THE DEVELOPING WORLD

How an explosion of creativity from developing countries is changing the world—and why the developed world has to start paying attention

AUTHOR OF THE IDEA BOOK—FEATURED IN "THE 100 BEST BUSINESS BOOKS OF ALL TIME"

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AUTHOR OF THE IDEA BOOK—FEATURED IN "THE 100 BEST BUSINESS BOOKS OF ALL TIME"
To my mother and father
– and to all parents with a curiosity about the world who have bestowed this gift upon their children.
The Developing World

How an explosion of creativity from developing countries is changing the world—and why the developed world has to start paying attention.
Foreword

The idea for this book came about on a trip to India in 2003 – during an interview with a professor at the Indian Institute of Management in Bangalore, to be exact. I have, unfortunately, forgotten the professor’s name, but I will never forget what he said to me. “Fredrik! We Indians don’t want your boring jobs, like sewing footballs or assembling cell phones. We want your fun jobs: your research jobs, your analytical jobs, your design assignments and your development departments. Thanks to the Internet, we can look at what you’re doing and compare it to what we’re doing, and we’ve suddenly realized that there isn’t such a great difference between you and us after all.”

That interview was the turning point that helped me realize something was happening in the world. Later, at the end of 2005, when China’s leader Hu Jintao announced to the nation that China was going to be ‘an innovative country’, I decided to dedicate a couple of years to really try to understand what it meant when developing countries decided to participate actively in the development of new ideas and innovations.

In December 2005, I moved to Beijing where I lived until April 2008, when I moved to Singapore. During the past few years, I have visited 18 developing countries in the course of working on this book.
My thesis is that we in the Western world made a huge mistake when we divided up the countries of the world and defined them as developed and developing countries. I do not mean that the label developed is in itself something negative:

A well-developed map can show the way.
An open parachute is ready to do its job.
A flower in full bloom can be admired in all its beauty.

Naturally, it is tempting to view the country you live in as developed – but I believe it is perilous to define a country as being stagnant in an ever-changing world. By categorizing ourselves as being developed, we have given ourselves an imaginary straitjacket that stops us from creating new and better solutions; that hinders us from seizing our golden opportunities.

By saying that we are developed, we are declaring that we are done developing.
By saying that we are done developing, we think that we have reached our goal.
When you reach your goal, you slow down.
When you slow down, you lose momentum and speed.
And stagnation is the same as the death of creativity.

I do not mean that the developed world has stopped getting ideas altogether, but we do not have as many as we used to. The ideas we do get are not nearly as innovative as they could be – and the changes that we implement are not as comprehensive, ground-breaking or original as they could be. We underestimate our creative potential by consciously limiting ourselves with the label developed. Believing that we can be developed in a world that is constantly changing is like treading water in a fast-flowing river. We mistake the moving of the legs for actual forward movement, when, in fact, we are just floating backwards. As soon as we stop swimming for a few minutes, we are whisked away by the force of the current.

It is tempting to think that we do not need to develop so much anymore. It is easy to think that we can take it easy. It is comfortable to believe that we are more or less ready with our work. It is understandable that we are blinded by our achievements. But it is a dangerous way to think.

A developing country is one that is always growing; one in which its inhabitants do not limit themselves by saying that they are done. A country that is still developing is alive and flexible. Something that is under development can be changed, replaced and influenced.

A developing country is not confined by what ‘should-be’. These countries are full of life. They have a feeling that they are creating something. There is a sense of direction.

Traditionally, the concept of developed and developing countries has meant something different. A developed country is, by implication, sophisticated, rich and advanced, while a developing one conjures up the picture of a primitive, poor and simple country.

I want to turn this picture upside down and show how dangerous it is to see your own country as developed; I want to highlight the advantages of living in a developing country - and to be a developing person.

I am fully aware of the fact that many developing countries face overwhelming problems when it comes to poverty, corruption, and lack of freedom as well as many other difficulties. I also realise that most leading research and development currently takes place in developed countries and that the Western world is light years ahead in many areas. And when I am writing about the development happening in developing countries I am not talking about the “underdeveloped” countries mostly in Africa, but of the developing countries that has developed rapidly the last 10-20 years.

Many people think that I am out of my mind when I say that, in spite of all the disadvantages that people in developing countries have, they also have advantages in comparison to those living in developed countries when it comes to creative thinking. According to these critics, I have overestimated the changes that are occurring, exaggerated the consequences and misunderstood where this is all headed.
Thanks to the progress in developing countries, the world is gradually getting access to many more creative people. This book tries to describe what these changes might lead to. It is my hope that you, the reader, will realize that something momentous is happening.

I hope that my writing can convey at least some small fraction of the wonder and fascination I myself experienced when working on this book.

I am not worried about being criticised if what I say in this book turns out to be wrong. It is quite possible that I am wrong and that the results of what is going on in the world turn out to be quite different to how I describe them. Predicting the future must be one of the most difficult things you can do. Or to quote Yogi Berra who said “It’s tough to make predictions, especially about the future.”

However, the purpose of this book is not to describe an absolute truth, but to get you, the reader, more curious about what is happening in the world, to pique your interest about what these changes might mean and to make you more eager to implement the changes that you find necessary.

In the course of researching this book, I have carried out more than 200 interviews; 100 of them were in-depth dialogues. I have spent endless hours on airplanes and at airports, and the passport I got at the beginning of 2006 was already full of travel permits less than two years later. The one I got in 2008 was full in April 2010.

