



Jane Jacobs Geographies of Place - Jacob's Special Lens on the City

Dr. Tigran Haas*

Director, Associate Professor, ABE School, KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Center for the Future of Places (CFP), Drottning Kristinas väg 30, Entré Plan, SE-100 44 Stockholm, Sweden

***Corresponding Author:** Dr. Tigran Haas, Director, Associate Professor, ABE School, KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Center for the Future of Places (CFP), Drottning Kristinas väg 30, Entré Plan, SE-100 44 Stockholm, Sweden

Abstract: Some of the leading ideas and discussions in the Global Age of Cities and rapid urban development have and are still associated with cities and their different futures: the concept of global cities, ¹rise of the creative class and the urban crisis, ²the network society, ³city of bits, ⁴splintering urbanism, ⁵planetary urbanization, ⁶and ultimately the triumph of the city⁷ as well as well-tempered city⁸ and infinite suburbia. ⁹These discourses see a plethora of structural transformations that Jane Jacobs was unable to see or predict and that go beyond her understanding of cities, which is ultimately bounded to specific places. This essay looks at some of Jane Jacobs' "urban lenses" and specific points of view as well as the analysis of her specific "complexity of the urban" approach and deficiencies in not seeing the interdependency of the micro-meso-macro scales.

Keywords: Streets; Race; Urban Planning; City Development; Humanistic Principles; Housing; Residents; Urbanism; New Geographies;

1. INTRODUCTION

New trends and emerging patterns are either in place, happening, or in the continuous "becoming" phase; creativity is becoming a more important part of the economy as cities hinge on creative people; i.e., they need to attract creative people's human capital, which generates growth. Therefore, cities are engines of growth and economic prosperity when they exemplify this "creativity." Richard Florida sees cities as a great source of innovation and economic growth, but also as a source of terrible tensions and traumas.¹⁰ He argues and begs for the development of a new understanding of cities as complex, contradictory entities; of how they work, what they do that's good, and the problems and contradictions that they generate. Over the years, Jacobs has been called many things: an urban visionary, an anti-planner, an amateur economist, a geographer, a community activist, a feminist, an architectural critic, and a radical centrist. She was foremost an urbanist that understood the value of the cities at that time. In a 2005 article for *Metropolis* magazine, urban theorist Joel Kotkin introduced the *ephemeral city* as one that has become "playpens for the idle rich, the restless young, and tourists."¹¹ He defined it as a "new kind of urban place, populated largely by nonfamilies and the nomadic rich." The ephemeral city "feeds off the wealth generated elsewhere while providing a stage where the affluent classes can expend their treasure most fashionably," a marked contrast to the well-functioning city Jane Jacobs described in her seminal work *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, which features Boston's North End as a prominent example of a thriving, livable neighborhood.¹² It is important to note here that this "ideal" city district, neighborhood unit, humanistic model of dwelling, and Oldenburg's notion of third place has transformed into something quite different. The transition from Jacobs' diversity, social mobility, and social capital to Kotkin's monoculture of transience and wealth was primarily affected by infrastructural changes and the changes that Graham and Marvin¹³ talked about as well as the changes that go beyond the place-based complexity of Jacobs's cities. The transition is also influenced by urban demographic shifts, the nature of business establishments, new urban geographies, the decline of middle-class families, the changes in patterns of living, racial diversity, erosion of social capital, technological changes, etc. The

most salient issue today for the neighborhood that Jane Jacobs celebrated is the erosion of the very elements that made up neighborhood vitality: *diversity, upward mobility, and social capital*.



New York City Street Scenes - Rushing to Catch the Train at Penn Station August, 2015, New York, Photo by Steven Pisano

2. FOCUS ON THE MICRO SCALE AND PLACE

Jacobs's main argument is that a city, neighborhood, or block cannot thrive without diversity. This includes racial and socioeconomic diversity as well as diversity of residential and commercial use, governing bodies (from local wards to state agencies), modes of transportation, public and private institutional support, and architectural style. Large population concentrated in relatively small areas should not be considered a health or safety hazard; they are the foundation of a healthy community.¹⁴ Jacobs foremost sees and understands cities as integrated systems whose development significantly influences community activity. She was opposed to the dominant and prevailing view of spatial urban-physical planning, which architects knew best and was apparently good for people. Jacobs did not agree with the conviction that anonymity and alienation is prevalent in cities. Rather, she suggested that the city can and should provide diverse social life in public spaces, squares, streets, sidewalks, parks, etc. and this should be supported with appropriate planning schemes; the neighborhood is thus realized. As an activist, she fought against nonfunctional quarters, where many people would be crowded and squeezed into so-called sleeping settlements/communities/bedrooms with minimum common areas for social activities. There were opinions that cities were not just functional life containers but first functioned as the bearers of "sociability." Jacobs promoted the view of the inhabitants—sidewalks in response to the dominance of car traffic—something that pro-city urban movements, planners, urbanists, and majors would amplify in the future. Sharon Zukin pointed out that according to Jacobs, city life is the most real one; although she did not use the word 'authentic' then, she would have used it if she were writing now. Cities are the most authentic form of human life and Jacobs laid down the "authentic," humane, and social design principles that most urban planners in North America cherish today. Jacobs praised the small blocks, narrow streets, small shopkeepers, individuals, and families who make up the social bonds of city life.¹⁵

