

# How realistic are the prospects for reviving 'dying cities'?

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A-level Global Perspectives

Word Count: 5000\*

\* This word count includes the block quotes that are bound inside a textbox

## Introduction:

### Background:

*I grew up in the city of Detroit. Growing up there, I knew what streets were safe to walk down, what gang presided over a certain area, but most importantly I knew fear. This fear can be displayed in a myriad of facets: fear of being hungry; fear of being homeless; fear of being unsafe. Detroit, like most dilapidated cities, if not abandoned, are overrun with crime; it is a place where I am five times more likely to get murdered, twice the likely to get raped, and seven times the likely to be assaulted. The city suffers not only from astronomical crime rates, but a crippling economy, an absent education system, and a severe lack of resources too. Detroit was also my home, and a home to approximately 700,000 other people as well (Micheline Maynard, 2013). From my personal experiences, I feel it is imperative to ask the question: How realistic are the prospects for reviving 'dying cities'?*

### Analysis of the Question:

Before defining the debate, I must put the key terms of the question in perspective. First and foremost is the definition of the term revive. I am defining this term, as well as the term "breathe life", as the definition of the word re-establish, which is: "establish again or anew" (Oxford, 2015). Equally important is the definition of dying cities. I will define dying as dilapidation, which is defined by the 2015 Merriam Webster Dictionary as, "to become decayed or in partial ruin." This definition of dilapidation includes abandoned cities as well as cities that are falling apart, literally and figuratively. After defining these vital words, I will investigate a dilapidated city's crime, economy, education system, lack of resources and potential for revival.

I will answer my question by investigating dead city's crime, economy, education system, lack of resources and potential for revival. Primarily, I will evaluate the process in which dilapidated cities can be restored. Then I will showcase a revived city, Singapore, which followed a specific route of revival. Following this, I will further expand upon restored cities. The opposition shows cities that haven't or couldn't be revived. Finally, I will conclude by contrasting the views to establish whether or not it is possible to breathe life into dead cities. As someone who used to live in the dying city of Detroit, I need to see if dying cities, like my hometown, can or should be saved.

I personally believe that all dying cities hold a true chance of revival. The complication on determining how realistic the prospects of revival is the drastic differences between each dying city. These cities all hold unique circumstances that diseased them to the brink of death; the only similarity between them is the death they are submerged in.

## The Steps to a City's Recovery:

### Introduction:

*In 1975, World Bank President Robert McNamara stated that: "If cities do not begin to deal more constructively with poverty, poverty may begin to deal more destructively with cities" (McNamara, 1975). In 1975 this man pointed out one of the biggest symptoms of a dying city: poverty. But the follow up question still hasn't been presented, until now. But, before the debate can commence, I will present the theoretical process that needs to be taken to breathe life into the dying cities. In this section, I will provide three separate processes from three different point-of-views. First is Mason Gaffney, a professor of economics at the University of California and an established author, who provided a solution for dying cities in his essay entitled "How to Revitalize a Falling City". This publication provides real world examples of revived and lost cities as well as why we should revive the cities. Further, Edward Glaeser tackles the rising issue of dying cities and how it can be fixed in his book, Triumph of the City. Finally, a series of video lectures entitled How to Revive a City provide a basis for revision that can be accomplished by the citizens of the city.*

### Evidence:

There is a blight that falls upon cities across the world. This "blight [is] defined as a failure to maintain, to replace, and to renew the capital inherited from the past" (Gaffney, 2013). A cure to this grave blight is the process in which the sickly and dying cities can be saved. Mason Gaffney- an economist with a Georgist point of view- presented a cure, which is to implement Georgist policy of failing cities. This is the idea of "pit[ting] cities against each other to attract people... It raises their bargaining power as tenants, buyers, and workers" when these people are being competed for (Gaffney, 2013). The game that is played when competing for people is the taxation game. Georgist policy uses a specific taxing mechanism on ground rent and rent control (Gaffney, 2013). Gaffney furthers by providing examples in which Georgist policy would work in specific cities. This policy fails if the city is suffering for different reasons. For instance, if a city has been abandoned and the buildings of the city are decaying, raising taxes on rent or installing rent control wouldn't help said city at all. All in all, Georgist policy would only excel if the buildings are in shape and an economically compliant population is available for the increase tax mechanism.

