

Toronto Pedestrian Charter – Jane Jacobs 1916-2006

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Jane Jacobs had no professional training in the field of city planning, nor did she hold the title of urban planner anywhere. However, she 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 practising planners and planning students alike.

Born in 1916 in the coal mining town of Scranton, Pennsylvania, Jacobs was never afraid to stand on her own. After graduating high school, where she claims she "didn't listen much in class. I would try to, but I would just get bored with it...I just did enough to get by, really", 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 unemployed for periods. 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.

She wrote a variety of books over the years, including "The Death and Life of Great American Cities", her first published work, "Cities and the Wealth of Nations", and "Systems of Survival". It is through these writings that she expressed her ideas about cities. She advocated "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 saw cities as being "organic, spontaneous, and untidy;" diversity and activity were crucial to their survival over the centuries. The main area in which Jacobs and traditional planners disagreed is in that of density. She believed that the concentration of people in a city is essential for its economic growth and prosperity. After residing in New York City for thirty years, Jacobs moved with her family to Toronto in 1968, where she lived and wrote until her death in 2006.

Jane Jacobs was a woman with strong ideas who was not afraid to share them, even if she didn't 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.



"Jane Jacobs will be remembered as one of the



great urban thinkers of our time," Toronto Mayor David Miller said upon learning of her death. "Her contributions and insights have forever changed the way North American cities are developed."

Her main publications are:

- "The Death and Life of Great American Cities" (1961)
- "The Economy of Cities" (1969)
- "Cities and the Wealth of Nations" (1984)
- "Systems of Survival: A Dialogue on the Moral Foundations of Commerce and Politics" (1992)
- "The Nature of Economies" (2000)
- "Dark Age Ahead" (2004)

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