

Review: Designing Healthy Cities: Prescriptions, Principles, and Practice

By Joseph Aicher

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Aicher, Joseph. *Designing Healthy Cities: Prescriptions, Principles, and Practice* Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing Co., 1998. 142pp. US \$29.50, cloth. ISBN: 0894649272.

Desired by all, realized by only a few, healthy cities "can provide tremendous resources to promote human health." However, as the author states in his preface, cities often fall short of this ideal. Aicher clears the air surrounding many of the issues facing today's city dwellers, including high-rise living, toxic hazards, crowding, traffic, pests, noise, and many more. He emphasizes the good news that it is not necessarily more costly to design healthy cities than those that are unhealthy. It merely requires a willingness to take a holistic approach to design by bringing together the multifaceted aspects of the physical, biochemical, socioeconomic, and psychosocial environments of modern living.

Based upon a stress-support model, Aicher devotes a chapter to each of these aspects. Although the geographic scope of the problem, like this text, is international, the focus here is on the United States. While the need for more information on this topic is very real, it is difficult to find current material. Yet, a good companion volume to the one under consideration here is *Directions in Person-Environment Research and Practice*, edited by Jack L. Nasar and Wolfgang F.E. Preiser. As might be expected, the Internet offers a number of useful resources as well, such as the final report of the National Science Foundation 1998 workshop on urban sustainability, "Towards a Comprehensive Geographical Perspective on Urban Sustainability" <<http://www.policy.rutgers.edu/cupr/sustain/sustain.htm>>.

Organized around major sources of stress and support, Aicher's book addresses the many challenges facing architects, city planners, engineers, environmentalists, health professionals, and city residents, one issue at a time. For example, under the "physical stressors/supporters" chapter, he discusses such specific topics as light, sound and noise, population densities, natural disasters, and many others. Following each discussion he lists various prescriptions and implications for planning and design. Numerous sidebars and illustrations are used to highlight and elaborate important points. The writing style is clear and the physical structure of the text is easy to follow; however, numerous technical terms necessarily occur throughout. A glossary,

index, and three appendices are available to help with unfamiliar terms, a real possibility with such an interdisciplinary field where you can expect to come across new acronyms, chemical formulas, pollutants, and other jargon. Numerous references follow each chapter, reflecting the fact that the text is well researched.

The difficulty of providing thorough coverage for the dozens of topics included is evident by the brevity of some entries. For example, the discussion of "allergens" consists of a single paragraph. One is left with the impression that, if more information could not be presented, then it would have been better to leave the topic out entirely. In spite of this shortcoming, the text offers practical information and insightful coverage of a complex and challenging aspect of modern living. Public, special, and academic libraries will find this resource useful for students and professionals alike.

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