One process in a book entitled Triumph of the City written by Edward Glaeser- a respected economist and Harvard professor but with a minimal education in architecture- presents broad ideals to reviving a dilapidated city in general. The last chapter (Flat World, Tall City) is where he reveals that in order for cities to thrive, they must do one of two things: “attract smart people and enable them to work collaboratively”, or “have a mix of skills and provide pathways for those who start with less to end with more” (Glaeser, 2011). Then, he furthers by providing nine subsequent actions that I combined into three strategic components that would enable a struggling city to be successful.

1. **Education:** When the education system is broken or suffering, it is of upmost importance for the city to address the local issue and invest in the repairing of the schools. By fixing this, it would create and “attract [the] smart people” that are needed in order for a city to thrive (Glaeser, 2011). For example:
 

Boston’s post-industrial success has been built on engineering, computers, financial services, management consulting, and biotechnology – all education-oriented industries (Glaeser, 2011).
2. **Architecture:** The author stresses the importance of infrastructure within a city. This infrastructure should complement the indigenous industry that the city holds: Sea ports if the city is on the coast with a surrounding fish population, airports if the city’s industry pertains to commercial or tourism oriented, medical buildings when there is a greater population of elderly people. For example, the city of Paris invested in the quality of life, and Chicago opened up to leading advancements in infrastructure (Glaeser, 2011).
3. **Rule of Order:** Glaeser has two sub points to describe this component in which a city doesn’t have to cover both, but only one. First, he points out that the city must become a strong and structured sanctuary in comparison to the places that surround it (Glaeser, 2011). Basically, as long as the city is more structured than its surroundings, it can begin to be cured, but this would mean the all the surrounding cities must be failing to. His second sub point- the more attainable one- is to have a strong leader or team of leaders to implement well-thought-out and concrete policies (Glaeser, 2011). Hong Kong succeeded through the first point by “establishing themselves as bastions of economic freedom and the rule of law in an often disorderly part of the world” (Glaeser, 2011)

With further research to finding a process to revive cities, I came across a TED Talks playlist titled “How to Revive Cities”. This playlist included six individual TED talks that either tackled a problem or showed how a certain method could provide success. While Gaffney’s harsh solution to reviving a city and Glaeser’s process involved government control, this series of TED Talks focuses on the importance of the people within the cities. Each video tied the community to how successful a city is, because the more isolation, the more unlikely it is that progression is possible. Following are the provided mechanisms of recovery in the order in which they must be completed.

First is the recovery of the community. Theaster Gates- a potter turned social activist living and working in the dilapidated city of Chicago- refurbishes abandoned buildings to create community centers that accommodate to the neighborhood’s needs. For example, he created The Archive House in the Dorchester Projects, his own neighborhood (Gates, 2015). The Archive House staged “exhibitions, small dinners, and... became a kind of gathering site for lots of different kinds of activity... [in which] very significant people in the city and beyond would find themselves in the middle of the hood” (Gates, 2015). With the instillation of these types of buildings in small communities around the city, civic interest and participation increased. This increase in civic participation- the second step- provided individuals with the will to create change in their city, because if their city was thriving, they believed they would be successful, too. Furthermore, Alessandra Orofino- Co-Founder and Executive Director at Meu Rio and Our Cities, two political organizations in Rio de Janeiro, meaning she makes her living off of increasing civic participation- in a Ted Talk called *It’s our city. Let’s fix it*, provided specific examples of the benefits of civic participation. To demonstrate, one tool provided by her organizations, called Pressure Cooker, was used by three separate individuals in Rio, Bia, Jovita, and Leonardo, to change a course of action for the benefit of the community. Bia stopped the demolition of her school to be made into a parking garage; Jovita created a centralized intelligence police unit for missing persons after her daughter’s disappearance; Leonardo started a recycling project in the slum to battle the over-run and garbage infested city (Orofino, 2014). With the importance of the community established, the infrastructure needs to accommodate the needs of the community, starting with public spaces.

