

Book review



Play and the city: How to create places and spaces to help us thrive

Author: Bonham, A.

Year: 2021

Publisher: Robinson.

ISBN: 9781472144805



It seems that bringing more play into our cities – and extolling the virtues of play – is hugely topical in Aotearoa right now. At least three councils are currently employing Play Advocates, and Ōtautahi-based social enterprise Gap Filler is delivering a programme to establish the city as a world capital of urban play. With many people still working from home since the pandemic, we are in a unique position to reimagine the city as a playground, and author Alex Bonham proves to be a fun playmate.

Bonham is a performer and theatre director, an Auckland city walking tour guide, and current member of the Waitematā Local Board. She has recently completed a PhD on Auckland city and play, but her 2021 book *Play and the City: How to Create Places and Spaces to Help Us Thrive* is not restricted to the shores of Aotearoa. The book takes us on a journey through the history of play, how it has shaped our cities and societies over time and how it came to be segregated from the everyday lives of most adults.

Bonham is clearly a collector of playthings, and the book is sprinkled with countless references, mentions and suggestions with little detail (we recommend reading at your desk so you can Google something virtually every page). We wished the book was more focused, but each chapter has its place in the exploration of play in the city, and by the end of the book you are left feeling hopeful and a little bit inspired for how play could help things play out well in the future.

Our favourite part was the final part, *Playing The City*, a collection of six short chapters with tangible suggestions for how each of us could play more in – and bring more play into – our cities. Each of us has a preferred mode of play (a play personality), and this final section is full of tips and activities (how to start a collection; how to lead a local walk; how to throw a good party) that are fun, often funny, and motivating. Despite some annoyance at how hasty much of the book felt, we came away from it fired up to try some new things and with the feeling that we had spent a week in the presence of Bonham's playful personality.

Kate Finnerty & Ryan Reynolds - Gap Filler Trust

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