

# “Toward an Urban Design Manifesto” Revisited

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“Toward an Urban Design Manifesto”, co-authored by Donald Appleyard and Allan Jacobs in the early 1980s, was highly influential in how we understand urbanism in the XXI century. Like other seminal documents, it represented the paradigm shift from modernism to contemporary planning and urban design. Professor Ivor Samuels, an international expert on urban morphology and urban design who often contributes to FOCUS, discusses the Manifesto’s continuing relevance to European and wider contexts.

*“Non locis viri, sed loca viris efficiuntur honorata”*

(Places do not add splendour to people but people add splendour to places)  
Inscription on Canon’s House in Katedralna, Ostrow Tumski, Wroclaw.

**T**oward an Urban Design Manifesto was prepared by Alan Jacobs and Donald Appleyard, two notable United States urban design practitioners and academics. The former is perhaps best known for his books *Great Streets* (1995), *The Boulevard Book* (2003) and *The Good City: Reflections and Imaginations* (2011) and the latter for his important *Livable Streets* (1981) published before his tragic early death in a car accident in 1982.

The work is organised into three sections. The first identifies and discusses problems for modern urban design, followed by a section where the authors set out six goals for urban life which they consider “essential for the future of a good urban environment.” The final section covers their proposals for “An urban fabric for an urban life”. This paper concentrates on the problems of the first part of the Manifesto, and is based on a presentation given at the 11th International Virtual Cities and Territories Congress in Krakow, Poland, in July 2016.

The Manifesto was presented at an American Planning Association conference in San Francisco (1980), as a working paper from the University of Berkeley (1982), and as an article with a new prologue by the American Planning Association Journal (1987). A generation later, this review examines its continuing relevance in response to changed circumstances and also whether this document, produced on the West Coast of the United States, is relevant to a European context in general and in particular to the United Kingdom with which this author is most familiar. This seems to be a legitimate exercise since Jacobs himself, in a prologue composed after Appleyard’s death, writes about “the need for a lot more work and research on all

the terribly important pieces that make up good urban living environments” ( Jacobs and Appleyard, 1987: 112). This paper represents a small contribution to this process.

## Problems for Modern Urban Design

The Manifesto is introduced by a discussion of what the authors describe as problems of modern urban design. They identify eight, each of which will be considered here for their relevance to current issues in a European context:

- Poor living environments,
- Giantism and loss of control,
- Large-scale privatisation and the loss of public life,
- Centrifugal fragmentation,
- Destruction of valued places,
- Placelessness,
- Injustice,
- Rootless professionalism.

## Poor living environments

These are considered by Jacobs and Appleyard to be the problems of the external conditions of urban life since the authors suggest that internal “housing conditions in most advanced countries have improved in terms of such fundamentals as light, air, and space.” In a British context, this assertion can be questioned, and it is discussed below under their heading of Injustice. Jacobs and Appleyard note that “our surroundings are frequently dangerous, polluted, noisy anonymous wastelands.” These assertions need to be considered in more detail, and it is proposed to undertake this after Jacobs and Appleyard’s other seven problems are reviewed.

## Global problems

- Giantism and loss of control,
- Large-scale privatisation and loss of public life,

- Injustice,
- Rootless professionalism

Following the consideration in some detail of aspects of the general problem of poor living environments, it is suggested that the other problems identified by Jacobs and Appleyard could be considered in two groups. The four above problems form a closely interlinked group whose significance has been exacerbated by the decades of neo liberal economic policies and globalisation since the Manifesto was first drafted in 1980.

Housing is of great political and social concern and, in formal terms, it is central to the shape of our cities. In the UK housing development is increasingly dominated by a few large operators whose main responsibility is to their shareholders and the growth of their profits. These large corporations operate through a series of regional offices in which the lead role is taken by land buyers. They have accumulated large land banks which make it difficult to for smaller house building firms to compete in the market (Hayward et al. 2015). This has left a market which has seen house prices rise, ownership levels fall, and there is an increase in private sector renting with lower standards of space and maintenance, and the associated problems of insecurity for tenants.

This loss of control has been exacerbated by the public sector withdrawal from housing provision which, since the Second World War, had been mainly built by local authorities under the control of local councils. In the 1970s almost one-third of Britons lived in social housing in contrast to the one-fifth who now do (The Economist, 2016).

The developer dominated market is paralleled by the growth of multinational consulting firms. A typical case is Savills which employs 30,000 people in 700 associated offices throughout the world and offers a range of services associated with all aspects of property design, development, and management. On opening the Savills website the most prominent part of the display is the company's current share price.