After the increase of civic participation, the public architecture is of utmost importance. Amanda Burden, a New York city planner and animal behavioral specialist, stated “Where

people go and where people meet are at the core of what makes a city work” (Burden, 2014). But, “public space can change... how you feel about a city, whether you choose one city over another, and public space is one of the most important reasons why you stay in a city” (Burden, 2014). When a city starts to get sick, buildings start to deteriorate and the citizens with the means to leave will move away and that is why most sick cities can’t come back from the brink of death. Ole Scheeren- a German architect who runs the Beijing office of his firm- worked with



(News-05-oma2, 2009)

others to create a geometric skyscraper (shown left) that enforces community through public spaces while housing the same amount of people as the originally zoned, twelve stand-alone skyscrapers. Ole Scheeren states in his Ted Talk that the building would:

Provide sufficient shading to the courtyards so that those would be usable throughout the entire year... [and the strategically placed] water bodies along the prevailing wind corridors, so that evaporative cooling would create microclimates that, again, would enhance the quality of those spaces available for the inhabitants (Scheeren, 2014).

This building, looking more intricate than it actually is, is called the economy model, which are overall “cheaper to build and more compact” as stated by Israeli-Canadian architect, urban planner, and author Moshe Safdie in September of 2014.

## Ending Analysis:

Overall, through extensive research, I have found three avenues of revival. The first, which I will refer to as Georgist Policy, dictates direct control over the real estate market coupled with a taxation mechanism. This avenue of revival will only uphold if applied to a city when the first symptoms of blight occur. In other words, the city still has upheld infrastructure and has just started to have a decrease in population, but not enough that the taxation process won’t compensate. The second, I will refer to as Glaeser’s Reconstruction, sets up a flexible plan of revision that contributes to the entire city. The three components must be completed, but the order in which they are done are interchangeable to fit any dying cities. And the third, I will refer to as the People’s Revision, stresses the importance of a strong community and architecture to have a successful city. This avenue is considerably much more structured with a set procedure. This procedure can be applied to any city with basic elements in place, but there must be a community. These three avenues of revival will be shown in the upcoming sections.

## Case Study: Singapore's Revision

### Introduction:

*I will continue by providing one in-depth example on how people around the globe are re-establishing dilapidated cities. I will use Singapore, an island city-state off of Malaysia, as my area of focus. Whereas many cities are working through the mist of countering dilapidation caused by economic struggles, Singapore was a dilapidated dwelling that was revived and now has one of the most successful economies in the world.*

### Evidence:

Singapore is one of the greatest examples of a full-scale revival using Glaeser's Revision. Singapore was newly independent in 1965, having a "GNP per capita of less than \$320" (Our History, 2015). Though the article Our History is un-authored, it is published by Future Ready Singapore, a governmental news provider. During the sixties and seventies, Singapore's Economic Development Board was developed, funded and expanded until the electronics industry started booming in the late 1970s. With this expansion and the skyrocketing of the electronic industry, the economy remained "nimble" and "flexible" through the global recession of 1975 (Singapore, 2016). Singapore implemented Glaeser's Reconstruction in which they went from a very deprived state to one of the most economically stable and prosperous nation in the world, in other words, it came back from the brink of death. Edward Glaeser stresses this in his book, but it is also supported by many other sources. One highly accredited source, Jim Zarroli of NPR's economic and business section, highlights Singapore as a "big financial center with a high standard of living" (Zarroli, 2015). Another source, a 2015 article published by the Huffington Post, critically outlined Singapore's success. Today:

The OECD [Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development] ranked 15-year-old Singaporean children number one in the world in a recent global ranking of "Universal Basic Skills" in mathematics and science (Mahbubani, 2015).

