users. Another speaker, Scott Brun of AbbVie Ventures, talked about emerging cities, which he anticipates will be new hubs rising around technology research labs. He believes these centers of innovation will arise, although we currently have no idea where they will be.

### **Design Between the Buildings**

What was interesting about the panel called "Redesigning the Global City" was that there was not a professional designer on it. Indeed, the panelists were remarkable for the diversity of their expertise. Panelist Peter Kudryavtsev, of the Citymakers organization in Moscow, noted that there was a sociologist, a health-care expert and a specialist in public spaces, but not a single professional architect. Hence, nobody was throwing stunning architectural images onto a screen.

Instead, the panelists circled around the theme of human interaction and connectivity as the key concern in good city design. Kudryavtsev made the point that the professional urbanist, the "city maker," is something new. He pointed out that there's an objective side to city making, supported by big data and the technologies that were discussed throughout much of the three-day forum. But he said there's also a subjective side, one that imagines what is unique in each global city.

Indeed, the idea of the city maker of today as more of a generalist than a specialist, as one who can draw on an array of disciplines, emerged during the course of discussion. All of the panelists, coming at the question of design from their diverse perspectives, contributed to this notion.

LaMar Hasbrouck, MD, executive director of the National Association of County and City Health Officials in Washington, brought in the key concern of health. He made the issue stark. "In Chicago," he said, "if you tell me what zip code you live in, I can tell you when you're going to die. Place matters that much."

He said there are some census tracts in Chicago, just a few train stops apart, where life expectancy can differ by as much as sixteen years. But the key to good design is a holistic approach with bikeways, a good walking environment, access to green spaces, and access to jobs with livable wages. All of these need to be around a person to ensure health, Hasbrouck asserted.

Ricky Burdett, director of the London School of Economics Cities Program, brought up the importance of good city-wide design. "Every city will have inequality built in," he said. "The question is how to manage that inequality, how to distribute it, so it's not zoned." Burdett asserted that good urban planning is about managing differences, such that zones of inequality do not become hardened.

FT architecture critic Edwin Heathcote closed out the discussion by asking what key element is needed in a city to make it a successful global city? Helle Sørholt, CEO of Gehl Architects in Copenhagen, framed the context of the question by again referring to the generalist nature of today's non-architect city maker. "Many of

so forth, all of these take place between the buildings, in the public spaces,” she said. “A predominant part of what is being built in global cities today does not involve architects.”

Burdett brought up two key factors: density and complexity. “It’s not visual,” he said, “it’s more to do with the fundamental connection of space to the structure of society.” He elaborated by adding another factor of good design, which is openness. “We’re seeing increasing closure of cities, with zones, enclaves, differences cast in stone,” he said, noting how the middle classes are being priced out of the center of London, New York, Paris and many other global cities. “To maintain openness, in the context of incremental change,” is required as a city grows and spreads, he said.

### **The Future Belongs to the Youth**

So the idea sharing went on and on. But the Forum left the question open of what an old industrial behemoth like Chicago, having painfully transitioned into a global city, is to do.

Richard Longworth, of course, has some thoughts about that. He feels the price pressure rising in Chicago, too. “It’s expensive to keep up a global city, and it will become more expensive to live here,” he says. Costs will rise, he thinks, as the city struggles to crawl out of its heavy debt burden while continuing to invest in the infrastructure and services that ensure a high quality of life. A key challenge lies in continuing to attract the global elite, the “global citizens” who might go anywhere, while not pricing everyone else out of the city. And Chicago, he affirms, must strive to make a good life possible for all its residents.

“Chicago made the leap from an industrial to a global city,” says Longworth. “It’s doing much better than the rest of the Midwest.” But he warns against feeling complacent about the city’s global role. “The global economy is a constant flow of people, goods and ideas, and a few cities are key stopping points or depots in that flow,” he says. Chicago is one of those key stopping points in the global hierarchy now. But Longworth argues that this prestigious position is not guaranteed, that the city could again decline.

Longworth sees the city engaged in a ceaseless work of recreating itself. And overall he’s optimistic about Chicago. He even finds a bright spot in the recent Census Bureau report, yet another one from the Bureau showing the city’s ongoing and seemingly relentless population loss. “We’re going up in population of people with bachelor’s degrees,” he notes. “So we’ve got a brain gain, we’re a magnet for young people in the way cities have to be.” He has faith that good leadership will emerge from these young people to keep Chicago high in the global hierarchy.

### **Alan Mammoser**

Alan Mammoser is a regional planner and writer in Chicago, and the author of “Beyond Burnham, An Illustrated History of the Chicago Region.”



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