From the Planners' Bookshelf...

TRIUMPH OF THE CITY, *How Our Greatest Invention Makes Us Richer, Smarter, Greener, Healthier and Happier.*
Edward Glaeser [scholar.harvard.edu/glaeser], The Penguin Press [USA], London, 2011.

Summary.
Mr. Glaeser is an unabashed advocate of the importance of cities. This doesn't mean he approves of the current state of our cities, but in fact, his study offers useful and insightful ideas to better our inventory, as listed below. His final words in the chapter entitled Gifts of the City; "I suspect that in the long run, the twentieth century fling with suburban living will look, just like the brief age of the [crowded, dangerous and ugly] industrial city, more like an aberration than a trend." [p269].

Leadership and vision are the critical factors. Leadership, over a sustained period, the unspoken asset emanating from the private or public sector, or both, enables success as presented in the examples of London, Paris, Singapore, New York, Boston and Chicago.

Community-based visions drive strategy and subsequent actions. Vision ideas are reflected by Mr. Glaeser's useful and interesting insights into the future of the city, including:

- Make a "Flat World, Tall City".
- Give cities a level playing field.
- Urbanize through globalization.
- Lend a hand to human capital.
- Help poor people, not poor places.
- Fight the bias toward sprawl.
- Build green cities.
- Challenge urban poverty; make it a regional issue, not a central city issue.
- Resist the curse of NIMBYISM: "Cities are the path out of poverty and preventing urban growth makes developing countries artificially poor." [p264].
- Raise the consumer city; make cities entertaining, but remember, all the Parisian cafés will not overcome a bad school system. [p260].

A broadly supported vision pursued by sustained private and public leadership makes the city go.
A good read and a useful contribution to the city-building professions.
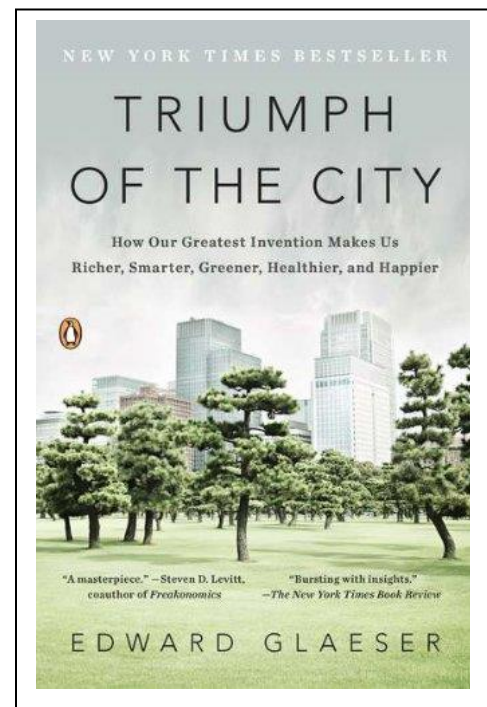
YouTube
Check out the author's presentation to the London School of Economics on March 16, 2011.
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dsofgp01tZs

From the Planners' Bookshelf...

Published Reviews

Up, Up, Up

By **DIANA SILVER**

Published: February 11, 2011, New York Times

Diana Silver is an assistant professor of public health at the Steinhardt School of New York University.

A version of this review appeared in print on February 13, 2011, on page BR21 of the Sunday Book Review.

"Edward Glaeser, a Harvard professor of economics, has spent several decades investigating the role cities play in fostering human achievement. In 'Triumph of the City,' he has embedded his findings in a book that is at once polymathic and vibrant."

London, Dec. 20, 2010.

TRIUMPH OF THE CITY

How Our Greatest Invention Makes Us Richer, Smarter, Greener, Healthier, and Happier

By Edward Glaeser

An image from the book

Excerpt: 'Triumph of the City' (Google Books)

"Glaeser's essential contention is that "cities magnify humanity's strengths." They spur innovation by facilitating face-to-face interaction, they attract talent and sharpen it through competition, they encourage entrepreneurship, and they allow for social and economic mobility. Glaeser takes us on a world tour of urban economics, collecting passport stamps in Athens, London, Tokyo, Bangalore, Kinshasa, Houston, Boston, Singapore and Vancouver. Along the way, he explains how urban density contributed to the birth of restaurants, why supermarket check-out clerks demonstrate the competitive advantage such density confers and how the birth of Def Jam Records illustrates the way cities spur artistic innovation. Here, his enthusiasm for cities is refreshing.

