

Book Reviews



Blue Urbanism: Exploring Connections between Cities and Oceans

Timothy Beatley

Reviewed by Amanda Martin

Nearly half of the seven billion people on earth live within 60 miles of an ocean. Land-based cities, and their ever-growing populations, rely on the sea for transportation, food, livelihoods, recreation and a place for refuge. This great, untamed resource remains all but invisible in sustainable urbanism discussion and practice. This oversight is the topic of Timothy Beatley's 2014 book, *Blue Urbanism: Exploring Connections between Cities and Oceans*. Beatley, currently the Teresa Heinz Professor of Sustainable Communities at the University of Virginia's School of Architecture, has written extensively on green urbanism, but by his own admission, he had overlooked the topic of oceans until his 2011 essay on blue urbanism in *Places*. While few of the individual ideas presented in his recent book are truly new, *Blue Urbanism* provides a compelling case for packaging together policies and behaviors that promote the health of ocean systems into a cohesive philosophy.

This short, accessible book opens with two chapters that discuss the connections between oceans and cities. Without the heavy hand of doomsday environmentalism, Beatley illustrates the grave dangers that cities – really, all coastal development to some degree – pose to ocean life. Greenhouse gas emissions are rapidly changing ocean environments and habitats, overfishing is decimating the productive capacity of global fisheries, and waste and toxins from land-based activities have generated large marine “dead zones,” void of all animal life. Beatley follows this exposition of the problem with three chapters that analyze sustainable fisheries, coastal architecture, and spatial planning. In each, Beatley overviews problems that threaten the vitality of ocean and coastal ecosystems and suggests solutions with vignettes of innovative practice from across the developed world. A New England fishing town runs a community-supported fisheries program modeled after community-supported agriculture, Oslo Opera House's sloping rooftop plaza dips gracefully into the sea, and an urban marine reserve invites residents of

Wellington, New Zealand to interact with the ocean.

The second half of the book looks at strategies to re-connect cities and oceans, largely on a personal level. Beatley explores innovations in environmental education and outreach related to oceans, and devotes a chapter to citizen science efforts that engage volunteers in collecting data on oceans. *Blue Urbanism* concludes by invoking the power of moral commitments to the ocean. Beatley's even-toned plea for ethical engagement is filled with a sense of wonder at the ocean world and wild habitat.

From the perspective of public planning, one of the more innovative and interesting strategies that Beatley describes concerns networks of waterways in cities. Like the corridors of natural areas known as greenways, blueways are the pathways through which water moves through cities. This water can include ocean water, but also wetlands, stream corridors, and storm runoff. By taking a more systematic view of how water flows through a city, planners have the opportunity to enhance water quality and animal habitat as well as provide recreation amenities. This re-framing of urban water management emphasizes the relationship among constituent parts of the natural water network instead of viewing water as a static resource to be managed in separate, individual locations.

The blueways re-framing also encourages cities to consider their local ocean resources as part of their network, and therefore, part of the city itself. One of the more thought-provoking themes of the book is that coastal cities ought to consider their spatial extent to include the nearby ocean for the purposes of planning, recreation, and

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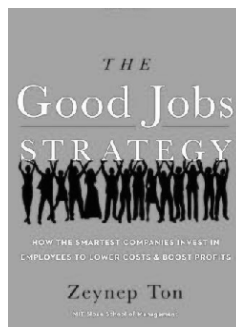
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cities' self-identity, if not in a legal sense. As Beatley points out, we draw maps of cities that simply end at the coastline, as if the ocean was a flat, blue, featureless plain. The suggestion that we might include proximate ocean area in planning builds on the work of marine spatial planning, which has formalized decades of practice of managing the three-dimensional ocean for distinct human purposes. Beatley's argument is distinct, however, in that it seeks to integrate city planning with ocean planning, not just do one side-by-side the other. Moreover, his point is not limited to planning, regulation, or management; he is suggesting that we internalize the ocean – and not just the coastline – as part of the city itself.

