

Preface

When I was 19 and an architecture student in Scotland, I first heard Jan Gehl's lectures. With a mixture of humility, humanity, and humor, Jan Gehl's common-sense approach weaves together architecture, planning, and psychology, with poignant observations of the human condition. From Jan I learned the huge significance of small, seemingly banal aspects of the everyday environment; the simple things, which influence our behavior and contribute to our well-being. I also learned that most of what I needed to know about how to design could be found by simply watching people and looking at the environment around me; by seeing what works and what doesn't.

These pragmatic ideals became the foundation for my future—for my continued education and professional practice. I studied in Denmark and Sweden, not only with Jan Gehl, but also with other architects who had become my personal heroes, including Steen Eiler Rasmussen, Sven Ingvar Andersson, Ralph Erskine, and Klas Tham. Living in Scandinavia, with its tradition of beautiful everyday architecture and design, I came to understand and appreciate an underlying respect for nature and humanity and a softer approach to daily life.

In 2002, I joined the fledgling Gehl Architects practice in Copenhagen. Since then, I have been working with an extremely dedicated, highly talented, and ever-growing group of people with the motto "making cities for people." At Gehl I have been given a platform to put my life's learnings into practice in projects around the world, as well as the opportunity to make this book. I would like to thank the Gehl team, especially my in-house editor Birgitte Svarre, who has supported me through this project over the last years, as well as my business partner, Gehl CEO Helle Søholt, who entrusted me with this task, and many others.

It would not have been possible to publish this book without the support of the Danish foundation Realdania that has a mission to create quality of life for all by developing the built environment. This book shares the mission of Realdania with its focus on the human dimension while

considering the challenges of density, diversity, and livability. I hope this book will contribute to the making of better neighborhoods.

The process of writing this book has been long and sometimes painful, as I tried to decide what was worth sharing while also recognizing that there is so much I still don't know. Even with 25 years of professional practice, teaching, and research experience, I am still learning new things every day, and I continue to be a student of the human condition.

However, perhaps the wisest moment in my life as an urbanist came very early, at the age of five or six, with the living room floor strewn with Lego bricks. When my mother despaired, "When will this town of yours be finished?" I solemnly—and I think correctly—answered, "It's a town, mum. It'll never be finished."

David Sim
Copenhagen, 2019

Perhaps the wisest moment in my life as an urbanist came very early, at the age of five or six, with the living room floor strewn with Lego bricks. When my mother despaired, "When will this town of yours be finished?" I solemnly—and I think correctly—answered, "It's a town, mum. It'll never be finished."

