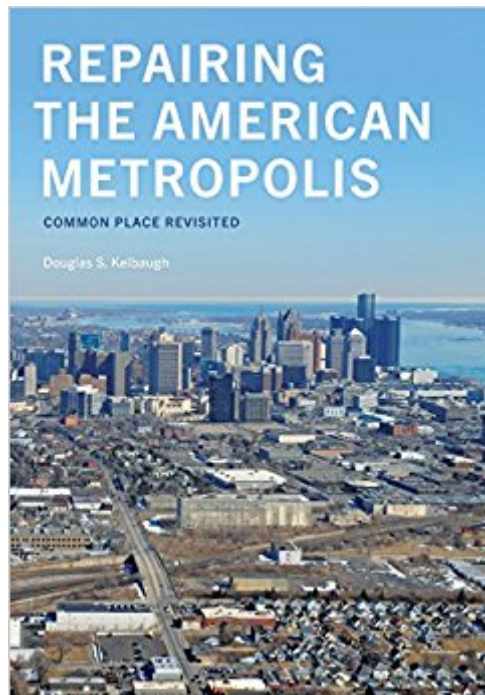




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# **Repairing The American Metropolis: Common Place Revisited (Samuel And Althea Stroum Books)**



## Synopsis

Repairing the American Metropolis is based on Douglas Kelbaugh's Common Place: Toward Neighborhood and Regional Design, first published in 1997. It is more timely and significant than ever, with new text, charts, and images on architecture, sprawl, and New Urbanism, a movement that he helped pioneer. Theory and policies have been revised, refined, updated, and developed as compelling ways to plan design the built environment. This is an indispensable book for architects, urban designers and planners, landscape architects, architecture and urban planning students and scholars, government officials, developers, environmentalists, and citizens interested in understanding and shaping the American metropolis.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Kelbaugh describes architects' and urban planners' responses to the problems of 20th-century urbanism and reviews the predicament of modern suburbanization, offering a cogent critique of both modernist and postmodernist paradigms. In contrast to architectural historians who do similar work, however, Kelbaugh also suggests solutions to the spatial problems he documents." "Choice" "An academic's thoughtful meditation on values that should underlie development—community, sustainable order, and human spirit—and a discerning examination of the proposed remedies." "New Urban News" "The reader's urban experience will never be quite the same after experiencing this book. With clarity, precision, and deft detail,

Kelbaugh pans the unsustainable design strategies and conceits of an auto-crazed culture, as our human spirit vanishes in the rear view mirror. The author is uniquely well qualified to connect the dots between the habitat we could fashion and the humanity we could reclaim." — Planning and Zoning News

"At once a primer on how architecture, urban design, and metropolitan planning can be pursued in a key that resonates with sustainability and wise stewardship of the environment and a compelling polemic on why such thinking will produce better places to pursue our livelihoods and live out our lives." — Alex Krieger, Harvard Graduate School of Design

Repairing the American Metropolis is written with such exquisite clarity and confidence, it is easy to overlook that Doug Kelbaugh is arguing for nothing less than a fundamental reconsideration of contemporary American architecture and planning." — Don Prowler, Princeton University

This is the most sophisticated critical presentation of the New Urbanism to be found anywhere." — Andres Duany, Duany Plater Zyberk & Company.

Review by Tigran Haas (Reproduced by permission from the Nordic Journal of Architectural Research, Sweden)

Just when you thought that what you are looking at is nothing more than another book on anti-sprawl in America, along comes Douglas Kelbaugh's new book "Repairing the American Metropolis". This refreshing work is written with formidable ease of style, research lucidity and academic strength, as well as many years of practical experience. In a nutshell, this book offers a completely new reconsideration of contemporary American architecture, design, planning and policy making, as well as ways how to revitalize and repair our cities. All of this evolves in a metropolitan sustainable vision where cities would be ecologically, socially and spatially acceptable again. Aristotle's axiom that 'we come to the cities to live the good life' could not be more correct in the context of this book.

Repairing the American Metropolis is a follow-up to the author's highly successful earlier book Common Place: Toward Neighborhood and Regional Design. This earlier work, illustrated by a number of workshops and charrettes, is a tour-de-force about how we can develop community and create sustainable places in face of fragmented growth and development. Kelbaugh's work on charrettes has been cited and copied around the USA and abroad as a model for community design. The new book continues on the same line of thinking but lifts the whole discussion to an even higher intellectual level, but in an understandable and overwhelmingly logical and persuading manner. Backdrop for the whole discussion lies in the fact that America is becoming more and more a suburban nation, as portrayed and discussed in the

