

# Urban planning essay sample



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One of the most distinct marks of civilization in the whole world is the formation of informal communities that aim to make the lives of its members relatively more manageable when compared to the times that the group is still not formed. As modernization became an unstoppable trend across many communities, a process of pooling these communities occurred. It resulted to a process that is attributable to the formation of socio- economic and political centers such as cities. Generally, it can be said that cities are considered to be the center of activities from all aspects of humanities; this presupposition relegated urban planning strategies and developments close to the notions of cityhood.

This paper would strike this presupposition down by counter arguing that urban planning need not be compromising in terms of achieving a city- like environment. Adding to this presupposition is the common conclusion that change within cities are caused by moving developments of both materialistic and idealistic natures in the field of city planning (Cooke n. pag.). Among these developments, common foci of studying urban planning such as spatial analysis, urbanization and social networks are put into play. However, in this paper much link will be given to social change in cities being a result of the spatial structuring plan of the cities' urban planners.

This paper will try to achieve its goals through in depth analyses on two of the most pronounced literatures on urban planning- *The Life and Death of Great American Cities* and *Home: A Short History of an Idea*. Jane Jacob until her death in 2006 is considered to be one of the most influential and successful urban planner in the second half of the twentieth century (Alter n. pag.). Her glory is crowned with her book titled *The Life and Death of Great*

American Cities. On the other hand, *Home: a Short Story of an Idea* is written by a contemporary popular urban planner-Witold Rybczynski.

He is one of the minds behind the redefining of the term comfort which he believed has been long compromised due to urban developments (Wilson Quarterly 153). His works are being used by many students and even members of the academe of urban planning because of its precisely set conditions in laying down its plan, and also Rybczynski is internationally acclaimed for the aids that he has given to compliment the existing sets of ideologies regarding urban planning.

This paper will be guided by three basic thematic conditions where these books will be studied on. Jacob's work will be studied in this paper through the controversial issue of American schizophrenia in their actions that can be accounted for in the destruction of nature. Additionally, Jacob's work will be examined through her rejection in the presupposition that cities have inherent "unnaturalness" and "naturalness" of the suburban. On the other hand, Rybczynski's work will be explained through its underlying principle on the importance of comfort through the approaches of materialism and even fetishism.

*Jane Jacob and the Basic Ideas in "The Life and Death of Great American Cities"*

Jane Jacob as one of the most influential and successful individuals in the field of urban planning was able to establish herself as a teacher that show hostilities toward the orthodox and modern strategies in city planning and building (Kutsche 908). She attacked the basic tenets of the orthodox school

of city planning by restructuring the strategies prescribed by most modern city builders through putting stress and importance on what she regards as the real reasons for the successes of cities.

According to Kutsche, Jane Jacob regards that success of cities is highly dependent on concentrated use, high diversity of residents and effective experimentation with new enterprise (908). These factors are deemed by Jacob to be present in her residential area in Greenwich Village. Due to her personal attachment to what she coined as successful, criticisms whether what she claims is too biased to her personal preferences are abundant.

### *1. American Schizophrenia in Sentimentalizing and Destroying the Environment*

Jane Jacob also attacks modern city planning through the conception that the American population is schizophrenic in sentimentalizing as well as destroying the environment. Her argumentation in this aspect is evident in the specifications of her work regarding the building of sidewalks and parks in cities. As a generalization of the points that she raised in relation to the environment, a stress on informal social structure is evident in her work (Kutsche 908). There are four major specific themes in Jacob's work- multi purpose of district, short blocks, variation in buildings and dense population (Kutsche 908). Each district must serve different purposes to insure the heavy traffic flow of pedestrians in both sidewalks and parks (Kutsche 908). The building of blocks should be short to cultivate more interactions among residents through closely knitted turns (Kutsche 908). Buildings must vary in condition and nature of use to insure economic variations that will further

translate to diversified opportunities (Kutsche 908). Residents should be densely concentrated to promote safety and security in the community (Kutsche 908). Jacob pursued these qualifications by stating that the American city planning can become a schizophrenic entity by failing to meet these qualifications.

The schizophrenia in sentimentalizing and destroying the environment in Jane Jacobs's *The Life and Death of Great American Cities* can be seen in what she coined as destructive city infrastructures. Among these structures is low-income and low-cost housing projects. This type of housing project according to Jacob does not only breed alienation but also paranoia. Low cost housing projects breed paranoia such as on the field of security and safety by cultivating a generalization that the residents of such projects are more prone to conduct harmful activities such as gang violence and other leading crimes (Kutsche 908).

