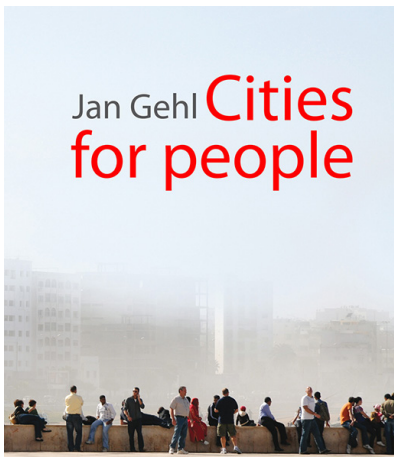


Cities for people

Author: Jan Gehl

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Gehl is a Danish architect and urban design consultant based in Copenhagen, who has focused his career on improving urban life by re-orienting city design towards the pedestrian and cyclist. He presents a book about urban space and how to design it from a pedestrian perspective or, as he puts it, respecting “the human dimension.”

The author emphasizes that city planners are neglecting city space and city life. He believes that when they design cities for automobiles, or build buildings just for the sake of building, then they are moving away from what makes cities really work. Jan Gehl criticizes planning from above and with that the neglect of well-functioning human scale. On 244 pages he explains, that human body, senses and mobility are the key to good urban planning for people. He is giving a good overview, how physical structures influence human behavior.

Jan Gehl's concern for pedestrians and cyclists originates from the perspective of the famous activist Jane Jacobs. Traditional knowledge about scale and proportions has been lost. New areas are often built on a scale far removed from what people perceive as meaningful and comfortable. Taking into account changing demographics and changing lifestyles, Gehl describes four main considerations, that he sees as essential to successful city planning. He explains how to develop cities that are lively, safe, sustainable, and healthy. The author also emphasizes the social function of city space as a meeting place that contributes to the aims of social sustainability. In the book he clearly explains the methods and tools he uses to reconfigure non-workable or nonfunctional cityscapes. The content of the book is not only presented with theoretical points, but also practical examples, especially from Copenhagen. Because of the use non-scientific terms, the essence of this book is simple to understand. The text is also well equipped with 700 photographs of real situations following the text and schemes of design approaches. Each of the six book sections is dealing with a different aspect of perception of cities: »The human dimension«, »Senses and Scale«, »The lively, safe, sustainable, and healthy city«, »The city at eye level«, »Life, space, buildings-in that order« and »The developing cities«. In the end of the publication there is a “Toolbox,” presenting key principles, overviews of design methods and keyword lists.

50 years ago, Jane Jacobs pointed out the importance of human scale. Today Jan Gehl continues her thoughts, and in his book he describes her approach in a contemporary way. The content of the book is interesting and important. However the reader often gets a feeling that the essence of various chapters could be captured in shorter texts. This book is recommended to students and early practitioners of planning, architecture and landscape design to gain basic knowledge about the relationship between public spaces and society, and how the two are interwoven.