As Sandy Ikeda points out, for Jane Jacobs, the key is for each neighborhood or city district to have sufficiently diverse attractions at different times of the day, what is sometimes today called "mixed uses," (a term renewed and popularized by New Urbanists) so that lots of different people pursuing their own agendas are present at all times. The people who use the schools, places of worship, stores, offices, residences, workshops, theaters, and restaurants located in the same vicinity help to make it interesting and attract still more people, who encourage still more diverse uses. When it is lively

enough, an area becomes safe and feels safe. This, as Jacobs argued, is a bedrock attribute of any successful city. All this is done on its own.¹⁶ At the end of her life, she witnessed on one hand, an overuse or misuse (often misinterpretation) of her ideas and principles in the New Urbanism urban planning and design approach that was based on neotraditional neighborhood development, transit-oriented approaches, and regeneration of human-based city planning ideals. On the other hand, she witnessed what she called the “over success” of her pro-neighborhood policies, which often resulted in gentrification. Over success, she argued, stemmed from undersupply. If the suburbs (which were not cities by definition, implementation, or use) did not keep sucking potential residents out of cities, more neighborhoods would blossom into desirable places to live. Another misuse of Jane Jacobs’ ideas is something we see in the entire array of principles and approaches to create happy, feel-good cities based on a humane and habitable cityscape; a place that gives people comfort, where people can feel that they belong and are at home, but also a place of exclusion in many ways; at times, this is the worst simulacrum of urbanism one can imagine. These so-called happy, feel-good, urban oases of a post-Disneyesque future driven by place making principles of generic urbanity would probably be Jane Jacobs’ biggest concerns if she was alive today. As Jill Grant observes,¹⁷ many of Jacobs’s ideas seem implicit in New Urbanists’ thinking and prescriptions and end up in their final designs. The funny thing is that New Urbanism primarily works at the neighborhood scale that Jacobs highly criticized. As Jacobs wrote, “Neighborhoods built up all at once change little physically over the years as a rule.” They cannot update or repair themselves and are dead from birth.¹⁸ Like Jacobs, New Urbanists advocate and accept that developing a mix of uses, short blocks, and continuous networks can foster lively streets; that integrating parks, squares, and public buildings with the street fabric enhances the public realm; and that emphasizing the identity of districts helps to connect people to the place.¹⁹ New Urbanism practitioners embraced Jacobs’s pro-city fully, anti-suburb sentiments with zeal and a determination to eradicate the misery contemporary planning and urbanism were causing²⁰. Yet, Jacobs saw the tangible outcomes of her vision as a betrayal: ‘They [New Urbanists] only create what they say they hate’ she is quoted to have said²¹. The fact of the matter is, and this does rest on high speculation, that Jane Jacobs was probably aware that her ideas (those) already plainly laid out in her book -Density, Diversity, Design and Destination (4D) - when implemented on the ground (in this case by New Urbanists) were simply products of rules and codes. Her disappointment could have been connected with the fact that the ideas she laid out were not that complex at all and that through new urbanism principles they had to look as they did. She maybe despised and rejected the New Urbanist due to the fact that they uncovered the real truth to her for which she was not ready at all, that her “complex” 4D principles can end in reality only in that form. We will never know.



Jane Jacobs speaks at an event organized in opposition to the proposed construction of New York University’s Elmer Holmes Bobst Library in New York City, June 20, 1966. By Fred W. McDarrah/Getty Images.

3. THE SOCIAL AND RACIAL FABRIC OF CITIES

In the first biography of Jacobs, Alice Sparberg Alexiou argues that one of the rather serious shortcomings in Jacobs's otherwise brilliant discourse on cities [Death and Life of American Cities] is her failure to include any meaningful discussion of race.²² Margaret Crawford, Professor at UC Berkeley, in her various talks on public realm and urbanism, often brings forward the important issue of race and poverty in relation to Jane Jacobs. What remains a problematic tenant of Jacobs's work and thinking on cities is the lack and omission of race as the important element of urbanism, real social life of urban forms Fran Tonkiss calls it.²³ Jane Jacobs was an outspoken advocate of racial equality, but her primary audiences were white Americans and therefore her discourse was very much dependent on that.²⁴ This was a difficult issue to tackle; nonetheless, it was essential, considering that *Life and Death of Great American Cities* is now one of the great treatises and manifestos of architecture and planning (urbanism). Rem Koolhaas declares that hardly any theoretical descriptions of the city have been presented by architects since Jane Jacobs' *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), Robert Venturi's *Learning from Las Vegas* (1972), and his own *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan* (1978) that describes how a city performs and how it should perform.²⁵ Sharon Zukin (2009), in her book *Naked City: The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places*, casts criticism on Jane Jacobs, who 50 years ago saw two ideal (idealistic) visions for the future of the American (and all other) cities in the West Village and North End. She posits that Jacobs focused too much on the built character of the street and did not give sufficient attention to the sociological factors affecting cities. Jacobs' overly romanticized notions of the city and neighborhoods helped attract people back to the city, but in the process, transformed them into "idealized urban playgrounds." Jacobs' message has even been misinterpreted by developers and their pundit allies to the point where her ideas are used as marketing tools. As Zukin astutely observes, despite Jacobs' good intentions, her ideal vision of life in the city has shaped two important tools that help the builders achieve their goals: the politicians' growth theory and the media representations of cultural consumption in cities.²⁶ Her analysis of the mechanics of street life and of the ways in which people use buildings, streets, and vacant spaces in such areas is eye-opening. The principles of neighborhood planning that derive from her observations are far more closely attuned to how people actually live than those of orthodox city planning.²⁷ Another problem associated with Jacobs' lack of deeper understanding of cities and neighborhoods is closely connected with the understanding of culture, ethnicity, and justice (issues of race and conflict in public space) in relation to the built environment, particularly the public realm that bonds the urban fabric of cities.²⁸ These issues are well taken onboard and understood by authors and researchers such as Setha Low (2016) and Ash Amin (2008), who understand that the need for socially collective and just public spaces is an absolute necessity.

