

Future of the City

What Happens Next – 07.03.2022

Larry Bernstein:

Welcome to What Happens Next. My name is Larry Bernstein.

What Happens Next is a podcast where the speaker gets to present his argument in just six minutes and that is followed by a question and answer session for deeper engagement.

Today's session is on the future of the city and urbanization. Our speaker is Deyan Sudjic who is the former director of the Design Museum in London and the author of the book *The Language of Cities*.

I want to learn from Deyan why it's important that cities give you freedom with its anonymity and how that differs from village life. Deyan will re-examine some of Jane Jacobs' insights on city life in the present day, and he will evaluate the success and failure of rejuvenating former industrial sites in urban environments.

After Deyan speaks, we are going to raid the What Happens Next archive and hear excerpts from previous episodes on the topics of urbanization.

We will hear from Howard Husock at the think tank the American Enterprise Institute. Howard will discuss the role of private market solutions for housing for the poor.

Then we will have a discussion with Mitchell Schwarzer who is a Professor of Architectural and Urban History at California College of the Arts. Mitchell will discuss the problems of zoning restrictions and the not-in-my-backyard paradigm that limits new residential construction in California generally and Oakland specifically.

Our final excerpt from the What Happens Next archive will be with Edward Glaeser who is the Chair of the Department of Economics at Harvard and the recent author of *Survival of the City: Living and Thriving in an Age of Isolation*. Ed will tell us that cities are the center for economic growth and that we need to get back to face-to-face interactions for economic and cultural reasons and because it is so much fun.

I think you're going to love hearing the What Happens Next greatest hits.

If you missed last week's podcast check it out.

Our first speaker was Paul Kennedy who is a military historian at Yale. Paul has agreed to speak on a four-part series on the history of World War 2, and last week's episode was on *The Battle of the Atlantic and the War in the Mediterranean*. Paul is a very engaging speaker and I think you will love hearing his perspective on this historic conflict.

Our second speaker was Ilya Shapiro who was recently cancelled at Georgetown Law School, and the conversation was about the lack of free speech for students and faculty at America's elite universities.

Let's begin with our first speaker Deyan Sudjic.

I would like to welcome Deyan Sudjic to speak about his book *Language of Cities*. Deyan, please begin your six-minute presentation.

Deyan Sudjic:

It's impossible to talk about cities without thinking about Jane Jacobs. She was perhaps the first person to make it a subject open to the wider world. My first book about urbanism called *A 100 Mile City* was to revisit Jacobs and see how well her ideas stood up.

She talked about observing the street life of Greenwich Village and the ballet of the sidewalk. In my first book *100 Mile City*, I looked at what the city has become beyond physical form to a sense of belonging and what ties those much bigger cities together. And *Language of Cities* was my thoughts about what cities represent. A city is about freedom, that ability to be anonymous, to take from it what you need and to be yourself. Especially in the Anglo-Saxon world, we have this idea that the village community is a desirable ideal place. But the village though it has that sense of belonging and togetherness is no place to be different. A city is a place which offers that freedom.

In the present digital world, some of those qualities of anonymity that chance to be yourself are being eroded. Social Media means that there is no privacy and some of those metropolitan qualities are really under threat.

A city has scale to offer many different things, which gives us a certain sense of freedom. Big cities offer that chance for people to reinvent themselves.

I live in a part of London between Regent's Park, this utopian landscape, and Camden Lock which offers drug dealers, body piercing saloons. Every Saturday night is full of drunkenness and people vomiting into the gutters and it's what city life is about.

A city is about treating individuals as adults. Jane Jacobs acutely pointed out that urban landscapes are never frozen.

There's an area of London known as Spitalfields which is on the edge of the old financial core. And there's an 18th century building, which started out as a Huguenot chapel built by Protestant Weavers from France fleeing religious prosecution. That Protestant chapel then became a Methodist church and then subsequently became a synagogue and is now being used by another generation of migrants from Bangladesh who have turned it into a mosque. That is the sign of urban vitality, to coexist in this wider identity that is a big metropolis.

Larry Bernstein:

Jane Jacobs in her book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* tells the story of a city always in flux. She uses an illustration of this through the life of an office building. It begins as a class A building with the top commercial tenants, and as the building ages, top tenants are replaced with accountants and lawyers and the building becomes class B, and finally with small start-ups as rents are relatively low as it is classified as a Class C building. For Jane Jacobs this is a natural cycle for an office building and that it is good. What is your take on the life cycle of an office building?

Deyan Sudjic:

A Class C office building is torn down to be replaced by a class A is wasteful; it's shortsighted. Certain building type are very hard to adapt. And it's not simply going from class A to class C office use, can a commercial building find residential uses. London at the moment and other cities are busy transforming some of those office buildings into high rent apartments.

