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critique of the death
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\n[[toc title="Table of Contents"](#)]\n

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1. [Introduction](#) \n \t
2. [Summary of Jacobs' Book](#) \n \t
3. [Second Part](#) \n \t
4. [Third Part](#) \n \t
5. [Part Four](#) \n \t
6. [Relevance of Jacobs' Argument in the 1960s and Today](#) \n \t
7. [Conclusion](#) \n \t
8. [References](#) \n

\n[/toc]\n \n

Introduction

The Death and Life of Great American Cities authored by Jane Jacobs was the most influential book of her time. First published in 1961, it made an attack on the objectives and principles of modernist, orthodox planning of the city and rebuilding in the post-war period in the USA. The book was written in reaction to the devastating outcome of the urban refurbishment in the post-war period. She makes a direct attack on what she terms "orthodox" city planning and reconstruction. She points out the failures of modern city planning, arguing how the various institutions of intellectual planning history have the misconception about the functioning of cities. She vehemently criticizes the Garden City of Howard and the Radiant City of Le Corbusier, pinpointing the destructive result of such modern planning. She argues how the American city planners by decentralizing the big cities is creating

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barriers within the city, preventing people from mixing with each other, hindering diversity and promoting crimes. This paper would summarize the four chapters of the Jacobs' 'The Death and Life of Great American Cities', touching upon the relevance of her ideas today.

Summary of Jacobs' Book

First Part

In part 1 of her book, Jacob traces the origin of orthodox city planning and argues that all the modernist conceptions about city planning lacked the clear depth of how cities work. She first made an attack on Howard's Garden City, claiming that Howards introduced the potent city-destructive ideas into city planning. Howard, observing the poor living conditions of the urban poor in London during the late 19th century, proposed to stop the growth of metropolitan cities and repopulate the countryside by constructing an innovative new kind of town called the Garden City. Jacob disapproved Howard's ideas because she believes that Howard's ideas neglected the rich life that city offers. Inspired by Howard's ideas, the American city planners moved the houses away from the street and put them into a sheltered green area, claiming that streets create a bad environment for human beings. Jacobs claims that the decentralized planning of a city with businesses and residences segregated from each other and the introduction of the concept of blocks completely destroys the city life (Jacobs, 1961). The notion of the American city planners to increase neighborhood privacy by allowing a few people in a neighborhood directly contrasts with Jacobs' vision of a throbbing city life with densely populated neighborhoods.

Second Part

In the second part of her book, Jacobs touches upon the general conditions of city diversity based on her observations of different large cities of the USA, including Boston, New York, and San Francisco. She proposes four conditions crucial for the development of diversity in the streets and districts of a city.

These four conditions include the following:

- 1) In order to ensure the presence of people who use the same common facilities at different times, the districts must fulfill more than one primary function.
- 2) The blocks should be short in length in order to increase the path options between the points of departure and destinations, thereby enhancing the social and economic development (Jacobs, 1961).
- 3) The buildings in the districts should vary in age and condition, accommodating different businesses and people with different level of affordability of rents.
- 4) There must be a dense concentration of people in the promotion of a vibrant city life (Jacobs, 1961).

Third Part

Jacobs highlights the four forces that contribute to the decline and regeneration of city cycles in the third part of her book. These four forces include the following:

- 1) Successful diversity is an element of self-destruction which occurs when less affluent businesses and residents are replaced by more affluent and profitable ones, thereby multiplying the existence of an affluent class in a

district. This leads not only to the erosion of the variety of businesses and dwellers in that district, but also deprives other districts of the presence of the affluent sections that can provide support (Jacobs, 1961).

2) Massive single elements like railroad tracks, college campuses, and big parks make a bad influence in the city life by creating vacuums in the immediate adjoining areas. She believes that borders within cities are keeping people of different neighborhoods from intermingling with each other. She, therefore, suggests the special use of checker pavilions and parks to blend the order and join the immediate neighboring areas together.

3) Population instability is cited as the third factor contributing to the decline of a city. She gives the example of slums that slums remain slums because the slum dwellers are unstable inhabitants who move from the slums at the slightest opportunity. Therefore, she believes that the real slumming process should be to make the slum dwellers stick to a single slum for long and develop neighborhoods for them (Jacobs, 1961).

4) Public and private money have been cited as the last contributing factor. Jacobs divides money into three kinds, credit provided by traditional, private money lending institutions, money given by the government through tax receipts, and money generated by the underworld of credit and cash. She believes that all these kinds of money are cataclysmic in nature contributing to the ruination of city districts (Jacobs, 1961).