I have met advertisers in Lithuania, professors in South Africa, marketing managers and entrepreneurs in China, an Indonesian minister, government workers in Singapore and industrial designers in India. I have had coffee with a young Art Director from Indonesia, who got her education in Singapore and then moved to Shanghai. I have interviewed a curator from Europe who recently started up a project to exhibit new Chinese art in Sweden. I have spoken with many entrepreneurs about everything from fish farming to MP3 players, and have had the honour of meeting fashion designers, journalists, PR managers, advertisers and many others.

I thought I knew what was going on in the world before I moved to China. But after spending the past four years travelling and speaking to people in different developing countries, I realized that I really had no idea of the scope or effects of the creative revolution that is going on in many developing countries right now.

I want to give another perspective on the world in this book and to turn a number of ‘truths’ upside down. Looking at the world from a different point of view lets you see things that you have never seen before.
If you read this sitting in a **developed country** I hope this book will **make you more curious** about what is happening in the world.

If you read this sitting in a **developing country** I hope this book will inspire you to look at your world with new eyes and to **trigger you to join the creative movement** that is sweeping through the world.
A look at the rapid development that is going on in the world at the moment and how the changes in education, technology, infrastructure and many other areas have drastically changed circumstances for us all—and especially for those living in developing countries.
When more and more people have access to information

If – back in 1990 – you had told people living in, say, Europe that within ten years they would have access to a technology that would make it possible to read 50 billion pages of information, listen to 10,000 radio stations, watch millions of TV clips, read thousands of newspapers, call and send mails to anywhere in the world, and have access to the world’s biggest mail catalogue – and all for just 12 Euro per month – then very few people would have believed you.

Nowadays, most Europeans have Internet access and even complain that it is too slow. However, this does not mean that they have begun to use the Internet yet. Although they have access to the entire Internet, they use their bandwidth to read their local online newspapers or to visit eBay and YouTube and a handful of other sites. Those who have really understood the whole point of the Internet are the people in developing countries.

It is not until you meet these people and hear them talk about what the Internet means to them that you begin to realize what effect the Internet has on humanity. You might hear a young designer in Shanghai talking about his friend who learnt fluent Japanese by playing online Japanese games or perhaps a 28-year-old Chinese woman in Beijing describing how she learnt English fluently and then went on to study a free online program in feminism at an American university.

The 29-year-old Internet entrepreneur that I met in Bangalore a few years ago might also give you a hint about the significance of the Net. We ate a delicious dinner at a noisy Indian restaurant after I had completed my interview with him at his office. As we sat there in the outdoor area of the restaurant drinking beer on a Friday evening, I asked him what young Indians did on a Friday night. “I can’t speak for anyone else,” he replied. “But as far as I’m concerned, I usually read the online version of the Harvard Business Review.”

The determination in his look made me feel slightly guilty about how badly I used Internet resources from other countries, sticking mainly to the sites of my own country or the USA as reference sources.

While the Internet means easier access to our own information for us in the developed world, for those living in developing countries it means access to information in general. People who hardly had access to any information ten years ago have suddenly got the same access to as much information as an academic in Boston or a journalist in London. Just as a hungry person appreciates food more than someone who is full, people who have had limited access to information recognize the value of the Internet more than those who have had a lot of information at their fingertips for a while.

Lim Tit Meng is a manager at the Singapore Science Centre and he told me a bit about how the inhabitants of developing countries have adopted the Internet. When he was at a conference in Boston a few years ago, Google had a stand where they showed in real time where in the world Google was being used most. It was two in the afternoon in Boston; in other words, the middle of the night in India and China.

“China and India were alive – like fireworks!” he explained. “They were these two big red blobs. And I thought to myself, ‘Oh my god! It’s 2.30 in the morning there.’ The ability to access the Internet has really opened up everything.”

The same thing is going on all over the world. A Brazilian whom I met at an Internet conference in Stockholm told me that Brazil has the world’s highest usage of online social networks per capita, based on number of hours of Internet use per month. Although very few of the poor in Brazil have Internet access at home, the big cities have Internet cafés on every street corner where people can hang out. The sheer possibility of sitting anywhere in the world and being able to access the global mass of information means that, for the first time, people in developing countries can seriously begin to compete when it comes to creating world-leading innovations. The effects of this are going to be massive. As the Turkish-born Shanghai resident and designer Genco Berk put it so well in the jargon of computer games, “The Internet is just one big turbo booster button.”

Hikmet Coskun Gunduz at the Department of Computer Science, Istanbul Bilgi University, exemplifies how the Internet has affected people in developing countries. At the moment, he is working on
coming up with a quicker way of multiplying: faster integer multiplication.

“Before the Internet, I would have been forced to move to the USA because the world’s leading professor in this subject works there,” he told me. “Ten years ago, I wouldn’t even have had access to his work if I had remained here in Istanbul. Nowadays, though, I can chat with him every day if I feel like it.”

Hikmet Coskun Gunduz even has a mentor in Germany who is teaching him about European research methods, and who has also inspired him to translate Linux manuals into Turkish. In his spare time, Hikmet tries to solve one of the world’s ten most difficult mathematical problems: P=NP or non-deterministic polynomial time. The Boston Clay Institute has promised to give a million dollars to the person who solves the problem and Hikmet is determined to be the winner. Thanks to the Internet, he can read how others have tried to solve the problem. However, money is not the main reason for wanting to solve the mystery; he wants to ‘be a role model for other young Turkish people and show them that you can come from Turkey and still solve one of the world’s greatest problems.’