Other than their strong education system, they "have the highest home ownership of any country in the world, with 90 percent of residents living in homes they own" (Mahbubani, 2015). Kishore Mahbubani though only a Dean of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, he is an accredited author and a member of the World Economic Forum's Global Agenda Council on China. Moreover, many analysts credit the success to the partnership of their leader, Lee Kuan Yew, with architect Dr. Goh Keng Swee and philosopher Mr. S. Rajaratnam (Glaeser,

2011). This strong and well-versed leadership “implemented three exceptional policies: Meritocracy, Pragmatism and Honesty” that secured the rule of order within the area (Mahbubani, 2015).

### Ending Analysis:

The case study of Singapore is extremely relevant to revival; the fact that Singapore is an island city-state, and not a city, proves the grand expanse of the restoration. These sources show that Singapore used all three strategic components, introduced by Edward Glaeser, to breathe life into the city: education, architecture, and a strong rule of order. The country used the correct avenue of revival, and clearly succeeded. Which begs the question, can this success be replicated or was it a unique circumstance?

## Reviving a Ghost Town:

### Introduction:

*I quickly will first present known revivals of cities by referring to Reviving America's Forgotten Neighborhoods by Elise Bright, which looks at fallen American cities and the possibility of urban renewal in the area. Then, I will display the transformation of Hebron, Israel as a revived ghost town. Additionally, Varosha, a dead city in Cyprus, is analyzed by two CNN writers. Following this I will refer back to Mason Gaffney's essay called "How to Revitalize a City," which is found in his collection of essays that is named, Essays solving the "unsolvable." Another piece of literature I will be analyzing is titled Inclusive Cities, a book within the Urban Development Series written by the Asian Development Bank. The book provides examples of specific dead or dying cities in Asia and their potential benefit to the country. This section shows that dead cities can occur any country in world, whether or not they are a developed, emerging, or developing country.*

### Evidence:

Briefly, there are many well-known examples of revival throughout history. The United States cities of Atlanta, Washington D.C., and Chicago all recovered from fire-related incidents without breaking a stride (Bright, 2000). Furthermore, San Francisco, Anchorage, and New Orleans, in the US were revived, with struggle, from natural disasters (Bright, 2000). Also, after World War One and Two, whole countries- such as Britain, France, Russia, Germany, and Japan- are being or were revived from war related destruction.

In more detail, Hebron- a religious city in Israel- was infected with blight a little over 20 years ago, this is described in a 2015 The Guardian article written by Harriet Sherwood, an actual correspondent within Jerusalem. The severity of blight can be seen through the closing of "more than 500 shops... [and] at least twice as many [more] as curfews, constraints and depopulation" that took place (Sherwood, 2015). For this reason, the Hebron Rehabilitation Committee (HRC) was established, and slowly started to renovate buildings and settlements in the area. Despite the obstacles of political and cultural upset in the region, the HRC has accomplished a remarkable amount of work to revise the infrastructure and reviving the city.

Of equal importance, Varosha, a city in Cyprus, was crippled by centuries of violence to the point where now it is "empty and in a state of disrepair" as described by John Deferios-

who usually works as the CNNMoney Emerging Markets Editor- and Eoghan Macguire- a London based freelancer for mostly CNN- in 2014. This city was left unaccounted for because it laid on the line that separates Turkish-Cypriots from Greek-Cypriots. But a group of Cypriots wish to change that. "Vasia Markides... has founded The Famagusta Ecocity Project," a project that aims to transform this dead city to Europe's model eco-city (Defterios, 2014). As of now, The Famagusta Ecocity Project has assemble a team of individuals who are working through the process of re-establishing this city (The Famagusta Ecocity Project, 2016). Amongst them are:

Ceren Bogac, a Turkish-Cypriot architect and environmental psychologist... Jan Wampler, a distinguished MIT professor and world renown expert of sustainable community design, Fiona Mullen, one of the island's leading economists, George Lordos, an economist and businessman who is also a refugee from Famagusta... and many others (The Famagusta Ecocity Project, 2016).

