Jane Jacobs, OC, OOnt (May 4, 1916 – April 25, 2006) was an American-Canadian writer and activist with primary interest in communities and urban planning and decay. She is best known for *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), a powerful critique of the urban renewal policies of the 1950s in the United States. The book has been credited with reaching beyond planning issues to influence the spirit of the times.

Along with her well-known printed works, Jacobs is equally well-known for organizing grassroots efforts to block urban-renewal projects that would have destroyed local neighborhoods. She was instrumental in the eventual cancellation of the Lower Manhattan Expressway, and after moving to Canada in 1968, equally influential in canceling the Spadina Expressway and the associated network of highways under construction.
American years

Jane Butzner was born in Scranton, Pennsylvania, the daughter of a doctor and a former teacher and nurse, who were Protestant in a Catholic town — adherents of a minority religion. After graduating from Scranton's Central High School, she took an unpaid position as the assistant to the women’s page editor at the Scranton Tribune. A year later, in the middle of the Great Depression, she left Scranton for New York City.

During her first several years in the city, Jacobs held a variety of jobs, working mainly as a stenographer and freelance writer, often writing about working districts in the city. These experiences, she later said, "… gave me more of a notion of what was going on in the city and what business was like, what work was like." Her first job was for a trade magazine, first as a secretary, then as an editor. She also sold articles to the Sunday Herald Tribune. She then became a feature writer for the Office of War Information. While working there she met an architect named Robert Hyde Jacobs whom she married in 1944. Together they had two sons and a daughter.

She studied at Columbia University's extension school (now the School of General Studies) for two years, taking courses in geology, zoology, law, political science, and economics. About the freedom to study her wide-ranging interests, she said:

"For the first time I liked school and for the first time I made good marks. This was almost my undoing because after I had garnered, statistically, a certain number of credits I became the property of Barnard College at Columbia, and once I was the property of Barnard I had to take, it seemed, what Barnard wanted me to take, not what I wanted to learn. Fortunately my high-school marks had been so bad that Barnard decided I could not belong to it and I was therefore allowed to continue getting an education."

On March 25, 1952, Jacobs responded to Conrad E. Snow, chairman of the Loyalty Security Board at the United States Department of State. In her foreword to her answer she said:

"The other threat to the security of our tradition, I believe, lies at home. It is the current fear of radical ideas and of people who propound them. I do not agree with the extremists of either the left or the right, but I think they should be allowed to speak and to publish, both because they themselves have, and ought to have, rights, and once their rights are gone, the rights of the rest of us are hardly safe …"

Opposing expressways and supporting neighborhoods were common themes in her life. In 1962, she was the chairperson of the "Joint Committee to Stop the Lower Manhattan Expressway", when the downtown expressway plan was killed. She was again involved in stopping the Lower Manhattan Expressway and was arrested during a demonstration on April 10, 1968. Jacobs opposed Robert Moses, who had already forced through the Cross-Bronx Expressway and other roadways against neighborhood opposition. A late 1990s Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) documentary series on New York's history devoted a full hour of its fourteen-hours to the battle between Moses and Jacobs, although Robert Caro's highly critical biography of Moses, The Power Broker, gives only passing mention to this event, despite Jacobs's strong influence on Caro.
Canadian life

In 1968, Jacobs moved to Toronto, where she lived until her death. She decided to leave the United States in part because of her objection to the Vietnam War and worry about the fate of her two draft-age sons. She and her husband chose Toronto because it was pleasant and offered him work opportunities.

She quickly became a leading figure in her new city and helped stop the proposed Spadina Expressway. A frequent theme of her work was to ask whether we are building cities for people or for cars. She was arrested twice during demonstrations. She also had considerable influence on the regeneration of the St. Lawrence neighborhood, a housing project regarded as a major success. She became a Canadian citizen in 1974, and she later told writer James Howard Kunstler that dual citizenship was not possible at the time, implying that her US citizenship was lost.

