



# “THE DEATH AND LIFE OF GREAT AMERICAN CITIES”

*- A study based on extraction of Case Studies*

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## ABSTRACT

The Death and Life of Great American Cities" is a seminal work by urbanist Jane Jacobs, published in 1961. In it, Jacobs critiques the prevailing urban planning theories of her time, particularly those that favoured large-scale redevelopment projects and urban renewal efforts. She argues that these approaches often destroy the intricate social fabric and vitality of neighbourhoods.

Jacobs proposes a new vision for urban planning, emphasizing the importance of mixed-use development, short blocks, and dense, diverse urban environments. She celebrates the vibrancy of neighbourhoods characterized by a variety of building types, ages, and uses, where residents can interact and form strong social bonds.

The book's abstract would encapsulate Jacobs's argument that successful cities are not the product of top-down planning but emerge organically from the interactions of their inhabitants. It highlights her call for a more human-centred approach to urban planning that prioritizes the needs and experiences of local communities.

This study provides a deep understanding of the ideology and philosophy of Jane Jacob which will help architects to absorb the knowledge for progressive practices.

*(Keywords- Jane Jacob, the death and life of great American cities, vitality, case study, walkability, mix used development, street, neighbourhood)*

## INTRODUCTION

Jane Jacobs, an influential urbanist, challenged traditional urban planning approaches by emphasizing the importance of community, diversity, and human-scale design in cities. Her philosophy, epitomized in works like "The Death and Life of Great American Cities," argued for organic, bottom-up development, emphasizing the vitality of mixed-use neighbourhoods, pedestrian-friendly streets, and the preservation of local character. Jacobs believed that cities thrive when they prioritize the needs and experiences of their inhabitants, fostering social interaction, economic diversity, and a sense of belonging. Her ideas continue to shape urban planning and development worldwide, emphasizing the value of community engagement and the celebration of urban complexity.

### IDEOLOGY

In "The Death and Life of Great American Cities," Jane Jacobs presents a comprehensive ideology and philosophy that challenges conventional urban planning wisdom prevalent in the mid-20th century. Key aspects of Jacobs's ideology and philosophy in the book include:

- **BOTTOM-UP APPROACH-** Jacobs advocates for a bottom-up approach to urban planning, emphasizing the importance of understanding cities from the ground level and recognizing the wisdom of residents and their interactions. She criticizes top-down planning efforts that disregard the intricate social and economic dynamics of neighbourhoods.
- **ORGANIC DEVELOPMENT AND VITALITY-** Jacobs argues that successful cities evolve organically over time through the interactions of their inhabitants. She believes that attempts to impose rigid planning schemes often lead to the destruction of vibrant urban communities. Instead, she advocates for policies that support the organic growth and diversity of neighbourhoods.

- **MIX USED DEVELOPMENT-** Central to Jacobs's philosophy is the concept of mixed-use development, where residential, commercial, and cultural activities coexist within proximity. She contends that mixing different land uses fosters pedestrian activity, social interaction, and economic vitality, creating vibrant and liveable urban environments.
  - **EYES ON THE STREET-** Jacobs introduces the concept of "eyes on the street," highlighting the importance of natural surveillance in promoting safety and security with enhanced transportation accessibility in neighbourhoods. She argues that active street life, with residents and businesses overlooking public spaces, deters crime and fosters a sense of community ownership over public areas.
  - **URBAN DIVERSITY-** Jacobs celebrates the diversity of people, activities, and buildings within cities, arguing that it contributes to their resilience, urban complexity, and vitality. She values the presence of older buildings, small businesses, and mixed-income housing as essential components of vibrant urban neighbourhoods.
  - **CRITIQUE OF URBAN RENEWAL-** Jacobs offers a scathing critique of urban renewal policies that prioritize large-scale redevelopment projects and highway construction. She argues that such initiatives often displace residents, destroy historic neighbourhoods, and disrupt social networks without achieving their intended goals of revitalizing urban areas.
  - **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT-** Throughout the book, Jacobs emphasizes the importance of community engagement and grassroots activism in shaping the future of cities. She encourages residents to take an active role in shaping their neighbourhoods and resisting planning decisions that run counter to their interests.
- Jane Jacobs** identified four distinct urban forms or archetypes in her seminal work "The Death and Life of Great American Cities." These urban forms represent different configurations of streets, buildings, and land uses that contribute to the vitality and liability of neighbourhoods. Here are the four urban forms identified by Jane Jacobs:

