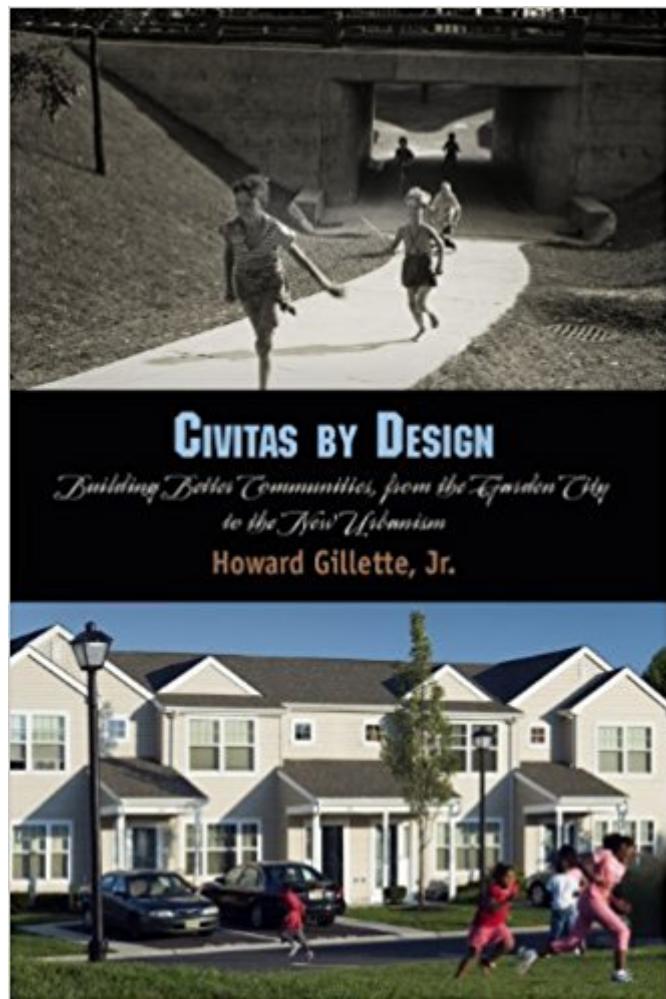


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Civitas By Design: Building Better Communities, From The Garden City To The New Urbanism



Synopsis

Since the end of the nineteenth century, city planners have aspired not only to improve the physical living conditions of urban residents but also to strengthen civic ties through better design of built environments. From Ebenezer Howard and his vision for garden cities to today's New Urbanists, these visionaries have sought to deepen civitas, or the shared community of citizens. In *Civitas by Design*, historian Howard Gillette, Jr., takes a critical look at this planning tradition, examining a wide range of environmental interventions and their consequences over the course of the twentieth century. As American reform efforts moved from progressive idealism through the era of government urban renewal programs to the rise of faith in markets, planners attempted to cultivate community in places such as Forest Hills Gardens in Queens, New York; Celebration, Florida; and the post-Katrina Gulf Coast. Key figures—including critics Lewis Mumford and Oscar Newman, entrepreneur James Rouse, and housing reformer Catherine Bauer—introduced concepts such as neighborhood units, pedestrian shopping malls, and planned communities that were implemented on a national scale. Many of the buildings, landscapes, and infrastructures that planners envisioned still remain, but frequently these physical designs have proven insufficient to sustain the ideals they represented. Will contemporary urbanists' efforts to join social justice with environmentalism generate better results? Gillette places the work of reformers and designers in the context of their times, providing a careful analysis of the major ideas and trends in urban planning for current and future policy makers.

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Customer Reviews

This book discusses several attempts to use urban design to build more civil communities, including the early 20th-century Garden City movement, the early shopping malls, and new urbanism. I felt like the most informative chapters were the first ones- perhaps because I knew less about the Garden City movement than about the more recent movements. The Garden City movement was a reaction against overcrowded urban slums; Ebenezer Howard (a leading Garden City theorist) proposed small towns limited to 32,000 people and linked by commuter rail. These garden cities were to be surrounded by greenbelts within walking distance of homes, putting everyone close to cow pastures and forests. After the automobile became popular, the Garden City movement shifted gears (pun intended). An American Garden City, Radburn, New Jersey, sought to control the auto by separating cars from pedestrian traffic, linking houses by walkways and parks. (I wish, however, that Gillette had explained more clearly why this sort of design did not become more popular). Like the earliest Garden Cities, Radburn provides its residents with plenty of parkland and puts housing within walking distance of shops. Gillette points out that mid-century shopping malls also sought to protect pedestrians from cars in a different way- by creating shopping areas for pedestrians only. But unlike Radburn, suburban shopping malls are often difficult for pedestrians to reach because they are ringed by parking lots, and unlike Radburn shopping, are often not near housing. One area where Gillette stumbles is his treatment of urban malls; he assumes that such malls are generally successful. In the more successful downtowns (e.g. Boston, Baltimore) this is the case.

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