Smarter developers, the ones that see a shopping center that works is one which are not simply international chains to occupy their spaces. That model of traditional anchor tenant in a shopping mall is discredited. Real estate development is too often a short-term business, but it should be a long term one.

Farming is a better analogy. There are times when a good farmer knows that it's good to leave a field fallow or in the case of real estate to bring life and generate new energies.

Like many cities divided by rivers, there's an east end and a west end. Usually, the west end is the more prosperous one traditionally, something to do with the way the wind blows.

And there's always a North and a South Bank. And in London, south of the river used to be where people used to go to misbehave. It was a pleasure palace.

Larry Bernstein:

The Tate Modern Museum was built on the other side of river in what was formerly a power plant. It started a whole new neighborhood and become a fantastic destination for tourists and locals. What is the role of a new cultural institution to a neighborhood?

Dejan Sudjic:

By building a large-scale cultural institution in what, as you rightly say, was once a coal fired power station looking straight at St. Paul's dome, Christopher Wren's masterpiece. It was the most terrible thing to build imaginable, but turning into an art gallery, one which has developed an audience of 5 million people every year has completely transformed the way that London works.

The Tate had the effect of shifting land values all around it. The Tate itself has not benefited from that rise in land values.

Larry Bernstein:

In some real estate developments, there are substantial positive externalities for a project. Disneyland had the effect of increasing land values next to the site, and so when they built Disneyworld, the owners purchased 100,000s of acres next to the site so that they could fully capitalize on the land site appreciation. Disney learned, and with Euro Disneyland, the company squeezed out tax benefits from the state as France was a net beneficiary as well.

Let's try a second example of changing neighborhood use. This is the story of the container ship. In 1950, Brooklyn was the busiest port in the world. There was an entire infrastructure built around the Brooklyn docks including warehouses, insurance brokers, and longshoremen. And when the container was developed it increased productivity massively. Workers did not have to take all the items off the ship to ascertain which goods were meant for Brooklyn instead of another distant port. Brooklyn longshoremen went on strike to stop the container, but it was a losing battle and Elizabeth New Jersey opened the container port and Brooklyn went from being the busiest port to no port at all.

The Brooklyn docks and its neighborhood began a long-term process of decline and eventual renewal. I moved to Brooklyn Heights after I graduated from college in 1987, and those areas of Brooklyn near the docks were still in total disrepair. Tell us about a neighborhood change in its use and subsequent rebirth.

Deyan Sudjic:

The shipping container was the lowest of low-tech changes. A metal box that was the urbanist equivalent of the neutron bomb. It wiped out not just Brooklyn but London's docks, Amsterdam, all around the world. Within a very, very short period, there was an utter transformation. And the first reaction in the community that threatened by that is fear. Where are our jobs gonna come from? What are we gonna do with these areas?

I moved to Wapping about the same time that you moved to Brooklyn Heights, which was in the heart of that Dockland area. And when I went there, I moved into a loft, and for three years I barely saw a green tree, a store and it really was like living in this moonscape. When I go there now, it's been through its Bohemian period, and it's now gone from large scale artist studios into tiny apartments, in subdivided old buildings and lots and lots of high-rise new towers.

Larry Bernstein:

There are three main approaches to rejuvenate the docks. There is a private market solution, where real estate developers figure out land use, a public solution usually with public housing or other public works, or a combination where developers build for private use and the government provides new transportation or schools. Please you use Canary Wharf as an example of a private-public partnership?

Deyan Sudjic:

Canary Wharf is now London's second biggest office district. And that change was never foreseen. It's planning is the law of unintended consequences in the same period that you described in Brooklyn, thousands of jobs went, and the state intervened. It was so concerned

that there will be nothing to replace those lost longshoreman's jobs, it offered massive tax benefits for anybody to build there.

And they assumed that what they might get an industrial park if they were fortunate until a banker from Credit Suisse First Boston realized that the same financial incentives that were there to fund the building of a refrigerated warehouse for a restaurant chain he was investing in could also be used for tax write-offs to build a 60 story high-rise designed by César Pelli. When this was brought to the attention of Mrs. Thatcher, there was a concerted bid to persuade the Reichmann brothers from Olympia & York who simultaneously to start building that high-rise by César Pelli. And having once been a busy European dock has now become the second financial center in Europe entirely by accident. And it opened before there was any investment in transport infrastructure. It's a crazy way of planning a city, it's brutal, but it worked.