➤ **THE STREET:**

- Streets are the fundamental building blocks of urban life according to Jacobs. They serve as the primary public space where various activities unfold, including walking, socializing, shopping, and commuting.
- Jacobs emphasizes the importance of lively and well-used streets characterized by a mix of pedestrian traffic, storefronts, cafes, and other amenities.
- Vibrant streetscapes with diverse building types and uses contribute to the social and economic vitality of neighbourhoods.

➤ **THE DISTRICT:**

- Districts are larger areas within cities that consist of multiple streets and blocks sharing common characteristics and functions.
- Each district typically serves as a hub for specific activities or communities, such as shopping, entertainment, or residential living.
- Jacobs emphasizes the importance of mixed-use districts that offer a variety of amenities and services within walking distance, promoting pedestrian activity and social interaction.

➤ **THE NEIGHBOURHOOD:**

- Neighbourhoods are cohesive residential areas within cities characterized by a sense of community and shared identity among residents.
- Jacobs highlights the importance of diverse and mixed-income neighbourhoods with a mix of housing types, ages, and densities.
- Well-functioning neighbourhoods feature a range of local amenities, public spaces, and social institutions that support the daily needs and activities of residents.

➤ **THE CITY:**

- The city represents the larger urban context that encompasses multiple districts, neighbourhoods, and diverse communities.
- Jacobs emphasizes the interconnectedness of different parts of the city and the importance of urban diversity in promoting economic and social resilience.
- A successful city is characterized by its ability to accommodate a wide range of activities, populations, and land uses while maintaining a sense of coherence and identity.

Coming to heads like **BOTTOM-UP APPROACH** and **ORGANIC DEVELOPMENT AND VITALITY**,

The provided data is based on the combination of the above written ideas.

1. **AN EXPLORATORY CASE STUDY**

To showcase the evaluation model, we present an application to three neighbourhood parks in the city of **Cagliari, Italy**. The main purpose of the application is to explore how the NPV-potential relates to the effective observable uses of the parks. A case of a "well-designed" park, with a wide range of equipment, but localised in a more peripheral area of the city; despite its relatively good design, the park is not very popular nor used; "Parco della Musica" (P2, area 27,110 m<sup>2</sup>) is a classic example of a park located in a central and lively urban context, with a lot of spaces and facilities that allow density and diversity of activities, resulting in more intensive use throughout the day; although not among the largest public parks in Cagliari, it is well known among neighbourhood residents and a broad section of city users; "Piazza Islanda" (P3, area 4050 m<sup>2</sup>) is a smaller park located in a semi-peripheral area with a predominantly residential vocation; the residential neighbourhood that surrounds the park is limited attractions, therefore considered limited activity area resulting in a predominant use only during certain times of the day.

CONCLUSION

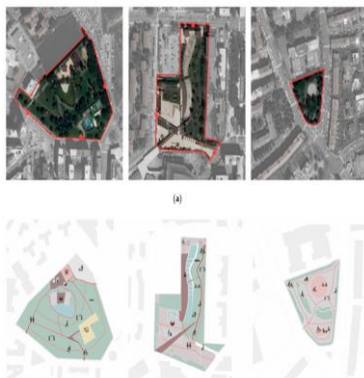


figure 1. (a) aerial view of the three parks, showing the boundaries and the points of access (the third park is open form).

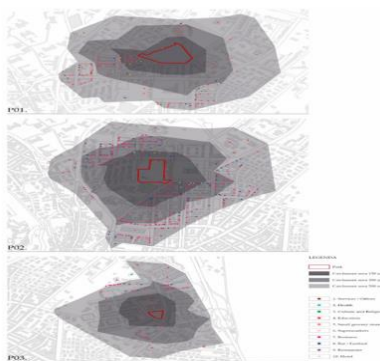


Figure 4. Catchment areas and activation for the three parks: P01 "Plaça Espanya", P02 "Plaça de la Marina", P03 "Plaça Isabel·la"

(b) schemes of parks' main design characteristics.