For a professional or academic planner, Beatley's analysis may seem optimistic, which is intentional because it supports his effort to inspire a connection with oceans on an emotional and ethical level. However, it is hard to avoid a sense of skepticism. Longstanding conflicts riddle ocean management problems, from fisheries to non-point source pollution. Tackling this conflict in the text, perhaps with an example of unusual partners coming together – fishermen and conservationists, regulators and private property owners – might have inspired some thinking about creative consensus-building.

Climate change poses some challenges for the Blue Urbanism supposition that improving personal or city-level connections to the ocean will support healthier oceans. As Beatley himself admits, while cities have taken great strides toward reducing greenhouse gas emissions, some real policy action must also occur on the national and international stage. Further, while Beatley highlights a handful of innovative approaches to accommodating sea level rise in urban environments, the instinct to reduce human risk from coastal storms and sea level rise may actually pose additional threats to ocean and coastal health.

The major contribution of *Blue Urbanism* is not any particular idea, however; it is a philosophy of sensitive, intimate city-ocean relations that encompasses previously disparate ocean, urban, and environmental issues. This philosophy of coastal development, with its fluid movement between lifestyle and policy, feels distinctly twenty-first century. It reflects our society in its current moment, searching for consumer- or building-scale solutions to problems that have deep social, political, and economic causes. It is reasonable to suspect that blue urbanism will not serve as a blanket socio-environmental solution any more than the platforms of new urbanism or sustainable development have single-handedly delivered on their goals. However, like those other movements, blue urbanism has great potential to inspire conversations that eventually lead to action. *Blue Urbanism's* accessible tone and interesting examples will likely bring oceans deeper into the consciousness of urban dwellers and onto the agendas of planners and decision-makers.



The Good Jobs Strategy
Zeynep Ton

Reviewed by Julianne Stern

Zeynep Ton's *The Good Jobs Strategy* is a critical resource for workforce development practitioners and economic developers who are interested in growing the number of "high road" jobs in their communities – jobs that offer a family-sustaining wage and opportunities for advancement, and in which workers are empowered to make decisions with some degree of autonomy. One way to grow the number of high road jobs in your community is to attract new businesses that already offer good jobs. But another critical strategy that economic developers can use to improve the job structure in their communities is to work closely with existing small and medium businesses to help them offer high road jobs.

What do those strategies look like in action? Ton's book, while primarily aimed at a business audience – Ton is an operations professor at MIT's Sloan School of Management – doubles as a detailed playbook for economic developers who want to help their community's small businesses offer high road jobs in ways that enhance their competitiveness. Scholars of business strategy and service operations acknowledge the link between good jobs, excellent customer service, and profits. Business school case studies tout the success of companies like the Four Seasons and Zappo's, where front-line workers are empowered to make independent judgment calls to meet customers' needs. Ton's book adds new depth to our understanding of how these strategies work, arguing that any firm that simply offers good jobs is doomed to fail, unless those good jobs are also paired with operational excellence. "Operational excellence," she writes, "requires a great operational design and great people to carry it out. Neither can make up for the lack of the other" (29).

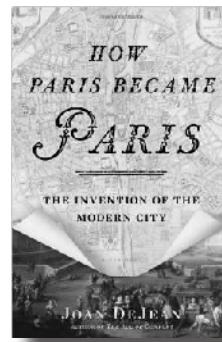
As a foil for her case studies of four firms that are industry leaders whose success is driven by investment in both people and operations, she offers the cautionary tale of Home Depot. In the 1980s and 1990s, Home Depot was the fastest-growing retailer in the world, offering customers a combination of expert service and low prices. Home Depot recruited experienced building trades workers, paid them well, and gave store managers a high degree of autonomy around stocking, advertising, and hiring. "Such decentralization," Ton explains, "helped store managers and associates take ownership of their stores and understand their importance for Home Depot's

success” (20) – on the surface, critical elements of a high road job, and a strategy that might be celebrated by workforce development advocates. But by 2000, Home Depot began to miss its earnings targets because, as Ton explains, a lack of operational discipline began to undermine employees’ ability to offer excellent service to customers.