Larry Bernstein:

Robert Moses tore down the slums of the West Side of Manhattan to build Lincoln Center. These were previously those fantastic 4-story walk-ups depicted in the musical West Side Story. And Robert Moses believed that the poor side of town should be replaced by Lincoln Center. Is Lincoln Center a success or failure? Do you think that private sector growth is organic, and that top-down public planning is unnatural?

Deyan Sudjic:

People have been trying to fix the Lincoln Center ever since it was finished. That period believed that culture should be in massive blocks. It's not only New York that has that cultural program in one place. London has its South Bank complex. Hong Kong, and in some of the Gulf states.

Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. Why did the Rockefeller Center work so well? And Lincoln doesn't. But to go back to your original point about contrasting public versus private investment.

The model of Disney, Disney has tried to replicate around the world. They've built one outside Paris, which did require massive public investment. Tokyo did something quite similar. When France's intellectual left saw the coming of Eurodisney, they saw it as another example of American imperialism appearing on European soil.

How could you call the Manhattan grid organic or natural? A city to paraphrase Christopher Alexander, a city is not a tree, a city is not an organic growth. It is an idea. It is society's will on a landscape and to call private sector organic and the public investment in the city inauthentic or fake seems to be kind of way off beam.

It's an inappropriate term for what city making is like. Good planning is not limited to either private or private sector. Subtle, nuanced planning and understanding, it's a long-term business for both public and private.

Larry Bernstein:

A few weeks ago, on What Happens Next, Mitchell Schwarzer discussed the development of cultural institutions in Oakland California. Two wealthy families George Kaiser who built the Liberty Ships in World War 2 and a very successful health care business and the Bechtel family who built the Hoover Dam, worked together on philanthropic projects in their hometown of Oakland. They built a symphony, the ballet, and an opulent art museum at the time when those cultural venues were viewed as a necessary ingredient for a successful city to attract and maintain talent. This happened at the same time as white flight from Oakland, and the black community was relatively uninterested in the symphony, ballet or the white artists exhibited in the museum. How do cultural curators help the philanthropists meet the needs of a demographically changing local community?

Deyan Sudjic:

There's a yearning for authenticity, that sense that we are discovering places for the first time, that we're not in the middle of some artificial environment, we're not the subject of a matrix like experiment to find ourselves being manipulated. Between those two is the intermediary of the curator, the museum professional, and the understanding of what culture in all forms has to offer and an audience and an understanding of what that audience needs is so important to making an institution work.

I don't only write books, I was a museum director myself for 12 years. And my job was to understand that a museum has multiple audiences and find ways of being welcoming to all of them, to speaking to different groups in the community. It's impossible to say that certain cultural forms appeal to one group rather than to others.

When ambitious cities feel that it's important for them to establish themselves with iconic architecture and I'm allergic to it, but ever since the Guggenheim arrived in Bilbao, there's been a sad theory that all it takes spectacular architecture to transform the fortunes of a city is so destructive and misconceived.

Larry Bernstein:

The example of Bilbao is interesting. I went on vacation to Spain and visited Guggenheim's Bilbao Museum and then because I was there went to see the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum, which I thought was even more interesting than the Guggenheim because it included a fabulous collection of Spanish art that just was not important enough to be on display at the Prado in Madrid but it showed great depth and range. I never would have visited Bilbao without the wacky Frank Gehry structure for the Guggenheim. Why isn't Gehry's work a success?

Deyan Sudjic:

My point was that it's the wrong lesson from Bilbao is that all it takes is one building. The right lesson from Bilbao is it's a reflection of a strong regional culture with a strong national identity. The Basques do see themselves as a nation, one which reflects that culture and everything from the art that you saw in the Museum of Fine Arts, which its current director was

the director of the Prado in Madrid, he moved home and a fantastic focus on great food. So what Bilbao is a virtuous circle. It's invested wisely in the future. What it's not done is simply collect trophy architecture.

Larry Bernstein:

Next topic is beauty. How important is architectural beauty to the enjoyment of a city or a neighborhood?

Deyan Sudjic:

Beauty is the most difficult subject to talk about. There's Rem Koolhaas who said it's like talking about sex. It's the great embarrassment for architects. Talking about the Lincoln Center earlier, we were talking about how opinions of what is beautiful changes. This switch every second generation what was seen as being terrible suddenly becomes amazing.

Victorian architecture in the 1940s was seen being at best amusing, and now is priceless heritage. And 10 years ago, brutalism, that concrete style suddenly went from problematic to the subject of fan mail.

Every generation develops a taste for things which annoys its parents. It takes time for buildings to mature and the memories that they engender. It's the things that they allow us to see. Even in Warsaw, which has as its centerpiece, this gift from Joseph Stalin, the Palace of Culture, which is a 60 story high wedding cake, and was once seen as a literal symbol of Soviet cultural and political oppression, a colonial landmark in the center of the Polish capital. Another generation of young post-communist Poles, see it as a kind of a memory of pre-capitalism and look on it as a place they spent their youth smoking, going to cafes. And buildings do have that ability to change their meanings over time.