The findings of this study bring evidence for a perhaps obvious, but not seldom shrugged at teaching of Jane Jacobs: that it is people who attract other people, and that a good park project is moulded foremost from the material of its urban context and surrounding. That claim would require more extensive empirical study, with larger and more internally variable samples of parks and surrounding conditions. Hence, the reported agreement between the potential and the observed vitality on the ground should be considered only as preliminarily indicative and suggests the potential usefulness of further studies. However, the results of the example application point at the possible usefulness of the proposed evaluation method for urban planning. Rather than strictly predictive, its purpose may show up as a method to treat, explore, and incorporate Jacobs's insights into planning and policy making more explicitly and formally.

REFERENCE

Neighbourhood Park Vitality Potential: From Jane Jacobs's Theory to Evaluation Model  
- Research Paper

2. This **case study** corresponding to a low-income peripheral district in a Mediterranean city, **Barcelona (Spain)** characterized by presenting diverse social and morphological characteristics.

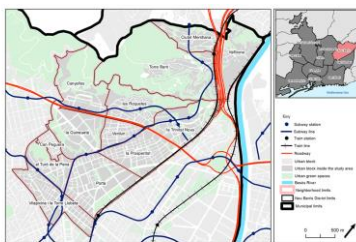


Fig. 1. Study area: Nou Barris district (Barcelona). Source: own elaboration.

fig 2– study area barcelona

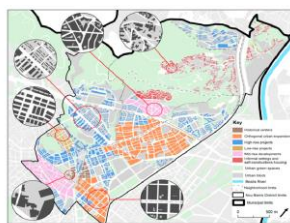


Fig. 2. Urban morphology map of Nou Barris. Source: own elaboration.

fig 3 – urban morphology

This study is based on the construction of an updated and extended version of the JANE Index, described in a previous work. We build on the four basic generators of vitality according to Jacobs and two accessory principles . In addition, we incorporate other

variables based on the recent literature exploring vitality and its drivers under the framework of Jacobs. The result is an updated JANE Index consisting of 22 variables compiled from diverse data sources.

**CONCLUSION**

The results have evidenced that the conditions for urban vitality in a present-day city are not necessarily related to centrality, specific urban fabrics, or certain level of income, but instead, they can be the result of different combinations of certain urban features. In this sense, this study challenges the widely held assumption that the highest levels of street activity and vitality are mostly found in inner-city districts, which are normally characterized by higher population densities and mixed use. Contrary to what occurs in other contexts where outer-city sectors are almost exclusively residential in terms of land use, the City of Barcelona presents a homogenous high level of density of population associated with a high provision of services and retail shops that are also in peripheral and low-income neighbourhoods. Hence, urban vitality here follows a polycentric pattern.

**REFERENCE**

Jane Jacobs reloaded: A contemporary operationalization of urban vitality in a district in Barcelona.

- Research paper.

Coming to heads like **MIX USED DEVELOPMENT, URBAN DIVERSITY, CRITIQUE OF URBAN RENEWAL and COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT,**

All the provided data is based on the combination of the above written ideas.

1. **Case study** of Hong Kong

The study is in Hong Kong (HK), a city of 7.29 million with a range of urban form conditions, including the compact historical core, large housing estates in new towns, and “rural” village houses. HK has a density spectrum close to Jane Jacobs’ observation on the compact North American cities of the 1950s.

**1.1 Tweet Density** is an indicator for activities and social interactions. Strictly, it captures the effect of the sub-population group who have an active Twitter account. But since having a Twitter account is itself a measure of social interaction and vitality, it is reasonable to take this as a vitality measure, accepting that fewer Twitter users and lower Tweet rates are both indicators of lower vitality.

**1.2 POI Density** is another accepted measure for urban activities. A POI is a point feature tagged by category, such as a restaurant, grocery store or other amenities which depend on and attract pedestrian activities.

**1.3 Walking Commute.** Walking commute was calculated by counting the percentage of people reportedly walking to work, the input data were acquired from the official travel mode survey.

