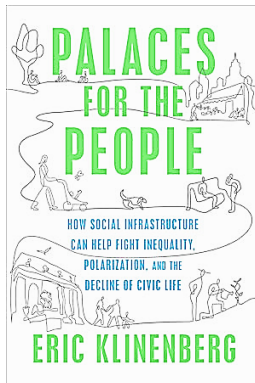


## Book Notes by Mary Hasselbring



### ***Palaces for the People: How Social Infrastructure Can Help Fight Inequality, Polarization, and the Decline of Civic Life***

By Eric Klinenberg

Wow! Would I recommend this book? Yes, I would...to friends, my book club, my nephew Ted, who is a real estate developer, and to our Sarasota County Commissioners!

Eric Klinenberg, a professor of sociology at NYU, makes a strong argument for the crucial importance of “social infrastructure” for the well-being of our communities. His interest in the subject spiked when he analyzed the statistics relating to the devastating heat wave in Chicago in 1995 which killed over 800 people. Why would two adjacent poor neighborhoods in Chicago’s south side, have such radically different death rates? Englewood’s death rate was ten times higher than that of neighboring Auburn Gresham. Klinenberg’s meticulous research revealed that social infrastructure (places where people could form connections with others) was the key component in survival. Isolated people trying to fend for themselves experienced much lower survival rates.

Libraries are a text-book example of social infrastructure in action. Libraries are places where people of different ages, social status, and ethnicity are welcome in a shared space (a “palace for the people”). The presence of all kinds of people requires us to confront differences, an increasingly important concept in our divided society today.

The book is not only about libraries. Klinenberg also talks of the role of schools (smaller if possible), parks (for walking, playing, gardening), corner stores, churches, and synagogues, and other social spaces in strengthening our communities. This infrastructure needs our support. Eric Klinenberg suggests a way we can once again find common ground.