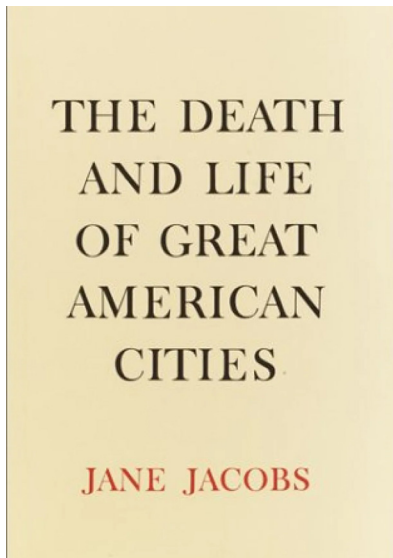


# The Death and Life of Great American Cities

Author: Jane Jacobs

Publisher: Random House, New York 1961



Say NO to urban planning projects that are imposed upon communities without public involvement! A city is a complex system. To fully comprehend it, people need to learn how cities work in real life, rather than relying on quick impressions and this is one of social scientist Jane Jacobs' motivations for writing the book.

In the last century, Ebenezer Howard's „Garden City“ and Le Corbusier's „Ville Radieuse“ had a significant influence on urban planning theories. However, Jane Jacobs found that their practical application has led to many urban issues. In addition to attacking the principles of urban planning, the main reason for Jacobs' book is to introduce new principles of city planning and rebuilding. Her publication is divided into four parts. In the first part, she describes the uses and functions of sidewalks and neighborhoods. The second part, which is the most important chapter, deals with city diversity and the conditions that support it. Diversity is the core of her concerns. The practice of separating the residential, working, commercial, and traffic functional zones is criticized by Jane Jacobs since it weakens the complexity of urban areas. The third part examines the causes of city decline and regeneration. Finally, the last part explores strategies for dealing with city decline.

The tone of this 458-page publication is critical. Rather than directly telling readers how to do urban planning, Jane Jacobs uses case studies to guide people to analyse the problems in urban development. Many of her ideas may seem like common sense today, but they were very instructive in 1961. For instance, she points out that the key to the city's safety is having active streets. When people are interested in watching the street for pleasure - they play the role of „eyes on the street“. Even though the book was published in the last century, urban planners today can still benefit from it because of the sociological perspective. More than urban planning, the publication is a lesson in public engagement and introduces the topic of urban planning to the public. This democratization empowers communities to question projects without public participation. The author outlines her case in a story-telling tone, rarely using complex academic words or long sentences. Easy-to-understand examples and simple language allow readers to quickly put themselves in the author's position and better understand her point of view. There are no maps nor photos of the examples, so that readers who are not familiar with the United States need to search for themselves.

This publication is not a dry academic theory book but enjoyable to read. Plenty of examples make Jane Jacobs' points convincing. It is highly readable and easy to understand, which makes it appropriate for students of landscape architecture and urban planning as well as inspiring for non-professionals. It also offers professionals a refreshing perspective on city streets, community safety, and urban development.