book *Suburban Nation: The Rise of Sprawl and Decline of American Dream* by Andres Duany, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk and Jeff Speck. With more than 50% of population living outside of the city, we are witnessing the breakdown of community and civic life, people-friendly neighbourhoods - cities as we used to know and love them. It is not surprising that Peter Calthorpe, one of the founders of New Urbanism in America is thinking on the same lines as Kelbaugh. Calthorpe and Kelbaugh wrote the national best seller in urban design in 1998 entitled "The Pedestrian Pocket Book", in which they have argued for walkable neighborhoods, pedestrian communities and transit oriented development (T.O.D.) as well as for bringing back the sense and quality of place. They are not pushing for the disappearance of the automobile but rather for designing livable communities and repairing the old ones, while realizing that too much traffic not only destroys the urban quality of place but also damages the occupant of the car. Many of these ideas were later incorporated into New Urbanism. Along with Andres Duany, Peter Calthorpe and others, Kelbaugh has been one of the pioneers of this movement. The discourse in this book evolves around the notions of community, sustainability and the role of design. The book is divided into five sections that flow tightly and move all the time from the general to the specific and backwards: suburban sprawl, Critical Regionalism, typology, New Urbanism and public policy. Kelbaugh presents the case of the high costs of sprawl, how Critical Regionalism can be an answer to the growing forces of homogenization, commodification and banalization. It also addresses the importance of architectural typology to sustainable urbanism. He blends all chapters in a historical, architectural, design, planning, policy and sociological discussion that flows together well and that can be read well as separate parts as well as one single work. Andres Duany, one of the founders and spiritual leaders of the New Urbanism movement could not put it more correctly when he says that this book is "The most sophisticated critical presentation of the New Urbanism to be found anywhere." What he was actually referring to is a highlight of the whole book, Chapter 4, New Urbanism vs. Everyday Urbanism and Post Urbanism. Much less critical and openly assertive than some other proponents of New Urbanism, Kelbaugh nonetheless gives a sophisticated and strong critique of CIAM and failures of The Modernist architecture and planning principles that destroyed good urbanism and created zoned and fragmented communities dominated by vehicles and inhumane urban design. That notwithstanding, he comes up with a brilliant critique on New Urbanism, restating its principles in a highly intelligent way. At the same time he defends New Urbanism. Vicious attacks on modern architecture as failing on multiple levels - human, aesthetic, social and environmental - are not to be found here, but rather a lucid and realistic analysis of the state of the city. It is unquestionable (even the worst critics of New Urbanism cannot deny it) that the movement has revived enthusiasm for the

city's potential and possibilities. It represents the antithesis (despite occasional lapses into gated communities) of community isolation, alienation, and spatial fragmentation, all in favor of livable places. Finally in Chapter 4 he presents the Three Paradigms: New Urbanism, Everyday Urbanism and Post Urbanism. Basically what Kelbaugh argues very convincingly is that New Urbanism ("idealistic, civic and structuralist") is not the "only game in town". There are "competing emerging urbanist paradigms" that have gained momentum at this moment in history. Aside from New Urbanism and the conventional suburban development that continues to enwrap the American metropolis - Everyday Urbanism ("informal, populist and non-structuralist") and Post Urbanism ("heterotopian, sensational and structuralist") exist in parallel, side by side. In the final chapter (Chapter 5) on Public Policy, Kelbaugh sets out a new metropolitan agenda where he points to a need for new and reformulated public policy. He presents seven policy initiatives for immediate action in America: (1) Get development priorities right; (2) Get automobiles under control; (3) Get transit on track; (4) Get planning; (5) Get more granny flats and live-work units (6) Get funding and taxing right; and (7) Get governance right. These are ready-made nostrums that, if adopted, would stop urban sprawl, create environmentally sustainable cities, public life, calm traffic and regenerate the urban, social and cultural realm. Instead he sees them as 'enabling strategies' that could help local government to address problems and seize opportunities. The American project since WWII has been to opt for mobility and freedom while the European ideal has been place and urbanity. Unfortunately the European suburbs are not testimony to that fact. Although this book has not focused on the international context, it still has relevance to the European situation. The European metropolis will also have to go through a number of revitalizations (especially in the suburbs) as a consequence of all the eradications and negative changes left behind after the WWII. Kelbaugh's book represents an important primer in that respect. At times written in an overwhelmingly provocative, compelling and convincing style, this book reminds one of the colossal and influential work on urbanism and town planning, Jane Jacobs *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. Kelbaugh's reasoning and ideas places him in the forefront of the current American and international urbanism debate. *Repairing the American Metropolis* is certainly one of the finest books on the subject that has come out in the last decade, written in a crisp, readable style accessible to architects, planners, urban designers, decision makers, real estate developers and laypersons alike. Douglas Kelbaugh is the Dean of the Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning at the University of Michigan, and former principal in Kelbaugh, Calthorpe & Associates in Seattle and in Kelbaugh & Lee in Princeton, New Jersey. In the foreword, Alex Krieger of Harvard Graduate School of Design describes it as "a fundamental reconsideration of contemporary

American architecture and planning." Professor Kelbaugh's, in many respects dialectical work shows a person who understands today's realities, the constraints that we are faced with in our cities, options we have, and the need to proactively return to the authentic qualities of community and dwelling. He sums it up well by saying at the end of his book: These changes and reforms are essential because the alternatives are stark, and the consequences of inaction are apocalyptic. It will be worth both our grittiest and noblest efforts. And as we repair and revitalize our architecture, neighbourhoods, cities, and regions, we may build common places for ourselves along the way.

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