A long time ago, when the old rubber barons in Brazil had the monopoly on rubber, they were indescribably rich. It is said that they even made streets out of rubber so that the noise of horses’ hooves would not disturb the performances at the opera houses they built on their plantations. By controlling the supply of this sought-after raw material, they amassed untold wealth. However, a few rubber trees were smuggled out of Brazil and countries like Malaysia and Indonesia started producing rubber too. In the same way, we in the Western world have had a near monopoly on information and knowledge in many areas, but thanks to the Internet, this is changing.

You can really begin to grasp the impact of the Internet when one, for example, visits small villages in Sri Lanka and see children who teach each other how to use surf. You see, the Internet is not just a source of information and knowledge; it is also a tool. Someone just beginning to play World of Warcraft can get help from a more experienced player, and a ten-year-old boy can make an instructional video about how to use SCRATCH, MIT’s programming tool for kids. An eleven-year-old in India can then use this film to teach himself how to program an interactive presentation for his school project, or to create his own version of Tetris.

This means that the eleven-year-old Indian boy does not need a programming expert to motivate him to develop his programming skills. Human role models no longer have to live in the same village. Ten years down the line, the Indian boy can himself be a leading programmer and part owner of a newly-started Indian software company.

We can already see the effects of this development. Cmune is just one example: a little software company founded by a Frenchman living in Beijing and an Australian in South Korea. In order to develop their software further, they then went out searching for extremely clever 3D developers. They eventually found a young man living in a small Tunisian village via an online community.

No matter that this was a remote village in a poor developing country: for one of the best designers of 3D models around was to be found there. He then became one of the top designers by learning from others on the Internet.

Most companies would not look to recruit employees living in small Tunisian villages. But it is precisely by such an example that we can see the changes that have already taken place. In ten years’ time, we will not be talking about a handful of people in small villages as examples. For then tens of thousands of people will be growing up in a world where you can learn anything you put your mind to, no matter where you live, as long as your curiosity is alive and have access to the Internet.

However, perhaps one of the greatest benefits of having the Internet is not access to information and facts, but to sites like www.ted.com, where anyone, completely free of charge, can watch inspiring lectures by experts within a huge variety of subjects. From a professor in International Health like Hans Rosling, who passionately talks about how much healthier the world has become over the past few years, to brain researcher Jill Bolte Taylor, who gives a spell-binding talk about how the brain works.
A teacher I met on my travels said that the main task of a teacher is not to teach facts, but to encourage students to want to learn. “Teachers don’t get the horse to drink – they make the horse thirsty.” So, thanks to the Internet, young people – no matter what their geographical location – have both the tools with which to learn and the motivation to want to learn from the best and most inspirational people around the world. You could say that there are a lot of thirsty horses out there right now.

When many foals are inspired to become thirsty, then the right circumstances exist for the creation of countless new thoroughbred experts. And this process has already begun.
The battle of the brains

Professor Amarnath is the kind of teacher you wish all teachers were like: experienced yet young at heart, passionate about getting his students to challenge themselves and seize every opportunity that comes their way. His job is to help students at the Indian Institute of Technology in Mumbai become more creative – and he helps them do this in a creative way. According to Professor Amarnath, creativity is all about a sense of wonder, about being curious and astonished about everything you can do. He wants his students to recapture their childlike spirit, when they wanted to poke, investigate and build things.

During a long, interesting car journey between Mumbai and Pune he told me about the time he forbade his students to have their mobile phones with them on campus. When his students complained, he retorted by saying that of course they could use their phones - as long as they built them themselves. He has even started an innovation challenge in which students build football-playing robots. Although similar robot-building contests are to be found in many countries, Professor Amarnath realizes that even though Indian students have the same intellectual capabilities as students in the West, they may not have the same economic resources. So, instead of asking his students to build the usual five robots, which could then play football against five other robots, his contest requires them to build only one robot that can play against another one – but with nine footballs at the same time. This is just as challenging, but one that requires fewer physical and financial resources. When the professor started the competition a few years ago, there were ten contestants, including himself. Nowadays, 15,000 students from all over India compete to create the most innovative football-playing robot, and the number of participants increases every year.

The ACM International Collegiate Programming Contest, sponsored by IBM, is the world’s most prestigious contest for university students. It is called The Battle of the Brains. In 2007, over 6,000 teams from more than 1,700 universities in 82 countries took part. As MIT (the Massachusetts Institute of Technology) in Boston is often given as an example of a ‘super university’, you might guess that they won this competition to find the university that has the world’s best programming team. They came fourth – but they did not win. A good ranking even if they did not get a medal. The bronze medal went to St. Petersburg University of IT, Mechanics and Optics. Tsinghua University in China snapped up the silver, and Warsaw University in Poland took the gold.

In other words, students from developing countries won the world’s most prestigious programming contest. Only three universities from developed countries made it into the top ten; the other seven came from developing nations. Apart from the medal winners, those that made it into the top ten include Novosibirsk State University, Saratov State University, Jiao Tong University and Moscow State University. I could not help but laugh when I saw that Petrosavodsk State University just missed a top ten place and came in at an honourable thirteenth place. Petrosavodsk State University!? Petrosavodsk what?