The celebration of people-centered public spaces, neighborhoods, and cities is Jacobs' epicenter of urbanism; but which people, celebration for whom, and what were really those spaces for? Race, equality, ethnicity, justice, poverty, equity, and diversity were incredibly difficult terms to define during those times and for Jane Jacobs to handle in the everyday urban discourse. However, places of happiness and joy and places for people to enjoy and thrive in were the hallmarks (silence on race of course) of the racial liberals of that era wherein the celebration of people's similarities was a much easier task, cozier and safer than the discussions of racism and the differences and inequalities of people. That was simply not her focus. Sidewalks were the essence, the primary public spaces of the city, where Jacobs sees the celebration of publicness and real urbanity as the "intricate street ballet outside of her home in Greenwich Village," where she lived. Here one could draw parallels with the New Urbanism movement that saw the same thing, though the movement did manage to produce, in spite of all hurdles, the most important social housing program of all times: the HOPE VI. Omissions and exclusions embedded in Jacobs' urban (idealism) ideas were neither understood then nor understood now as the majority of city planners, urbanism advocates, academics, and professionals only see the glorifications of her work and blind adaptations, ignoring the reality of American as well as other multicultural and diverse places and cities around the world. Daily Life and evolution of the fabric of the city is one of the most complex and evolving ideas about the city in general. Therefore, at times those types of "perfect urban neighborhoods" become rather radically disruptive as a new homogenous community notwithstanding diversity and urban mixité. Jacobs did address the issues of affordability and displacement in her vision of the city, although one finds only fragments, bits and pieces of that in obscure places, outside the realm of her major writings and books. So the urban

village ideal that Jane Jacobs highly advocates becomes a “gentrifier” (contemporary term used here) ideal and lever of power to displace long-time residents. But Jacobs herself was not someone who attacked state power or the power of capitalists; she instead went after the planners as she was a communitarian spirit in essence, a spirit against state control.

Jane Jacobs’ romanticized social conditions were already becoming obsolete when she wrote about them in the 1960s (the force of money and state power, large-scale projects, hyper gentrification and the commodification of the public realm.²⁹ Herbert Gans astutely summarized the crux of the matter in Jacobs’ urban lens when he addresses the fallacy of physical determinism (something David Harvey addresses in the “Communitarian Trap” in relation to New Urbanists, but in a much smaller and shallower manner than Gans).³⁰ According to Gans, Jacobs made claims about social cohesion based on architecture, for which she had no evidence. She also refused to acknowledge that the pathologies of American cities in the 1960s were mostly due to issues of racism, not solely urbanism and construction.³¹ Her argument is built on three fundamental claims: (1) people desire diversity; (2) diversity is ultimately what makes cities live and the lack of it makes them die; and (3) buildings and streets as well as the planning principles on which they are based shape human behavior.³² Claims 1 and 2 have been grounded through her observation studies and fact gathering in the places she lived and observed, but they are still lacking many facts and empirical data to fully be accepted. In contrast, Claim 3 is in the realm of physical fallacy, physical determinism (something modernists were famous for), and leads her to ignore the social, cultural, and economic factors that contribute to vitality or dullness. It also blinds her to the less visible kinds of neighborhood vitality and the true causes of the city’s problems.³³ Her analysis in “Forces of Decline and Regeneration,” in *Death and Life* is accurate when it comes to self-destruction of diversity; the problem is that self-destruction of diversity, which is similar to the “gentrification” that we know of today, is not exactly the same thing. Self-destruction of diversity is a concept that is much more over-encompassing than gentrification because it also includes the self-destruction of diversity in business districts (and not just by chain stores and office buildings). Nobody is negating that Jane Jacobs often took the long view of urban issues, and “gentrification” (using today’s term) was no exception.³⁴ One of Jacobs’ main points regarding the self-destruction of diversity is that the best way of preventing the problems generated by self-destruction is to create even more healthy urban neighborhoods that would be capable of being “gentrified” in turn so that pressure is taken off of those relatively few (even today) existing urban neighborhoods that experience the self-destruction of diversity (gentrification).³⁵ Claims similar to those of Jacobs’ have also been made by New Urbanist proponents, particularly Andres Duany. Jacobs’ work was not decidedly feminist, but in light of a masculinist urban studies tradition, the adoption of the ideas and observations from *Death and Life* and its perspective on actual women’s, elderly’s, and children’s lives may open up room for a gendered view on re-urbanization and gendered urban processes such as gentrification.³⁶ A deeper understanding of the role of a place within the spatial configuration of meso-macro cities and regions in fostering social mobility with social capital was beyond Jacobs.



1963: American writer Jane Jacobs and architect Philip Johnson (background) stand with picketing crowds outside Penn Station to protest the building’s demolition, New York City. (Photo by Walter Daran/Hulton Archive/Getty Images)

