

SUMMARY 'TRIUMPH OF THE CITY' BY EDWARD GLAESER

Today 243 million Americans crowd together in 3% of the country that is urban - "The city has triumphed". Glaeser's premise is that human beings are best when they are close together, that cities provide the lifestyle that brings humans closer together, and that "cities magnify humanity's strengths." To solve many of the problems in the States, he encourages people to live in cities. Also he encourages cities to build taller buildings to fit more people, and to not limit urban growth.

Glaeser's essential argument is that "cities magnify humanity's strengths". It is by facilitating face-to-face interaction that innovation is born. Cities attract talent which is sharpened through competition. Entrepreneurship is encouraged in cities and they allow for social and economic mobility.

There is a near perfect correlation between urbanization and prosperity across nations. Even though there is a myth that even if cities enhance prosperity, they still make people miserable. On contrary, people report being happier in those countries that are more urban. Glaeser argues for that we should help poor people, not poor places with new buildings etc. and he stresses the importance of education.

Driving and urbanization patterns may be the most important environmental issues of the 21st century, in developing countries such as India and China. Glaeser references Green Metropolis and the eco-benefits of cities, and he writes about how sprawl is destroying the environment. In other words he argues for that the States need to be more like Europe as we have a far smaller carbon footprint per person due to their more eco-friendly lifestyles. But also in the Western society he writes about how sprawl is destroying the environment. We should stop romanticizing rural living. Cities are gateways between cultures and the future way of living.

Human capital, far more than physical infrastructure, explains which cities succeed. People have flocked to skilled areas because of higher incomes, and education in 1970 does an impressive job of explaining which of the States' older, colder cities have managed to successfully reinvent themselves.

Glaeser reflects on Jane Jacobs's urban theories on mixing residential and retail together and he does not fully agree with her prescription for small-scale neighborhoods. He would much rather see neighborhoods of skyscrapers than acres of suburban developments. The goal is greater density; more people mean more possibilities.

We live in an age of expertise, when earnings and knowledge are closely linked. One year of extra schooling equals approximately 8% higher earnings. American

society is more unequal today because the marketplace increasingly rewards people with more skills. Robots etc. have decreased the need for unskilled labor. Glaeser discusses Detroit as failed city and blames the car companies which had lots of uneducated laborers rather than educated professionals working. Because they were uneducated, there was not a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship, and therefore they were unable to progress. He uses Detroit as an example to illustrate his point that fancy buildings and good transportation don't help a city if the fundamentals of economic prosperity are absent.

Silicon Valley and Bangalore reminds us that electronic interactions won't make face-to-face contact obsolete as they are the world's most famous example of the benefits of geographic concentration. He attributes this to the fact that they are able to exchange ideas quickly when in close proximity. Using Silicon Valley growing around Stanford University, he demonstrates the effect of having a strong intellectual community for encouraging innovation.

Glaeser also reflects on contemporary and modern ways of interacting and makes the point that the internet and teleconferencing cannot substitute face-to-face exchanges. To exemplify he uses Silicon Valley as the hub of computer innovation. He explains their success by mentioning that they have companies and corporate buildings; they don't just have all their workers telecommuting from far off places around the country, even though such telecommuting is technologically possible.

He talks about the decline of New Orleans too since the city is nothing without educated people but only a more or less functioning infrastructure since the rebuilding of the city. His recommendation is that certain cities have to die or decline in order to allow stronger cities that are better equipped for business to take a leadership role.

Slums in Dharavi, India, and Rio are discussed and Glaeser refers to Platon: "any city, however small, is in fact divided into two, one the city of the poor, the other the city of the rich". The pressure of poverty in cities from Rio to Rotterdam reflects urban strength, not weakness. Megacities are not too big. Limiting their growth would cause significantly more hardship than gain, and urban growth is a great way to reduce rural poverty.

Glaeser emphasizes that providing clean water and healthy streets as necessary functions of municipal governments and shows skepticism on massive building projects initiated to "revitalize" cities. His greatest scorn is reserved for the governments of cities like Mumbai, which excessively regulate new building projects while failing to provide basic services.

The same density that spreads ideas can spread disease. Urban governments in developing countries must do the most basic things that the cities of the West did in the 19th and 20th century which is to provide clean water while safely removing

human waste. Cities aren't full of poor people because cities make people poor, but because cities attract poor people with the prospect of improving their lot in life.

The masses of poor people and economic forces that pull the rich and poor apart create challenge for the cities that must be solved. The urban ability to magnify human creativity makes cities enjoyable as well as industrious. Glaeser mentions urban innovation as something more than new types of factories or financial instruments; it also means new cuisines and plays.

Dense cities attract younger, single people for many reasons. Cities are good places to work hard and acquire knowledge. They are also fun places to be young and single and additionally attract well-educated couples since there are more jobs to find.

How do cities succeed then? What is a successful city?

Glaeser analyses at length why cities fail and why they thrive. Below are some of the main factors that influence:

- Wealth of human energy/capital
- Attraction of smart people that are enabled to work collaboratively
- A strong human interaction
- Education
- Immigration
- Urban density which creates a constant flow of new information from observing other people's successes and failures

Conclusion

"Flat World, Tall City"

"Help Poor People, not Poor Places"