I love it when my picture of the world is turned upside down and I find myself laughing out loud. If you had asked me fifteen years ago if I thought that Petrosavodsk State University would come thirteenth when 1,600 teams from the best universities in the world competed against each other in a programming contest, then I probably would not have said yes. In fact, it is far more probable that the top ten list would have looked completely different fifteen years ago with more teams from the USA and Western Europe at the top.

During this time, something has happened. I do not mean that Americans and Europeans have necessarily become less intelligent – but rather that the world now has access to many more imaginative students as more creative people in developing countries have the chance to get an education in subjects they are good at. The fast-growing group of well-educated people who can wrestle with creative problems and who we can now connect with, thanks to the steep and fast increase in university students in developing countries, is such a powerful trend that it is difficult to get a good overview of what is going on.

This same phenomenon can be seen in many countries and within many disciplines. After years of slow growth, creativity suddenly
seems to have exploded. I have seen examples of this time and time again in many places in developing countries.

Take India’s best design school, IID, which has been around for 50 years and always had one campus. Now, quite suddenly, it is planning to open three more in just one year. Five years ago, there were only five students in the industrial design course. The same course today has 20 students. In Mumbai fifteen years ago, there were only a handful of colleges where you could study for a Master of Business Administration, an MBA. At the end of 2007, you could find 42 colleges, and another 30 popped up in 2008. In other words, within a year, this Indian city had increased the number of its MBA programs from 42 to over 70. You can see the same kind of development going on in China, which educates five times as many engineers as the United States. There are 17 million university students in 2,000 universities. The number of Chinese in higher education is five times higher than it was five years ago and most of the students at these 2,000 universities are under the age of 20.

However, the rapid increase in college and university students is not only happening in India and China, but also in a number of smaller developing countries that have started to focus more on higher education. Singapore, for example, has decided to become a global hub for education in order to attract students from all over the world. Abu Dhabi wants to do the same thing and is building an academic city that will contain 40 universities and tens of thousands of students when it is finished.

In autumn 2007, when Business Week asked a panel of innovation consultants, academics and CEOs to rank the world’s best 40 design programs, 25 of them were to be found in the USA. This is to be expected when it is an American magazine compiling the list. And, of course, the USA has been a world leader when it comes to design programs for many years. What is more interesting, though, is that only eight design courses from other developed nations (outside the USA) were mentioned, while seven design schools from developing countries made it onto the list of the world’s best design programs. These seven were: ESDI BRASIL (Brazil), Hongik University College of Design (South Korea), Hong Kong Polytechnic University (Hong Kong), National Cheng Kung University (Taiwan), National Institute of Design (Ahmedabad, India), Shih Chien University (Taiwan) and, last but not least, Tsinghua University (China).

New stars appear on the scene at a breath-taking pace. In China today, there are more than 800 universities that offer courses in design. It will be interesting to see who is on the list of the world’s best design schools in fifteen years’ time.

In a lecture that you can find on www.ted.com, Sir Ken Robinson talks about the increasing numbers of highly-educated people in the world. He mentions a UNESCO report that predicts that within the next thirty years more people will graduate than in the whole of the history of the world so far. A large majority of these graduates will be people from developing countries who want to get an education in order to compete on the global market.

Not all kinds of education boost creativity. In fact, the wrong kind of teaching is more likely to kill a student’s creativity skills. One thing is clear, though, knowledge and information are essential when it comes to being creative. I have put my favourite definition of an idea into this nutshell: Idea = P (K + I). In other words, an idea is when a Person (P) takes his or her Knowledge (K) and Information (I) and puts them together (+) in a new way.

This definition shows that it is impossible to come up with a new idea from nothing. Knowledge about glass, how lenses distort light coupled with an understanding of how the eye works led to the invention of glasses. Knowledge about the zip and information about how the burrs of plants manage to fasten to your trousers led to the invention of Velcro.

All ideas arise when someone combines the knowledge and information she already has to come up with something new. If you study the formula, you realize the value of acquiring many different kinds of knowledge in order to have many diverse bricks to combine in different ways. And the more people who gain access to knowledge and information and who are then encouraged to learn how to put them together in novel ways, then the more creativity there will be.
You cannot, of course, equate knowledge with university. Many people acquire new knowledge and facts without going via traditional ways of learning and many spend years studying without really absorbing any knowledge. However, the rising numbers of university students paint a clear picture of the almost unbelievable increase of well-educated people in the world. As more and more of these people with access to knowledge and facts get the chance to combine them in new ways, then the more creative people there are who can come up with more innovative ideas.

According to Louise Julian, CEO for the educational company EF, a billion people are learning English — and 200 million of them are to be found in China alone. How can the world make the best use of this explosion of highly educated, multi-lingual and hungry academics? What will this mean in a wider perspective?

You need more than a seed if you want to grow a plant. The seed needs water, sun and fertile soil in order to grow. In much the same way, a country that wants to become innovative must have more than well-educated people with their heads full of information.

Innovation is about implementing change and ideas, and just because you have an idea that does not mean that you can make it a reality. Fertile soil is needed to help creative people implement their ideas. Until now, this has often been lacking in developing countries; but circumstances are gradually improving so that it is easier for them to turn their ideas into reality.
Show us the way to the moon

The people in developing countries have grandiose and daring dreams, but this does not mean that magical things with great impact will occur just like that. Inventive creation is as much about the ability to realize your ideas as about the ability to come up with them in the first place. What has been missing in many developing countries is the support that makes it easier for creative people to make their ideas come true.