4. OBSERVATIONAL URBANISM

In many ways, Jacobs was part of the Kuhnian Paradigm Shift. Her book's great strength lies in her ability to analyze the interplay and intricacy between structure and society at the block level. In her observation, she walked, looked, and used her skills to understand the dynamics of the city (but on the micro level). Jane Jacobs' anticipatory perspective can be well considered by suggesting that, in the 1960s, it was via the street that a society's life and plurality could be better investigated. A street is a place of passage, circulation, street corners, conversations, violence, understanding, eroticism, and diversity and therefore a place of sociability and construction of civilization; it is in the street space that contemporary social relations effectively happen.³⁷ Studying sociology as the study of human relationships and behavior interested Nathan Glazer, an American sociologist; but he did not feel restricted to the methods and theories of the discipline, preferring to forge his own: "as a sociologist I have been more interested in specific issues than in the discipline of sociology itself, more in empirical subject matter than in theory, more in substance than in methodology," he later wrote in an autobiographical essay.³⁸ Glazer had at least partially rejected the sociological method in favor of an impressionistic portrait, or cultural study, based on a range of sources.³⁹ Jane Jacobs continued to champion empirical knowledge using observations as her main "method" of collecting real-life data and her knowledge in understanding planning, building, traffic, etc. Her inductive reasoning was the obvious driving force and had richness and validity, but her reasoning should by no means be equated or mistakenly taken (as some authors would want us to believe) for Glaser and Strauss' (1967) Grounded Theory, Qualitative and Quantitative Research Strategy in Social Sciences.⁴⁰ Jacobs had in fact developed, through direct observation rather than utopian theory, a highly personal way of thinking and "researching" about cities. Decades after, New Urbanists will try to replicate her approach of verifying almost everything with their own eyes. If this was developed into a systematic approach, a research strategy, we could easily call it "observational urbanism." Unfortunately, it is still in the becoming; however, it remains a powerful "method" and stands in direct opposition to academic theorists who trust specific embedded urban planning and design ideas, approaches, and theories as well as postmodern/poststructuralist intellectual fashions that dominate the field of real sciences today more than their own observations and field experiences. Jacobs not only saw things differently with her own eyes, but she habitually observed, measured, and walked the city. She took nothing for granted and internalized everything around her. If the theories did not fit her observations, she trusted her senses. In that sense, William H. Whyte and Jacobs were of a similar mindset. So what about observational urbanism then, if anything at all, in this case? The grounded theory is a systematic generation of theory from data, an inductive methodology and a process that is systematically done.⁴¹ Grounded Theory has the capability to produce theory from data, theories that are empirically grounded in data from which they arise.⁴² The important thing to remember is that the question is not of naïve inductivism but rather of sensitive deduction based on carefully developed ideas. This conceptual induction fosters even more deduction.

According to Glaser and Strauss, the grounded theory inductively emerges from its data source in accordance with the method of constant comparison that includes an amalgam of systematic coding, data analysis, and theoretical sampling procedures. These procedures enable the researcher to interpret most of the diverse patterning in the data by developing theoretical ideas at a higher level of abstraction than the initial data descriptions.⁴³ This is a very systematic approach, which has a view that all things are integrated, that actions are integrated with other actions, that nothing is mono-variable, that everything is in motion, and that patterns are systematically occurring over and over again.⁴⁴ This approach, at that time and even today, is a leading method of social science research.

A lot can be learnt by observations of the rich dynamics of the community and the relationship between the people. As mentioned before, the grounded theory method was developed by two sociologists, Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss. From all that is known, Jacobs never came into contact with their work nor did she apply any of their principles or methods of work, naturally because of her disdain toward academia. Owing to this, she never received real legitimacy in empirical observations within academia circles on the whole. Jacobs did not expect readers to accept her amateur, inductively generated ideas on the basis of academic credentials; but still, she had every opportunity in the world to consult with leading sociologists, geographers, environmental psychologists, etc. of that time. She of course never did. Similar was with doing case studies, where data (as it is the case with grounded theory) can be acquired from multiple sources, observations

(looking & listening is just one of the methods of acquiring data), reports, documents, theoretical literature, quantitative sources/statistics, interviews, surveys, questionnaires, ethnological approaches, etc.⁴⁵To get more valid results and simply have truthful and stable data, more sources are recommended.⁴⁶For example, the work of Robert Yin on “The case study as a serious research strategy” (1981) never entered her realm of interest in her later days, where one expected a certain maturity in her perception toward academia and real social science research.

That notwithstanding, the works, fore mostly the seminal publications, of Jane Jacobs (1961),⁴⁷Christopher Alexander (1977),⁴⁸and William Whyte (1980)⁴⁹are not and cannot be empirical science (for example, in the vein of Glaser and Strauss) but are based on the detailed observations of cities, neighborhoods, districts, and people using multiple logics of urbanism. Therefore, their “research” can be placed into urban design, an applied social science where knowledge is and has to be much broader, spanning both natural and social sciences as well as the arts and humanities. As Dovey and Pafka (2014) observe, better metrics than those by Jane Jacobs need to be developed for understanding density and distinguishing between building and population densities, housing and job densities, and internal versus.⁵⁰There simply are no typical or universal cities one might study.⁵¹The interesting part lies in the fact that these chief protagonists of “observational urbanism” are not sociologists, but, as Nathan Glazer points out, do have “sociological imagination;” so they cannot be discarded. Jane Jacobs had developed a highly personal way of thinking and seeing (about) cities and explained her ideas and the rationale behind them so effectively that they have since been adopted by generations of planners as well as criticized by others. Research in applied social sciences such as urban planning and urban design is the systematic, rigorous investigation of a situation, problem, or (urban) phenomenon geared to generate new knowledge or validate existing knowledge within the field. That notwithstanding, another parallel concern in this field has to do with the discovery and definition of problems, rather than with the matters of research design, by which the hypotheses derived from these problems may be put to test. In that spirit, scientific research is an art, not a science. William Hollingsworth “Holly” Whyte was an American urbanist, organizational analyst, journalist, and people-watcher, not very different than Jacobs, who was an urbanist, a journalist, an author, and an activist. Both Whyte and Jacobs were observational urbanists. In many ways, White was Jacobs’ mentor and both of them celebrated the small scale, the diverse, and the mixed, thus being antagonists to large-scale planning such as large-scale housing or any type of commercial or other redevelopment. For them, (mind you, their views were from Greenwich Village and Midtown Manhattan) this was the death of the city that they knew and loved: destruction of the essential ingredient that was diversity. They were in favor of retaining the old and voiced its advantages in creating a diverse social environment (for example, Boston’s North End, which was an area that Herbet J. Gans introduced to Jane Jacobs). But as Nathan Glazer observed in a discussion just before he passed away, based on what was happening in the urban realm of US and Global cities, was that that the prophet of the future city may turn out in the end to be not Ebenezer Howard or Jane Jacobs but rather Le Corbusier.⁵²

