

## PRAISE FOR *AGE OF THE CITY*

**‘A fresh, clear-eyed and timely analysis** of the challenges and opportunities that comes from one of the most important themes of the 21st century – the rise of urbanisation and the fact that more people live in cities than at any time in human history.’

Professor Peter Frankopan, Oxford University and  
author of *The Earth Transformed* and *The Silk Roads*

**‘Age of the City takes us on an absorbing journey through the relationships connecting civilization, progress, and the city.’**

Tim Marshall, author of *Prisoners of Geography*

**‘Age of the City is the book we need now.** Ian Goldin and Tom Lee-Devlin take aim at those who believe the age of our great cities is over. They marshal powerful and much needed evidence to show that cities are becoming even more important to our economy and society. Their book illuminates the ongoing ability of cities to preserve and thrive in the face of all manner of adversity, as platforms to harness and unleash the human creativity which stands as the engine of human progress. **Their book is essential reading for political and business leaders and each and every one of us who cares about and wishes to help create a better collective future.**’

Professor Richard Florida, University of Toronto and  
author of *The Rise of the Creative Class*

**‘A sweeping survey of the history and modern challenges facing cities** that will persuade you that they are the key to a happier and more sustainable future together.’

Baroness Minouche Shafik, President and Vice-Chancellor, London  
School of Economics and Political Science

‘Ian Goldin and Tom Lee-Devlin have written a compelling volume explaining why cities will survive and thrive despite the twin threats of remote work and pandemic. This book vividly explains how cities are engines of cooperation, which fundamentally enable us to become

more human. Using a compelling combination of history and data, the authors remind us that life is better lived in urban streets and cafes than in Zoom waiting rooms. This is an important read for anyone who cares about cities.'

Professor Edward Glaeser, Economics Department Chair,  
Harvard University and author of *Triumph of the City*

'A compelling, holistic and well-balanced narrative on the critical role of cities in an age of global warming – full of insights based on hard data. From cover to cover, a great read. Full of positive ideas for the future, and grounded in vital lessons from the past. The authors link together many disparate subjects into one integrated whole – bringing alive history, planning, infrastructure, pandemics, urbanism, deprivation, industrialisation, fertility, wars, governance and more – all in support of the city.'

Lord Norman Foster, architect and designer

'*Age of the City* provides a startlingly fresh and compellingly readable account of the forces that have defined our past and will shape our future. An essential and enjoyable guide for all our lives.'

Professor Saskia Sassen, Columbia University  
and author of *The Global City*

# AGE OF THE CITY

Why Our Future Will Be Won  
Or Lost Together

IAN GOLDIN  
TOM LEE-DEVLIN

BLOOMSBURY CONTINUUM  
LONDON • OXFORD • NEW YORK • NEW DELHI • SYDNEY

BLOOMSBURY CONTINUUM  
Bloomsbury Publishing Plc  
50 Bedford Square, London, WC1B 3DP, UK  
29 Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin 2, Ireland

BLOOMSBURY, BLOOMSBURY CONTINUUM and the Diana logo are trademarks of  
Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

First published in Great Britain 2023

Copyright © Ian Goldin and Tom Lee-Devlin 2023

Ian Goldin and Tom Lee-Devlin have asserted their right under the Copyright, Designs  
and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as Authors of this work

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any  
form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or  
any information storage or retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from  
the publishers

Bloomsbury Publishing Plc does not have any control over, or responsibility for, any  
third-party websites referred to or in this book. All internet addresses given in this  
book were correct at the time of going to press. The author and publisher regret any  
inconvenience caused if addresses have changed or sites have ceased to exist, but can  
accept no responsibility for any such changes

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing-in-Publication data has been applied for

ISBN: HB: 978-1-3994-0614-7; TPB: 978-1-3994-1242-1; eBook: 978-1-3994-0613-0;  
ePDF: 978-1-3994-0612-3

2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1

Typeset by Deanta Global Publishing Services, Chennai, India  
Printed and bound in Great Britain by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY



To find out more about our authors and books visit [www.bloomsbury.com](http://www.bloomsbury.com)  
and sign up for our newsletters

To Tess, for all your love and support  
*Ian Goldin*

To Megan, for all the joy  
*Tom Lee-Devlin*



## CONTENTS

<i>List of Figures</i>	xi
<i>Preface</i>	xiii
1 Introduction	1
2 Engines of Progress	17
3 Levelling Up	37
4 Divided Cities	59
5 Remote Work: The Threat to Cities	81
6 Cities, Cyberspace and the Future of Community	97
7 Beyond the Rich World	109
8 The Spectre of Disease	131
9 A Climate of Peril	149
10 Conclusion: Better Together	167
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	183
<i>Notes</i>	187
<i>Bibliography</i>	211
<i>Index</i>	229





## PREFACE

We live in tumultuous times. In the space of just a few years, we have witnessed a surge in populist politics across the world, a global pandemic, a spike in environmental disasters and a fraying of geopolitical relations demonstrated by the tragic war in Ukraine and escalating tensions over Taiwan. That has all occurred against a backdrop of dramatic technological changes that are fundamentally altering the way we work and relate to one another.

So why do we need a book about cities? There are two reasons. First, cities are now home to over half of the global population, a share that will rise to two-thirds by 2050. That is something never before seen in human history, and means that the forces shaping life in cities now also shape our world as a whole. Second, cities throughout history have been the great incubators of human progress through their power to bring us closer together, something we need now more than ever.

Put another way, the battle for our future needs to be fought and won in cities. From inequality and seething social divisions to pandemics and climate change, this book will show how many of the answers to our greatest challenges are to be found in reforming our cities. It will also show that, if we fail to take action, cities will magnify the perils that lie ahead.