The prospects of revival seem very realistic because former residents, including the surrounding community, support the movement wholeheartedly and are the most willing to compromise (Defterios, 2014).

Looking back to Mason Gaffney's essay, he provides many examples of revived cities using Georgist Policy. To illustrate, he provided a quick, to-the-point list of cities that included Taipei, Taiwan; Harrisburg, Pittsburgh and Scranton, USA; Sydney and Johannesburg, Australia; and Nairobi, Kenya (Gaffney, 2013). Taipei was revived by Georgist Dr. Sun Yat-Sen's philosophies. Pittsburgh, Harrisburg, and Scanton used a graded tax plan under the Georgist policies to revive the cities. After overcoming social problems, Sydney, Johannesburg, and Nairobi have become "economic capitals of their respective continents" through the use of Georgist policies (Gaffney, 2013).

A large scale project in Indonesia called the Neighborhood Upgrading and Shelter Sector Project (NUSSP) was financed by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) through a total loan of \$90.1 million to cure the dying cities (Chomistriana, 2010). The project proved to be very successful because of its implementation in "32 cities in 17 provinces... and provision of housing for the poor more responsive to the needs of beneficiaries" (Chomistriana, 2010). Once the NUSSP established the goals of the project in a particular region, "community meetings [and neighborhood surveys] were arranged at which proposed project interventions were discussed" (Chomistriana, 2010). After the reestablishment of the cities, the quality of life has increased, and people began to relocate to the city. The book Inclusive Cities financed by the ADB also specifically outlines how they have also revitalized cities within India and the

Philippines along with their plans for other cities in Asia. The outline presented closely follows the People's Revision.

### Ending Analysis:

Each and every one of these cities recovered from destructive blight. An observation that I have constructed through vast research is that cities that are blighted because of post-war effects or natural disasters have the fastest recovery rates, due to the interest of other cities and nations willingness to help. Nevertheless, cities blighted by other reasons, have been revived through correctly fitted avenues that compliments the city.

## The Uncertainty of Revival:

### Introduction:

*The book mentioned in the above section is utilized as a segway into the second view of the question. In this section, I will show the improbability in which a city can be re-established. For example, CNN News journalists Ivan Watson- a senior international correspondent in Hong Kong since only 2014- and Connie Young- CNNs trusted freelance writer for Chinese news- question the failings of China's attempt to restore abandoned villages and towns. One Canadian ghost town that is trying to be brought back to life written in an article titled "Abandoned Canadian Ghost Town to be Revived by Entrepreneur" by George Dvorsky- though not a journalist he is a bioethicist and is a contributing editor of io9- on August 1st, 2013, proves this point. Furthermore, an un-authored article published by Business Insider on September 1st, 2010 gives the examples of ten American cities that are "dead forever." Other than these dead cities being completely abandoned, realistically, the prospects for reviving dead cities may be economically impossible.*

### Evidence:

Globally, there have also been many cities that are too far gone to revive. China has recently tried to cure the dying cities in the country. The city of Zhengzhou was one of the largest ghost towns that sat empty until a recent installment of parks, buildings, a stable route for an education system, a rule of order. The refurbished city sparked an interest in some surrounding citizens, but there were still problems. According to a CNN article entitled "Can China breathe life into 'ghost towns'?" published in 2013, "rows and rows of luxury apartments and office buildings sat empty on vast, deserted boulevards," even with the new public place that provided a community (Watson, 2013). In addition to daily and work related infrastructure, "city planners had constructed 14 new university campuses in the city" (Watson, 2013). Even though many citizens were interested in the newly revamped city, they encountered a monetary problem. Many said they "could not afford to live in the sprawling, newly-constructed [city] of Zhengzhou" (Watson, 2013). To illustrate:

The average income per month in Zhengzhou is roughly \$483 while property prices in the new district stand at \$1,660 per square meter, and are expected to climb (Watson, 2013).