In 1980, she offered an urbanistic perspective on Québec's sovereignty in her book The Question of Separatism: Quebec and the Struggle over Separation.

Jacobs was an advocate of a Province of Toronto to separate the city proper from Ontario. Jacobs said, "Cities, to thrive in the 21st century, must separate themselves politically from their surrounding areas."

She was selected to be an officer of the Order of Canada in 1996 for her seminal writings and thought-provoking commentaries on urban development. The Community and Urban Sociology section of the American Sociological Association awarded her its Outstanding Lifetime Contribution award in 2002.

In 1997, the City of Toronto sponsored a conference titled "Jane Jacobs: Ideas That Matter", which led to a book by the same name. At the end of the conference, the Jane Jacobs Prize was created. It includes an annual stipend of $5,000 for three years to be given to "celebrate Toronto's original, unsung heroes — by seeking out citizens who are engaged in activities that contribute to the city's vitality".

Jacobs never shied away from expressing her political support for specific candidates. She opposed the 1997 amalgamation of the cities of Metro Toronto, fearing that individual neighborhoods would have less power with the new structure. She backed an ecologist, Tooker Gomberg, who lost Toronto's 2000 mayoralty race, and was an adviser to David Miller's successful mayoral campaign in 2003, at a time when he was seen as a longshot. During the mayoral campaign, Jacobs helped lobby against the construction of a bridge to join the city's waterfront to Toronto City Center Airport (TCCA).

Following the election, Toronto City Council's earlier decision to approve the bridge was reversed and bridge construction project was stopped. TCCA did upgrade the ferry service and the airport is still in operation as of 2011.

Jacobs was also active in a fight against a plan of Royal St. Georges College (an established school very close to Jacobs' long-time residence in Toronto's Annex district) to reconfigure its facilities. Jacobs suggested not only that the redesign be stopped but also the school be forced from the neighborhood entirely. Although Toronto council initially rejected the school's plans, the decision was later reversed — and the project was given the go-ahead by the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) when opponents failed to produce credible witnesses and tried to withdraw from the case during the hearing.

She died in Toronto Western Hospital at the age of 89, on April 25, 2006, apparently of a stroke. She was survived by a brother, James Butzner; two sons, James and Ned, and a daughter, Burgin Jacobs; by two grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. Upon her death her family’s statement noted:

What's important is not that she died but that she lived, and that her life's work has greatly influenced the way we think. Please remember her by reading her books and implementing her ideas.

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Legacy

Reason: What do you think you'll be remembered for most? You were the one who stood up to the federal bulldozers and the urban renewal people and said they were destroying the lifeblood of these cities. Is that what it will be?

Jacobs: No. If I were to be remembered as a really important thinker of the century, the most important thing I've contributed is my discussion of what makes economic expansion happen. This is something that has puzzled people always. I think I've figured out what it is.

Expansion and development are two different things. Development is differentiation of what already existed. Practically every new thing that happens is a differentiation of a previous thing, from a new shoe sole to changes in legal codes. Expansion is an actual growth in size or volume of activity. That is a different thing.

I've gone at it two different ways. Way back when I wrote *The Economy of Cities*, I wrote about import replacing and how that expands, not just the economy of the place where it occurs, but economic life altogether. As a city replaces imports, it shifts its imports. It doesn't import less. And yet it has everything it had before.

Reason: It's not a zero-sum game. It's a bigger, growing pie.

Jacobs: That's the actual mechanism of it. The theory of it is what I explain in *The Nature of Economies*. I equate it to what happens with biomass, the sum total of all flora and fauna in an area. The energy, the material that's involved in this, doesn't just escape the community as an export. It continues being used in a community, just as in a rainforest the waste from certain organisms and various plants and animals gets used by other ones in the place.

