International Journal of Institutions and Economies
Vol. 3, No. 2, July 2011, pp. 161-163

The 8th GLOBELICS International Conference: A Summary

Around four hundred scholars gathered at the Holiday Villa Hotel in Subang Jaya, Malaysia from the 1st to the 3rd of November 2010 to participate in arguably the world's number one conference on learning, innovation and competence systems. Picked as the first Southeast Asian nation to host such a prestigious conference, University of Malaya did a splendid job to ensure that the opportunity made the university and country proud. The occasion was the *8th Globelics International Conference*. *Globelics* is the acronym for Global Network for Economics of Learning, Innovation and Competence Building Systems, which uses evolutionary thinking as the basis for addressing the issues of science, technology and development. The first Globelics conference was organized in Rio de Janeiro in 2003. Subsequent conferences were held in Beijing (China), Johannesburg (South Africa), Trivandrum (India), Saratov (Russia), Mexico City (Mexico) and Dakar (Senegal). In Malaysia the conference was entitled, *Making Innovation Work for Society: Linking, Leveraging and Learning*. This has very much been the dominant route East and Southeast Asia took to reach the technology frontier in a number of industries.

A total of 320 scientific papers were refereed and approved for presentation under ten sub-themes. The first sub-theme saw a number of papers that provided evidence regarding the institutional environment through which science has increasingly been used to help the poor. The second sub-theme brought together novel measures, indicators and frameworks for understanding growth and change. The third and fourth sub-themes captured a key pillar of evolutionary economics in discussing the evolution of national, regional and sectoral innovation theories and subjecting it to change with empirical evidence. Three further sub-themes addressed the search for and use of knowledge, its stimulation and coordination by *meso*-organizations and the management of it for development. The next sub-theme discussed strengths and weaknesses of the regulatory framework provided by intellectual property rights mechanisms on development. Finally, two sub-themes attracted presentations on the governance of healthcare and the environment. Globally recognized experts presented their views on the critical dimensions of the conference in eight plenary sessions.

In my opinion three plenary speeches stood out for mention here. The first honoured one of the founders of evolutionary economic thinking, the late

Christopher Freeman, who died after leading the successful Science and Policy Research Unit (SPRU) at Sussex University where a number of Malaysians obtained their doctorates in science and technology policy studies. The second stand-out speech, by the President of Globelics, Bengt Åke Lundvall, made it clear that mainstream economics has failed to construct the right approaches to understanding problems of development because of its focus on narrow disciplinary assumptions, and hence the Globelics network has emerged with an interdisciplinary framework for understanding development issues more meaningfully. He had earlier shown us the critical role user-producer interactions play in the innovation process and was arguably the first to use the modern version of the concept of national innovation systems. The third was the Khazanah Nasional-University Malaya-Globelics lecture on evolutionary theorizing by Columbia University Professor, Richard Nelson, whose pioneering work on institutions and institutional change makes him a highly popular choice for the Nobel Prize.

The key message of the conference was its call to target science and technology on the global commons and the habitat of the world (rather than on optimal profits) so as to reduce poverty, global warming and climatic change. Attempts to do that would require the inductive mapping of the drivers of change for promotion, and novel methodologies to filter the good agents that bring progress to society through a harmonious set of paths. The global commons and the need to offer non-market institutions the same latitude as markets are not new ideas, but the evolutionary thrust to provide them equal scrutiny with the objective of ensuring sustainability by alleviating problems of poverty, global warming and climatic change sheds light for a better future.

Among the salutary features of the conference was the opening speech by the Vice Chancellor of University Malaya, Prof Datuk Ghauth Jasmon, who laid bare the struggle of leading a university up the world university rankings. The participants I spoke to later were thoroughly impressed with both the style and content of such an honest message that bluntly called for the stepping up of publications in high impact journals and the quality of teaching, supervision and research. He cited the rapid rise of China in particular as a sign that the future of world class research in the field of science is poised to move to Asia.

The conference was unanimously voted as a big success as the participants realized that Malaysia had more to offer than its immaculate beaches and warm hospitality. Over 85 per cent of conference participants considered the quality of the presentations at all sessions, the organization of the conference and the hospitality as excellent. I wish to take this opportunity to thank Bengt Åke Lundvall, President of Globelics, the Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA), the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) of

Canada, Aalborg University and Innogen who were the international sponsors of the conference, while the Ministry of Higher Education, the Economic Planning Unit, the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation, and the Ministry of Tourism and Genting Berhad played important roles in the hosting of the conference. The organizing committee members at University of Malaya from the Faculty of Economics and Administration, and the Science and Technology Studies Department at the Faculty of Science, in particular, Thiruchelvam Kanagasundram, Goh Kim Leng, Ng Boon Kwee, Zeeda Fatimah Mohamad, Nik Rosnah Wan Abdullah and Zainab Abdullah, deserve a big pat on their shoulders for doing such a good job.

Rajah Rasiah
Chairman
8th Globelics Organizing Committee