"Glaeser's got some tough words for poorly reasoned public policies that feed suburban living: federal highway programs, the mortgage tax deduction, low gas prices. While he understands the lure of big houses and lush lawns, he's against subsidizing them. And he chastises city planners in Paris and Mumbai, making a passionate argument for building up — and up and up."

CharacterTowns.org's Commentary

At first scan, the discussion seemed conversational, sans charts, tables and graphs, but re-reading the book I found that the conversational tone worked and the story unfolded in a progressive sequence that provided a foundation for most of the author's conclusions. In the end, a worthy read.
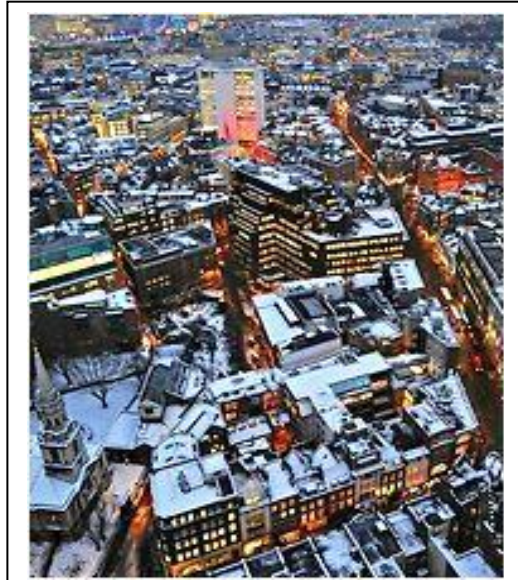
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The author firmly believes in the value of cities and provides a convincing argument on their behalf. His city is a place, a growing place, a place of some density and height, a place where people meet and share ideas, a place where innovation and creativity cluster, and a place where culture thrives and investors find comfort.

Cities are not, or should not be, established sprawled urbanesque jurisdictions committed to forestalling growth, limiting diversity and preventing messy intrusions. To the contrary, cities are important because they enable people to have "face-to-face" contacts that mitigate cultural and lifestyle siloes.

The prosperity and success of cities is described by drawing lessons from cities with a single point of control, like Singapore, to complex cities like New York. The lessons generally apply to most situations. The point that most cities will not become all that their potential provides is clear, if not explicitly mentioned. Leadership, over a sustained period, the unspoken asset emanating from the private or public sector, or both, enables success as presented in the examples of London, Paris, Singapore, New York, Boston and Chicago.

In the concluding chapter, entitled "Flat World, Tall City", the author forgets the simplicity of his earlier chapters that provide a more succinct formula for success. The nine prescriptive subsections in his conclusion can be consolidated into three powerful drivers:

1. **The Rule of Law:** Whether internationally or locally derived, a strong, clear, fair and reliable system of regulations is critical.
2. **A High Education Level:** The author concludes there is little a local community can do to affect the educational level of its citizens; I challenge this conclusion. In America, education, for better or worse, has been determined to be a local issue handled by the local school board. Cities, whether chartered to do so or not, can invest in their education system and become a place known for the quality of its educational system. "Boston's post-industrial success has been built on engineering, computers, financial services, management consulting, and biotechnology – all education-oriented industries."
3. **Infrastructure:** The author presents examples and arguments supporting the importance of a strong system of infrastructure as a key to a city's success; infrastructure for indigenous industries and new ones that can find a competitive advantage in the local market based on sea ports if the town is industrial and coastal with a nice harbor; based on an airport if commercial or tourism oriented or based on universities or medical facilities when some foundation exists for enhancement. The ubiquity of high-speed broadband internet service is a given for success.

The fundamental strategy is to evaluate the city's assets and liabilities, determine a vision and commit to a long-term development program in an inclusive and transparent manner. Leveraging existing, historic or naturally-occurring assets to create other "manufactured" assets is critical; timing is important to use leverage while it exists, before the competitive advantage disappears…this is the "triumph of the city".