— Jane Jacobs, "City Views: Urban studies legend Jane Jacobs on gentrification, the New Urbanism, and her legacy", Reason, June 2001, Interviewer: Bill Steigerwald

It is evident through her interview with Bill Steigerwald in June 2001, that despite the virtuosity, public and intellectual awareness and influence of Jane Jacobs’ first book, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, she herself believes that her later works are historically more important and earthshaking.

In spite of this, her work in regards to planning should not be disregarded. In the world of planning, Jane Jacobs' observations about the ways in which cities function, revolutionized the urban planning profession and discredited many accepted planning models that dominated mid-century planning.[12]

Through her life, she fought to alter the way in which city development was approached. By arguing that cities were living beings and ecosystems, she advocated ideas such as "mixed use" development and bottom-up planning. Furthermore, her harsh criticisms of "slum clearing" and "high-rise housing" projects were instrumental in discrediting these once universally supported planning practices.[13] [14]

Jane Jacobs will be remembered as being an advocate for the mindful development of cities[15] and has left “a legacy of empowerment for citizens to trust their common sense and become advocates for their place”.[16]

Despite the fact that Jane Jacobs mainly focused on New York, her arguments have been identified as universal.[17] For instance, her opposition against the demolition of urban neighbourhoods for projects of urban renewal had "special resonance" in Melbourne, Australia.[18] In Melbourne in the 1960s, resident associations fought against large-scale high-rise housing projects of the Housing Commission of Victoria, which they argued had little regard for the impact on local communities.[18]

Throughout her life, Jane Jacobs fought an uphill battle against dominant trends of planning. Despite the United States remaining very much a suburban nation,[19] the work of Jacobs has contributed to city living being rehabilitated and revitalized. Because of her ideas, today, many distressed urban neighbourhoods are more likely to be gentrified than cleared for redevelopment.[12]

"It may be that we have become so feckless as a people that we no longer care how things do work, but only what kind of quick, easy outer impression they give. If so, there is little hope for our cities or probably for much else in our society. But I do not think this is so."

In her book ‘Death and Life of Great American Cities,’ written in 1961, Ms. Jacobs’s enormous achievement was to transcend her own withering critique of 20th-century urban planning and propose radically new principles for rebuilding cities. At a time when both common and inspired wisdom called for bulldozing slums and opening up city space, Ms. Jacobs’s prescription was ever more diversity, density and dynamism — in effect, to crowd people and activities together in a jumping, joyous urban jumble.


As a tribute to Jacobs, the Rockefeller Foundation announced on February 9, 2007 the creation of the Jane Jacobs Medal, "to recognize individuals who have made a significant contribution to thinking about urban design, specifically in New York City". From the mid 1950s to the mid 1960s, the foundation’s Humanities Division sponsored an "Urban Design Studies" research program, of which Jacobs was the best known grantee.

In September 2007, the Rockefeller Foundation awarded Barry Benepe, co-founder of NYC’s Green Market program and a founding member of Transportation Alternatives, with the inaugural Jane Jacobs Medal for Lifetime Leadership and a $100,000 cash prize. The inaugural Jane Jacobs Medal for New Ideas and Activism was awarded to Omar Freilla, the founder of Green Worker Cooperatives in the South Bronx; Mr. Freilla donated his $100,000 to his organization.

In May 2008, the Rockefeller Foundation announced that Peggy Shepard, executive director of West Harlem Environmental Action, would receive the 2008 Jane Jacobs Medal for Lifetime Leadership and Alexie Torres-Fleming, founder of Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice, would receive the award for New Ideas and Activism. Both women received their medals and $100,000 awards at a dinner ceremony in September 2008 in New York City.

In 2009, Damaris Reyes, Executive Director of Good Old Lower East Side (GOLES), received the 2009 Jane Jacobs Medal for New Ideas and Activism. Richard Kahan, as Founder and CEO of the Urban Assembly, which created and manages 22 secondary public schools located in many of the lowest income neighborhoods in New York City, received the 2009 Jane Jacobs Medal for Lifetime Leadership. Both of them received $100,000, in addition to the medal.

