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The important lessons: The double-edged sword of superstar cities, like Toronto, New York and London



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Dave Abel/Toronto Sun/Postmedia Network

This week's non-fiction book of the week is *The New Urban Crisis: How Our Cities Are Increasing Inequality, Deepening Segregation, and Failing the Middle Class – and What We Can Do About It*, by Richard Florida. For Lesson [#1](#), [click here](#).

Lesson #2: Superstar cities

Toronto is tied with Stockholm for 10th on the list of superstar cities compiled by the University of Toronto's Martin Prosperity Institute, where Florida is Director of Cities (New York, London and Tokyo are the top three). These cities benefit from the clustering effect of individual talent, firms and industries (especially tech).

A study by the Sante Fe Institute think tank also shows that each doubling of a city's population makes its residents 15 per cent more productive. Which sounds great until you realize that you're going to have to be 5000 per cent in order to afford to live there (my statistic: to be confirmed).

Despite the positives derived from the economic scaling-up of superstar cities, these same factors promote inequality, as economically displaced citizens lose access to those very job prospects, urban amenities and mobility.

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“Gentrification,” according to Florida, “is the manifestation of America’s new class geography.” Large cities and metro areas, he notes, can be both increasingly diverse and increasingly segregated at the same time (despite often being more liberal) – a reality that compounds across generations as younger families increasingly need access to existing capital from “the bank of mom and dad” to buy into neighbourhoods with better schools and socioeconomic opportunities.

Tomorrow’s lesson: Why NIMBYism and rent-seeking behaviour poses a special challenge to cities.



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