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Quotes and Notes for the Text...

- **Connectivity rules:**
  - "…the death of distance…" [p2] is a wonderful phrase.
  - "Indeed, for many Americans, the latter half of the twentieth century – the end of the industrial revolution – was an education not in urban splendor but in urban squalor." [p2].
  - New York was founded in an earlier period of globalization [p3], with the hub and spoke shipping industry.
  - "… a chain of interconnected ideas…" [p5], re-invented NY in the 1970s financial world."
- **Re: the Rust Belt,** "…public policy should help poor *people*, not poor places." [p9]. "Historical review of Athens, Baghdad, Nagasaki and Bangalore reflects that "Human capital, far more than physical infrastructure, explains which cities succeed." [p27].The rise of Silicon Valley illustrates the same point as re-iterated in **Cities of Knowledge** by Margaret O'Mara*.
- **The Cities of Tomorrow** [p34] are characterized by their role in connectivity:
  - "A wealth of research confirms the importance of face-to-face contact." [p34].
  - Face-to-face and electronic interactions are complements, not substitutes. [p35].
  - Innovation clusters are places.
  - Cities that become places of creativity and excellence will then become nodes connected with other hubs of excellence. [p40].
  - Cities that become centers for creativity and commerce will succeed.
  - Cities that convert a creative idea to mass production based on lower costs will struggle.
  - Detroit v. NYC [reference **Detroit, An American Autopsy** by Charlie LeDuff]:
    - NYC re-invested, re-invented and drew upon a diverse base of ideas.
    - Detroit, with one base, originally had a great idea but it became a commodity dependent on price competition.
  - The role of slums – "Urban poverty is not pretty - no poverty is pretty – but the favelas of Rio, the slums of Mumbai, and the ghettos of Chicago have long provided pathways out of destitution for the poor." [p90]. Clean water, basic transportation, safety from crime, education and health care, as basic services, enable the poor to progress [reference **The Arrival City** by Doug Saunders]."
- **Three simple rules** [p160]:
  - "…cities should replace the current lengthy and uncertain permitting process with a simple system of fees." Tax for height, density, whatever. Pay the city rather than consultants.
  - "… historic preservation should be limited and well defined." Distinguish truly important works from the targets of NIMBYISM.
  - "…individual neighborhoods should have some clearly delineated power to protect their special character." [p162].
- **Housing** prices are determined by high incomes in the region: Houston v. NYC, good weather and attitudes toward growth; housing stocks not restricted by geography or policy have growing supplies; plentiful housing reduces swings in prices. [p190].

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- **Sprawl.** "Perhaps the most important factor encouraging suburbanization is our school system." [p195].
- **How do cities succeed?**
  - "But all successful cities do have something in common. To thrive, cities must attract smart people and enable them to work collaboratively. There is no such thing as a successful city without human capital." [p223].
  - "Land, per se, is not the key ingredient. Singapore's success illustrates the irrelevance of acreage." [p229]. Singapore has terrific logistics for trade and transport. Investors want the rule of law and good infrastructure as much as available land. Education systems are the final element.
  - Competitively:
    - The rule of Law: America has a strong system of law and the rule of law; but so do many others; so this is not a great differentiator.
    - Education: The ability to determine the city's education level, says Mr. Glaeser, is limited. The system seems to be federal or state government dominated, but education systems are actually very local, to the systems general demise, but a dedicated city can dramatically improve the educational levels of its citizens.
      - "Boston's post-industrial success has been built with engineering, computer, financial services, management consulting, and biotechnology – all education-oriented industries." [p234].
    - Infrastructure: Though not listed in this section, elsewhere it is acknowledged that a strong infrastructure system has been a key to success. Infrastructure systems for distributing public goods and services, systems for collecting and disposing of wastes and systems for communication and collaboration form the basis of the infrastructure required by successful cities.
      - "London, NY and Paris are successful – pleasant and industrious – due to centuries of infrastructure development." [p118].
    - Commitment to the cost of infrastructure system design and construction supported with maintenance and operational funding is the missing factor in 21st century America.
    - Cross leveraging economic, social and physical assets with actions focused on a community-based vision is the strategy for cities to triumph.