When I interviewed Professor Raj Ramesar at his office in Cape Town University, he summed up the changes that are occurring rather poetically, “It is alright to gaze up at the stars and declare, ‘I want to go there one day.’ It is comforting to dream. But it is another thing altogether if you show me how to get there. What we need is someone who will show us the way to the moon; who will guide us to the stars.”

Perhaps the most exciting thing that has happened in developing countries over the past few years is the fact that people, organizations and governments have begun to realize the value of creating this kind of guidance. Several governments have understood that they must actively help to support the creative branches in both words and actions. We should not underestimate the importance of hearing from the highest levels of government that innovation and creativity matter.

China’s leaders realize that it is too expensive to import innovations from other countries, so that they are making an effort to develop their own instead. This concerted effort is known as ‘Zi Zhu Chuang Xin’ in Chinese, and can be freely translated as ‘self-owned innovation’. When a president talks about the importance of creativity, you might think it is just empty words; but when Hu Jintao, China’s president, encourages the country to become ‘an innovation-oriented country within the next fifteen years’, the people listen. In his speech, the president encouraged state-owned companies to support innovation more and the country as a whole to become more open to its own culture as well as learning from others. He added that ‘profound social reform’ would be needed in order to transform China into an innovative country.

We suddenly have innovation being officially sanctioned from on high. As a consultant whom I met in China put it, “State-owned enterprises showed very little interest in creativity a few years ago. But all that has changed now.”

It is difficult for us Westerners to understand that countries like China can suddenly become creative just because the government has sanctioned it. Yet we can compare this to the sudden change that occurred when China went from being a totally non-capitalist system to being one of the world’s foremost capitalist countries. It happened after Deng Xiaoping’s famous speech in which he declared: “It doesn’t matter if a cat is black or white – as long as it catches mice.” In much the same way, China’s leader has given a new speech in which he encourages the Chinese people to develop their creative skills.

A similar change is going on in other developing countries I have visited. In Malaysia for example the government has started to really support the creative industries. When I was one of the speakers at Design Week KL in May 2010 I saw examples of this. The KL Design week has only been around since 2009 but still they were able to get both a minister as well as the mayor of KL to come and speak at their different events. At the opening of the event the mayor of KL held a passionate speech where he invited the delegates of Design Week KL to tell him how the government could do even more to help. He said: “How can we support creativity? How can we turn this into a business success? How can we support those with good ideas to reach their customers?” And when I later met with some of the government representatives who are helping to spread innovation to Malaysian companies they too stressed how the government was taking an active role in developing innovation. With passion in her eyes one Malaysian government official said to me: “The government is leading the way. Work needs to be done. All governments have the responsibility to have a plan for the future.” And she ended her short, passionate speech to me by saying: “We have to make it easy to make it happen.”, and gave me a big, warm smile. The Malaysian
government is really pushing to support the creative industries, and that is equally true for its neighbor Singapore.

At times, the multi-ethnic government in Singapore has by some been perceived as trying to squash creativity. However, a few years ago, it started being a country that actively - you could say, nearly aggressively - spreads the message about the significance of creativity. The government is not only investing in advertising campaigns and information packages, but it is also ploughing resources into government-run enterprises and departments so that they can construct an infrastructure that will boost creative development. Singapore has undergone a metamorphosis during the last three to five years. It has gone from being a relatively boring, sleepy and uncreative place to being a country that launches new initiatives in creative branches at an almost manic tempo. It can sometimes be difficult to keep up with all the schools, institutes, campaigns and ideas that are being launched. An old police station is being converted into a design school. New art and music schools as well as a centre for performing arts called The Esplanade have been built, and a gigantic new art college is opening its doors at one of the best addresses on Orchard Road. In addition to all of this, two enormous casinos have been built that will attract world-famous entertainment concepts.

Singapore has definitely decided to promote creativity through a massive, long-term investment in a variety of different areas. Similar determined efforts to create a more congenial atmosphere for the growth of creativity is taking place in many developing countries that have not traditionally been connected with innovation.

Thailand is more often associated with tourism and paddy fields than the boosting of innovation. There are, of course, always many sides to a country. When I was in Bangkok, I met two representatives from Thailand’s National Innovations Agency, an organization that was founded three years ago in order to develop creativity and innovation. They told me that they had managed to breed a special type of clownfish that can be cultured in fish farms. One big advantage is that this provides competition that can help stop the illegal poaching of fish. Another benefit is that these tank-raised fish learn not to swim straight into the glass plates of the tanks. Another Thai innovation is synthetic diesel made from native nuts and a plastic substitute manufactured from local plants. Similar innovations can be seen in the most varied of businesses, from medical products to textiles. And yes, just three years ago, Thailand did not even have an organization to support the development of innovation.

The impact of this public kind of support is probably most apparent in South Korea. A few years ago, the government decided to work towards making South Korea a creative country that could export its ideas. One of its ventures is the DIC – Design Innovation Center – a kind of creative playhouse that contains everything from computers to 3D printers. People can come here with their ideas and develop them into innovations. These centers are often found on university campuses. There are 29 such centers in South Korea, five of which can be found in Seoul.

