

Biography of Jane Jacobs

Jane Jacobs has no professional training in the field of city planning, nor does she hold the title of urban planner anywhere. However, she has used her own observations about cities to formulate her philosophy about them. Though some of her views go against the traditional views on planning, her work is well respected by practicing planners and planning students alike.

Born in 1916 in the coal mining town of Scranton, PA, Jacobs has never been afraid to stand on her own. After graduating high school, she took an unpaid position as the assistant to the women's page editor at the local newspaper. Shortly after that, and in the middle of the Depression, she left Scranton for New York City. During her first several years in the city, she held many different types of jobs, and was even subject to periods of unemployment. This experience with hard times gave her more of a notion of what was going on in the city. Her first real writing position was at a metals trade paper. While working there, she also held free-lance writing positions at The New York Herald Tribune and Vogue. She worked for the Office of War Information, and it was there that she met her husband, architect Robert Jacobs. She continued her writing later when she joined the staff of Architectural Forum. After residing in New York City for thirty years, she moved with her family to Toronto in 1968, where she still lives and writes.

Jacobs has written a variety of books over the years, including *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*(1961), her first published work, *The Economy of Cities*(1969), *A Question of Separatism: Quebec and the Struggle over Sovereignty*(1980), *Cities and the Wealth of Nations*(1984), *Systems of Survival*(1992), and *The Nature of Economics*(2000), her most recent effort. It is through these writings that she expresses her ideas about cities. She advocates "mixed-use" in the urban fabric, meaning no separation of the different types of buildings, whether residence or business oriented, old or new. She also sees cities as being "organic, spontaneous, and untidy," and that diversity and activity are crucial to their survival over the centuries. The main area in which Jacobs and traditional planners disagree is in that of density. She believes that the concentration of people in a city is essential for its economic growth and prosperity.

It is obvious that Jane Jacobs is a woman with strong ideas who is not afraid to share them, even if they may not necessarily agree with the ideas of others in her field of interest. Her original ideas give us the opportunity to look at cities in a different light.

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