5. THE GEOPLANNING LENS OF JANE JACOBS

There has clearly been an overemphasis and focus on Jane Jacobs and her work, while people like Louis Wirth and Louis Mumford got overshadowed. These scholars and great writers had a lot to say. In particular, Wirth and Mumford were able to describe cities based on a scholarly focus on the systematic theory of city building and (urban) complexity of the urban realm. They created a dialogue on the (everyday) life in cities that was fundamentally different than before; this included straightforward issues such as how cities affect human life, life choices, and everyday conduct. Wirth believed that there were three key characteristics of cities, large population size, social heterogeneity, and population density, and all three have fundamental consequences for social life in the city.⁵³Wirth ordered us to avoid identifying urbanism as a way of life to define a city. In contrast, Mumford, in addition to sharing the above on importance of cities, believed that cities were first designed for their relationship to nature and their spiritual values, followed by their physical design and economic functions in the community. He also spoke of the city acting as a theater and the social drama in the community as the “play.”⁵⁴ Wirth argued that explaining the characteristics of urban life and accounting for the differences between cities of various sizes and types was possible using his three characteristics. In contrast, Jane Jacobs saw a living city as a problem of “organized complexity,” which involves “dealing simultaneously with a sizable number of factors which are interrelated into

an organic whole.”⁵⁵ That notwithstanding, Mumford's “Urban Prospect” (1968) was a tour de force collection of essays on nature and city, in the level of Nathan Glazer's “From Cause to Style” (2007) written about 40 years later.



In 1969 with city controller Margaret Campbell and councilor Ying Hope at a meeting about the Spadina Expressway, where Metro chairman Albert Campbell fought for construction to continue. (Image: Boris Spremo/Getty Images)

It was known that Jane Jacobs did not participate in the discussions within the profession of architecture and urban planning and design, attend relevant conferences (except for the 1956 Harvard conference), contribute to the zeitgeist topics and projects of the day, and publish in professional journals.⁵⁶ In other words, she was not part of the contemporary language and discourse; instead, she had her own. Her emphasis lay elsewhere. Jacobs' words and images create a language that embodies our longing for a good place to live. Over time, this language convinces us that the good life is dependent on us building more cultural attractions that can attract tourists to the city, opening more cafés and shops, and restoring more old houses to their former elegance. These images of the good life camouflage a fundamental conflict. Politicians are dependent on both investment and construction by private construction companies as well as voters' votes; they constantly seek balance between pledging more cheap housing that helps to preserve the local community and expressing their support for remediation projects that are likely to change the same local community. Originating in the mid-twentieth century American discourse, the corporate city and the urban village are, in one way or another, the pre-eminent socio-spatial constructs of global urbanism today and are both realities.⁵⁷ Jane Jacobs simply did not want to submit to the political realities; and sometimes she succeeded and often she'd ideologically triumph. However, it was an ideological triumph that was not matched by any reproduction of the more positive urban environment she had in mind. The fundamental premise of Jacobs' thinking was planning from the grassroots up and the issue of self-determination. As Campanella observed, “It was the Jacobian revolution and its elimination of a robust physical-planning focus that led to the diminution of planning's disciplinary identity, professional agency, and speculative courage.” And that's what it feels that Jane Jacobs argues against most, not planning or infrastructure in and of itself per se, *but the deliberate planning of usage and order*. The idea that some megaproject, super project, or starchitecture project will cure all ills of the city, which exists even to this day, is absurd. However, her concern was mostly with what the central planners were actually doing, not per se with the fact that they existed. Campanella's further observations bring us to

the first of the three legacies of the Jacobian (planning) turn: It diminished the disciplinary identity of planning. The second legacy of the Jacobian turn related to the first: Privileging the grassroots over plannerly authority and expertise meant a loss of professional agency. The third legacy of the Jacobian turn is perhaps the most troubling of all: The seeming paucity among today's American planners of the speculative courage and vision that once distinguished this profession.⁵⁸

Many good ideas—public housing, urban renewal, suburbs built according to the plats laid down by planners—seemed to be going bad. All of that was the target of Jane's deep and profound criticism. However, it was also the planning that was connected with the realities of politics and economic urban development. And the reality was that the involvement of planners or the planning model seemed to not improve on what would occur on the basis of normal economic activity.⁵⁹ She is best-known for her impact on city planning and was among the most articulate voices against "slum clearance," high-rise development, highways carved through urban neighborhoods, and big commercial projects. But she was not simply against all big and bad things; she was also for a different urban vision.⁶⁰ What each of us sees and understands depends on our own experience: where we come from, personally and professionally. Observation can tell more about the observer than about the environment being observed. It reflects the values, beliefs, and worldview of the witness. We see through the lenses of our interests and understanding. We recognize patterns that match what we have seen before. Urban observation is also aimed at informing better, and more equitable, plans, policies, and political decisions. A historical, interdisciplinary tradition of urban observation, with the modern-day "urban diary," is an experiential method of documenting city life and form. Through evocative photography, use of smartphone apps, and other cutting-edge tools, we can explore and document the urban spaces as well as the structures and human activities around them. According to Merriam Webster's Dictionary, to observe is to watch carefully, especially with attention to details or behavior for the purpose of arriving at a judgment; to make a scientific observation is an act or instance of observing a custom, rule, or law and an act of recognizing and noting a fact or occurrence often involving measurement with instruments.