This is a book that has been many years in the making, with its origin in the great paradox of modern globalization: that declining friction in the movement of people, goods and information has made where you live more important than ever. Appreciation of the complexity of globalization has come a long way since the early 2000s, when Thomas Friedman's *The World is Flat* and Frances Cairncross's *The Death of Distance* captured the public's imagination. With the power of

hindsight, we now know that place is of utmost importance in a globalized world.

That world is being shaken by a populist politics, often built on anger against cosmopolitan urban elites in major global cities. This has been given expression through Brexit in Britain, and in support for anti-establishment politicians in the US, France, Italy, Sweden and other countries. A common thread of all these populist movements is the notion that mainstream politicians, business leaders and media figures cocooned in big cities have let the rest of their countries down and lost interest in ‘left behind’ places and people. These populist revolts against dynamic cities are rooted in real grievances based on stagnating wages and soaring inequality. A transformational effort to even out economic opportunity is long overdue. But undermining dynamic cities is not the way to do that. Cities like London, New York or Paris – and in the developing world Mumbai, Cairo or Lagos – are engines of economic growth and job creation without which their respective national economies would be crippled. Moreover, they continue to harbour profound inequalities of their own, which need urgent redress. That is why we advocate in this book for a holistic approach to economic revival that harnesses the power of cities, rather than trying to resist it.

The impact of the recent surge in remote working on the geography of our economy also demands answers, which this book seeks to provide. Without a doubt, the collapse of commitment to offices and commuting is proving to be highly disruptive for cities, particularly in the US and Europe where rates of remote work remain high. Commercial real estate is suffering, municipal taxes are declining and the viability of businesses that depend on intense footfall – from barbers to buskers – is being challenged. So too are public transport systems, many of which are haemorrhaging cash.

All of that is reason to rethink cities, not abandon them. Creativity still thrives on physical interactions and serendipitous encounters. Most jobs are still apprenticeships, meaning workers, especially early on in their careers, benefit from observing and

## PREFACE

informally engaging with their more experienced colleagues. And workplaces are pillars of the community, bringing together people from many different walks of life and helping to combat isolation and loneliness. A society without dynamic cities would be less productive, less cohesive and less fulfilled. Our argument in this book is that, with the right initiative, the transition to hybrid work offers a window of opportunity to transform cities for the better.

While much of this book focuses on the cities of the developed world, we also offer readers a global perspective. The growth in the share of the world's population living in cities in recent decades has been driven almost entirely by developing countries, which now account for most of the world's urban-dwelling population. In some of those countries, such as China, rapid urbanization has been the result of a process of economic modernization that has lifted large swathes of the population out of poverty. In others, such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, urbanization and economic development have been disconnected, with rural deprivation and the flight from danger playing a greater role in the migration to cities than urban opportunity. Either way, cities are now where the world's poor are choosing to live. And many of their cities are giant and overcrowded, with residents too often living in appalling conditions.

Appreciating what is happening in the cities of the developing world is essential if poverty is to be overcome. It also is vital if we are to understand why contagious diseases are making a comeback. Modern pandemics, from HIV to Covid-19, have their origins in these cities. Crowded conditions are coinciding with a number of other trends in poor countries, including rapid deforestation, intensive livestock farming and the consumption of bushmeat, to increase the risk of diseases transferring from animals to humans and gaining a foothold in the population. From there, connectivity between the world's cities, particularly via airports, makes them a catalyst for the global dissemination of deadly diseases. That means that dreadful living conditions in many developing world cities are not only a humanitarian and development issue, but also a matter of global public health.

Tremendous progress has been made in the past two centuries in combating infectious diseases, but the tide is turning against us. Cities will be the principal battleground for the fight ahead.

No book on the challenges currently confronting the world would be complete without consideration of climate change. This poses an existential threat for many of the world's cities. Ocean rise, depletion of vital water resources, and urban heatwaves risk making many cities uninhabitable. Coastal cities are particularly vulnerable, yet nearly all global urban growth is in coastal cities. While rich cities such as Miami, Dubai and Amsterdam are threatened, those in poorer countries are even more vulnerable as the monumental investments required to build sea walls and drainage systems are simply unaffordable. Cities nevertheless hold many of the answers to mitigating climate change, and we show how they can establish more sustainable foundations.

In this book, we bring together insights from a wide range of disciplines in order to inform our understanding of the challenges facing cities and their potential. Historians, economists, sociologists, urban planners and other experts all look at cities through different lenses. Each are valuable, but problems do not emerge in disciplinary silos, nor do solutions.

We are far from the first to recognize the fundamental importance of cities to the modern world. Ed Glaeser's *Triumph of the City*, Richard Florida's *The Rise of the Creative Class*, Enrico Moretti's *The New Geography of Jobs* and many other excellent books over recent years have laid a trail before us, as have canonical works such as Lewis Mumford's *The City in History*, Peter Hall's *Cities in Civilization*, Jane Jacobs' *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* and Paul Bairoch's *Cities and Economic Development*. We have also been inspired by recent works that explore the importance of place more broadly, such as Tim Marshall's *Prisoners of Geography*, and provide a fresh historical perspective on why our world is the way it is today, including Peter Frankopan's *The Silk Roads*. We hope this book

PREFACE

can further contribute to advancing our collective knowledge on these subjects.

This book argues that we must take action now to shape our urban destiny, and shows how the challenges we face should be addressed. By sharing our understanding of the present and vision for the future, our aim is to equip our readers to play a part in creating a better life for all.

*Ian Goldin, Oxford*  
*Tom Lee-Devlin, London*

# AGE OF THE CITY

Out Now



Scan to order or visit  
[bloomsbury.com/city](https://bloomsbury.com/city)