**1.4 Mortality and Premature Mortality** measure the death rates of the population and its sub-groups, in reference to Weicher’s work (1973). “Death” was mentioned 4 times Jacobs (1961), although more in a rhetorical sense, meaning “deprivation”.

table 1 – comparison of regression results

Table 2 A Comparison of regression results from six evaluation studies including this one. We reported only the sign of beta coefficients due to the difference in adopted unit system among studies.

Performance Indicators		Vitality & Activities					Failure & Success			
Descrip	Study (location)	Twitter Activities	Mobile Phone Activity	Walking Commute	Walking Activities	POI Density	Mortality Rate	Standardized Death Rate	Perceived Crime	Reported Crime
		This study (Hong Kong)	De Nadai et al., 2016 (Italy)	This study (Hong Kong)	Sung et al., 2015 (Seoul)	This Study (Hong Kong)	This study (Hong Kong)	Weicher, 1973 (Chicago)	Fowler, 1987 (Toronto)	Schmidt, 1977 (Denver)
Mixed Use	Land Use Mix	+	n.a.	+	n.a.	+	+	-	-	+
	Housing Mix	-	n.a.	-	+	+	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Short Block	Road Intersection Density (count/km <sup>2</sup> )	+	+	+	+	+	-	-	-	+
Aged Bldg.	Mean Bldg. Age (yr.)	+	n.a.	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Density	Dwelling (1,000/km <sup>2</sup> )	-	n.a.	-	n.a.	-	+	-	-	+
	Work (1,000/km <sup>2</sup> )	+	+	+	+	+	-	+	n.a.	n.a.
	Building (1,000/km <sup>2</sup> )	+	n.a.	+	n.a.	+	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Others	Tall Bldg. (m)	+	n.a.	+	n.a.	+	-	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
	Border Vacuum	n.a.	-	n.a.	-	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
	R-squared	0.82	0.77	0.74	n.a.	0.80	0.51	0.53	0.62	0.51

\* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.001

**CONCLUSION**

The study examined Jacobs’ doctrine of whether urban form conditions contribute to “vitality” and “failure and success” of city districts. We measured “vitality” using Twitter activity, POI density, walking activities, and “Failure and success” using tweet sentiment, mortality, and employment ratio. Findings lend support for the most aspects of Jacobs’ theory in HK, six decades after the publication of the original text. Her four primary conditions were positively related to vitality measured in social media activities, walking, and POI density, except that one needs to substitute dwelling density for building density.

**REFERENCE**

Re-Examining Jane Jacobs’ Doctrine Using New Urban Data in Hong Kong

- Research paper.

2. **Case study** of Four cities **Grand Lyon, Chicago, Kolkata and Singapore.**

This article examines the intersections of Jane Jacobs’ four conditions for diversity with low-carbon and low-energy use urban systems in four cities around the world: Lyon (France), Chicago (United-States), Kolkata (India), and Singapore (Singapore). After reviewing Jacobs’ four conditions for diversity, we introduce the four cities and describe their historical development context. Presenting a framework to study the cities along three dimensions: population and density, infrastructure development/use, and climate and landscape.



## 2.1 Infrastructure Development /Use

While Jacobs emphasizes the many benefits of short blocks and walkable cities in general, these can also provide upward pressure on emissions from transportation in two ways. Short blocks could lead to greater number of intersections, leading to an increased idling relative to longer blocks with fewer intersections.

## 2.2 Climate and Landscape

Arguably, with a humid subtropical climate, no hot months and relatively few wet days, Lyon offers the best conditions for walking and cycling; coupled with its high density and short blocks, Jacobs' conditions and lower transportation energy demand are further encouraged.

## 2.3 Low-Carbon Systems and Jacobs' Conditions for Diversity

One point worth noting from Table 4 is that Kolkata consistently ranks well both in the metrics representing Jacobs' conditions and GHG emissions (on a per capita basis). While much of this can be attributed to low levels of income, policies that preserve these both Jacobs' conditions and low emissions during the expected era of economic growth will be important. Pricing roads (as Singapore did), preserving old buildings (along with the density they provide, as was done in Chicago and Lyon), and maintaining multiple uses of buildings (which all three have achieved) will be vital to this long-term effort. This provides additional support for the argument that Jacobs' conditions are an important consideration when planning the low-carbon city.