Larry Bernstein:

Robert Kaplan spoke on What Happens Next a few weeks ago, and he mentioned that the architecture in the Albanian capital built recently is a catastrophe. When should we knock down cinder block buildings that are ugly and horrible?

Deyan Sudjic:

Most things should not be demolished, embodied carbon needs to be in our minds when we think about demolition. Buildings that have the ability to grow, adapt, are much more useful than those that don't. So, yes, there are cases when those cinder block slabs are no longer adaptable.

Larry Bernstein:

You have a new book out entitled Stalin's Architect: Power and Survival in Moscow that was released in mid-June 2022. It tells the story of Boris Iofan and his effort to create Stalinist architecture. Why did you want to tell this story?

Deyan Sudjic:

Boris Iofan was born in Odessa. It was an imperial expansion by the Russian Empire, which turned what had been an Ottoman fortress with 500 people into an open city. It became a place in which the Jewish subjects of the Russian Empire could work freely in any occupation. The usual quotas were removed. There were no restrictions on Jewish people making their lives there and declared open season for migrants from almost anywhere.

It became a city in which the administration was subcontracted to a couple of French governors. The first street signs in Odessa were in Italian as well as Russian, so that non-Cyrillic readers could read them. It became for a while the most prosperous, fastest growing part of the Russian Empire. Because of that ability to attract talented gifted people to cite your example about opera houses, the French governor Richelieu built an opera house in Odessa before they built the first Russian Orthodox cathedral.

By 1880, it was a third Jewish, a third Ukrainian, the rest was a mixture between Russians, Greeks, Italians, the French. And the Soviet system crushed that diversity as well as religious intolerance. Cities have that ability to be both a place of refuge from the oppression of the Shtetl, but also are places in which intercommunal strife can also break out from time to time.

And the pogroms of the early 20th century were the beginning of the end of the tolerance that made Odessa a special and interesting place. In the Soviet era, tolerance was completely lost, its flexibility, its openness had gone.

Larry Bernstein:

My maternal grandfather George Karp was born and raised in Sibiu Romania. When he was born it was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and was populated by a combination of Hungarians, Germans, Jews, Slavs and Greeks. Today the city is entirely Romanian. The Jews were killed by the Nazis, and the rest moved to be near their own kind. What are the lessons for the ethno-cleansing of Eastern European cities?

Deyan Sudjic:

Odessa, Istanbul and Thessaloniki had a similar mix. That's why authoritarians distrust cities. An urban identity is a much more generous, welcoming one than defining yourself through national characteristics.

Rome at the time of Christianity's arrival, the great cities around the Mediterranean, the North African coast, these cities had communities of Greeks, Egyptians, Jews. In Asia today, Chinese communities play a similar role in Bangkok or in Malaysia.

And we thought that the city was the future, and national boundaries might start to fall away, that the model for the future was Singapore or Hong Kong. And one of the disturbing things about the present century is that cities are vulnerable. Few cities have armies, can actually defend themselves against an authoritarian state.

Think about the city wall, every major European city that's more than 300 years old, had a wall around it.

Larry Bernstein:

Ed Glaeser spoke on What Happens Next about public health and a city's risk to pandemic and the spread of disease. How has COVID reintroduced that fear of high density living?

Deyan Sudjic:

Disease has also always been an issue within the urban context. Cholera was the great threat, before that plague, more recently the COVID outbreaks.

And that fear of disease is certainly what drove modernism. These ideas for flattening Paris to replace it with 60 story high-rises growing out of green fields was certainly a response to the cholera outbreaks that were killing thousands of Parisians every summer.

Larry Bernstein:

Modern cities are massive in scale. In the emerging markets, Mexico City and Jakarta are enormous, what do you think of their growth and managing these vast communities.

Deyan Sudjic:

Is there is a limit to the size of a city? If you look at contemporary Mexico City or Jakarta, these are cities which have populations in excess of most European nations. Spain is 30 million people, probably less than Mexico City. Jakarta is bigger than all of Scandinavia put together.

What stops a city going at civil war with itself? Think about Beirut or Belfast on a much smaller scale, these are places in which religious factions are so violently opposed to each other that cities lose that sense of cohesion and identity.

What makes someone who lives two hours commute from one side of Mexico City to another feel they belong to that same city? Or in other cases such as the Netherlands where effectively the whole country is one city but never say that to someone who lives in Rotterdam and works in Amsterdam because they know they're utterly different places.