Hi-tech regions such as Silicon Valley in the USA, and technology parks like those in Heidelberg, Germany, and Grenoble, France, have now got competition from places like Dhahran Techno Valley in Saudi Arabia and Hsinchu Science Park in Taiwan—not to mention areas around major universities in Beijing and Shanghai in China, which already have the highest number of people in the world working in the research and development departments of global companies. Highly-educated Chinese and new graduates can easily get jobs there working in one of the research and development intensive companies that are located in these newly-built technology parks with all the latest hi-tech equipment.

One of these parks is The Knowledge and Innovation Community, KIC, located in the north of Shanghai, in the same area as top university Fudan. Nearby you can find 14 other universities with more than a total of 130,000 students. When it is completely finished, KIC will be an enormous technology park that attracts both small and large innovative new companies, started up by former students or researchers as well as housing the R&D departments of multinational organizations. Naturally, you can find all the mod cons that you would expect in a technology park. A fund of around 200 million US
dollars has been created in a venture between Silicon Valley and KIC to invest in the start-ups that establish themselves in the KIC area. Earlier generations of entrepreneurs from developing countries were forced to move to Silicon Valley in order to develop their ideas. Nowadays, the same technology, infrastructure and possibilities exist at home. Access to assets like cash and capital are also becoming more available, not least from those entrepreneurs from developing countries who have already earned a fortune in Silicon Valley and who now want to invest it locally. One such example is the Indian Sabeer Bhatia, the founder of Hotmail, who is now investing in IT companies in Bangalore.

You might think that the world’s biggest digital arts festival takes place in London, Paris or New York – but you would be wrong. It is held in Shanghai. The Shanghai eArts Festival attracts delegates from around the world, from MIT in the States to the Pompidou Centre in Paris. They travel all the way to Shanghai. If world class digital art festivals are happening in China, how can one then say that Chinese do not have access to creative inspiration?

When I visited the eArts Festival in Shanghai I got to experience a lot of wonderful performing arts. For example, there was a troupe of dancers whose movements were recorded by a camera and then transformed into real time animations and shown on a gigantic screen behind them. I also saw a modern version of Beijing opera where the singers swayed in real time 3D on a screen, and a concert where the drummers and dancers were animated as fireworks on a screen.

I was amazed by the ability of the Chinese to combine thousand-year-old traditions with the latest technology. It was stunning, powerful and very impressive.

I also managed to take in a student performance: an installation where a bowl of water vibrated in time with the artist’s heartbeat. In another installation, a tree trunk had been equipped with electronic sensors so that when you touched the inner rings you could hear a child crying; and when you touched the outer rings, an old man talked about his life. Although these installations could well have taken place in London or Stockholm, they did not. Students of electronic arts in China’s second major city have now got their very own world stage.

Considering how inspired I was by the little I managed to see, I wonder just how inspired the hundreds of Chinese students who took part were – and how this inspiration will affect innovation in the future. The fact that the best artists in the world in the field of digital arts get together in Shanghai punctures the argument that some put forth about the Chinese not becoming as creative as Westerners because of the lack of creative collaboration opportunities.

These days you can work with electronic art and sit in Shanghai or Berlin. You can be a designer living in Cape Town and not have to leave your city to attend one of the world’s top design conferences. You can remain in Bangalore and set up your own IT company with the same conditions, or even better, than if you were living in Silicon Valley or near any European technology parks.

It is not only the physical infrastructure in the form of roads and airports that has developed quickly in progressive developing countries. Just as important are the massive investments in ‘creative frameworks’ during recent years. The soil for the ideas of creative people has become much more fertile in the space of just a few years.

I did not find the clearest example of how those in charge of developing countries have decided to develop their inhabitants’ view of creativity in an art exhibition or a technology park, however; but in a cinema.

During one of my visits to India, I took the chance to see the film Taare Zameen Par in a new shopping complex on the outskirts of Delhi. The Bollywood star Aamir Khan, who even has a starring role, is the film’s director. It is a film made in Bollywood that is not a ‘Bollywood film’. It could have been made in England or the USA. Taare Zameen Par is about a small, Indian boy who goes through hell in school before a teacher realizes that he is dyslexic and a gifted painter.

At the end of the film, two women remained in their seats. I went up to them and started talking with them. It turned out that one of the women, Punita Triirikha, was herself dyslexic and – just like the boy in the film – had gone through hell at school. She had been beaten
and bullied by teachers and pupils. Many years later, she realized
that she was not an idiot, just dyslexic. A few years ago, she went on
a course in jewellery design by chance and she suddenly found her
calling in life. “I’m very successful now,” she told me, before adding,
“But I still can’t read or write. I wish the government could force
all Indian parents to see the film.” In fact, the government realized
the value of the film and subsidized the tickets so that more people
could afford to see it.

There have always been innovative people in developing countries;
but the fact that many of these countries have not stimulated creativ-
ity has created unnecessary mental barriers for many. The fact that
India is putting resources into helping parents realize that having a
child who can be an artist is worthwhile is just one example of how
the government is trying to create a solid foundation to change at-
titudes towards creativity on a wider scale.

Another example is that a ‘creative institute’ is in the works to devel-

op the creativity of all schoolchildren. There is also a national paint-
ing competition for kids where the President of India gives out the
prizes. Together these small initiatives are slowly but surely changing
the Indian people’s opinion of the significance of creativity. When
attitudes change, then new creative possibilities spring into being.

