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Australia is well-placed to wrestle with the challenges it faces, says Marco Assorati

Australia is ripe for innovation to build smarter and more flexible infrastructure to meet the challenges posed by its growing population, according to “Flexible Cities. The Future of Australian Infrastructure”, a new report prepared by The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU).

Commissioned by global infrastructure group, Salini Impregilo, the report examines how Australian cities must become more flexible – or future proof – to meet the evolving needs of their residents, in a country that has a long-term plan and strong record of robust infrastructure investments, with its leaders, institutions and businesses understanding the urgency and importance of smart initiatives to keep growing.

“We wanted to contribute to the ongoing national discussion about the future of infrastructure in Australia, as we believe to have a lot to learn from Australia, a country with a clear vision on infrastructure investment,” says Marco Assorati, executive regional director Asia Pacific at Salini Impregilo.

“We hope to take part in this vision by bringing the expertise that we have gained from some of the more challenging infrastructure projects in the world.”

Assorati is one of the participants at the event “Flexible Cities. Advancing Australia”, together with Heather McDonald, head of School, Built Environment, UTS; Carlo Ratti, director of the Senseable City Lab at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT); Charles Ross, editorial director, The Economist Intelligence Unit, Asia; and Anna Chau, acting chief executive, Infrastructure Australia.

Australia is working hard to avoid becoming a victim of its economic success, according to the report. It is investing heavily in infrastructure to relieve the pressure that its rapidly growing population is expected to place on its ability to provide the high standard of living for which it is renowned. Although other countries are also looking to meet the needs of future generations, Australia, in many ways, could serve as a model, given its openness to innovation, the report says.

“Australia is well-placed to wrestle with the challenges it faces, and, as it navigates infrastructure challenges earlier and with greater urgency than some other countries, it could be a model for how other countries... can build smarter, more flexible, next-generation infrastructure in their cities,” it says.

Based on in-depth research and interviews with a wide variety of Australian infrastructure experts and stakeholders in both the public and private sectors, the report says global trends point to a new type of infrastructure that is flexible – in other words, adaptable to the future needs of the country’s dynamic cities. One of those leading trends is digital technology.

“The design, construction and maintenance of infrastructure projects are increasingly driven by digital technologies, unlocking cost and time savings in building roads, railways and entire city centres,” the report says.

Another leading trend is the new model of partnerships among governments, universities and commercial players to foster innovation and support in a better way the efficient planning and execution of major projects by contractors.

The report highlights how Australia’s advanced financing and procurement practices are attracting international investors and builders who integrate the local skills, bringing their expertise to support the country in achieving its ambitious goals.

“That’s why Australia is an attractive market for us and is part of our growth strategy,” says Assorati.

“The challenges that come with rapid urban growth are not easily addressed. Without strong partnerships and investment in infrastructure, as well as a willingness to take calculated risks on uncertain future scenarios, cities will struggle to provide for their citizens,” concludes the report.

“Australia’s cities are, however, not shying away from these challenges. Overall, the country has shown an enormous willingness to innovate, collaborate, and learn from global leaders.”

For a copy of the Flexible Cities. The Future of Australian Infrastructure report, [click here](#).

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