Public life studies have been useful for documenting the relationships between environmental design and behavior so that informed decision-making and design processes can improve places for people. They enrich our understanding of city life, particularly the quality, performance, and success of a place as well as the needs of people. Such studies assist with documenting existing conditions, identifying issues, developing solutions, and evaluating the impacts of design interventions. Observing people in public space is complex. City life is transitory with people moving and conditions constantly changing. There are extensive variables such as architecture and design, weather, noise, smell, light, and shade as well as the number, location, and types of people using the space. Proponents of New Urbanism, for example, visited cities, towns, neighborhoods, and streets that they liked—not only to observe but also measure them in detail. That has been the New Urbanism method ever since—dealing with every kind of community plan, from hamlets to big-city downtowns. New Urbanists verify everything with their own eyes, again and again, as Jacobs did. This is what we can truly call "observational urbanism." It is a powerful method that does not stand in direct opposition to, and rather complements, academic theorists who trust ideas and intellectual fashion more than their own observations and experiences. This approach, wherein New Urbanists diligently work to ground their ideas by testing them with the empirical data of observation and experience, was championed by Jane Jacobs and Christopher Alexander. But, the ultimate challenge for all urbanists involved in influencing and practicing urban planning and urban design is to translate, apply, and further develop the best ideas to promote the types of urban environments that can encourage and nurture the full potential of our social creativity, targeted at sustainable and open-ended human development.⁶¹ Much more congenial to Jane Jacobs' way of thinking (when it comes to the above issues) were the design theories of Kevin Lynch,⁶² Christopher Alexander,⁶³ William H. Whyte,⁶⁴ and Jan Gehl⁶⁵ as well as the novel traffic policies of "shared space" that are spreading across Northern and Western Europe today. All of these pay careful attention to what real people do and how they interact with each other and with the built environment. Each of these researchers, to some degree, understood with Jacobs that a city is a spontaneous order.



Rigorous and polemical: Author and activist Jane Jacobs at a community meeting in Greenwich Village's Washington Square Park in 1963. Fred W. McDarrah/Getty Images

6. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

It is undeniable that *The Life and Death of Great American Cities* had a profound influence and historical significance for contemporary urban planning and design and the way we “see” cities today. It is one of the foundational texts and “urban guides” for planners and practitioners today and a fundamental text for scholars in urbanism. It just might be, as Koolhaas declared once, one of the best/only three real manifestos/treatises in architecture, urban planning, and urban design we have ever had the fortune to read. Her “urban lenses” observations of city life, streets, and built environments and the dynamics of city in general remain unsurpassed and forever vital and actual. It has changed our profession, our view on cities, and our understanding of the urban forever. That notwithstanding, the fundamental problem of Jane Jacobs, William Whyte, and the later followers like Jan Gehl, large portions of New Urbanism Movement, Project for Public Spaces, and others is the over focus on and celebration of the small-scale, the diverse, the mixed; sidetracking and even working against the large scale one, the aesthetic one, the master plan one. To understand the real complexity of cities and the complexity and contradiction that make them happen, stand, function, thrive, survive, and die requires understanding of the logic and necessity of the large scale. Another major flaw of Jacobs was her lack of understanding of the symbiosis of natural and urban landscapes, their dichotomy, and most importantly, their necessary conversation for cities to function. The fact that she often underestimated the value of great green enterprises, such as Central Park and Prospect Park, and the fantastic work people like Frederick Law Olmsted have done with the view that the work of such people and parks in general was insufficiently connected to the fine grain of urban tissue shows that she generally did not understand the organism of the cities and the fact that great urban places cannot really fully function without the real symbiosis and linkages of the urban and nature.

In eyes of people like Jacobs and Whyte, “large scale” (including parks) is a negative potion for the heart of the city—its diversity. Their attractive Disneyesque diversity is an alluring and probably the most attractive image of the city for many or most of its residents; however, it is also a very dangerous one, a limited image and vision of the city and far worse, a limited knowledge of the contemporary and future city. The contradiction between her unqualified idolization and perception of the small scale, intimate values of neighborhood life and diversity versus the issues of scale, metropolitan bigness, beauty, order, spaciousness, and clarity of purpose (all that do not have a place in her world) followed by the addition of activism remains unreconciled. This is largely because she rejects the principles of academia, research, and practice of the discipline established at Harvard in 1956. The principles of urban design would unite these complementary qualities, a discipline that she unfortunately knew very little of or cared less for. Maybe at the end of the story or at the beginning of

a new one, it was Herbert Gans who characterized Jacobs' work on the Life and Death in the best possible way: "No one, it is true, has stated these ideas as forcefully as she, or integrated them into an over-all approach before. The neighborhoods with which she is most concerned cannot serve as models for future planning, but the way in which she has observed them, the insights she has derived, and the principles she has inferred from her observations can—and ought to be—adapted for use in planning cities and suburbs in the future. Her book is a path breaking achievement, and because it is so often right, I am all the more disappointed by the fact that it is also so often wrong."⁶⁶

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper is an abridged version of a larger essay written for the 100 years anthology on Jane Jacobs that will be published in 2020. I am especially indebted to Douglas Kelbaugh, Charles Wolfe, Michael Mehaffy, Emily Talen, Jill Grant, Margaret Crawford, Peter Elmlund, Setha Low, Saskia Sassen, Edward Glaeser, Alan Berger and the late Nathan Glazer, for several discussions on the history of planning and urbanism and their relation to Jane Jacobs' view on the cities and complex systems concepts that helped me frame some of the ideas developed here. I also indirectly thank Joel Kotkin and Richard Florida for inspiring me to write about Jane Jacobs. Special thanks go to my co-editor Jesper Meijling who started this whole 100-year Jacob affair book. Without him, nothing would have been possible. Also, I thank the blind peer reviewers for the comments and suggestions on the manuscript. This research was partially supported by the Ax: son Johnson Foundation within the Civitas Project and is part of the research program in Urban Form and Human Behavior at KTH Royal Institute of Technology.

