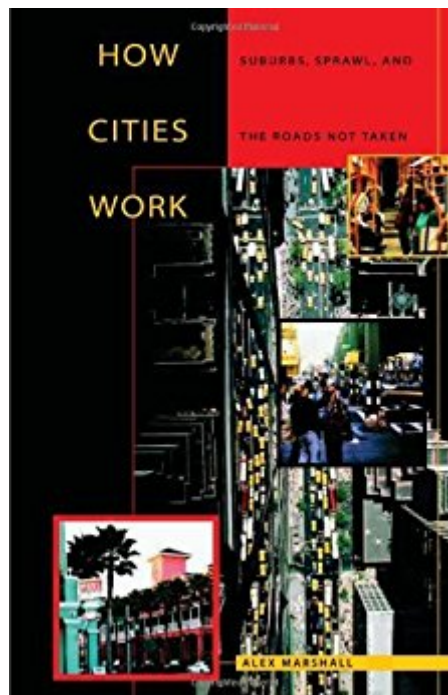


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How Cities Work : Suburbs, Sprawl, And The Roads Not Taken (Constructs Series)



Synopsis

Do cities work anymore? How did they get to be such sprawling conglomerations of lookalike subdivisions, megafreeways, and "big box" superstores surrounded by acres of parking lots? And why, most of all, don't they feel like real communities? These are the questions that Alex Marshall tackles in this hard-hitting, highly readable look at what makes cities work. Marshall argues that urban life has broken down because of our basic ignorance of the real forces that shape cities-transportation systems, industry and business, and political decision making. He explores how these forces have built four very different urban environments-the decentralized sprawl of California's Silicon Valley, the crowded streets of New York City's Jackson Heights neighborhood, the controlled growth of Portland, Oregon, and the stage-set facades of Disney's planned community, Celebration, Florida. To build better cities, Marshall asserts, we must understand and intelligently direct the forces that shape them. Without prescribing any one solution, he defines the key issues facing all concerned citizens who are trying to control urban sprawl and build real communities. His timely book will be important reading for a wide public and professional audience.

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Customer Reviews

I bought this book because I wanted an introduction to urban studies without having to slog through a dry, academic textbook. What I got was not really an introduction to the subject, but rather a polemic against the current trends of urban planning, and the ever-growing dominance of suburban sprawl and the personal automobile. This is not to say that Marshall doesn't describe the basics of planning, he does, but this serves mainly as the backbone of his argument; that being that the car and the massive freeway systems that accompany them, have basically destroyed the city and the notion of community. We live in an aimless, rootless society, he argues, with no sense of place or meaning. He starts by explaining that cities are founded on three basic components; transportation, politics, and economics. What type of city you will have depends on the type of transportation system you have, and the type of transportation you have depends on political decisions. And economics are the whole reason cities exist in the first place argues Marshall, "cities exist because they create wealth." Marshall spends a good portion of the book criticizing "New Urbanism" which basically embraces suburban sprawl and artificial communities like Celebration, Florida. These communities, argue Marshall are trying to build new urban communities without the transportation systems that are needed to support them, and thus are bound to fail. Marshall supports things like growth boundaries to help revitalize inner cities instead of just continuing to spread outward, eating up more precious land and resources while leaving the center city areas to decay. He supports more government involvement in such matters and thus will make no friends out of the free trader types. Overall, I think Marshall makes a compelling case, although I think he tends to blame too many of societies problems on suburban sprawl. I am a lifelong suburbanite myself and I have a love/hate relationship with the burbs. I like the privacy and convenience it affords me, but I can't help but emphatically agree with this statement by Marshall: "I believe...that the generally fragmented lives so many of us lead break up marriages, disturb childhoods, isolate people when they most need help, and make life not as much fun. We live, to speak frankly, in one of the loneliest societies on earth." Can all this be blamed on the car and suburban sprawl? Probably not, but I would whole-heartedly recommend this compelling read anyway. Four stars.

Everything came very smoothly and made for an easy transfer. Very satisfied with my service and the product. It came exactly as it said it would, and it was even shipped the same day. Very good service!

This book fundamentally changed how I think about how cities are constructed and how they function. Marshall provides a thorough and very readable (much more so than most academic texts) introduction to the basic forces that create and shape cities. I found the book to be irreverent and compelling in its analysis of the political, economic and transportation forces that shape cities. Great critical discussion of new urbanism as well. I lived in Jackson Heights for a few years and he is spot on in his laudatory description of it as an urbanist's dream. Alex: Please write an update! This is a bit dated now but still very relevant...

Marshall, lays it out. Our cities are determined by our transportation choices and our transportation choices are political decisions. Not a very sexy situation and no easy solutions for so many American cities. For Marshall, front porches, alleys and over designed communities ala Andres Duany cover over and contribute to sprawl. As a Portland Metro resident I'm happy Marshall feels so good about what Portland is doing, but I worry about the rest of Oregon and any urban area that is not investing in transportation options beyond larger, faster roads. Marshall is a fan of Oregon's Urban Growth Boundaries, but fails to realize the continual outward creep they are subject to. The book is a good read for beginners and those familiar with urban design. Marshall's formal occupation as journalist helps make the reading easy. Suburban Nation (by Duany) makes a good companion. Enjoy.

Marshall does an exceptional job of telling readers that the form of our cities is based strongly on the choices (and tradeoffs) we make, be they governmental, transportation, economic, or otherwise. The book is a good exploration into how cyclically linked are developers, government, and taxpayers.

I give this book five stars. It's a good resource for refuting the New Urbanist horse pucky, and I've seen those ideas crash and burn exactly as he describes. He is dead on with his defense of suburbia and mocking of the pinky raised urban elitist. Liberal authoritarians hate his idea that cities exist to create wealth. You can see that in some of these reviews. This is a book a person can read and understand how urban planning affects our lives directly and indirectly. It's worth reading, and, if you're always being criticized for living in "cookie cutter suburbia", has lots of good answers for the snobs.

This book was suggested to me by a friend. He had to read it as part of an urban design class in college. To his credit he didn't vouch for the book from a standpoint of recommending it as a good read, so I take responsibility for having bought it. I was grossly disappointed to the point of being offended at the lack of understanding that the author had for the principles of new urbanism. Having studied, taught, and worked directly with new urbanism as an urban planning discipline I am well versed in both its strengths and weaknesses. I was dumbfounded by the lack of journalistic presentation of new urbanism. The misrepresentation of its principles was astounding. The author fell into stereotypes that were unfounded and unsupportable. His presentation was rudimentary at best. Knowing what I do about the subject matter made it difficult to read because of how uniformed the author was. Ultimately, this author won in my case because he got my money when I bought the book. My hope is that I can save others from the same fate. There are far better books to be reading on the subject matter rather than this one. I implore you to SPEND YOUR MONEY ELSEWHERE!!!

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