The 2010 recipients were Joshua David and Robert Hammond, whose work in establishing the High Line park atop an unused elevated railroad line, led the Rockefeller Foundation to award the 2010 Jane Jacobs Medal for New Ideas and Activism, along with $60,000 for each of them. The 2010 Jane Jacobs Medal for Lifetime Leadership was given to Elizabeth Barlow Rogers, for her longtime work as writer, Park Administrator and co-founder of Central Park Conservancy. She also received $80,000.

The City of Toronto proclaimed Friday May 4, 2007 as Jane Jacobs Day in Toronto. Two dozen free walks around and about Toronto neighborhoods, dubbed Jane’s Walk, were held on Saturday May 5, 2007. A Jane’s Walk event was held in New York in on September 29 and 30, 2007 and, for 2008, the event has spread to eight cities and towns across Canada.

She was also famous for her saying, "Eyes on the Street", a reference to what would later be known as natural surveillance.

The Municipal Art Society of New York has partnered with the Rockefeller Foundation to host an exhibit focusing on "Jane Jacobs and the Future of New York" which opened at the MAS on September 26, 2007. The exhibit aims to educate the public on her writings and activism and uses tools to encourage new generations to become active in issues involving their own neighborhoods. An accompanying exhibit publication includes essays and articles by such architecture critics, artists, activists and journalists as Malcolm Gladwell, Reverend Billy, Robert Neuwirth, Tom Wolfe, Thomas de Monchaux, and William McDonough." Many of these contributors are participating in a series of panel discussions on "Jane Jacobs and the Future of New York" taking place at venues across the city in Fall, 2007.
Criticism

Jacobs was not professionally trained in the field of city planning, nor did she hold the title of planner, so her ideas in regards to planning were very much developed through personal experience and observation.\[12\]

The planners and developers that she fought in order to preserve the West Greenwich Village were among those who initially critiqued her ideas. During this period, Robert Moses has generally been identified as her archrival. However since then, Jacobs’ theories and ideas have been analyzed many times,\[26\] \[27\] \[28\] often in regards to the outcomes that their influences have produced.

In examples such as the West Greenwich Village, the factors that she argued would maintain economic and cultural diversity have instead led to gentrification and some of the most expensive real estate in the world. Arguably, her own white, white-collar family’s conversion of an old candy shop into a home was indicative of the gentrifying trend that would continue by employing Jacob’s ideas.\[27\]

However, gentrification was also caused by “the completely unexpected influx of affluent residents back into the inner city”.\[27\] The extent to which her ideas facilitated this phenomenon was at the time unimaginable. For example, she advocated the preservation of older buildings specifically because their lack of economic value made them affordable for poor people. In this respect, she saw them as “guarantors of social diversity” (Klemek, 2011:76). That many of these older structures have increased in economic value solely due to their age was implausible in 1961.

Issues of gentrification have dominated critiques of Jane Jacobs’ planning ideas.\[29\] But her concepts have also been critiqued more broadly. For example, although her ideas of planning were praised at times as “universal”,\[17\] they were criticized as inapplicable when a city grows from one million to ten million (as has happened many times in the Third World). Such arguments suggest that the ideas apply only to cities with similar issues to that of New York, where Jacobs developed many of her ideas.

In respect to Third-World cities, her ideas have been criticized for not addressing problems of scale, or explaining how infrastructure should be built.\[30\] Perhaps her support of bottom-up and small-scale development initiatives would indicate that all urban areas are different and require individualized initiatives, as opposed to major projects of urban renewal.