The introduction of systems of control, the smart city, is being driven by large corporations. For example, Siemens has built the Crystal in London's Dockland a building which is "a global hub for debate on sustainable living and development" (<https://www.thecrystal.org/about/>). The question is whether these initiatives will result in more local control or be an opportunity for a few large global firms to control the potentially very lucrative market in smart-city technologies. It must be noted that the internet was originally developed as a military control system. The struggle between national states and international corporations for control of the internet, and the new media is a continuing saga.

As an aside it should be noted that these firms produce visualizations of future cities that are often illustrated by aerial views which are eloquent in their portrayal of an urban environment under strict top-down control and which

demonstrate little concern for any qualities of place. An example is Cisco Corporation's Infographic, the city of the future.<sup>1</sup>

The best-known architects ("starchitects") also operate on an international scale. In their case, they seem to be mainly concerned with purveying buildings that help brand their international clients rather than respond to the different contexts in which they are invited to build. This is true whether the client is an international corporation or an ancient university. An example of the latter is the Blavatnik School of Government of the University of Oxford, inserted into a nineteenth century context by the architects Herzog and de Meuron (Figure 1). It is a building without front or back which makes no acknowledgment of its neighbours on the street.

While starchitects are rarely involved in housing, an exception from Milan are *Residenze Hadid* and *Residenze Liebeskind*: two large gated communities inserted into a nineteenth-century tissue of blocks and streets which completely fail to respond to, or extend the logic of, the established street system (Figure 2). Of note is the manner in which the architects' names are used for branding and marketing purposes.

In addition to the prevalence of gated communities, presumably in a search for greater security (see above), the insertion of shopping malls on central and peripheral sites is a common form of development. These have the effect of moving retail development away from streets thus reducing the opportunities to retain their diversity and mix of uses. They also result in the presentation of blank walls and inactive edges to the surrounding streets, as in the *Galeria Kazimierz* in Krakow (Figure 3). In the UK a major example of the privatisation of public space was the sale of Milton Keynes New Town Center (a 700-metres long modernist structure) by the public development corporation who built it. The result is that the internal pedestrian routes crossing the center now close at 8.00pm, and even earlier on weekends, forcing residents to make long detours around the building.

Injustice is more accurately expressed by the widely noted growing inequalities in developed countries (GINI, 2011). One expression in the UK is the way younger people are being excluded from the housing market because house prices are rising much faster than incomes which, in real terms, have been falling over the last five years. In parts of the country, this problem is exacerbated by housing being regarded as an asset to be invested in rather than a home. In London, a reported 70% of the new homes are purchased by foreign investors. As a result, workers (who are necessary to support the city's economy) are being forced to live far and endure long daily commutes. The housing crisis is so acute in London that Local Authorities who, because of privatisation, had reduced their stock of social housing, are now offering bribes to tenants to relocate to other parts of the country (Komati 2015).

<sup>1</sup> The City of the Future: Smart and Connected. See <http://www.cisco.com/web/tomorrow-starts-here/connectedcities/preview.html>

Inequality is also represented by the reduction in the size of new homes. There is no reason to believe that space standards have improved since a Policy Exchange Study (Evans and Hartwich 2005) revealed that the average size of new homes in the UK was the smallest of fifteen European countries (700 as compared to 1,390 square feet of the average new Danish home). In the UK there are no minimum space requirements for new homes with the result that, today, within the same development, houses sold on the open market may be smaller and of a lower standard generally than those few units that are still built by housing associations for social renting. These are designed to the older, more generous standards used for public housing.

### “Professional” problems

- Centrifugal fragmentation,
- Destruction of valued places ,
- Placelessness.

The remaining three problems identified by Jacobs and Appleyard while, to a great extent, being consequences of the same political and economic forces as the four discussed previously, have been and remain a central concern of urbanists who can contribute more effectively to their resolution. Certainly, policies to restrain the extent of urban sprawl have been a preoccupation of British urbanism for the last century. These have resulted in Greenbelts around many British cities. However, these barriers to urban expansion have resulted in a new set of problems.

An example of this phenomenon is Oxford where the Greenbelt is tight around the city’s built up area and local authority boundary. There is little room for further expansion without intruding on the territory of the adjoining District Councils who insist on retaining the integrity of the Greenbelt, forcing new development to locate in small towns some distance from Oxford. Since Oxford continues to grow as a major centre of employment, the resulting commuter traffic overloads existing rail and road capacity at peak travel times. People no longer live, work and play within the same built up areas, and unless the boundaries of planning authorities and the plans they make correspond more closely to where people live their everyday lives this type of problem will continue.

This more extensive scale of urban design which in the UK until 2011 was being developed by the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) as Strategic Urban Design (STRUD) not only engages with problems of development beyond the scale of the single settlement --which has usually been the broadest scale of urban design-- but also addresses problems of the wider ecosystems which cannot be completely resolved within urban boundaries. It thus links closely to the problems of conserving valued places, not only those built up but also natural places.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> See the CABE archives at: <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/201110118095356/http://www.cabe.org.uk/strud/about>



Figure 1: The Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford, by Herzog and de Meuron.

