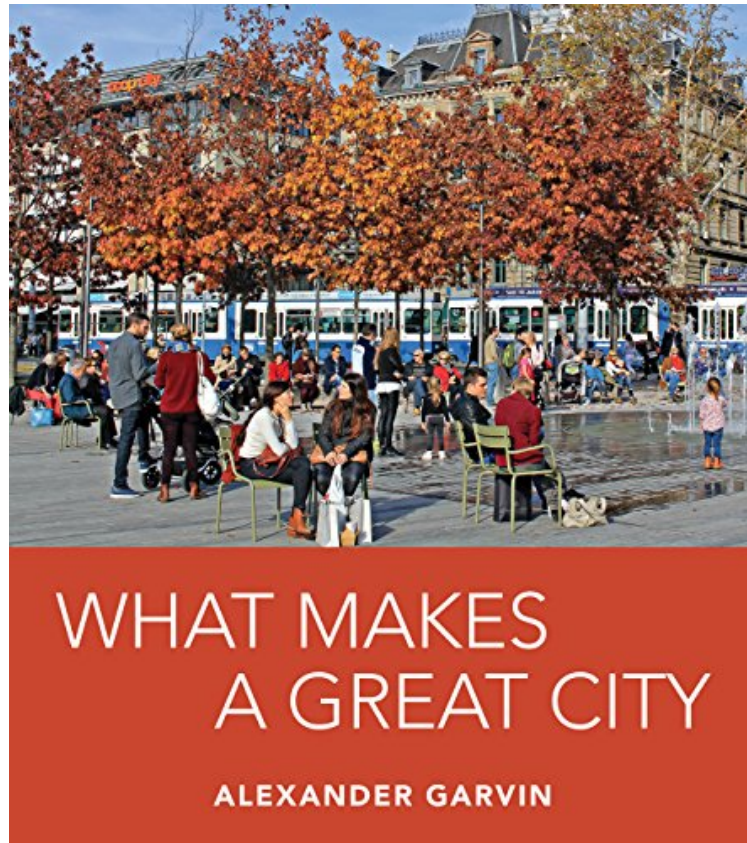


What Makes a Great City

Alexander Garvin

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Alexander Garvin : What Makes a Great City before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised What Makes a Great City:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Great read!By Sandra SteeleI am a Planning Commissioner and I heard the author speak. I immediately came home and ordered the book. It has changed my view on how public spaces should be designed. I usually struggle with the academic type books but I read this one like a novel.2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Review of What Makes a Great City by Alexander Garvin John FBy John M.Review of What Makes a Great City by Alexander GarvinJohn F. Meigs, ReviewerAlexander Garvin's new book, "What Makes a Great City" is an admirable addition to his impressive array of urbanism scholarship. Garvin, a life-long denizen of New York except for college years at Yale, has cities in his blood and, after a few years working as an architect, has for decades taught a college course on cities, their problems and solutions, served on city planning commissions, worked as a real estate developer and in a variety of other urban roles. On top of that, he has continuously roamed the cities of the world with his camera and inquiring eye. This book is the latest distillation of his observations.Garvin has a strong belief in appropriate government and civic action intertwined with a private market response as the formula for reviving or building the livable city. This book focuses on what he calls the "Public Realm" which he defines as not only streets, squares, parks, but everything that is accessible to the public. The core of the book is the history of the development of various spaces and places in certain cities and how that happened. He

points out the mistaken notions of Le Corbusier, with his antiseptic plans in which people are either confined to their apartment or going someplace in automobiles. Robert Moses, responsible for much of New York city's great public resources and a hero of Garvin's is appropriately taken to task for his plan to put an elevated highway through Greenwich Village. Garvin's book is really, to a large extent, about reclaiming the city for people on foot or bicycle and the like from domination by the automobile and other vehicles, though he never comes out and says so directly. What is lurking beneath Garvin's fluid text is the transformation of his subject cities in several stages. First, they were, for the most part, places of heavy industry or horse-drawn trade where many people lived in relative squalor within walking distance of smoke-spewing noisy industry or crowded markets filthy with horse dung. Next, the automobile and truck appeared and, for a while, made the city work better without overly impinging on urban life. After that, gradually the core of the city became overrun with these vehicles and many people with means retreated to the quieter, cleaner suburbs. Garvin's book is focused on the next happy stage where the cities he describes are repurposed as places where people want to live as well as work. He describes in detail the strategies that smart city leaders, working with the various constituencies of residents, investors and business owners, have adopted to remake their city into a comfortable, exciting and resource-rich place for people, whether or not they work there. These strategies mainly involve the Public Realm and its interaction with private businesses and investors. More specifically, a large part of the solution generally involves limiting car traffic in the core so that people can reacquire space formerly devoted to vehicular traffic and thereby support businesses and multiple amenities. In that regard, the future looks promising as we benefit from general disenchantment with the automobile among younger people and experience pooled riding with Uber and Lyft. As with any book, a reader has minor quibbles. How, for instance, do the private squares of London enhance the Public Realm if the public can't get into them? And why does a park have to have something for everybody? Can't it just be really good at a few things? Overall, however, "What makes a Great City" offers a well-conceived and well-described formula for making our good cities great and our great cities even better. And the photographs are wonderful.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Great book for those aspiring to be city planners or mayors. Emphasizes public spaces

By JAMES FIORENTINI I love this book! The writer reviews, with hundreds of photographs, parks, walkways, streets, boulevards and other public places that make a city great with the message, you can do it and become a great city! As the mayor of a city of 62,000 it is inspiring. My only problems (questions) really with the book are -- does he adequately emphasize the basics, and to what degree does a great and visionary leader make a great city? On the basics, before a city can be a great city, it must be a safe city and must have a transportation network that will allow everyone to get to and around the city. But these things aside, the book is an inspiring look at public areas in the US and Europe and gives some great ideas to city planners and mayors. Highly recommended.

One of Planetizen's Top Planning Books for 2017 bull; San Francisco Chronicle's 2016 Holiday Books Gift Guide Pick

What makes a great city? Not a good city or a functional city but a great city. A city that people admire, learn from, and replicate. City planner and architect Alexander Garvin set out to answer this question by observing cities, largely in North America and Europe, with special attention to Paris, London, New York, and Vienna. For Garvin, greatness is not just about the most beautiful, convenient, or well-managed city; it isn't even about any "city." It is about what people who shape cities can do to make a city great. A great city is not an exquisite, completed artifact. It is a dynamic, constantly changing place that residents and their leaders can reshape to satisfy their demands. While this book does discuss the history, demographic composition, politics, economy, topography, history, layout, architecture, and planning of great cities, it is not about these aspects alone. Most importantly, it is about the interplay between people and public realm, and how they have interacted throughout history to create great cities. To open the book, Garvin explains that a great public realm attracts and retains the people who make a city great. He describes exactly what the term public realm means, its most important characteristics, as well as providing examples of when and how these characteristics work, or don't. An entire chapter is devoted to a discussion of how particular components of the public realm (squares in London, parks in Minneapolis, and streets in Madrid) shape people's daily lives. He concludes with a look at how twenty-first century initiatives in Paris, Houston, Atlanta, Brooklyn, and Toronto are making an already fine public realm even better—initiatives that demonstrate what other cities can do to improve. What Makes a Great City will help readers understand that any city can be changed for the better and inspire entrepreneurs, public officials, and city residents to do it themselves.

"Garvin here explores the importance of public spaces to public life—and how a 'great' city, unlike a great painting or sculpture, is not an exquisite, completed artifact."