Works

Jane Jacobs spent her life studying cities. Her books include:

The Death and Life of Great American Cities

*The Death and Life of Great American Cities* is her single-most influential book and possibly the most influential American book on urban planning and cities. Widely read by both planning professionals and the general public, the book is a strong critique of the urban renewal policies of the 1950s, which, she claimed, destroyed communities and created isolated, unnatural urban spaces. Jacobs advocated the abolition of zoning laws and restoration of free markets in land, which would result in dense, mixed-use neighborhoods and frequently cited New York City’s Greenwich Village as an example of a vibrant urban community.

Robert Caro has cited it as the strongest influence on *The Power Broker*, his Pulitzer-winning biography of Robert Moses, though Caro does not mention Jacobs by name even once in the book despite Jacobs’ battles with Moses over his proposed Lower Manhattan Expressway.

Beyond the practical lessons in city design and planning that *Death and Life* offers, the theoretical underpinnings of the work challenge the modern development mindset. Jane Jacobs defends her positions with common sense and undeniable anecdote.
**The Economy of Cities**

The thesis of this book is that cities are the primary drivers of economic development.

Jacobs' main argument is that explosive economic growth derives from urban import replacement. Import replacement is when a city begins to locally produce goods which it formerly imported, e.g., Tokyo bicycle factories replacing Tokyo bicycle importers in the 1800s. Jacobs claims that import replacement builds up local infrastructure, skills, and production. Jacobs also claims that the increased produce is exported to other cities, giving those other cities a new opportunity to engage in import replacement, thus producing a positive cycle of growth.

In the second part of the book, Jacobs argues that cities preceded agriculture. She argues that in cities trade in wild animals and grains allowed for the initial division of labor necessary for the discovery of husbandry and agriculture; these discoveries then moved out of the city due to land competition.

**Cities and the Wealth of Nations**

*Cities and the Wealth of Nations* attempts to do for economics what *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* did for modern urban planning, though it has not received the same critical attention. Beginning with a concise treatment of classical economics, this book challenges one of the fundamental assumptions of the greatest economists. Classical (and Neo-classical) economists consider the nation-state to be the main player in macroeconomics. Jacobs makes a forceful argument that it is not the nation-state, rather it is the city which is the true player in this worldwide game. She restates the idea of import replacement from her earlier book *The Economy of Cities*, while speculating on the further ramifications of considering the city first and the nation second, or not at all.

**The Question of Separatism: Quebec and the Struggle over Sovereignty**

The Question of Separatism incorporates and expanded Jacobs’ presentation of the 1979 Massey Lectures, entitled *Canadian Cities and Sovereignty-Association*. Published in 1980 and reprinted in 2011 with a previously unpublished 2005 interview on the subject, Jacobs' book advances the view that Quebec's eventual independence is best for Montreal, Toronto, the rest of Canada, and the world; and that such independence can be achieved peacefully. As precedent, she cites Norway's secession from Sweden and how it enriched both nations. The origins of the contemporary secessionist-movement in the Quiet Revolution are examined, along with Canada’s historical reliance on natural resources and foreign-owned manufacturing for its own economic development. Jacobs asserts that such an approach is colonial and hence backward, citing by example Canada buying its skis and furniture from Norwegian-owned factories in Canada, the latter procedure being a product of Canadian tariffs designed specifically to foster such factories. The relevant public views of Rene Levesque, Claude Ryan, and then Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau are also critically analyzed, an example being their failure to recognize that two respective, independent currencies are essential to the success of an independent Quebec and a smaller resultant Canada, an issue that is central to her book. Jacobs stresses the need for Montreal to continue developing its leadership of Québécois culture, but that such a need can ultimately never be fulfilled by Montreal's increasing tendencies toward regional-city status, tendencies foretelling economic, political, and cultural subservience to English-speaking Toronto. Such an outcome, Jacobs believed, would in the long run doom Quebec's independence as much as it would hinder Canada's own future. She concludes with her observation that the popular equating of political secession with political and economic failure is the result of the Enlightenment, which perceived nature as a force for "standardization, uniformity, universality, and immutability." Since then, naturalists and their readers have gradually realized that nature is a force for diversity, and that, "diversity itself is of the essence of excellence." The right kind of secession, Jacobs states, can lead to the right kind of diversity, and Quebec and Canada are capable of both, and must achieve both, to survive.
**Systems of Survival**