REFERENCES

- [1] Sassen, S. (2005) "The Global City: Introducing a Concept," *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, WINTER/SPRING 2005, XI (2): 27–43.
- [2] Florida, R. (2003) "Cities and the Creative Class." *City & Community Journal*, 2 (1):3–19, March 2003. American Sociological Association; Florida, R. (2017) *The New Urban Crisis: How Our Cities Are Increasing Inequality, Deepening Segregation, and Failing the Middle Class and What We Can Do About It*, New York: Basic Books.
- [3] Castells, M. (1996) *The Rise of the Network Society: The information age: Economy, society, and culture*, Vol. 1, New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- [4] Mitchell, W.J. (1995) *City of Bits: Space, Place, and the Infobahn*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- [5] Graham, S. and Marvin, S. (2001). *Splintering Urbanism: Networked Infrastructures, Technological Mobilities and the Urban Condition*, London: Routledge.
- [6] Brenner, N. (2001) *Towards a Study of Planetary Urbanization Implosions/Explosions*, Jovis:Zürich.
- [7] Glaeser, E. (2011) *The Triumph of the City: How Our Greatest Invention Makes Us Richer, Smarter, Greener, Healthier and Happier*, New York:Pan Macmillan.
- [8] Rose, J. (2016) *The Well-Tempered City*. New York:Harper Wave.
- [9] Berger, A. and Kotkin, J. (2017) *Infinite Suburbia*, Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press.
- [10] Florida, R. (2017) *The New Urban Crisis: How Our Cities Are Increasing Inequality, Deepening Segregation, and Failing the Middle Class and What We Can Do About It*, New York: Basic Books.
- [11] Kotkin, J. (2005) "What Jane Jacobs Got Wrong About Cities." *Metropolis Magazine*, Joel Kotkin [<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/11/the-prophecies-of-jane-jacobs/501104/>] Accessed on July 8th 2019. 08.01.15 [<https://www.thedailybeast.com/what-jane-jacobs-got-wrong-about-cities>] Accessed on August 24th 2018.
- [12] Jacobs, J. (1961) *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, New York:Random House(Reissue 1992,New York: Vintage Books).
- [13] Graham, S. and Marvin, S. (2001). *Splintering Urbanism*, London: Routledge.
- [14] Rich, N. (2016) "The Prophecies of Jane Jacobs." *The Atlantic Magazine*, Nathaniel Rich.
- [15] Zukin, S. (2009) *Changing Landscapes of Power: Opulence and the Urge for Authenticity*. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, Volume 33.2 June 2009 543–53
- [16] Ikeda, S. (2015) *The Great Mind And Vision Of Jane Jacobs*, By Sandy Ikeda, November 1st 2016, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, June 2009, 33 (2): 543–553.
- [17] Grant, J.L. (2011) "Time, Scale, and Control: How New Urbanism (Mis) Used Jane Jacobs." In Page, M. and Mennel, T. (eds.) (2011). *Reconsidering Jane Jacobs*, Washington DC: APA Planners Press and New York: Routledge. 91–103.

- [18] Jacobs, J. (1961) *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, New York: Random House.
- [19] Grant, J.L. (2011) "Time, Scale, and Control: How New Urbanism (Mis) Used Jane Jacobs." *Reconsidering Jane Jacobs*, 91–103.
- [20] Grammenos F. (2019) *New Urbanism and Jane Jacobs – A Tangled Disconnect in New Geography* [<https://www.newgeography.com/content/006328-new-urbanism-and-jane-jacobs-a-tangled-disconnect>] Accessed on 06/18/2019
- [21] Kanigel, R. (2017) *Eyes on the Street: The Life of Jane Jacobs*, Vintage; Penguin-Random House: New York
- [22] Alexiou, Sparberg A. (2006) *Jane Jacobs: Urban Visionary*, Rutgers University Press: Rutgers American Sociological Association.
- [23] Tonkiss, F. (2014) *Cities by Design: The Social Life of Urban Form*, New York: Polity Press; *Urban Wisdom*, New York: Routledge.37–48.
- [24] Crawford, M. (2015) *From the Feel Good City to the Just City* (Event Transcription, USC Bedrosian Center, October 2nd, 2015), USC Bedrosian Center | SLAB | UCLA Department of Chicana/o Studies 1-7.
- [25] Koolhaas, R. (2007) "In Search of Authenticity." In Burdett, R. and Deyan S. (eds.) *The Endless City*. London: Phaidon. 320–323.
- [26] Zukin, S. (2009) *Changing Landscapes of Power: Opulence and the Urge for Authenticity*.
- [27] Gans, J.H. (1962) "A Review of *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* by Jane Jacobs." *Commentary Magazine*.
- [28] Low, S. and Iveson, K. (2016) "Propositions for more just urban public spaces." *City Journal*, 20 (1): 10–31; Amin, A. (2008) "Collective Culture and Urban Public Space." *City Journal*, 12 (1): 5–24.
- [29] Zukin, S. (2009) *Changing Landscapes of Power: Opulence and the Urge for Authenticity*.
- [30] Harvey, D. (2001) "The New Urbanism and the Communitarian Trap." *Harvard Design Magazine*, winter/Spring 1997, 1: 1–3.
- [31] Gans, J.H. (1994) *People, Plans, and Policies: Essays on Poverty, Racism, and Other National Urban Problems*, New York: Columbia University Press.
- [32] Gans, J.H. (1962) "A Review of *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* by Jane Jacobs." *Commentary Magazine*; Gans, J.H. (1994) *People, Plans, and Policies: Essays on Poverty, Racism, and Other National Urban Problems*.
- [33] Gans, J.H. (1994) *People, Plans, and Policies: Essays on Poverty, Racism, and Other National Urban Problems*.
- [34] Storrington, N. (2015) *Jane Jacobs on Gentrification*, [<http://www.nathanstorrington.com/2014/10/29/jane-jacobs-on-gentrification/>] Accessed on January 21st 2019.
- [35] Powell, M. (2010) *An Urban Theorist Questions the Gospel of St. Jane*, By Michael, February 19, 2010 [<https://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/02/19/an-urban-theorist-questions-the-gospel-of-st-jane/>] Accessed on July 20th 2019.
- [36] van den Berg, M. (2018) "The discursive uses of Jane Jacobs for the genderfying city: Understanding the productions of space for post-Fordist gender notions," *Urban Studies*, 55(4): 751–766.
- [37] Jacobs, J. (1969) *The Economy of Cities*, New York: Vintage.
- [38] Glazer, N. (1990) "From Socialism to Sociology." In *Authors of Their Own Lives: Intellectual Autobiographies by Twenty American Sociologists*. Berger B.M. (ed.) (Berkeley, Calif., 1990), 207.
- [39] Riesman, D., Denney, R., and Glazer, N. (1950) *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Culture*(New Haven, Connecticut., 1950), vii.
- [40] Hirt, S. and Zahm, D. (eds.) (2012). *The Urban Wisdom of Jane Jacobs*, London: Routledge
- [41] Glaser, B. and Strauss, A. (1967) *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, Chicago: Aldine.
- [42] Glaser, B. (1998) *Doing Grounded Theory: Issues and Discussions*, Mill Valley: Sociology Press.
- [43] Glaser, B. and Strauss, A. (1967) *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, Chicago: Aldine.
- [44] Glaser, B. (1998) *Doing Grounded Theory: Issues and Discussions*, Mill Valley: Sociology Press.
- [45] Gillham, B. (2000) *Real World Research - Case Study Research Methods*, London: Continuum.
- [46] Yin, R.K. (1981) "The case study as a serious research strategy." *Science Communication* 3 (1): 97–114; Yin, R.K. (2003) *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- [47] Jacobs, J. (1961) *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, New York: Random House (Reissue 1992, New York: Vintage Books).
- [48] Alexander, C., Ishikawa, S., Silverstein, M., Jacobson, M., Fiksdahl-King, I., and Angel, S. (1977) *A Pattern Language: Towns, Buildings, Construction*, Oxford University Press, New York.
- [49] Whyte, W. (1980) *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*, Washington, DC: The Conservation Foundation.

