



Cities Of Joy

Mixed land use makes for spatial, economic sense

Dinesh Mohan

At about the same time professionals in Delhi were finalising the First Master Plan for the city in the early 1960s, Jane Jacobs published her book, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. More than 40 years later, while the Delhi Urban Arts Commission was holding discussions on the future of Delhi and bulldozers were demolishing slums and destroying unauthorised structures, Jane Jacobs passed away in Toronto in April 2006. Her death went almost unnoticed in India, though her scathing critiques of expressways in cities and strict zoning laws have strongly influenced the thinking of urban planners all over the world for more than a generation.

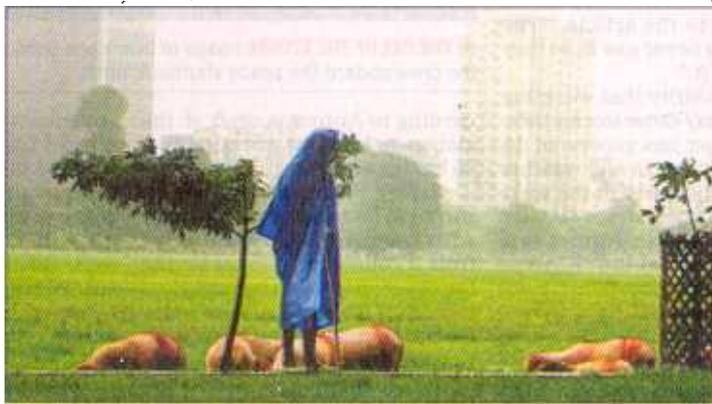
The *Death and Life of Great American Cities* questioned the concept of sprawling suburbs, which she showed killed inner cities and discouraged the growth of safe and economically active neighbourhoods that develop organically. A strong proponent of mixed land use, she further explored these ideas in books such as *The Economy of Cities and Cities and the Wealth of Nations*.

Her ideas have strong supporters around the world, and cities that are admired today incorporate most if not all of her prescriptions. In North America, these cities would include Portland (Oregon) and Vancouver (Canada) that have discouraged building of fast highways inside the city, put constraints on vehicular traffic, and encourage local small businesses and public markets. In South America, the most talked about cities are Curitiba and Bogota, that rejected plans for building a metro years ago and introduced the concept of bus rapid transit which is being emulated by dozens of cities the world over. Bogota has also built over a hundred kilometres of bicycle tracks and provided air-conditioned libraries for young people in poor neighbourhoods and parks and public facilities all over.

Some analysts point to these developments

as being responsible for reducing crime rates in the city. In Europe, Barcelona and Copenhagen have provided citywide bicycle networks, reduced space for cars on roads, revitalised city squares, pedestrianised large sections and encouraged local restaurants. In Melbourne, Australia, a new heart was created for the city by increasing housing in the city centre, moving university faculties to attract young people to the centre, and adding and improving public spaces.

Where does this lead us? Certainly not to slum demolition, sealing of businesses and into the jaws of bulldozers. We have to realise that concepts of garden city and strict zoning have proved counterproductive and unenforceable. Cities are living organisms, and like all living



organisms thrive on plurality of experience, self-organising structures and innovation. Monoculture, artificial drugs, stress on a few organs and favouring one limb over another leads to disease and cancer. How do we translate these thoughts to promotion of vibrant cities?

People of all incomes have to be brought centre stage in the concept of mixed land use. It is only when rich and poor neighbourhoods are placed cheek-by-jowl that we encourage efficiency in job opportunities, transport management, energy conservation, pollution abatement and crime reduction. With this kind of land use all members of a poor family can walk or cycle to work and maximise employment opportunities in richer people's homes and offices. This reduces demand for motorised

travel with all its beneficial consequences.

When more adults are employed and spend less money and time on travel they give more attention and facilities to their children. A sure prescription for a happier and better educated youth. Demolishing slums and sending poor people to the periphery of the city can only have exactly the opposite results and encourage formation of criminal gangs among disaffected teenagers.

Optimal policies for mixed land use cannot come with detailed prescriptions for what people can do behind four walls of their properties, and where. This just promotes inspector raj accompanied with all its externalities. Monitoring should be continuous and out in the open. This is possible if we make laws about how activity inside a building affects neigh-

bourhoods outside. We should not really care about what someone does inside — whether he runs an office, shop, restaurant or a banquet hall. In any case, this can be hidden. However, if we have stringent laws to control the effect of these activities on the neighbourhood, then we might get an efficient self-organising system.

We have to set standards for parking on streets, price it and make arrangements for punishing defaulters. Scientific methods can be put in place to measure pollution and noise on the streets, and responsibility for surveillance given to RWAs, contractors or NGOs with suitable safeguards. Traffic-calming methods to reduce speeds can be introduced in all neighbourhoods to promote safety of children.

If we bring regulation out in the open it can be enforced in a transparent manner. Owners of businesses and offices will locate themselves in areas where they can easily and profitably conduct their trade. Visitors to a wedding in a banquet hall located in a residential area will arrive in buses or taxis and have a quiet ceremony. Small neighbourhood restaurants that do not pollute, make noise, or need parking will make our lives more colourful and fulfilling.

It is time to move away from use restrictions to performance criteria.

The writer is with IIT Delhi.