## CONCLUSION

The main goal of this paper was to investigate the intersection of Jane Jacobs' conditions and low-carbon urban systems by studying four very different global cities. First, we listed Jacobs' conditions for diversity, discussing how they relate to the overarching goal of reducing lower energy use and GHG emissions. Second, we provided a brief historical overview of four case study cities and discussed the influence of their development on drivers of GHG emissions. The cities were then analysed using three dimensions: Population and Density, Infrastructure Development/Use, and Climate and Landscape, to explore how Jacobs' conditions have manifested themselves and how this has affected their GHG emissions. Ultimately, the contribution of this work is the exploration of how Jacobs' conditions are exhibited in the four case study cities and the examination of how they influence GHG emissions in each case. We suggest that all four conditions for diversity can have a positive influence on GHG mitigation and that cities that display macro-scale characteristics indicative of the presence of Jacobs' conditions benefit from lower carbon emissions.

## REFERENCE

Intersections of Jane Jacobs' conditions for diversity and low-carbon urban systems: a look at four global cities

- Research paper.

Coming to the head **EYES ON THE STREET**, the provided data is based on the mentioned head.

## 1. SURVEY

Streets in cities serve many purposes besides carrying vehicles, and city sidewalks—the pedestrian parts of the streets—serve many purposes besides carrying pedestrians. These uses are bound up with circulation but are not identical with it and they are at least as basic as circulation to the proper workings of cities. A city sidewalk by itself is nothing. It is an abstraction. It means something only in conjunction with the buildings and other uses that border it, or border other sidewalks very near it. This task is totally unlike any service that sidewalks and streets in little towns or true suburbs are called upon to do. The first thing to understand is that the public peace—the sidewalk and street peace—of cities is not kept primarily by the police, necessary as police are. It is kept primarily by an intricate, almost unconscious, network of voluntary controls and standards among the people themselves and enforced by the people themselves.

### EXAMPLE:

An **incident at Washington Houses**, a public housing project in New York, illustrates this point. A tenants' group at this project, struggling to establish itself, held some outdoor ceremonies in mid-December 1958, and put up three Christmas trees. The chief tree, so cumbersome it was a problem to transport, erect, and trim, went into the project's inner "street," a landscaped central mall and prom. The other two trees, each less than six feet tall and easy to carry, went on two small fringe plots at the outer corners of the project where it abuts a busy avenue and lively cross streets of the old city. The first night, the large tree and all its trimmings were stolen. A city street equipped to handle strangers, and to make a safety asset out of the presence of strangers, as the streets of successful city neighbourhoods always do, must have three main qualities:

**First**, there must be a clear demarcation between what is public space and what is private space. Public and private spaces cannot ooze into each other as they do typically in suburban settings or in projects.

**Second**, there must be eyes upon the street, eyes belonging to those we might call the natural proprietors of the street. The buildings on a street equipped to handle strangers and to ensure the safety of both residents and strangers, must be oriented to the street. They cannot turn their backs or blank sides on it and leave it blind.

**And third**, the sidewalk must have users on it continuously, both to add to the number of effective eyes on the street and to induce the people in buildings along the street to watch the sidewalks in sufficient numbers. Nobody enjoys sitting on a stoop or looking out a window at an empty street.

## RESEARCH CONCLUSION

In "The Death and Life of Great American Cities," Jane Jacobs masterfully critiques prevailing urban planning paradigms while offering insightful alternatives for creating vibrant, liveable cities. Through her observations and arguments, Jacobs emphasizes the importance of diverse, mixed-use neighbourhoods, organic urban growth, and community involvement in shaping urban spaces. She advocates for preserving the intricate social fabric of cities, rejecting the sterile, top-down approaches that often lead to urban decay and disconnection. Jacobs' work serves as a timeless reminder of the vitality and resilience inherent in cities when they embrace complexity, human scale, and the unique character of their communities. As we navigate the challenges of urban development, Jacobs' ideas continue to inspire meaningful dialogue and innovative solutions for creating truly great American cities. In conclusion, "The Death and Life of Great American Cities" offers architects valuable insights into creating more liveable, sustainable, and inclusive urban environments that prioritize human needs and community well-being. By embracing these principles, architects can contribute to the revitalization and enrichment of our cities for generations to come.

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