- [50] Dovey, K. and Pafka, E. (2014) "The Urban Density Assemblage." *Urban Design International* 19(1): 66–76.
- [51] Dovey, K. and Pafka, E. (2016) "The science of urban design?" *Urban Design International* 21: 1–10.
- [52] Glazer, N. (2007) "History's Angel." In *Block by Block: Jane Jacobs and the Future of New York*; Glazer, N. (2007) *Modernist Architecture's Encounter with the American City: From a Cause to a Style* (Collection of Essays), Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- [53] Wirth, L. (1938) "Urbanism as a way of life." *American Journal of Sociology*, 44(1): 1–24.
- [54] Mumford, L. (1938) *The Culture of Cities*, New York: Harcourt Brace.
- [55] Jacobs, J. (1961) *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, New York: Random House.
- [56] Schubert, D. (2011) "Jane Jacobs's Perception and Impact on City Planning and Urban Renewal in Germany." In Schubert, D. (ed.) (2014) *Contemporary Perspectives on Jane Jacobs: Reassessing the Impacts of an Urban Visionary*, Farnham: Ashgate. 137–170.
- [57] Zukin, S. (2009) *Changing Landscapes of Power: Opulence and the Urge for Authenticity*.
- [58] Campanella, T.J. (2011) "Jane Jacobs and the Death and Life of American Planning." *Design Observer*, POSTED 04.25.11, April 2011, *Places Journal* [<https://placesjournal.org/article/jane-jacobs-and-the-death-and-life-of-american-planning/?cn-reloaded=1>], Accessed on April 3rd 2012.
- [59] Glazer, N. (2011) "The Urban Crisis After 40 Years, An interview with Nathan Glazer" Summer 2011 *Cities Journal*.
- [60] Dreier, P. (2006) "Jane Jacobs's Legacy." *City & Community* 5: 227–231, 3 September 2006.
- [61] Schubert, D. (ed.) (2014) *Contemporary Perspectives on Jane Jacobs: Reassessing the Impacts of an Urban Visionary*, Farnham: Ashgate; Mehaffy, W.M. (2017) *Cities Alive: Jane Jacobs, Christopher Alexander, and the Roots of the New Urban Renaissance*, Portland: Sustasis Press.
- [62] Lynch, K. (1960) *The Image of the City*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press; Lynch, K. (1981) *Good City Form*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- [63] Alexander, C., Ishikawa, S., Silverstein, M., Jacobson, M., Fiksdahl-King, I., and Angel, S. (1977) *A Pattern Language: Towns, Buildings, Construction*, Oxford University Press, New York.
- [64] Whyte, W. (1980) *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*, Washington, DC: The Conservation Foundation.
- [65] Gehl, J. (1987) *Life Between Buildings*, New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold; Gehl, J. (2010) *Cities for People*, Washington DC: Island Press.
- [66] Gans, J.H. (1962) "A Review of The Death and Life of Great American Cities by Jane Jacobs." *Commentary Magazine*, 13.

AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY



Tigran Haas, Ph.D. is the Tenured Associate Professor of Urban Planning + Urban Design. Tigran Haas is currently the Director of the Centre for the Future of Places at KTH. His current research focus on contemporary trends and paradigms in urban planning & design, new urbanism, sustainable urbanism, social housing and urban transformations, and city development, ageing society, design and medialization of urban form. His Key works are: *New Urbanism & Beyond – Designing Cities for the Future*, Rizzoli 2008 (ed.) and *Sustainable Urbanism & Beyond -Rethinking Cities for the Future*, 2012, Rizzoli (ed.) and the current (2018) "In The Post-Urban World" - *Emergent Transformations Of Cities and Regions In The Innovative Global Economy* - Routledge. Tigran He has written over 80 scholarly articles, 40 Conference Papers, 8 books, 4 Research Anthologies, and has been involved in teaching in International educational programs.

Citation: Dr. Tigran Haas. "Jane Jacobs Geographies of Place - Jacob's Special Lens on the City". *International Journal of Humanities Social Sciences and Education (IJHSSE)*, vol. 6, no.9, 2019, pp. 30-42. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.20431/2349-0381.060904>.

Copyright: © 2019 Authors. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.