It's football; it's the way that people speak, accent is amazing, language is a way that people identify who belongs, who doesn't belong. And language doesn't stay still in the city. The London I grew up in the 1960s, people spoke entirely differently to the way they do now. There is a melting pot in the same way that food has changed, bringing in the influences of all the people that live and work here, so the language has changed.

Larry Bernstein:

What do you think of the fictional city of the future like in Blade Runner and for me that is a dystopian nightmare?

Deyan Sudjic:

But I don't think Blade Runner does make it look like a living hell. Blade Runner was one of the first sophisticated attempts to show that the world in the future will not be squeaky clean. But at street level Blade Runner, which is meant to be Los Angeles, looks like a lot of fun. The noodles might be made of reconstituted cockroaches, but it's a great bar life, wonderful looking replicants. It looks like more fun than life on the top of the Trump Tower where the Decker Corporation hangs out.

Architects designing the future started referring back to Blade Runner's vision of it. In the popular imagination showed that messy reality could be more interesting than the neat well-ordered suburbia.

Larry Bernstein:

I end each episode on a note of optimism. Deyan what are you optimistic about related to cities?

Deyan Sudjic:

I'm optimistic that despite the pandemic, so many of those predictions about the death of cities have proved as there's often have in the past to be ill founded. The cities are coming back to life. They are reminding us how much we need each other, how much physical contact is so special about what it is to be human.

Larry Bernstein:

Thanks Deyan. I want to now go back to our What Happens Next archive and enjoy excerpts of my favorite discussions about urbanization. We are going to begin with Howard Husock from AEI who discussed his book *The Poor Side of Town*, Howard please tell us about it.

Howard Husock:

My book is about the history and future of affordable housing.

We once had the formula for low income, affordable housing, which served healthy communities. Bronzeville in Chicago, Black Bottom in Detroit, Dorchester in Boston, East Harlem in New York, there were poor, good neighborhoods with landlords who lived in the same buildings as their tenants with small shops, churches and synagogues nearby and the mutual aid institutions that characterize healthy communities.

There was more to the slums than abject poverty. Hundreds of thousands of families lived normal lives. They worked, paid rent, fed their children, had hopes and dreams for the future. And crucially poverty was not a life sentence.

We chose to demolish what were labeled slums that drove me to write my book, *The Poor Side of Town and Why We Need It*. I blame a movement that began with Jacob Riis. Riis was a very celebrated author of a book *How the Other Half Lives* about 19th Century New York housing tenements on the lower East Side and was New York's leading police reporter. He was trained

as a sensationalist and his approach to housing was aimed at images that shocked. He sparked a movement predicated on the idea that the private market fails the poor and must be replaced by government.

He germinated the idea of public housing, as championed by two New York Women, Edith Abbott Wood and Catherine Bauer. Both believed that the private housing market would fail. Both would join the Roosevelt administration and the National Housing Act in 1937 would become the vehicle for slum clearance. Small shops and community institutions were swept away and replaced by The Projects. Planned communities without streets, stores or businesses.

Today we're ignoring a fundamental question: Why shouldn't poor neighborhoods also be good neighborhoods? They were in the past. We adopted draconian zoning laws which mandate exclusively single-family districts and mandating larger lots for such homes. This is a recipe for unaffordability.

We need to relax zoning laws to permit two and three family homes, smaller shops and businesses on ground floors. Government has distorted housing markets. It should get out of the business altogether.

Jane Jacobs reminded us, it's the spontaneous plans of thousands of builders and businesses that are superior to the housing planners. We need all sides of town, a full spectrum of housing types including a poor side of town.

Larry Bernstein:

Thanks Howard. How does public housing make poverty a life sentence?

Howard Husock:

Public housing's biggest problem is this. You cannot own anything there. It's all owned by the government.

We all invest in our houses. We make it impossible for poor people to do it. African Americans were particularly disadvantaged by this, because they came to the northern cities at the same time public housing was sprouting.

Larry Bernstein:

People used to refer to the Tenement as the "urban log cabin." What does this phrase mean?

Howard Husock:

I love this phrase. It's so meaningful to me. It's Abe Lincoln. It's the ground floor before you get to the next better neighborhood, as opposed to a life sentence. There's no doubt that if you make it impossible to run a rooming house because it's too dense, you won't have any rooming houses and you'll have homeless guys on the street, which we have here in New York now.

Larry Bernstein:

How do we get back to having high-density housing?

Howard Husock:

Have to fight this battle, community board by community board all across this country. We have to get the idea that dense housing areas are actually desirable. They have a high walkability index.