Could a film like Taare Zameen Par have been made ten years ago?
According to Punita Tririkha, this would have been impossible. She
went on to explain that India is undergoing a mental change proc-
ess. I asked her what she thought India would be like in ten years’
time if the change concerning how Indians view children, creativity
and knowledge continued at the same pace for the next decade. She
smiled while saying, “When it comes to creativity, no country will
be able to beat us. We are going to reign supreme!”

If two people compete against each other and one is motivated and
hungry but lacks the right tools while the other has both experience
and tools, then it is likely that the one with the tools will win. But
what happens when the hungry and motivated person also has access
to the same tools?

When the framework for developing people’s creativity is in place, it
creates new conditions in which people can think. The construction of
Science Centers, for example, shows how the opinion of developing na-
tions about creativity is changing.
This is a digital SAMPLE of the book “The Developing World” by Fredrik Härén. The real book is 188 pages thick.

Read more about the book, and order your own copy at:


The book is also available at amazon.com.

If you have any questions email to tdw@interesting.org
Conclusion

Michelangelo once said: “The greater danger for most of us lies not in setting our aim too high and falling short; but in setting our aim too low, and achieving our mark.” I wonder what he would have thought of the expression ‘developed’ country.

Earlier on in the book, I mentioned that 70% of the people living in a developed country like Sweden do not believe that life will improve in the future. And yet, in many surveys about the best countries in the world to live in, Sweden is usually at the top – often in fifth or sixth place, and Norway is very often number one on these lists. When I visited Norway recently to give a lecture to more than 150 top managers in Norwegian export industries, not a single person put up a hand when I asked if they thought Norway would be a better country tomorrow than it is today. It is, of course, quite a feat for two insignificant countries in cold, northern Europe to succeed in creating some of the world’s best countries to live in. However, that does not mean that there is no room for improvement. We have bought into our own myths that we are so well developed that we just cannot advance any further.

Never before has the world developed at such a rapid pace as it is doing now, and this development is only going to increase as more and more creative, enterprising and ambitious people in developing countries get the possibility to contribute their creative skills. In this context, the label developed strikes me as being the silliest and most limiting thing we can use to define ourselves. Instead, we have to create a feeling of collaboration, of wanting to participate; and we have to continue developing the developed world too.

The world faces challenges of enormous proportions when billions of people in developing countries – at a furious pace – want to participate in and share the wellbeing that is being created. The solutions we have come up with so far are just not good enough. We already use more of the earth’s resources than the earth can produce. The solution cannot – and must not – be to try to stop certain people from sharing the wealth. And anyway, they would not accept this solution.

We have to create new solutions, find new ways of coping with both old and new problems and urge ourselves to change the way we view what we do, how we do it and how we could do it in the future. To put it simply, we have to be more creative.

In a changed world like ours we cannot afford it if that part of the world that many have looked up to for leadership and direction now finds itself in a kind of collective inability to take action and where we defend what we have. We cannot afford to look at what is going on in developing countries either and dismiss them as merely problems. Developing countries lag behind in many areas and are facing gigantic problems. They do things wrong; they can be unprofessional and undemocratic. It is up to us to help them solve these problems. At the same time, we must let them help us with our problems. We may live in one of the best countries, but I do not think that any Swede (or European) would go as far as saying that our society is ideal and that we could not be healthier, happier, more satisfied and whole as people. Nor would we claim that the world could not be made even better.

Looking back on what people have done earlier will not solve our problems in the future. We cannot possibly see our way to new solutions by just saying that others have done things in a worse way than we have. And the world will never be a better place if we believe that we already have all the answers.

On one occasion, while doing research for this book, I found myself in Iceland. While I was there, I heard about the Icelandic word heimskur. It is a concept that means idiot. The word supposedly comes from the Viking age. A heimskur was a Viking who had never left his home to embark on journeys to foreign countries and who, therefore, missed out on new ways of thinking about how things could be done. In the eyes of the Icelandic Vikings, you became an idiot by just sitting around at home, believing that you already knew how things could be done in the best way. By staying at home, you end up not daring to try new things and, by doing so, make your world a very narrow one. This can lead to even more unfortunate results: for a limited person is someone who does not dream very much and who does not try to make any dreams come true.
During the interviews I conducted with more than 200 people in 20 different countries, I nearly always concluded the interviews by asking what we in the developed world could learn from the people in developing countries. The most frequent answer was, “You have to be more curious.”

So, I choose to end this book with the same words. We have to be more curious. Curious about what is going on in the world. Eager to know what these changes mean. Curious enough to look at how people in other countries choose to define and solve problems. Enthusiastic enough to manage to question how we choose to do things at home. And daring enough to dare to dream about how the world could be an even better place to live. And then we need to be brave enough and strong enough to implement those ideas. Because the world is far from being developed.

So never become a developed person.
The Developing World Manifesto

You are the developed world.
I am the developing world.

You think that most things have been developed.
I look for new opportunities.

You look to your own part of the world for good ideas.
I look everywhere for the best ideas.

You know all about your world.
I know all about my world. And yours.

You are stuck in the old infrastructure.
I absorb and adopt the latest technology.

You teach.
I learn.

You try to protect what you have got.
I am determined to get what is mine.

Your dream for tomorrow is to keep the status quo.
I am dreaming great dreams – and making them come true.

Change makes you uncomfortable.
For me, it is as natural as breathing.