Explaining the critical role that good operations play in empowering front-line employees, Ton writes “It is hard for a grocery store to make you happy if it repeatedly doesn’t have what you came in for, or if the checkout line is long and slow, or if you get home and find that the eggs you just bought have already expired. [...] It is hard for your dry cleaner to make you happy if you can’t wear your favorite suit to an important meeting because they didn’t get it cleaned on time” (22-23). These examples might resonate with anyone who has committed to patronizing a new local business, wanting to support a local business owner who perhaps is also providing jobs to community members – but who has eventually been driven away by operational hiccups.

Ton spends the bulk of the book describing in detail a recipe that local economic developers can offer to businesses. This strategy can also be a powerful part of the toolkit of workforce development advocates who push local firms to offer higher-quality jobs, only to be told it’s too costly. The key elements of Ton’s “good jobs strategy” are: (1) a more limited offering of products and services; (2) pairing employee empowerment with a relatively high degree of standardization facilitated by a limited product offering; (3) cross-training employees as a strategy for managing variability, rather than making employee schedules dependent on unpredictable demand; and (4) building slack into staffing, which gives employees time and space to contribute to improving operations – a long-term cost savings (15-16).

This tightly interwoven strategy should serve as a model for local economic developers who seek to improve job quality in their communities through offering technical assistance. Although Ton’s case studies focus on national and international-scale retail businesses, in some ways her insights are even easier to apply for a business that is building its operations from the ground up. Ton’s good jobs strategy offers an essential tool for economic developers to simultaneously enhance the competitiveness of new local businesses while making them great places to shop and to work.



How Paris Became Paris: The Invention of the Modern City
Joan DeJean

Reviewed by Adam Levin

Financier. Nouveau riche. Millionaire. Femme fatale. Fashion. Sidewalk. If any of these terms resonate with you, Joan DeJean posits that you have one place and era to thank: seventeenth century Paris. In DeJean’s telling, the genesis of the modern, Western, planned city can be traced directly to the innovations and experiments in civic infrastructure, spatial development, and public finance dreamed up by France’s pre-Revolution monarchs and vanguards of urban thought. In *How Paris Became Paris: The Invention of the Modern City*, DeJean paints an illuminating picture of how the City of Light became the birthplace of the inchoate field of urban planning while simultaneously—albeit unconsciously—illustrating how planning’s myriad of intractable problems have been with the profession since its very inception.

Where DeJean’s book excels is in its elucidation of how many phenomena taken for granted in everyday urban life came about in seventeenth century Paris. The work opens with the history of that most iconic Paris landmark, the Pont Neuf. Driven by his desire to make Paris the most celebrated city in Europe and to create an enduring monument to his reign—not to mention devising a way for merchant and pedestrian traffic to flow across the Seine—Henri IV pushed his civic engineers to build a bridge spanning the river. Not satisfied with solely implementing a public work, Henri IV had his staff take control of much of the area on both sides of the Pont Neuf’s landings in order to create the first planned cityscape in Europe.

The Pont Neuf was an immediate smash upon its opening in 1607. Intended to be a “great social leveler” the bridge indeed became a gathering place for Parisians across the social and economic spectrums. The bridge and its surrounding area buzzed with activity day and night, drawing visitors from all over Europe and beyond. Much like other indelible public works such as the Golden Gate Bridge and Hoover Dam, the Pont Neuf served a functional purpose, and, more importantly, as a reason in and of itself for outsiders to visit and stand in awe. It also allowed Paris to become the progenitor to the 24-hour-city—its popularity among all social classes in Paris proved so strong that it became the central place where news was spread, and became a hotbed of civil unrest at various points throughout the seventeenth century. This construct, wherein massive, centrally-planned public spaces are transformed into places fomenting popular revolt and protest, has played

out countless times in public view, be it in Tiananmen Square or Tahrir Square. In DeJean's recounting, the Pont Neuf is the original model for those acts.