*Systems of Survival: A Dialogue on the Moral Foundations of Commerce and Politics* moves outside of the city, studying the moral underpinnings of work. As with her other work, she used an observational approach. This book is written as a Platonic dialogue. It appears that she (as described by characters in her book) took newspaper clippings of moral judgements related to work, collected and sorted them to find that they fit two patterns of moral behaviour that were mutually exclusive. She calls these two patterns "Moral Syndrome A", or commercial moral syndrome, and "Moral Syndrome B", or guardian moral syndrome. She claims that the commercial moral syndrome is applicable to business owners, scientists, farmers, and traders. Similarly, she claims that the guardian moral syndrome is applicable to government, charities, hunter-gatherers, and religious institutions. She also claims that these Moral Syndromes are fixed, and do not fluctuate over time.

It is important to stress that Jane Jacobs is providing a theory about the morality of work, and not all moral ideas. Moral ideas that are not included in her syndrome are applicable to both syndromes.

Jane Jacobs goes on to describe what happens when these two moral syndromes are mixed, showing the work underpinnings of the Mafia and communism, and what happens when New York Subway Police are paid bonuses here — reinterpreted slightly as a part of the larger analysis.

**The Nature of Economies**

*The Nature of Economies*, a dialog between friends concerning the premise: "human beings exist wholly within nature as part of the natural order in every respect" (p ix), argues that the same principles underlie both ecosystems and economies: "development and co-development through differentiations and their combinations; expansion through diverse, multiple uses of energy; and self-maintenance through self-refueling" (p82).

Jacobs' characters discuss the four methods by which "dynamically stable systems" may evade collapse: "bifurcations; positive-feedback loops; negative-feedback controls; and emergency adaptations" (p86). Their conversations also cover the "double nature of fitness for survival" (traits to avoid destroying one's own habitat as well as success in competition to feed and breed, p119), and unpredictability including the butterfly effect characterized in terms of multiplicity of variables as well as disproportional response to cause, and self-organization where "a system can be making itself up as it goes along" (p137).

Through the dialogue, Jacobs' characters explore and examine the similarities between the functioning of ecosystems and economies. Topics include environmental and economic development, growth and expansion, and how economies and environments keep themselves alive through "self-refueling." Jacobs also comments on the nature of economic and biological diversity and its role in the development and growth of the two kinds of systems.

The book is infused with many real-world economic and biological examples, which help keep the book "down to earth" and comprehensible, if dense. Concepts are furnished with both economic and biological examples, showing their coherence in both worlds.

One particularly interesting insight is the creation of "something from nothing" — an economy from nowhere. In the biological world, free energy is given through sunlight, but in the economic world human creativity and natural resources supply this free energy, or at least starter energy. Another interesting insight is the creation of economic diversity through the combination of different technologies, for example the typewriter and television as inputs and outputs of a computer system: this can lead to the creation of "new species of work".
Jane Jacobs

Dark Age Ahead

Published in 2004 by Random House, in *Dark Age Ahead* Jacobs argued that "North American" civilization showed signs of spiral of decline comparable to the collapse of the Roman empire. Her thesis focused on "five pillars of our culture that we depend on to stand firm," which can be summarized as the nuclear family (but also community), education, science, representative government and taxes, and corporate and professional accountability. As the title suggests, her outlook was far more pessimistic than in her previous books. However, in the conclusion she wrote that, "At a given time it is hard to tell whether forces of cultural life or death are in the ascendancy. Is suburban sprawl, with its murders of communities and wastes of land, time, and energy, a sign of decay? Or is rising interest in means of overcoming sprawl a sign of vigor and adaptability in North American culture? Arguably, either could turn out to be true."

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