You are used to being in the lead.
You take it for granted.
You think that this gives you an advantage,
And you say it will take us a hundred years to catch up.

I know better.

You live in the developed world.
I live in the developing world.

You do not know where you are headed.
I am already embracing my dreams.

Join me.

Leave The Developed World.
Become part of The Developing World.
The **author**

Fredrik Härén is the founder of The Interesting Organization (interesting.org) – one of Sweden’s leading creativity companies. He is the author of seven books. His Idea Books have been translated into more than 15 languages, and was recently included in the American book “The 100 Best Business Books of All Time”.

Fredrik is a renowned speaker and has given over 1,000 lectures in 30 countries. He was voted Speaker of the Year 2007 in Sweden together with his twin brother Teo Härén.

Fredrik lived in Beijing from December 2005 until April 2008 when he moved to Singapore where he now lives. He often holds lectures and workshops in Europe as well as in Asia.

While carrying out research for this book, he travelled to 20 countries, including developing countries like Lithuania, Estonia, Russia, South Africa, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Maldives, India, Sri Lanka, China, South Korea, Turkey and Laos. He has also travelled to developed countries like Iceland, Sweden, Japan, Norway, Great Britain, the USA and France. What thoughts and ideas did you have while reading this book? Have you discussed the book’s theme with others?

Please share your viewpoints with him at:  
fredrik.haren@interesting.org

Do you want more information about what is happening in the world? Send an e-mail to: tdw@interesting.org to get more stories and information. Do not forget to check out Fredrik’s lecture on YouTube: http://www.youtube.com/user/interestingorg.

Fiona Miller, an award-winning scriptwriter and author, is the translator of this book. Educated at Cambridge University, she has worked as a teacher around the world and written more than ten educational books for companies such as the BBC, Oxford University Press, Liber AB and Natur & Kultur. She is one of Sweden’s most experienced scriptwriters for interactive media.
About
the interesting organisation (interesting.org)

The Interesting Organization is Sweden’s leading creativity company and is most active in Northern Europe and Asia. Our vision is to inspire others and each other to get more ideas and make them a reality.

The Interesting Organization helps people and organizations in more than 30 countries to become more innovative and creative. And as no two people or companies are alike, we do this in many different ways.

From creative coaching of managerial groups to individual coaching of company presidents; from workshops about how to develop creativity and generate ideas to helping companies develop long-term creativity strategies.

We are also well known for our successful keynote speeches, lectures and workshops about creativity, innovation and idea generation as well as for our best-selling series of Idea Books and other creativity tools.

Contact us at www.interesting.org and let us know what challenges you are facing. We will let you know how we can help you and, of course, provide relevant references from among our thousands of satisfied customers.

About The Idea Book

Fredrik Häréns most well known book is “The Idea Book”. It is a book and note book designed to help the reader develop his or her creativity. It has sold more than 200,000 copies around the world and has been published in 14 languages, including: English, Japanese and Chinese.

The book was so popular in Iceland that 3,000 copies were sold in a month – meaning that it only took 30 days for 1% of the population to come in contact with the book.

The Idea Book was recently included in the American book “The 100 Best Business Books of all Time” by Jack Covert and Todd Sattersten.

Book a lecture or workshop

Invite your co-workers or customers to an inspiring seminar on business creativity. To a lecture about the importance and value of new ideas. Or to an uplifting talk that encourages creativity and innovative thinking.

Fredrik’s lectures help the audience understand how valuable it is to think in new ways – and how difficult this is to achieve.

Fredrik was voted Speaker of the Year 2007 in Sweden, so if someone can give a good speech, he can. He lectures around the world and has given speeches to more than 1000 companies and organizations in more than 30 countries ranging from China and Japan to the USA and Canada.

Satisfied customers include The Swedish Parliament, The Swedish Police Force, Hewlett Packard, China Mobile, Ogilvy and American Express and many, many more.

In 2008 Fredrik was selected as one of Sweden’s “10 most sought after b2b-speakers.”
About The Developing World.

There is an explosion of creativity happening in the developing world right now. Best selling creativity author and keynote speaker Fredrik Härén wanted to understand what this creativity explosion means, what it will lead to and how it will change the world.

So he set out to find out.

The last five years Fredrik Härén has been to 18 developing countries (and 8 developed countries) and done more than 200 interviews with people who in some way are involved with business and creativity.

He has met with cosmetics executives in Russia, professors in South Africa, creativity consultants in Egypt, IT-journalists in Iran, hotel managers in Dubai, designers in Indonesia, government officials in Thailand, mobile phone designers in South Korea and many, many more.

The result of his research is this book. A book about “The Developing World”.

In this book you will learn about the advantages of being a creative person in a developing country, about what the developed world can learn from the developing world, and most importantly, you will read about the dangers of defining yourself as “developed” in a world that has never been developing faster than now.

It is a book that may turn your view of the world up-side-down, and that hopefully will inspire you to become more curious about the great changes happening in the world.

About the author.

Fredrik Härén has written 7 books, including The Idea Book, an international best selling management book on business creativity that has been translated into 14 languages and which was recently included in “The 100 Best Business Books of All Time”. He has been invited to give keynote speeches at more than 1000 conferences and events in 30 countries. In 2007 he was awarded “Speaker of The Year” in Sweden. He now lives in Singapore.

Learn more about Fredrik Härén and his books at www.interesting.org