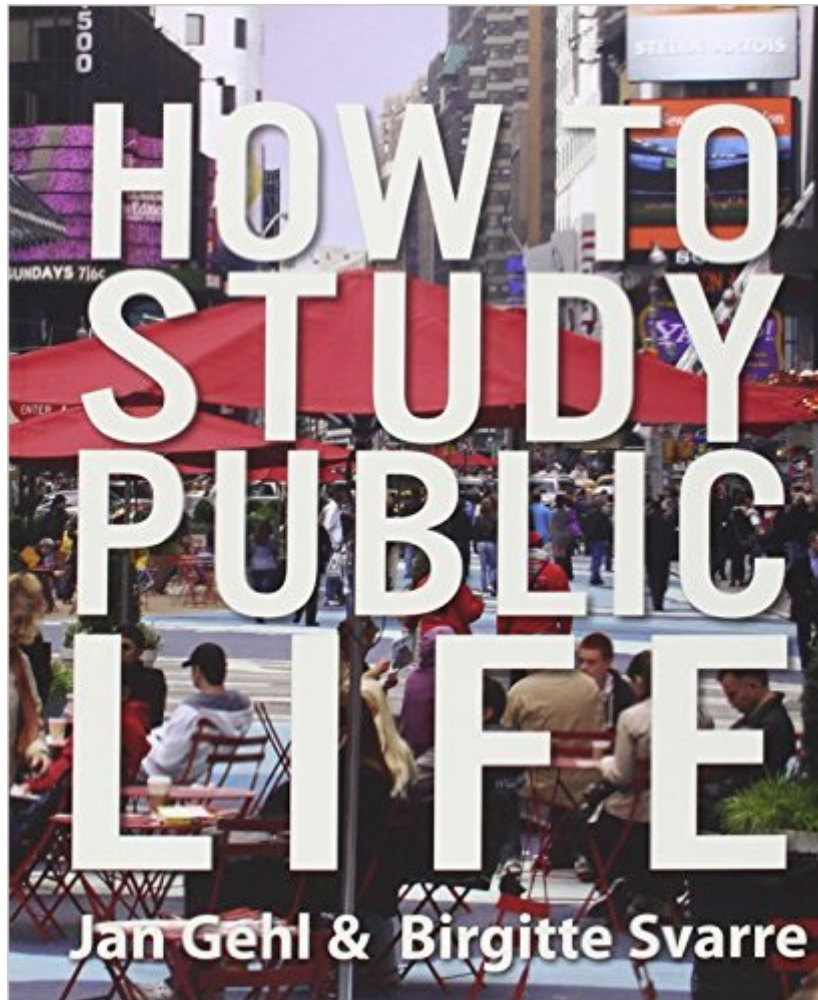


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How To Study Public Life



Synopsis

How do we accommodate a growing urban population in a way that is sustainable, equitable, and inviting? This question is becoming increasingly urgent to answer as we face diminishing fossil-fuel resources and the effects of a changing climate while global cities continue to compete to be the most vibrant centers of culture, knowledge, and finance. Jan Gehl has been examining this question since the 1960s, when few urban designers or planners were thinking about designing cities for people. But given the unpredictable, complex and ephemeral nature of life in cities, how can we best design public infrastructure—vital to cities for getting from place to place, or staying in place—for human use? Studying city life and understanding the factors that encourage or discourage use is the key to designing inviting public space. In *How to Study Public Life* Jan Gehl and Birgitte Svarre draw from their combined experience of over 50 years to provide a history of public-life study as well as methods and tools necessary to recapture city life as an important planning dimension. This type of systematic study began in earnest in the 1960s, when several researchers and journalists on different continents criticized urban planning for having forgotten life in the city. City life studies provide knowledge about human behavior in the built environment in an attempt to put it on an equal footing with knowledge about urban elements such as buildings and transport systems. Studies can be used as input in the decision-making process, as part of overall planning, or in designing individual projects such as streets, squares or parks. The original goal is still the goal today: to recapture city life as an important planning dimension. Anyone interested in improving city life will find inspiration, tools, and examples in this invaluable guide.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Excellent new book by Gehl and his collaborator Svarre. A great account of the evolution of studies of public life and a description of a series of methods to study behavior in public spaces. Goes beyond his couple of previous books which were pretty much the same and did not break any new ground. Too bad the graphic designer who did the cover of this book did not notice he is advertising Stella Artois... or maybe that was his intention.. (top right corner).

This book provides an excellent introduction to simple but highly effective methods of studying public life in cities. Many of the research methods (counting, mapping, tracing) are low-tech, only requiring paper, pen, a watch, and some rigour, thus available to anyone. Most of the book is dedicated to succinctly presented examples of how these methods can be used, from small case studies of streets and squares to large urban areas. While many examples are taken from Gehl's extensive research since the 1960s until today, other classic as well as recent studies have been also included. Readers new to the topic will be amazed to find out how many things can be learned through simple methodical observations about the way the design of public spaces affects peoples' behaviour. The book is clearly intended as a very easy read, with many highly effective diagrams and photographs, making it accessible to everyone. While focused on observation methods, it also introduces some basic urban design concepts and provides a good guidance to the broader literature in the field. For those that are already familiar with the topic, there won't be many surprises as much of the content is recycled from earlier publications, but it can be still useful as it compiles a broad range of research methods together in a new format. After Gehl's 1987 classic *Life Between Buildings*, this is probably the most interesting book he published.

Jan Gehl provides an interesting perspective in the study of urban life and how to understand it in order to build new and better cities. The book is fitted for professional city planners and enthusiasts alike, since it provides simple tools and techniques to work on community building. I very much enjoyed this book.

Jan Gehl and his coauthor offer a vision and explanation for what public spaces can be and why certain kinds of public space appeal and others do not. The grand wide boulevards may look great on paper and from the air, but to the individual pedestrian they are at a scale too large to enjoy.

Conversely, failing to adequately segregate cars from humans on foot or bicycle leads to a different kind of obstacle to public gathering and sharing of spaces. While this book should be mandatory for city planners, managers, and transportation directors everywhere, it should also appeal to smart decisionmakers and citizens who care about how civilized civic engagement can be increased through appropriate design.

First of all, I love the size of the hardcover. It's big enough not to be treated like a bedtime novel, and small enough not to feel intimidated like a college textbook. It's concise and best of all, it makes an urban planner feel proud to be an urban planner. Many would scorn at the seemingly 'duh' kind of title, but it really makes sense from the obvious. Thanks to the authors for making public life alive!

An interesting review of thecnics and methodology. Lack of reference in contemporary bibliography.

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