The housing affordability formula is simple. As many units as you can have on the same amount of land, more units for the same square footage of lands. One acre zoning that's going to be an expensive house. Five 1200 square foot houses on the same lot, it's not as expensive. Levittown, the ultimate post-war suburb, derided by the socialists as little boxes. The houses were 750 square feet and people were dying to move out of Brooklyn to get there.

Larry Bernstein:

What is your favorite Jane Jacobs insight?

Howard Husock:

New ideas need old buildings. We have to accept that change.

We need planning and zoning boards that embrace the advent of class C from class A and then facilitate the revitalization that can finally occur. Whole cities. The Buffalos, the St.Louises, the Detroites. They all need to learn this lesson.

Larry Bernstein:

Should there be zoning for exclusive residential living?

Howard Husock:

They segregate the commercial, residential and industrial. If you look at old urban neighborhoods, there would be a commercial bakery, but then the bakery also sold day old goods on the ground floor and next door was a clothing store. And guys lived upstairs. All of that is illegal in most cities today. But in the neighborhoods where it persisted, people are dying to move in there. We're mandating neighborhoods that people dislike. That is crazy.

Larry Bernstein:

How do you explain the success of fast-growing Southern cities?

Howard Husock:

Houston has no zoning. The Texas cities are permitting the housing market to respond to increased demand, there is a small homes movement, which is growing. Durham, North Carolina has it, Houston has it, you have closely adjacent townhouses where you can get a lot more homes on the same lot size.

Larry Bernstein:

I end each episode on a note of optimism. Howard, what are you optimistic about?

Howard Husock:

I'm optimistic that there's more communities adopting less restrictive zoning. Minneapolis abolished single family zoning. The thousands of volunteer Americans who make decisions will take in this idea that the physical environment influences our behavior and gives us different options about how to live.

Let's have a comeback of the two-family house so people can afford to buy because they rent the upstairs out to somebody else. Commonsense ideas that I hope local officials, under pressure from the electorate, will start to make better choices. that's the theme of my book. *The Poor Side of Town and Why We Need It* and I believe in it.

Larry Bernstein:

Thanks Howard, our next guest from the What Happens Next Archive is Mitchell Schwarz who spoke last April about the insidious effects of NIMBY, Not in My Backyard.

Mitchell Schwarz:

The phenomenon of NIMBY-ism goes back to the early 1960's and battles for local control over neighborhoods under siege by urban renewal.

Over time, the battle for local control over neighborhoods, NIMBY-ism, burned most brightly in upper-class districts. An apartment building on or near a single-family street, a chain or franchise replacing a mom-and-pop store, greater density, traffic congestion, and introduction of unwanted outsiders.

Improvements to a neighborhood are also out of favor: bike lanes, improved transit lines, better landscaped streets, cafes, yoga studios. Why? Because these accessories signal an influx of gentrifiers. The more educated and affluent, usually white and Asian folks, whose presence will lead to the exodus of black and Latino residents who cannot afford the new housing.

Larry Bernstein:

Ed Glaeser pointed out that California used to allow residential real estate construction. California was the fastest growing state with average home prices. Today, there is little building because of zoning and other governmental impediments to building. Real estate prices are now very high and there is migration out of the state. Did the laws change to block new construction?

Mitchell Schwarz:

People arrive in California, it's beautiful, and they want it to stay the way it was. This is the case with a lot of people in San Francisco and Berkeley. And, Oakland, increasingly.

California had a bill passed in 1972, CEQUA, the California Environmental Quality Act, which mandates environmental review for a whole range of projects.

CEQUA is wielded by the anti-growth forces, to stop development or to scale it back by lengthening the process or by making it so difficult that people give up altogether.

People are like, "Let's scale it back. Let's go slower. Let's preserve the neighborhood character. We like it things the way it is."

Larry Bernstein:

New Topic: Professional Sports Teams. In the 1970s, sports teams were expanding to California and the SF MSA is the second largest in the state. I am sure Oakland rolled out the red carpet for these teams.

Mitchell Schwarzer:

Around 1970, we had four professional teams. We had hockey, the Warriors, the A's and the Raiders. There's no city of around 400,000 people that had four major league teams. There's none that had three. Oakland was uniquely successful in building the Coliseum arena. That was the the coup. The old philanthropic elite, Henry J Kaiser, Steven Bechtel and others were behind it. We used to have that old philanthropy in Oakland, we don't anymore. And we've lost the teams.

Larry Bernstein:

Are other institutions packing up for San Francisco?

Michell Schwarzer:

My college, California College of the Arts is moving to San Francisco and abandoning the Oakland campus. After a hundred years in Oakland, they're leaving because of that allure of San Francisco.

Larry Bernstein:

Universities rarely move, what is the back story?

