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Book Review: Healthy Cities: Public Health through Urban Planning by Chinmoy Sarkar, Chris Webster, and John Gallacher

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Sarkar, Chinmoy, Chris Webster, and John Gallacher. *Healthy Cities: Public Health through Urban Planning*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2014. xv + 407 pages. Hardcover, \$160.00.

Epidemiology, sociology, economics and health promotion intersect to inform the field of public health. Professors Sarkar, Webster and Gallacher examine how these fields must meet the complicated task of mingling with urban planning and departments of transportation to build healthier cities for all members of our ever-growing urban populations. Through the illustration of many of the significant historical factors of public health in the United Kingdom, they lay the foundation for a healthy city model. Readers are able to understand that where neighborhoods and individuals respond to and have a positive impact upon one another, public health is improved and promoted.

In Chapters 1-3, the authors explore the concept of the healthy city model. The healthy city model is based on the 'urban health niche' in which every individual's health is based on his or her interaction with three inseparable systems: the individual system, the household/neighborhood/city system, and the governing and decision-making system. Chapter 4 is extremely important and useful. It provides significant evidence of Sarkar, Webster and Gallacher's hypothesis that in order to have a positive influence on urban public health – that is, on the health outcomes of the members of the urban population – the ways in which cities are laid out, the designations of land use, the transportation infrastructure, and the delivery of supports and services, must work so well together that barriers to access of the supports and services are removed. Chapter 5 deals with housing, workplace, and neighborhood factors and conditions that impact an individual's physical and mental health. The authors include over 80 pages, comprised of three tables, that summarize: (1) the research on neighborhood-level environmental variables that impact health outcomes, (2) the evidence and key findings from research on the connection between neighborhood-level environmental variables and health outcomes, and (3) the research instruments used to survey and study the correlates between environment and an individual's physical and mental health.

In the latter part of the book, Sarkar, Webster and Gallacher focus their attention on the surviving members (men ages 65-84) of the longitudinal Caerphilly Prospective Study (CaPS). The text outlines the following findings: (1) The psychological distress found in the sample of the fifth cohort was clearly associated with the way the land was used and the way the street networks were configured; (2) The built environment was seen to have an impact on the Body Mass Index of the older members of the third through fifth cohorts; and (3) Depression, anxiety, long term illness or disability, and perceptions of individual health were impacted by variables in the built environment. The authors conclude the book with implications for future research, and document the urgent need for professionals to work more closely together in order to develop more effective health promotion programs and to remove barriers that limit access to these programs for the members of the community.

Our cities' built environments shape our health and well-being, and Sarkar, Webster and Gallacher conceptualize the 'urban health niche' as an approach to public health and healthy-city planning. The book is of practical use for those involved in public policy, public health and urban planning. The text also has a place in academia as a good foundation for new research being done by epidemiologists, urban planners, economists, and sociologists.

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