Figure 2: Designed by Zaha Hadid, residential buildings in Milan, fails to respond to Milan’s 19th century fabric.



Figure 3: The lack of transparency and integration to city life of the Galeria Kazimierz, a shopping center in Krakow.



Planners have developed sophisticated instruments to protect historic buildings and groups of buildings. In the UK these include the listing of buildings according to their historical and architectural importance and the designation of 8,000 Conservation Areas, which ensures that changes to the physical fabric are only made after careful consideration and in a way which does not detract from the overall quality of the area. However, today there is also a well-established awareness that the conservation of biodiversity, natural habitats, and their sustainability, particularly within built up areas have also to be valued and conserved (Barton, 2000).

A concern for the qualities that make localities distinct from one another may be considered as a reaction to the Modern Movement's quest for universal qualities which resulted in placeless housing estates. In the UK the initial measures against these circumstances dates from the 1970s and was led by public agencies, starting with the pioneer Essex Design Guide (EPOA, 1973). The guide was an attempt to reintroduce the design qualities of urban settlements which were characteristic of a specific region of Southern England.

However, the guide was frequently misinterpreted, in that its models and solutions, appropriate for the County of Essex, ended up being adopted in other parts of the country with completely different building traditions. This movement has been reinforced in recent years through the renewed interest in traditional vernacular architecture, and in the UK through the adoption of concepts from New Urbanism and Form-Based Codes, which have been central to the realisation of developments such as Poundbury (Samuels, 2014).

### Reasons for Poor Living Environments

To understand in more depth the characteristics of Poor Living Environments—referred to as the first problem in the Manifesto—we need to identify and discuss the most pressing of the current problems causing European towns and cities to be dangerous, polluted, noisy and anonymous wastelands. They are all inter-related, all have implications for urban policy, and their impacts must be considered to devise policies and plans for the future form of our towns and cities. These sub-problems are:

- Pollution,
- Extreme weather events,
- Demographic change,
- Obesity,
- Security,
- Pollution.

The principle source of the most dangerous form of air pollution is the burning of fossil fuels in vehicles, industry, and domestic heating. In "The Mortality Effects of Long-Term Exposure to Particulate Air Pollution (2010) the Committee on the Medical Effects of Air Pollutants in the United Kingdom of the Health Protection Agency reported that this type of pollution was responsible for 29,000 deaths in 2008. Other sources suggest

this figure may be higher. From a 2016 report on early deaths caused by air pollution, the BBC quoted European figures which indicated that the worst affected countries are the Benelux, North Italy, Poland, and Hungary. In Belgium, each person loses 13.6 months of life from pollution.

Another form of pollution is noise, in particular from traffic that it is claimed to bother over 40% of the population of the UK and impacts human health generally (Stansfeld and Matheson 2003). The UK's Department for the Environment publishes noise maps of urban areas that show the intolerable levels from road traffic and, in some exceptional locations by aircraft noise, such as the vicinity of Heathrow Airport.

That air pollution and noise are now a major policy concern are demonstrated by the fact that, over the last decade, it has proved impossible to decide on the siting of new runways for London's airports because of local opposition.

### Extreme weather events

Lately, rich and well-organised countries not usually associated with extreme weather, such as Germany and France, have been afflicted with flooding that claimed lives. While it is arguable that these events are no more frequent than in the past (Kelly, 2016) and whether or not they are caused by climate change induced by human activity, there is no doubt that they impact urban areas, and precautions need to be taken to minimise their future impact. These can only be undertaken on a communal or governmental basis, which suggests that a degree of urban planning is needed to coordinate private developments. This runs counter to the current neoliberal ethos that regards planning as an impediment to the efficient operation of the market.

### Demographic Change

Population ageing is a global challenge, but Europe is leading the world in facing this problem which will have profound economic, social and cultural implications for decades ahead. As an extreme case, the World Bank (2014) forecasts that the ratio of Poland's population over 65 will grow from 29% in 2010 to 70.7% in 2060—one of the fastest ageing populations in Europe which is coupled with a low birth rate.

In relation to the implications of these changes to living environments, some attention has been given to the internal layout of dwellings. For example, the UK Life Time Homes (2010) protocol was applied to all new dwellings so that they would accommodate residents with reduced mobility. However, there is little attention to the impact of urban form on these ageing populations and the consequences to their lives, another urgent task for urban designers.