Mitchell Schwarzer:

The school was founded in Berkeley. It moved to with the Oakland campus in 1923. And in the '80s, they started design and architecture programs, graphic design, industrial architecture, etc. And they did it in San Francisco campus. The Oakland campus, which was more Fine Arts has been atrophying. And I think the board shifted from the East Bay to the West.

Being in San Francisco, near Pinterest and Adobe. They decided to consolidate everything in San Francisco and, and leave Oakland behind because there isn't the money there.

With CCA, my school leaving and the Raiders and Warriors leaving, the Oakland Tribune folded. We're becoming the residential and office suburb of the West Side of the Bay. We don't have our own wealthy individuals who back things, and all these things are part of a sad institutional decline in the East Bay.

Larry Bernstein:

Next Topic: Museums and cultural institutions. In your book you discuss how the White elite got run out of town, what happened?

Mitchell Schwarzer:

The Bechtels and Kaisers banded together in the '50s for a state of the art museum. Downtown, right on the edge of the lake, and they built this extraordinary building. And it was a real triumph for Oakland to have this museum. But it comes at that period when the demographics are changing and, it's still a white institution serving the affluent whites, and it makes tremendous efforts to be a multicultural museum, for all of Oakland.

The last great project was the Oakland Ballet and Oakland Symphony. They took an old movie palace and turned into a concert hall. And it failed. The Oakland Symphony didn't make it. And the ballet, it's dark most nights.

Larry Bernstein:

Our next guest is Edward Glaeser who is the departmental chair of the Economics Department at Harvard. Ed spoke on What Happens Next to discuss his new book *Survival of the City: Living and Thriving in an Age of Isolation*. This excerpt is from the What Happens Next archive and I chose it because he beautifully articulates urban problems and potential solutions. Ed please begin your six minute presentation.

Edward Glaeser:

For most of my adult life, cities were triumphant. They became safer, became far more prosperous, and it really seemed as if the future was assuredly as urban as it could possibly be. In March of 2020 because of COVID-19, we saw the rapid-fire de-urbanization of the world.

I wrote this book because I was worried about the threat of remote work, meaning that people abandon offices, abandon face-to-face contact, and abandon cities. It has never been easier for businesses and firms to uproot themselves and go somewhere else. The tendency of particularly those on the left in cities to see the rich as a piggy bank that can just be cashed anytime you want, to see firms as being something that are a problem rather than a solution to a city's needs, that's deeply worrisome to me.

The book begins by tracing thousands of years in which there has been a dance between death and urban life. From the plague of Athens that slew Pericles, to the plague that derailed the Emperor Justinian's attempt to bring the Pax Romana back to the Mediterranean world. Those plagues were fairly devastating to the civilizations that they struck. By contrast, for most of the past 650 years, our urban worlds have been quite resilient to pandemic.

In the 19th century, first yellow fever, and then cholera struck down our cities. And these didn't stop urbanization from occurring. In fact, our cities rallied. Our cities built the sewers and aqueducts that enabled them to become much safer, to continue to grow without people

dying. The process of pragmatic collaboration is exactly what we need now.

The impact of every natural disaster is mediated by the strength of civil society when it strikes. America's cities were much less robust in 2020 than they were in 2001 when the terrorists struck the Twin Towers because cities appear to have been doing a very poor job of taking care of their poor citizens, of making sure that the police treat everyone with decency, and of providing affordable housing for everyone.

The book is a cry for a pragmatic agenda of making our cities effective at doing what cities are always supposed to be. They're supposed to be places where poor people can turn into middle class or rich adults. And that has been happening too rarely.

We need to actually take effective government more seriously. The right answer is not more government or less government, but better government. This requires actually finding out what works.

In the case of upward mobility, schools are our primary channel. And here, I think we have to admit that we don't know what works. One of the things that we emphasize over and over in this book is that you need to have the humility to learn to effectively change the quality of government, to effectively fight pandemic. For all the fanfare of No Child Left Behind or Race To the Top, they didn't really solve the problem of America as a whole under-educating its children.

So, I think we have to recognize that we need to have something more like an Apollo Program than a Marshall Plan where we don't just spend, but we recognize that we've got to learn what works here.

I am fundamentally optimistic about the future of the city. There's so much to like about learning from one another when we're close to one another. That type of learning that has been powering urban miracles since Socrates and Plato bickered on an Athenian street corner. And I believe that the age of urban miracles is not gone, and the cities will continue to create the collaborative change of invention that have powered humanity's greatest hits for millennia.

Larry Bernstein:

Thanks Ed. In reading the Wall Street Journal review of your book, they focus heavily on land use. This is a topic that's near and dear to your heart. Can you give us a little background about the errors in government policy that have limited land use for new construction of homes and effectively driven up the price of real estate, particularly for young people?