Other legacies of seventeenth century Paris will also be familiar to today's urban planners. When the Ile Saint-Louis was being developed, the project's engineer put in a variety of amenities intended to draw residents and visitors, including a public fountain, bathhouse, athletic facility, butcher shops, fishmongers, and rotisseurs. In other words, he sought to create a vibrant, mixed use area. But his idea initially failed to bring in people, a quandary which will be recognized by many flummoxed planners: what uses do people actually want? When Louis XIV had the influential city planners Francois Blondel and Pierre Bullet create his master plan for Paris in 1676, —a document which went by the unwieldy title of "A Map of Paris, That Shows All the Public Works Already Completed to Beautify the City and to Make It More Convenient—As Well As Those His Majesty Wishes to See Carried out in the Future," it was the first time that a European city produced what might be called a comprehensive plan. In fact, the Sun King's commissioned project was so revered that it was still being consulted forty years later.

Yet more prominent endeavors and projects abounded. The Tuileries, the public gardens which today remain a must-see on tourist agendas, were put in place in the seventeenth century. The era also saw Europe's first postal system, public transportation system (in the form of five hugely popular carriage lines) and nighttime lighting system. These projects were intended to mix social classes and give Paris the aura of modernity, efficiency and vibrancy, again providing an impetus for foreigners to take in these civic wonders only experienced in Paris. Louis XIV also worked purposefully to make Paris the center of "la mode," meaning "everything that is stylish or fashionable." Through the use of prescient marketing tools such as public advertising and publishing fashion periodicals, Louis XIV made Paris into the sartorial capital of the Continent, creating an export base by monopolizing fashion and flooding the market with French luxury fabrics. Finally, the seventeenth century saw the rise of a new class of wealthy French individuals who became known as financiers. These men, often from the lower social classes in provincial French towns, grew rich off the strength of their collective financial acumen and France's military quests. The seventeenth century saw France involved in a nearly nonstop cycle of foreign wars, efforts which required tremendous amounts of capital. These financiers became fabulously wealthy by lending to the crown at exorbitant interest rates. In an echo of today's criticisms of widening income inequality, these financiers were derided as *nouveau riche*—"new rich"—and were castigated by much of French society, which was still overwhelmingly poor at the time.

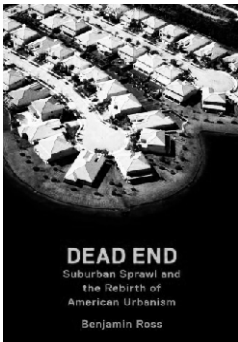
This brings up some of the more debatable points in DeJean's book. Much of the work revolves around her

argument that these innovations in seventeenth century Paris were explicitly intended to mix social classes, and in fact that they accomplished that end. The Tuileries are presented as a place where everyone gathered, the public carriage system is seen as an attempt at social harmony and the Pont Neuf is the great socioeconomic melting pot.

But how much of this is really true? Public resentment of financiers is a good place to start. Bringing oneself up from one's bootstraps—which is essentially what these individuals did, even if it was partially at the expense of the government—is the central tenet of the American dream. That they were harshly criticized as new rich implies that a rigid caste system was still in place at the time, and that that the public considered that system not to be trifled with. In this context, the social mobility of the financiers was disquieting.

The public carriage system became another emblem of France's social ills. After its initial popularity among all classes, wealthier riders demanded that the *hoi polloi* not be allowed to ride the carriages—and they got their wish. The Place Royale—, a large development of private residences which encircled a huge public space, —was allegedly intended to be a place for the people. Yet its residences were certainly only accessible to the upper echelon of French society, and its inaugural function was to celebrate a royal wedding, hardly a display of solidarity with the workaday Parisian. Even its description, as a "palatial public space," seems an oxymoron. More than anything the Place Royale seemed to represent the inherent contradiction between a democracy and a society of equality and actual French society at the time, which was still rigidly stratified along class lines. This was a society, after all, headed for the French Revolution and which already in the seventeenth century had seen the occasionally violent Fronde political movement, a cause which bubbled up from the lower classes.

Perhaps then DeJean's book best serves as a reminder that planning should be ever mindful that cities are places where certain animosities and conflicts may always exist. With the concept of equity at the forefront of planning today more than ever, DeJean reminds us that unequal access to resources and unequal treatment have always plagued cities. Can planning and infrastructure be used to open a city up to all its residents? Can disruptive social norms and classism be minimized through conscious planning? DeJean's book give some insights into these questions, but leaves the reader aware that there are no easy answers.