In trying to fix this, a strong rule of order was established. The leadership of Premier Li Keqiang provided a tight control of the real estate, which included, "limitations on homes per person

and higher taxes on transactions” (Watson, 2013). However, while the rule of order was established, it failed to bring in more people into the city. In summation, Zhengzhou attempted to revive through Gaffney’s Reconstruction, but failed to do so.

Additionally, Kitsault, a city in Canada, has been completely abandoned for almost 30 years. After the mining industry collapsed, the inhabitants of the city moved away to find a city more suitable to their needs (Dvorsky, 2013). Recently, Krishnan Suthanthiran- an Indo-Canadian businessman and billionaire- has decided to attempt to revive the entire abandoned city. There have been many delays with the project, including complete isolation, the market crash, and the tanking of real estate. As of now, the project will “require up to \$30 billion to get off the ground” in addition to the 8 million he has already invested in the land (Dvorsky, 2013).

Within America’s history, fluctuations within cities is common, and almost expected. A common factor between the cities that cannot be revived is the collapse of an industry. When a city profits off of a certain industry, the people within the city gain their success off of the industries success. So, if the industry collapses, the city as well as the people, will collapse as well. For example, Detroit “was the fifth largest city in America with a population of almost 1.9 million in 1950,” and when the industry progressed, along did the people (Business Insider, 2010). Then, in the 1970s, Japanese cars became the biggest demand in the automobile industry: Detroit’s fall commenced. Japanese cars then began to “flood the markets in great numbers in the 1980s [which caused] Detroit’s car manufacturing base... [to be] nearly destroyed” (Business Insider, 2010).

To further exemplify, Allentown in Pennsylvania in the mid-1900s was the direct hub that connected iron ore and steel to transportation across the nation. But, when its top product began to be “produced in greater and greater volumes and at lower prices in Japan,” the industry took a major hit (Business Insider, 2010). Allentown and Detroit serve as examples as to why the prospects of revival in cities that gain their success off of a broken or collapsed industry is unrealistic.

## Analysis:

These examples prove that you can't flip a switch and the city becomes inhabitable and successful. Also, one notable observation is that there are many different circumstances as to why a city couldn't be revived. In other words, each city's blight is different, making it very

difficult to have a universal process in which restoration is definite. This point of view perceives that some cities are too far gone to revive at all, making the prospects of revival unrealistic.

## Final Analyzation:

### Introduction:

*I will answer my question by investigating dead city's crime, economy, education system, lack of resources, and potential for revival. I will compare and contrast the views to establish whether or not it is possible to breathe life into dead cities. As someone who used to live in the dying city of Detroit, this analysis will finally answer whether or not my city can be saved, or even if it is worth saving.*

### Analysis:

To reiterate, I was at first skeptical if dying cities could be revived. After researching ways to breathe life back into cities, I was even more discouraged because all of the processes I found were extremely varied and didn't come to a consensus on the issue. But, after diving deeper into the revival of cities and realizing the differences between every city's fall, the different equations to solving the same problem didn't contribute to my worry any longer. My investigation concluded in the realization that the discrepancy isn't that there are different equations to solve the same problem, but the problem isn't congruent in any way shape or form. Because every city's blight is different, a different process of revival is needed in each case. This means that some dilapidated cities might be following the wrong process of revision, and there is still hope of resurrection. Jaime Lerner, a Brazilian politician and architect, stated in 2008:

Every city in the world can be improved in less than three years. There's no matter of scale. It's not a question of scale, it's not a question of financial resources. Every problem in a city has to have its own equation of co-responsibility (Lerner, 2008).

By investigating the death of cities all around the world, multiple cures have been found, but not all are the best avenue of revival for a particular city. The cure must revolve around the state of deterioration with in the dying city. To bluntly answer the question, the prospects of reviving 'dying cities' is realistic. Now, the question isn't can cities be saved, but by which avenue can the dilapidated cities be saved? Hope is still left for those living in my hometown of Detroit, the exact cure hasn't been found yet.

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