### Obesity

It is now widely recognized that now obesity has achieved the status of a major epidemic, it is a major problem confronting

urban designers. According to Ng et al. (2014), between 1980 and 2013 the worldwide proportion of overweight or obese men rose from 28.8% to 36.9%, and of women from 29.8% to 38%. In developed countries, 16.9% of boys and 16.2% of girls were overweight or obese in 1980. By 2013, those figures rose to 23.8% and 22.6% respectively.

As a response, some countries imposed taxes on sugar while large sums of money are spent on bariatric surgical interventions to reduce food intake. However, one of the generators of obesity is physical inactivity, and by making active transport (walking and cycling) easier, safer, and relevant to everyday activities, the urban form can also make a contribution to alleviating this problem. For instance, in spite of the dangers of accidents and pollution, the health benefits and increased life expectancy of active transport have been convincingly documented (de Hartog et al. 2010).

Clearly, making provisions for walking and cycling will not automatically make people use these modes of transport, but at least they will have the possibility of benefiting from a more active lifestyle. There is evidence that by increasing investment in providing for these modes of transport a greater proportion of the population will take advantage of them.

Table 1 shows the proportion of journeys made according to different travel modes in 16 developed countries. It includes public transport, but it is notable how increased bicycle use correlates with increased investment in infrastructure for that specific mode. For instance, in the UK which --with the exception of London-- spends £1.38 per person on cycling infrastructure, only 1.2% of all trips are made by bike, while in the Netherlands which spends £20 per person, 25 % of all trips are by bike. With half of London car journeys under 2km: i.e. just a 25 minutes' walk, there is clearly room for improvement if the investment were to be forthcoming.

## Security

Safety in residential areas is of great public concern. A UK Government Home Office report noted that “two-thirds of people in England and Wales feel unsafe walking alone in their neighbourhood at night” (Ford, 2004). The popularity of gated

communities is one response to this insecurity and has been discussed above under the Manifesto heading of Large-scale privatisation and loss of public life. While the form of our towns is believed to impact security, there is a debate on the relative safety of different arrangements. For example, the argument between the advocates of cul-de-sacs and those of connected streets is still unresolved (Whittaker, 2015).

The UK Police have responded to public concerns about urban security by publishing their own design guide (Secured by Design, 2014). The guide sets out useful, common sense suggestions for housing designers such as inserting windows to overlook corners, avoiding routes without houses opening onto them, as well as measures connected with the security of the dwelling fabric and its components such as doors and windows.

## Conclusion

This short examination of the relevance of the Jacobs and Appleyard perception of urban design problems suggests that they all are still central and are even more severe than when the Manifesto was first drafted. However, under the heading of poor living environments it has been considered appropriate to outline in more detail some issues which are becoming ever more acute.

One major concern not specifically identified in the Manifesto is the growing awareness of the importance of urban ecosystems and how our urban environments can be designed to respond to the range of issues which these pose. Whether the whole of the Manifesto is as resilient as the first part must await a detailed discussion of its goals for urban life and its proposals for an urban fabric which would meet these goals.

Finally, the publishing history of this Manifesto deserves attention. The authors report that the Journal of the American Planning Association refused at first to publish it on the grounds that the assertions it made were not supported by research. Its editors only relented six years later because, in the words of the authors, initially they had not acknowledged that “professional experience had the value of research” (Jacobs and Appleyard 1987: 112). Unfortunately, this divide between practice and research has become even wider as witnessed

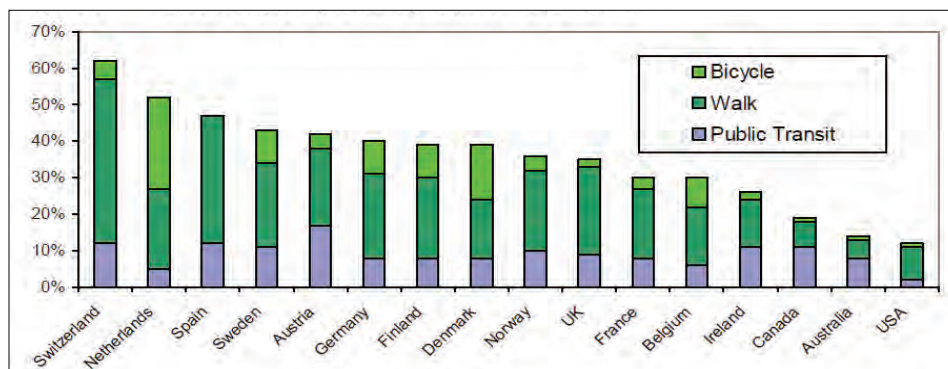


Table 1: Mode share by country (Litman, 2016)

with the introduction of research assessments that influence the allocation of funding according to the quantity of refereed published works (but curiously, not books...) which, in their quest for originality, are ever more divorced from the world of practice. Perhaps Schon's concept of the reflective practitioner is becoming extinct (Schon, 1983).

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