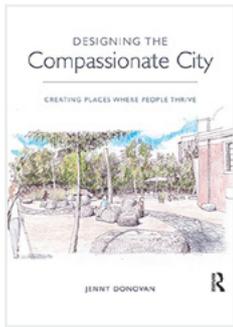


Designing the Compassionate City



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Designing the Compassionate City by Jenny Donovan, advocates a way of undertaking urban design and redevelopment that recognises the significance of a social, holistic and collaborative approach, with the user of public space placed at the centre. In the words of the author, the book ‘considers differences urban design can make to people’s lives and seeks to identify the types of interventions that best facilitate people to meet their needs’.

The book is well referenced and, in the holistic and collaborative tone taken, the subject matters referenced are broad ranging including design, health, psychology, philosophy and law.

The book is divided into 3 main sections:

- What is the relationship between people and place and what does it mean to live in either a nurturing or neglectful environment?
- Nine international case study projects that have been undertaken to enhance the relationship between people and place that highlight the successes and challenges for the projects. For example:
 - Play Streets in London where streets are closed to traffic at certain times of the day to allow outdoor play
 - Christie Walk in Adelaide, which is a multi-generational community-led urban infill residential development
 - UN Habitat place-making projects in West Bank villages in Palestine, which allow residents to assert their identity by turning unused places into meaningful spaces.

- Reflections of the case study projects, lessons learnt, barriers and potential solutions

The author takes a life-course approach in considering the needs of young children, families and older people. The overt and visible elements of cities, for example the design and construction of infrastructure and accessibility, are explored. But so are the less tangible and visible, emotional and emotive elements, such as experience, trust and historical and societal influences that shape communities.

The author writes as much from a philosophical standpoint as a practical one where hope, happiness, connections and choice are equally as important as design, planning and building regulations. However, the tone is in no way naïve. Barriers to inclusive and compassionate design are clearly outlined, such as resource constraints, competing interests, perception and an emphasis on risk and regulation.

In closing, the author provides a series of design principles and processes that may overcome these issues. Ultimately, an optimistic view is presented of what can be achieved and a firm grounding is provided of why it should be aimed for. The book concludes with the characteristics of a compassionate city.

While written through the lens of ‘what this means for urban designers’, this book is an enjoyable, informative and valuable read for anyone interested in people and places.