

FROM...GuardianWitness assignments Cities

What makes a city attractive?

Mystery, visible life and organised complexity, says the School of Life – but we'd love to hear from you.

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LINK: <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2015/feb/10/what-makes-city-attractive>

Is there an “art of making attractive cities”? London-based alternative education group [The School of Life](#) (founded by Alain de Botton) seem to think so, and have made [a video that, they claim, explains just how to do it](#).

According to their manifesto, there are six fundamental things a city needs to “get right” if it is to be deemed beautiful. First up is order. Order is the reason we love Paris and New York, we're told. But we must avoid too much of it. Excessive regularity can be “soul-destroying, relentless and harsh,” so what we want is organised complexity. Humans simply “adore” cities midway between chaos and boringness. Apparently.

Next we have “visible life”: streets need to be full of people and activity in order to be beautiful instead of bleak. The third principle is ensuring that our cities are compact, not sprawling. Think Barcelona, not Phoenix, Arizona.

The next rule of attractive cities is “orientation and mystery”: the ability to both get lost and to not get lost (you've lost me), which is achieved by a balance between small streets and big ones. This leads to the fifth principle, which is scale. Our urban skylines have become dominated by tall buildings dedicated to banking and commerce. Instead, we should be building at an ideal height of five stories, resulting in dense and medium-rise cities, like Berlin and Amsterdam. If there are tall buildings in a city they should be dedicated to something “all of humanity can love.” I've never seen a building unite all of humanity, but I'm interested to find out.

Finally, the sixth key to making a city attractive is to “make it local”. Which is to say, cities should embrace their unique characters of place and avoid sameness.

So what's stopping us from making our cities attractive? An intellectual confusion around beauty and a lack of political will, says The School of Life. We'd love to hear your thoughts though.

While there are certainly other things more important in a city than how it looks, what do you think about these guidelines for beauty? And what, in your eyes, makes a city attractive?

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