Dead End: Suburban Sprawl and the Rebirth of American Urbanism

Benjamin Ross

Reviewed by Rachel Eberhard

In *Dead End: Suburban Sprawl and the Rebirth of American Urbanism*, Benjamin Ross pulls together a narrative detailing how the American suburbs came into existence and how the unintended consequences of sprawl created problems that planners are scrambling to resolve 70 years later. In something reminiscent of a psychological assessment of the built environment, Ross poses the question, why do so many Americans live in widely dispersed, single-family homes and willingly spend so much time sitting in traffic?

Personal frustration led Ross to tackle this challenging topic, and he recently traveled to Chapel Hill to discuss *Dead End* and the road he took to arrive in advocacy work. While visiting Flyleaf Books, he described how the little details often fail to get fixed until people start complaining, which is precisely what he aimed to accomplish when he organized a coalition to request more spending on sidewalks. After lobbying the Montgomery City Council for more dollars for infrastructure improvements, he soon found himself serving as president of the Action Committee for Transit in the Washington, D.C. metro region. In this role, Ross entered the battle for the light-rail Purple Line connecting Montgomery County, MD to downtown Washington, D.C. The hurdles Ross encountered during his 15 years with the grassroots advocacy group provided him with the questions *Dead End* aims to answer.

The main takeaway from Ross' research indicates that sprawl is the result of a clashing of value systems. He found that the primary motive behind a mass exodus to the suburbs resided with "status-seeking" Americans, which led to the structure of zoning rules, housing covenants, and other regulatory mechanisms to protect the social cachet. Throughout *Dead End*, Ross works to examine the struggle between what he terms "snob zoning" and "NIMBYism" versus the principles of smart growth and the benefits experienced within economically mixed communities.

The most persistent critique of zoning since its inception in the early twentieth century is that it infringes upon the rights of private property owners by defining what they can or cannot do with their land, and Ross wholeheartedly supports this notion. He argues that suburban zoning has roots in private covenants governed by today's homeowners' associations. In an effort to

maintain more effective control, the covenants gradually evolved into more formal zoning regulations. According to Ross, these mechanisms continue to hamper the emergence of more diverse urban-style neighborhoods that younger generations desire.

Dead End also covers a broad range of topics considered essential to the planners' understanding of how the profession matured and became more controversial. From the Garden City to redlining practices, Ross weaves an intricate web of how sprawl festered and unfurled across the landscape. He also highlights the roles of many influential figures in twentieth century planning. In describing the influence bohemian culture had on shaping urban neighborhoods, Ross devotes an entire chapter to the mother of the modern urbanist movement, Jane Jacobs.

He praises Jacobs and her core principles for urban design: dense cities are better than sprawl and train and bikes provide a better way to transport people than automobiles. He also supports the notion that mixed-use neighborhoods that encourage walking will simultaneously encourage social and economic life. Ross stops short of addressing the effect gentrification has on the neighborhoods that exhibit these qualities, something that Jacobs could not foresee in her beloved Greenwich Village. He also deviates from her core principles when he criticizes policies supporting historic preservation, arguing that it often works hand-in-hand with zoning ordinances.

The book is a timely discussion of the benefits of new urbanist principles, as young professionals and retired empty nesters increasingly want to live in urban environments that offer the benefit of close proximity to amenities and less reliance on driving. *Dead End* contains a remarkable level of detail and research, as evidenced by a plethora of footnotes. I cannot declare Ross' work to be a light read—as the publisher needed a full two years to complete the peer review and editing process.

As a planning student, it's refreshing to hear a perspective on the motivations for suburbia from a psychological perspective, and Ross lays out an array of strategies for tipping the scale back in favor of smart growth and urbanist policies. His ideas range from encouraging apartment tenants to have a voice in local planning issues to dissolving anti-residential zoning restrictions that work to drive up rent prices. He concludes with how urbanists can work to gain political influence in order to initiate structural change. *Dead End* serves as a total package that will round out the essential bookshelf for any planner or budding urbanist.