Edward Glaeser:

We used to be following standard common law traditions, that if you owned a plot of land, you could pretty much do what you wanted with that land, including building on it. Right? And gradually we ate away with that.

In the East Coast, great swaths of whole neighborhoods are now allocated to historic preservation districts in which basically nothing can be changed in those areas. In the West, an environmental justification is often given. The irony about that often is that these alleged environmental reasons actually are somewhat counterproductive, environmentally. There's a lot to like about dense construction, close to city centers, in terms of being good for the environment in terms of reducing carbon emissions, because you have less driving, in terms of people's living typically in smaller houses, if you build up urban areas.

So small local organizations have basically figured out how to use the tools of local government to shut new building down.

Larry Bernstein:

Why does it matter if people are not moving to cities anymore? They can just move to places like Texas that have cheaper housing.

Edward Glaeser:

Well, I think we should worry about Americans not moving to places that are more productive anymore.

We have migrations driven often by the availability of inexpensive housing. I'm glad that that inexpensive housing is available, there's a lot to like about Texas, for goodness sakes, but it seems problematic when Silicon Valley, New York, Boston, places which by most observable measures, some of the most productive places on the planet, they don't allow growth, and the country as a whole suffers in terms of its productivity, because of it.

Larry Bernstein:

Let's switch topics now. How have we traditionally designed our cities?

Edward Glaeser:

We have always built our urban spaces around the transportation technology that was dominant in that era. Our oldest cities are walking cities with narrow streets, and often winding paths. Our 19th century cities are built around various forms of wheeled transport, street cars, then elevated railroads that enabled cities to stretch much further, but still meant you had to walk from wherever that the train, or the streetcar drop you off to your final destination. In the 20th century, the car was completely dominant, and for totally understandable reasons, we radically rebuilt our urban spaces around the car.

Larry Bernstein:

In your opening remarks, you talked about the demonization of our wealthiest city goers. you mentioned that we can't throw these guys out because they provide so much both human and physical capital to the cities and cultural capital as well.

Edward Glaeser:

Yeah.

Larry Bernstein:

Why are the wealthy under such attack by progressives right now, and what can be done to encourage these individuals to stick around and encourage the growth of the cities?

Edward Glaeser:

That was one of the things that motivated the book, was this deep worry about the fact that cities seemed to have forgotten that the rich and businesses are mobile, and they've only become more mobile thanks to Zoom, thanks to remote work.

I think the reason why this comes up is a real frustration with the pace of progressive change by many people on the left and an understandable frustration with the inequality of American society and the lack of upward mobility in cities. Cities have always been unequal places. It was Plato who wrote 2400 years ago that every city with whatever size, in reality is two cities, one, a city of the rich, the other, the city of the poor, and they are perpetually at war with one another.

Urban inequality is not something that cities should be ashamed of. Cities attract the rich by being relatively pleasant places to be rich, and they attract the poor by being relatively tolerable places to be poor. That's not something that's an urban problem. Those are urban assets. But that level of inequality is only tolerable if cities are continuing to do their historic job of turning poor children into rich adults.

That combines with frustration at the police, frustration about the high cost of living and frustration with national politics as well. Local politics seems like an outlet, but if you want to tax the rich and give to the poor, the right level of government to do that is the federal government because it's much harder to run away from America than it is to run away from Chicago.

You really should not be using local government to redistribute. You should be using local government to try and solve the core tasks of local government.

If you do decide that this is something where the real goal is to demonize the wealthy and treat them poorly, then they will leave, and cities will be much the worse for it.

Larry Bernstein:

Someone that you hold dear to your heart is the urbanist Jane Jacobs. What about her work do you think has most relevance today?

Edward Glaeser:

It's her observing the ballet of the sidewalk, understanding the ways that people who live in cities interact with the streets around them, understanding the strange and unpredictable things that happen in cities and how things that look inefficient in cities actually produce sort of remarkable long run benefits.. There's always something inefficient about being in the office

relative to being home and at Zoom. But surprising things happen at the office that enable us to learn more from each other and to have more fun. And I think that's part of what she was recognizing was that cities, despite their seeming inefficiencies had hidden strengths that led to long run creativity and long run vitality.

Larry Bernstein:

We end each session on a note of optimism. What are you optimistic about as it relates to your topic, broadly defined to be the economics of cities?

Edward Glaeser:

Cities have shown a remarkable ability to survive much worse than this. And I think that the value of information rich environments that promote some degree of opportunity for young people who are outsiders, the demand for those spaces is not going to go away. And cities provide the space in which we can really make our future, in which we can learn from people around us. And that completely makes me optimistic.

Larry Bernstein:

Ed, thank you very much.