## *2. Rejecting the Naturalness of Suburban and the Unnaturalness of the Cities*

Jane Jacob is also famous for the qualifications she set on the need to have balanced planning strategies (Rybczynski n. pag.). Her strong focus on the needed balance for city and urban planning is the direct clashing point in terms of her rejection of the notion that cities are unnatural and suburban areas are natural. She does not have explicitly stated whether suburban areas are bad and cities are good. Instead, she simply broke away from the basic prejudices of individuals regarding cities and suburban areas by stating that the successes which the two can achieve are highly based on balanced

planning. Balanced planning which can only be achieved by accounting not for what works, but also for what fails (Kutsche 908).

It is true that suburban traits such as the existence of parks in cities is good and even relaxing; however, Jane Jacob limits the value of suburban integration in the cities through more city- like features like sidewalks beside parks that would divert more traffic to the park, making the park less dangerous and more enjoyable. It can be said that for Jane Jacob, the “unnaturalness” of cities and the “naturalness” of the suburban can be compliments of each other; highly dependent on what she primarily established- balanced planning (Rybczynski n. pag.).

Even in the presence of these evident specifications in the field of urban planning in the work of Jane Jacob she is still criticized to be too vocal than ideal in her works. Among the criticisms she received is the criticism that she failed to historically account for the possible reasons why the orthodox modern city planning strategies existed in the first place (Kutsche 909). This failure of Jacob will be compensated for by the book, *Home: A Short History of an Idea* by Witold Rybczynski. As the name implies, this book from Rybczynski is literally a historical accounting of the developments towards the concept of “comfort”.

*Witold Rybczynski: Historically Accounting of Urban Planning Strategies*

Witold Rybczynski is known to be one of the pioneering urban planners that put emphasis on the relative definition of comfort (Wilson Quarterly 153). In his book *Home: A Short History of an Idea*, Witold Rybczynski pushed forward two basic concepts- home as a retreat and home as a result of fetishism.

Rybczynski notes that comfort is one of the most forgotten foci in urban planning (Wilson Quarterly 153). He used historical accounting to draw out a vivid illustration of the evolution of urban planning as well as the reasons for the changes that occurred during those times.

### *3. The Conceptualization of Comfort through the rise of a Strong Bourgeoisie Class*

He started off by stating that during the 11<sup>th</sup> up to the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, comfort is questionable up to the point that it appears to be non existing (Wilson Quarterly 153). He characterizes that during these periods spaces between workplace and home are joined and are not demarcated (Wilson Quarterly 153). Privacy is minimal to nonexistent because of the merging of spatial boundaries (Wilson Quarterly 153). Furnishings during these times are also movable because spaces transform every once in a while according to the need at hand (Wilson Quarterly 153).

However, the emergent of a new bourgeoisie class in most European parts put a stop in the almost tragic living conditions. Neglecting the concept of comfort ended during in the settlements of Dutch bourgeoisie in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century (Wilson Quarterly 153). Since more individuals are gaining wealth through the fast developing economy, a more distinct line that state that home is a retreat from the stresses of workdays can be seen in this period. Some of the basic features of Dutch settlements are clean and orderly dwellings, workday environment are vividly demarcated from the actual home spaces (Wilson Quarterly 153).

The distinct demarcation between work areas and the materiality of the concept of home is a clear mark that indeed individuals have started to take comfort as a vital part of their lives. This trend in the same way clearly shows that the stratification of comfort is the result of the material fetishism that people started doing just like in the case of the Dutch.

Leisure and ease paved the way for the perfect structuring of comfort as a part of urban planning (Wilson Quarterly 153). Among the representations of the fetishes in making materials around the house more comfortable are stuffed chairs and improved fireplaces and stoves which soon also became the benchmark of belonging to the class of bourgeoisie (Wilson Quarterly 153).

#### *Conclusion: The Value of these Works*

One of the present day trends in urban planning are clear attempts to provide the utmost comfort possible (Wilson Quarterly 154). This trend is only made possible after the almost downfall of issues on efficiency and productivity. Comfort has been traded for the more tangible and measurable parts of city living. However, through the works of Jane Jacob and Witold Rybczynski, the whole world amidst the criticisms on their works was able to find an equal footing on rediscovering comfort. This goes the same to what Witold Rybczynski said that comfort should be rediscovered to avoid living in machines instead of a home.

#### Bibliography



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