Part Four

In part four of the book, Jacobs discusses the effective tactics required for improving the city performance. These tactics include the following:

- 1) Subsidized dwellings, which, according to Jacobs, should be offered to those unable to afford normal housing.
- 2) Decrease of the use of automobiles as extreme dependence on cars erodes the city life by increasing street traffic and reducing the importance of sidewalks.
- 3) Improvement of cities visually without sacrificing diversity by introducing irregular street patterns, and special buildings.
- 4) Redesigning the governing and planning of districts by laying more importance on the horizontal structure than vertical one, which oversimplifies the problems of organized complexities in cities (Jacobs, 1961).

Relevance of Jacobs' Argument in the 1960s and Today

When the *Death and Life of Great American Cities* was published in 1961, Jacobs' voice that challenged the prevailing theories of the entire planning establishment and the proposition of her philosophy of city planning were disregarded by the urban city planners. However, in the long run, her ideas influenced the new generation of urban planners, architects, and developers who understood the importance of preserving the older structure and the street pattern in the urban context. John Zucotti, the chairman of the New York City Planning Commission, stated in 1974, "to a large extent we are neo-Jacobean" (Wendt, 2009).

Jacobs explores the uses of various elements of an urban city, such as sidewalks, city neighborhoods, and neighborhood parks in the first part of her book. She believes that sidewalks serve three primary purposes. Busy

sidewalks provide street safety, maintain contact by bringing people together, and help assimilate children into the society. At the time of her writing the book, New York and most of the major cities of the USA had high crime rates. Many young families in order to avoid the danger of the city life moved into the suburbs. Crime was a big issue in the big cities of the USA as it is today. According to Jacobs, it is the decentralized planning of the city that jeopardizes the street safety by taking eyes of the protectors away from the city. She believes that the street of a city is safe when there are eyes on the street, eyes that belong to " the natural proprietors of the street" (Jacobs, 1961, p. 35). The mixture of businesses and residents along the street assures the street safety, because there are people on the streets at all times, but in the typical American decentralized model, since a less number of people use the sidewalks, the safety of them comes into question, and after one or two crimes on a street, even fewer people begin to use them, adding to the growing problem of safety. Her opinion is echoed in the words of another architect and city planner, Oscar Newman, who too agrees with Jacobs that the introduction of high rise blocks and dispersion of businesses and residences away from the street disconnect people from the street altogether, fostering a culture of street crime and vandalism. He concurs with Jacobs' concept of the " street eyes" that provide a casual surveillance by the local business owners, residents, and passers-by on the streets, ensuring the street safety. Newman tried to implement Jacobs' philosophy in the reconfiguration of a troubled housing project in New York by facilitating street eyes and making outdoor " defensible" spaces (Newman, 1972).

Another important factor touched upon by Jacobs is that the spontaneous contacts on sidewalks promote a metropolitan life without any obligation. But the 'decentrist' American planners totally ignored the importance of people brushing against each other on sidewalks, promoting an impersonal city life that results in people remaining unknown to each other. Even if they live in the same housing, they do not interact with each other as the neighboring areas lack the provisions of the natural and casual public life. This argument is still valid today as it is known fact that people do not know their next door neighbors in big cities. Jacobs argues that the designated parks and playgrounds are not safe for children as these are often unsafe and boring for children. She bases her argument on the point that parks and playgrounds of the 1950s and 1960s' housing projects are the hub of the adolescent street gangs fighting among each other due to which the safety of these places is totally jeopardized. She believes that sidewalks rather help assimilate children under the surveillance of adults (Jacobs, 1961). However, this argument may not be valid in today's scenario when parks and playgrounds are much safer than the streets of cities for children.

Jacobs' philosophy of city planning mainly influenced the renewal and rebuilding practices of urban areas. Since the late 1970s, a new emphasis was laid on the preservation of the old structure and repair, with the federal government allocating more funds for the rehabilitation project. In the 1980s, it became a prevailing fashion to recycle the existing buildings and remodeling them in the preservation of the historic city planning. Today, Jacobs' ideas have become the foundation for the New Urbanism movement in which the new urban design of a city includes the variety of old and new

buildings, mixed uses of the same, usage of the housings by different income groups, and a clear demarcation between private and public space (Wendt, 2009).

Conclusion

Jane Jacobs in her book 'The Death and Life of Great American Cities' voiced her opinion against the erroneous city planning of the modern urban city planners, pointing out the damaging outcome of the decentralized model of city development. She argues how the 'decentrist' urban planners by taking people and business away from the street has given birth to a high rate of street crimes. She argues that the street eyes of the natural proprietors of the street that ensured the street safety of cities are completely discounted by the urban planners. Besides, the urban city planning, in the name of issuing privacy, has created barriers between people preventing them from intermingling, thereby hindering diversity and social interaction. Her ideas, once rejected by the urban city planner, now form the bedrock of the New Urbanism movement.

References

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